

## **Welcome to all Parent Council Members**

Due to a great deal of political discussion parents in some of our schools have asked for board input into the question of Parent Advisory councils – What are they? What powers do they possess? What is their function? How do they relate with the schools and the legally constituted school boards, etc.?

To answer these questions and ensure that superior education continues in The Red River Valley School Division the board is forwarding guidelines that will clarify the issue. All research done on the effectiveness of parent councils point to one basic issue – all educational stakeholders must clearly understand their specific roles to eliminate confusion, competition and ultimately poorer education for our students.

The underlying cornerstone of parent/school relationship is that The Red River Valley School Division will continue to show equal respect and attention for any type of parental involvement, be it on an individual parent basis, a formally organized Parent Advisory council or the existing PTA's that have demonstrated positive influences on the direction of education in the division.

RRVSD Board of Trustees

## INFORMATION & GUIDELINES FOR PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

### **CONGRATULATIONS New & Returning Parent Council Members**

You have demonstrated your care and interest in the education of our young people. We hope to work co-operatively with you through the administration and staff of your school.

### **Purpose of Parent Councils**

*“To obtain the best education possible for our children”*

To accomplish this takes a combined positive effort of all of us and a lot of communication between all stakeholders.

### **How are Parents Influencing our Education**

- a. Parents select a trusted community member to represent them on a board that is legally formed through the Education Act. The board trustee is involved in the formation of board policy and governance issues.
- b. Communities and parental councils have helped us with many issues that represent cultural distinctiveness. The following examples illustrate how parents have helped to shape the education of The Red River Valley School Division.
  - ❑ AIDS Education
  - ❑ Family Life Education (Drug & Alcohol Education)
  - ❑ Home Economics/Industrial Arts
  - ❑ Kindergarten Programming
  - ❑ Second Language Choices
  - ❑ Selection of Excellent Library Materials

One of the most valuable inputs has come from individual parents, advising teachers and principals about their children’s needs. Our doors are open at all times to address specific concerns.

Parents have been involved in many school projects, raising funds for playground structures, field trips, computers, etc.

Parents are volunteers – everything from assisting as teacher helpers to reading with students, to serving pizza, to serving as monitors on fieldtrips. The RRVSD has close to 800 parents volunteer on an annual basis.

Parents have been instrumental as encouragers to their teachers, schools and the division office through appreciation suppers, phone calls, local media coverage, etc.

Do parents count in RRVSD? A resounding – **ABSOLUTELY!**

Why do we have one of the best, if not the best, division in the province? Mainly because of caring parents and involved parents - parents who have parenting skills and in general send us great kids!

***NO PROVINCIAL/FEDERAL law ever written about the involvement of parents will replace THE GOODWILL, THE GOOD ADVICE, AND SUPPORT parents give their schools and the division***

## PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

Outlined in duties of the Minister, the board and parent advisory councils, by law, fall into three categories.

- ❑ Shall (compulsory)
- ❑ May (permissive)
- ❑ Give Advice (advisory)

**Government** – shall set hours of school, compulsory age, curriculum, certification – provides funding, etc.

**Boards** – shall develop policy, hire, fire, and monitor operational/educational activity

**Superintendents** – shall implement, make things work (manage), advise boards regarding policy changes, report progress, etc.

**Principals** – shall be in - charge of schools. By law they are obligated and ultimately responsible to the board and the government.

**Parent Councils** – give advice and forward suggestions, on behalf of all parents, to principals, influence teachers and principals for the collective welfare of the students.

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**Individual Parents** – need to ensure that they deal with specific matters that deal with their children. Discussing other parents' children in a public forum is not what parents normally appreciate.

## PROCESS OF BEING HEARD

For example, a Parent or Parent/Council has a request. What is the process? In whose jurisdiction does the request reside?

### **Individual Parent**

Any parent who has a concern should follow normal lines of communication – teacher, principal, superintendent, board, and minister. 99% of all problems are resolved at the school level.

- a. Individual parents' requests should be directed to the individual teacher, principal, and only to the principal if parents believe that they are not receiving fair attention from the teacher. If concerns still exist after discussion and problem solving with the principal, the parent may contact the Superintendent's Department for further direction. If needed, the parent may then approach the board through the Superintendents' Department. Your local trustee representative is a board member, one of the people who will then deal with the issue if no policy exists. Superintendents are certainly available to discuss issues informally. Once a written request is made it will always go to the board.

### **Parent Council**

- a. Informally talk to the principal who is trained to understand the process and can explain what is possible and how the request can be best processed. The request should fairly represent all parents.
  - i. If it falls within school jurisdiction rather than board or minister's jurisdiction the principal will listen and use his/her best judgment to deal with the issue.
- b. The principal, if he/she believes that the parental request is in the best interest of education and falls within local parent council jurisdiction, knows how and when to ask the system or board for permission or assistance to proceed. i.e. The principal is aware of when budgets are done, what guidelines or policies exist, etc.
- c. Parent Council requests should be directed to the principal, and only to the board if parents believe that they are not receiving fair attention from the principal. They should then approach the board through the Superintendents' Dept. Your local trustee representative is a board member, one of the people who will then deal with the issue if no policy exists. Superintendents are certainly available to discuss issues informally. Once a written request is made it will always go to the board.

- d. Boards develop policies so that most detailed decisions can be made by the superintendents, principals or staff. Boards are policy makers and work with governance issues. Superintendents, principals and teachers are managers of policy, the act, and parent input. Board Policies are made within law and government regulations and apply to the whole division. Board Policy is based on precedent and long term planning.

Also, please refer to the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth document entitled, “Working Together – A Guide to Positive Problem-Solving for Schools, Families and Communities.” \* MECY website <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca>.

### Dangerous Precedents

- a. Parent Councils should not involve themselves in personnel issues, hiring, firing, and assessment of employees, going contrary to Board Policy or Provincial Law. Parent Councils may state their individual views but always with the understanding that ultimate decision making by law rests with the board. They are your legally elected representatives.
  - i. Do not circumvent the school or school administration by making direct appeals to the board without going through the process.
- b. Avoid dealing publicly with private issues of individual students or parents. This can lead to invasion of privacy that you as a parent would resent if it happened to you.

### The Key to Any Operation is Trust/Integrity/Good Intention and Understanding the Process

Parents can have access to any general information including board policy, financial information and budgets. It is **important** that an explanation be provided to assist parents to understand this information.

Parents do not have access to private information about students other than their own, staff assessments or private information on staff.

The key to making parents a true partner in education is to understand everyone’s rights and responsibilities, and the process to have one’s influence felt.

All evidence indicates schools work in the best interest of kids in an atmosphere of Good Intentions, Integrity and Trust. As a parent you should have reason to feel proud of your children, your teachers, your school and your division.

We appreciate your cooperation as we all work in the best interest for our students attending RRVSD schools.