

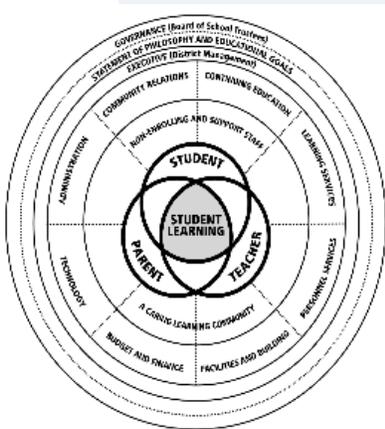
DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY

Policy 103-G

Foundations for Learning

We believe that our success “is dependent upon the existence of a common vision which results in collaborative action on the part of all concerned” (Policy 100). Consequently, the District strives for mutually supportive relationships. Policy 103 makes this intention explicit by stating that, “Open communication will be supported and ... collaborative decision-making will be encouraged in order to promote a sense of common purpose and community amongst trustees, administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and students.”

The district organization and culture that enables educational success is illustrated in the Foundations graphic, which shows how people in a wide variety of roles support schools. The three overlapping circles at the center of this graphic represent the critical partnership between the classroom teacher, student and parent supported by other teachers, support staff and administrators within the school.



Collaboration is nurtured in all aspects of district work, but the specific focus of these guidelines is practices through which, “Staff will invite and support a partnership with parents and students” as required by *Policy 103 Regulation: Foundations for Learning*. Because partnership is reciprocal, these guidelines also address the active role that students and parents play in creating collaborative relationships that maximize student learning and well-being.

The District’s Foundations commitment is that the learning partnership between teacher, student and parent will be grounded in an ethic of care and nourished by clarity, communication and consistency. This commitment implies

certain responsibilities for all involved.

Caring

Our most basic assumption is that parents, educators and support staff all want children to have the knowledge, understandings, skills and attitudes necessary to their growth and learning so that they will experience personal fulfillment in their lives and be able to contribute to society.

There are clearly utilitarian reasons to want all children to experience success in school, but the fundamental reason is that we care for them and believe that a positive school experience is important to their present and future happiness as individuals and as a society.

Clarity, Communication and Consistency

Caring is an essential, but insufficient, basis for the learning partnership between teacher, student and parent. It is also important that there be mutual clarity on purposes and processes, that there be open two-way communication and that the clarity and communication result in consistency between home and school.

All three parties – teacher, student and parent – have goals. The partnership should create a synergy in which everyone's interests are given due consideration and advanced as much as possible. This begins with mutual understanding, which requires open two-way communication, and a mutual curiosity and respect. Through dialogue, processes that are understood and endorsed by the partners can be developed. These processes must then be consistently applied by all. This process of clarification, communication and consistent application is an ongoing one through which the partnership continuously evolves.

Consistency does not necessarily mean uniform action. It means that underlying values are adhered to, regulations are obeyed and common purposes are resolutely pursued by all, but there must also be room for discretion and judgment. Without that the creativity and adaptability that is required to enable all learners would not be possible.

It is for this reason that the Collective Agreement with the Richmond Teachers' Association contains a Professional Autonomy Clause as follows.

While it is recognized that the Board has the responsibility to exercise instructional leadership through its Administrative Officers in order to promote effective educational practice, teachers shall, within the bounds of the prescribed and locally developed curriculum, and consistent with effective educational practice have individual professional autonomy in determining the methods of instruction, evaluation and the planning and presentation of course materials in the classes of pupils to which they are assigned.

This clause ensures that teachers have the freedom to use their professional skills and judgments in order to fulfill their role, which is to design instruction and assessment in a way that is most likely to make all students successful; that is, to enable all learners. This autonomy in matters of instruction and classroom assessment is guided by the teacher's professional obligation to students and circumscribed by his/her duty to follow administrative directions.

Consistent with the spirit of Professional Autonomy, the following responsibilities of teachers, and others, for nurturing a partnership that benefits students are described in terms of required outcomes, but leave the specific actions open to individual preferences and contextual influences.

Responsibilities

In the partnership between the student, parent and teacher, each person's circle of influence overlaps with the others so that all roles, responsibilities and actions become interdependent.

The Student

The student is responsible for:

- Understanding what it is intended that s/he learn and why
- Being engaged and working productively
- Behaving appropriately

In order for the student to be engaged in, and take appropriate levels of responsibility for, learning, s/he needs to understand what it is s/he is learning, and why. To a great extent, the student must seek this information from the teacher but s/he must also use the information provided by the teacher to develop his/her own goals and motivations relative to the educational program the teacher provides so that s/he will achieve personal excellence in his/her learning.

The student is also responsible for demonstrating productive work habits and appropriate conduct. This includes the various duties, attitudes and behaviours that are required for a learner to perform well as a student and be a contributing member of a peer group and community.

The Teacher

The teacher is responsible for:

- Communicating what the student is learning and how
- Communicating what is expected of the student
- Communicating how learning will be assessed and performance evaluated
- Communicating what s/he knows and observes about the student and his/her learning, and seeking further information from the parent and/or child as appropriate
- Inviting inquiries and further information from parents and the student about their interests and perspectives

The process of clarifying and communicating these understandings is ongoing and should employ a wide variety of means. Early each year, however (or in a semestered secondary school early each semester), the teacher will seek information from students and parents about:

- the student's background, interests, involvements, needs and abilities; and
- relevant aspects of the home situation that may affect learning.

The teacher will also inform both students and parents about:

- the learning objectives for that year;
- classroom procedures and norms;
- instructional practices;
- homework and home study expectations and procedures;
- anticipated field trip and other costs;
- assessment and evaluation processes;
- two-way communication strategies for students and parents, including reporting; and
- opportunities for parent involvement.

This communication may occur in any manner that is efficient and effective for the teacher, parent and student, but each school should discuss the processes in order to develop a consistent, and well understood, approach within that school.

Communication with parents should be based on the premise that "communication is in the listener," and therefore designed with the audience in mind. This means at a minimum that it will avoid unnecessary jargon and strive to provide a clear, concise statement of the most important information. When language and/or cultural expectations are a known barrier to communication, the teacher, with the assistance of the school and district, will seek strategies to assist parents and/or students.

Non-Enrolling and Support Staff

Non-enrolling staff (Learning Resource Teachers, Teacher Librarians, Counsellors and District Specialist Teachers) and Support Staff (primarily Educational Assistants) work in collaboration with the Teacher to assist in providing learning activities for all students that are appropriate to their educational needs and personal abilities.

Non-enrolling and support staff are responsible for:

- Providing services and supports to the student under direction of the teacher
- Maximizing the student's ability to participate in and benefit from the curriculum and the school community
- Communicating with the teacher about the student's experiences and achievements
- Communicating with other non-enrolling and support staff as necessary to provide the services the teacher has requested
- Communicating with parents in collaboration with, and as requested by, the teacher

The Parent

The parent is responsible for:

- Communicating what s/he knows and observes about the child and his/her learning and seeking further information from the teacher and/or child as appropriate
- Taking an active interest in the child's educational program, classroom and school and being involved in appropriate ways as it is possible to do so
- Supporting the child's learning at home
- Clarifying how the child is doing as a learner

Parental involvement is essential to providing a student with the best possible educational experience and enabling both student and teacher to be successful. This involvement can take many forms, ranging from being loving parents and providing a supportive environment in the home to sitting on committees at the school or district level.

Parental involvement includes:

- Parenting
- Communicating with the school
- Volunteering at the school
- Supporting learning at home
- Participating in school activities, plans and decisions
- Participating in community programs

The level of parent involvement in the school should not be judged by reference to any one or two of these types. All forms of involvement are valuable and appreciated.

Parent involvement is most often, and quite appropriately, focused on the needs of the parent's child, but parents must also appreciate that public education is both a personal and a public good.

That is to say, sometimes the good of the class, school or district will supercede the interests of an individual student, staff member or parent.

As members of a community with the common purpose of enabling every student to achieve personal success in learning, parents have the opportunity to not only support their own child but also all the other students, staff and families in the school by being connected to them through dialogue and shared experience. One way of doing so is to participate in the Parent Advisory Council, which is the mechanism established by legislation for the collective action of parents in the school.

The School

The school is responsible for:

- Actively supporting the learning partnership between teacher, student and parent
- Emphasizing and demonstrating the importance of a learning partnership based in an ethic of care and characterized by clarity, communication and consistency
- Assessing the general effectiveness of Foundations processes and adapting or evolving them as necessary

The school has a responsibility to provide structures and processes that make possible well-informed, supportive relations and effective communications among students, teachers and parents. It acts as a collective body of teachers, administrators and support personnel to ensure that clarity, communication and consistency are characteristic of their practices.

In order to involve and inform parents, the school will provide an annual opportunity for them to participate, through the PAC or otherwise, in a review of school procedures and rules including attendance, conduct, dress, homework, assessment, reporting, communication and health promotion, emergency procedures and school closure due to emergent conditions. In secondary schools students will be included in this annual process of review. These procedures and rules, once reviewed and, if necessary, revised will be communicated to the school community.

When parents do not understand, or find it hard to participate in, some types of parent involvement due to economic, cultural, linguistic or other factors, the school has a duty to assist them in understanding and participating. It cannot, however, be held solely responsible for making it possible for parents to participate actively. Individually and collectively parents also have a responsibility to reach out to the school and to support each other.

The School District

The school district is responsible for:

- Clarifying and communicating what is meant by Foundations
- Continuously supporting, assessing and developing Foundations

The District is responsible for demonstrating its philosophy and values in practice, and specifically for actively supporting Foundations in its words and deeds. Just as the school supports Foundations at the classroom level through its collective action, the District supports Foundations at the school level through its policies and procedure.

The Evolving Nature of the Partnership

Although the partnership between student, parent and teacher evolves as the child becomes a youth and assumes increasing responsibility for learning and life decisions, it remains critical to the student's growth and development from Kindergarten through Graduation.