

2 people and relationships

Relationships can mean “a connection or association; a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings.”

The Concise Oxford Dictionary. Ninth Edition. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1995

“The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with parents.”

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, Article 7, 1959



■ For more information on legislation, please see **Section 5 Governance and Legislation.**

Supporting students’ success is a shared responsibility between home and school.

Parents have a responsibility to care for their children and participate in their children’s education. Schools have a responsibility to provide a quality learning environment that is responsive to, and inclusive of, all students.

Open and respectful communication between parents and educators helps parents understand the different roles and responsibilities of people in the public education system. It is important for parents to know what they can expect from educators and to let educators know what the family can offer to support their children’s education.

In public education, there are relationships defined in legislation, and there are relationships that develop as parents interact with the people who work with their children. The public education system can be overwhelming to many parents. Educators play an important part in helping parents understand how the system works and encouraging their involvement in their children’s education.

Success for students is enhanced when parents and school and district staff pay attention to their relationships with each other. By understanding and respecting the differences in their roles and responsibilities, parents and staff can create a safe, caring place where students and parents can express their views and all voices are heard.

Teachers

Teachers recognize the benefits of developing positive and respectful relationships with the parents of children in their classroom. Parents can provide teachers with important information about their children that will help the teacher in meeting their child’s needs. Teachers can explain the work they do and help parents provide support for their children at home. They can offer parents a variety of ways to become involved in the classroom and the school. When teachers and parents work together, children are supported in their learning.

The teacher:

- provides teaching and other educational services
- evaluates each student's intellectual, human, social and career development
- provides regular reports to parents on students' school progress
- encourages the regular attendance of students
- ensures students understand and comply with the school codes of conduct, rules and policies
- helps with supervision of students at school and at school functions
- maintains the records required by the minister, the board and the school principal.

Other School Staff

A school may hire non-teaching staff in a variety of positions. One example is a teacher assistant⁶ or a paraprofessional who works with the teacher to support students with special needs. While teachers are responsible for designing, implementing and evaluating the educational program of the student with special needs, teacher assistants help them in this responsibility. Both the teacher and the teacher assistant facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs in the classroom. Together, they encourage the student to become an independent learner and member of the classroom, school and community. They create a classroom environment where all students are respected and valued.

Multi-cultural and Aboriginal workers, school counsellors, supervisory and clerical staff, school bus drivers and custodians also play a role in supporting students and the school.



Teachers and support staff in public schools belong to unions. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) represents all teachers in public schools in the province; a number of unions represent support staff, although the majority belongs to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). Union contracts should not take away the rights of a parent or a child's rights as a student or human being.⁷ However, parts of these contracts can affect how the principal or district staff make decisions and act on them.

“Developing a strong, positive relationship with your child's teacher works in everyone's favour. When parents and teachers communicate well and work together, everyone comes out ahead—the student, the parents, and the teacher.”

BC Teachers' Federation
www.bctf.ca/parents/communication/StrongTeacherRelationships.html



■ Parents can visit www.bctf.ca/parents/communication/StrongTeacherRelationships.html for tips on building a relationship with their child's teacher.



Students with special needs have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, or have a learning disability or have exceptional gifts or talents.

School Principals

Principals have an important leadership responsibility to support communication between the home and school. They nurture the conditions that build relationships between parents and teachers. They have a key role in encouraging a positive relationship with their PACs. Principals spend a large amount of time interacting with students, parents, teachers and the local community. They provide educational leadership in the school, to the SPC and in the district. Principals have the right to exercise professional judgment in managing their schools in accordance with specified duties and powers. They work with students, parents, teachers and school support staff to develop and maintain a positive and safe learning environment.

The school principal:

- may attend PAC meetings
- provides information and consults with the SPC about class size and composition
- is the person to whom teachers and other staff report
- works with district to hire staff
- administers and supervises the school
- exercises paramount authority concerning student discipline according to board policy
- may suspend students according to board policy
- is responsible for general conduct of students in all school and school-sponsored activities
- may set policy that is consistent with district and provincial guidelines
- evaluates and writes reports on teachers
- may be assisted by a vice-principal
- may teach in a classroom.

Professional Judgement

Educators use their professional judgement when they carry out their responsibilities. When educators make decisions using their professional judgement, they are:

- drawing on their education, knowledge and experience
- following the Principles of Natural Justice (See page 36). For example, they consider the needs of the student and the facts in the situation
- able to show parents and others how they used their professional judgement to make the decision.

School District Superintendent

Superintendents are responsible for the overall operation of education services in the district. They provide education leadership to all staff in the district. Their relationship with their school boards is key to carrying out the vision for public education in the district. Superintendents also develop a respectful working relationship with their DPACs and other education partners in the district. Depending on the size of the school district, assistant superintendents and directors of instruction may assist the superintendent.

The superintendent:

- reports to the school board
- may attend DPAC meetings
- advises and assists the school board
- is responsible for general organization, administration, supervision and evaluation of all educational programs
- is the person to whom the principal reports
- supervises and directs education staff
- may suspend students according to board policy
- may suspend employees who, in the opinion of the superintendent, pose a threat to the students' welfare
- may report at any time on the work of a teacher and the learning situation in a teacher's class, or the work of a principal, vice principal or director of instruction and must deliver a copy of the report to that person
- reports to BC College of Teachers on the work of members of the college
- assists the Minister of Education as required.



"BCSSA members must be skilled collaborators who can rally all available resources to support better education for all children living in our multicultural society."

Dimensions of Practice for Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and Directors of Instruction or Equivalent.
British Columbia School Superintendents' Association (BCSSA)

School Board

A school board's most important responsibility is keeping the focus of all school district decisions on the best educational interests of students.⁸

Residents in a school district elect individuals to the school board every three years. A school district may consist of many communities. As a board, trustees represent the diverse values, interests and expectations of all the people who live in their communities. They are accountable to their



Some examples of school board policy include:

- parent involvement
- School Planning Councils
- student conduct and discipline
- field trips.

Many school districts have posted their policies on their district websites.

Please call the local school board office to make sure the policies on the website are the current versions.

“Student achievement is the focus of all school board decisions, policies and actions. It is the key work of every school board. Improving student achievement and maintaining a consistently high level of student achievement is the school board’s first and highest priority.”

Key Work Resources. British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA). November 2005

communities and to the Minister of Education for improvements in student achievement. The province decides every year how much funding a board will receive to provide programs and services to students. The board has a duty to govern in a fiscally responsible and cost-effective manner.

The school board’s power is set out in legislation. It is a corporate body, meaning no trustee can independently exercise the power of the board. School boards must govern districts and their schools in accordance with the *School Act* and its accompanying regulations and orders. The board has the authority to make policies. These policies must be consistent with provincial legislation and policy. The board may delegate some policy-making to superintendents, but the school board is ultimately responsible for the policies that guide the district.

The board consults with students, parents, staff and the community on many topics. Examples of those topics include policy, budget, school closures, the accountability contract and others that affect children and youth in the community. Some school boards assign one or more trustees to keep in contact with PACs and the DPAC in their districts. The school board holds public meetings, and there is time on the agenda for the public to have input. Trustees are accessible to the public and can be reached through their local school board office.

The school board:

- sets local policies for the effective and efficient operation of schools
- enacts policies governing student conduct and discipline
- employs the staff necessary for school district operations
- establishes conditions of employment for employees, within the framework of collective bargaining for unionized staff
- prepares and approves the school district’s operating budget and capital plans
- hears appeals from students and parents where a staff decision significantly affects a student
- approves local courses and resource materials for use in the school district
- approves annual school plans
- prepares the accountability contract on improving student achievement
- acquires, owns and disposes of school property and makes decisions on school facilities.

Ministry of Education

In Canada, education is the responsibility of the provinces. In BC, the Minister of Education is responsible to the BC Legislature for K-12 education. Through the *School Act*, the minister presides over and administers the public education system. The minister also has responsibility for libraries, literacy, early learning and independent schools. The minister sets the education policy and direction for the province. The Deputy Minister is responsible for day-to-day operations of the ministry.

The ministry:

- sets education standards on what students need to achieve
- develops policy and legislation to support the school system
- distributes funds to school districts
- develops provincial curriculum
- conducts provincial assessments of students' learning
- reports assessment and review results to the public
- conducts district reviews.

6 A BCTF/CUPE Joint Paper, *Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants*, <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/TeacherTA-Roles/> Vancouver, April, 2001

7 *Summary of the Ombudsman's Suggestions*, Fair Schools Report No.35, Office of the Ombudsman, May, 1995, p. 36.

8 BC School Trustees Association, *Key Work Resources, The Guide to School Trusteeship in BC*, Vancouver, November, 2005