

December 1, 2006

School Planning Councils

This week, the Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Education, sent a letter to all School Board Chairs outlining the importance of ensuring that a School Planning Council (SPC) is in place in each school. This underlines the importance the Minister places on the role of parents and the work of School Planning Councils.

I have heard from parents and superintendents that the work of SPCs is difficult without the full and willing participation of teachers. Some parents feel awkward being involved when they know the controversy that surrounds the SPC. Parents want to work with teachers identifying areas for improvement based on available evidence and find it quite unusual that teachers will not participate. We have heard that clearly in many places, but parents also take a view of “Why bother?” in the absence of teacher participation – that’s how important teachers are to parents.

A variety of practices are developing in response to the BCTF’s direction to its members not to participate in School Planning Councils. In some cases, the name of the School Planning Council is changed. Sometimes the composition of the planning committee is changed. Some districts avoid the word “accountability” as though we should be ashamed to be accountable for student learning and planning for improvement. It seems to me that we should focus on getting over the adult problems, conflicts over control of the public policy framework and get on with planning for improvement within the provisions of the *School Act*.

Many schools still have functioning SPCs with and without teacher involvement. The Minister’s letter makes clear that it is her expectation that **all** schools have SPCs. In fact, Boards that fail to form SPCs in each school are in breach of the *School Act*. Two sections of the *School Act* are of particular importance in this regard.

8.1 (1) A board must establish a school planning council for each school, except a provincial school, in its school district.

(5) A board may appoint a person to fill a vacancy on a school planning council if:

- a. there is no parents’ advisory council for a school,
- b. the parents’ advisory council for the school does not elect 3 representatives under subsection (3)(c),
- c. the teachers of the school do not elect a representative under subsection (3)(b), or
- d. the principal of the school does not appoint a student under subsection (3)(d).

We would like School Planning Councils to function in a collaborative manner for the purpose of improving the learning of all students. We know the principal is key to bringing the members of the SPC together in an inclusive and respectful way to focus on the main thing – student learning. I look for your assistance in facilitating the functions of School Planning Councils in your schools.

Following is a piece that you may wish to include in a newsletter to guide parents. With all the talk about FSA, we regularly get asked what does it all mean. Parents need to know that the FSA result for their individual student that was received in the fall is measuring the child's performance at a point in time. The learning needs of the child are far more complicated, but the FSA result can be the beginning of productive conversation between teacher and parent. The conversation can also serve to clarify what the standards of performance look like and how the parents can help ensure that their son or daughter achieves those standards.

Think about using this in your next newsletter to parents:

FSA

Each year, all children in grades 4 and 7 are expected to participate in the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) program, except those children excused because of special circumstances. If your child was in Grade 4 or 7 last year, you should have received a report on his/her results this fall. If you did not receive a report, inquire with your school principal.

If what your child's FSA results mean is not clear to you, the first thing you should do is:

Ask the teacher and/or principal:

- If the FSA results really reflect the child's actual classroom performance, as the FSA is not designed to reflect a child's learning in detail. The teacher will have a much better understanding of how your child is performing in all areas and know more about your child's learning needs.
- To explain specifically what areas, if any, are causing your child difficulty. Find out what Meeting and Exceeding Expectations looks like.
- What is being done at school to help your child. How are your child's individual learning needs being met.
- What you can do at home to help your child improve.
- What your child can do successfully, as building on your child's strengths makes for successful learning.

FSA results provide a good opportunity to have a conversation with the teacher about how to best understand and support your child's school achievement.