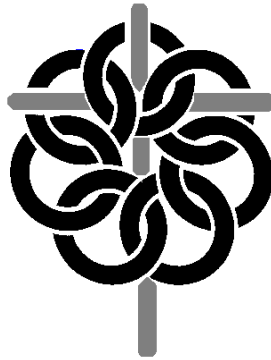


FOCUS



DIOCESE OF JOLIET
COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY & PURPOSE

The administration and staff are committed to effective and appropriate communication. We feel that effective communication will foster a spirit of understanding and cooperation between school administration, staff and parents. Our goal is to build collaborative relationships between school personnel and parents. The team paradigm is an essential element in our educational model and facilitates an ideal learning situation for our students.

Communication can be either very constructive or at times even destructive. The purpose of this booklet is to act as a guide for professional, constructive and effective communication. We encourage our school parents to communicate freely with school administration and staff. They need to hear about the positive elements of the school program and staff. They need to affirm the staff and build upon their gifts. They also need to hear about those issues that concern parents. They need to receive those concerns in helpful and constructive ways so that we can grow and improve.

The following guidelines are supported and endorsed by not only local parish and school administration, but also by the Joliet Diocesan Schools Office. Much of what is outlined here is diocesan policy.

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Defining the issue: Whether one intends to communicate something affirming or share some concern, it is important to have a clear understanding of the issue. Carefully review the facts, experiences and circumstances of an issue. With an open mind evaluate and consider every conceivable cause. Decide who may be involved in the issue. Is there one or more persons affected or involved? It may be helpful to write down or outline some of these ideas. Once the issue is clear, sometimes it can be helpful to wait at least 24 hours before making an appointment to communicate the issue or concern. Usually a little time helps to put the issue in better perspective.

With whom to communicate: The next step is to decide who to best receive your affirmation or concern. It is usually best to initially communicate with those who are directly involved with the issue. If the issue is not resolved after the initial meeting or conference, then the following chart may be helpful. This chart is in no way a complete list of every possible issue, but it serves as a guide.

Concerns dealing with:	Should initially involve:	If not resolved, who to involve next:
Student's performance	Student	His/her teacher
Teacher	Involved teacher	Principal
Unfair discipline	Person who disciplined the child	That person's supervisor
Specific classroom assignments	Teacher	Principal
School Board Policy	Principal	School Board
Principal	Principal	Pastor
School rules or procedures	Principal	Pastor

The Catholic Schools Office may be contacted for advice at any point in the process. To resolve an issue the Catholic Schools Office is contacted only after local recourse is exhausted.

Verbal vs. Written communication: A verbal “face-to-face” meeting is a most effective form of communication. This type of communication allows for a dynamic exchange and sharing of ideas. It allows for questions, clarification, and collaborative solutions. Written communication is one sided and rarely settles an issue. Our preferred form of communication is always a personal “face-to-face” meeting. We will readily receive and give written communication our sincere consideration. All letters must be signed. Any letter that is received that is written anonymously or contains derogatory or insulting comments against any person will not be given any consideration.

Guidelines for conference/meetings: The following guidelines are set forth for all conferences or meetings between parents and school personnel.

1. Any parent wishing to have a conference should make an appointment. Setting up a mutually convenient time helps to provide for a setting where all parties can focus on the issue(s) without frequent disruption.
2. The Principal and teachers know that it is healthy to separate their professional career from their homes and families. We ask that parents please respect their privacy. Please arrange so that all phone calls or scheduled meetings take place during school days and normal hours of operation.
3. All conferences with teachers should be on school days, either before or after school hours. The meeting should take place in a private room conducive to such a gathering.
4. All meetings with other school/church personnel can take place at a mutually convenient time. The meeting should take place in a private room conducive to such a gathering.
5. At the beginning of each conference, a mutually agreed upon agenda should be established. The focus of the discussion should remain faithful to the agenda.

Boundaries/Confidentiality: The effectiveness of our educational program and our continued growth and improvement is very much affected by the morale of our staff, students, and parents. When communication is effective and within certain boundaries it can bolster school spirit and morale. Yet communication can also be very destructive especially when it involves non-affected parties or betrays the boundaries of confidentiality.

When a problem or concern arises, the process of resolution should involve only those parties directly affected by the issue. For example, if a parent judges that a problem exists between their child and his/her teacher, then the involved parties are the teacher, the student, and the parents. It is not helpful

to contact other parents to see if their children are having similar problems. While this form of solicitation may find other families with similar problems, it actually creates more problems and has a disastrous effect on school morale. It does not help to resolve the immediate problem between a particular teacher and a student. If other parents have similar problems, it is best that each problem be resolved on an individual case-by-case basis.

We understand that we all need to share with others both our joys and our difficulties. When someone feels that he/she needs to share their concerns or frustrations with others, then friends and family members that are not part of the school community make better confidants.

Confidentiality is a very essential element in fostering effective communication and respect. *All discussions, conferences, and resolutions should remain only with involved parties.* For example, issues involving adults should not be discussed or reviewed in the presence or within the earshot of a child. The details of a conference between a teacher and a given family is not a matter for other non-involved parties. *Maintaining confidentiality will encourage respect, cooperation, and will help to foster more effective resolutions.*

COMMUNICATION & THE SCHOOL BOARD

Role/Purpose of the School Board: A public school board is constituted as regulatory, one which enacts or uses existing rules and regulations to govern the operation of its institution. This type of board is considered administrative and differs significantly from the consultative board of a Catholic School.

A parochial school board is a body whose members are selected to participate in decision-making in specific and designated areas of responsibility. A parish school is part of the educational mission of the parish for which the pastor is the canonical administrator. He delegates, according to diocesan policy, administrative responsibilities to the school principal, who is accountable to him. In the Diocese of Joliet, school boards are consultative in nature. A consultative board operates in the policy-making process by formulating and adopting, but never enacting policy. This very general responsibility resolves into six distinct functions:

1. To participate in and encourage strategic planning by establishing a mission statement, goals, objectives, long-range and short-range plans for the school.
2. To develop and defend policy by formulating policies in accord with diocesan policies which give general direction for administrative action.
3. To offer financial advice by developing plans/means to finance the educational programs including tuition, development and fundraising, allocating resources according to a budget and monitoring these plans.
4. To serve as a good public relations source.
5. To evaluate itself periodically determining its own effectiveness in light of its mission and its responsibilities as outlined by diocesan policy and its own constitution.

6. To participate in the selection of the principal, who is the board's executive officer? The pastor hires the principal. At his discretion, he may invite board members to serve on the search committee when a principal needs to be hired.

What the School Board is not: The parochial school board does not act as a grievance committee. It does not hire, evaluate, or terminate faculty members. The board does not administer the school. It does not tell the Principal *how* to administer the school, rather it gives direction through policy. The board does not regulate the instructional program or involve itself in matters of curriculum.

Communication with the School Board: Whenever anyone has a concern that falls within the scope of the school board matters, they are welcome to come and address the board at any regularly, scheduled board meeting. During the school board meeting a time has been allocated for visitors to address the board. Visitors will be welcome to share their viewpoints during the agenda item labeled as "Official Delegations". The following points of order are to be observed in these matters:

1. Anyone wishing to address the board needs to outline their issues in writing and submit them to the Principal or Board President one week before the scheduled meeting. If the issues fall within the scope of school board matters, the person will be placed on the agenda.
2. Only those people who have been placed on the agenda will be permitted to address the board during the explicit time allocated for such communication.
3. Those addressing the board should focus their presentation on only those issues approved prior to the meeting.
4. Any presentation or expressed viewpoint that becomes or borders on a personal attack of a particular person or family will not be tolerated.
5. Any communication which is not expressed in a calm respectful manner will not be tolerated.

At the board meeting the board members will simply receive, without response or interaction, the comments of the person making the presentation. The president will thank the speaker. After the meeting it will be determined how to follow-up the speakers presentation. Possible follow-up includes but is not limited to:

1. discussion at an executive meeting
2. new business item at the next board meeting
3. information regarding issue included in the school newsletter
4. personal contact regarding issue:
 - a. letter
 - b. phone call
 - c. face to face visit
5. referral to proper group or committee