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TEACHER GUIDE

Teachers with Children in School



The Alberta
Teachers' Association

Teachers with Children in School

Parental Rights

Teachers may also be parents with children in the school system. Like other parents, they will occasionally want to raise concerns and participate in special activities involving their own children. At such times, they will need to balance their rights as parents with their responsibilities as professionals and as employees.

Raising Concerns

As professionals, teachers must act with additional care because any concerns that they raise will generally carry more impact than those raised by parents who are not teachers. Although teachers who are also parents have the same rights as other parents, they must maintain a professional standard at all times. Teachers have been disciplined for failing to do so.

Like other parents, teachers who have a concern about their own child's teacher should discuss the matter directly with the teacher in an effort to clarify or correct the situation. A parent who goes behind the teacher's back to an administrator should be referred back to the teacher. If no resolution can be reached directly, a supervisor may be brought in to assist.

A teacher who has a complaint about a colleague should follow this procedure:

1. Begin by raising the concern with the colleague.
2. If the matter cannot be resolved, tell the colleague it will be raised confidentially with "proper officials." Proper officials in this context are people in positions of authority who are able to act with respect to the complaints or criticisms. Other teachers, parents, members of the community and school trustees are not proper officials.
3. Consider putting the criticisms into a written report so that they can be verified. If a report is created, the teacher must give a copy of the report to the colleague being criticized before sending it to proper officials. In case resolution is still possible, the colleague should also be given a chance to respond to the criticisms. E-mail is not the best way to report criticisms about a colleague as it requires extra attention to maintain confidentiality.

Teachers who are parents must also be cautious to not undermine the confidence of pupils in their teachers.

Teachers often have concerns about the balance between their professional obligations and their parental rights. The Alberta Court of Appeal has ruled that, in a meeting with proper officials called for the purpose of discussing the progress of their child, parents who are also teachers can freely discuss their child's educational background without fear of professional repercussions. In all other situations the code must be followed without fail.

A teacher who raises a concern as a parent may request only actions that are within the purview of a parent. For example, it is appropriate for such a teacher to ask for a general outline of plans and a synopsis of course content. It is inappropriate for such a teacher to seek copies of day, unit or year plans, to inquire about the professional growth plans of the child's teacher or to ask to peruse the teacher's mark book. Like other parents, teachers who are also parents are not entitled to evaluate or supervise their child's teacher.

Special Events

Teachers maintain their professional role even when acting outside the school setting. Any time teachers mix their personal and professional roles they are at risk. Teachers should act with more caution than other parents because any casual comments they make or actions they take can be misinterpreted.

Even elementary teachers are at higher risk of legal, financial, professional and employment liability than other parents. As a result, they should take no part in planning, fundraising for, supervising, participating in or operating such activities as "safe grads" in their own or any other school. Similarly, teachers who bring their own children on field trips or to special activities also increase their risk. Such actions are not recommended.

For additional information about the involvement of teachers in school-related activities, contact an Association executive staff member.