

## **What Does it Mean to have a Vibrant and Thriving Parent Body and School Community?**

As parents, we all came to SunRidge with the knowledge that the parent community plays a big role in helping the school to function. We are told in our initial orientation that parent involvement is written into the charter. As a matter of fact, it is state law that parents are represented in all areas of a charter school. As SunRidge moves into its next stage of development (we are, after all, in the nine-year change!), a subcommittee of the Parent Council (currently known as the Health of the Parent Body committee) is exploring how parents can provide support to other parents, the administration, our teachers and most of all, to our children as we help our wonderful school continue to thrive.

Here are some of the questions the committee has been exploring:

- What does a "collaborative model" of governance mean for SunRidge?
- How does a community of over 400 ensure that our voices are heard effectively and efficiently? When we speak, do we speak for ourselves as individuals or for ourselves as part of the greater community? What's the difference?
- How do we clarify and fully occupy our respective roles as parents, teachers and administration?
- How do we balance the needs of the individual vs. the needs of the community? How do we behave in response to this reciprocal relationship?
- How can we best utilize the formal parent leadership roles that are a part of our charter to support the faculty, the administration and our parent body?
- Can we, as a community, co-create a set of agreements about how we will treat each other and how we will treat faculty and administration using elements of the Tribes model that is being practiced by our children in their classrooms?
- What are the rights and responsibilities of being part of a collaborative school community?

The initial journey (beyond the HPB committee) into these questions began with the current leadership groups, at a daylong retreat last Sunday, and will be introduced more formally to the larger community in the near future. The retreat was beautifully facilitated by 4th grade parents Alexander and Kathia Laszlo, and included parents from the Health of the Parent Body group, the Charter Council and the Parent Council. We thought it would be a good idea to start the discussion among parents who are occupying formal leadership roles within the school at this time. Our intention was to begin a conversation to identify and name the range of current positive and challenging experiences within our school community, and then to imagine together how we might initiate a cooperative movement within our community; inviting everyone to put conscious intention into

all of our communications and connections. We see this moment in our community development at SunRidge as an opportunity to find some common ground regarding the issues listed above and to use that common ground as a launching place from which we co-create a model of functioning *with* the community.

There is an understanding in ethical organizational design that states one must design *with* others, not *for* others. In this way, form follows function. Or put another way, the areas that have broken down are useful markers that help us see what needs adjusting and reforming. So all solutions are informed by and in response to real needs that have surfaced. Everything put forth to the community-at-large will be an open invitation to join this effort.

We recognize that it is to everyone's benefit to widen the circle as we move forward, to include other voices. At the same time, the beginning steps of this process require extensive discussion and there are logistical limits to the group size of initial meetings. Therefore, we would like to extend an invitation to 4-5 parents in the school who are interested in joining us. The next meeting will be Sunday, February 7 from 12:30-6pm. We are looking for parents who are interested in learning more about the process we have begun, and feel like they have something to offer to this initial process. If you are interested, please e-mail [bethfully@earthlink.net](mailto:bethfully@earthlink.net) .

Please send a paragraph with the following information:

Let us know what draws you to want to join this process at this early stage, and what specific skills, interests, and goals you feel that you would bring to the group. Those who wish to attend the next gathering will also need to meet with someone who attended the previous gathering in order to be brought up to speed in what was discussed and where we are headed.

Parents who were at the first gathering were inspired by the potential that we as a community have to create a healthy and vibrant environment. And we are joined together in our intention to help our children thrive. We know that we will not only be modeling healthy relationships, but will be surrounding them in healthy and peaceful energy.

We look forward to sharing more of our work with you shortly, and hope you will join us in our intention to make SunRidge a thriving community.