

What Can the Advocacy Project Do for You?

The Southeast Kootenay/Rocky Mountain DPAC Joint Advocacy Project is committed to ensuring that parents have a voice in decisions affecting their children.

The Southeast Kootenay/Rocky Mountain DPAC Joint Advocacy Project will guide and support parents seeking to improve communications and resolve problems between home and school.

They will work within the problem-solving process already in place in their respective districts, to help parents define their concerns, obtain information and communicate with school and district staff.

If you need an Advocate...

If you find you cannot go through this process alone, please ensure that you have someone with you whom you trust: for example, a friend or a PAC member. It is important that this person is respectful, has integrity and is not emotionally attached to the issue. It would be of benefit to have this person read this brochure or contact your PAC for more information on Advocacy.

The Steering Committee has excellent material on advocacy. They will also do presentations on request.

The Southeast Kootenay/Rocky Mountain DPAC Joint Advocacy Project is a member of the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils Advocacy Project.

For more information on advocacy, please call:
(your confidentiality is assured)

In Southeast Kootenay School District:
Cheryl McCann
Phone: 250-489-5269
E-mail: dpac@cyberlink.bc.ca

In Rocky Mountain School District:
Lori Tedrick
Phone: 250-427-5231
Fax: 250-427-5228
E-mail: dpac@sd6.bc.ca

BCCPAC Advocacy Project :
1-888-351-9834 (toll free)
<http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/advocacy/Advocacy-Main.htm>

Southeast Kootenay & Rocky Mountain District Parent Advisory Councils Joint Advocacy Project



“Parents Helping Parents”

Advocacy
Definition: A process to promote fair treatment to address concerns.

Background

In 1994, two parents in Qualicum, B.C. recognized a need for advocates to assist parents in their school district to resolve issues positively on behalf of their children.

Through funding from the Ministry of Education, the "Advocacy Project" was born. Qualicum was the pilot for what is now a province-wide British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) initiative.

In March 2003, Southeast Kootenay DPAC and Rocky Mountain DPAC began a joint venture to bring advocacy services to the parents of both school districts.

The first goal of our advocacy project, "Parents as Natural Advocates" is about parents acting effectively on behalf of their children, then ultimately teaching their children how to effectively advocate on their own behalf.

The second goal of our project is "systems Advocacy" with Parent Advisory Council (PACs) acting as system advocates. They will ensure the processes, policies and protocols of education are so understandable, fair and compassionate, that few people, if any, require individual assistance.

In order to be successful, it is paramount that this project follow due process and be respectful of all parties concerned.

Important to Know

For many parents, their first personal contact with staff and the school system, occurs when there is a concern. The resolution, or lack thereof, supports or undermines the success of individual students. Students who end their education in crisis are most often students who have had ongoing difficulties: problems that were never solved.

Communication

A lack of communication is usually the main reason why problems occur. If, to the best of our ability, we use the following advice, the chances of resolution are very good.

Communicate:

- ▶ Share your ideas with the people who can make the necessary changes.
- ▶ Ensure your child's best interest is the main priority when discussing the issue.
- ▶ Work to be assertive, not aggressive.
- ▶ Encourage others, and recognize what is working, as well as what you need changed...you are dealing with people and your attitude matters.
- ▶ Address the issue and stay positive.
- ▶ Speak only for yourself (and your child), **do not indulge in hearsay.**
- ▶ Work to improve your personal communication skills.

Parents as Natural Advocates

The following steps are designed to enhance your skills as a natural advocate and focus on the best interest of your child.

Listen to your child: To assist and/or represent your child, you need to listen carefully and consider the views.

Know the facts: Encourage your child to share their thoughts and be available when they do. Respond rather than react.

Identify the issue: It is very difficult to solve a problem if you don't know what it is. Work to clarify and pinpoint the key issue.

Decide if your child needs your support and assistance: Self advocacy is an important life skill. As your child matures, your roll changes from representing the best interests of your child to helping them represent themselves.

Document: It is easy to get confused or to forget. Jot down notes, record dates of meetings, phone calls and who you spoke to. Keep copies of everything.

Identify appropriate support: Talk over the issue with your spouse or a trusted friend. Avoid public discussion of private concerns. Identify and use the process and assistance available.

Commit to resolution: Ensure you are working to solve the problem. Be honest with yourself and others. Don't give up.

Plan: How will the problem be solved? Act in good faith; assume the best of others. Be both flexible and open-minded.

Stay involved: Confirm action plans and arrange for follow-up. Help to define reasonable deadlines for each goal. If one solution is not working, try another: plans must be workable.