PEIHSF Semi-Annual Meeting

"Communication Between Home and School"

Discussion Summary – October 15, 2013

Four round-table objectives:

1. Identify current communication tools.
2. Determine if current one-way and two communications between home and school are effective and discuss their limitations.
3. Identify new communication tools.
4. Discuss the idea of a Standard Home and School Communications Protocol.

1) COMMUNICATION TOOLS

One-way: School and/or Home and School websites; newsletters; SAS; broadcast emails; handbooks/agendas
Two-way: Parent/Teacher interviews; email, agendas, written notes, telephone

2) EFFECTIVENESS/LIMITATIONS

It was the consensus that all identified communication tools serve a purpose – hand written notes and agendas work particularly well at the elementary level whereas SAS, school websites and email were considered more effective forms of communication as students move into intermediate and senior high school levels. However, it was determined that there is no benchmark or minimum standard for communication between school and home.

Three current communication tools were specifically singled out as having major limitations:
- School websites vary greatly. Teachers' use of school email also varies significantly. Some websites are updated regularly while others are rarely utilized. The discussion groups thought greater emphasis should be placed on having school websites present a more standardized layout so parents, regardless of school or grade, could easily navigate the site. It was also suggested that teachers should adopt a "24 hour rule" - meaning that all emails from parents would be answered within that period of time.
- Students Achieve Site was also lauded as a very useful tool for parents. However, it too was criticized for being difficult to navigate. Parents felt that more concise directions for use were needed. This tool was also singled out as problematic because its use varies considerably from school-to-school, and teacher-to-teacher. It was suggested that a Minister's Directive for a minimum standard of use be established. Minister McIsaac was very interested to hear the feedback on SAS, particularly parents'

frustrations with the program. Deputy Minister MacDonald was also interested to hear the same frustrations and requested more information from the Federation regarding local associations' perceptions of its value to the education system as well as suggestions for improvement.

- Parent/teacher interviews were regarded as very useful at the elementary level but incredibly inefficient and frustrating at the junior and senior high school levels. Not enough time with the teachers was identified as the greatest concern. Process is flawed – it's too congested and busy to have any meaningful conversation with teachers. It was suggested that teachers should email parents ahead of the scheduled P/T interviews to determine what concerns and questions parents were interested in discussing. Further, teachers could then schedule one-on-one interviews with parents to discuss specific subjects that were of concern.

3) <u>NEW COMMUNICATION TOOLS</u>

Technology was determined to be the way of the future for home and school communication. Broadcast emails/texts, Twitter, Facebook as well as Podcasts were identified as low cost, effective forms of communication. The use of Youtube and other social media were also identified as having great potential. It was suggested that students should be involved in these discussions as well. They have a pulse on new, accessible forms of online communication that even parents are unaware of. They could help to determine the easiest, most accessible tools for parents to use. It could also create a parent/school/student engagement opportunity.

4) <u>COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL</u>

The discussion groups regarded the idea of a communications protocol as a useful first step in helping to alleviate the huge communication discrepancies that exist in Island schools. Establishing a step-by-step guide for parents that would help them determine 'who' to contact, 'when' to contact and by 'what means' to contact was welcomed news. It was also thought to be an important initiative to share with school administrations and the Department of Education and ELSB so they too understood, supported, and enforced a minimum acceptable communications standard.