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Dear Parents of Buffalo Trail Public School Students:

I am hoping this letter finds you well and that you and your families had a restful summer break. Hopefully we will have a good fall to allow our farmers to get their crops in the bin. I would like to welcome you all back for another school year and look forward to working collectively with all of the members of our team to maximize student learning in our schools.

I am certain that there will be many opportunities to celebrate the achievements of our schools and our students over the course of the 2016-2017 school year. As well, I know there will be times when we have to address challenges that may surface. Serving the learning needs of over 4200 students requires the cooperative efforts of many. As with all organizations, there are roles and responsibilities that are assigned to different members of our team. Clearly understanding these roles and responsibilities will most certainly assist us all in making sure that information is shared appropriately and that concerns are addressed in the most efficient and best manner possible.

School Trustees play a vital role in our organization. They provide a voice for their constituents with respect to the overall direction of the jurisdiction and set policy that reflects the learning needs of students. It is this important policy that drives the practices and procedures that are in place. Nine trustees form the BTPS Board. While individual trustees voice the perspective of their constituents at the Board table, it is this collective group that sets policy through formal Board motions. These changes to policy at the Board table are reflected in change in practice and procedure across the jurisdiction. While trustees are in a position to propose change in policy, they are not in a position to take individual action on issues that are brought to them by their constituents. Concerns of this nature need to be taken through the correct process and may eventually end up before the Board and prompt a change in policy when supported by a majority of the Board.

The Superintendent is charged by the Board of Trustees to take the action necessary to implement the policies of the Board. The Superintendent is responsible for the overall operations of the school jurisdiction. It is the role of the Superintendent to put practices and procedures in place at the jurisdictional level that will support the policies of the Board. The Superintendent is responsible to monitor the operations of the schools in the jurisdiction to ensure that they are meeting the expectations as set out by the Board of Trustees in policy. While the Superintendent is in a position to make change to practice and procedure that is jurisdictional in nature, he is not in a position to overturn practices at the school level unless they are in conflict with the overall direction of the division. Concerns at the school level must be taken through the correct process and may eventually end up before the Superintendent to prompt a change in practice or procedure.

The principal is charged by the Superintendent to implement the practice and procedures reflected by Board policy. The principal is responsible for the overall operations of the school. It is the role of the principal to align the school practices and procedures to those of the jurisdiction. Where necessary, the principal develops

practices and procedures that are specific to the operation of the school. Concerns at the classroom level must be taken through the correct process and if not resolved may eventually end up before the principal to prompt a change in school practice and procedure.

The teacher is charged by the principal to implement the practices and procedures of both the jurisdiction and the school that reflects Board policy. When necessary the teacher develops practices and procedures that are specific to the operation of the classroom. It is the responsibility of the teacher to align their classroom practices and procedures with those of the school and the jurisdiction. Concerns at the classroom level must be taken to the teacher to prompt a change in practice or procedure.

Most often the best solutions are found as close to the concern as possible. By addressing the concerns at the source first, we can often avoid the escalation of a problem. **Typically, at the root of these types of issues is the lack of clear communication between the home and the school.** Ensuring that concerns are communicated to the correct person as early as possible is essential. All too often, these types of situations escalate when assumptions are made or only a part of the information is communicated. I encourage all parents to build a relationship with their child's teacher through regular communication early in the school year. Should a concern arise, this relationship will provide a vehicle to address it at the early stages. Whether or not you have been able to establish this relationship prior to a concern, I strongly encourage you to take your concerns to your child's teacher immediately and begin to work with them toward a solution. **All too often a concern that could have been quite easily addressed through open communication evolves into a crisis if left unattended.** It is not in the best interests of our children that we allow this to occur.

As we work through meeting the challenges that will no doubt occur, we must honor the resolution process to provide ample opportunity to address concerns at the appropriate level. When a concern is brought to any level of our organization, we will be asking about the steps that have been taken. Our intent is to respect the abilities of parents and the school to work cooperatively to resolve these types of issues. Of course, when the appropriate steps have been taken and our help is still needed we will be glad to offer our support and assistance to the resolution process. At the end of the day, our objective is to ensure that the learning needs of students are being met and that as a team we are working together to make this happen.

Alberta Education has provided a wonderful resource for parents to assist them in understanding the resolution process. I have attached that information as a resource for you and invite you to review it for your information.

Once again, on behalf of your school and Buffalo Trail Public Schools, I look forward to working with you and your children as vital members of our team. **When our collective purpose is to provide the best that we can for our children, we can do great things.** I look forward to being out in your school communities throughout this school year.

Take care,



Bob Allen
Superintendent of Schools

Attachment



Working Together to Resolve Differences

Parents Working with Schools and School Systems

(provided by Alberta Education)

First Steps

Alberta schools are required to make every reasonable effort at the school and district level to resolve concerns collaboratively with you as parents. Despite these efforts, when you do not agree with a decision related to your child's educational programming at school, your first step is to **talk to the teacher** to try to resolve the concern together. If that fails, your next step is to **talk to the school's principal or assistant principal**. Together with the teacher and school administration, you should be able to resolve most issues that affect your child at school.

Next Steps

The teacher and school administration may not be able to resolve the concern with you, and they may **refer** you to a staff member at the central office of the school system. If, after this step, you still do not agree with the staff member's decision, you should **write or telephone the school superintendent** and explain your concern. If the concern is not resolved by the superintendent, you may apply in writing to the school board chairman to initiate a **board-level appeal**.

All school boards are required to have a board-level appeal procedure. You may use the board-level appeal procedure when you disagree with any decision that significantly affects the education of your child. Your school board office can provide you with a copy of its appeal procedures for you to follow.

The process of a board-level appeal must be open, fair and timely. Procedural fairness includes the right to be heard and the right to an unbiased decision. The appeal process must be open; that is, all relevant information must be shared with you and others involved in the appeal. The appeal process must also be timely in completing each step so that you and the school board personnel have time to prepare, but the process is not delayed unnecessarily.

Another Step

Some of Alberta's school systems make provision for **mediation of disputes**. Mediation can occur at any point during the appeal process, and requires that both the school system and the parents agree to a third party working with them to resolve the dispute. Both parties to the dispute must agree to the mediator, and either party may end the mediation process at

any time. The mediator will try to bring the parties together on a consensus, or agreement, about how the problem will be solved. Both parties will sign the agreement.

The Final Step

If you don't agree with the board's decision after the board hearing, you may request in writing that the Minister of Education conduct a **Review by the Minister for specific decisions**. Under the *School Act* of the Province of Alberta, the Minister may review a board decision on a matter that board and parents have not been able to solve with respect to placement in a special education program, Francophone Charter 23 issues, an expulsion decision, home education matters, the amount and payment of fees, and accuracy or completeness of a student record.

Student Health Services

School systems coordinate, but do not have responsibility for providing some student health services to your child.

One way that school systems coordinate student health services for students is through a partnership agreement. All school systems have an agreement with their Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) agency to provide student health-related services for children and students.

General Enquiries

For more information please contact your local school or school jurisdiction central office.