



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

Diocese of Salt Lake City

Parents' Role in our Catholic Schools

Over twenty-five years ago the Bishops of the United States published *To Teach as Jesus*, a statement on authentic Catholic education. This document is still the standard for judging the authenticity of the Catholic school. The school must teach solid Catholic Doctrine, provide for worship and prayer as an expression of faith, build community among parents, students, faculty, staff, and administration and reach out to the larger community through service.

In research done over this same period of time, community or social capital was identified as the greatest strength of the Catholic schools. What does this mean for those of us who are engaged in Catholic education? We believe that it means partnership between educators and parents. We believe that it is a partnership built on the foundation of mutual trust, respect, and honesty.

When parents enroll their children in a Catholic school, they have certain expectations of the school, its teachers and administrators. The school likewise has certain expectations of parents. Sister Mary Angela Shaughnessy, CSN, J.D., Ph.D. in her book published by NCEA in 2003, entitled *Home & School Working Together: The Rights & Responsibilities of Catholic School Parents* discusses parental rights and responsibilities. Some of the parental rights that she lists are:

- To have your children's safety be a priority
- To have your children receive an academically sound education in a Catholic environment
- To have your children taught by competent teachers who respect and care for them
- To participate in the life of the school

Some parental responsibilities that she lists are:

- To be a partner with the school in the education of your children.
- To understand and support the religious nature of the school
- To read all communications from the school
- To discuss concerns and problems with appropriate personnel
- To be as actively involved as you can be in the life of the school and to volunteer assistance when possible
- To promote your school and to speak well of it to others
- To meet your financial obligations in a timely manner and to support fundraising efforts.

Within the community of the school mutual expectations can best be met when all partners act with trust, respect, and honesty. When this relationship breaks down all parties lose.

What has become increasingly clear over the last number of years, even in our Catholic schools, is the need to deal with parents who do not respect school policies or who detrimentally impact the schools' ability to effectively serve its students. The February 21, 2005 issue of *Time* carried an article entitled: "What Teachers Hate About Parents." This article speaks of "Pushy dads. Hovering moms. Parents who don't show up at all" and asks: "Are Kids paying the price?" We believe the answer is yes. Whenever the parent takes responsibility for the child instead of allowing the child to take responsibility for his/her quality of work, classroom behavior, homework, and grades. When the parent does this, the partnership role, based on trust, respect and honesty, breaks down and makes it impossible for a teacher or administrator to find mutual ground on which to build a good solution for the child.

In a strong Catholic school community parents and educators work as partners to allow growth in their children. They acknowledge that the role of parent and educator differ and respect each other's role so that the child is the winner.