

Salmon Creek Community School
Handbook
2009-10

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This handbook is intended to serve as a guide to the operation and maintenance of Salmon Creek Community School. Board members are encouraged to read this guide thoroughly, reference it throughout the year, and make changes to it as necessary. Records and notes about events are filed in a separate file box near the copy machine. Minutes of the previous year are to be kept near the copy machine, along with a policy file. Older minutes are in the filing cabinet as are past student files, equipment information, lot maps and sundry business records.

1. ABOUT THE SCHOOL

S.C.C.S. was founded in 1970 to serve the educational needs of children in the Salmon Creek neighborhood. As a community school, it is open to any child who wishes to attend. The school also serves as a site for community events, workshops and meetings, and has been designated an emergency evacuation site. The school is located at 3598 Thomas Road in Miranda, California, and consists of several buildings on land which is leased from Jerry Juan. The school's water is leased through Nat Childs and the tanks and line are shared with Mr. Juan. There are two telephone lines, 943-1500 and -1529 which serves as our internet modem.

The founding philosophy is reflected in the school's motto, "Independent Schools for Independent Minds". The curriculum is intended to surpass that which is required in public schools and to promote a strong sense of community, responsibility, creativity and respect. These goals are to be striven for through maintaining a low student-teacher ratio, individualized student evaluations, direct democracy in the classroom, teaching self-discipline, involving parents and integrating local history, neighbors and the environment as resources in the curriculum. Funding is achieved through tuition, donation, special events and sales of goods. The financial support of the school is intended to come solely from the community.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, its' business is overseen by a board of directors who volunteer their time and resources. The board consists of parents of students, the staff and interested community members. The board holds monthly meetings which are posted and open to the public, and provides the community with annual reports. The board is subject to the parameters outlined in the school's bylaws and articles of incorporation, as well as California nonprofit law. The bylaws provide for and describe the activities of the following standing committees: maintenance, curriculum and finance. The school's current budget does not allow for a custodian, secretary, principal or administrator, and the duties of such personnel is performed by volunteers from the board of directors. A parent who does not wish to serve on the board must provide written indication of this decision and in doing so forfeits their right to vote on board issues. Any board member who misses three consecutive meetings without notice may be removed from the board. The board will annually elect its' officers at the August meeting. The president should conduct meetings in a timely and democratic manner. Set and post the monthly agenda to prioritize school business. Delegate detailed work to committees. Act as primary volunteer and fundraiser. Act as administrator in the absence of one. Verify compliance with all legal requirements of private schools and nonprofit corporations. Represent the school to the media and general public. Propose policy and practices that will improve the functioning of the school. Encourage community participation in school activities and student involvement with the community. The Vice President serves in the absence of the president, currently acts as the staff liaison and chairs the hiring committee. The Secretary keeps and posts the monthly minutes, posts the agenda for public viewing and currently collects tuition in confidence. The Treasurer presents monthly financial statements and attends all budget meetings.

Board officers are: Sherri Nelsen as president; Shanna Archibold as vice president; Ann Michelini as secretary; Dick Michelini as treasurer. Finance Committee: Ann, Dick, Shanna, Sherri. Maintenance: Brian, chair; Stephen, power system; Kyle, kindling and grounds; Tyce, water; Dick, generator.

The curriculum committee meets once annually. All parents should meet in June after reviewing Ca. standards to give their priorities and offer materials/resources. The VP will summarize these for the teachers. Individual academic concerns should be addressed in private meetings with the teachers.

2. USE OF THE SCHOOL

Salmon Creek Community School grounds are available for activities that promote community interaction, education, health and safety. Please contact the board president* for permission and scheduling. For events, a responsible party must sign a release of liability and be responsible for cleaning up; events may not be publicized outside the community without landowner's consent. A donation is requested for use of the buildings and equipment like coolers, tables, chairs, etc. Long distance (including to cell phones) calls should be recorded.

-Please leave any area better than you found it, and report any damage immediately. Respect private property of students and teachers.

-If you bring items to the school that you wish returned to you, please label the items with your name.

-Turn off water and the inverter, lock doors and close gates before leaving.

-Mice are discouraged by keeping all food and potential bedding material in closed containers. Food waste is composted. Trash and recycling are located by the storage unit in the meadow.

-Please, no food or drinks in the library or on carpeted areas..

-The school has a composting toilet system. This requires the addition of mulching material (peat or sawdust --but NOT cedar or redwood!) and water after each use. The system also requires specific monthly maintenance. The toilets should only be cleaned with the Clivus-specific antibacterial solution.

-A buried water main box with a bleeder valve (hose bib) is located at the corner of the driveway above the school. It includes 3 valves for: the incoming flow, flow to the school and to Jerry Juan. Please keep Jerry's water on! Hot water is provided by on-demand water heaters. If water pressure is low, please contact the maintenance person*.

-To use electricity in the buildings, you must turn on the inverter, which is on the counter in the very back of the long house. Push the "on" button until you hear the clicking become a steady hum. A small light will indicate that the inverter is on. The school has a 24-volt system, which is sufficient to power lights in the classrooms part of the day. In order to use anything with greater demand than the light bulbs, or if the inverter will not turn on, the generator must be started first. The generator is located in a small shed at the back of the long house. The door should be propped open during use, unless very wet weather will drive rain inside. To start, check gas level, pull out the choke, turn key to "Start" then release key to "on" position and push in the choke. It should be left on "eco-throttle" unless a large load is put on it. Record running time of the generator and replace gas. Oil should be checked regularly. When the generator is running, it is charging the batteries. The battery level and solar array can be read on the meters beside the inverter. The battery water level should be checked twice a year. The generator's oil is changed annually. Dazey's services the generator when needed.

The school is a community composed of families, staff and neighbors.

All members of the school community have the rights to:

- *be safe
- *be respected
- *be included.

To ensure these rights, you have the responsibility to:

- *behave in a safe manner
- *respect others and the school itself
- *make efforts to stay informed and involved

3. EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS:

Parents are automatically school board members. Keep yourself informed of events and issues, participate in teacher hiring, reviews of teachers and development of curriculum.

Keep in direct and regular communication with your child's teacher. There is usually a weekly letter from the teachers in student folders. Inform the teacher of any anticipated absences, tardiness or early dismissals.

Parents are expected to bring children to school and pick them up on time, or make arrangements with another adult for their supervision before 8:15 or after 2:30, and during meetings.

Children should arrive in good health, with adequate lunch and appropriate clothing.

Check the homework folder nightly, and call the teacher if there are questions about it.

Pay tuition monthly, or make arrangements with the board secretary for an individual payment plan.

Parents share in providing snacks and keeping the classrooms cleaned throughout the year.

Volunteer at fundraisers and work days when possible.

4. EXPECTATIONS OF TEACHERS:

Develop curriculum for the year based on state standards, parents' input, students' development and available resources. Present a curriculum plan at the September board meeting. Schedule and arrange field trips and special guests. Conduct class activities in accordance with the school's values, ie: direct democracy, respect for the environment, community and individuals. Meet with other teachers regularly to develop educational/personal improvements. Maintain a cumulative file of work for each student. Write twice-annual evaluations for each student and go over them in meetings with parents, setting educational/personal goals for students. Be available for additional consultation during given hours. Keep attendance records for absences, tardiness and early departures. Put together homework assignments for any missed class time. Encourage parental participation in the classroom. Prepare at least one performance by the children for presentation to the community at an annual event. Keep in frequent and clear communication with parents, using appropriate discretion. Bring personnel issues to the vice president. Request a mediator if/ when a conflict arises.

Be present at school before students arrive. Arrange for a substitute when absent. Keep a tidy, welcoming classroom environment. Start and maintain wood fires. Empty the refrigerator of perishables before breaks. Report any maintenance concerns to the appropriate party. Prepare snacks. Supervise lunch from hand washing to clean up. Help to warm student lunch items. Supervise recess (accompany students to the playground, encourage safe, cooperative play, help mediate arguments, be available to play). Buy materials for the classroom, both instructional and functional (office and teaching supplies, as well as toilet paper, dish soap, etc.) based on a given budget of \$25 per month per student. Turn in receipts to the treasurer.

5. BOARD MEETINGS: STRUCTURE AND PROTOCOL

SCCS board meetings are the second Monday of each month at 3:00. Please remember to arrange supervision for children during the meeting.

AGENDA: We try to have it posted a week before the meeting, so it can be viewed and added to. Anyone can introduce items, but issues are prioritized according to the categories below. Some boards vote to adopt their posted agenda before beginning each meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS This is time to share info that requires no input or to request input outside of the meeting.

READING OF MINUTES: The previous meeting's minutes are either accepted as read or amended. Final copies of the minutes are kept in a 3-ring binder near the photocopier.

COMMITTEE/PROJECT REPORTS: These include fundraising, events, maintenance projects, budget reports and bank statements. It's not the time for committees to do their actual work, but they may offer information for board discussion, or proposals for board approval.

OLD BUSINESS: Any discussions/decisions that had to be tabled from previous meetings; time-sensitive issues. This is where voting issues come up. Before there can be a vote, there must be a motion: it can be seconded or it can be amended (then seconded) before being open for discussion and vote. Stating a motion helps us clarify the specific decision being made. (Example: I move that we install smoke detectors in all the buildings-- discussion would open to consider the cost, timing and solicit a volunteer)

NEW BUSINESS: Just like it sounds: upcoming events, new proposals, etc.

PUBLIC COMMENT: If we're joined by a non-board member, their chance to address the group is fit in to suit their time restraints.

ADJOURNMENT: Meetings should not exceed 2 hours. If there is a personnel issue the board may excuse staff and go into a closed session before adjourning.

There is ample information online regarding the legal requirements of non-profits as well as of private schools:

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/RegPrivSchl/californ.html>

http://nonprofit.about.com/od/blogs/Blogs_We_Recommend.htm

<http://ag.ca.gov/charities/raffles.php>

http://www.ss.ca.gov/business/corp/corp_artsnpinf.htm

6. ABOUT BOARD MEETINGS vs OTHER MEETINGS

All parents are given a vote on the board upon enrollment, but there is a difference in our roles as board members and as parents of students. Board business includes the school's financial, legal and physical well-being, its transactions and policies.

Parents are responsible for selecting the teachers and approving the calendar and curriculum. For these purposes, parents meet separately from the board.

Any parent may call a parent meeting by notifying all the other parents. One parent should be selected as a moderator, another to keep a record of discussion, questions that need follow up or decisions made.

While the board settles questions by vote, parents may choose to reach consensus on issues like hiring, discipline, snacks, etc. This often means delaying decisions until all parents can be reached, and sometimes means multiple meetings to reach agreements that everyone can live with.

There are areas that overlap between these roles, and still other issues that should be addressed between private parties, directly to a teacher, or through a particular board officer or committee. For example, private tuition questions should be addressed to the secretary. Concerns about a student's behavior or schoolwork should be directed to the teacher or parent, either of whom may request a meeting with the other. The vice-president is the liaison for staff/personnel issues.

If you're uncertain how to bring up a matter, just ask. If a situation becomes difficult, we have qualified community members who have offered to act as mediators. Matters may be brought to the board in written form. The main thing is to speak up about things that concern you in a way that solutions can be found. The most important element in our functioning together is direct, honest and respectful communication!

7. DISCIPLINARY POLICY

The disciplinary policy should be reviewed each year by the parents, teacher and students. Everyone should understand their rights and responsibilities as members of the school community. Parents and teachers should keep in regular communication throughout the year to share information and ways to address any problems. Students should be aware of skills they need to work on. Teachers and parents should encourage the development of self-discipline and self-esteem, and should receive resources/tools with which to do so.

Behavior will be classified by level of concern:

1. Some behaviors are clearly developmental and may be dealt with "in the moment"; interrupting, not listening, leaving a mess, running in the classroom, volume, etc. will be addressed by the teachers. An apology of action may be needed to set things right. The class may conduct regular meetings to discuss behavior and agree on logical consequences.
2. Swearing, persistent disruption, emotional injury to others, violent gestures or speech, lying, etc. are disruptive behaviors, and may result in loss of recess time as well as an apology of action. Parents will be informed of the behavior and consequences.
3. Behavior that is dangerous, including including leaving the school grounds, physical violence, theft, misuse or damage of property, will merit an immediate phone call to parents or guardians. The individual may be asked to leave the school grounds for the remainder of the day, and may be suspended for one or more days.
4. If disruptive or dangerous behavior is unrelenting, the board may recommend expulsion as a final consequence. Every effort must be made to continue working with an individual, providing resources for them, and keeping them in the school community. It is recommended that this decision be reached by consensus rather than vote.

Non-violent Communication, the Apology of Action and Logical Consequences

Some of the methods that have been effective in de-escalating a conflict include the use of “I” statements, where the offended party states their own feelings in connection with the behavior, (“I feel angry when you say it that way”); this is different from a direct accusation (“you’re mean”), and gives the other party a clearer view of the results of their behavior. Non-violent Communication follows this objective statement with a recognition of some need that is not being met and a clear request for positive, doable action. This language format identifies the emotion that’s causing disruption, the behavior eliciting the emotion, the underlying need that the behavior threatens, and puts the injured party in a position of identifying all of this on their own as well as articulating a desire that does meet the need. For example, “I feel hurt (dejected, embarrassed) when you laugh at my attempts, because I need encouragement. I would like you to just keep quiet when I miss.”

Another part of classroom discipline has been the “apology of action”: this was a system in which the class itself agreed upon numerous appropriate actions that would help to heal hurt feelings--much more than just “Sorry”. Examples: If you were excluding someone, you could invite them to do an activity with you; if you laughed at someone’s mistake, you could point out a number of things they do really well. This “you break it, you fix it” approach puts the responsibility for behavior on the individual rather than an outside authority; it also encourages the injured party to speak up. Teachers are not absent in this practice, they must oversee its’ use to be sure it is reasonable and respectful. The teacher has a valuable role to play in setting an example when addressing behavior, avoiding labelling or judgement, even in the tone of voice used.

The apology of action is part of a system called logical consequences -- not to be confused with “natural” consequences, like getting hurt if you jump from the roof-- in logical consequences, the teacher/parent informs the child of facts (“if you can’t settle down quickly, we won’t have time for painting”), and arranges a choice for the child (“Would you like to sweep that up yourself or would you like me to hold the dustpan?”). Logical consequences give the child an active role and have a direct connection to the behavior. This upholds the classroom goals of responsibility, respect and productivity.

Using a closing circle at the end of the day for a class meeting can provide a forum for issues that were not adequately resolved in the moment, or for ongoing issues. Items may be placed in an agenda basket. Taking turns to speak, the students hear out the problem and brainstorm ideas together.

For further guidance, reference “Life-Enriching Education”, “How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk”, “Taking Charge”, “Positive Discipline” and other similar books in the parent/teacher’s resources section of the library.