

FAMILY/CUSTODIAL POLICY

St. Joseph School is finding an increasing number of families experiencing transitions in parental custodial relationships. For this reason we find it necessary to clarify and restate the usual procedures followed by the administration and faculty in dealing with parents in such situations.

In two-parent families it is assumed that both parents are living at the same address unless we have been notified otherwise. St. Joseph School personnel will, therefore, send home notices, communications, etc. with the child. It is assumed that both parents are communicating regarding the child and that all information is shared by and between the parents. This information includes but is not limited to conference appointments, report cards, interim reports, discussions with school personnel, and tuition statements.

In families experiencing separation of parents, or pending divorce, the above information will be sent home with the child to whichever parent currently has care of the child. It is assumed that this information is shared by the parents and *between* the parents. Since this situation frequently impacts on a child's achievement and interactions at school, parents are asked to inform *both* the principal and teacher of this fact so that appropriate support can be given to the child. St. Joseph School personnel cannot proceed on hearsay, rumors, or demands of a parent, but only with the appropriate documentation detailed below.

In cases of an actual divorce decree involving clear *custody by one parent*, the principal is to be informed by the custodial parent of this fact. A copy of the entire decree bearing the case number, the judge's signature and the filing stamp of the clerk of courts are to be submitted to the principal. Unless the decree indicates otherwise, school communications will be sent home to the *custodial parent*. Custodial parents should understand, however, that unless the divorce decree specifically limits the noncustodial parent's right to access records, the noncustodial parent has a right to the same access as the custodial parent. We will, unless instructed by a Court Order, release such records upon request to the noncustodial parent. "Records" includes official transcripts, report cards, health records, referrals for special services, and communications regarding major disciplinary actions. It does not include daily class work and papers, or routine communications sent through the children to the home of residence. In these cases the custodial parent is asked to cooperate with the school and share this information directly with the noncustodial parent. This avoids time-consuming duplication of services.

Further, you should realize that unless restricted by Court Order, any noncustodial parent has the right to attend any school activity of their child which includes sports activities and class programs. Parents should keep each other informed as to these activities to avoid duplication of communications and to allow the school to better attend to the duty of teaching your children.

In cases of 'joint custody' (shared parenting agreements) entitling both parents access to school personnel and activities, it is assumed that **one copy of communications** and information will be sent home with the child and that this will be shared by and between the parents.

Regarding parent conferences in all custody situations: it is preferred and will be the general procedure that *one* conference appointment be scheduled 'jointly' if both parents wish to be present. It is assumed that parents are able to set aside differences and to come together on behalf of their child for this time. **A joint conference further insures that both parents are given the same information at the same time**, thereby avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

In cases where joint conferences are *clearly* neither possible nor desirable by all parties involved, alternate arrangements may be discussed with the principal, subject to the approval of both parents, and further reviewed by St. Joseph School's legal counsel. Every effort will be made to keep communications open with both parents while at the same time avoiding duplication of services and excessive demands on the teacher's time.

Visitation should generally begin at the home of one of the parents and not at school. It is hoped that visitation arrangements would reflect the sensitivity of both parents to the consistency and routines that foster security in a child and allow for school responsibilities and homework to be taken care of during the school week.

If there are questions concerning this restatement of procedures or circumstances you feel necessitate other arrangements, please contact the principal personally.