

# RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

A SNAPSHOT

Section 1 of *Rights Respecting Schools:*  
*Toolkit for Canadian Schools*

## **ABOUT UNICEF CANADA'S GLOBAL CLASSROOM PROGRAM**

UNICEF Canada's mission is to mobilize and empower Canadians to invest in the positive transformation of every child's future. UNICEF Canada's Global Classroom program is a partnership with Canadian teachers and their students to inspire, educate and promote action on social justice, humanitarian issues and human rights - especially the rights of all children. This acclaimed program provides educators with classroom-ready resources and engagement tools. Designed to foster global citizenship and understanding, the Global Classroom shows how each of us can create a better world for all children and the communities in which they live.

For more information about UNICEF Canada's Global Classroom program, visit <http://globalclassroom.unicef.ca>.

## **ABOUT RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS (RRS)**

Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) is an initiative of UNICEF Canada's Global Classroom program. This initiative uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) as the basis for enhancing an inclusive, participatory and respectful school culture for children and adults.

As a framework for educational improvement, the initiative helps schools address the whole learning environment through a consistent, rights-based approach. It is premised on the understanding that in order for children to want to achieve, they have to feel included, that they belong and that they matter. It brings children into early contact with the universal ideals of respect for oneself and for others, in the school community and in an interdependent world.

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email: [rightsrespectingschools@unicef.ca](mailto:rightsrespectingschools@unicef.ca)

website: [www.rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://www.rightsrespectingschools.ca)

## ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

This *Rights Respecting Schools: Toolkit for Canadian Schools* has been written for school boards and schools interested in the Rights Respecting Schools initiative. The toolkit provides the framework, background information, and learning and evaluation tools needed to participate in the initiative.

The toolkit has been organized into four separate sections:

### SECTION 1 Rights Respecting Schools: A Snapshot

*This section includes information about Rights Respecting Schools (RRS), background information about the Convention, benefits of RRS, the building blocks of RRS, and answers to the most frequently asked questions about the initiative. This section can be used as a separate guide for administrators, teachers and parents interested in learning more about RRS.*

**Useful for:** school board and school administrators, teachers, interested parents and community members.

### SECTION 2 Steps to Becoming a Rights Respecting School

*This section provides a step by step guide for schools participating in the Rights Respecting Schools initiative. Checklists, how-to steps, best practice examples and evaluation tools provide practical direction for administrators, teachers, school staff, parents and student leaders.*

**Useful for:** the RRS Planning Committee (the group that facilitates participation in RRS).

### SECTION 3 Rights Respecting Schools Workshop Series: Facilitation Guide

*The RRS Workshop Series is designed to increase understanding of children's rights and rights-respecting education among the staff, parents and student leaders leading the school's transformation into a rights-respecting school. The Facilitation Guide provides the instructions, background information and accompanying resources necessary to facilitate the eight school-community workshops and one student-leader workshop that comprise the series.*

**Useful for:** the RRS Planning Committee, or those responsible for facilitating the workshop series.

### SECTION 4 Rights Respecting Schools Workshop Series: Participant Guide

*Participants in the RRS Workshop Series receive this Participant Guide that contains readings, reflections and take action ideas for use by teachers, parents and school staff.*

**Useful for:** participants in the Rights Respecting School Workshop Series.

# CONTENTS

UNICEF Canada and the Global Classroom Program..... 2

What is a Rights Respecting School? ..... 3

Where does the model for the Rights Respecting Schools initiative come from? ..... 4

Why children’s rights? ..... 5

Guiding Principles of the Convention..... 6

What is children’s rights education? ..... 7

What are the benefits of a Rights Respecting School? ..... 8

What are the steps to becoming a Rights Respecting School?.....9

How long does it take to become a Rights Respecting School?..... 10

Why are the Phase 2 Workshops important? ..... 11

How much does it cost to be involved in RRS?..... 12

What support does UNICEF Canada provide?..... 12

How can we ensure RRS involves a whole-school approach?..... 13

How does the RRS initiative support existing school initiatives? ..... 14

Why do we need to evaluate the RRS initiative? ..... 14

## MORE INFORMATION ON RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

*Rights Respecting Schools: A Snapshot* is a section within the *Rights Respecting Schools: Toolkit for Canadian Schools*. If you are reading this guide separately from the toolkit and you wish to learn more about the initiative or obtain a copy of the toolkit, visit UNICEF Canada’s Rights Respecting Schools website:

[www.rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://www.rightsrespectingschools.ca)

## UNICEF CANADA AND THE GLOBAL CLASSROOM PROGRAM

UNICEF Canada's mission is to mobilize and empower Canadians to invest in the positive transformation of every child's future. Working through school communities, UNICEF Canada's Global Classroom equips Canada's young people to play an active role in promoting development and ensuring respect for human rights in their own communities and around the world.

Rights Respecting Schools is an initiative of UNICEF Canada's Global Classroom program. As a framework for educational improvement, the initiative helps schools apply a consistent, rights-based approach to the whole learning environment, in order to ensure that all members of the school community feel welcomed and respected.

Beyond the Rights Respecting Schools initiative, the Global Classroom program supports Canada's education system in the following ways:

- UNICEF Canada supports teachers with professional development opportunities to help them bring children's rights pedagogy and global issues into their classrooms.
- UNICEF Canada collaborates with educators to develop and promote children's rights curricula and resources.
- UNICEF Canada supports the Rights Respecting Schools initiative through technical support and partnerships with schools, school boards and ministries of education.

To learn more about the Global Classroom program, visit <http://globalclassroom.unicef.ca>.

## WHAT IS A RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL?

UNICEF Canada's Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) initiative uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) as the basis for enhancing an inclusive, participatory and respectful school ethos for children and adults. From what is taught and learned in the classroom, to how students participate in school life, from administrative and policy decisions, to initiatives addressing diversity, bullying or special needs, Rights Respecting Schools shape the learning environment into spaces where both children and adults feel respected and act responsibly. Ultimately Rights Respecting Schools have been shown to have positive, inclusive and peaceful school climates with higher rates of student achievement, lower absenteeism and instances of bullying, and higher rates of teacher satisfaction.

The journey toward becoming a Rights Respecting School involves placing the Convention at the heart of the school's culture. It means learning about and incorporating a deep understanding of the responsibilities people have for one another and that our society has for children, as set out in the Convention. This helps give coherence to the daily tasks of teaching curriculum, administering policy, managing special programs and dealing with issues, opportunities and challenges. It includes giving children meaningful opportunities to voice opinions about their school, to participate in school and classroom decisions, and to contribute to resolving obstacles to teaching, learning and well-being (including violence and discrimination).

UNICEF Canada's Rights Respecting Schools initiative is based upon four building blocks:

- **Awareness:** The school community (students, staff, teachers, parents) knows and understands the concept of children's rights, the rights children have as outlined in the Convention and how children's rights relate to school culture and to their own roles.
- **Student Participation:** Every student has regular opportunities to be an active participant in the school community, and his or her opinions are sought and listened to by decision makers.
- **Teaching and Learning:** The Convention is a reference point for classroom rules, formal and informal curriculum implementation and other decision-making. Adults model rights-respecting attitudes and behaviour, and students are given regular opportunities to learn about and exercise their rights and responsibilities.
- **Leadership:** Administrators are committed to promoting respect for children's rights. Children's rights are used as a lens for policies, program choices, program implementation, and other decision-making.

## WHERE DOES THE MODEL FOR THE RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS INITIATIVE COME FROM?

### CONNECTIONS TO UNICEF PROGRAMMING AROUND THE WORLD

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative draws inspiration from UNICEF's Child-Friendly Schools in countries around the world.

UNICEF developed the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) model as a way of building quality education in both everyday circumstances and emergency situations. In the past decade it has become the main model used by UNICEF and other partners to promote healthy and protective environments for learning. Child-Friendly Schools embrace a philosophy that fosters equality, respect for human rights and participation of all children. They also embrace instructional programs that promote relevant life skills, such as HIV/AIDS prevention; community involvement and participation; and a child-centred style of teaching and learning.

### THE HISTORY OF RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS IN CANADA

In 2000, the Children's Rights Centre (CRC) at Cape Breton University began working with the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board. With early funding support from Canadian Heritage (and later support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canadian Race Relations and UNICEF Canada), they sought to encourage the integration of children's rights education into social studies and health core curricula, and promote awareness of children's rights among professionals working with children.

The early successes of this children's rights initiative came to the attention of education officials in Hampshire, England. In 2002 and 2003, two groups of teachers and administrators from Hampshire spent study leave in Canada examining the work in Cape Breton. The partnership led to the 2004 launch of the Hampshire Rights, Respect and Responsibility Initiative (RRR), a collaboration between the CRC at Cape Breton University and the Hampshire Education Authority. The initiative sought to incorporate children's rights education into the curriculum, and to ensure that school policies, practices and ethos are framed by the Convention. In its first year, the RRR was introduced to 300 schools at the primary level, with the goal of 540 participating schools, serving 200,000 students. There are now more than 600 schools participating in the RRR Initiative in the United Kingdom.

UNICEF UK piloted the Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) in 2006, and launched it as a UK-wide initiative in the spring of 2007. In 2008, UNICEF Canada began the process of adapting materials from the RRR and RRSA initiatives to reflect the Canadian educational context. The UNICEF Canada Rights Respecting Schools initiative was piloted in September 2008 with the Coquitlam District School Board at Cape Horn Elementary School in British Columbia. The Children's Rights Centre at Cape Breton University provided research support to this Canadian initiative.

## WHY CHILDREN'S RIGHTS?

Children have rights, as do all human beings. The rights of all humans are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This international treaty outlines the civil, economic, cultural and social rights that apply to individuals worldwide, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, nationality or any other distinction.

In 1979, world leaders decided that children needed a special convention that would recognize that they have rights and require specific care and protection that adults do not. This Convention, which came into effect in 1989, became known as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Convention outlines the rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; the right to develop to the fullest; the right to protection from harm, neglect and exploitation; and the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. These rights are universal (all children have them), and interdependent and indivisible (one right cannot be ensured without, or at the expense of, other rights). Children's rights are also inalienable (they cannot be taken away) and non-discriminatory (they cannot be denied based on factors such as religion, age, etc.)

The Convention is the most ratified United Nations human rights treaty in the world. Only two countries have not ratified the Convention: the United States of America and Somalia. Canada signed the treaty with support from all provinces and territories on May 28, 1990 and ratified the treaty on December 13, 1991. Signing a treaty indicates a state's intention to incorporate the treaty into domestic law, while ratification of a treaty is a declaration that the state's law reflects the rights outlined in the treaty.

To ratify the Convention in Canada, the government reviewed all provincial and federal laws and concluded domestic laws provide for the rights outlined in the Convention. Therefore, there was no legislation introducing the Convention into domestic laws.

However, ensuring the legal protection of children's rights is an ongoing obligation. Governments are expected to develop new laws, as well as all types of public policy, administrative decisions, services and programs to uphold children's rights. As time goes on, standards become clearer about what it means to provide for and protect children's rights. Governments are expected to constantly revisit existing legislation and develop new legislation to incorporate the highest possible standards of treatment for children.

The courts also have a role to play in advancing children's rights. According to Canada's Constitution, international law such as the Convention can be used by the courts and other decision making bodies (such as tribunals) as an aid in interpreting legislation that affects human rights in Canada.

By agreeing to (or ratifying) the obligations under the Convention, governments have committed to be accountable to the international community for protecting and ensuring the rights of all children. Under the Convention, the Government of Canada is a 'duty-bearer' with a primary responsibility to fulfill and protect the rights of all children in Canada.

However, the responsibility to ensure children’s rights is not the government’s alone. Duty-bearers include all levels of government, and both public and private institutions such as schools and hospitals. As well, the Convention recognizes the primary role of families to nurture and guide their children. Under the Convention, children are the ‘rights-holders’. As in the diagram above, the rights-holders claim their rights from the duty-bearers and, in turn, the duty-bearers have the responsibility to ensure those rights are protected and fulfilled. As institutions responsible for the care and development of children, schools play an important role in upholding children’s rights. By integrating children’s rights into teaching practices, curriculum and policies, schools fulfil their legal obligations to uphold children’s rights.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE CONVENTION

The 54 articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are based upon four guiding principles. The guiding principles are themselves articles of the Convention. They reflect the explicit values of the Convention and provide the means by which all other articles are interpreted. Adherence to these guiding principles is necessary for the full implementation of the Convention.

1. **Non-discrimination (Article 2):** The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It does not matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.
2. **Best interests of the child (Article 3):** The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.
3. **Right to life, survival and development (Article 6):** Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop fully.
4. **Respect for the views of the child (Article 12):** When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. The Convention requires that adults listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making - but it does not give children authority over adults. Article 12 does not interfere with the right and responsibility of parents to express their views on matters affecting their children. Moreover, the Convention recognizes that the level of a child’s participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child’s level of maturity.

## WHAT IS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS EDUCATION?

Children's rights education is simple: "Children's rights education is the explicit teaching of the rights described in the Convention in an environment that itself models and respects those rights".<sup>1</sup>

Within the field of education, there is large support for the view that children cannot effectively learn without doing. In teaching children about their rights, it is crucial that these rights are modeled within their own learning environments. Through the implementation of democratic pedagogy, teachers can model the rights outlined in the Convention. Children's rights education is not only the 'what' but also the 'how' of learning.

Research from Cape Breton University's Children's Rights Centre demonstrates that when children learn about rights and are taught in a rights-respecting environment, the value of rights develops into support for the rights of others. Children become more responsible and begin to demonstrate more rights-respecting behaviour towards peers and adults.<sup>2</sup>

Covell and Howe outline five different approaches to human rights education. (The final approach ('full-blown rights education') forms the basis of the Rights Respecting Schools initiative.)

1. **Not Yet:** Children are educated for their roles and responsibilities they will gain as adults, which neglects to treat children as rights-holders and citizens.
2. **Constrained Rights:** Grudgingly recognizes the rights of children and makes the assumption that children are not able to understand and practice these rights. Children are taught about the rights as outlined in the Convention, but these rights are not recognized or respected in their schools.
3. **Limited Rights Education:** Focuses on issues such as how fortunate children are to have the Convention's rights to protection and does little to impact attitudes and behaviours of children.
4. **Rights Violations Education:** Students are taught about developing countries as places that abuse the rights of children; that there is a Convention to protect the rights of those children, but that it fails. This approach has little relevance to the students.
5. **Full-blown Rights Education:** Combines talk with action. The Convention is taken into consideration through both pedagogical approaches and content. Students are engaged in the process of democratic learning and participation. Essentially, children's rights are not only taught, but are recognized, respected and modeled.

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<sup>1</sup> Covell, K., and Howe, B. *Empowering Children: Children's rights education as a pathway to citizenship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2005), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Covell, K., and Howe, B. (2005).

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL?

Katherine Covell and Brian Howe, researchers at the Children's Rights Centre at Cape Breton University, have found that student participation in school enhances the students' commitment to learning, engagement and enjoyment in school, as well as their optimism for the future. Participation is associated with increased attendance and fewer behavior problems.

Rights Respecting Schools have been shown to facilitate student participation by providing a common set of values across the school. The guiding principle of children's rights – as shared by students, teachers, and school administrators – creates a sense of community in the school. Respect for rights becomes the values framework that students use to make decisions, choose behaviour and guide participation.

Becoming a Rights Respecting School – according to the research of Covell and Howe and an evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award initiative<sup>3</sup> – provides a number of benefits for both children and teachers.

### BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

- There is a decline in bullying and less disruption.
- Children's approach to resolving conflict with each other and with adults is less adversarial.
- Children show greater concern for themselves, for each other and for children around world.
- Children's language becomes more sophisticated and they are more likely to use higher order thinking.
- Children are less likely to be excluded.
- Attitudes toward diversity improve and become more positive.
- School attendance rates improve.
- Children begin to behave like citizens.
- Children actively participate in decision-making around the school.

### BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

- Teachers feel empowered and many are reminded of why they came into the job.
- Teachers have much more time to teach, achieve good progress and higher standards for children, and there is less low level disruption.
- The classroom and school atmosphere is healthier.
- Teachers enjoy their jobs more.

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<sup>3</sup> Sebba, J., and C. Robinson, *Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award*, UNICEF (Sept 2010).

## WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO BECOMING A RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL?

Experience has shown that the process of becoming a Rights Respecting School requires the commitment of a school leadership team that is not only responsible for guiding and undertaking the process but also for monitoring its impact on the school community. The following steps provide a guide for the establishment of a leadership team (the Rights Respecting Schools Planning Committee) and the development of a clear plan for becoming a Rights Respecting School.

These steps draw from the UNICEF Canada Rights Respecting Schools pilot in Coquitlam, British Columbia as well as the model used in schools throughout the United Kingdom. Although each school embarks on its own journey to becoming a Rights Respecting School, the following steps provide the framework to do so successfully.

### STEP 7

**Evaluate Progress:** Use evaluation strategies to measure your efforts and determine the overall impact of the Rights Respecting Schools initiative.

### STEP 6

**Take Action:** Implement your action plan. Start with a kick-off week and continue efforts to build a Rights Respecting School, including classroom charters, codes of conduct, student councils, policies, etc.

### STEP 5

**Generate a Plan:** Develop an action plan based on ideas generated during the workshop series. A successful plan will include concrete strategies for instilling the Rights Respecting School philosophy in your school culture and curriculum.

### STEP 4 (This step is optional. Some schools will skip Step 4 and proceed to Step 5.)

**Phase 2 Workshops:** Continue the workshop series for key stakeholders. The remaining four workshops examine best practices under each building block and encourage participants to start using strategies within the school. Schools receive access to an online learning portal.

### STEP 3

**Phase 1 Workshops & Baseline Audit:** Examine children's rights and RRS through a series of UNICEF-led workshops for key stakeholders (staff, students, etc.). Assess the school community's current rights-respecting capacities with a baseline audit. Submit results to UNICEF and receive recognition/feedback.

### STEP 2

**Establish Leadership:** Set up a **Rights Respecting Schools Planning Committee** that is responsible for guiding and implementing the project. Your team should include multiple stakeholders from the school community, including: students, parents, teachers, administrators, school staff, community members, etc.

### STEP 1

**Introduction to RRS:** Invite UNICEF Canada representatives to facilitate a workshop for stakeholders representing the whole school community (teaching staff, parents, students, administrators, community members, etc.) to learn about the Rights Respecting Schools initiative. As a group, decide whether to move forward with the RRS initiative at the school.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL?

The process of becoming a Rights Respecting School is organic and unique to each school environment. Schools need to determine to what extent they wish to participate and how much time they will devote to seeing the process through.

An integral component of the process is the Rights Respecting Schools Workshop Series for key stakeholders. The length of time a school takes to become a Rights Respecting School will depend largely upon how much of this professional development the school undertakes.

The RRS Workshop Series is divided into two phases: Phase 1 Workshops and Phase 2 Workshops. Some schools will choose, for various reasons (e.g. time and resource constraints), to skip the second phase of workshops. These schools will be classified as Phase 1 Rights Respecting Schools. Schools that complete both the first and second phases of workshops are classified as Phase 2 Rights Respecting Schools. A Phase 1 RRS can complete the second phase of workshops at any point to become reclassified as a Phase 2 RRS.

Various factors will influence how long a school takes to progress through the Steps to Becoming a Rights Respecting School, but to help with planning, schools should expect to commit to a two-year to three-year facilitation process.

**Important:** Whatever amount of time schools choose to dedicate to becoming an RRS, it is most important that they use the framework of steps to guide the process, and that they continue with the best practices established, beyond the initial year(s) of engagement.

For further information on how to continue with the Rights Respecting School initiative beyond the seven steps, see *Long Term Engagement in the RRS Initiative* on page 79.

## WHY ARE THE PHASE 2 WORKSHOPS IMPORTANT?

Every school that embarks on the process of becoming a Rights Respecting School participates in the Rights Respecting Schools Workshop Series. The series is divided into two phases. All participating schools complete the first phase of workshops:

**Phase 1:** The Phase 1 Workshops are delivered, where geographically possible, by UNICEF Canada staff or someone trained by UNICEF Canada. These workshops introduce the school community to children’s rights, rights-respecting education and the RRS initiative. At the end of this phase, the school conducts a baseline audit to assess current rights-respecting capacities. This data is submitted to UNICEF Canada. The school receives feedback and a Certificate of Participation.

Following the completion of the Phase 1 Workshops and baseline audit, schools decide whether or not to proceed with the second phase of workshops.

**Phase 2:** The Phase 2 Workshops explore the building blocks and benchmarks of the RRS initiative in more detail. The workshops guide members of the school community through the process of forming their own action plans to become more rights-respecting as a community.

Schools that choose to skip the second phase of workshops will move ahead to developing the RRS Action Plan (see *Step 5 – Generate a Plan*, pg. 61) under the direction of their RRS Planning Committee. Schools that complete the second phase of workshops will start the development of their School Action Plan during the Phase 2 Workshops, and the RRS Planning Committee will finish them after these workshops. The Phase 2 Workshops are particularly valuable for the breadth of input and action ideas they generate.

Additionally, the Phase 2 Workshops (through both the workshops themselves and the additional content and reflection in the *Participant Guide*, pg. 219) provide rights-respecting support as well as pedagogy and activity ideas to strengthen engagement in the RRS initiative.

## HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO BE INVOLVED IN RRS?

There is no official cost associated with being a Rights Respecting School. UNICEF Canada provides support and resources at no cost to participating schools. However, there will be photocopying costs (and potentially the time costs of professional development) associated with facilitating the RRS Workshop Series (see the *Facilitation Guide*, pg. 81). There may also be additional costs, depending on the activities that schools choose to undertake in their plan to become a Rights Respecting School – for example, if a school hosts a speaker or an evening to educate parents. These types of costs are the responsibility of the school.

## WHAT SUPPORT DOES UNICEF CANADA PROVIDE?

Every school that embarks on the journey of becoming a Rights Respecting School will liaise with UNICEF Canada personnel and receive support as it proceeds through the steps. UNICEF Canada staff, or someone trained by UNICEF Canada will facilitate the Workshop series, co-facilitate the student workshops, and assist in the baseline audit. UNICEF Canada staff will provide feedback on submitted Action Plans. Teaching resources from the UNICEF Canada's Global Classroom website will be made available to all schools in Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools will be provided a Rights Respecting Schools Supplementary Resource Guide.

## HOW CAN WE ENSURE RRS INVOLVES A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH?

Research has shown that cultural transformations within a school do not occur unless all stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators, parents and community members) collaborate and work towards a common goal.<sup>4</sup> This is largely because children are more likely to change their attitudes and actions when educators promote a consistent message, and when this message is reinforced by practices across the institution, in the home and in the community. Moreover, when children participate in creating and directing educational improvement plans, they are more likely to take ownership of them.

The following ideas help ensure that all stakeholders are engaged in the process.

### WHOLE-SCHOOL FROM DAY ONE

From the very initial stages of becoming a Rights Respecting School, representatives of all school community stakeholders need to be an active part of the process. See *Tips for Establishing the RRS Planning Committee* (pg. 32). Ensure the leadership team fully represents the school community.

### ENCOURAGE CHILD-LED PARTICIPATION

Wherever possible, children should be encouraged to brainstorm, initiate and lead how the school undertakes this transformation. Not only is this approach representative of the Rights Respecting Schools ethos, but it encourages wide-spread support because children have helped envision the process and educate their peers about the initiative.

### COMMUNICATE SUCCESSES

Encourage a wider level of participation by regularly communicating your successes both inside and outside the school community. Use various methods of communication (emails, posters, newsletters, announcements, newspaper articles) to keep everyone informed. Remember to appropriately acknowledge the contributions of all those who participate.

### ORGANIZE STAFF SUPPORT

The organization of school-wide events requires the involvement of as many staff as possible. However, teaching and administrative staff often have little extra time. Try these ideas to engage staff:

- **Involve all staff from day one:** Before committing to the Rights Respecting Schools initiative, facilitate a discussion with all staff members. Discuss your ideas and ask for their support. Listen to and address their concerns to ensure they feel ownership over what unfolds.
- **Maximize the participation you get:** Staff with many demands on their time may only put in the minimal amount of effort. If you focus on a quality experience for those who do participate, show a keen interest in incorporating their ideas, and communicate your successes well, reluctant staff may be more inclined to participate in the future. Encourage staff to contribute what they can and work from their skill set.
- **Take a cross-curricular approach:** Encourage teaching staff to incorporate the rights-respecting lens across all disciplines. Provide resource support and ideas for how to do so.

<sup>4</sup> NESRI, *Teachers Talk: School Culture, Safety and Human Rights* (New York: National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, 2008), 30-38.

## HOW DOES THE RRS INITIATIVE SUPPORT EXISTING SCHOOL INITIATIVES?

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative is comprehensive and flexible, and builds upon the current assets, programs and expertise of a school community. Before schools design a plan to become a Rights Respecting School they evaluate the programs and rights-respecting capacities already present and operating at the school. The results of this baseline evaluation ultimately inform the RRS plan going forward.

With the baseline evaluation, many schools discover that much of what they are currently doing is already rights-respecting. Participating in the RRS initiative then brings rights-respecting language to current activities, develops a cohesive focus and theme for school activities and culture, and deepens the understanding of children's rights and the extent to which they are upheld and protected within the school community.

Overall, the Rights Respecting Schools initiative is most effective when viewed as an opportunity to enhance what is already happening within a school, rather than as an additional stand-alone program to be implemented.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO EVALUATE THE RRS INITIATIVE?

The assessment and evaluation process is an imperative part of the RRS initiative. This process determines the progress and effectiveness of the initiative, especially in relation to original expectations.

The information acquired through assessment and evaluation can be used for a variety of purposes:

- It helps schools evaluate current rights-respecting capacities before they launch into the initiative.
- It helps schools understand whether the initiative is having its intended effect.
- It provides schools with an opportunity to reflect upon and improve practice.
- It demonstrates progress, thereby motivating the continued commitment of stakeholders.
- It provides the evidence needed to receive continued support from administrators, boards of education and ministries of education.

In addition to the value of assessment and evaluation for individual schools, the information collected by each school influences: the design of the Rights Respecting Schools initiative, the support resources and programming provided to schools by UNICEF Canada, and the wider understanding of how rights-respecting education contributes to the development of children in Canadian schools. The assessment and evaluation results of participating schools are shared with UNICEF Canada at the end of each school year in order to contribute to these processes.