

## **So, you want to make a difference at Seven Generations Charter School? We welcome you!**

The Seven Generations Charter School (SGCS) community is full of creative, passionate, intelligent individuals. We invite community members—we *need* community members—to share their ideas about how to make SGCS the best school it can be. Below are some general guidelines and procedures describing how anyone in the SGCS community can get involved and bring forth fresh, new ideas. Fresh, new ideas are essential for SGCS to become the school our children and our community deserve!

### **Guiding Principles: A Consensus Model of Decision Making**

- 1. Share widely!** As a general rule, ideas should be shared with diverse stakeholders (i.e., CEO/Academic Director, staff, Community Circle, parents, Board) to solicit feedback and develop the ideas further. The development of our school is a collaborative effort.
- 2. Work as equals with other community members!** SGCS does not practice “top down” governance. This means that, typically, one does not go directly to the Board expecting that they will instantly change things “from on high.” In reality, the CEO/Academic Director holds much responsibility for policies, procedures, and activities at SGCS, and develops these based on substantial collaboration with staff, parents (especially via committees and Community Circle), students, and the Board. The governance of our school is a collaborative effort.
- 3. Seek consensus!** Several years ago, the SGCS community embraced a Formal Consensus process of decision-making. We hope that community members will learn and explore this process. You can read about Formal Consensus here: [www.consensus.net](http://www.consensus.net). Also, at that site you can order the book *On Conflict and Consensus*, by C. T. Butler and Amy Rothstein, which describes the Formal Consensus framework used at SGCS. Finally, Formal Consensus trainings are offered at SGCS from time to time.

### **Specific Procedures**

During the first several years of our existence, policies, procedures, and activities at SGCS have been successfully developed and implemented through a variety of pathways. Thus, the intent of this document is not to describe procedures that must be followed with military precision. Rather, it is to offer a “general sketch” to help community members who want to get involved and make a difference but who are confused about how to do so. If any community member remains confused even after reading this document, we invite you to contact Susan Pfeil ([susan.pfeil@sevengen.org](mailto:susan.pfeil@sevengen.org)), our CEO/Academic Director, who will be happy to help you find your place to get involved!

**Got an idea for your child’s classroom?** If so, then the appropriate starting point is a conversation with your child’s teacher. It would also be wise to confer with parents of other children in the classroom, to hear their reactions to your ideas. Teachers are certainly more likely to be open to ideas when many parents indicate clear, reasoned support for those ideas. If you feel that your child’s teacher is insufficiently responsive, then you should have a conversation with the CEO/Academic Director.

**Document history:** Consistent with the ideas shared in this document, the document has traveled through many hands and minds. It originated in the Governance Committee, was subsequently shared with the Academic Director and the Community Circle, and feedback into it along the way.

**Do you have an idea with broader implications; potentially relevant for a whole grade level, all children in the school, or the entire school community?** If so, then the appropriate starting point is a conversation with the CEO/Academic Director. The CEO/Academic Director could potentially handle your idea in a variety of ways. The precise manner in which it is handled depends on the scope of the idea, the urgency of the suggested change, the necessity for background research, among other factors. Depending on these considerations, the CEO/Academic Director might:

- Implement the idea right away (probably unlikely).
- Share the idea (or invite you to share it) with various stakeholders (e.g., staff, Community Circle, Board), modify the idea based on feedback received, and then implement the idea.
- Inform you that SGCS has an existing committee under whose purview your issue falls (e.g., Food Committee). Please consider joining that committee, as everyone in the community is encouraged to join committees. At a minimum, you should share your idea with the committee.
  - N.B., A complete list of committees with descriptions and contact information can be obtained by clicking the relevant link on this page:  
<http://www.sevengenerationsschool.org/page.phtml/committees>
  - N.B., If you feel strongly about your idea, please make an effort to present it in person. With the onslaught of information and emails we all receive daily, good ideas are easily lost if they do not come with a “personal touch.” Making the investment of time and energy to bring your ideas forward in person will likely cause your idea to move forward more efficiently.
- Invite you to form a new committee to refine your idea, do relevant research, and develop recommendations that can then be brought back to the CEO/Academic Director and other stakeholders. For example, a group of parents created a new committee that will examine the issue of homework: How much is too much? Does homework truly facilitate learning? What types of homework are most beneficial?

If you join or form a committee, please do your part to ensure that the committee keeps all stakeholders informed about its activities and discussions. Because s/he plays a crucial role in coordinating the activities of different facets of our community, the CEO/Academic Director should receive meeting minutes (including information about who attended) from all committee meetings in a timely fashion. Furthermore, committees should regularly give brief presentations (e.g., 5-10 minutes) at both Community Circle and Board meetings. Depending on the activity level of the committee, these presentations might range from monthly to quarterly. Presentations should aim to inform others of what the committee is doing and also to solicit feedback from those in the community who are not on the committee.