

What is a Rights Respecting School?

A Rights Respecting School uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) as a basis for enhancing an inclusive and respectful school culture which promotes participation and active citizenship.

Through this program, schools identify how the Convention can be used as a framework to augment existing school initiatives. The Rights Respecting Schools program directly supports many of the Ministry mandated initiatives such as:

- Safe and Caring Schools
- Equity and Inclusive Education
- Character Development and Citizenship Education
- Student Engagement.

What are the Benefits of a Rights Respecting School?

Research conducted in schools that have incorporated a rights respecting framework (including the [Rights Respecting School Award](#)¹ program in the United Kingdom) show consistent results:

- Improved self-esteem and well-being
- Enhanced moral understanding
- Reductions in bullying and disruptive behaviours
- Increased student participation in decision-making
- Improved conflict-resolution skills
- Increased support for global justice
- Improved teacher job satisfaction.

What does a Rights Respecting School look like?

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative is based upon four building blocks which inform the activities that a school undertakes in its process to becoming a Rights Respecting School.



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.

Example

Student-led school assembly about the Convention



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.

Example

Engaged student government



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.

Example

Classroom Charters instead of classroom rules



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.

Example

School code of conduct reviewed with a rights-respecting lens

¹ <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Impact-Evidence/>

What is the process and timeframe of becoming a Rights Respecting School?

Although the process to becoming a Rights Respecting School is organic and unique to each school that undertakes it, experience has demonstrated that the following clear and easy-to-follow steps help guide schools on their journey. During the seven steps to becoming a Rights Respecting School, schools will:

- Learn about Rights Respecting Schools and make a commitment
- Establish a team of staff, students and parents to lead the initiative
- Conduct an assessment of rights respecting capacities *before* the initiative begins
- Participate in five 2-hour professional development workshops for staff and parents
- Make and implement an action plan to achieve the RRS Building Blocks
- Assess the impact of the initiative after one full cycle of implementation.



There is no prescribed timeline to which a school must adhere, but schools should expect to commit one to two years for full implementation of the program. Upon successful completion of the seven steps, a school receives recognition as a Rights Respecting School.

What support is provided to Rights Respecting Schools?

Every school that embarks on the journey of becoming a Rights Respecting School will liaise with an RRS Facilitator who will:

- Travel to and deliver the RRS Professional Development Workshop Series.
- Assist with both the Initial and Follow-Up Rights Assessments (in Steps 3 and 7).
- Provide teaching resources and support materials.
- Provide feedback on and help develop the school RRS Action Plan.
- Be available for questions, support and direction by phone or email.
- Point to online support tools (RRS Web site).

What are the costs of becoming a Rights Respecting School?



Schools that undertake the process to becoming a Rights Respecting School should expect some minimal costs associated with participation. However, many of the resources, training and support needed to implement the initiative are available at no cost to the school.

The Rights Respecting Schools Workshop Series will require the full participation of school staff. This may result in costs associated with professional development release time. Also there will be photocopying and some costs associated with materials needed for the workshops (i.e. chart paper, markers, sticky notes, etc.).

I think this is something my school should do – what are the next steps?

Because becoming a Rights Respecting School involves a process of whole school transformation, it is important for school staff and parents to also be committed to the program. The first step is to have an RRS Facilitator come and present this program to the whole school community. The school then decides if this is a program they would like to explore further. Contact rightsrespectingschools@unicef.ca for more information.