

RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL
SCHOOL AND FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS
POLICY

River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and federal law having to do with non-discrimination on the basis of age, ancestry, athletic performance, color, creed, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, homelessness, mental or physical disability, national origin, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, prior academic achievement, race, religion, sexual orientation, and special need in its educational programs and activities.

Educational research clearly indicates that parental involvement in children’s education increases the likelihood that a student will succeed at school. As such, it is the general goal of River Valley Charter School to foster relationships with **all** caregiving individuals in the homes of students, providing maximum accessibility and encouraging the maximum level of parental involvement. Information that supports the growth and achievement of the student, or that will aid the student in the completion of school work and/or activities, which might include but not be limited to assignments, rubrics, notes, materials, take home exams, etc., will be shared with all caregivers.

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the definition of “parent” includes a natural parent, a guardian, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or guardian. This language has been interpreted to include stepparents provided that the child lives with the biological and stepparent at least part of the time.

The Family Compliance Office of the federal Department of Education has issued additional guidance regarding stepparents, establishing that a “stepparent has rights under FERPA where the stepparent is present on a day-to-day basis with the natural parent and child, and the other parent is absent from that home. In such cases, stepparents have the same rights as do natural parents.” In addition to establishing the direct rights of stepparents, and barring the existence of a court order to the contrary, each natural parent also has the right to designate another individual(s) of their choosing to have access to the records, without the express permission of the other parent.

In its role as a public school, River Valley Charter School provides direct services of education and enrichment to students within its charge. Consistent with this responsibility and the firm belief that parental involvement supports improved outcomes for children, members of the school staff will communicate and consult with caregivers/parents/guardians regarding student progress and achievement, student development, and proposed plans for enhancing the same, to the extent authorized by federal and state student record laws and regulations. Student-specific meetings and conferences will be open to attendance by all appropriate caregivers simultaneously. The School may deny requests to hold separate meetings when parents are separated or divorced.

The custodial parent(s) retain all authorization and decision-making powers including but not limited to those related to a student’s general educational plan, Individual Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan) unless such a case arises that the custodial parent assigns his/her rights via a Caregiver’s Authorization Affidavit.

Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a Caregiver Authorization Affidavit may be filed with the school to further recognize a stepparent's role in their stepchildren's lives. The Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit allows a custodial parent to "assign" his or her parental rights to another person including a stepparent. In other words, the designated person can act as an agent or representative of the natural parent. Such authorization is subject to the same limitations as might be placed upon the natural parent through a custody agreement or court order. The Authorization does not provide greater rights to the stepparent than those afforded the natural parent. The Authorization does not limit any of the rights of the other natural parent. However, the other natural parent cannot prevent the designee from accessing records in the absence of a court order.

Family involvement in the educational program and activities of River Valley Charter School will be encouraged through regular communication by school administration, teachers, staff, the parent/teacher organizations, the school volunteer program, and other constituents that provide opportunities for participation in school activities and programs. The goal of family involvement is the development of a partnership between home and school that facilitates academic success.

River Valley Charter School is committed to:

- Building a bridge between home and school;
- Ensuring smooth home-to-school transitions; and
- Creating a welcoming environment for both students and families.

Caregivers/parents/guardians are encouraged to:

- Work collaboratively with all caregivers/parents/guardians to support their children;
- Be aware what their child is being taught/learning;
- Ask questions about their child's education;
- Advocate for their child's individual needs; and
- Support their child's learning.