



## Coming Up

**Drop Your Kids Off Night**

January 20th from 6 until 10

**Staff In-Service, No School**

Monday, January 23rd

**Open House**

Sunday, February 19th from 2 until 4

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## Announcements

When shopping on Amazon this season or any season for that matter please go through our **Amazon Smile**. Here is the link so every time you purchase AmazonSmile eligible products 0.5% of that purchase goes to TRVS. **Every little bit counts!**

<http://smile.amazon.com/ch/35-2468033>

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Submissions from parents, staff, board members, and students are welcome here in the newsletter.

Please take a few moments to read this vivid and insightful article written by Jason. In my opinion, there's nothing better than knowing more today than you did yesterday.

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### The One Weird Trick No Sudbury School Can Do Without...It's Not What You Think!

Forgive the clickbait headline, but it's true. School Meeting and student initiated activity get all the talking time, but there's another element that may be even more important.

At our school, students, along with staff, have a lot of authority. They are responsible for their own time, school rules, policies at School Meeting, enforcing school rules at Justice Committee, overseeing school resources via Co-ops, and implementing policies individually and in committees. Students can easily change the official rules and structure and they can even more easily change the way things are done day to day. They can and they do change things every day, at TRVS and at other Sudbury schools around the country and around the world. Still, there's one thing that they always keep.

I've been to five Sudbury schools now myself. I've read rulebooks and policies of many more. I've talked to staff and students from dozens of schools. We have a lot in common. We all work to preserve student freedoms. We believe in kids' innate drive to grow. We know that success in life, almost however you define that, is more dependent on building relationships, on knowing how to motivate and organize yourself and others, and on taking responsibility than it is on which facts you've memorized. I have been surprised to learn though, that we have a lot of differences, too.

Some Sudbury schools have open campus policy where any student can come and go with hardly any restrictions. At TRVS no students can leave by themselves. They need staff with them or several other students and a phone and a special form signed by their parents. Some schools elect officials every month. Here it's about once a year. Some schools have individual chores assigned to each student. Here we have teams who cover different areas. School meeting sometimes must hear any motion at two different meetings. We only require one. At one school or another almost every job of running the school is delegated to a clerk instead of being considered by the full school meeting. There's just one main structure

that remains nearly the same at every school.

Deciding on rules that everyone should follow is kind of abstract. You just can't imagine every possible situation. Setting staff salary is very concrete, and limited in many ways beyond the immediate control of school meeting. Admissions has an enormous impact on the school, requires highly developed communication skills and is fraught with emotional impact on all sides. School Meetings at different schools have come up with wildly different solutions to these challenges but there's one thing they all agree about.

Without enforcement or consequences, our rules would be more like suggestions. A big part of our school order does come from students and staff letting other people know what's expected in a casual way via conversations, pointed stares, and organic social consequences. When a rule relates to safety or when relationships become strained, or the rule is well understood but maybe impulses win out or the rule isn't valued, then School Meeting needs some way to communicate to the rulebreaker that a behavior isn't tolerable. At all the Sudbury schools I'm aware of, that job is given to the Justice Committee.

There is just no better way to be sure a student listens when they're told about the impact of their actions than by having their peers tell them. There's no more just way to decide the outcome of a potentially confusing conflict than by giving all parties time to share their story and have concerned and impartial people from the community work to help find a resolution plan.

The understanding that a student gains as a Justice Committee member would be almost impossible to teach. They learn about our rules and why we have the ones we do and, often, how they could be improved. They learn how to find agreement and how to be sure everyone's voice is included. If a someone doesn't feel heard, everyone gets to see how that works right away and first hand. They learn how hard it is to decide what to do when you can't be certain of the facts.

Another powerful role of JC is an important parallel to adult legal systems. JC decides what the laws mean. Our food rule allows drinks anywhere if they're in a "closed container." We have a rule that says "No one may use excessive force when closing a door." If someone asks me what a closed container is or what excessive force is, I can't say. Only JC gets to decide. All I can do is talk to them about what the rule is trying to do and encourage them to think about the impact of their actions and imagine what JC might decide.

In JC students have access to justice under the law. They have responsibility for rules and standards that support the community. They have an opportunity to be heard and an obligation to listen. Because JC interprets the law, students must think about the purpose of rules and the consequences of their actions. They must try to see themselves from another point of view just to decide if they are following the rules.

Every element of our school except JC could change and we might still be Three Rivers Village School. Justice Committee is the single most essential element in preserving the freedom, responsibility, safety and community of our school and our students.

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For those of you not from Pittsburgh you'd probably say "the table needs to be fixed". For those of you from the 'burgh you may just say "the table needs fixed"

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## School Meeting is a-buzz



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