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The Annual Assembly: A Pivotal Moment

Revised
version

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Resources

For answers to your questions, to learn more about a subject, to find the proper tools or resources...

Contact the FCPQ. We provide:

- advice;
- information;
- references;
- training workshops.

Visit our web site at www.fcpg.qc.ca or contact your Regional Association through the Parents' Committee of your School Board.

Credits

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The Annual Assembly: A Pivotal Moment



A Legal Obligation

"During the month of September each year, the chair of the governing board or, if there is none, the principal shall, by written notice, call a meeting of the parents of the students who attend the school to elect parents' representatives to the governing board" (Education Act, s. 47).

At this Assembly, the parents also elect a representative to the Parents' Committee, and a substitute, and decide if they wish to form a Parent Participation Organization (PPO).

The Ideal Time to Inform Parents and Promote Parent Participation

There is no better time to set the tone for the year ahead and to convey to parents the enthusiasm of those who are already involved in the school.

During the Assembly, parents elected to the Governing Board, the PPO and the Parents' Committee report on the work accomplished since the last Annual Assembly.

Encouraging Parents to Participate

A fairly limited number of parents attend Annual Assemblies. However, this is not unique to the Education sector. Statistics show that on average 4 to 5% of the population become involved in public participation organizations. Surpassing 10% attendance at an Annual Assembly is therefore quite an accomplishment, but does not mean that higher objectives are not worthwhile!

The First Condition for Success: Have Precise Objectives

For example:

- Highlight the achievements of the Governing Board, Parent Participation Organization and Parents' Committee.
- Discuss the Educational Project or the School Success Plan with the Assembly.
- Report on prior actions taken on behalf of the parents.
- Instill in parents the desire to become involved in their child's school.
- Present the various forms of participation under consideration or already in place, such as school newspaper, library, theatrical group, choir (see Leaflet 1 *Parents, let's go! Parent Participation Organization: Helping schools be their best*).

Tips for stimulating the interest of parents

- Organize discussion workshops on subjects of interest to parents.
- Simulate a meeting to demystify roles.
- Invite a speaker or a well-known guest.
- Introduce school staff and projects for the year ahead.
- Offer childcare services.
- Ask students to present their projects or to put on a show or an exhibit.

A Good Assembly is Well-Prepared



The responsibility for organizing the Annual Assembly falls to the Chair of the Governing Board who, in accordance with the Act, must convene the meeting. Here are some guidelines:

- Work in collaboration with the school principal but without passing on the entire responsibility to him or her; This Assembly belongs to parents and must be run by parents;
- If possible, start preparing in May or June;
- Form a team with which to share tasks; include the Parents' Committee representative and the person who heads the PPO;
- Keep in mind evaluations of past Assemblies;
- Identify the expectations and needs of your community;
- Allow for an appropriate budget.

Be Imaginative When Calling the Assembly

The Act specifies, "the notice shall be sent at least four days before the meeting is to be held" (Educ. Act, s. 47). Here are a few suggestions for going beyond this minimal requirement:

- Announce the date of the Assembly in June, particularly if you are planning special activities;
- Use all possible means of circulating the information (internal newsletter, students' agendas, local newspaper, bulletin boards, memos, etc.);
- Send an attractive and friendly invitation letter with the agenda, giving parents a general idea of the program and the objectives for the evening;
- Do not send the notice with other papers not related to the meeting; the notice might be missed;
- Ask parents already involved in the school to help contact other parents;
- Send a follow-up invitation on the day of the Assembly.

Above All, Leave Nothing to Chance

- Provide a sufficient number of chairs; arrange them in an inviting way, in semi-circles for example. Choose a room neither too big (much less friendly) nor too small (too hot and stuffy).
- Provide copies of the agenda, the positions to be filled and their descriptions (see page 7, 8 and 9) and the election procedure (see page 6).
- Provide a chalkboard or an easel with paper for writing nominations and make sure there are enough ballots.

Take Care of Your Guests

- Choose one or two people to greet participants as they arrive.
- Be confident and positive.
- Provide a special welcome to new parents (word of welcome, tour of the school, etc.).
- Invite participants to sit near the front.
- Provide a snack at the end of the meeting (coffee and juice) to encourage communication among participants.
- Say goodbye to participants as they leave.

Expect the Unexpected!



Absence

- If the Chair is absent, the Principal convenes the Assembly. During the meeting, the Chair position may be taken over by another parent member of the Governing Board or by a parent appointed by the Assembly.
- It is not mandatory that the Principal be present, but it is strongly recommended. If the Principal is absent, it would be preferable to postpone the Assembly to a later date, before September 30, making sure the Principal or a substitute will be available.

Vacant Positions

- If the required number of parents to fill Governing Board positions is not elected, the meeting may be adjourned to a later date, before September 30—hence the importance of calling the Assembly early in September!
- The term of office for parent representatives on the Governing Board is two years. Parents who resign or who no longer qualify to sit on the Board must be replaced. Parent members of the Governing Board choose the replacement parent for the unexpired portion of the term (Educ. Act, s. 55). They also have the right to choose the proper time to appoint the replacement parent.
- However, a parent whose child leaves the school during the first year of the parent's mandate may remain on the Governing Board until the next Annual Assembly (Educ. Act, s. 55).

Pitfalls to Avoid

- Designating a parent to the Governing Board after the election is closed: this could be contested.
- Giving Governing Board members the task of electing the Parents' Committee representative or substitute: persons chosen this way may not legally sit on the Parents' Committee.
- Holding the Annual Assembly after September 30: all decisions made by the Governing Board could be contested.
- Not electing the required number of parents to the Governing Board: the Governing Board's powers are then assumed by the school principal. ("Where the meeting of parents called [...] fails to elect the required number of parents' representatives, the principal shall exercise the functions and powers of the governing board" (Educ. Act, s. 52). This required number is determined by the School Board after consultation (Educ. Act, s. 103), and cannot be changed after the Annual Assembly is held.)

The Agenda: An Indispensable Tool



The agenda is the main item in the Annual Assembly. Here is a typical example:

Opening activity (optional)

1. Opening and welcome

The Chair of the Governing Board presides over the Assembly. The Chair's duties are to keep to the agenda, give the floor and ensure that the schedule is respected.

A tip: announce the length of the meeting at the beginning.

A suggestion: don't get bogged down in useless procedures!

2. Designating a secretary for the meeting

3. Reading and approval of agenda

4. Approval of minutes of last Annual Assembly

5. Presentation of the roles and functions of the Governing Board, the Parent Participation Organization and the Parents' Committee

This is a very important part of the meeting, the goal of which is to make parents want to become involved. Clearly present the basic points on roles and functions. Stress the particular contribution of parents and how their actions influence various levels of the school environment. Remember to mention that there are advisory committees on transportation and on services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning difficulties. See page 7 for the presentation of the places for parent action in the education network.

6. Approval of election procedure

This subject is discussed on page 6.

For items 7, 8 and 9, it is a good idea to ask the committee chairs to give a summary of their committee's activity report (avoid reading from a paper).

It is also important to set aside time to answer parents' questions.

Finally, remember to include the follow-ups to the recommendations from the previous year, if applicable.



7. Governing Board

- 7.1 Presentation of last year's annual report
- 7.2 Election of new members

8. Parent Participation Organization (PPO)

- 8.1 Presentation of last year's annual report
- 8.2 Formation of a PPO
- 8.3 Composition
- 8.4 Rules of operation
- 8.5 Election

9. Parents' Committee

- 9.1 Report by out-going representative
- 9.2 Election of representative
- 9.3 Election of substitute

10. Question period

This is a unique opportunity for parents to express their opinions and expectations or to ask questions. As necessary, inform parents of the follow-up action that will be taken

11. A Word from the Principal

Remember to give the Principal a chance to speak. This person can be the parents' best ally in their child's education.

12. Evaluation of the meeting

Verbal evaluation (the Chair asks for comments and suggestions from participants) or written (evaluation forms are handed out as participants arrive).

13. Closing/adjournment

Snack (optional)

Conduct Elections Quickly and Efficiently!



IMPORTANT!
Election rules must
be presented to the Assembly
for approval.

Elections are held at several different times during the Annual Assembly. Here are the minimum rules that may be applicable in all circumstances.

1. **Presiding over elections:** The Chair of the Assembly assumes this responsibility, unless he or she is a candidate for the elective position. In this case, the Assembly designates another person, on the proposal of a parent.
2. **Designating scrutineers:** On the proposal of a parent, the Assembly designates two scrutineers from among the persons who are not candidates for an elective position.
3. **Nominations:** The President of Elections opens the nomination period for the positions to be filled. Any participant with the right to vote may nominate an eligible person. Any eligible person may nominate him/herself (optional rule). On the proposal of a parent, the President of Elections closes the nomination period. The President asks nominees if they accept their nominations, starting with the last person nominated. If the number of persons who accept corresponds to the number of positions to be filled, the President declares them elected.
4. **Ballots:** There are various ways to proceed with voting (raised hands, secret ballot). We suggest the following secret ballot procedure:
 - 1) Before the vote, candidates are invited to speak briefly (optional);
 - 2) Scrutineers hand out a ballot to each parent present who has a child attending the school;
 - 3) Parents who have the right to vote may write as many names as there are positions to be filled;
 - 4) Scrutineers collect the ballots and count the votes, rejecting ballots which have more names than there are positions to be filled;
 - 5) Scrutineers hand over the written results of the vote to the President and make sure the used ballots are destroyed.
5. **Declaring an election:** The President of Elections declares elected the persons who received the most votes. The President reports the number of votes received by each candidate (optional).
6. **In case of a tie:** If there is a tie between two candidates and this affects the results, the President calls for a new vote. For example: 2 positions are to be filled; the candidate X obtains 20 votes and the candidates Y and Z obtain 12 votes each; the President calls for a revote for candidates Y and Z; the candidate who obtains the most votes is elected.

Places for Parent Action



Organize, support, inform, be involved, develop relationships, collaborate, work for the benefit of students and parents in order to improve the quality of school life – do these activities interest you? There's a place for you in the PPO!

Decide, communicate, be informed, consult, represent, study – do these actions appeal to you? Choose the Governing Board!

Represent, influence, discuss, listen to the needs of the community and convey them to the school board – do these actions inspire you? Get elected to the Parents' Committee!

The Annual Assembly is an occasion for parents 1) to decide whether or not to have a Parent Participation Organization, 2) to elect their representatives to the Governing Board, and 3) to appoint, from among the latter, a representative (and a substitute) to be on the Parents' Committee.

The Parent Participation Organization (PPO)

"The purpose of a parent participation organization is to encourage the collaboration of parents in developing, implementing and periodically evaluating the school's educational project and their participation in fostering their child's success" (Educ. Act, s. 96.2). It can also "advise the parents' representatives on the governing board regarding any matter concerning which the organization is consulted by the parents' representatives on the governing board" (Educ. Act, s. 96.3). The parents at the Annual Assembly decide the name, the composition and the operations of the PPO. The PPO is:

- a place exclusively reserved for parents;
- a place for communication about ways to help students succeed and about school life;
- a place of support for parents.

The Governing Board

The Governing Board is composed of an equal number of parents and staff representatives, as well as two community representatives and two Cycle Two Secondary students, where applicable. The Governing Board is:

- a place for dialogue between the different educational agents of a school;
- a place for decisions about the aims and objectives for the school and ways to implement them;
- a place for expressing parents' opinions on the student supervision policy, rules of conduct, safety measures and anything else that might improve the operation of the school.

The Parents' Committee

At the school board level, the Parents' Committee is formed of one representative from each school, elected by parents at the Annual Assembly, and one representative from the Advisory Committee on Services for Handicapped Students and Students with Social Maladjustments or Learning Disabilities (Educ. Act, s.189). The Parents' Committee is:

- a place to represent the interests, expectations and needs of parents at the school board level;
- a place to express your opinion on any question or subject which may improve school board operations;
- a place to develop parent participation in education.

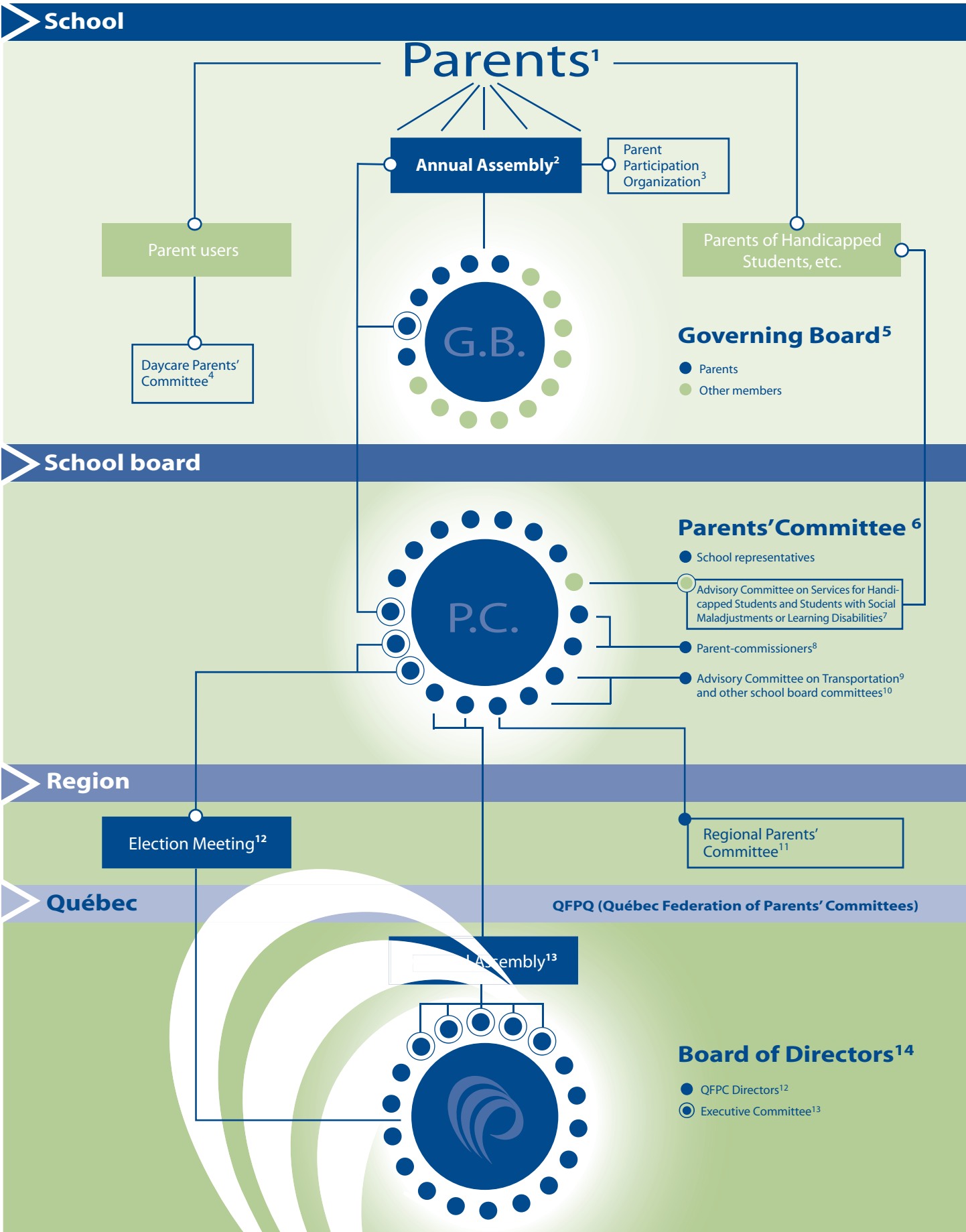
The Parent Participation Network



The organization chart opposite presents the different places for parent participation in the education network. It shows the place of the Annual Assembly and the organizations directly related to it—the Parent Participation Organization, the Governing Board and the Parents' Committee (page 7). The organization chart also includes the other places for parent participation.

Notes for the organization chart opposite:

1. The Education Act defines "parent" as the "person having parental authority or, unless that person objects, the person having custody de facto of the student" (Educ. Act, s. 13 (2)).
2. See page 1.
3. See page 7.
4. In accordance with the Regulation respecting childcare services, the Governing Board may form a Day-care Parents Committee.
5. See page 7.
6. See page 7. Note: "every school board that divides its territory into administrative regions may, for the same purposes, replace the parents' committee by a regional parents' committee for each region and a central parents' committee composed of delegates from the regional parents' committees" (Educ. Act, s. 191).
7. Each school board establishes an Advisory Committee on Services for Handicapped Students and Students with Social Maladjustments or Learning Difficulties; it is composed of parents of these students and of representatives of the people who provide services to these students (Educ. Act, s. 185). These parents are designated by the Parents' Committee.
8. The Parents' Committee elects two parent-commissioners (one for the elementary level and the other for the secondary level) who sit on the school board's Council of Commissioners and Executive Committee.
9. The Parents' Committee names one of its members to sit on the school board's Advisory Committee on Transportation (Educ. Act, s. 188).
10. The Parents' Committee designates parents for the various committees formed by the school board (Educ. Act, s. 192 (1)).
11. The Parents' Committee designates one member or several members to sit on the Regional Parents' Committee (sometimes called federation, association or section).
12. At an Election Meeting, each region in Québec elects a director (and a substitute) to the Board of Directors of the Québec Federation of Parents' Committees.
13. At a General Assembly, the representatives of each Parents' Committee elect the members of the Executive Committee of the Federation.
14. The Directors and members of the Executive Committee form the Board of Directors of the Federation. In addition, the English section of the Federation is represented by a Director and by a Vice-President for English Affairs designated by the General Assembly of English-speaking parents.



Resources

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- advice;
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