



5 Fullfledge Partners

Summary

<i>Partnership: A Necessity</i>	1
<i>From Spectators to Partners</i>	1
<i>The Reform's Heritage</i>	2
<i>Partnership Within the Governing Boards</i>	3
<i>The Benefits of Partnership</i>	6

Resources

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

We offer:

- Advice;
- Information brochures;
- References;
- Training workshops.

Visit our web site www.fcppq.qc.ca or contact your regional association through the Parents' Committee at your School Board.

Acknowledgement

Leaflet 5 "Fullfledge Partners" is published as part of the training program of the Fédération des comités de parents de la province de Québec, 389, boulevard Rochette, Beauport, Québec, G1C 1A4.

Contributors to the Production:

- Coordination, research: Multi projets
- Text: Claudine St-Germain
- Graphics: Groupe Zone Communication
- Printing: Litho Acme-Renaissance

March 2002

Legal deposit – 2002

Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

ISBN 2-921357-66-6

Partnership: More Than a Fad, a Necessity



Whether it is winning a game, turning a profit, or producing an educational project, partners must come to an agreement because without the participation of all, their goal will never be achieved. Everyone has a role to play and must work with and alongside the other partners so that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

What do the members of a sports team, business associates and members of a Governing Board have in common? Each in their own way are partners. They have committed to a common goal and must work together and adopt strategies and means for seeing their project through to completion.

In short, partnership in education means exercising power collegially, while respecting the skills of all in order to achieve a shared objective, that is, the success of every student. Partnership occurs everywhere in the school community but is particularly visible in Governing Boards.

From Spectators to Partners

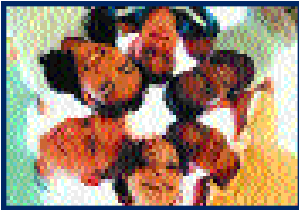
Parent participation in school life has changed considerably over the years. From simple spectator status when Québec's education system first began to genuine partners under the reform, parents now express their viewpoint and are involved in making numerous decisions that affect school life.

There are various forms of working relations between parents and the school team. For example, parent-teacher meetings are opportunities for the mutual exchange of information. Parents learn more about the behaviour and academic strengths and weaknesses of their children, and teachers get to know more about the personality of their students and their background.

Parent Participation Organizations (PPOs) are another way for parents to get involved in school life by expressing their opinions, taking part in various activities and carrying out various projects. Here we are referring to consultation and collaboration.

Lastly, Governing Boards are joint action forums where partnerships are created between the groups represented. It is through their representatives on the Governing Board that parents become genuine partners within the school.

Partnership at School, the Reform's Heritage



Clearly, this mission goes beyond grammar rules and mathematics! It assumes acquisition of an array of knowledge and skills, as well as values that call for a contribution by parents and the community.

The notion of partnership debut with the reform of the education system. Since the reform is aimed at the academic success of all students, it hinges on pooling the strengths of every group concerned, that is, parents, students, teaching staff, principals, non-teaching professionals, support and daycare staff and community members.

One of the goals of the reform is to give schools more autonomy. In being granted the power to tailor their services to the needs and features of the communities they serve, schools are better positioned to foster the academic success of every child.

To do this, genuine partnership between parents, students, staff members, the principal, and community members is crucial. The government has therefore built provisions into the Education Act to ensure that education is a responsibility shared by all partners within each school.

When you consider the mission of schools, it becomes clear why partnership is so important. This mission is threefold:

- **To teach**, that is, act so that students acquire knowledge and learn how to use this knowledge in their daily lives;
- **To socialize**, that is, teach students to live together and foster their social development;
- **To provide qualifications**, that is, give students all they need to be productive citizens and to enter the labour market,

by making every student capable of undertaking and successfully completing a path of learning.

In order for partnership to really take root, all players must espouse the basic principles guiding the education reform:

- More autonomy for schools;
- Responsibility shared between the Governing Board and the principal;
- Specific powers for the principal and the teaching staff in pedagogical matters;
- Consultation of teaching staff and other school staff before files are forwarded to the Governing Board;
- Parity in the number of parent and teacher representatives on the Governing Board.

Partnership Within the Governing Boards.

Understanding the Dynamics



Partnership within a school is exercised mainly at the Governing Board level. Governing Boards are complex bodies. Being aware of the functions and powers granted to Governing Boards under the Education Act is not enough, we have to be familiar with their every facet.

A Task Group

A Governing Board is not just a discussion group. In fact, it is more of a task group. The members have the common goal of ensuring student success by improving school life. The functions a Governing Board assumes are clearly specified: Produce and implement an educational project, approve the rules of conduct enforced in the school or the school's subject-time allocation, adopt the school's annual budget, etc. To carry out these tasks, the members must meet and be prepared to invest in the Governing Board.

Investing time and energy

Expressing ideas, listening to other people's viewpoints, making informed decisions...takes time! Availability is critical to successful partnership, in a climate of harmony and mutual understanding. Meetings where decisions are made in haste or when everyone is in a hurry to leave are ineffective and can only lead to conflict and a feeling of uselessness. To reach their common goal, the partners must make a commitment and take the time needed to think and act.

A Democratic Group

Governing Boards have all the features of a democratic organization. All members are equal and everyone's input is crucial to achieving the common goal. This is why it is essential that Governing Boards be places where the expertise of every member is recognized, where their wide range of skills is respected, and where all members can promote their vision of the school and of its mission.

Believing in the advantages of partnership

When we surround ourselves with partners, we realize that two heads are better than one and individual action is more effective when geared towards a common pursuit. This means knowing how to assume the consequences of group choices and accepting the decisions made. This is democracy at work!

A Representative Organization

Each Governing Board member represents a particular group and must act on behalf of that group. Of course, representation means great responsibility for the members, but also assures that their presence on the Governing Board is legitimate. To play their role properly, the representatives must know what position their group has on an issue, present this stance to the Board with conviction and tact, and report back to their group on the work of the Governing Board.



Accepting others

Governing Boards are formed of people from different backgrounds and with different skills and ideas, yet they all share a common goal. This is why all members must consider their partners as collaborators whose contribution is indispensable. Accepting others, with their values, knowledge, viewpoints, and approach to problems, is the basis for successful partnerships in which trust and respect prevail. If every person feels that his or her experience can be of help, a building block that contributes to the whole, and if that person believes the same can be said of every other member, the result is cooperation that is enriching.

Honing communication

The exchange of ideas is an integral feature of partnership. In order for the group to feel like a group, it is vital that all members be able to express themselves and understand the viewpoints of others. This mutual understanding fosters a common vision and coordinated action. To create this understanding, good communication is essential. This requires a generous amount of listening, empathy, accuracy and clarity from the members in order to eliminate the misunderstandings that can hinder partnership.

A Living Structure

Like any team or family, every Governing Board has its own experience and history. It has its strengths and weaknesses, internal tempo and dynamics that grow out of the different relations that characterize it. In a word, it has its own personality that influences its choices and decisions.

Having confidence in the group

Partnership requires cooperation and a good deal of trust by all parties. If we have committed to this cause, it is because we feel we can move ahead and see our projects through with the other members of the group. This calls for the will to work together, an open attitude and confidence in our partners.

Having a taste for success

Behind every partnership is the pursuit of a common goal that is clearly defined, motivating and important to all partners. This pursuit is what drives the members to spare no efforts, overcome obstacles and give the best of themselves. In the case of Governing Boards, the common objective is student success and well-being, a goal that certainly gives the members an appetite for success.



Developing a deep sense of belonging

A feeling of belonging binds the relationships between partners. It makes every member proud to contribute to the group while benefiting from the contributions of the other members. For this feeling to develop, the partners must perceive themselves as important parts of the group, feel comfortable and accepted, and feel they have a certain influence.

A Place of Power and Influence

Under the Education Act, Governing Boards are assigned a series of powers, so to call it a place where power is exerted is nothing new. Within the Board itself, every member flexes his or her power to influence or convince others according to his or her personal abilities. For example, a principal who has no leadership ability is not an asset! In other words, Governing Boards enable political relationships to exist, and this should come as no shock. Real debate, consensus-building, close votes, informal exchanges of opinion, and the chair's occasional deciding vote are all part of this zone of influence where all members use their skills in order to seek the very best for students.

Overcoming unavoidable difficulties and resolving inevitable conflicts

Despite our efforts and good intentions, difficulties or conflicts are bound to arise. The members of the group must be able to accept them, find solutions and learn from them. The way in which they deal with these problems is a clear indication of the ties and quality of the partnership they have created. This process requires considerable humility, determination and work, but once the difficulties and conflicts have been overcome, the group is the better for it.

Consensus-building

In Governing Boards where partnership is promoted and valued, decisions are often unanimous. Every member knows the goals of the educational project and takes it from there. But opinions on the means for achieving these goals may differ. Compromise cannot occur regularly without jeopardizing the partnership itself because this technique can lead to frustration and withdrawal. Consensus is located halfway between unanimity and compromise. Consensus-building is the result of open expression of all viewpoints and exploration of new scenarios or innovative solutions that fully satisfy all participants and meet with their approval.

Feeling united

By definition, partnership means mutual assistance. Governing Board partners work together to find solutions, make decisions and do what is required to improve school life. They are confident that together they can do something to change what needs to be changed and to make whatever is good even better. This solidarity is crucial to achieving the partners' common objective.

The Benefits of Partnership.

Everyone Comes Out a Winner

When partnership occurs, there are no losers. Everyone comes out a winner because everyone has the same goal and works in tandem to attain it. Everyone rises above his or her own interests to embrace those of the group. This is how it becomes possible to get results it would have been impossible to get individually.

Benefits For the School

Governing Board partnership makes it possible to build a school where there is quality of life and where students succeed. Thanks to the contribution of parents, school staff, community representatives and secondary students, the school is firmly rooted in the community and is able to meet the needs of the children who are part of it. The school benefits from the strengths of the community and, in return, is an instrument of local growth through its impact on social and cultural development.

Benefits For People

To be a partner is to grow through sharing, collaboration and conquering a common challenge. To be a partner is to feel motivated, accountable and valued by taking part in a project of importance to oneself, the family and community. It means learning through contact with people from different backgrounds. But, most of all, it means fully exercising ones citizenship by helping the next generation face the future.

