



18

The Governing Board Chair
and the School Principal

Working in Tandem

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This information leaflet is primarily intended for persons who hold the office of Governing Board Chair or who are engaged as school principals. It is a follow-up to the publication of three documents related directly to the title subject:

Leaflet 6: "Schools and their World"
Leaflet 12: "Governing Boards at the Heart of the School"
Leaflet 17: "Chairing Governing Boards: A Rewarding Challenge!"

Leaflet 18 is based on the themes addressed in these leaflets and summarizes their main points before taking a closer look at the relation between the Governing Board Chair and the school principal. It may also be useful to consult:

Leaflet 5: "Fullfledged Partners"
Leaflet 21: "Conducting a Meeting"
Leaflet 23: "Consultation"

The Fédération des comités de parents du Québec (FCPQ) is an organization that brings together parents involved in educational structures. It has the following mission:

- To provide parents with the information and training they need to be able to participate in the school
- To represent and express parents' opinions at the provincial level
- To defend the rights and interests of parents within the school system
- To participate in the development of education with other partners in the school network

Resources

To obtain reference material and to find useful tools or competent resource persons, please contact the FCPQ.

We offer:

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

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

Acknowledgments

Leaflet No.18 "*The Governing Board Chair and the School Principal Working in Tandem*" is published as part of the training program of the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec, 389 Boulevard Rochette, Beauport, Québec, G1C 1A4.

Contributors to the Production:

- Coordination, research, text: Multi projets
- Graphisme : Groupe Zone Communication
- Impression : Litho Acme-Renaissance

The FCPQ wishes to thank the people and groups who contributed to the preparation of this document.

March 2003
Legal deposit — 2003
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
ISBN 2-921357-75-5

A common mission



The education reform undertaken in the late 1990s and currently being upgraded, is designed to give back to the schools a leading place in the school system. It is only natural that schools, where the real education of young people takes place, should have the necessary controls to accomplish their mission.

This concern, widely voiced at the Commission of the Estates General on Education and recommended in its final report, is at the origin of many changes in the schools, in particular:

- The creation of Governing Boards possessing important decision-making powers and composed of representatives of parents, school staff, secondary level students and the community;
- The assignment of increased powers to school principals;
- The direct involvement of staff in defining educational and instructional practices.

Against this background, Governing Boards and school principals, each in their own way, find themselves invested with new responsibilities in a shared mission: to impart knowledge to students in their community, foster their social development and give them qualifications, while enabling them to undertake and achieve success in a course of study (school mission, Education Act, s. 36).

Principals and Governing Boards must take on major challenges: to create a true learning community, to define together an Educational Project based on an analysis of the situation prevailing in their school, to establish specific aims and objectives for their school and objectives to increase student success and finally, to report on these actions. That is quite a lot to manage successfully!

Due to their respective roles, Chairs and principals are closely involved in taking up these challenges.

Understanding the place of the school in the educational network



For more information on this subject, see FCPQ Leaflet 6: "Schools and Their World."

To fully grasp the finer points of the relation between the Governing Board Chair and the principal, it is important to recall the place of the school in Quebec's education system:

- A school is established by the school board, which places at the school's disposal one or more immovables, or premises therein (Education Act, s. 39), and which determines the services to be provided there (Education Act, s. 236);
- A school is defined mainly as an educational institution (Education Act, s. 36) that pursues its mission within the framework of its own Educational Project; a school is also expected to contribute to the social and cultural development of the community;
- A school does not have the legal status of an autonomous corporation; the legal powers belong to the school board established by the government as a legal person in the public interest (Education Act, s. 113);
- The school itself has no powers: the functions and powers exercised within the institution are held by the Governing Board or the principal;
- The principal is appointed by the school board (Education Act, s. 96.8); under the authority of the Director General, and ensures the quality of the educational services provided at the school (Education Act, s. 96.12);
- The school board exercises several important functions within the educational system. First, it ensures (a controlling mission) that the persons under its jurisdiction have access to educational services (Education Act, s. 208). It sees that the Education Act adopted by the National Assembly is complied with, and that the Basic School Regulation prescribed by the government along with the programs of study developed by the Ministry of Education are implemented. Its strategic plan contains directions and objectives in line with those established by the Ministère de l'Éducation. It also exercises other functions such as managing human resources, immovables and student transportation, and allocating its revenues among its institutions. Some school boards delegate part of these functions and powers to the principal.

The principal at the head of the school



When we look at the functions and powers given to principals, it is fair to say that the legislature has placed principals at the head of the schools (*Education Act, s. 96.12 to 96.24*).

These functions and powers include:

- Ensuring the academic and administrative direction of the school;
- Ensuring the quality of the educational services provided at the school;
- Encouraging concerted action and participation within the school;
- Ensuring that required proposals are prepared and submitted to the Governing Board and providing in advance all necessary information;
- Ensuring that Governing Board decisions and other provisions that govern the school are implemented;
- Coordinating the analysis of the situation prevailing in the school, and the development, review and any updating of the Educational Project as well as the operations related to the Success Plan;
- Establishing an individualized education plan adapted to the needs of the special needs student;
- Approving criteria for the introduction of new instructional methods;
- Approving textbooks and instructional material after consulting with the Governing Board;
- Approving standards and procedures for evaluation of student achievement;
- Approving the rules governing the placement of students and the rules for promotion from one cycle to another at the elementary level;
- Informing the board of the proposals they approve;
- Managing school staff and informing the school board of the school's staffing needs;
- Managing the school's physical resources and informing the school board of requirements regarding the school's immovables, after consulting with the Governing Board;
- Preparing the school's annual budget, administering it and rendering an account thereof to the Governing Board.

The Governing Board at the heart of the school



If we can easily see that by their functions and powers, principals are at the head of the schools, we can also easily accept, taking into account its membership and its role, that the Governing Board is at the heart of the school.

The Governing Board, made up of representatives of all those who are affected by the school, is responsible for the major issues the school must face. Its principle powers are the following:

Full decision-making responsibilities:

- To adopt the Educational Project (Education Act, s. 74);
- To adopt the annual report (Education Act, s. 82);
- To make public the Educational Project, the Success Plan and the services provided;
- To report to the parents and to the community;
- To organize educational services other than those prescribed by the Basic School Regulation, to enter into contracts for this purpose and to require a financial contribution from users (Education Act, s. 90-91);
- To organize social, cultural or sports services, to enter into contracts for this purpose and to require a financial contribution from users (Education Act, s.90-91);
- To solicit and receive any monetary gift, legacy, grant and other financial contribution (Education Act, s. 94).

A right of review and approval on several issues:

- Success Plan (Education Act, s. 75);
- Rules of conduct and safety measures (Education Act, s.76);
- Approaches for implementing the Basic School Regulation (Education Act, s. 84);
- Overall approach for enriching or adapting the programs of studies and developing local programs of studies (Education Act, s. 85);
- Time allocation for each compulsory or elective subject (Education Act, s. 86);
- Programming of educational activities outside of school or outside of school hours (Education Act, s. 87);
- Implementation of student services and special educational services programs (Education Act, s. 88);

For more on this subject, see
FCPQ Leaflet 12: "Governing
Boards at the Heart of the
School."



- Use of premises or immovables placed at the school's disposal (Education Act, s. 93).

An advisory function at the school board:

- On any matter likely to facilitate the operation of the school;
- On any matter likely to improve the organization of the services provided by the school board;
- On the amendment or revocation of the deed of establishment;
- On the selection criteria for appointment of the school principal.

The role of the Chair

In light of the above, we can already see the complexity of the Chair's role. Following is a summary of the essential aspects of this office.

Official duties:

- To lead meetings;
- To cast a deciding vote;
- To call the General Assembly.

Special duties:

- To implement the Governing Board's rules of internal management;
- To prepare the General Assembly, in collaboration with the principal;
- To represent the board in public or policy-making situations.

Beyond the duties:

- To lead the Governing Board;
- To ensure the accessibility and the quality of information given to members;
- To be concerned with the decision-making process;
- To ensure that the Governing Board meets its obligations;
- To be concerned with evaluation and reporting

For more on this subject,
see FCPQ Leaflet 17:
"Chairing the Governing
Board: A Rewarding
Challenge."

Working in tandem in the school and on the Governing Board



The image of working in tandem appropriately describes the relationship that should exist between the Governing Board Chair and the principal. They each have their own roles, their own strengths and qualifications, but together these two partners can achieve feats that will reflect positively on student success.

They could not possibly work completely independently without undermining school life.

Have a good understanding of respective roles

To maintain the quality of the relationship between these two partners, several conditions have to be respected. The first is to have a good understanding of each other's roles. Some people might have the impression that one of these roles is above the other, like in a private enterprise where there is only one head director. The Governing Board Chair and the principal work in concert, and their roles complement each other. To put it plainly, the Chair does not run the school and the principal does not run the Governing Board! It is basically like the difference between policy and administration.

Respect each other's responsibilities

To achieve this complementary balance, it is essential that both persons respect the responsibilities mentioned in the preceding pages. The lists of duties associated with the Governing Board and its Chair show us that they have clearly defined functions and powers, while the principal has a more general function.

Share information

The Governing Board Chair and the principal should spend time on a regular basis sharing and updating the most relevant information. To successfully conduct board meetings or to effectively represent the institution, the Chair must be up to date on what is going on in the organization in matters that are under the Governing Board's jurisdiction. The Chair does not have to know everything or understand everything, but must have a good command of the basic information required to fulfil the office and, if necessary, quickly fill in the gaps. However, the principal is supposed to know what everyone around the Governing Board table knows. To secure this exchange of information, transparency and mutual trust are indispensable.

Be open, be frank, be respectful

We could list many qualities to describe what qualifies as a good relationship and excellent communication between the Chair and the principal. We will just mention the qualities that build trust: openness, frankness and mutual respect. The background of experiences that these two people possess allows them to appreciate the importance of these values, especially in an organization like the school.

Times when working together is essential



This close relationship between the Chair and the principal is evident at particular times and in different contexts:

The first mandate

- The first contact with a newly elected Chair or a new principal is critical. Take the time to get to know each other well.

Planning the school year

- It's a good idea for the Chair and the principal to get together, preferably before the start of the school year, to talk about their respective expectations and to plan Governing Board work.

Preparing the meetings

- One very important meeting is needed to prepare the agenda, plan for hand-outs, get the latest information on the progress of issues that will be dealt with, make provisions for possible reactions, divide up the duties, etc.
- The principal should ensure that the premises are available with the necessary facilities, etc.
- The principal should ensure that the Governing Board receives the necessary information before approving the documents that are submitted.

Holding the meeting

- This responsibility typically belongs to the Chair who must: direct discussions, enforce rules of internal management and decorum, respect the right to speak, follow the agenda, etc.
- The principal is responsible for submitting to the assembly the proposals that the Governing Board must adopt or approve. Note that even though the law states that matters submitted to the board come through the principal (Education Act, s. 96.13), it is up to a member to formulate a draft resolution that will be voted on by the assembly.
- The Chair gives the necessary explanations or asks the principal or another person to do so.

For more on this subject,
see Leaflet 21 "Conducting
a Meeting."



Secretarial duty

The Act stipulates "the minutes of the proceedings of the governing board shall be recorded in a register kept for that purpose by the principal or by a person specially designated by the principal" (Education Act, s. 69). The minutes are signed by the person who chairs the meeting and countersigned by the principal or by the person designated by the principal; this person must be present at the start of the meeting.

- Section 69 implies that the principal should prepare the minutes or at least be responsible for the final version.

Supervising the meetings

- The principal must see that Governing Board decisions are implemented (Education Act, s. 96.12).
- The Chair and the principal might have a brief discussion in some circumstances to make sure certain decisions are followed up.

Communicating between meetings

- It is desirable that the Chair ensures that contact with members is maintained between the meetings, especially if problems arise between two meetings or if a special meeting is being planned. The principal must be kept up to date on these proceedings.
- Similarly, the Chair cannot be kept in ignorance of what is going on between two meetings.

Information, periodic evaluation and reporting

- The Act makes provision for various procedures for informing parents and the community, evaluating the Educational Project and the Success Plan as well as obligations concerning reporting.
- It goes without saying that the Chair and the principal must be closely involved in preparing the relevant documents.
- The Governing Board should also carry out a self-evaluation, keeping in mind their work plan. It would be advantageous for the Chair and the principal to work together on this.

Grey areas

In the preceding pages, we emphasized how responsibilities are divided up among the principal, the Governing Board and its Chair.

But saying "to each his own" is not enough to ensure harmonious relations in such a complex network. In day-to-day operations, we are confronted with grey areas that are not covered or clarified by any law. In fact, no law, no matter how perfect, can predict every situation, let alone anticipate all the inevitable changes.



And we always find things that don't seem to belong in any defined area. How can we best clarify these delicate situations?

Informing and consulting parents

- In what instances are these actions the responsibility of the principal or of the Governing Board parents?
- In what instances can the principal exercise a veto?

The employer–union relationship

- How should we behave in the case of labour conflicts or boycotts?

Fundraising

- What is the principal's share of responsibility when a fundraiser authorized by the Governing Board involves students or staff?

Relations with a foundation

- Are the relations between a foundation and the school maintained by the principal or by the Governing Board through its Chair?

Chair and parent

- How should the Chair behave when he/she speaks to the principal as a parent and vice versa?

Solidarity

- To what extent do Governing Board decisions involve solidarity among members that would be binding on the principal?
- When there are differences of opinion, how can a principal show solidarity with a Governing Board decision and conform to school board expectations in terms of his/her management?

Latent or open conflict

- Who takes the initiative to defuse a conflict that affects the Governing Board? Is it the Chair, the principal or both?

Little tips for practically perfect people

- Avoid irritants such as last-minute reference material or unexpected proposals;
- Stay in contact, especially when there is a crisis or a major problem;
- Be friendly, it will please others;
- Congratulate and thank people;
- Celebrate occasionally

There is no question that the quality of the relation between the Governing Board Chair and the principal is an important factor in school operations and development.

The sharing of responsibilities between the principal and the Governing Board is complex and inevitably includes grey areas. Therefore, it is important that the Governing Board Chair and the principal have a respectful, open and close relationship.

The pursuit of the aims and objectives of the school, the quality of its administration and even the level of student success will be influenced by the strength and the vitality of this team working in tandem.

The distinction between policy and administrative levels is often used to illustrate the relationship between a board and the management of an organization. This separation of responsibilities can also apply to our situation.

Since the Chair in fact directs a board made up of elected members, his/her office can be equated to the policy level, that is, the Chair sees that these elected people decide aims and objectives, adopt broad frameworks, and so on.

The principal on the other hand, directs day-to-day school operations: implementing Governing Board decisions and other provisions that govern the school; ensuring the quality of the services provided by the school; managing its resources and exercising an educational and instructional leadership so that the school may fulfil its educational mission. As managers, they are automatically part of the administration.

It is often said that a good chair should have a natural business sense, while a good manager (here, the principal) should have a nose for politics! We must also point out that the responsibilities of this team are more related to the third dimension of their work, that concerning the very mission of the school, that is, the educational mission.

It is not enough to simply divide up the areas of competence. Both parties have to display an understanding of their situation, the limits that the other must respect, and the constraints on the other and not try to take over the other's place.

Trust, closeness and pleasure in working together should be the hallmarks of this relationship that is vital to everyone in the school.

