



22 Procedures for Meetings

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This information leaflet is intended for parents who want to become familiar with procedures for deliberative assemblies. It supplements the leaflet(No. 13) dealing with the operations and internal management of the various participation groups in the education network: Governing Boards, Parent Participation Organizations, Parents' Committees, Special Needs Advisory Committees and FCPO regional structures.

Note.– In this document, the term committee is used to designate any or all of these organizations.

Resources

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

We offer:

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

References

Comité de parents de la Commission scolaire du Val-des-Cerfs (2001), Mode de fonctionnement et régie interne (www.csvdc.qc.ca).

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Why have rules of deliberation?



The discussions which arise in the various committees that have parent involvement are often informal, tending toward open discussions, a search for solutions that calls on each person's abilities, consensus on a likely hypothesis and so on.

But there are situations where a stricter procedure for discussion encourages better participation, a more solid consensus and a more appropriate decision. Thus, associative life in committees will be more democratic and parents will find the experience much more satisfying. Knowledge and application of shared rules of deliberation will certainly make the participation process easier for parents by making them less dependent on the leader and will ensure that everyone can contribute equally. Parents involved in consultative or decision-making structures will, therefore, benefit from knowing and applying the rules of discussion that make committee work more formal and more effective.

Rules of procedure are standards of conduct that ensure effectiveness and good order in the process that leads to decision-making. That is the reason for asking members of a deliberative assembly to observe them.

The ultimate goal of these rules is to have everyone participate equally and to have the questions submitted for discussion at the meeting receive a satisfying solution in the form of a resolution (adopted proposal). Proceeding in this manner allows each participant to form an opinion, take a position and take part in the deliberations.

The right to speak

To ensure good order during a meeting, it is important that the exercise of the right to speak be regulated. For example, all representatives (or substitutes in the event of absence) have the right to speak at Parents' Committee meetings.

A member cannot take the floor until authorized to do so by the Chair and the member can only address the Chair. Furthermore, the one speaking must keep to the subject and respect the time allotted for interventions. The speaker can only be interrupted by the Chair or by a member who raises a question of privilege or a point of order, who appeals a decision of the Chair or who asks for a closed session or the reconsideration of a question.

How many times
can I speak?

Number of interventions

The frequency and duration of interventions may be regulated by the assembly. For example, the assembly may decide that each person may speak no more than twice on the same proposal or that each intervention can last no more than three minutes. In principle, the Chair accords the exercise of the right to speak in the order in which members have requested it, in relation to the subject being dealt with.

Do the Chair and the secretary
have the right to speak?

The Chair's and the secretary's right to speak

The Chair may, without vacating the chair, express his/her opinion and speak on the subject being dealt with. He/she can also present or support a proposal. In the same way, the secretary, if he/she is a legally elected Parents' Committee representative, can submit or support proposals and participate in the deliberations.

What about the right to speak
of the principal, the
Commissioner and guests?

Other participants' and guests' right to speak

The Education Act sets out that the principal of the school (Education Act, s. 46) and a school board Commissioner, if so authorized (Education Act, s. 45), may participate in the sessions of the Governing Board. A Parents' Committee or a Parent Participation Organization (PPO) may also adopt similar rules. These persons then have the same right to speak as the other participants.

Furthermore, the assembly may, by regulation, give the Chair the power to accord the right to speak to observers, if he/she deems it advisable and if the smooth conduct of the meeting will not be affected. This right to speak is then accorded outside of the period set aside in the agenda, except for subjects related to the method of operation and internal management.

The requested order of speakers is not absolute. It is sometimes desirable for the Chair to ask a resource person or the person in charge of a matter (the principal present at the Governing Board, for example) to elucidate the subject being debated.

Out of order?

Pertinence of contributions

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the debates, the Chair must make sure that each intervention is pertinent. The member with the right to speak should confine himself/herself to remarks that are directly and essentially related to the question being debated.

If the speaker fails to do so, the Chair can interrupt and ask that the speaker address the point being discussed.



Question of privilege and point of order

Any participant who feels his/her rights or prerogatives have been infringed upon or who feels his/her reputation has been adversely affected (through verbal abuse, threats or improper language) may raise what is commonly called a *question of privilege*. To do so, the member speaks to the Chair, and states his/her grievance.

Furthermore, a member may raise what is called a point of order to request that a regulation be respected or ask that the temperature of the room be adjusted, to give two examples. These contributions are not subject to discussion. They must be addressed to the Chair who must make the necessary decision and act accordingly. If the question is contested, the Chair may then decide to put the question to the assembly, which will then make a decision without debate.

Full committee

Any group of people or any body called on to make a decision after having discussed a given subject is called a deliberative assembly. In principle, a *deliberative assembly* cannot initiate a discussion unless there is a proposal before them. If the members want to have an open discussion before making proposals, the assembly must form itself into a full committee by voting a proposal to this effect.

In common practice, the use of a full committee is implicit without recourse to a proposal.

Closed sessions

The purpose of a closed session is to allow an assembly to sit without the public being admitted, particularly to discuss a subject that may cause prejudice to an individual or organization.

If requested by a member, a closed session may be decreed by the Chair who must also explain the terms. Closed sessions are confidential and only voting representatives and people whose presence is deemed pertinent by the Chair may attend them. Even in committees where the public is not admitted or is absent, a closed session can be decreed to show the confidential nature of the debate that will follow. If notes are taken during this period, a summary should not appear in the minutes and should only be accessible to the people who were present. Ending of the closed session is decreed by the Chair.

How to act during the meeting



During the meeting, members should behave with a certain decorum in order to facilitate debates. There are usually a few basic rules:

- Before speaking, each member should receive the right to speak from the assembly Chair;
- The person speaking should always address the Chair and follow the standard of courtesy that the committee has adopted (for example, the use of members' surnames or first names);
- A proposal received by the Chair becomes the property of the assembly and only it can decide the future of the proposal;
- A member may speak only once (or more, according to the rules set out by the committee) during the deliberation of a proposal and once during the deliberation of an amendment. Some committees accord a right of reply to the person who submits a proposal.

How to bring up a proposal

The proposal, sometimes called *motion*, is a recommendation made by a member regarding an item on the agenda.

The assembly discusses the proposal (deliberation), then is called on to make a decision about it (vote). If the proposal is adopted by the assembly, it becomes a *resolution*.

In a deliberative assembly, the proposal is the basis of all discussions. In a very formal assembly, if there is no proposal to deal with, there can be no deliberations.

Some principles to know

Within the limits of its functions and powers and within the framework of the provisions that govern it, the assembly is sovereign.

Any member of the assembly may submit a proposal.

The most popular procedure calls for a proposal thus submitted to the assembly to be seconded by another member before being debated. If a proposal is made but not seconded, it is considered null. As soon as a proposal is received by the Chair, the assembly should deal with it immediately because it can only consider one proposal at a time.



Unless otherwise noted, all proposals are subject to discussion and must be submitted to a vote. As soon as a proposal is before the assembly, it becomes its property. It cannot be withdrawn without the consent of the members. At the end of the discussion, the Chair or the secretary rereads the proposal and asks for a vote.

The assembly deals with a proposal by adopting it, rejecting it, postponing it or withdrawing it.

A proposal may be received at any time during a session. The rules of some committees disallow proposals during an item in the agenda called *Varia* so that no proposal may be submitted without preparation or warning during this period. Rigid application of such a rule is often a source of dispute. In fact, it is preferable for points that require a decision to appear in *New business*. The practice of having a member make known in advance the point that he/she wants to submit to the agenda makes it possible to avoid embarrassing situations.

Now, let us look at the types of proposals.

Proposals

The rules for deliberative assemblies all contain different categories of proposals. These lists are more or less sophisticated. They specify if the proposal can be debated or not, if it interrupts the discussion or the person who has the right to speak, if it must be the subject of a simple vote or of a majority greater than 50% and the order in which proposals must be dealt with.

Just as abusing these procedures can be injurious to a committee, totally ignoring them does not encourage the quality of debates or respect for people. It is therefore important for a committee to follow the rules that are appropriate to its situation.

Ordinary proposals

These proposals are directly related to the question being studied and are designed to get the assembly to make a decision.

Generally, the person who makes the proposal must be seconded by another member, except for a point of order, or for the nomination of a candidate for election or for a question of privilege. Some committees do not require this procedure.



The main proposal

This is the statement on which the assembly is called upon to vote. The main proposal should deal with the agenda item in question.

Proposal of an amendment

An amendment is a modification of the main proposal. It is possible to add to, remove or replace aspects of the main proposal. It is however essential that the amendment deal with the subject of the main proposal. An amendment is used to modify a proposal during the adoption process; it should not change the meaning of the proposal. For example, it is possible to replace a circumstance (ten thirty instead of eleven o'clock), a means (a press release instead of a letter), or the like.

An amendment is designed to change part of the main proposal. If a member disagrees with the entire proposal, he/she may announce that he/she is going to introduce another main proposal, vote against the proposal debated and then present his/her proposal, in the event the first proposal is not adopted.

The main proposal may be amended several times, but only one amendment proposal should be considered at a time. The same is true of sub-amendments.

Proposal of a sub-amendment

A sub-amendment is used to modify an amendment; it is subject to the same rules as an amendment except that a sub-amendment itself cannot be modified. It is the lowest level at which it is possible to make modifications. If a proposal is amended, then sub-amended, the assembly first discusses and decides on the sub-amendment, then the amendment and finally, the main proposal whether it is amended or not.

The sub-amendment exists in all codes of procedure. However, specialists avoid it like the plague as generally it only confuses ideas, complicates the procedure and spreads confusion in the assembly, thereby wasting time and energy. In practice, there is always a way to do things (for example, using two consecutive amendments) without resorting to a sub-amendment. Thus, a Chair can receive a sub-amendment by considering it as a second amendment.

Privileged motions

Due to their importance or urgency, they take precedence over all other proposals. They can be presented at any time, and the assembly must deal with them immediately.

For example, there are motions to close, adjourn or suspend the meeting momentarily and set a time for its resumption. In general, barring questions of time (date and duration), privileged motions are not subject to debate.



Other proposals

The various codes of procedure list several other types of regular or special proposals, related to the functioning of the assembly (for example, dilatory motions, ancillary motions, subsidiary motions, special motions, etc.). Some of these proposals are not subject to debate; sometimes their adoption requires two thirds of the votes, or even a unanimous vote by the assembly. The most important of these proposals is the immediate vote motion explained below.

The immediate vote motion

The immediate vote motion, also called the previous question, is used to end the debate on an ordinary proposal. It is the same as asking if the proposal being debated should be voted on immediately. Its adoption brings an immediate end to the discussion on the proposal being debated. However, its rejection means the continuation of the debate.

This proposal must be seconded. It cannot be discussed or amended, and to be adopted it must be supported by two thirds of those present.

The legitimate purpose of this proposal is to put an end to a discussion that has gone on too long. It is particularly useful when, for example, a few members are using a filibuster to paralyze the assembly's decisions. It should, however, be used tactfully as it interrupts the debate and limits the right to speak.

The vote

Debate on a proposal ends when:

- no one else wishes to speak
- the time limit set in advance has ended
- the assembly adopts an immediate vote motion

A proposal can be:

- adopted unanimously
- adopted by the majority
- rejected.

Once the debate has ended, the Chair rereads the proposal debated and invites the assembly to decide on it. Then, if no one asks for a vote, the Chair declares the proposal has been unanimously adopted.

Voting is usually done by raising hands unless the assembly decides on a secret ballot. In the latter case, the votes are gathered and counted by ballot officers named by the assembly.

With some exceptions, decisions are made by a **simple majority**, the greater number of voices wins. In certain cases, a committee may decide that a **two thirds majority**



of the voting members is necessary for a proposal to be adopted (for example, in the case of modifications to rules of internal management). However, this is an exceptional method which is contrary to democratic custom and should not be abused.

Members may vote for or against a proposal, or they may abstain. **Abstention** is not a vote against the proposal but a refusal to vote. Abstentions are entered into the minutes. However, they are not taken into account when calculating the majority. Except in the case of a secret vote, any member who is opposed to a proposal may ask to have his/her dissent entered into the minutes.

In many organizations, the Chair does not vote, except in the event of a tie vote. This is not what is set out in the Education Act as regards the rules of operation for school organizations. The Chair has the right to vote, and in the event of a tie, the Chair has a second vote, called a casting vote.

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Adjournment

Action to postpone to a later date the meeting and discussions undertaken.

Agenda

List of items adopted by the assembly for information, discussion and decision-making purposes.

Amendment

Modification made to a proposal, without changing its basic meaning.

Appeal of a decision of the Chair

A challenge to a decision of the Chair concerning the application of the committee's rules of internal management. Being sovereign, the assembly can reverse a decision made by its Chair. Because of its possible outcome, this procedure remains an exceptional measure.

Assembly

Group of people gathered to study, discuss, make a decision about a question of common interest.

Casting vote

In the event of a tie, the Chair's vote is decisive. The Chair should vote last to avoid confusion between his/her first vote and the casting vote.

Closed session

Confidential debate held out of the public eye.

Closing of session

End of the meeting. It is the subject of deliberation by the assembly. When the agenda is finished, the closing of the session is proposed.

Deliberation

Reflection designed to weigh the pros and the cons before making a decision. It contains a statement of the question, a discussion, a proposal and a resolution.

Deliberative assembly

Group of people gathered, generally in the same place, to make a decision after having examined and discussed an item.

Full committee

This is a meeting or part of a meeting held with a view to allowing free debate without formal rules of deliberation. Only elected members and invited guests participate and no minutes are kept.

Internal Management

Everything related to the proper functioning of a committee (for example, approval of the agenda, approval of the minutes, use of the Parents' Committee funds, rules of procedure) is called internal management. In the education network, a distinction is made between the operating procedures prescribed in the Education Act and the rules of internal management adopted by the committee.

Notice of motion

Notice that a proposal will be presented later.

Ordinary meeting

Meeting which includes the usual items of an agenda.

Point of information

Question from a member of the assembly addressed to another member through the assembly Chair. A point of information may interrupt a person who has the right to speak. A point of information is brief and should not be used to present a proposal. Used in small working committees, this procedure is not appropriate for large groups.

Point of order

Intervention made when procedures have been contravened. It is a reminder to the Chair from the assembly. A point of order may interrupt a person who has the right to speak and can be raised by any member of the assembly.

Point or question of privilege

When a member's rights or privileges have been abused, the member can raise a point of privilege with the Chair. A point of privilege lets a member interrupt a person who has the right to speak.

Previous question

Sometimes the debate may seem interminable and be considered a waste of time. At such time, any member of the assembly may make a motion to put the previous question, in other words to ask for a vote to find out who is ready to vote on the proposal being debated. A previous question cannot interrupt someone who has the right to speak. There is no discussion on a previous question and it must usually be adopted by two thirds of the participants to move to vote on the proposal.

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of voting members whose presence is required to validate deliberations, in accordance with the operating procedures prescribed in the Education Act or the rules of internal management set by the committee.

Special meeting

Meeting that can only include the items for which it was expressly convened. It is not necessarily an emergency meeting.

Tabling

Tabling of a proposal consists of postponing in-depth discussion of a question. Discussion of a tabled proposal is generally not allowed.

Leaflet No. 22 deals with procedures for meetings and everything related to methods of deliberation.

It supplements Leaflet No. 13 on the operations and rules of internal management of the various participation organizations in the school network: Governing Boards, Parent Participation Organizations, Parents' Committees, Special Needs Advisory Committees and FCPQ regional structures.

To learn more about the functions, the powers and the place of the various organizations likely to have recourse to these rules, refer to the other leaflets already produced by the FCPQ, especially:

- No. 1 *Parent Participation Organization, Helping schools be their best!*
- No. 6 *Schools and Their World*
- No. 12 *The Governing Board at the Heart of the School*
- No. 14 *The Parents' Committee – Focal Point of Parental Participation*
- No. 15 *The Advisory Committee on Special Needs Children*

Those called on to play a leadership or secretarial role in these organizations will be helped by the following leaflets:

- No. 17 *Chairing the Governing Board, A Rewarding Challenge!*
- No. 18 *The Governing Board Chair and the School Principal, Working in Tandem*
- No. 21 *Conducting a Meeting*
- No. 19 *The Role of Secretary*

