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Chairing the Governing Board: A Rewarding Challenge!

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This information leaflet is published as part of the FCPPQ training program. It is intended in particular for parents who are Governing Board chairs in their schools and for anyone else interested in learning more about this position, whether they are Governing Board members or not.

Ressources

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.

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Contributors to the Production:

- Coordination, research: Multi projets
- Research: Pierre Lortie
- Graphics: Groupe Zone Communication
- Printing: Litho Acme-Renaissance

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A challenging role!



The first and principal challenge of a Governing Board chair is to ensure that the Board rises to its own challenges, which are to effectively guide the school in accordance with community expectations, to carry out the school's mission by placing students at the centre of all concerns, and to make its goal the success of all students. This is not a small task, but many people are devoted to it, and the Governing Board is there to ensure that everyone works together to achieve this mission.

The Board shares responsibility for the school with the principal, in collaboration with the students themselves, parents, staff, and the whole community. It plays a central role in adopting the school's orientations, offering quality educational services, and attaining the results that the school is seeking.

The chair also faces his or her own challenges, the main one being to conduct Governing Board meetings. But the chair's job does not stop there. In the following pages, you will discover how complex this role is and the issues that are involved in the work of a Governing Board chair.

Some procedures prescribed in the Education Act

The Education Act prescribes certain operating procedures concerning the chair's function.

- The chair is chosen from among the parents' representatives on the Governing Board who are not members of the personnel of the school board (*Education Act, s. 56*).
- The principal shall preside over the Governing Board until the chair is elected (*Education Act, s. 57*).
- The chair's term of office is one year (*Education Act, s. 58*).
- The chair of the Governing Board shall preside at meetings of this board (*Education Act, s. 59*).
- If the chair is absent or unable to act, the Governing Board shall designate a person from among the members who are eligible for the office of chair to exercise the functions and powers of the chair (*Education Act, s. 60*).
- If votes are equally divided, the chair has a deciding vote (*Education Act, s. 63*).
- The chair calls the annual General Assembly (*Education Act, s. 47*).

Duties of the Chair



Official Duties

The legislator expressly entrusts the following duties to the chair:

- **To conduct the meetings**
This means the chair opens the meeting, follows the agenda, confers the right to speak, prepares a summary of opinions, ensures a decision is made, applies the rules of internal management, etc.;
- **To cast a deciding vote in case of a tied vote**
If votes are equally divided, the chair can uphold his or her original vote or change this vote if it seems in the best interests of the students to do so. In cases where votes are so equally divided, it may be preferable to study the issue further and, if possible, put off making a decision until a later date;
- **To call the annual General Assembly**
For more information on this subject, please consult leaflet n° 2 of the FCPPO training program, "The General Assembly, A Pivotal Moment."

Additional duties

To effectively carry out official duties, obviously the chair is also responsible for the following:

- **To prepare the meetings** with the principal; to plan, with the principal, the agenda and the documents to be handed out to members;
- **To prepare the General Assembly**, a crucial event in respect to parent participation in the school;
- **To act as a representative** of the Governing Board during public relations activities.

Duties related to the rules of internal management

The Education Act is not overly specific about the duties of the chair, leaving it up to each Board to further define these duties in its rules of internal management (Education Act, s. 67). It would therefore be desirable for these rules to clarify the following:

- The chair's tasks in respect to convening members, holding meetings, members' conduct, public's right to speak, follow-up of the meetings, etc.;
- The chair's role when acting as spokesperson for the Board, a role that is difficult for principals to assume since they are members of school board personnel;
- The relations between the Governing Board and the school board that are the jurisdiction of the chair or the principal.

It would also be useful for these rules to include procedures for replacing the chair, if necessary, in order to ensure the continuity of the work of the Governing Board.

Effectively carrying out your duties



Having clearly defined the duties, let us look at the main issues related to the office of chair.

Establishing a good relationship with the principal

If there is one element that is vital to the success of the chair's work, it is the quality of the relationship that must be maintained with the school principal. The division of responsibilities between the principal and the Governing Board is complex and inevitably, there are grey areas. Therefore, it is important that the relationship between the chair and the principal be based on openness, honesty, and cooperation.

The pursuit of the school's orientations, the quality of its administration, even the success of the students will benefit from the quality of this relationship between the principal and the Governing Board chair.

Conducting the meeting effectively

While ensuring that Board meetings run smoothly, the chair endeavors to bring members together to form a real assembly, a group able to take on responsibilities, show solidarity, and share a common vision. In particular, it is up to the chair to encourage concerted action among Board members and to see that they develop into a united group. Furthermore, as we mentioned earlier, the chair sees that the rules of internal management are followed.

Ensuring the quality and accessibility of information

The flow of information is the driving force behind the work of the Governing Board. The chair, positioned at the centre of a set of interactions, accumulates a great deal of information and knowledge. The chair and the principal ensure that information is accessible, adequate, concise, and available sufficiently in advance. It is the chair's responsibility to see that all pertinent information circulates properly.



Leading the group

Chairing a meeting means not only leading the discussions, but also leading the group itself.

To achieve this objective, the chair must act in such a way that each person feels recognized and appreciated within the Board. The open and pleasant atmosphere thus created contributes to encouraging more active participation and greater unity among Board members. In addition, the chair must see to it that Governing Board members have a clear understanding of their role.

The chair will seek to mobilize all Board members around shared objectives and pave the way for all available competencies and resources to be used to the best advantage. When a group is working at its best, people tend to support and enrich each other, and in this way they become a united and creative force.

Being concerned with decision-making requirements

One of the important activities of a Governing Board is to make decisions. The chair's role is to see that this process is properly and effectively carried out at all times. Moreover, the chair must ensure that everyone who is expected to vote on an issue can do so in an informed and accurate manner.

Ensuring that the Board carries out its duties

Governing Board members depend on their elected chair for guidance and help in fulfilling their responsibilities. In other words, they expect the chair to be vigilant in the exercise of his/her duties. Responsibility for the duties and prerogatives of the Board lies primarily with the chair.

The Governing Board's duties are not just administrative; its members must respect certain rules of good conduct. The chair is responsible for reminding members of their responsibilities in regard to conflicts of interest, for instance (Education Act, s. 70).



Being concerned with evaluation and accountability

Accountability is now an obligation and is one of the responsibilities of leaders of public institutions; schools are not an exception to this rule.

Thus, the Education Act requires the Governing Board of each school to inform its community of the services provided by the school and report on the level of quality of such services (Education Act, s.83). The Board must be answerable to its community for the quality of the services and administration of the school. All of this presupposes that there are mechanisms to evaluate the performance of the various aspects of school life. There are a variety of ways to show accountability, such as public information sessions, activity reports, financial statements, and so on.

Speaking on behalf of the Governing Board

The Governing Board chair is the institution's political representative. In that capacity, he or she can be invited to speak on behalf of the school. The chair is the person in the best position to convey the values, mission, and major concerns of the school.

Looking for a good Chair!



In the preceding material, we begin to get an idea of the profile of a "good chair."

Now we must ask ourselves what criteria the Board should use to select the person most capable of assuming the position of chair. As well, people intending to run for the position can ask themselves if they have the qualities it takes to be chair.

Here is a list of elements that may help answer these questions.

Content

To handle the content dealt with by a Governing Board, the chair must possess a basic knowledge of the school system, how a school operates, and the roles and responsibilities of the various agents. It is not necessary to have professional expertise in the content, but it is important to be able to understand the issues involved.

A sound judgment, an analytical mind, and an ability to synthesize information are valuable assets.

The chair is concerned with the needs and expectations of the community.

The chair's primary reference point when making decisions is concern for the students.

Quality relationships

Good listening skills, attentiveness, good communication skills, the ability to work in a group and mobilize people around a common objective, these are indispensable qualities. A talent for easing tensions and solving conflicts is a definite advantage for the candidate.



Do the requirements for the position of chair seem too demanding?

Remember, no one truly becomes proficient in this role until it has been practiced, and all these qualities have had time to develop. For the chair, school is also a place of learning!

Personal aptitudes

A chair should possess the personal qualities that correspond to the values sought by the group, values such as respect, tolerance, perseverance, trustworthiness, tenacity, flexibility, confidence, and self-control.

Values, attitudes, and feelings, these are the things that show the person's heart is in the right place!

Leadership

Actually, most Governing Board members possess the qualities mentioned above. But we want something more of a chair, and that is leadership.

In fact, the leader has to possess the qualities already mentioned but must also have passion and charisma. He or she is a visionary, able to look ahead and motivate the group to excel. A good leader is rarely content with half measures or the status quo. How can the chair nurture the principle of success in the school unless he/she can encourage Governing Board members to do their best?

At the end of his/her mandate, it should be possible to say that the chair has had an influence on the development of the school.

What is different about chairing a Governing Board?



Many Governing Board chairs have already chaired other types of committees or administrative boards.

They have all, at the least, seen other people acting as chairs in a variety of situations. What distinguishes the chairmanship of a Governing Board from other chair positions? What are its special features? Here are the main ones and they are important.

A group made up of elected representatives

For the most part, Governing Boards are made up of people elected by their peers to represent them. These elected members are there to promote different interests, with different perspectives. Parents, secondary school students, teachers, professionals, support staff, day care personnel, even community representatives, all convey different values and concerns and are there to promote them. Being head of such a group requires tact, diplomacy, and leadership.

A place where cooperation is required

Despite these diverging concerns, the Board must achieve the results set for itself, and this requires concerted action. The chair must ensure that an atmosphere develops within the group that is conducive to making the best decisions, in the greatest interest of the students.

Varying powers

The Board must constantly juggle with functions that have different implications. They adopt, approve, advise, are consulted, and are informed. The chair has to be careful that the Board always respects the nuances between these different powers.



Shared responsibilities

Furthermore, the chair must see to it that the Board works within the scope of its duties. In this respect, the chair's relationship with the principal is primordial. The information given to the Board comes from the principal and it is the principal who must implement the decisions made on the basis of that information. The relationship between the Board and the principal is not one of employer-employee. They each have their responsibilities within the school, which means that the chair and the principal must work in constant partnership.

Deciding orientations

Finally, the Board is more involved with the school's orientations than with school projects, which distinguishes it from many structures of participation. Chairing a Governing Board with insight and vision can have significant repercussions on the quality of the education offered by the school.

Working in partnership

In a context of partnership and cooperation, the chair is not alone. Far from it, the chair typically feels supported by the group. Each member is involved and supports the chair in order to meet the challenges of the school and to achieve the desired results, all in the interest of the students.

This information leaflet produced by the Fédération des comités de parents presents the role of the Chair of a Governing Board. You may supplement this information by obtaining in particular the following leaflets:

- The Governing Board at the Heart of the School
- The Relationship Between the Chair and the Principal
- Conducting a Meeting
- The Educational Project: A path towards success for each school
- Fullfledged Partners

