



# GOVERNING BOARDS

L'ASSOCIATION PROVINCIALE DES ENSEIGNANTES ET ENSEIGNANTS DU QUÉBEC

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO IMPROVE YOUR OPERATION? HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS!

It has been five years now since the governing board was first established in our schools and centres. A recent study entitled *School Governing Boards in Québec: How is the bold new experiment working?*<sup>1</sup>, reveals positive attitudes with regard to their operation and their future prospects. However, five years is a relatively short time to evaluate the various aspects of a body instituted in the context of an education system that is still in the throes of profound changes.

That being said, we will focus on the positive by offering some tips that a number of governing boards have found helpful in improving effectiveness and procedure at their meetings.

### Review duties and responsibilities

At the beginning of the year, many governing boards conduct a review of their duties and responsibilities. If you haven't already done so, you might wish to add this to the agenda of your next meeting, referring to the guide on governing boards prepared by the Québec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT)<sup>2</sup>. The guide is available from your local union.

**Advantage:** ensures that everyone is on the same wavelength.

### Develop an action plan

A number of governing boards determine the priorities to be discussed during the year. Each member states his own priorities. The governing board then considers whether these are suitable and within the board's mandate. Finally, they develop an action plan that situates the designated items within the governing board's schedule of meetings. This provides a useful framework which, naturally, can be modified during the course of the year.

**Advantage:** provides a view of work to be accomplished during the year and a time-line, which allow for appropriate consultation and preparation.

### Use an evaluation grid for meetings

This grid might include items such as:

- Discussions on general orientations rather than on details of the school's day-to-day operations;
- Conduct of the meeting in accordance with the governing board's procedural rules;
- Documentation pertinent to the discussion is circulated in advance and is easy to understand;
- Reports are clear, concise, and contain all relevant information;
- Debate is restricted to those items on the agenda;
- The agenda for meetings is balanced (between "easy" items and more controversial subjects);
- Teamwork where everybody takes part;
- Successful discussion on controversial items with a sincere attempt to reach consensus;
- Punctuality and respect for time limits.

Members reply on these points with a yes or a no. The evaluation can be done individually or with the entire group, each member completing his or her own form. The chair can collate the results and make a report at the next meeting. You might even wish to conduct such an evaluation at every other meeting.

**Advantage:** encourages changes in procedure as the need arises, rather than letting an unsatisfactory situation degenerate.

### Review procedures

In conducting such a review, you might wish to take the following subjects into consideration:

- A time limit for meetings (e.g., two hours);
- Publication of the agenda and the minutes of the last meeting at least a week in advance;
- Procedure for preparation of the agenda (limit on items, from most to least important, including a note on the nature of the item – information, consultation, or decision, time allowed for each subject);

- Reports and correspondence at the end of the meeting;
- Participation of the administration, staff and parents in the preparation of the agenda;
- Clarification of the role of the chair (does not speak for the board everywhere at all times).

**Advantage:** specifies procedures that apply before, during and following meetings with a view to improving effectiveness.

If you think any of these suggestions might be useful, please share them with your governing board colleagues.

I wish you a year of successful and productive meetings in 2002-2003.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with the president of your local union, or contact Nancy Champagne at QPAT, (514) 694-9777 or 1-800-361-9870.

<sup>1</sup> Smith, W.J., Champagne, N. & Deniger, M.A. (2002); School governing boards in Québec: How is the bold new experiment working? Montréal: McGill University, Ed-Lex.; <http://Ed-Lex.Law.McGill.ca>

All schools received copies of the highlights of this study last June in both the English and French.

<sup>2</sup> Champagne, N. (1999); What you need to know about governing boards; Montréal: QPAT. Champagne, N. (1999); What you need to know about governing boards in centres; Montréal: QPAT.