



Fostering Great Working Relationships in Your School Community

MANY PEOPLE make up a school community. There are students and teachers, of course, and support staff as well as the school administration led by the principal. Then there are the people on the school's governing board, in the local Home and School Association, and at the school board.

Schools thrive through the contribution and collaboration of all. But what does this collaboration look like and how is it achieved? And what role does the local Home and School Association play in relation to all these players? These were the questions QFSA Board President Rosemary Murphy explored in her Zoom workshop, which was held on December 1, 2022.



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For her presentation, Rosemary drew upon her years of experience advocating for education in Quebec, whether as a parent commissioner with the Lester B. Pearson School Board, as an executive director and board member at the Quebec English School Boards Association, or as a volunteer with the Home and School movement.

Rosemary believes strong school relationships are built through an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the main players: **the school board, the principal, the governing board, and the local Home and School Association**. What follows is the handy primer Rosemary created to explain each group's/person's role, using information from the Quebec Education Act and other sources. (Education is a provincial responsibility.)

About School Boards

Each English public school is part of a network of schools in one of the province's nine English **school boards**. A school board:

- Is a legal person established in the public interest.
- Is administered by a Council of Commissioners.
- Organizes the educational services provided by the government.
- Develops policies.
- Consults with its community.
- Reports to the provincial government.

About Governing Boards

Every school is overseen by a **governing board** composed of parents, school staff, students (for secondary schools), and members of the wider community. A governing board:

- Is a decision-making body that assists in defining policy guidelines and operating procedures to meet the educational needs of all students.
- Approves or adopts the following for its school: the success plan; the educational project; the subject time allocation; the approach for implementing the basic school regulations; the enrichment or adaptation of programs; the rules of conduct and safety; the school fees; the use of the premises; field trips; the approach for implementing student and special education services; the school budget; and the governing board's operating budget.
- Analyzes the school's situation and needs.
- Informs parents and the community of the services provided.
- May organize other educational services.
- May solicit funds.
- Is consulted by the school board and principal.
- Consults with its community.
- Reports to the community and the school board.

About School Principals

Appointed by the school board, the **school principal**:

- Is the school's academic and administrative director.
- Is responsible for the management of staff and the school.
- Works with staff to provide educational services to ensure that all government rules and regulations and all board policies are followed.
- Assists the governing board in its functions and powers, but does not have voting rights on the governing board.
- Encourages the participation of staff, parents, and students in the life of the school and their collaboration in fostering student success.
- May join Home and School meetings but does not have to be a member of the local association.

About Local Home and School Associations

The **local Home and School Association** is entirely volunteer run. Although most volunteers come from the school's parent community, parent alumni, grandparents, and others who share an interest in supporting student success and the school community may also be Home and School members. The local Home and School Association:

- Is obliged to have a constitution and by-laws and a volunteer code of conduct.
- Is obliged to have a president, treasurer, and a secretary/membership chairperson. *Rosemary notes that three to five parents at minimum are needed to establish a new local association.*
- Has its own bank account.
- Provides its members with clear financial statements and minutes at every meeting.
- Must submit a year-end report to the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA) annually.
- Determines programs, projects, and activities (both educational and financial) within the school in collaboration with the principal and staff.
- Ensures that the principal has all the information needed to present programs, projects, and activities to the governing board.
- Votes on funding and allocation of support for governing board-approved programs, projects, and activities.

As the descriptions show, the local Home and School does not work in isolation. It is part of an important network that includes the governing board and principal, and effective communication within this network is vital. What can Home and School volunteers do to promote good communication? Rosemary shared her insights and workshop participants made important suggestions, too. A summary of the major points discussed is provided below.

Keep Everyone in the Loop About Home and School's Plans

Any Home and School activity organized **must be approved by the governing board in advance**. This includes activities occurring during and outside of school hours. How does this approval process happen? It starts with a meeting with the principal. At the meeting, Home and School shares the plan for an activity or fundraiser, providing as much information as possible. The principal then presents the proposal to the governing board for approval.

Given the principal's role as intermediary between Home and School and the governing board, it is important for local associations to strive for open and clear lines of communication with their principals.

A good practice is for Home and School to schedule a meeting with the principal early on in the school year to discuss the year's plans. The goal is to map out the schedule of Home and School activities for the entire year in advance. The principal is then able to share the proposed schedule with the governing board with the understanding, of course, that things may have to be adjusted as time goes on. This advanced planning sets the stage for a smooth-running year, reducing the number of last-minute requests or surprises.

Tips for Home and School Meetings:

- Make sure that the principal or another school delegate sits in on your meetings. This is a good way to ensure the lines of communication are open. It is also helpful to have a member of the school staff on hand to answer some of the questions that come up in the meeting.



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Fostering Great Working Relationships Continued...

- Share the meeting agenda with your principal/school delegate in advance. This gives the person time to prepare for the issues that will be discussed.
- At each meeting, provide clear financial statements to your members.
- Create minutes for each meeting.

Fundraising Tips:

- When planning fundraising activities, it is a good idea to iron out in advance how you plan to use the money. Keep in mind that you want to support projects that benefit the school and promote student success.



- Good money earners are often the fundraisers that provide welcome services for parents.
- It may be possible for the school board to pay for some or part of a capital project you are contemplating. Before you take on a new project (like replacing school water fountains, painting lines in the schoolyard), ask your governing board if the school board can cover some or all of the cost.
- Home and Schools can organize directed fundraising for a long-term goal (a new schoolyard play structure, for example). Again, for these large projects, be sure to explore other funding sources (your school board, municipality/borough, your local MNA).
- Create an allocations committee that will decide how funds will be used. While the school's administration, staff, and governing board can certainly make suggestions on how Home and School funds could be used, the final decision rests with the voting parents at the allocations meeting.
- That said, keep those wish lists from the governing board, principal, and school staff in mind. See if you are able to raise funds for these requests, but also remember that your allocations committee may have already earmarked the funds for something else. It is worth remembering, too, that governing

boards have the power to solicit funds themselves.

Other Tips:

- Find a way to let your parents know all that Home and School does for your school community. Some suggestions: Share your news on social media, via the principal's e-bulletin to parents, or distribute your own newsletter to parents.
- Provide a monthly report to the governing board. This keeps everyone in the loop about your activities (and your financial picture). It also ensures that there are realistic expectations about what monies can be raised and spent that year.

This workshop sparked a lot of good discussions. Attendees asked questions and the helpful suggestions and advice from the group flowed freely. We learned, for example, about the challenges some Home and Schools are having getting the volunteers they need. It is a problem aggravated by the time required for police checks.

Rosemary also took a few moments in her workshop to share the history and mission of the Canadian Home and School Federation (CHSF). It is hard to believe that the CHSF was created more than 125 years ago. Established in Nova Scotia in 1895, the CHSF's first Quebec meeting took place in 1919 at Macdonald College High School in Ste. Anne de Bellevue.

Home and Schools have a very long history of supporting schools, students, and families. Working in collaboration with their principals and governing boards, Home and School volunteers have an important role to play in their school communities. As Rosemary reminded us, in the end, we are partners working towards a common goal: to enhance our children's education and enrich their lives.

The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations Inc. (QFHSA) is an independent, incorporated, not for profit volunteer organization dedicated to enhancing the education and general well-being of children and youth. Since 1944, the QFHSA has been promoting the involvement of parents, students, educators and the community at large in the advancement of learning and acting as a voice for parents.