



QUEBEC HOME & SCHOOL

NEWS

"The Voice of the Parent in Education"

SPECIAL ISSUE

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Boards and Commissioners:

They're losing their power

At the recent Awards Banquet of the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations, Dr. S. B. Frost, former Vice-Principal of McGill University and now director of the history of McGill project, was the main speaker. Part of what he said had reference to forthcoming elections.

One of the prime requirements when Confederation happened was that Catholic and Protestant schools systems were to be protected in Quebec, in that no rights enjoyed by the two communities before Confederation could be taken away from them by the provincial authorities.

You know what has happened in recent years. The Civil Code has been revised twice during the past century. There has been no attempt on anyone's part to interfere with the jurisdiction of the Quebec Legislative Assembly in this area. This guarantee has been fully respected. But the protection of the English language in the Quebec assembly and in the courts of the province has been removed by the party presently in power, and an appeal has had to be lodged with the courts of Canada to restore that protection.

Similarly, the powers of the school commissioners in both the Protestant and the Catholic school systems have been constantly eroded to the point where those commissions are in danger of being devoid of any decision-making authority. In the last few years, school commissions have been largely deprived of the control of curriculum; parents, both anglophone and francophone, have been deprived of the right to choose through their school commission the language of education; the commissions have lost the right to negotiate effectively with their teachers and they have been deprived of the right to tax their respective communities in order to provide the kind of education the parents and the commissions elected by them believe desirable.

The history of the commissions is important. In Lower Canada the control of education was in 1801 consigned to the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning. But this was a government body, almost wholly anglophone, almost solidly Protestant, and very understandably the francophone Catholics would have nothing to do with it. In 1829 the Assembly passed the Syndics Act, putting education directly under the control of the members of the Assembly it-

self. But this was found to provide too many temptations for politicians; too many school monies found their way into party election funds; too often, schoolteachers were engaged by reason of party membership rather than any other qualifications; the riding which elected members of the party not in power received little by way of school buildings and supplies. The third solution was to give control of the school systems to the municipalities, and this was found to be no improvement—there were now many little greedy hands instead of a few big ones. Finally, it was agreed that new, independent bodies, elected by the franchised voters, should be in control of the school system independently of both municipal and provincial politics. Like all systems, this too had its drawbacks. Some school commissions were content with very low standards of education and were loathe to tax themselves and their neighbours as they ought. The Parent Commission recommended the establishment of a Ministry of Education to supervise the school commissions and to try to equalize educational opportunities across the province.

But what we are seeing now is that we have created a colossus which is not guiding and supervising the commissions but is overriding and indeed destroying them. The Minister of Education has sweeping powers, so many indeed that he cannot exercise them personally; he delegates them to his deputies and his assistant deputies and to their assistants and in fact to a huge bureaucracy. The Minister of Education has forgotten that the word minister means "servant" and that the concept was of one who would serve education, not someone who would dictate and decide not according to the ideas of freely elected school commissions but of those nameless, faceless Ministry of Education bureaucrats.

In this situation, we should clearly make every effort to change the direction of educational evolution in this province. We are greatly concerned with the outcome of the referendum, as indeed we should be. But after the referendum will come elections for school commissioners. This is not an anticlimax but a continuation of the same struggle. It is a follow-up, a necessary consequence, a next step which is equally important. After the election will come a provincial election. A change of political climate will do much to alleviate the present dangerous situation. The intro-

duction of the so-called Canadian option, whereby at least anglophones coming from other provinces will have the right to choose English-language education for their children, will be a great step in the right direction. The use of maternal language, the language spoken in the home, as determining the right of parents to choose education for their children, will be a fur-

ther step. But for francophones and anglophones freedom of language choice must be the ultimate goal.

In the coming sequence of referendum, school commission elections, provincial elections, the commission elections take their place as an effectual link in the chain. In a renewed confederation we need to choose able, concerned, responsible

commissioners who will understand what their task is, who will be representative of their neighbours and who will serve education for its own sake, for when we speak of education we speak of the future—the future of our province, the future of our schools, the future of our children. The coming commission elections are important indeed.

vote for me!

By electing a school commissioner during the school elections you'll have a say in my education.



KEEP THAT IN MIND ON JUNE 9th!

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The role of school boards in Quebec

D. C. Wadsworth,
Executive Director
Quebec Association of
Protestant School Boards

"In the first place
God made idiots;
this was for practice;
then he made school boards."
—Mark Twain

Idiots? Perhaps because in assuming the duties given to them, school boards take upon themselves a role which must be one of the most onerous and responsible given to an elected body. This role is to act as the body which is responsive and accountable to the family unit for the primary and secondary education of the children of that unit. They, the members of a school board are trustees charged with providing the necessary means for the public education of the children of the Province.

In order to place the school board in its proper perspective, it is important to try and comprehend where it stands in the hierarchical system of education. This can best be done by reference to the preamble of the former Department of Education Act of the Province of Quebec (Chapter 233, RSP) which reads as follows:

"WHEREAS every child is entitled to the advantage of a system of education conducive to the full development of his personality;

WHEREAS parents have the right to choose the institutions which, according to their convictions, ensure the greatest respect for the rights of their children;

WHEREAS persons and groups are entitled to establish autonomous educational institutions and, subject to the requirements of the common welfare, to avail themselves of the administrative and financial means necessary for the pursuit of their ends;

WHEREAS it is expedient to establish, in accordance with these principles, a department of education with powers commensurate with the functions vested in a superior council of education, its Catholic and Protestant committees and its boards."

Thus, parents are given the right to choose the institutions which will ensure the greatest respect for the rights of their children. Consistent with this theory, authority and responsibility must remain as close to the local level as possible. In the public sector those institutions which are established at the local level are the responsibility of the school board. School boards are established for Protestants and Catholics by the provisions of the Education Act of Quebec (Chapters 1-14).

By virtue of the Education Act, school boards are established and their members are chosen by election of their local constituents. Once in place, they are charged with the responsibility of providing the necessary personnel and facilities so that the children of the community can receive quality education.

The Education Act presently provides that school boards have some twenty-five specific duties that they must fulfill (Article 189). These can, however, be summarized in five sections:

1. To engage the personnel who

are duly qualified to teach it, operate and administer the schools under their jurisdiction;

2. To ensure that the necessary steps are taken so that the approved courses of study are given to all children under their jurisdiction so that an education of high quality is provided for all;
3. To make regulations necessary for the management and development of the schools under their jurisdiction including the operation of the same;
4. To provide such other educational and cultural services as are required by the local community and ensure that such services are accessible to the children and adults of the community.
5. To be accountable to the Ministry of Education and the public which has elected them for the quality of services offered, the administration of the schools and the use of resources.

Duties, however, are only one aspect of the role of school boards. Without the power to perform the same, the theoretical responsibility becomes meaningless. For this reason, when school boards were first legally established in Quebec, certain powers were given to school boards.

In the 1841 statute, school boards were given, amongst other powers, the right to determine the amount of monies which were deemed necessary, by them, to carry out the duties imposed upon them by law and to collect these monies, if necessary, from their taxpayers.

Until very recently this right of decision on what monies were required to provide the educational services demanded by the local community rested solely with the local school board. Recent provincial legislation has attempted to curtail the rights of school boards in this field and legal action has been taken in contestation by the school boards.

If one ignores this recent legislation, it becomes apparent that the role of the school board in Quebec is two fold. First, is the decision as to the type of education which shall be provided in response to the needs and aspirations of the local community and second, is the decision as to how this is to be paid for.

At the present time and because of personnel and, in particular, the determining of the working conditions of unionized personnel, negotiations for a large part of the collective agreements are conducted at the provincial level. The Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards, by legislation and the mandate of its member boards, conducts negotiations with the provincial unions on behalf of its member boards. At the same time, the working conditions of its non-unionized personnel are discussed at the provincial level with the concurrence of the school boards.

Time tabling of subjects and courses of study are also things which, although subject to a form of consultation between representatives of the school boards and officials at the Ministry of Education, are determined by regulation of the Ministry.

The role of the school boards has, therefore, changed and to

some extent it has diminished. However, so long as they retain the right to determine what their level of expenditures shall be and the right to seek funds from their taxpayers to respond to local needs and thus are able to provide the educational and cultural services demanded of them, they will continue to play an important role in education in Quebec. They will remain, as was originally intended, as an essential element of democracy, retaining the authority and responsibility for education at the level which is responsive and accountable to the parents of the children at the local level.

THE SCHOOL COMMISSIONER

All kinds of people!

"What are school commissioners made of?"

Many different kinds of people become school commissioners or school board members. They can represent a cross-section of the community. Some are professional people, some are in business or industry; others are self-employed, retired or carrying the responsibility of running a home and a family. A school board led by a group of commissioners which lacks different occupational points of view runs the risk of being unrepresentative. There is profit to be gained from the insight of an accountant, for instance, or a foreman on the shop floor. Women are taking on more frequently the job of school commissioner. Many of these women have, as mother, had close contact with a school or schools over many years; others have a range of professional and occupational backgrounds like their male colleagues.

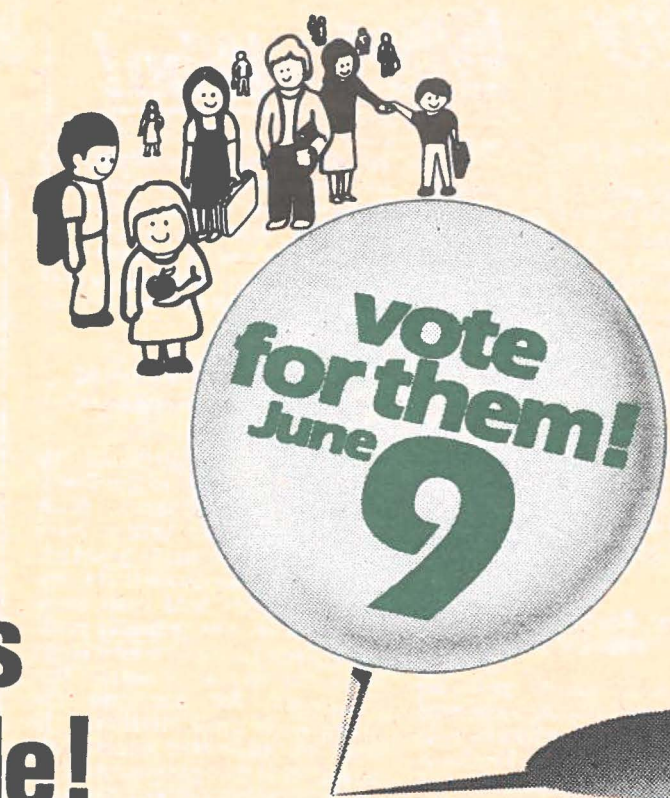
The Council of Commissioners

The individual school commissioner has no authority. It is the Council of Commissioners which has the authority over the school board and its operations. The Council of Commissioners reaches the decisions as to how to exercise its authority by debating and voting on resolutions brought before it. The decisions of the Council of Commissioners are those courses of action supported by the majority of its members.

The Council of Commissioners, therefore, is greater than the sum of its parts. For one thing, it is advised by the chief executive officer, usually called the Director-General, and his staff through information and expert opinion. It also has a Secretary-General who is the member of the board's administration responsible for seeing that the minutes or records of the Council's meetings are kept and that its resolutions come within its powers.

The individual commissioner

The individual commissioner



makes his or her contribution to the deliberations and decisions of the Council of Commissioners by weighing the viability and appropriateness of a recommendation in regard to the school system as he or she knows it. The commissioner has the right to express an opinion, raise questions, contribute information and vote. The process through which this is done in a Council meeting depends on the rules of order for the conduct of such meetings adopted by the Council in session. Usually, Robert's Rules of Order apply. They provide a logical and democratic procedure which protects the rights of the individual commissioner to speak and be heard and the rights of the Council to reach decisions.

Because the business of a school board which is under the authority of the Council of Commissioners is dealt with in public sessions using formal meeting procedure, a school commissioner has to be effective in this setting and be able to tolerate the long hours that the sessions can entail.

The tasks

Apart from the public meetings held on one or more occasions each month, the school commissioner can find, depending on the school board, that there are other roles to fill. These include attending or chairing meetings of committees that are set up by the Council of Commissioners, acting as liaison with other community groups and representing the school board on organizations such as the Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards.

In the community which the school commissioner serves, there are often school committees or Home and School Associations which, on occasion, ask for commissioner participation. The consultation with parents and teachers which has been instituted under Quebec law can involve a school commissioner in such activities as a source of information or opinion. Getting information from the community represented is the other side of the philosophy of open communication between board and citizen.

In other instances, a school commissioner is called upon to

act as advocate for a student or parent in their relations with the school system. Problems of bus transportation, of school choice or special services may be brought to a commissioner's attention with the request for intervention. The role in such cases is often one of mediation, explanation and information.

Opportunities to learn

As a member of the world of education, a school commissioner may be sent by the Council to attend meetings of provincial or Canadian educational associations. The information acquired and the contacts made can be put to use in dealing with local problems and plans. The commissioner, by these experiences, can become more knowledgeable about alternative methods of operating schools, and differing objectives and their attainment.

The kind of person who responds to the challenges of being a member of a school board and gives effective service to the community is hard to define. Democracy is based on the idea that any person selected by their peers to represent them is an authentic participant in society's decision-making. These representatives, together rather than individually, reflect the community which has selected them.

Personal qualities

The kind of person who contributes most is good at managing their time, holds education in high esteem, respects individual differences and is articulate, yet thoughtful. In a constantly-changing society, it also helps for a commissioner to be bold in their thinking and consistent in their values.

Election to any public post nowadays seems to bring with it a feeling of 'distance' from the public. The public can seem very ready to assume that, in a school board as in the system of justice, 'the law is an ass,' and that the people who make the laws of the school board are misdirected and misinformed. Sometimes this may be true.

Whether it is true or not, a school commissioner needs a very thick skin.

Editorial comment

School Board strength needs more active parent support

The April MEQ News arrived in early May at anglophone homes around the province. It gave pre-eminence to those structures at the level of the school and its board which provide opportunities for parents to participate in school affairs. There is only brief mention of the school board, which is the local authority for the schools, and no mention of the opportunities for parents and other taxpayers to participate as members of the council of commissioners of the school board.

The council of commissioners is the board of directors of the corporation which is the school board. If a parent is really serious about participating in school affairs, surely this is the means par excellence. Not only is the commissioner likely to have access to a wider range of information about schools and students than does a member of a school or parents' committee, but also the commissioner is party to the decisions which set up the policies of the board and which assign its human and financial resources.

Some parent groups have been vociferous about wanting to take part in decision-making. Yet the competition for the job of commissioner of a school board has never been vigorous. For instance, in the 1973 school board elections on Montreal Island there were elections in only four out of fifteen wards of one of the school boards, with a voter turn-out of only 18%. The other eleven commissioners were returned unop-

posed. In 1977 the same school boards had elections in six wards, with almost 27% of voters casting ballots.

As Dr. Stanley Frost of McGill said so eloquently in his address to the QFHSA 1980 annual convention, school boards are being encroached upon by government legislation and regulations. Implementation of standardized curricula under the Plan d'Action and legislation to reduce, and eventually eliminate, local board taxing powers are examples of this.

There are aspects of the school board which are due for rethinking. However, building up the strength of parent participation at the level of the school through school committee and orientation council should be accompanied by increased public interest and demonstrated support for the school board and its council of commissioners as an institution. Otherwise school communities may find themselves isolated from each other and unable to resist the tremendous centralizing power of the Ministry of Education's bureaucracy and its government.

It is time this June, when school board nominations are open, for all who care about preserving and strengthening their system of schools to offer themselves as candidates and then, when elections are held, to work to ensure a high voter turn-out.

Joan Mansfield

Education costs \$5 billion

According to the Education Department Act, the Minister of Education is responsible for the promotion of education and for assisting the youth of Quebec in the preparation and planning of its future. To this end the Department is organized in three main administrative sectors: Elementary and Secondary Education, Post-Secondary Education and a Research and Planning Sector. Each sector is administered by an Assistant Deputy Minister. The Associate Deputy Minister (Protestant) is responsible for the guidance and general direction of Protestant schools.

The Elementary and Secondary sector, as the name implies, is the branch of the Department most closely associated with the operation of elementary and secondary schools.

It has three main sub-divisions. La Direction générale du développement pédagogique is responsible for curriculum development and examinations. La Direction générale de

University subsidies 2,800,000\$
Financing the college network . 548,600,000\$
Subsidies to private schools . 208,800,000\$
Adult education services 149,900,000\$
Financial aid to students 109,500,000\$
Subsidies to school boards . . 2,965,400,000\$

l'administration looks after budgets, equipment and buildings. La Direction générale des réseaux communicates the policies and directives of

the Department to school boards through its eleven Regional Branches. At the same time these organizations supply the Department with feedback from the schools, school boards

and community organizations.

Over the last decade, the reorganization of the Department had led to a diminution in the number of civil servants involved. For example from 1975 to

1979 the number dropped from 2,940 to 2,656, a decrease of 9%.

For 1980-81 the budget of the Department forecasts the expenditure of 5,029 millions of dollars.

MOST COMMONLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

M.E.Q.	Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec Ministry of Education of Quebec
C.S.E. S.C.E.	Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation Superior Council of Education
C.P.C.	Central Parents' Committee
Q.A.P.S.B.	Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards
Q.A.S.A.	Quebec Association of School Administrators
Q.A.D.G.	Quebec Association of Directors General
F.C.S.C.Q.	Fédération des Commissions Scolaires Catholiques du Québec Federation of Catholic School Commissions of Quebec
C.E.Q.	Centrale de l'Enseignement du Québec
P.A.P.T.	Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers
P.A.C.T.	Provincial Association of Catholic Teachers
C.S.T.A.	Canadian School Trustees Association
C.T.F.	Canadian Teachers Federation
A.D.G.P.S.B.	Association of Directors General for Protestant School Boards
C.P.N.C.P.	Comité Patronale de Négociation des Commissions pour Protestants Employer Bargaining Committee for Protestant School Boards
C.M.E.C	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
S.C.I.M.	School Council of the Island of Montreal
C.S.I.M.	Conseil Scolaire de l'île de Montréal
C.H.S.P.T.F.	Canadian Home and School/Parent-Teacher Federation
Q.F.H.S.A.	Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations
C.E.A.	Canadian Education Association



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School Boards

Why What Who!

What is a school board?

A school board is a corporation set up for the purpose of establishing and operating elementary and secondary schools. School boards in Quebec are either Roman Catholic or Protestant because this was the way schooling was organized at the coming into effect of the British North American Act and the Canadian Confederation in 1867. Section 93 protects the rights and privileges of classes of persons in effect at Confederation, in this case Roman Catholics and Protestants.

What does a school board do?

The school board provides elementary, secondary and adult education services in English or French or both. The language in which services are provided reflects the needs of the Roman Catholic or Protestant community served. The school board draws up the budget, seeks funding from the provincial government or the local tax payers, the schools, and is employer of the staff. The decisions on these matters are made by a group of private citizens elected by their community to form the 'Council of Commissioners'.

What does the Council of Commissioners do?

The Council of Commissioners is like the board of directors of a corporation. The commissioners and the representative or representatives of the parents' committee who make up the Council of Commissioners can "sue and be sued and do all those acts which a corporation may do with regard to the purposes for which it was constituted." The Council sets the policy under which the full-time administrators and staff must operate the schools and services under its jurisdiction. It makes decisions on finance, management, programs, staffing, transportation, buildings and equipment. It must also implement the regulations of the Ministry of Education of Quebec, and those of either the Protestant or Catholic Committees of the Superior Council of Education.

On the Island of Montreal, the Council of Commissioners participates in the setting of the financial guidelines for the eight school boards which comprise the School Council of the Island of Montreal, in order to ensure that there is equal educational opportunity for all the children served by the Montreal Island borders.

Who are the members of the Council of Commissioners?

The school commissioners on the Council of Commissioners are elected for a three-year term of office by a ward of the school municipality. The school municipality is the territory over which the board has jurisdiction as a Catholic or a Protestant school board. Each board's territory is divided into between 9 and 19 wards. An electoral list for each ward is compiled listing all those Canadian citizens over 18 residing in the

area who by virtue of their religion or by choice (if they are neither Protestant or Catholic) support the school board in question. When seats fall vacant at the end of a three-year term of office, notice is given publicly that an election will be held.

What are the duties of a school commissioner?

A school commissioner attends the meetings of the Council of Commissioners. Such meetings must be held at least four times per year. In practice, meetings of the Council of Commissioners are held most months during the school year. Often they take place over more than one day or evening. The Education Act required the Council of Commissioners to elect an 'executive committee' to which it delegates certain of its responsibilities and the day-to-day administration of the school board. Such an executive committee is required to meet twice per month. Other communities may be set up by the Council to study in depth and make recommendations to it in session as a basis for decision-making. The tasks assigned to individual commissioners by their Council can vary widely from one school board to another, depending on the size of the system administered, and the tradition and philosophy of the school board. As the ward representative on the Council, a commissioner can expect to act as liaison between the school board and other groups involved with the youth of the community. Giving and collecting information informally to parents, taxpayers and colleagues can also require significant amounts of time and attention. The time which a commissioner will give to the job may depend on the other roles they fill at home and in the world of work.

Is a school commissioner paid a salary?

Under government regulations, the Council of Commissioners may pay a stipend to its members for the services which they render to the school board. The stipend may vary according to the function that a school commissioner fills on the Council. For instance, Commissioners who act as chairman of the Council or of its executive committee, or as members of the executive committee may receive a larger total sum permissible than 'ordinary' members of the Council of Commissioners. The basic stipend for every commissioner, according to the regulation, is \$1,500. The total amount available to a school board



CAL POTTER
President

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Quebec's public school system, with its faults and inequities, is a fundamental element of our political democracy. But two forces—legislated change and inflation—have caught this system in a double squeeze.

At risk is the quality and control of the English-language system. What will happen, for example, when the public system is cut to ribbons by the effects of Quebec's Bill 101? We already see the signs of decline. More and more schools are being closed. More and more of those remaining open are being stripped of their "frills". And more and more parents are withdrawing their children from the public system. The consequences reach far beyond enabling school boards to balance their budgets. In the community the consequence is to allow the division between the haves and the have-nots to widen. It could cause education to become the basis of a stratified society, and eventually the public schools could be left with only the poorest and the most deprived. Maintaining quality in our public school system, therefore, is not only an educational imperative, it is also the means of preserving a fluid as opposed to a stratified society.

Again, what will happen when the traditional autonomy of the English-language public system is subverted by legislation such as Quebec's Bill 57? This bill limits the right of school boards to finance operation by taxes on local real estate to a "surtax" that in amount would be restricted to 6 percent of expenditures. For a levy in excess of this amount, a referendum would have to be held for the school board's tax-

payers and electors to give permission. It sounds most democratic. But what is the implication in our inflationary setting of the lack of tax powers? Our experience is that in inflation prices take the elevator and wages and salaries take the stairs. School board electors are decent, hard-working citizens. When they are squeezed by inflation they naturally have to look after themselves. This is particularly true for senior citizens. But in trying to protect themselves by voting against "surtax" levies, these good people will make it impossible for local school boards to function without total dependence upon the provincial government.

Parents should consider such loss of financial option an unhealthy development. It is axiomatic that a loss of local financial control will eventually lead to a loss of local educational control. Under the guise of democratizing school boards we can easily end up with a centralized control of education. Then teaching children to read could have more than pedagogic implications.

The school board elections on June 9 are an opportunity for parents to make our political democracy work at the local level. Inform yourselves about the elements of the school system by reading carefully this issue of the News. Learn what you can of the programs and views of the candidates by attending the candidates' meeting organized by your school committee or Home & School Association. Think about the issues of quality and control in our public school system. And, above all, get out and vote on June 9.

varies according to the size of the board and the type of schooling which it provides. Off the Island of Montreal, where there are regional school boards which group local boards for the purpose of providing education, the chairman and vice-chairman of the regional board's Council of Commissioners may receive additional sums. Delegates from school boards to the School Council of the Island of Montreal receive from that body a stipend of \$4,500 per year. There are additional increments to those serving the School Council as members of its executive committee, chairman, or vice-chairman. One third of the total stipend received is non-taxable since it is regarded as payment for a portion of the expenses in-

currred by the commissioner in fulfilling his or her function.

Who can be a school commissioner?

Canadian citizens over 18 years of age who have resided for at least six months in the school municipality are eligible for election. A candidate does not necessarily have to reside in the ward in which the election is taking place. A candidate is not eligible if he or she is an employee of the school board, is the spouse of a commissioner of the board, or is legally disqualified by reason of a criminal record. A candidate must, moreover, support, by reason of religion or choice, the board for which the election is being held.

How is a candidate nominated?

A candidate must be nominated by a certain number of electors. For the school boards which make up the School Council of the Island of Montreal, the number of electors is twenty. The names of the electors must appear on the electoral list. In the rest of the province of Quebec, two electors may nominate a candidate. The nomination must be given in written form to the Chief Returning Officer for the school municipality and must be de-

livered to the appointed place by 2 p.m. on the first Monday in June, signed by those making the nomination. On the Island of Montreal, the written consent of the candidate to the nomination must also be supplied at that time, together with a deposit of \$50 which will be returned if the candidate receives 10% or more of the votes cast.

When is an election by vote held?

If there is only one candidate for a seat on the Council of Commissioners, that candidate is deemed elected 'by acclamation.' If there is more than one candidate, voting will take place at polling stations located in local schools for that purpose on the second Monday in June between the hours of 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. The school board, may by resolution, fix the opening of the poll at 8 a.m. and the closing at 8 p.m.

Who can vote in a school board election?

Those who are resident in the ward in which the election is being held or who are on the real estate roll may vote in the school board election. They must not vote if they have been legally disqualified by reason of a criminal record.

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