Schools in Partnership With Their Community

Summary of an Exploratory Study

Québec

This document is a summary of a research report written by a team at the Université de Sherbrooke under the supervision of Paul Prévost. For more information, consult the complete report at <http://www.usherbrooke.ca/adm/grecus> (in French only).

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Introduction

At the Forum des générations, which was organized by the Government of Québec in 2004, certain concerns were raised concerning the development of the role schools play in their local and regional communities. Could schools become a place where services for students and the community could be integrated? Could the school serve as a facility offering a range of services to residents, with priority being given to students?

Since a number of school-community collaborations have already been established in Québec, it was agreed that some of these initiatives would be studied in order to better discern the challenges faced, the problems encountered and the solutions found by various stakeholders. The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) mandated a research team from the Université de Sherbrooke, under the supervision of Paul Prévost, to carry out this study.

This document aims to highlight new relationships between the school and its community, the different ways in which these relationships are organized, and the elements that contribute to the sustainability of these relationships. The three conceptual models identified in the study allow for a better understanding of the many options available to a school when it seeks to work with its community to tackle present and future challenges.

Methodology of the study

Ten case studies were documented. This sample covered a variety of school settings (urban and rural communities, different levels of education, student enrollments, geographic regions and linguistic environment, as well as school and local socioeconomic difficulties). It also looked at the different ways in which services were grouped, both in terms of the dynamics between the partners and agreements.

To gather information, the research team conducted partially guided interviews with eight key resource persons on average for each project. These individuals were from the education system (school board and school administrators, teachers and other staff members) and the community (elected officials, municipal officers, and other representatives of public and private organizations in the area). The information gathered was then completed and validated by analyzing certain relevant documents on the situations and initiatives involving the integration of services (e.g. strategic plans, educational projects, project-related documents).

This study documents five existing situations and five pilot projects. Each pilot project received a non-recurring $30 000 grant from the MELS during the 2004-2005 school year, to be used in the short term to reach agreements with local partners. Data was gathered between March and June 2005 and collated in the form of case studies that were then validated by some of the interviewees. For each case study, cross-sectional analysis was used to highlight any recurring elements as well as elements that the interviewees considered important. Numerous team meetings were held in order to reach a consensus among the research team on the results. Further analysis was then conducted in light of the concepts and models drawn from literature on the subject.

Forging
School-Community Ties

A community is made up of people from school, municipal, business and community organization settings, as well as individual citizens. It is a living organism in perpetual development. The various members of a community may come together in order to face changes that are inevitable. This bond may occur gradually over time or be more intensive and sporadic.

The ten schools in the study all faced considerable changes and were required to take a stand with respect to the rest of the community. They also had to assess their needs and issues.

Recognizing Change

The changes observed in how the ten schools operated stemmed from diverse situations.

Situations related to demographics:

- an increase in enrollments requiring new services or facilities
- a decrease in enrollments resulting in a potential school closure (*see Frame 1*)
- the presence of new immigrant populations
- the decline of a rural English-speaking population

Situations related to social problems or to school and municipal projects:

- the need to provide students experiencing specific social problems with resources
- the renovation of an old school building
- the creation of an auditorium for students and the community

Frame 1

The impact of demographic decline

Student enrollments have been dropping for more than 10 years at the *École de Sainte-Famille (Commission scolaire des Premières-Seigneuries)*. The school board restructured its activities in 1994, and the school lost its deed of establishment. The school board's decision elicited much protest from the community. At the initiative of the former parent participation organization, a school survival committee was created.

Issues that Could Bring Schools and Communities Closer Together

The various issues that stakeholders have dealt with may spark collective action. They drive the stakeholders' interest in collaborating, and instill a sense of urgency in taking joint action to solve a problem.

The extent of the collaboration therefore depends on the types of issues.

Three types of issues have been identified in the ten case studies:

- **Administrative issues** are primarily of a financial nature and focus on effectively managing each party's resources and assets.
- **Educational issues** focus exclusively on improving services aimed at students' educational success.
- Through **social issues**, the school, in cooperation with the other stakeholders in the community, deals with problems that affect a common clientele.

Depending on the case study, one type of issue predominates and determines the **vision** that the stakeholders have adopted in developing the partnership. Two types of visions, therefore two ways of approaching problems and solutions, have been identified.

- Stakeholders with a **corporate vision** approach partnerships with their own objectives and organizational environment in mind. For example, the school's objective would be to effectively carry out its educational project (see *Frame 2*).
- Stakeholders with a **development vision** focus on problems related to a common clientele; they share the same overall approach to the problems to be solved. These stakeholders consider how the problems of the respective clienteles interrelate with those of the community as a whole (see *Frame 2*).

Frame 2

Two visions

Corporate vision

These two institutions have adopted a corporate vision and endeavour to respond to their immediate organizational concerns. *École Laval (Commission scolaire des Hauts-Bois-de-l'Outaouais)* established a relationship with its municipality, because keeping the school open is dependent on the municipality's financial commitment. The *École Marguerite-Bourgeoys (Commission scolaire de Kamouraska–Rivière-du-Loup)* is motivated to establish a relationship with its municipality by a desire to keep its building occupied and profitable.

Development vision

The *École Barthélémy-Vimont (Commission scolaire de Montréal)*, located in a multiethnic and urban environment, cohabits with community organizations and maintains relationships with health and social services organizations. It is primarily concerned with educational and social issues, and its vision clearly incorporates a developmental aspect.

When school issues are strictly educational, strictly administrative, or for the most part administrative, a corporate vision comes into play. But in the face of a complex situation involving a variety of issues and stakeholders, a more developmental vision seems to come into play.

Aspects of Working Together

A number of important factors involving human, social, financial, material and organizational aspects contribute to preparing for collaborative projects.

Human aspects

In all the case studies, an individual or small group of individuals devised and promoted the projects. Therefore, individuals must have credibility both within their organization and with the various parties. If an idea stems from the lower ranks, these individuals must be able to influence upper management to adopt the idea and to become an impetus for change within the organization.

Networks and communication

Communication is the vehicle through which information may be shared, a vision developed, and issues explained and understood by the partners. Communication is impacted by the networks of personal and professional relationships that exist or that are newly developed. Partners are often chosen on the basis of existing relationships according to an affinity with certain individuals or the potential contribution of the partner. The more positive the partnership experience, the greater the chance of choosing the same partner again for other similar, wide-scale projects.

Material and financial aspects

The availability of facilities for offering services as well as access to equipment appear to be factors essential to establishing closer school-community relationships. Other factors, related to school board and school budget constraints, may define the type of collaboration, for example, the resources available for services offered to students at risk. This situation is behind the efforts of the schools and the health and social services system.

Organizing
School-Community Relations

The first initiatives affect the type of relationships and agreements that will ensue. Organizing collaborative relationships involves sharing responsibilities and tasks as well as setting up minimal organization to support the coordination of activities. The forms of partnerships are based on the initial steps taken, any official and unofficial agreements concluded, as well as any means implemented to achieve common objectives. Various facets of school-community relationships are presented below.

The First Initiatives

In five of the ten case studies, the school board or school administration initiated the project. In the other cases, initiative was taken by community organizations or individuals (*see Frame 3*).

Frame 3

An example of school board/school initiative

In 2004, the St. Willibrord School administration (*New Frontiers School Board*) proposed a school theme focusing on closer ties with the community. Project implementation was facilitated by MELS subsidies, which, combined with pilot project status, made it possible for the school board's director general and the school's director of educational services to plan the project as a community learning centre. This administration-designed project mobilized all parties concerned.

An example of community initiative

In a context where the local population is increasing and at the municipality's request, the *École secondaire l'Horizon (Commission scolaire des Affluents)* has opened up to the community. The administration shares its building with organizations such as a senior citizens' group, a youth group and a Caisse populaire Desjardins service counter. It shares its equipment and facilities for certain sports activities and municipal recreational activities. The municipality initiated this project and funded an expansion project so that the premises could be renovated to accommodate a senior citizens' university. Later, following changes to the school administration, a municipal library was built (without any school funding), again strengthening ties with the municipality. A municipal project to construct a community centre is expected to further enhance opportunities for school-community partnership.

The role of the school milieu in organizing collaborative relationships as well as the orientation and scope of the first initiatives varies depending on the institution involved. When a school administration takes the initiative or is solicited by the community, the ensuing relationship with community organizations appears to correspond more specifically to the local reality and tends to lead more quickly to partnership. When a school board administration is initially involved, the steps seem to be more of a general nature, often in the form of a framework for action within which the school administration may establish partnerships with the community. Direct participation of the school administration is therefore critical to organizing partnership projects, as is the school board's support.

Different types of relationships may emerge from these first initiatives.

Relationships

The relationships established between the school and the community depend largely on the type of project and the issues involved. Each of the case studies presents a complex situation comprising various types of relationships that continue to evolve over time (*see Frame 4*):

- relationships of usage
- relationships of complementarity
- relationships of a political and co-developmental nature

Administrative issues generate relationships of usage that involve the school board and its partners sharing material assets.

The relationship of usage can be broken down into three categories: partnership, owner-tenant relationship and cohabitation.

- In a **partnership relationship**, the school board negotiates with another party for students to use the premises and equipment and, in return, the other party's (or partner's) clientele can use the school facilities.
- In an **owner-tenant relationship**, an organization leases space in a school board building for its own needs. The school board may also lease space in a building belonging to another owner.
- **Cohabitation** is a relationship between the occupants of the same building, normally school personnel, students and organizations located in the premises. They agree to "live together" because they share a common objective or have the same needs (financial difficulties, the need to belong to a local community, etc.). The school milieu sometimes considers the community a client or a "neighbour," and the school acts as the host facility.

Educational issues generate relationships of complementarity

These relationships give rise to discussions that make it possible to compare the approaches used with the various populations (children, youth, parents). The contributors share the same clientele even if their objectives differ. Each organization has its own project but associates with others in order to be more effective. Cooperation is promoted.

Relationships of a political and co-developmental nature are the outcome of social issues

- **Relationships of a political nature** are established between parents and the school board as well as between parents and the school administration. The three case studies involving schools closing and re-opening are an example of these relationships.

- **Relationships of a co-developmental nature** take place between different participants who go beyond the educational perspective to associate without losing sight of community development. The school therefore considers community revitalization or development as the main factor in maintaining or developing educational services.

Frame 4

Relationships that evolve over time

At the end of the 1990s, approximately 40 students attended the *École de Saint-Romain (Commission scolaire des Hauts-Cantons)*, and the school was being threatened with closure. This mobilized the community, which considered it important to maintain its primary institutions. **A political relationship** resulted (negotiation between the school board and the municipality) and led to a first agreement in 1997 that made it possible to reduce the school's operating costs and keep it open. The relationship then turned into a **partnership** when the Maison familiale rurale (MFR) became a partner and the facilities were used more effectively.

Since 2001, closure has no longer been an issue due to the partnerships established and to rising student enrollments. Two years ago, a daycare was set up in the school at the parents' request. In 2005, other projects, including an expansion project, changed the school profile yet again.

Agreements

Regardless of the type, relationships between partners are always governed by an agreement that varies in formality and duration. These agreements may be official or unofficial, depending on the extent to which resources and responsibilities are shared and how the parties define the governing and management rules. The agreement may also be short or long term, depending on the parties' level of commitment.

The case studies present three types of agreements between the school milieu and its partners: **user agreements, service agreements and political agreements**. The first type of agreement involves the use of premises and equipment; the second aims at providing complementary services; and the third focuses on the distribution of resources within an administrative region.

User agreements specify how the premises and equipment are to be shared, and generally require a financial commitment from the parties. Because of their legal nature, the school boards usually manage them. These agreements are generally well organized and involve cost sharing based on either the surface area used (e.g. for premises) or on pro rata use (e.g. for equipment). They typically involve two types of financial commitment: a set price and criteria for additional charges. They involve school premises and equipment. Some agreements specify the hours of use for each type of equipment and each room as well as each partner's roles and responsibilities. User agreements are generally concluded for 10- to 15-year terms (*see Frame 5*).

Examples of user agreements

At the *École Le Carrefour (Commission scolaire de l'Or-et-des-Bois)*, the auditorium renovation project resulted in the school board and municipality renewing the existing agreement protocol to cover the use of more of the school board's and the municipality's facilities and equipment for community, cultural, sports and recreational purposes.

Sunnyside School (Eastern Townships School Board) houses a point of service for the Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS) de Magog in Stanstead. This agreement has been in effect for a number of years and originated with citizens who observed a lack of access to basic health and social services. The partnership with the school board, which manages the premises, did not initially integrate services for students and the community. At the time, Sunnyside School had space available and the local party put the CSSS administration in contact with the school board, and then a lease was signed.

School boards also manage **service agreements**, which do not involve any financial commitment, only the sharing of expertise. Premises and equipment are exchanged free of charge for certain services, such as the presence of the police, social workers or nurses at the school (*see Frame 6*).

An example of a service agreement

At the École Saint-Georges (Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin), services have been exchanged with the youth centre and the CSSS for more than 20 years. These services are integrated in different ways, often in the form of shared projects. For example, the professionals concerned (nurses, social workers, teachers) jointly organize services according to "projects" or "themes," such as smoking prevention, school-family conferences or a program to help students with intellectual impairments set up in an apartment. Youth centres may also be involved in specific projects as well as with the Service externe de main-d'œuvre (SEMO).

Political agreements obviously involve political relationships and tend to be official, even legal and regulatory, for example, a policy that concerns keeping a school open or closing it. The formulation of such a policy necessarily requires public consultation and makes it possible for the community members (elected and non-elected) and school board officials to reach an agreement (*see Frame 7*).

Frame 7

An example of a political agreement

The partnership between the *École Laval (Commission scolaire des Hauts-Bois-de-l'Outaouais)* and the local community dates back a number of years. In 1993, the school board closed the school because of financial constraints directly related to a decline in enrollments. Several years later, and with the help of certain community organizations, parents submitted a petition to the Council of Commissioners to have the school re-opened. The municipality made a financial contribution and the school was re-opened in September 1999.

A written agreement currently exists between the municipality, the school and the school board; however, the parties never signed it. The agreement is a "formality" that does not affect how each party assumes its financial responsibilities. The existence of a written document therefore seems to promote goodwill.

Lastly, **moral commitments** may also exist between parties, and are based on the parties promising to commit to future action. Through these commitments, the parties promise to collaborate or agree on a forum of discussion such as a local or regional committee or discussion panel (*see Frame 8*).

Frame 8

An example of a moral commitment

Located in a multiethnic neighbourhood of Montréal, the *École Barthélémy-Vimont (Commission scolaire de Montréal)* brings together a local network of more than 25 stakeholders who jointly focus on youth problems by means of various working committees. This network is called the Table jeunesse de Parc-Extension.

Sustainable
Ties

Whether agreements are official or not, they must be based on sound relationships between stakeholders and be adaptable to change, regardless of the circumstances. The following three conditions were observed in the case studies as contributing to maintaining partnership projects, agreements and good relationships among stakeholders.

Factors Associated with Sustainability

Renewing a common vision

It would appear that the more pressing the issue, the greater the commitment and the more likely the partnership is to succeed. However, if new stakeholders are added, they must endorse the common vision of the partnership. If the project is relatively flexible, all stakeholders may review the vision in light of any new issues at stake. This seems to be easier when each organization has already undergone change in order to adapt to working within a partnership.

Maintaining communication and trust

The partnership may last, providing that the persons in place maintain a high level of communication and trust. In some cases, interviewees clearly indicated that it was fundamental for them to broaden and increase opportunities for discussion because communication is essential for a partnership based on trust. This generally implies identifying the possible opportunities for discussion, such as committees, governing boards or parent participation organizations. It is also not surprising that the more people "get along well," the more likely partnership projects are to succeed. Individuals rooted in the community are in a position to increase communication and trust because they adhere to a set of values, attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with the local culture.

Being aware of the advantages that the partnership brings to each party

In order to invest in a collective initiative, the participants must each benefit from it. In lasting partnerships, these advantages are fair and beneficial for each of the organizations and persons concerned, and they outweigh the time, money and effort dedicated by each participant to develop solutions with other partners.

When assets are shared, the goal is usually to reduce operating costs and the initial outlay required for constructing or renovating facilities—obviously an advantage to both school and local organizations. Sharing space within the school building creates a meaningful common ground for students, their families and the community at large. This situation may also bring certain services closer to students and their families.

The advantages related to exchanging services concern the quality of intervention with students, the complementarity of resources made available to students and their families, and easier intervention. Intervention is expected to improve because a variety of professionals are in a more effective position to coordinate their activities and each has better information on the range of problems that their clientele may experience.

Activities involving sharing and concerted effort allow the partners to better comprehend problems, to gain a common understanding of the community's issues, to envisage partnership opportunities, to identify and better understand potential partners, and to share projects and develop a common vision of certain issues.

Three Models
of Schools in Partnership

This study defines three conceptual models that categorize schools according to the type of collaborative tie developed with the community. It also demonstrates that no single model describes all of the relationships between the stakeholders and the organization in place. Nevertheless, these three conceptual models—the **shared school**, the **expanded school** and the **networked school**—while not being mutually exclusive, make it possible to understand the specific experiences of schools having established partnerships. It is also possible to envisage how one dominant model could be applied to another and thus see how schools can work toward a durable partnership model.

The shared school is based on a corporate vision and aims first and foremost to respond to administrative issues. These issues concern both the school milieu and community organizations. The relationships revolve around sharing assets (equipment or premises) as well as long-term official agreements defining the rules for using these assets and the partners' material or financial commitments, if applicable. In this case, the school milieu maintains ties with organizations whose priority mission is not necessarily education.

The expanded school is based on a corporate vision, but it is the educational issues that motivate it to collaborate with other organizations. These issues generally concern services aimed at fostering educational success. Relationships are based on the complementarity of services. Agreements are generally official, of short or medium duration, and focus on the needs to be met with respect to students and their families. The various parties primarily exchange expertise (human resources), but may also share assets in order to facilitate the coordination of activities.

The networked school is based on a development vision in response to social issues. The school is involved in the collective initiative and the group of stakeholders is seen as a community project. The school milieu and community organizations commit on a voluntary basis because they believe the project will help them achieve their respective missions. Relationships of a political and co-developmental nature are maintained that may help each partner coordinate strategies.

Some of the case studies fall under the model of the shared school: École de **Sainte-Famille** (Commission scolaire des Premières-Seigneuries), **Sunnyside School** (Eastern Townships School Board), École secondaire **l'Horizon** (Commission scolaire des Affluents), École **Marguerite-Bourgeoys** (Commission scolaire de Kamouraska–Rivière-du-Loup), **St. Willibrord School** (New Frontiers School Board), and École de **Saint-Romain** (Commission scolaire des Hauts-Cantons) (see *Figure 1*).

One can be considered both a shared school and an expanded school: École **Saint-Georges** (Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin) (see *Figure 2*).

Lastly, some share the characteristics of all three school models (shared, expanded and networked): École **Barthélémy-Vimont** (Commission scolaire de Montréal), École **Laval** (Commission scolaire des Hauts-Bois-de-l'Outaouais), and École **Le Carrefour** (Commission scolaire de l'Or-et-des-Bois) (see *Figure 3*).

Schools, like their communities, are living organisms in constant development. The trends observed may be represented in graph form.

Figure 1: *A shared school*

Shared school

Expanded school   Networked school
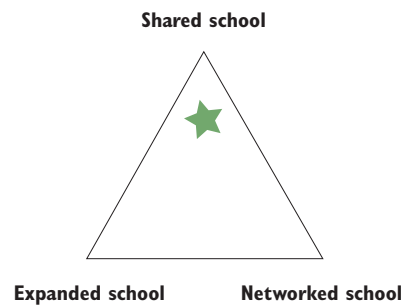
Figure 2: *A shared and expanded school*

Shared school

Expanded school   Networked school
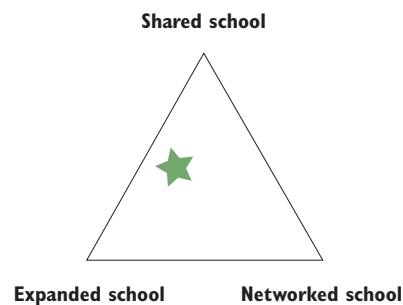
Figure 3: *A shared, expanded and networked school*

Shared school

Expanded school   Networked school
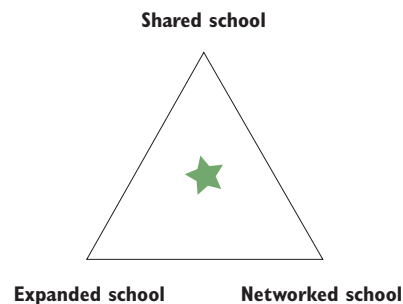
Challenges of Developing Schools in Partnership

A number of challenges may arise when schools develop partnerships in Québec.

The challenge of the school milieu being open to the community

The ability of the school milieu to open to the community depends on the individuals involved and on certain facilitating conditions. First of all, the vision promoted by school board administrators, especially through their strategic plan, may significantly promote this openness. Also, a school administration committed to creating a school that is open to the community is a crucial factor. However, in order to take action in the different environments and acquire the leadership necessary to promote projects, these persons must be confident and have a certain credibility with the other local leaders. This credibility is only acquired over time by carrying out small and large projects.

The challenge of the availability of human resources

In local communities that are socially, economically and even culturally disadvantaged, and where sometimes the population is declining, it may be difficult to have a number of stakeholders participate because social or material resources are scarcer. The community's ability to participate in the school project may therefore be impaired, but schools may nonetheless take certain action to impact the social, human and economic levers of the community by proposing, for example, new services for students and the general public.

The challenge of organizing the partnership

Developing a partnership involves a great deal of coordination and represents an organizational challenge that requires good communication. Working relations and the sharing of roles and responsibilities necessitate open-mindedness and a real desire to collaborate. In order to support and foster relationships and the negotiation of agreements, time and effort must be invested, more meetings and discussions must be held.

The challenge of managing shared material resources

Sharing equipment and facilities, especially in terms of accepting and managing additional charges, may be a source of conflict between different parties. When all parties accept and apply the principle of user fees when sharing assets, in particular, potential disputes may be mitigated.

For example, in the case of an agreement signed by a school board and a municipality to share equipment and premises, communication between senior and lower school board officials often seems to be inadequate, and an increased commitment by all to support the agreement is required.

The challenge of safety and the general climate

Other challenges also affect the implementation and operation of school-community partnerships. In a school that welcomes different partners, safety and the general climate are important aspects to be considered. However, all of the schools studied experienced difficulties in instituting controls (e.g. automatic locks) and circulation rules for verifying and minimizing the comings and goings of students and outside members.

In brief, the challenges presented illustrate the variety of elements that need to be considered when developing partnerships with the community. Certain conditions have been identified for establishing sustainable partnerships: sharing objectives, being jointly responsible for a project, respecting each partner's prerogatives and mission, and pooling complementary resources.

Conclusion

This study illustrates the variety of situations that can motivate a school to change its ways and to engage in a partnership-building process with the community. It also highlights the importance of the human dimension in creating and organizing partnership projects.

A community's issues vary according to the environment and impact the scope of the collaboration and the ensuing relationships. Some elements promote sustainable ties; for example, agreements appear more likely to succeed if the partnership is based on a common vision and understanding of the issues. A flexible structure that can be adapted to the different stakeholders and their respective missions also facilitates sustainable partnerships. The type of school-community relationship depends on the characteristics of the students and the local population as well as on the enthusiasm of the school and community stakeholders.

There is no single model to describe the types of relationships and modes of operation established by the partners. The three models presented—the shared school, the expanded school and the networked school—demonstrate that schools in partnership evolve over time, transform and adapt.

It is important that the various stakeholders be sufficiently flexible to lend their local flavour by investing the relevant resources, including their creativity, in order to tackle the challenges of developing new school-community initiatives in Québec.

Ten Studies
of Actual Cases in Schools

Case 1

École Barthélémy-Vimont

Commission scolaire de Montréal (CSDM)
Montréal, Parc-Extension district

The École Barthélémy-Vimont offers preschool and elementary education to nearly 900 students in the Parc-Extension district of the city of Montréal. Because of the neighbourhood's multiethnic character, some 40 mother tongues are spoken at this school; this poses a major challenge in communications between the school, parents and students, as well as in terms of the fragility of the social fabric in a small, densely populated area.

The school's main building, located in the William-Hingston Complex, belongs to the Commission scolaire de Montréal (CSDM). This complex houses a number of community organizations including an adult education centre, a daycare, a municipal library, a recreation centre and a community centre that includes several neighbourhood organizations. With the city of Montréal, the partner organizations in this complex form a management committee responsible for supervising the building's operation and facilitating cohabitation. The complex has been home to the recreation centre and several community organizations since 2000, and the school was incorporated in 2001. In addition to managing the library, the city leases space to the CSDM for community organizations. A financial agreement has also been concluded with the city for managing the recreation centre's activities and coordinating the use of its equipment and premises.

The school administration, in place since 2002, is in the process of working with the team of the Supporting Montréal Schools program of the MELS to rally different stakeholders around the concept of a community school. This concept remains to be defined, however, and is still ambiguous for most of the partners concerned. The school and community are also networking by means of two committees (*Réussite scolaire* and *Intervention auprès des parents*) of the Table jeunesse de Parc-Extension that are focusing on school success and intervention with parents.

The complexity and variety of interaction among the partners sharing the William-Hingston facility clearly reflect the common desire to work together to meet the pressing needs of a diverse population. For the school, the proximity of stakeholders and parents as well as the complementarity of certain services are definite advantages of the partnership. However, it appears to be more difficult for the school and the other organizations to transition from a series of specific collaborative efforts to a common vision that is based on developing a shared offer of services so that the partners may come together in a more efficient and effective manner.

École de Sainte-Famille [1]

Commission scolaire des Premières-Seigneuries (CSDPS)
Sainte-Famille (Île d'Orléans)

The École de Sainte-Famille is one of the three schools on Île d'Orléans offering preschool and elementary education; it serves the parish of Sainte-Famille and the northern part of the municipality of Saint-François. Located in a rural environment, it is at the heart of the most agricultural municipality of the island. Smaller than its neighbours, the Saint-Pierre and Saint-Laurent schools, Sainte-Famille had 54 students in 2004-2005. As with most schools under the Commission scolaire des Premières-Seigneuries, Sainte-Famille's enrollments are dropping, and have been for over ten years.

The school board first restructured the activities of the École de Ste-Famille in 1994, when it lost its deed of establishment and was annexed to the École de Saint-Pierre. This school board decision elicited protest from the community, and at the instigation of the former parent participation organization, a school survival committee was set up. With the uncontested support of the general public and the municipality, the committee submitted its file to the Ministère de l'Éducation. After lengthy negotiations between the municipality (and the community), the school board and the Ministère, the municipality and the school board concluded an agreement for the municipality to purchase the building: from now on, the municipality would cover the building-related expenses and the school board, the costs related to educational services. Since that time, no major problems have interfered with the school operating effectively, much to the community's satisfaction.

Parents' strong involvement and the community taking charge of the problem clearly attest to the extent to which Sainte-Famille's residents share a vision of development. This innovative solution is the result of all community stakeholders working together and of collective decision-making that is indicative of the sense of belonging that is specific to Île d'Orléans residents. The Sainte-Famille school shares its premises with three other organizations: the municipal library was opened in 1984, and the local development centre (CLD) and daycare were set up after an agreement was reached between the municipality and the school board. The daycare is private and is the result of parents taking charge of a service that the school board assessed as not viable because of low student enrollments. The CLD is located next to the building occupied by the municipality of Sainte-Famille and the MRC de L'île d'Orléans. An official agreement governs the allocation of space for each organization, while working relations and the exchange of services are managed informally. Cohabitation requires the participation of each stakeholder. Communication, respect and open-mindedness are factors that contribute to good working relations and the relaxed and pleasant atmosphere of the Sainte-Famille school.

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1 The situation of the Sainte-Famille school has changed since this study was carried out.

Case 3

École Laval

Commission scolaire des Hauts-Bois-de-l'Outaouais (CSHBO)
Sainte-Thérèse-de-la-Gatineau

The École Laval is a small elementary school with 28 students, under the jurisdiction of the Commission scolaire des Hauts-Bois-de-l'Outaouais. This school has two groups of students and serves the population of the municipality of Sainte-Thérèse-de-la-Gatineau and the surrounding area. This rural town is situated in the MRC de La Vallée-de-la-Gatineau and in proximity to Maniwaki, a regional service centre. Because of its attractions, including waterways, it is also a vacation spot.

The re-opening of the École Laval in 1999, closed since 1993, was necessary to revitalize the community. Even today, the school is an ideal place for residents to organize community and municipal activities. It houses the municipal library. Parents and elected municipal officers orchestrated the school's re-opening. They influenced the decision of elected school officers and rallied the community; the school was re-organized and residents made a commitment to renew educational activities at the school.

The partnership is primarily in the form of an official agreement between the school board, school and municipality as well as unofficial agreements between the municipality and community organizations. These agreements all involve the use of facilities. The municipality pays annual fees for the use of space representing approximately one third of the school's total surface area. It makes these premises available free of charge to community organizations and pays all expenses related to the library.

The willingness of school stakeholders to maintain these services in the town's school, to promote partnerships such as the one with the École Laval, and to develop regional partnerships translates into a vision of maintaining and developing human and social heritage in the area. The important challenge for the region's stakeholders remains ensuring that the economy can support efforts to keep residents and attract new ones to the area, especially children.

Case 4

École secondaire L'Horizon

Commission scolaire des Affluents (CSA)
Repentigny

In 2004-2005, the École secondaire l'Horizon had 1300 students in regular secondary education programs as well as in special education and concentration programs. Located in the heart of the Le Gardeur district in the new city of Repentigny, and under the jurisdiction of the Commission scolaire des Affluents, the school lies in an urban setting in the suburbs of Montréal. The community is relatively affluent, with little poverty. It has benefited from the expansion of the city of Montréal. Its growth has been primarily based on services to the population.

Since the municipal infrastructures could not sufficiently accommodate all the local services and activities, L'Horizon proved to be an interesting option. It allows certain organizations, associations and cultural and sports activities to operate. Other organizations have been integrated into the school and offer services to students: a Caisse populaire Desjardins service counter, a social worker, a youth police officer as well as a high-quality school and municipal library. Initiated by a former municipal council of Le Gardeur, this library was built adjacent to the school and is connected to it by a corridor. The special feature of the library is that it serves not only students but also the general public of Repentigny.

The municipality and the school board manage most of the agreements concluded between the partners. All the agreements are official, even if some are informal. An official agreement exists between the school and each partner for the use of space, leasing costs, and shared additional charges. Although they are being applied, the agreements have not been signed by municipal authorities because there is a disagreement concerning how the school board invoices for additional charges. The two parties have nevertheless made operating arrangements and hope to resolve the issue shortly. The informal agreements are managed amicably and concern the arena, the Caisse populaire and the professionals working with youth.

After a somewhat difficult period where certain ties were nearly ruptured, relations between the school and its partners have been harmonious for the past two years. This coincides with the arrival of a new school administration. Open-mindedness, communication and willingness to listen to the other party remain the primary strengths and key factors of the school's success. Everything points to the partnerships continuing because all partners benefit. Moreover, the municipality is having a new community centre built next to the school that will give the community access to facilities and an auditorium with a capacity of 400 persons. This will consolidate the school's role as a focal point for community services in the Le Gardeur district.

Sunnyside School

Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB)
Stanstead

Stanstead is a small community in the Eastern Townships located along the Québec-Vermont border, with a population of 3100 people, more than half of whom are English-speaking. Because of its strategic geographic location, its granite industry, its natural attractions and its quality of life, Stanstead used to be one of the most prosperous communities, but today, many of its industries have closed their doors and the community is experiencing socioeconomic difficulties.

Sunnyside School is one of the community's two elementary schools, the other offering instruction in French. In 2004-2005, enrollments totalled 135 preschool and elementary school students in a primarily disadvantaged area. Nearly half of these students had an individualized education plan. The school has concluded numerous agreements with community organizations, in particular the Colby-Curtis Museum, the Christian Youth Group, Beebe/Stanstead Centre, Haskell Library and Héma-Québec. These agreements focus on collaboration, activities for students or the use of premises outside of class hours. The Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS) de Magog has had a point of service in the school for a number of years.

The CSSS point of service was set up in Stanstead as a result of a citizens' initiative after a need for access to basic health care and social services was observed. However, the partnership with the school board, which governs the leasing of premises, did not integrate services for both students and the community. At the time, Sunnyside School had unused space available and a local stakeholder put the CSSS administration in contact with the school board. A lease was signed and the CSSS operated as it would in any other building, completely independent of the school.

Today, the school premises have been renovated in order to distinctly separate the school and the CSSS, and neither party has complained of major cohabitation problems. This cohabitation does not involve any additional management tasks for either the school or the CSSS. The respective material resources departments of the Eastern Townships School Board and the CSSS de Magog deal with management issues. This inter-organizational relationship is based on good communication. Collaboration between the CSSS and Sunnyside School is no different from that between the CSSS and the other elementary schools it serves. The programs offered at Sunnyside School are also offered at other schools. The advantage of the close proximity lies in the increased visibility of services offered to families. Teachers may also play a role in raising awareness with parents by inviting a CSSS representative to a parents' meeting, for example.

École Marguerite-Bourgeoys

Commission scolaire de Kamouraka–Rivière-du-Loup Saint-Pascal

The École Marguerite-Bourgeoys, built in the 1950s, is almost completely occupied by various organizations, but with the exception of the Centre de formation en entreprise et récupération (CFER), there are no students. Two organizations shared former classrooms—a daycare and a rehabilitation centre (CRDI). These two organizations leased the largest space in the school. The completely renovated school basement was also home to the Quartier jeunesse (Maison des jeunes), the Maison de la famille du Kamouraska, the Cercle des fermières de Saint-Pascal, the Groupe Scouts Saint-Pascal and the Unité Domrémy de Saint-Pascal.

At one time, the future of Marguerite-Bourgeoys was called into question. The physical condition of the building and the need to renovate for tenants, as well as the school board's inability to find a buyer for the building, paved the way for a pilot project for this school. Negotiating new agreements with the tenants solved the problem. These agreements made it possible to finance the renovations and make improvements to the building for the next ten years. This project is also consistent with the school board's orientations, one of which prioritizes the implementation of new organizational formulas.

The renovations included space for classrooms and offices for adult education in the Saint-Pascal sector. The Marguerite-Bourgeoys school was therefore revitalized and became a multipurpose centre bringing together services for children, families, youth, persons with intellectual impairments as well as youth and adult sector students. Each organization in the former elementary school offers an educational component that is beneficial to the community of Saint-Pascal. However, it is not a school in the normal sense because there are no students enrolled in regular programs.

Locally, it is not clear whether the community of Saint-Pascal still considers this building a school. Residents do not appear to have rallied when students were transferred to another school. According to Saint-Pascal's mayor, the municipality did not participate in the school project. This project seems to have been spearheaded primarily by the school board. This quality building located in the heart of the city has been given a second lease on life, and a synergy has been created in the municipality of Saint-Pascal by the various organizations present at the school.

Case 7

École secondaire Saint-Georges

Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin (CSBE)
Saint-Georges

Cycle Two students in Secondary III, IV and V attend the École secondaire Saint-Georges. Just as the city of Saint-Georges does, the secondary school serves the regional population, and several neighbouring rural municipalities benefit from the services offered by the city. This is characteristic of Chaudière-Appalaches, a region that encompasses a number of small rural towns served by several large urban centres such as Lévis, Thetford Mines, Montmagny and Saint-Georges.

Under the jurisdiction of the Commission scolaire de la Beauce-Etchemin, the school's enrollments totalled 1272 in 2004-2005. The majority of students were in the regular program, while 271 were in special education programs. With regards to these students, school personnel observed that resources were limited in terms of what they could offer to foster educational success. Therefore, since 2003, the school has taken steps to seek expertise outside the school in the hopes of promoting the education and socialization of students experiencing difficulties.

Numerous steps were taken two years ago when partnership efforts were initiated. However, partnerships with the CSSS de Beauce-Sartigan and the Centre jeunesse de Chaudière-Appalaches date back almost 20 years, and a social worker has been present at the school three days a week as well as a resource person to assist students through support groups or individual services. During 2004-2005, other partnerships were established with the CRDI, which shares space with the school: the Maison des jeunes, which allows a street worker to be present at the school two lunch hours per week, and the Centre de réadaptation en alcoolisme, toxicomanie et jeux compulsifs, which offers a support program for parents of children experiencing problems. In brief, these partnerships developed thanks to the school's vision and willingness. However, the steps required to achieve these results demanded a great deal of energy. The partners also had to enjoy certain advantages. Nevertheless, these steps permitted the school to stand out within its school board, and this is why it received financial assistance from the MELS as part of the pilot projects program. This assistance made it possible for the school to cover part of the salary for a coordinator for the community school project for several months. Employed since February 2005, this coordinator encourages potentially interesting organizations to establish agreements for exchanging services. In the space of several months, this person has enabled the school to make advances as significant as those over the past two years, during which time only sporadic efforts were invested in the community school project. New agreements that allow 24 community organizations to meet students' various needs were signed and have been in effect since the 2005-2006 school year.

Case 8

St. Willibrord School

New Frontiers School Board
Châteauguay

St. Willibrord School is one of four English elementary schools in Châteauguay. In 2004-2005, enrollments totalled 412 students, 25% of Aboriginal origin. It falls within the 5th decile rank in terms of its socioeconomic level and therefore serves the most disadvantaged population of the four elementary schools.

In 2004-2005, concerned with its image, the school administration proposed a school theme extolling closer ties with the community. When the MELS set up the pilot projects in 2004, the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Services à la communauté anglophone mentioned them to nine directors general of English school boards. The director general of the New Frontiers School Board thought St. Willibrord School could be a pilot school, and the school administration was very enthusiastic, seeing this as a concrete means of implementing the proposed school theme.

Pilot project status also provided the director general and director of educational services of the school board and school with an opportunity to formulate a project for a community learning centre. Strategic planning for the project had already been developed. This process did, however, take place before the main stakeholders accepted the idea, that is, the governing board, parent participation organization and school personnel. Senior officials set up the project; it did not originate from the lower ranks, and mobilizing the partners concerned required time and effort.

In order to complete the project, a coordinator was hired with the financial assistance of the MELS pilot projects program. This person was essential because the school administration or school board could not take on the ensuing tasks. Until now, initiatives have involved documenting the subject, evaluating the potential community partners, and approaching potential partners in order to know their needs and organize information sessions. A good portion of the tasks are related to communications, public relations and community organization. Given the progress of the work, not renewing the coordinator's contract would put the project in jeopardy.

St. Willibrord School has already established a partnership with a school in Montréal that works with children with pervasive developmental disorders. It also has access to human and material resources such as a part-time occupational therapist and an occupational therapy room. Services have therefore already been integrated in the school, although they are offered only to students enrolled in the *Giant Step* centre. This partnership is the foundation for an expanded vision of the sharing of services between the school community and the community in general.

École de Saint-Romain

Commission scolaire des Hauts-Cantons (CSHC)
Saint-Romain

In 2004-2005, 57 students attended Saint-Romain elementary school. There were three classes: one for preschool; one for students in grades one to three; and another class for grades four to six. Most of the students live in Saint-Romain. The school serves a rural and sparsely populated area, and since 1998, it has been under the jurisdiction of the Commission scolaire des Hauts-Cantons.

At the end of the 1990s, with enrollments hovering at roughly 40 students, the school was in jeopardy of being closed. The community, observing the importance of maintaining one of its main institutions, rallied and the first school-community partnerships were established. In 1997, a first agreement between the school board and the municipality made it possible to reduce some of the school's operating costs in order to keep it open. Then, a partnership with the Maison familiale rurale (MFR) allowed facilities to be used more effectively. Thus, since the 2000-2001 school year, secondary school students at the MFR share space with the elementary school students.

Since 2001, closing the school is no longer an issue, not only because of the partnerships created, but also due to a number of other factors. Enrollments total approximately 60 students, and for the past two years, an extracurricular daycare has been set up in the school in response to parents' requests. Other changes were planned for 2005 that would also modify the school portrait. The school expansion project completed in February 2005 provided MFR students with classrooms more suited to their needs, while allowing the elementary school students to recover some space. In the fall of 2005, an early childhood education centre was opened in the building for children 18 months to 18 years old. The school board has also decided that the elementary school and daycare will come under the same administration and that the person in charge will be present at the school on a full-time basis. New operating procedures should result, especially since the current director of the MFR has been appointed to be in charge. This situation coincides with the departure of the current principal of the elementary school, an individual who was appreciated and very involved in the community. In short, these changes will allow for the different sectors to be managed consistently.

École Le Carrefour

Commission scolaire de l'Or-et-des-Bois (CSOB)
Val-d'Or

The École Le Carrefour is located in Val-d'Or and falls under the jurisdiction of the Commission scolaire de l'Or-et-des-Bois. In 2004-2005, enrollments totalled more than 1600 students. A deprivation index of eight out of ten indicates a certain economic heterogeneousness, which partly reflects the fragile socioeconomic situation of the community, even though primary processing industries related to forestry and mining are quite present in the area.

In the past ten years, the secondary school and school board have made some interesting advances in terms of community ties. Firstly, a number of pedagogical projects have helped the school open up to the community, for example, the international education program and the Serre des tournesols project. However, it was the auditorium renovation project, initially requested by the municipality of Val-d'Or, that led the school board and the municipality to renew the existing agreement protocol. This agreement now covers the use of more of the school board and municipality's premises and equipment for community, cultural, sports and recreational purposes. Lastly, establishing a pilot project community school under the MELS spurred the partners to continue working together to integrate the school and municipal libraries.

A new vision of partnership adopted by the school board and municipal administrations, based on a spirit of sharing and openness, seems to be at the core of the success of all these endeavours. Formalizing principles based on a shared clientele (young people) and user fees appears to be the key to this success.

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Québec

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