

Recognition of **Student** Involvement

Support Document



*"Recognition yields
lasting benefits."*

Arab proverb



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- Association des directeurs généraux des commissions scolaires
- Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Québec
- Association québécoise du personnel de direction des écoles
- Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec
- Fédération québécoise des directions d'établissement d'enseignement
- Québec English School Boards Association
- Regroupement des maisons de jeunes du Québec
- Secrétariat à la jeunesse.
- Student council, École secondaire Les Etchemins

The committee also included a school principal, teachers, a spiritual care and guidance and community involvement animator, a student life animator and a recreation technician from elementary and secondary schools in Québec, along with representatives from certain departments of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy, renewed for 2009-2014, states: “We want community involvement to be contagious, which is why the government will act to recognize and promote committed citizens, and to create forums for discussion.”¹ It also recognizes the importance of encouraging youth involvement in the community. The Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport therefore undertook to prepare “a reference framework aimed at recognizing students’ volunteer involvement in sporting, cultural, political and community activities.”²

The purpose of this document is to help schools to improve or introduce methods of recognizing student volunteer involvement, since recognition stimulates involvement, promotes student retention and helps students to develop a sense of belonging and a desire to work hard. The document begins by defining “involvement,” sets out the reasons why involvement should be recognized from the preschool level onwards, and goes on to present some of the elements on which recognition can be based, proposing a variety of methods and explaining why it is up to schools to encourage volunteer involvement by providing recognition. It ends by proposing a series of steps that will help preschool, elementary-level and secondary-level institutions to review their recognition methods.

TWO DEFINITIONS

Involvement

The term “involvement” refers to student participation in sporting, cultural, leisure, social or community activities, or involvement in a cause or in the welfare of other people. Student involvement in their studies is not included here, although as Isabelle Archambault³ has shown, the fact of offering different opportunities for involvement helps give meaning to the student’s learning and encourages perseverance.

Recognition

According to Université Laval’s Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management (known by its French acronym CGSST), recognition is defined as “constructive, genuine feedback based on acknowledging people as sincere, worthy of respect, having needs, and equipped with their own personal expertise. It is a consideration of the human being as a whole.”⁴ Lack of recognition leads to disengagement, lack of motivation and absenteeism.

1. Gouvernement du Québec, *Investing in Youth, Empowering Québec’s Future: Youth Action Strategy 2009-2014*, (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2009), 49.
2. Gouvernement du Québec, *Young People Fully Involved in Their Own Success: Youth Action Strategy 2006-2009*, (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2006), 37.
3. Archambault, Isabelle. *Continuité et discontinuité dans le développement de l’engagement scolaire chez les élèves du secondaire: une approche centrée sur la personne pour prédire le décrochage*. Research project on student engagement presented as part of the Research Program on Student Retention and Academic Success funded by MELS.
4. Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management, Université Laval, *Employee Recognition*, <http://www.cgsst.com/eng/definition/employee-recognition.asp>.

WHO SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED?

Although the focus in this document is on recognizing individual student involvement, recognition may also be given to small groups of students, entire classes, or the school as a whole. In this case, it is important to emphasize that teamwork helps to develop the cross-curricular competency “Cooperates with others” as well as a community spirit that results from teamwork.

Schools may also recognize outstanding examples of involvement by staff members or parents, and draw student attention to community groups or individual volunteers who give their time freely to promote a cause or enhance the well-being of the community or of society as a whole. These people provide positive and inspiring models of involvement.

WHO SHOULD RECOGNIZE INVOLVEMENT?

Every member of the school’s personnel should try to recognize volunteer involvement by students. The people who supervise the students or witness their involvement clearly have a more important role to play in this respect. In addition, it is important for the staff of host community organizations to pay special attention to the students and emphasize the benefits of involvement. Indeed, some forms of recognition can be offered or supported by these organizations.

The school’s administrators have an important role to play in coordinating staff and partners and in selecting recognition methods that are consistent with the values conveyed by the school. Some of the school’s specialized complementary educational service personnel can bring new insight in student recognition, because of their fields of expertise. For example, spiritual care and guidance and community involvement animators and student life animators, as well as recreation technicians, are often in an excellent position to propose appropriate forms of recognition for different types of student involvement. They can help the school foster a culture of recognition.

WHY SHOULD INVOLVEMENT BE RECOGNIZED?

There are many good reasons for recognizing students’ volunteer involvement. For example, recognition has a positive impact on students, classrooms, the school as a whole and the community. It can help prepare future adults who will be involved and responsible in their community, develop student resilience and bring the community closer together.

For students, recognition provides an opportunity to understand the impacts of their involvement. It helps them assert their identity; consolidate their feelings of competence and efficacy; give meaning to school, learning and life in general; and hence develop motivation and the desire to work hard and encourage them to stay at school.

For the school and surrounding community, recognition provides an opportunity to assess the social capital derived from student involvement. The atmosphere is more harmonious and more conducive to an open attitude, mutual support and sometimes even compassion. A form of community spirit is created, breaking individual isolation and fostering social cohesion.

WHAT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED?

Generally speaking, recognition is given for the results of involvement. For example, many schools will award a trophy or certificate to the best member of a sports team, or publicize the results of a fundraising activity. Although this form of recognition is valid, it is not sufficient to motivate students, encourage them to stay in school and develop the desire to work hard.⁵ The four forms of recognition described below are complementary and interdependent. Schools will benefit from offering different types of recognition to their students.

Recognition of the individual

Recognition is primarily an interest in the individual as a whole: in his or her talents, special abilities, strengths, interests and so on. This form of recognition encourages students to use the positive aspects of their personality for both their own growth and the well-being of society.

Because this form of recognition makes a student feel that his or her needs are being considered, it is most effective at fostering student retention. Examples of this form of recognition include underscoring a student's resourcefulness and unique contribution or the personal characteristics that are appreciated by fellow students or by the person responsible for student involvement.

According to Jean-Pierre Brun, a member of Université Laval's Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management, this form of recognition, which he refers to as "existential recognition," should form the basis of all other types of recognition.⁶

Recognition of the quality of involvement

Students who are involved in volunteer activities must define and manage different situations, demonstrating both flexibility and ingenuity. Providing students with opportunities to recognize how they get involved, solve difficult situations, become organized and improve will help them to develop positive behaviours.

Examples of this type of recognition include encouraging and helping students to be autonomous, based on their individual abilities, appreciating students' ability to solve problems or apply strategies, or underscoring the quality of the work done in the course of volunteer activities.

5. This information was taken from "A profile of employee recognition," Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management, <http://www.cgsst.com/eng/definition/a-profile-of-employee-recognition.asp>.

6. Jean-Pierre Brun and Ninon Dugas, *La reconnaissance au travail: une pratique riche en sens*, (Québec: Centre d'expertise en gestion des ressources humaines, 2002), <http://www.cgsst.com/stock/fra/doc95-308.pdf>

Recognition of the level of commitment

In some cases students may not achieve the results they expected, in spite of the efforts invested. In these cases, emphasizing the quality and quantity of the students' efforts, the risks they take and the energy they expend are all ways of recognizing the students' dedication and of helping them persevere. Recognizing consistency and effort helps students persevere.

Recognition of results

For young people, involvement is perceived as a form of "individual or social investment"⁷ that enables individuals and the community to grow. In addition to tangible results such as the amount of money raised for a cause, the scores achieved by a sports team or the success of a show, the benefits of involvement for the student and the environment should be emphasized. This form of recognition underscores the achievement of goals, and is perceived by recipients as a sign of gratitude that will fuel their self-confidence and promote their civic involvement in the long term.

For example, to recognize a student's involvement in a sports team, it is important not only to focus on the number of points scored but also to underline the healthy lifestyle habits, the sense of hard work and the team spirit this involvement helps to develop. Recognition of results provides an opportunity to identify these benefits.

Areas of involvement to recognize

It is up to schools to select the most appropriate outlets for volunteer involvement, based on the students' interests and abilities. Opportunities for involvement can be created through activities organized at school or in the surrounding community. Schools should explore the range of outlets available in their environment, including:

- sports teams or outdoor clubs
- theatrical productions, dance shows, music shows or choirs
- student radio
- young explorers' clubs
- student council
- social activities (e.g. welcome activities at the beginning of the school year, the school prom, a theme day or theme week)
- mutual support initiatives at school (e.g. peer support, a community store, help at the library, help for younger students or homework help)
- mutual support initiatives in the community (e.g. for seniors or the underprivileged)
- involvement in local, regional or international social or environmental causes

7. André Thibault, Patrice Albertus and Julie Fortier, *Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes*, Research report, (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks Report, August 2007), iii.

HOW SHOULD INVOLVEMENT BE RECOGNIZED?

Quality criteria

The effectiveness of recognition methods depends to a large extent on the quality criteria chosen. These criteria ensure that recognition is appreciated and meaningful in the eyes of the recipient, and provide guidelines for those who wish to express or demonstrate recognition. Recognition must, above all, correspond to the type of involvement, be adapted to the characteristics of the student or group, be given as soon as possible, and show why the student is being recognized.

Informal recognition

Recognition of student involvement is a part of everyday life. It is usually expressed spontaneously, sometimes by pointing out the efforts or actions of a particular student or a group or the benefits that these efforts or actions have brought about. Although simple, these expressions of recognition nevertheless encourage students to maintain their involvement, develop their self-esteem and foster their sense of belonging.

Formal recognition

Recognition can sometimes be formal in nature, in which case the methods used are selected based on known criteria. It may be given privately (e.g. in a letter to a student) or publicly⁸ (e.g. in an awards presentation). In every case, it needs to be planned in accordance with the school's values, the characteristics of the environment and the needs of the students. It may be organized for a class, a specific group (e.g. a cycle, a field of activity), the school as a whole, or with partners from the community. Examples of formal recognition include posting a note of recognition, presenting a medal or trophy, making an announcement on the student radio or in the local newspaper, or inviting students to talk about their involvement.

Some forms of recognition can help students both while they are at school and later, during their careers. These forms may, for example, be useful when applying to CEGEP, looking for a job or applying for a grant, and include:

- a note on the student's report card⁹ or portfolio
- a letter of attestation or a certificate of appreciation (see examples in Appendix 1)
- asking the community organization with which the student was involved to write a letter describing his or her contribution and the benefits to the community

8. Throughout the process, but especially in the case of public recognition, the school, with support from the school board officer responsible for access to information, must ensure compliance with the principles of protection of personal information set out in the Act respecting access to documents held by public bodies and the protection of personal information.

9. The school may elect to include a note about the student's community involvement on his or her report card. However, the school cannot accord a specific mark for such involvement unless it is officially part of a local program of study that is subject to evaluation.

If the student's involvement took place as part of a local school board program, recognition may take the form of additional credits, provided the learning is evaluated using clearly defined criteria.¹⁰ If the involvement took place as part of a course (e.g. Entrepreneurship), it is important for the student to receive a letter of attestation or a comment in his or her report card, in addition to the grade given for the overall project, to highlight the volunteer aspect of the activity.

In some cases, it may be interesting to reward students with privileges or gifts. This form of recognition may help encourage more hesitant students to commit to some form of involvement; at the very least, it will provide real, material evidence of recognition. However, the impact of a reward may be short-term unless it comes with an authentic, constructive judgment of the involvement. Rewards should be used sparingly to avoid the possibility of negative impacts. Examples of rewards include nominating a student for a volunteering award (e.g. the government *Hommage bénévolat-Québec* awards¹¹ or the *Dollard-Morin*¹² recreation and sports volunteering award)

Recognizing involvement in schools

Schools that would like to reconsider the role they attribute to the recognition of student involvement should consult and involve all members of their staff, as well as students, parents, community stakeholders and other adults who have witnessed the students' involvement. This will help create a shared vision of recognition and ensure greater consistency.

Schools have their own priority values and goals, which are represented in their educational project and success plan. These values and goals, along with the school's culture, serve as a basis for selecting a variety of different forms of recognition. Schools should also acknowledge that humans need recognition, and that providing recognition is both an individual and a collective responsibility.

Some community or municipal organizations may already have their own forms of recognition for community involvement. It may be appropriate to obtain information on them, so that the students are able to benefit on the same terms as other citizens.

10. See Info/Sanction, 08-09-023.

11. Information on these awards can be found at: http://www.benevolat.gouv.qc.ca/prix_qc/index_en.asp.

12. The competition result should be a privilege for the students, but should not be the only form of recognition. In most competitions, only a handful of people are selected, meaning that they are too limited to serve as a form of recognition in schools.

Proposed process:

- Make a list of existing methods and forms of recognition in the school and community.
- Choose the forms of recognition to be maintained, improved or introduced, and appoint people to be in charge of implementing them.
- Inform the school's personnel, students, parents and community partners about the recognition methods.
- At the end of the school year, analyze the impacts of the recognition methods on student retention and success, and on the school climate as a whole, and make adjustments if necessary.

In elementary schools, students need to be praised as often as possible, and this can be done by recognizing even small helpful gestures on their part. It is essential, with children of this age, that recognition be given in a timely manner. Frequent use of informal recognition methods will therefore help create a culture of recognition, help encourage students to work hard and foster their sense of belonging. When students' make long-term commitments, for example by volunteering as school crossing guards or by organizing games in the school yard, a more formal type of recognition may be appropriate.

In secondary school, students are more independent and responsible and have many different opportunities for involvement. Secondary school students can also make their own choices regarding their involvement in the community and carry out their commitment independently. In doing so, they learn in a very real way how to make choices relating to their academic and professional careers. Forms of recognition should take these factors into account, and schools should ensure that these forms can be used by students when applying for higher education, grants or jobs. The students themselves can be involved in choosing forms of recognition, for example, through the student council.

Fostering a culture of recognition in schools

The more importance is given to recognition in the school's organizational culture, the more impact it will have on the people who work there, and the more positive its effects will be for both the students and the school. In the school environment, every individual is regarded as a human being, worthy of dignity and respect. The energy spent in recognizing student involvement encourages the development of a cohesive social environment and fosters a peaceful atmosphere of mutual support.

Giving young people an opportunity to use their talents and skills for the benefit of others provides clear palpable evidence of how important they are considered to be. In addition to helping create a more harmonious environment in which students feel a sense of responsibility, making use of their talents and skills is an excellent way of gaining their trust and motivating them to work hard academically.

CONCLUSION

Schools have a mandate to “prepare students to contribute to the development of a more democratic and just society.”¹³ Schools enable students to grasp and understand the knowledge and values on which society is based, and help them to develop the competencies they will need to play a constructive role in its development. Schools are “an ideal place for learning to respect others and accept their differences, to be receptive to pluralism, to maintain egalitarian relationships with others and to reject all forms of exclusion [...]”¹⁴ The mission of schools is to provide a variety of opportunities for students to structure their identity, build their vision of the world and develop the power to act. Recognition, in the form of constructive feedback and as an element of identity, has an important role to play in this respect.

Fostering a culture of recognition will help schools ensure that students’ strengths and abilities are applied not only in their own individual development, but for the good of society as a whole. By recognizing student involvement, schools can create an environment in which students are able to continue their efforts to understand the world and the meaning of their own lives, while extending their own involvement and developing their ability to adjust to society, which in turn helps form responsible citizens willing to play an active role in their community.



13. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *Québec Education Program, Preschool Education and Elementary Education* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec), 2.

14. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *Québec Education Program, Secondary Education, Cycle Two*, “Citizenship and Community Life,” in Chapter 2, “Broad Area of Learning,” (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec), 13.

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APPENDIX: SAMPLE ATTESTATIONS

Sample letter

[Place, date]

Re: Attestation of Volunteer Involvement

To whom it may concern:

This letter recognizes the volunteer involvement of _____ *(student's name)*.

During the _____ years in which [he or she] was a student at the _____ secondary school, i.e. from September _____ to June _____, [he or she] spent a total of _____ hours volunteering for _____ *(name of organization or cause)*.

His or her volunteer activities consisted of _____ *(briefly describe the student's tasks)*.

Through this volunteer involvement, _____ *(student's name)* helped to _____ *(describe the benefits of the student's volunteer involvement for the environment, the people or the cause concerned)*.

This volunteer involvement is a tribute to _____ *(describe the personal characteristics revealed by the student's involvement: abilities, strengths, qualities, skills, enthusiasm, etc.)*.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Principal

School address _____ Secondary School

Certificate of Appreciation for Volunteer Involvement

School _____

wishes to recognize the volunteer involvement of

who, by _____

helped to _____

We are therefore proud to present
this certificate of appreciation and
to thank you for your involvement.



Signature of School Principal

