

## Benchmarks for Hiring and Assigning Animators

“The usefulness of a spiritual support and community involvement service will depend largely on the quality of the people in charge.”<sup>1</sup>

- Reflection and consultation on the subject of spiritual life and community involvement have shown that such issues are often delicate and complex. Moreover, because of their link to conscience and religious and political convictions, there are **risks of ideological drifts and discrepancies with respect to freedom** of conscience and religion which can have serious consequences on the students and the school life. Consequently, it is important to assign individuals to the service who can:
  - offer students educational support that would serve as a defense against indoctrination and fundamentalist thinking (access to specialized knowledge, mastery of this knowledge, skills requiring intellectual acuity, etc.)
  - demonstrate openness and ease with respect to pluralism, have an ability to interact as an equal with other members of the school team and can ensure that his/her actions reflect the perspective of the school reform, etc.
  - reassure parents that their children are in the hands of competent individuals.

In this light, it is important for the school board to pay special attention when selecting and managing animators for the service.

### ▪ Training

The training described in the classification plan for school board professionals in the category of “animator of spiritual life and community involvement” is adapted to the nature of the service. It states that the animator must have the following qualifications:

Undergraduate university diploma in an appropriate specialty that consists mainly of courses in the following areas:

- spiritual or religious life
- social life

including courses in the principal religious affiliations, beliefs or trends of secular thought, the place of religion in the lives of individuals and social groups, social practices and contemporary social concerns, animation techniques, child and adolescent psycho-pedagogy, helping relationships and ethics of intervention as well as personal and professional integration seminars and observation and animation training sessions.

<sup>1</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation. Québec's Public Schools: responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations (Québec : Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), p. 15 (49-1319-01A).

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### Aptitudes

Aside from the training, it is important to look for candidates who have specific professional skills such as:

- **open-mindedness**, in other words an ability to listen, discuss, welcome others in their uniqueness and diversity, especially in relation to cultural and religious aspects
- **a sense of value for spiritual life and community involvement**, in other words the candidate should have a capacity to consider these two components of the service as important elements in people's lives and regardless of one's own personal convictions, to be able to recognize oneself as progressing in this regard
- **educational skills**, in other words an ability to animate activities, create, work in teams, cooperate and discuss
- **critical judgment**, in other words an ability to critique oneself, to be able to step back with regard to realities and see their value, while showing objectivity and good judgment
- **organizational skills**, in other words an ability to plan, to work autonomously and to show initiative

To summarize, we must look for people who will offer the best quality service, who will avoid indoctrination and fundamentalist thinking and who will be perceived as credible by the students, the school team and the parents, no matter what their religious and political convictions may be.

The preceding benchmarks highlight the necessity of an adequate selection process that will include, for example:

- interviews, role plays and appropriate questionnaires
- the participation of school administration, counselors, other animators or parents whose experience on the subject and good judgment are well established
- obtaining letters of references for these candidates

Moreover, in the case where people assigned to the service do not have all the necessary qualifications, the school board must provide adequate training, and even offer refresher courses in certain cases.

### ▪ Staff management

It is equally important to pay particular attention to managing the personnel assigned to *The Spiritual Care and Guidance Community Involvement Service*, by:

- conducting a thorough evaluation of these individuals, especially during the period preceding a permanent status
- ensuring high-standard continuous professional development in the form of yearly upgrading sessions, fostering the integration of the service in the entire school life and encouraging critical dialogue and discussion among peers

School boards and administrative teams have therefore an important role to play with respect to the personnel assigned to this service.