

**THE GUIDANCE-ORIENTED SCHOOL:
A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

SUMMARY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	2
SCHOOL DYNAMICS.....	2
PARENT INVOLVEMENT	4
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY	5
AVENUES FOR ACTION	6
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROJECTS.....	9
THE MEASURE IN ACTION.....	9
THE EFFECTS OF THE MEASURE	11
CONCLUSION	12

INTRODUCTION

This summary presents an evaluation of the guidance-oriented school measure that was first implemented on the Island of Montréal in the 1997-1998 school year. A report on the implementation process in participating schools is given along with the main factors that facilitated or hindered the process. The report also outlines avenues for action and the effects of the measure on students.

The evaluation with students was conducted on a semiexperimental basis. Eighty students (both boys and girls) took part. The experimental group consisted of 44 students who had benefited under the measure for one or two years. A general questionnaire constructed by the research team was administered to the students to ascertain their perception of certain aspects of the measure and of their personal guidance process. We also formed two discussion groups to get a more detailed idea of the students' perceptions and to give them an opportunity to suggest ways to improve the measure. The objective data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed by compiling results and calculating average indicators for each theme measured. The qualitative data from the questionnaire and the data from the discussion groups were systematically analyzed according to a mixed model based in part on a content analysis. In all, 78 partners participated in the project, including 32 school principals, 28 project coordinators, 10 parents and 8 representatives of socioeconomic organizations in the community. Their perceptions were gathered by means of semistructured interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes. The qualitative data collected from the partners were analyzed according to the same procedures used on similar types of data collected from the students.

The general picture that emerges from our study touches on the implementation process, school dynamics, parent involvement, partnership with the community, avenues for action, the conceptual framework for projects, the measure in action, and its effects.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Typically, implementation begins with an internal stage followed by an external stage. The internal stage is characterized by an initial phase in which the school learns about the measure and assimilates the guidance-oriented school concept. Then comes the design and development of a project and intervention tools and, finally, the application of the measure with target groups. Only a few schools undertook specific actions calling for outside partners in the community (parents and socioeconomic groups). The implementation models varied from one school to another with respect to the individuals hired, since sometimes responsibility for the implementation process rested with just one person (school principal) and sometimes with several members of the school staff. In some instances, multidisciplinary working groups were involved in the process.

SCHOOL DYNAMICS

Those responsible for coordinating and piloting the measure in the schools obtained a good level of cooperation from staff in one third of educational institutions. Another third of the schools had problems getting their staff involved, running up against resistance and a lack of cooperation. In the remaining one third of schools, cooperation and participation were average. In the vast majority of cases, the governing board was informed of the nature of the project and its contribution consisted in recognizing the objective and value of the guidance-oriented school measure, incorporating it into the school's educational project and endorsing its implementation.

With respect to the sharing of roles and responsibilities among staff members, guidance counsellors, school administrators and, to a lesser extent, teachers piloted and coordinated projects. The first two groups generally did not see any reduction in their workload, unlike teachers, who benefited considerably in this regard. School administrators, even when they were not in charge of a project, played a pivotal role in the implementation process. Guidance counsellors who were not responsible for a project were nonetheless considered resource persons for students and teachers. All schools could count on the participation of teaching staff. Respondents felt that teachers played a role of explaining and promoting the measure. Generally,

the members of each professional group demonstrated great versatility in assuming their roles and responsibilities, which made it possible to break down the traditional task-definition boundaries.

It was found that certain factors facilitated the implementation of the measure, such as the small size of some schools, interest and general enthusiasm on the part of students, the socioeconomic environment of schools in affluent areas and certain types of education (enriched and with an international component) compatible with extending learning beyond the regular curriculum. Other factors included receptiveness to the measure and a positive attitude in the school based on:

- the credibility of the person responsible for the project
- the leadership and support shown for the measure by school administrators
- the participation and collaboration in the project by the entire school staff
- the committed participation of project coordinators and certain staff members
- the creation of working teams and the development of joint initiatives
- a school climate conducive to personal and pedagogical development and creativity, leadership, open communication, cooperation, teamwork and flexibility in teaching the curriculum

Finally, the dissemination of sufficient, useful information, the coherent, relevant conceptualization of the project and related actions, and the availability of personnel to carry out the project (project coordinator granted a partial or total release from his or her workload) were also found to be essential to successful implementation.

Factors that impeded the implementation process included the large size of some schools, the presence of different groups and educational paths within a school that obliged it to adapt the project to the particular needs of the students and, in more affluent areas, the uniformity of students' education plans and of the expectations placed on them, almost all of these students

being headed for university. It was also difficult for school administrators and teachers to deal with a range of programs and to fulfill the requirements imposed by both the reform and the guidance-oriented school project. It should also be noted that the implementation process was often brought to a standstill during negotiations over teachers' collective agreements. The low rate of participation by school staff could be due to lack of information and a poor understanding of the concept of the guidance-oriented school and the objectives of the measure, the absence of collegial spirit among teachers in some schools, time and availability constraints, teachers' perception of the project as an extra burden and their reluctance to adapt to the timetable changes made necessary by the measure. Some career choice education and personal and social education teachers and guidance counselling personnel were not comfortable with the new guidance counselling practices under the measure. Some teachers felt at a disadvantage given their lack of knowledge and expertise with respect to integrating and applying the measure in a concrete, relevant way in their classes. It was found that staff changes affected the stability and continuity of the measure, and the tendency of teachers to work in isolation hindered the circulation of information and spirit of cooperation and cohesiveness necessary to implement the measure. Other obstacles are attributable to the socioeconomic environment: the school's difficulty in finding partners to provide training placements, a shortage of successful role models for the students, lack of personnel for creating ties with the community, and limited participation in the measure by parents and socioeconomic organizations.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Some parents became actively involved. The roles and responsibilities they took on included attending information sessions and supporting their children in activities related to the measure (e.g. Personal Education Plan exercises, visits to the workplace), giving a presentation on their occupation, setting up committees and organizing conferences. Nevertheless, their involvement as a group cannot be taken for granted. This is due in part to certain pre-existing conditions. In multiethnic communities, for example, low participation may be the result of communication problems between parents and the school owing to language and cultural barriers. Lower parent participation may also stem from the fact that many find themselves in a disadvantaged situation

and from limited involvement on their part in decision-making bodies and school life. In addition, some young people, at this stage in their development, may be embarrassed at the prospect of their parents getting involved in their personal or school life. Finally, the factors more directly linked to this stage of the implementation process often have to do with parents' limited knowledge about the objectives of the measure, a certain mistrust of the "guidance" aspect of the measure and a general lack of information. The majority of schools (two thirds) were still at the "internal" stage of the implementation process and consequently had not yet been able to integrate parents into the project.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

The involvement of socioeconomic organizations in the community took different forms: participating on school committees, holding workshops, giving presentations in the classroom, organizing visits to businesses and one-day placements, providing economic support for the project, and so on. The overall participation rate of these organizations was insufficient, however, since half of the schools had not yet established a partnership agreement and were not yet undertaking activities with them. Moreover, three schools that reported involvement on the part of socioeconomic organizations are only carrying out activities on the transition from elementary to secondary school. The respondents mentioned the following obstacles to cooperation with the socioeconomic community:

- lack of a real partnership between the school and the organization in some cases
- limited accessibility to the school and reluctance on its part to work with the community
- a certain distance between school administrations and the business community
- lack of clearly defined parameters for joint action between the school and organizations
- insufficient or fragmented knowledge of the measure
- socioeconomic groups' lack of awareness of the problems of young people

- too few placement opportunities for students
- lack of joint action between schools in the same school board
- lack of flexibility in the school timetable
- inadequate support provided by the school to the community with respect to the measure
- limited participation by the governing board in the local project

These observations point to a number of avenues for action intended to facilitate the implementation of a guidance-oriented approach in schools on the Island of Montréal and, indeed, throughout Québec.

AVENUES FOR ACTION

In schools, it would be useful to:

- Clearly define roles and responsibilities and obtain the approval of all participants with respect to the extent and nature of their involvement in the project, and encourage the participation of the governing board in the measure
- Ask the Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ) and the school boards to allocate the time and human resources necessary for the implementation process:
 - release time for the person in charge of the project
 - assignment to the project of personnel formerly involved with certain courses that have been eliminated (e.g. career choice education)
 - flexible management of time based on cooperation between teachers
 - hiring of qualified guidance counselling and academic and vocational information counselling personnel

The measure could also be supported in schools by creating a climate and conditions conducive to innovation and leadership; providing assistance in adapting to change; encouraging the development of expertise and the transfer of skills acquired in applying the measure (e.g. training different categories of personnel); and adapting the initial training of teachers, guidance counsellors and academic and vocational information counsellors to the requirements of the measure.

- Establish organizational structures and mechanisms to promote unified action by creating committees to coordinate the measure at the local, regional and provincial levels
- Establish processes and discussion and communication networks by developing mechanisms for consultation and cooperation in schools, applying the principles of the education community, and providing forums for exchange (networks, groups) among interested parties and schools
- Improve the support structure provided by the MEQ to individuals and schools

In the case of **parents**, the following strategies and mechanisms should be established:

- Provide better information on the concept and objectives of the guidance-oriented school, their child's guidance process, their role as parents in the context of the measure, and all aspects relating to work, career and education and the connections among these three areas; adapt information to the culture of the parents concerned
- Equip parents by giving them relevant training
- Establish conditions that will improve communication between the school and parents by creating meaningful ties with them, perhaps through contact with the organizations they are involved with, using existing parent networks and groups and by calling upon the services of liaison officers and interpreters
- Encourage parents to participate more actively in the management of the school and in any coordinating and discussion bodies at the local, regional and provincial levels

With respect to **socioeconomic organizations**, it would be beneficial to:

- Intensify efforts to provide information and promote the measure by producing documentation directed at community groups, continuing the promotional work undertaken by the Ministère des Affaires municipales et de la Métropole, and providing organizations with information on the entire measure rather than limiting information to the aspect with which they are involved
- Have schools strengthen their ties and improve communication with socioeconomic organizations by:
 - initiating the process with the socioeconomic organizations
 - increasing their knowledge of the workplace and community resources
 - creating closer contacts with local business associations
 - opening their doors to local organizations
 - organizing more activities with them
 - working with socioeconomic groups that can play a mediating role with other organizations and using the services of a community liaison officer

The organizations should appoint a contact person to be responsible for communicating with the school, keeping informed about the implementation of the measure in the school, and providing information to the various socioeconomic groups in the community. Community representatives should be encouraged to play an active role in coordinating bodies and discussion and communication networks. Finally, the sharing of common values between the two milieux should serve as a basis for building local partnerships.

- Bases for partnership should also be established between the school and the community by means of a formal agreement that identifies the specific tasks of each partner and the joint actions to be undertaken.
- Finally, with respect to the project and related activities, the school should offer better coordination and support in the community.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROJECTS

Although school administrators and project coordinators are generally quite familiar with the characteristics and objectives of the measure, there is nonetheless a need to clarify the concept of the guidance-oriented school and to ensure that school staff and schools themselves have a common understanding of it. The different perceptions circulating in the school and the confusion between the concept of the guidance-oriented school and the idea of promoting vocational and technical education indicate a need for more information in these areas.

Some schools looked to the fields of guidance counselling and career development to provide a relevant theoretical foundation for their project. More numerous were those that presented a project without a clear basis in theory, however, and as a result, these projects were somewhat lacking in cohesiveness. It was also observed that the educational component of the projects (i.e. their relationship to the principles of the education reform concerning cross-curricular competencies, the broad areas of learning and multidisciplinary) was not clearly stated in some cases. The schools should therefore make additional efforts to base their project on relevant guidance counselling and career development theory and educational principles. The MEQ could assist in this by providing more information on those aspects of the measure that tie in with the underlying principles of the education reform.

THE MEASURE IN ACTION

The activities carried out during the implementation process focused on self-awareness, knowledge of the school system and educational path, knowledge of occupations and of the

working world, identification of career aspirations, and competencies linked to the guidance process. The vast majority of schools developed a Personal Education Plan (PEP), but only a little over one third carried out activities on the transition from elementary to secondary school. Approximately half of the schools had incorporated the guidance-oriented project into their educational project, less than one third felt they had attained their objectives or were in the process of doing so, and a little over half had completed most of the activities outlined in their plan of action. These activities were generally relevant to the numerous needs of young people, who participated in them enthusiastically. The pedagogical actions taken were concrete, interactive and generally well received, but students were critical of some aspects and of certain tools that they felt were not always relevant, age-appropriate or easily accessible. Moreover, some schools had not yet established standards and mechanisms for ensuring the confidentiality of personal information about students, particularly in relation to PEPs.

Since pedagogical actions and the principles guiding intervention are, in our view, essential levers for the success of the measure, we would like to suggest guidelines likely to increase the consistency, relevance and effectiveness of these actions and principles. With respect to pedagogical actions, it is recommended that the principles of the reform relating to the measure be integrated into daily practice:

- keep learning in context
- involve students in learning that is meaningful
- develop facilitation strategies appropriate to the project
- practise “infusion” at all levels of secondary school and in all courses
- create new tools and diversify the means offered to students
- provide better access to documentation and work placements
- adapt material to the students’ ages and issues of concern

With respect to the principles guiding intervention, schools should develop a comprehensive, integrated approach that will contribute to promoting acceptance of the measure by students, that will provide for a process based on the student's identity, and that will apply a developmental, adapted perspective to the various groups and to individual learning rates. Within this approach, it would also be useful to provide opportunities for integrating experience (through effective use of the PEP, integration of the pedagogical aspects with the students' concrete experimentation process and by providing students with support and supervision through mentorship programs and personalized assistance). It would also be helpful to use information in a consistent manner that respects students' personal and vocational process and pace, to establish standards and mechanisms for safeguarding the confidentiality of personal information about students, and to decide on terms and conditions for making career education everybody's concern.

THE EFFECTS OF THE MEASURE

Almost all the students and a number of the project coordinators and parents interviewed felt that the measure had had positive effects on students' self-knowledge and self-esteem, followed, almost on a par, by their knowledge of the working world, motivation in school, knowledge of the school system and evolution of their career aspirations. Attitudes, behaviours and aptitudes with respect to the guidance process came last in terms of the positive effects of the measure, which also had a favourable impact on certain personal qualities and social competencies associated with young people's work. In addition, it was noted that, since the implementation of the measure, students start asking questions about the guidance process sooner and request individual meetings with guidance counselling staff earlier and in much greater numbers. In schools, the unifying, stimulating aspect of the measure was observed along with the new meaning it gives to teaching, which has the effect of boosting professional motivation among teachers. Parents reported improved communication with their children, and socioeconomic organizations gained greater visibility, more cohesiveness in actions undertaken in the community, greater knowledge of the structure of the school and the needs of young people, and a sense of personal satisfaction and pride derived from helping them. Moreover, almost all the project coordinators, representatives of socioeconomic organizations and students interviewed

hoped to repeat the experience, follow up on it and see it extended to the secondary level as a whole.

Attainment of the objectives of the measure can be promoted by regular evaluation at the local, regional and provincial levels of experiments with the guidance-oriented school concept so that the effects can be turned into useful knowledge. It would also be helpful to gather longitudinal data. For their part, the MEQ and funding bodies should support research on innovative strategies and means. Finally, by improving certain material resources in schools (e.g. providing documentation centres) and consolidating financial resources by maintaining the current funding level and by extending this funding at the end of these first two years, the MEQ would facilitate the longer term implementation of the measure.

CONCLUSION

The following are the most noteworthy of the positive aspects of the measure:

- familiarity with the objectives of the measure by those responsible for projects in the schools (principals and project coordinators)
- the enthusiasm of school principals and their support for the measure
- with respect to school projects, a relatively good level of coherence in terms of objectives, activities and pedagogical actions
- its unifying, motivating effect on school staff
- the positive reaction of students to the concrete, interactive aspect of activities and pedagogical actions
- the effects of the measure, even though not spectacular (they were perceptible to only some of the project coordinators and parents who were asked)

Aspects of the measure that need to be improved:

- collaboration and participation in the measure on the part of school staff, parents and socioeconomic groups (support for the project)
- the coordination of actions, communication and joint efforts in the various milieux as well as among all the partners
- the theoretical and educational foundations of the measure
- the information provided to school staff, especially teachers, and to parents and representatives of socioeconomic organizations
- certain features of the measure that should be based on a comprehensive, integrated approach and increased confidentiality of personal information about students

Based on this analysis and referring to the parameters outlined in the research protocol, the implementation of the measure has been only moderately successful. This is attributable to the fact that few schools feel they have attained their objectives and only half have incorporated the guidance-oriented school concept into their educational project or carried out the activities in their plan of action. The activities and the pedagogical actions taken are appropriate to many of the students' needs, but adjustments are required in some schools to take into account the age and concerns of the students.

Clearly, the implementation of the guidance-oriented school measure introduces demands at many levels and a change of paradigm with respect to the school's mission, guidance practices, regular pedagogical practices and certain cultural, organizational and relational aspects of the school. This raises the question of the measure's viability. If effectiveness is measured in terms of human, material and financial efforts and costs versus benefits and results, then the measure holds up quite well. The benefits emphasized by the respondents seem to attest to the fact that the measure meets real needs and that it does so in a relatively efficient way if one considers the obstacles to implementation, the slow progress of projects in many schools and the year lost as a result of the union boycott and the collective agreement negotiations.

Thus, it would appear that by focusing on the strengths of the measure and reworking weaker aspects, it will be possible in future to meet young people's needs for career guidance and transition into the workplace even more effectively and efficiently and in a cost-benefit ratio that remains advantageous to the MEQ and the partners involved.