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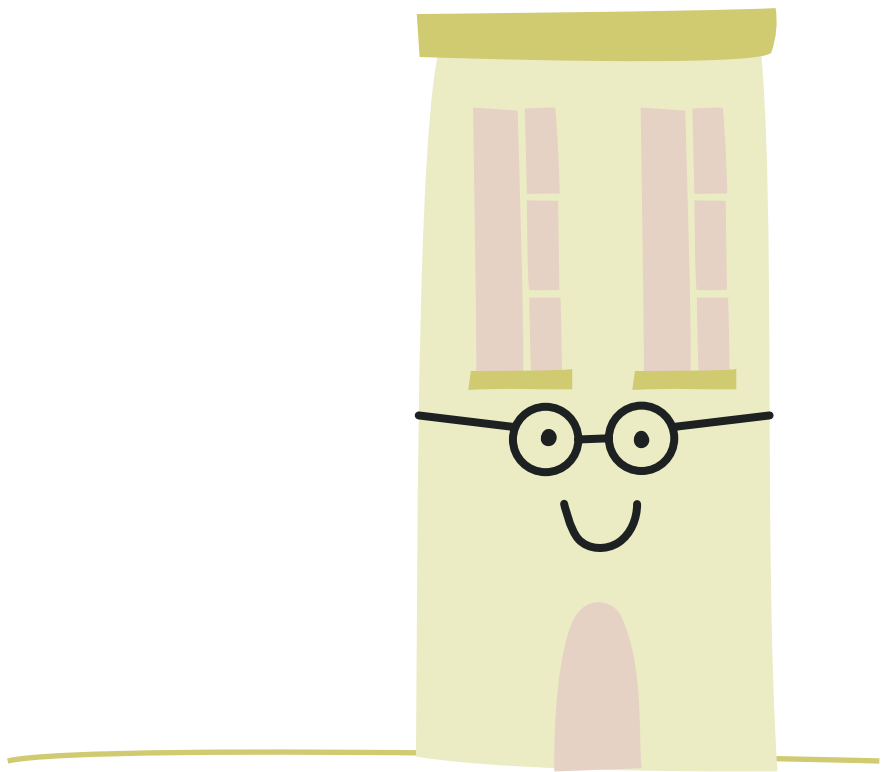
Together for Children: School, Family and Community Collaboration

Summary

December 2024



Québec 



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Introduction

As a follow-up to the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation's brief on [children's well-being at school](#) (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2020), this new brief is titled *Together for Children: School, Family and Community Collaboration*. Collaboration is considered essential to ensuring a concerted response to children's needs and supporting their development. For the Conseil, this collaboration is no longer an option, but a necessity.

In this brief, particular attention is paid to the collaborative approach in order to answer some key questions. How do schools go about initiating, developing and maintaining collaborative projects between the school, families, and the community? How can the various members of the education community contribute to the development of these projects? The goal of this brief is to demonstrate that collaboration is possible, desirable and beneficial, while presenting a wide range of forms that it can take. The full brief offers encouraging examples of school-family-community partnerships, such as with community organizations, the health and social services network, municipalities or businesses, and cultural, sports and leisure organizations. The Conseil hopes these examples will serve as a source of inspiration for other education stakeholders.

This summary is in three parts. The first answers three important questions: Who, how, and why. It is based primarily on a review of the scientific literature. The second part is more rooted in the Québec context: it outlines a wide range of possibilities for collaboration between the school, family and community (S-F-C) from a number of angles, including school governance, student and family services, pedagogy and the professional competencies of school staff, funding, and collaboration between the research and school communities. It presents results from a consultation carried out with seven elementary schools to identify levers and positive impacts of S-F-C collaboration. At the same time, four barriers to collaboration and three challenges are exposed. Finally, in the third part, the Conseil takes a stand in favour of three principles that support an elementary school rooted in its community. The summary concludes by putting forth four orientations and 18 recommendations aimed at a variety of actors in the education community. To illustrate these recommendations, the full version of the brief presents more than 60 inspiring practices gathered during its consultations, demonstrating that school-family-community collaboration is alive and well in Québec.

1 Part one: School-family-community collaboration: What is it?

Chapter 1 of the brief focuses on the actors in the education community. In the expression school-family-community, *school* refers to three levels of the education system: local (the school, its staff and its students), intermediate (school board or school service centre), and central (Ministère de l'Éducation). *Family* refers to the people who take care of the child, while *community* takes on the meaning of lived territory, i.e. the people who live or interact in the area around the school, as well as the organizations and institutions that act within that area. The school operates at the heart of an ecosystem, and as a result, the list of potential collaborators is vast: students' parents, associations, the municipal sector, the health and social services network, businesses, local figures, neighbours, etc.

Figure 1

Main actors in the education community (preschool and elementary)

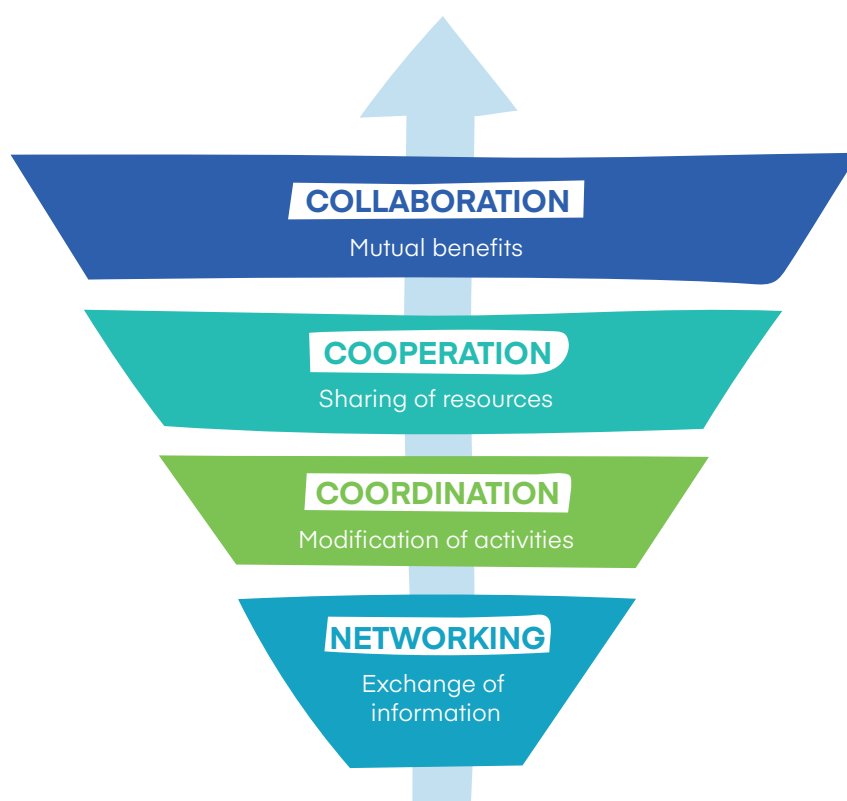


For the Conseil, the notion of education community includes all of the students, people, organizations and institutions who have the required potential to contribute to the education of learners in the school or connected to it.

Chapter 2 offers a number of definitions and models, from collaboration in a broad sense, to interprofessional collaboration, to specific models of S-F-C collaboration. In the context of this brief, collaboration is seen as a dynamic process in which at least two parties voluntarily engage in joint work based on a high level of interdependence and the same frame of reference. The participants share expertise, resources and responsibilities to solve complex problems and achieve common goals, which involves a continuous exchange of information and activities aimed at mutually reinforcing their capabilities. Collaboration is characterized by mutual interest as well as shared risks and benefits, with parity between participants and shared responsibility for all aspects of the process and results. However, achieving a high level of collaboration for mutual benefit does not happen overnight. Collaboration is part of a continuum where, at each stage, the various parties become more and more involved.

Figure 2

Collaboration continuum proposed by the Conseil



After presenting the main models used to conceptualize S-F-C collaboration, the Conseil examines three collaborative approaches from the literature, that is, those of Epstein (2018), Cœuréaction (Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec, 2013) and Larivée (2015). The Conseil notes that the

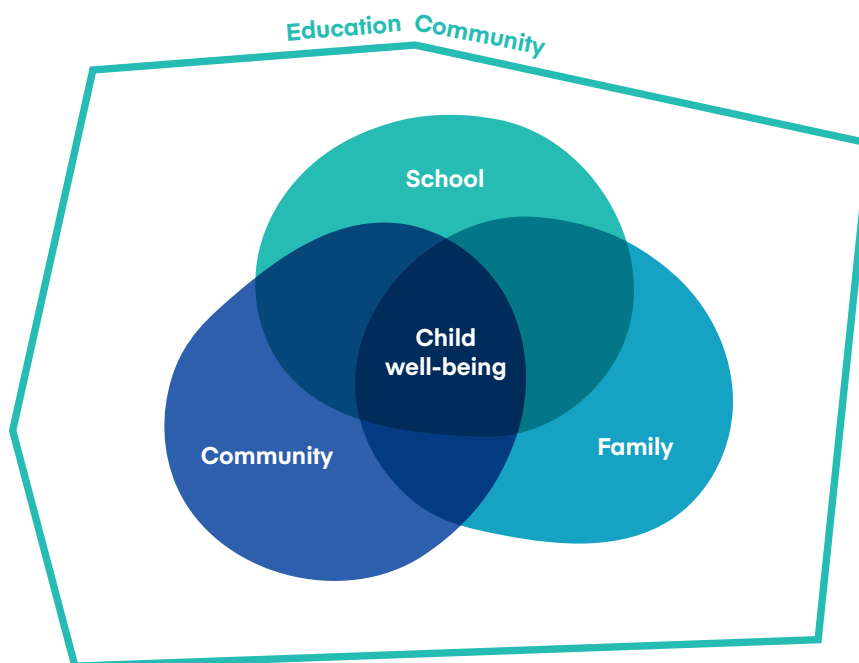
collaborative approach can be initiated by an individual, a group from the school, family or community, or even a student, but that, ultimately, it aims for the active participation of all actors. It can address a specific problem or emerge from a desire to engage in a sustainable approach. The essential conditions for collaboration must be created from the outset. Collaborative approaches also emphasize the need for a detailed analysis of the situation, establishment of an action plan, and evaluation of the initiatives.

Chapter 3 presents the multiple benefits of S-F-C collaboration as identified in the scientific literature, in particular with respect to children's well-being at school, meeting their basic needs, and educational success. Well-being is broken down into several components, including the child's subjective perception of their general state of being, school engagement, happiness and pleasure, and self-actualization. According to Beaumont (2018), the school-family-community partnership contributes to establishing and maintaining a positive school climate.

Benefits have also been observed at the systemic level (e.g. improving social cohesion in the community), on students (e.g. emotional development), on parents (e.g. better knowledge of available resources) and on school staff (e.g. positive change in attitude toward families). It is up to each school to identify the forms of collaboration that are most likely to produce the desired results, whether in an advantaged, disadvantaged, multi-ethnic, Indigenous or minority-language environment. School-family-community collaboration means putting the child's interests at the heart of the process, and maintaining equal relations between the various actors with a view to relevance, consistency, complementarity and efficiency.

Figure 3

The Conseil's vision of school-family-community collaboration



2 Part two: School-family-community collaboration: A wide range of possibilities

In the second part of the brief, the Conseil outlines a range of avenues for S-F-C collaboration as observed in elementary schools in Québec, and identifies levers, barriers and challenges. Its conclusions are based on an analysis of administrative and government documents, consultation with various stakeholder groups—including schools with inspiring projects—and deliberations among the members of its committees.

Chapter 4 looks at S-F-C collaboration from several angles. In terms of school governance, the Conseil notes that S-F-C collaboration is not an explicit concern of the central and intermediate bodies (Ministère de l'Éducation and school boards or service centres), despite the presence of parents and partners on advisory bodies and committees. The Conseil believes that setting up collaborative teams in schools is an excellent first step that can lead to even broader collaboration with families and community partners.

With respect to services for students and families, the Conseil notes that several initiatives aimed at providing a rapid, concerted response to students' needs are underway in Québec, demonstrating that models vary widely from one school to another. The smooth operation of complementary services depends on the mobilization of partners, first and foremost the health and social services network. A number of citizen and community organizations already offer services to children, parents and families, and it is important to fully recognize the coordination and liaison roles required to connect them, played in particular by regional consultation bodies and school community workers.

From a pedagogical and professional standpoint, the Conseil notes that, in the framework documents examined, every effort is made to encourage collaboration with families and the community. In the Québec Education Program, the broad areas of learning and culture appear as two particularly interesting entry points, regardless of the subject taught. Thus, S-F-C collaboration is not something that is *added* on but rather *integrated* into learning situations and the school's educational project. The Conseil also notes that there are a variety of teaching and learning contexts and approaches conducive to S-F-C collaboration. Finally, it is a competency expected of teachers, while the school principal has a strategic role to play in articulating this collaboration on a day-to-day basis.

In terms of funding, the Conseil notes that several operating budget measures have the potential to support collaborative projects, although few are aimed at directly funding collaboration and cooperation. Although relationships between school, family and community often play out at the local level, the Conseil observes that school service centres and school boards are strategically positioned with regard to funding: if the benefits and spin-offs of S-F-C collaboration are visible and explicit, then financial support is easier to obtain.

Finally, the Conseil supports greater collaboration between the research community and schools so as to foster innovation, professional development and continuous improvement in a spirit of constructive dialogue.

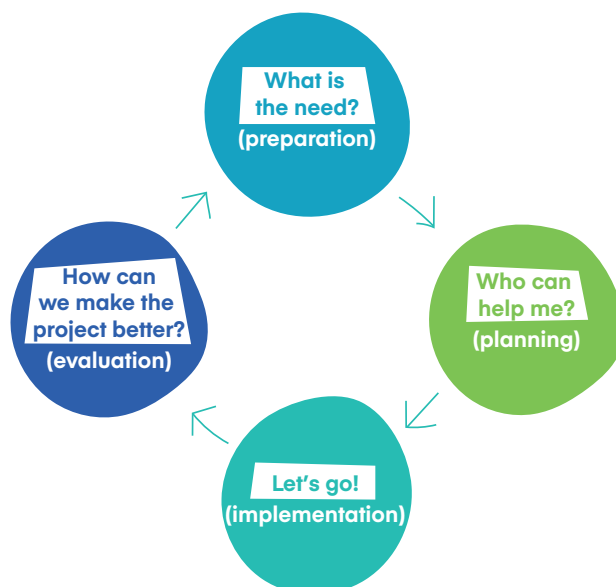
This overall picture leads the Conseil to conclude that collaborative initiatives abound in Québec, but that their implementation is uneven and highly dependent on the individual willingness of partners in each community.

In preparing this brief, Conseil members visited seven elementary schools with a variety of profiles. The results of this consultation are presented in **Chapter 5**. The schools visited are characterized by a culture of teamwork, staff commitment from project planning through to completion, and structured collaborative strategies. The collaborative projects and initiatives analyzed are varied both in terms of themes addressed and operating methods, ranging from integrated services and agri-food to entrepreneurship and cultural productions. In all cases, these projects contribute to enhancing students' educational experience. Community members, families and institutional partners provide essential logistical and financial support, in addition to expanding academic and extracurricular learning opportunities for students. Organizational and management strategies help convey a shared vision and ensure effective coordination of collaboration. The importance of ongoing training and pedagogical and professional development for school staff is also emphasized. In addition, it is crucial for people to maintain their network of contacts and seize every opportunity.

When they wish to work with families and communities, schools follow a four-step process: preparation, planning, implementation, and then evaluation and adaptation.

Figure 4

Collaborative approach adopted by inspiring schools



By cross-referencing information from the literature, comments from the actors consulted, and deliberations by the Conseil's bodies, it was possible to identify four barriers and three challenges with regard to school-family-community collaboration. These are presented in **Chapter 6**. The four barriers identified are limitations on actors' time, staff shortages and turnover, restrictive funding, and pressures on school space. The three challenges are the rigidity of the school form, different logics of action, and difficulties experienced by families.

The school form as we know it took root around the 18th century. It prescribes a specific time and space, a codified teacher-child relationship and relationship to knowledge, and a system of relatively uniform rules. Over time, these components have become institutionalized, creating a reference school model

that evolves little. The result is a *status quo* that is difficult to change—what the Conseil refers to as “the rigidity of the school form”—which constitutes the first challenge. However, all school actors have the ability to make a difference in a given situation, and can therefore infuse flexibility and creativity into their pedagogical interventions. The schools visited by the Conseil use their capital of flexibility to adapt pedagogical approaches and government prescriptions to the needs and interests of their students, while effectively mobilizing the potential of their environment.

The second issue analyzed relates to the different logics of action. The actions of individuals and organizations do not always follow the same logic, as their mission, intentions and objectives may differ. In addition, organizations are governed by laws and regulations that specify their mode of governance and the services they offer to the public. Two cases are presented to illustrate this point: the cultural distance between Québec schools and some families, and the contrast in organizational cultures between the school and community sectors. The pursuit of different logics of action is entirely legitimate, but can be a source of tension, incomprehension and misunderstanding if the different groups do not take the time to get to know and recognize each other. In a collaborative project, getting to know each other and recognizing each other’s contributions are essential.

Finally, the difficulties facing children and families, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, constitute the third challenge. Several statistical indicators show that the well-being of a significant proportion of children and families is currently undermined by factors such as stress and social isolation, the housing crisis, the digital divide, food insecurity, screen time, or the complexity of migration paths. These difficulties increase the pressure on schools, health services and social services, which are struggling to respond to the explosion in student and family needs. The Conseil believes that schools, as social institutions, can help connect families with local services for the benefit of children. Helping families is a way of helping children.

Faced with these challenges, what power do we have to promote the development, well-being and educational success of children? For the Conseil, the preferred approach is to revive the school’s community dimension, while respecting existing frameworks¹ and the roles and responsibilities of each actor. The Conseil stresses the importance of getting to know students, their family realities and the community’s potential—in other words, of being sensitive to the context in which children and their families live.

1 Frameworks include laws, regulations, ministerial directives, training programs, policies, reference frameworks, etc.

3 Part three: Toward a school rooted in its community

In this third part, the Conseil takes a stand in favour of a school rooted in its community, based on three principles presented in **Chapter 7**:

1. School-family-community collaboration concerns all schools.
2. A positive relational climate cements collaboration.
3. The education community creates a safety net for children.

Chapter 8 is devoted to presenting the Conseil's four orientations and 18 recommendations. These orientations and recommendations are illustrated by over 60 inspiring practices collected from the actors consulted. In its orientations, the Conseil first proposes establishing the winning conditions for S-F-C collaboration, and then invites schools to commit to a consistent and structured collaborative approach. It also suggests improving the school's ability to meet the needs of each individual student through targeted partnerships, and enriching the educational experience of young people by building on local strengths. A summary table of recommendations is appended here. The Conseil hopes this brief will be a source of inspiration for all those involved in making children's education a social project that goes beyond the school.

Conclusion

In this brief, the Conseil advocates greater collaboration between schools, families and communities. S-F-C collaboration is seen as an essential lever for promoting the well-being and educational success of all Québec students. Consultations conducted in schools revealed that everyone, regardless of their role and responsibilities, and regardless of the position they hold (e.g. parent, teacher, principal, special education technician, community worker, local community service centre officer), has the power to influence their environment for the benefit of students and their families. Collaboration is the building block that each and every one of us must lay in order to help children develop. What do we want for the future of Québec's children and families? Let's open doors, remove barriers, create zones of sharing, design schools differently, and promote alliances between schools, families and communities to foster well-being, curiosity and the pleasure of learning in all Québec children. Let's work together to make it happen.



Appendix: Summary table of recommendations

#	Recommendations	Actors concerned
Orientation 1: Establish winning conditions for school-family-community collaboration		
1	Consider the school as a living environment where children, school staff, parents and community members all have an important role to play. To this end, while respecting the frameworks in force and the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved, the Conseil invites the actors concerned to: a. engage in joint reflection so as to foster the educational commitment and full participation of all parents and community members, drawing on research findings and promising initiatives b. increase their openness and proactivity to create, seize and support even more collaboration opportunities that come from all the actors involved.	School service centres, school boards, principals, school teams, parents and community actors
2	Better welcome families by developing a welcoming protocol tailored to their circumstances, including, for example, strategies adapted to the realities of Indigenous families, newcomers to Québec or families living in poverty.	School service centres, school boards, principals and school teams
3	Locally develop data collection tools aimed at: a. recording the needs, interests and realities of students, families and school staff b. identifying existing contexts, routines and arrangements that would benefit from school-family-community collaboration c. identifying surrounding resources and potential partners.	
4	Increase meeting opportunities in order to establish a climate of trust and develop a sense of belonging, by: a. organizing activities (social, parent-child, networking, learning follow-up, etc.) b. creating committees c. making use of digital possibilities d. setting up spaces specifically for these meetings.	
5	Include opportunities for interprofessional collaboration in the professional integration of school staff, and support and equip them accordingly.	
6	Build on existing initiatives to offer support and ongoing training activities that foster mutual understanding, the acquisition of knowledge and the adoption of practices based on: a. the realities of Indigenous children and families, cultural safety and a trauma-sensitive approach b. the realities of parents with low reading skills and how to communicate with them in a simplified way c. ethnocultural diversity, migration paths and an intercultural approach d. the realities of sexually and gender-diverse individuals and families.	Employers in the sectors of education, health and social services, community action, municipal recreation and other relevant sectors

#	Recommendations	Actors concerned
Orientation 2: Commit to a consistent, structured collaborative approach		
7	Identify a local person, committee or organization to liaise with partners and coordinate collaborative projects, or create such a committee.	Principals and school teams
8	Set up simple mechanisms for consultation and communication between the school and families, and between the school and its partners.	
9	Pay particular attention to the dissemination, promotion, appreciation, and recognition of collaborative initiatives.	School service centres, school boards, principals and school teams
10	Ensure consistent alignment between issues, orientations, objectives, indicators and intermediate-level targets to promote the achievement of common outcomes related to children's well-being at school.	Ministère de l'Éducation, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Ministère de la Famille and other ministries and agencies concerned
11	Set up joint monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.	
12	Foster a culture of collaboration between research and practice communities.	Ministère de l'Éducation, higher education institutions, school service centres, school boards and principals
13	Exercise participatory leadership with all education stakeholders, as well as with other ministries and agencies, notably through existing consultative and participatory mechanisms.	Ministère de l'Éducation
14	Add at least one objective in the next strategic plan that directly targets collaboration between schools and parents or between schools and partners.	
Orientation 3: Increase the school's ability to meet students' needs through targeted partnerships		
15	Make the services offered by health, social services and community partners (promotion, prevention and intervention) visible and operational, so as to better meet the needs of children, families and school staff.	Ministère de l'Éducation, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, regional public health agencies, community organizations and education actors
16	Provide sufficient, long-term financial support for collaborative initiatives, based on known criteria, while maintaining the necessary flexibility to encourage and sustain: a. school-family-community collaboration projects b. initiatives aimed at integrating local services for children and families in a single physical location c. local and regional coordination bodies, essential to partner cooperation d. community organizations offering support to families, immigrant families and families facing food insecurity, by enhancing and consolidating their operating budgets.	Ministère de l'Éducation and other ministries and agencies concerned

#	Recommendations	Actors concerned
Orientation 4: Enrich students' school experience by building on local strengths		
17	Rethink school organization, including the school calendar, cycle timetable and group composition, to be able to enrich the academic and extracurricular offer in collaboration with the community.	School service centres, school boards, principals and school teams
18	Enter into partnerships or agreements to share infrastructure and services, while respecting each party's mission.	School service centres, school boards, municipalities and organizations in all sectors of educational activity

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