



## Country Report France

### Is parental involvement in the making of school laws and/or regulations a current topic?

In France, the Education Law of July 10, 1989 defined a broad framework for the parental role in school:

*"[...] parents are members of the educational community; participation in school life and dialogue with teachers and other staff will be guaranteed in each school and establishment. Parents will participate through their representatives in school committee meetings, board meetings and class meetings [...]"*

Moreover, one should note that the parental role in school (secondary education) is one of the concerns expressed in the letter sent out by the French Education Authorities (IGAENR and IGEN) (BOEN, 8/09/2005).

Finally, the Minister of National Education wanted to show, through the publication of the decree concerning pupils' parents, associations of pupils' parents and representatives of pupils' parents in July 2006, that the role of parents in school is being treated as a priority in his educational policy. In broad terms, this decree "emphasises the right to information, the importance of the representation of parents in the different educational authorities, the necessary co-operation with the establishment heads and the role of the mediators of parents' representatives" (Flash newsletter, 2006). The Official Newsletter of August 31 specifies these options, in three sections: rights to information, rights to attend meetings and rights to participate.

#### How does it work at school level?

All parents in a school are members of the education committee. They are offered information and support to help them to develop their children's learning. A group of parents is selected to

express views. Their tasks cover the following areas:

- Information and support for the children's education
- Parents' role in school
- Elections of a parent representative

All parents of the pupils who are new in school are invited into school and welcomed by the headmaster on the first day of the new school year. In primary schools the parent council and headmasters organise a meeting at least twice a year for the different classes. In secondary schools a meeting is held once a year where parents are informed about the school curriculum and activities throughout the school year. The parents are regularly informed about the children's behaviour and their marks using a «livret scolaire» in primary schools and a «bulletin scolaire» in secondary schools. Schools make arrangements to show parents these documents.

#### Le livret scolaire

A successful way of communication with parents is a "livret scolaire" for each student. It is a medium for the relationship between student and teacher as well as for the relationship between school and parents. It helps to show the progress of competences and knowledge in the course of a student's development. «Le livret scolaire» is used until the end of Primary School and handed over when students change school.

With the help of this documentation parents and teachers can easily draw a balance of their child's development. It also gives an insight into lessons within the curriculum.

#### The school council

As a rule, parents are encouraged to take an active interest in the school, either in a representative

capacity or individually. There are a number of committees at school on which parents are represented:

- At nursery school the school council is called a Conseil d'école, whilst at collège and lycée it is called a Conseil d'administration.
- In secondary schools there is also a Conseil de classe, which deals with pedagogical issues, notably the academic orientation of each child, and whether a child should repeat a year.
- Finally, at secondary schools there is also a conseil de discipline, which deals with serious disciplinary cases, involving the possible temporary or permanent exclusion of a child from the school.

### The main parents associations

PEEP – Fédération des Parents d'Elèves de l'Enseignement Public – the oldest of the associations that had its origins in secondary schools, but now is also represented in all schools and universities.

FNAPE – Fédération nationale des associations de parents d'élèves de l'enseignement public – of interest to those with children in a vocational lycée  
UNAAPE – L'Union Nationale, les Unions Départementales, Académique et Régionales – a small and strictly non-political association of autonomous parent bodies.

UNAPEL – L'union nationale des associations de parents d'élèves de l'enseignement libre – for parents of children in private schools.

### Which parents deserve special attention?

French school laws and regulations usually focus on parental involvement in general. But in recent times more attention has been drawn to involve parents with a migrant background.

The term "immigrant" is not used in France, as it is in the United States, to refer to children whose parents were born elsewhere. Most of the children of im/migrants enrolled in French ECEC settings are born in France.

Under French laws of naturalization, which consider anyone born and living in France to be a French citizen, these children automatically become French citizens when they reach adulthood. There are also many people living in France who hold French citizenship because they came to France from a former French colony. Finally, there are citizens who became naturalized after emigrating from overseas territories with historic ties to France, such as the Reunion Island and the French West Indies.

The population of im/migrants in France is diverse, with migration from Europe, Africa and Asia. There was an older wave of immigration from Europe (Italy, Poland, Spain and then Portugal). Today im/migrants come mainly from North Africa (principally Algeria and Morocco) and from black Africa (the former French colonies), but also from Turkey, Asia (Vietnam) and Eastern Europe. Immigration patterns reflect the history of French colonialism, but nowadays, in part because of the effects of illegal immigration, the population of im/migrants in France is increasingly diverse, and includes new arrivals who have no historical connection to France or experience in speaking French.

(Im)migrants make up 11% of the French population, but this percentage does not include those born elsewhere who hold French citizenship. Im/migrants are greatly overrepresented in all categories of disadvantage. The issue of immigration therefore is strongly associated with the issue of poverty.

### **Are there measures to support certain pupils ie. (im)migrants, ethnic minorities at school level?**

There are three important areas of migration in France: the Paris suburb, the Rhône-Alpes area and the south-east of France.

In the Upper Normandy migrants are enrolled in ordinary classes. Children who have not sufficient knowledge of the French language are given extra language training by teachers for a year (3 hours, 6 hours or 9 hours per week). Most of the time they attend the course "French as a second language / French for instruction" (Français langue de scolarisation) in a different secondary school.

This framework is defined in the ministerial education circular of April 2002. This regulation promotes above all quick school integration.

In the Academie de Rouen (Upper Normandy), there are 14 DAC in secondary schools and 12 CLIN in primary schools. In high schools, pupils may attend a "French for instruction" course as well.

Children coming from a minority ethnic community and who are not identified as migrants are enrolled in an ordinary class. They have no special status in the French school system unless they become disaffected with school or struggle with learning.

In fact, they show up in the system more because of low results at school than because of their ethnic background.

In the Academy of Rouen there are groups with more school problems, poor school achievement and sometimes violence or absenteeism. Pupils from minority ethnic communities are mostly involved in these.

Consequently, in those areas, much is done to integrate parents into school life and to include parents in the activities of school life.

### **Basic Structure of the French School System**

The French education system is divided into 4 stages: primary school, lower secondary school, upper secondary school, university and "higher schools".

Primary education = nursery school + elementary school (from 2/3 to 11 years):

- The nursery school lasts for three or four years (very small classes accommodating the two year old children);
- The elementary school lasts for five years: from the age of six (compulsory schooling) to eleven.

Secondary education is divided into 2 stages:

- Lower secondary school: from the sixth class to the third. Options depend largely on language courses (such as Latin or Greek) or technology courses;
- Upper secondary school, which lasts for three years, from the second class to the final class (general, technological and vocational upper secondary school). During the final two years, pupils specialize more. If they are directed towards a general upper secondary school, they can choose between literature, economics and sociology or sciences. All these choices, depend on their past results. The "Baccalauréat" is the qualification which validates success after completion of secondary school.

After the "Baccalauréat", there are 3 possible choices:

- University, leading to Degree/Master/Doctorate (LMD).
- Preparatory Classes for the higher schools: pupils study for two years then sit a competitive exam for a place in one of the higher schools (e.g.: Polytechnic / Higher Commercial Studies).
- The technological institute, a 2 year course, validated either by a University Diploma of technology (HAD) or by an advanced certificate in technology (BTS).

## Projects and measures to foster parental involvement

Ministry of Education: décret relatif aux parents d'élèves:

➔ [www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2006/31/MENE0601820D.htm](http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2006/31/MENE0601820D.htm)

The relation between parents and school:

➔ [www.pel-brest.net/article590.html](http://www.pel-brest.net/article590.html)

How to improve the communication between parents and school:

➔ [www.capcanal.com](http://www.capcanal.com)

Parents and school in France:

➔ [www.french-property.com/guides/france/public-services/school-education/parents/](http://www.french-property.com/guides/france/public-services/school-education/parents/)

### Approach on a national and regional level

Parents' elections are announced by the national and the local newspapers. Details are given about the dates and the process of election which is the same across the whole country (same dates and same procedure). The aim is to involve new parents such as immigrants or young parents, who are unaware of the rules and the advantages of these stakeholder elections. After the elections, results are published like any other political election. This has the effect of motivating parents to participate, because they develop a sense of civic duty.

This way they learn who has been elected and how to contact that person.

Régional newspapers:

- PARIS NORMANDIE
- L'ECLAIREUR
- Fil-F@x Normandie
- Eure Infos

## At a school level

In practice, most schools provide an opportunity at least once a year to meet individually with teachers to review a child's progress and, in many cases school counsellors will be invited to do so twice a year. This meeting is particularly important for new parents. Schools have a school counsellor who coordinates the liaison and communication between the teachers and parents. This person handles absenteeism and all difficulties between teachers and pupils. He can also be involved in organising a programme of educational intervention to support pupils' learning. He and his team are not normally teachers.

### Parental involvement and intercultural learning as an issue in teacher education and in-service training

Parental involvement is an issue in teacher education and continuing professional development. Each year something resembling a catalogue called PAF (Plan d'action de Formation) is given to the teachers offering them lots of CPD courses to choose from. This catalogue varies according to the Academy's objectives and can be focused on a special topic. (the Academy is the UK equivalent of an education authority but in France it is accountable directly to central government and the Ministry of Education)

### Exemplary projects, measures or initiatives to foster parental involvement

#### An initiative to foster parent involvement in education and encourage their cooperation with teachers

In the PAF, offered by the Academy of Rouen, we feel the need to create a special course about

parent involvement in schools. A lot of teachers understand that family involvement supports their work.

In 2007-2008 two CPD courses have been rolled out:

- "Create and develop school and family links"  
One day / 6 hours
- "Communication between school and family, how to do it?" > One day / 6 hours

These courses are not compulsory. They are in-house courses and depend on the availability of the teachers according to their timetable. If there is a special need the head teacher can allocate time to participate in these courses.

#### **An experience in a vocational school: LPO Palissy – ROUEN**

*Three actions are implemented to strengthen the link between school and family*

##### 1. A new type of meeting:

Traditionally, families and students attending vocational school are less motivated by education.

They choose vocational schools because the students want to leave school earlier or because the school assessment board council directs them to these schools in order to have a more practical and work-based education. Most of the time vocational school students come from lower socio-economic groups.

Parents are often a little disappointed by the school system and their experience with the school is likely to have been poor, only coming to school when there are problems such as bad results or discipline problems. This is why most of these parents have had a very negative experience of meetings at school. But how do you motivate pupils if the parents are not motivated?

The "Lycée Palissy" tries to make parents come to school by having a hands-on collaboration with the staff. They understand that a pupil's attitude to learning is linked to the family's attitude towards learning and this involves a higher participation for parents in schools.

In addition to the traditional meetings, such as the parent consultation evenings that occur twice a year, Lycée Palissy has established a new one: "graduation".

The importance of celebrating this event ensures that students and parents learn to appreciate success and that success is not based on marks but rather on competences. This requires a different method of assessment from the teachers and new results for the students.

##### 2. A new timetable for the meetings:

These students are in boarding schools and the schedule for all the meetings needs to take account of this. As parents come on Friday evening to take their children back home for the weekend, meetings should be organised at that time.

For example, traditional parent consultations are always on Friday evenings. This is different from other schools where the meetings are held during the week and most of the time during the afternoon.

##### 3. A new type of communication:

The third step is to avoid "*written communication*" with migrant families from ethnic minority communities. The French language is often difficult for them to read. They did not learn it at school but sometimes in special courses at work.

That is why schools prefer to phone them and arrange a meeting. The oral communication is fundamental because it facilitates an exchange, a meeting of minds through dialogue.

### An experience in a secondary school

*Collège Pablo Picasso – Saint Etienne du Rouvray: "Start of the School Year for Parents"*

In Collège Pablo Picasso- Saint Etienne du Rouvray there are a significant number of pupils from migrant or ethnic minority communities (about 60%).

The greatest challenge is to have direct contact with those families.

Because of the difference in culture and knowledge of the school system in France, they never come to traditional consultation meetings which are organised for parents in France.

They need to have a lot of information but they are intimidated and afraid to come.

In Collège Pablo Picasso- Saint Etienne du Rouvray (pupils are aged from 11 to 16 years old) parents of the first year new entrants at college (classe de sixième) are invited to school on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September (which is the day before the beginning of the school year in France) without the pupils.

On that day, they all take the place of their children in the classroom. They all become learners for that day.

After a brief introduction to the key staff of the school they are divided into small groups, they visit the school and then participate in a series of work-shops.

#### *Workshop 1 "Visit to the school"*

Parents are shown around the different classrooms and get timetables and the school behaviour code is explained to them.

#### *Workshop 2 "School Administration"*

Teachers explain the responsibilities of each parent and go through the manuals which often need to be explained in more detail.

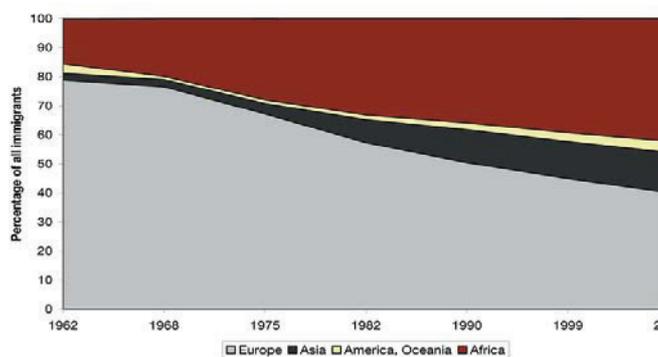
#### *Workshop 3 "Homework Support"*

Teachers explain how much time pupils must spend on their homework and a homework time table is given to them. Personal hygiene and health matters are discussed. At the end of this tour, the parents come together again in a plenary session where they can communicate and discuss their individual questions and problems.

This event is advertised in the local press as something to enjoy. Some parents come to school for the very first time, others for the second or the third time. However, they will meet new teachers or obtain new and important information for their children and meet other families.

By welcoming parents and listening and responding to their concerns and requests for help in supporting their children's learning, the school staff is able to break down barriers between home and school.

Figure 4: Immigration to France by region of origin



Source: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, INSEE (2006)

Engler, Marcus. Country Profile France – see Focus Migration ed. Hamburg Institute of International Economics  
[www.focus-migration.de/France](http://www.focus-migration.de/France)

## Press cuttings

### Sarkozy veut mettre fin à la discrimination

*Associated Press, December 17th, 2008*



Le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy/  
Photo: Reuters Associated Press

«L'égalité des chances doit cesser d'être théorique pour devenir réelle», a martelé mercredi Nicolas Sarkozy, en annonçant une série de mesures en faveur de la diversité dans les classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles, les partis politiques ou à la télévision. Il a en revanche «fermé la porte» à la discrimination positive sur des critères ethniques, ne préférant retenir que le critère «social».

Le chef de l'État français, qui s'exprimait à l'École polytechnique à Palaiseau (Essonne), a enterré définitivement à cette occasion la «discrimination positive» dont il avait caressé l'idée pendant la campagne présidentielle, pour préférer le très chiraquien thème de «l'égalité des chances». «La question d'une action publique volontariste fondée sur des critères ethniques ou religieux doit être close», a-t-il déclaré d'emblée. «Je pense que ce n'est pas la bonne grille de lecture (...) C'est par le critère social qu'il faut prendre le problème, parce que les inégalités sociales englobent toutes les autres.

«Je ferme la porte à l'ethnique et au religieux», et «c'est en rétablissant l'égalité des chances que la République fera circuler ses élites» et «fera droit à la diversité», a-t-il estimé.

Nicolas Sarkozy a néanmoins souhaité que la France se dote «d'outils statistiques» qui «permettent de mesurer sa diversité, pour identifier précisément les retards et mesurer ses progrès». «Ces instruments devront reposer sur des méthodes objectives et incontestables. Ils ne doivent pas traduire une lecture ethnique de notre société» et «un travail va être conduit avec la communauté scientifique pour avancer dans le dialogue, sur ce sujet sensible».

«Il ne s'agit pas de remplacer une discrimination par une autre», mais de «faire plus pour ceux qui partent de plus loin», a-t-il résumé en annonçant une série de mesures en faveur de la diversité.

«Nous allons ouvrir en grand les lieux où se forment l'élite de demain.» Pour cela, Nicolas Sarkozy a demandé mercredi que «dès septembre 2009, 25% des places de chaque classe préparatoire aux grandes écoles soient réservées aux meilleurs lycéens boursiers». Et «à la rentrée 2010, ce taux atteindra 30%».

Aujourd'hui, moins de 20% de leurs élèves sont boursiers, contre 30% à l'université, selon l'Elysée. Nicolas Sarkozy a retenu le critère des boursiers car «ce sont les familles les plus modestes, sans considérations ethniques».

Des internats ou des résidences de réussite éducative seront créés pour leur fournir non seulement un logement mais une aide pédagogique adaptée (tutorats, compléments disciplinaires...).

Dans tous les lycées qui préparent aux concours des grandes écoles, des classes préparatoires de mise à niveau seront créées pour les bons élèves d'établissements situés dans des zones en difficulté, sur le modèle de ce que fait déjà le lycée Henri IV à Paris. Ce sera «le même concours pour tous, mais pas la même préparation», a résumé Nicolas Sarkozy.

Un tutorat renforcé sera également mis en place à la rentrée 2009 en première année d'université pour les élèves de condition modeste.

Concernant les entreprises, le gouvernement proposera en 2009 à 100 grandes entreprises d'expérimenter le CV anonyme. Nicolas Sarkozy a souhaité «que le CV anonyme devienne un réflexe pour les employeurs» mais «sur ce sujet, nous n'avancerons pas par la contrainte, mais par la conviction».

Le gouvernement expérimentera également un système de mutualisation des stages en entreprise dans les collèges et lycées pour répartir l'offre plus équitablement, quelle que soit l'origine sociale des élèves.

Par ailleurs, la Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations (Halde) aura désormais le droit d'effectuer des «contrôles inopinés sur les lieux de travail».

Les entreprises devront aussi désormais faire état chaque année dans leur bilan social des actions qu'elles mènent en faveur de la diversité. Un «label diversité» sera créé dès janvier prochain pour valoriser les meilleures pratiques.

Nicolas Sarkozy a également suggéré de conditionner l'attribution de marchés publics aux entreprises à la mise en oeuvre d'actions en faveur de la diversité.

Des classes préparatoires aux concours de la Fonction publique seront aussi mises en place en 2009, à destination des élèves boursiers ou issus des quartiers. Leurs effectifs devront représenter au moins 30% des postes ouverts à concours.

Les partis politiques sont aussi priés de montrer l'exemple. Ils vont devoir signer une «charte de la diversité». «Leur financement public pourrait être

conditionné au respect de leurs engagements», a suggéré le chef de l'État.

Une «commission d'évaluation de la promotion de la diversité dans la vie politique» rendra par ailleurs chaque année un rapport sur les efforts fournis par les différentes formations.

Concernant la télévision, chaque chaîne devra se fixer des objectifs de diversité à l'écran et dans son encadrement, dans des conventions passées avec le Conseil supérieur de l'audio-visuel.

Toutes ces mesures seront mises en oeuvre dans le cadre d'un «plan d'action» présenté par le gouvernement «d'ici le mois de mars». Ce travail sera confié à Yazid Sabeg, nommé «commissaire à la diversité et à l'égalité des chances».

This article from the news agency Associated Press goes into detail on a speech by the French president Sarkozy in which he describes the present social discrimination and announces an action schedule for "diversity and equal opportunities". With this speech Sarkozy distances himself from his ideas demonstrated in his election campaign to improve the social integration of migrants by "positive discrimination" e.g. a system of quotas for the access to elite universities. He says that balancing social inequalities was more important than ethnic criteria.

## La Cour des Comptes accuse l'école communale d'accroître les inégalités



Des élèves de l'école primaire Henri Brunet à Caen écoutent leur enseignante, le 2 septembre 2008/Mychele Daniau AFP/Archives

### EDUCATION – Dans un rapport rendu public mardi, la Cour critique aussi le ministre Xavier Darcos ...

Quand l'école ne joue plus son rôle d'ascenseur social. L'idée n'est pas nouvelle. Mais cette fois-ci, c'est la Cour des Comptes qui le dit.

Alors que le ministre de l'Education Xavier Darcos tente de convaincre les enseignants du bienfondé de sa réforme de l'école et que le président Nicolas Sarkozy doit annoncer ce mercredi après-midi son plan pour l'égalité des chances – qui ne concerne pas uniquement les minorités visibles – la Cour des Comptes lance un pavé dans la marre.

Dans un rapport, publié mardi, la Cour souligne que l'école communale «ne réussit pas à maintenir l'égalité des chances» et appelle à une répartition plus équitable des ressources au niveau intercommunal et national pour inverser la tendance.

#### L'école accroît les inégalités

Intitulé «les communes et l'école de la République», le document constate un «manque de

coordination et de concertation entre l'Etat et les communes», a expliqué son premier président Philippe Séguin, lors d'une conférence de presse.

L'école communale, «premier des services publics» avec 6,6 millions d'élèves et 350.000 enseignants, «ne réussit pas à maintenir l'égalité des chances mais en accroît les inégalités», a-t-il estimé. Pointant notamment, de «grandes disparités d'équipement entre communes», notamment sur l'informatique, avec un taux d'équipement allant de «un ordinateur pour cinq élèves à un pour 138 élèves».

#### Les réponses «contradictaires» de Xavier Darcos

L'école est également «plus ou moins gratuite selon le lieu où on habite», a-t-il souligné. Les «nouveaux enjeux éducatifs» (voyages pédagogiques, accompagnement face à l'échec scolaire, etc.) sont en effet diversement pris en charge par les communes.

Et Philippe Séguin d'accuser: L'Etat, qui finance «60% des dépenses» de l'école, «ne peut pas considérer que sous prétexte qu'il nomme un instituteur dans une école, il a fait son boulot. Il doit veiller à ce que toutes les communes aient bien les moyens d'offrir à leurs enfants l'accompagnement, les moyens dont ils ont besoin pour pouvoir jouer leur chance». Avant de juger les réponses apportées par Xavier Darcos «un peu contradictoires».

The General Accounting Office ascertains in a report published in September 2008 that local schools don't contribute to the social advancement and to equal opportunities but reinforce social inequalities. This became apparent from the unequal material equipment in school depending on the financial power of the local school authorities. The General Accounting Office says that a different distribution of the financial resources was possible to counteract this tendency.

## Glossary

*Carnet de liaison/de correspondance* > School-parents booklet

*Conseiller Principal d'Education (CPE)* > School Pastoral Manager

*Classe d'Initiation (CLIN) an additional language* > Primary school instruction in French instruction class

*Elève nouvellement arrivé (ENA)* > recently arrived children

*Familles issues de la diversité culturelle* > families from ethnic minority communities

*Rectorat de Rouen* > Regional Education Authority in Rouen where the Academie is based

*Plan d'Action de Formation (P.A.F.)* > Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers

## Useful links

French Ministry of Education: décret relatif aux parents d'élèves: ↻ [www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2006/31/MENE0601820D.htm](http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2006/31/MENE0601820D.htm)

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