

## A guide for parent teacher associations and student boards

### EDUCATION

1

#### INDEX

#### Page

Preface from the minister of education, youth and sport.....	3
Preface from the authors.....	3
1 Elections in Brandenburgian schools.....	4
1.1. Legal framework of participation.....	4
1.1.1. Elections, dates, legislative period .....	4
a) Eligibility and the right to vote (§ 78 BbgSchulG) ....	4
For the parents .....	4
Exclusively for you .....	5
b) Mandate (§ 78 Abs.3 BbgSchulG) .....	5
c) Deselection (§ 78 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG) .....	5
d) Bye-election (§ 78 Abs. 5 BbgSchulG) .....	5
e) Execution of election (§ 78 Abs. 7- 9 BbgSchulG) .....	5
f) Minutes (§ 78 Abs. 7 BbgSchulG) .....	6
g) Scrutiny (§ 79 BbgSchulG) .....	6
h) Costs and space (§ 80 BbgSchulG) .....	6
1.2. Elections in school .....	6
1.2.1. Elections of parent boards.....	8
1.2.1.1.Election of class parent representatives.....	8
a) Preparation for elections.....	8
b) Executing elections .....	9
1.2.1.2. Elections of the parent conference.....	10
a) Preparation for elections.....	10
b) Executing elections .....	10
1.2.2. Elections of student boards.....	12
1.2.2.1. Electing the class monitor .....	12
a) Preface .....	12
b) Right to vote .....	12
c) Eligibility.....	12
d) Minutes and scrutiny.....	12
e) Other offices .....	13
1.2.2.2. Elections of student conferences.....	13
a) Election of head girl or boy .....	13
b) Elections of members of parent, symposia and “teil” conferences.....	14
c) Election of student district council .....	14
d) Elections of members of school conference .....	14
e) Election of guidance counselors... ..	14
1.2.3. Election of school conference members.....	15
a) Preface .....	15
b) Constitution .....	15
1.2.4. Elections within the school conference .....	16
2. Tasks and functions of the boards.....	16
2.1. Legal frameworks of education act .....	16
a) Work policies .....	16
b) Rules of procedures .....	17
c) Ballots and rulings.....	17
2.2. Role of elected parent representative.....	18
2.2.1. Class parent representatives .....	18
2.2.2. School parent representative .....	18
2.3. Responsibilities of elected student representatives.....	18
2.3.1. Tasks of head girl or boys.....	19
2.3.2. Student conference.....	19
a) Constitution .....	20
b) Dates .....	20
c) Agenda/ petitions .....	20

d) Chair/ minutes .....	20
2.4. Parents and students as consulting members of class conference, symposium and teachers conference.....	21
a) Preface .....	21
b) Class conference .....	21
c) Symposium, subject area conference .....	21
d) Teachers conference.....	21
2.5. School conference.....	21
2.5.1. Functions .....	21
a) Members .....	21
b) Guests und experts .....	22
c) Execution board.....	22
d) Members of school conferences at teacher conferences .....	22
e) Objections / Implementations .....	22
2.5.2. Tasks .....	22
a) Preface .....	22
b) Decision level 1 .....	22
c) Decision level 2 .....	23
d) Decision level 3 .....	23
3. Further possibilities of involvement of parents and students.....	23
3.1. School program .....	23
3.2. School visitations .....	23
4. Skill enhancement for parents and students.....	25
5. Contact for cooperation .....	25
6. Appendix .....	26

## What is the head master talking about?

### Preface from the minister of education, youth and sport

Compared to a lifespan, school only amounts to an extremely small period of time in life.

However, it collides with a crucial moment in personal history that is groundbreaking for one's future.

The British philosopher and social scientist Herbert Spencer therefore considered acting and not knowledge as vital to education.

The modern educational system offers many possibilities. Not only facts but also the ability to act is imparted to the students, fundamentals that empower us to positively create and contribute to our own lives.

This is especially in a democracy a constant challenge.

The constitution of Brandenburg formulates this basic idea in the article 30: "In the organization of school, parents, teachers, students as well as their representations and organizations contribute likewise"

The Brandenburgian education act describes these rights of participation in a comprehensive and concrete manner.

Yet, rights have to be used - that is primarily to know and understand them.

The at hand material therefore should enable parents and students to seize their democratic right to participate in an educated and creative way.

Often it is about negotiating, finding compromises and accepting majority decisions.

That is not always easy, but important.

School only remains alive and open to ongoing development in that way.

In this spirit I wish you all the best and success in work.

5

I thank the author Dr. Christa Lorenz, professional parent advanced trainer and member of many years of parent representative boards on all levels, and Gordon von Miller, a former student representative, for their work on the handbook.

Holger Rupprecht

Minister of education, youth and sport

## Preface of the authors

Dear parents and legal guardians,

Dear students,

Parents and students need to know their rights of participation in order to seize them and contribute efficiently to the school.

However, experience shows that there are common insecurities in exposure to the education act.

Notably elections for school boards and their functions are affected.

The at hand brochure is supposed to help out. Through tips and advice we would like to put the matter of elections and work of school boards across.

The handbook is fully updated based on comprehensive changes of the education act.

Furthermore we added amendments and questions that were occurring while working with the education act on a daily basis.

The authors Dr. Christel Lorenz and Gordon von Miller are experienced with school life and have collected many experiences over the years through the work in school boards.

That is why it is put emphasis on vividness and concrete examples.

A number of examples, particularly in the annex, can be used both by parents and students.

At the beginning of every section the legal framework is presented and is referred to the corresponding paragraphs in the education act.

The following parts deal with the daily work in school that ranges from elections to functions of the boards.

The third and fourth section is dedicated to possibilities of advanced training for parents and students and supplemented with important contact information.

The particular statutory provisions can be reviewed as well in school.

A special thanks goes to Silvana Hilliger, consultant of the Brandenburgian ministry of education, youth and sport for many helpful suggestions during editing.

We hope that the brochure will be a helpful assistance to school life.

Dr. Christel Lorenz

Gordon von Miller Potsdam, August 2007

## 1. Elections in Brandenburgian schools

### 1.1. Legal framework of participation

Participation in school is on the strength of § 74 Abs. 3 BbgSchulG exercised

1. in immediate form (every parent exercises the rights of their child according to the education act) and
2. through committees (collective rights).

In this brochure only collective rights are discussed.

The law defines committees, as generic term, as conferences, boards, councils and advisory boards.

#### 1.1.1. Elections, dates, legislative periods

Elections to the participation boards are carried out as on the strength of § 78, para. 2 BbgSchulG for two school years.

It has to be taken into account that class parent representatives as well as the head girl or boy have to be voted in newly assembled classes (approximately 7th and 11th grade) even if no new elections take place in the school year. On the other hand you do not vote in the classes in which the two-year legislative period has not yet ended. Within the last few years there were misunderstandings at many schools about it.

At the beginning of the school year the elected representatives of parents and students simply need to be invited again to the parents conference/ students conference.

Furthermore are parents or students that are only for another year at the school – e.g. 6th and 10th grade - not to be excluded from elections for office.

This happened frequently in the past on the grounds that candidates would only be in office for another year.

If a member of a committee leaves - for which reason whatsoever – a bye-election has to take place.

Elections for class parent representatives and head girl or boys are to be held within the first four weeks (§ 81, para. 5 BbgSchulG) of the beginning of a new school year. Elections within the parent conference as well as elections for the student conference are to be held within the first six weeks of the beginning of the school year at the latest. This also applies to the frequent bye-elections.

This timing is necessary for the committees to get together in order to be able to meet on area and regional level on time.

#### a) Eligibility and right to vote (§ 78 BbgSchulG.)

For the parents

All parents of underage student are eligible for office as far as they are not working as teachers, other school staff or lead the supervision (e.g. as school inspector) of the concerning school.

Not only biological parents of the minors are eligible for office, but also their partners, educational counselors or others if the legal guardian agrees.

The right to vote is to be exercised in person. If not present in person, one cannot exercise the right to vote, since absentee vote is prohibited by the education act.

Absent parents are eligible when they indicate readiness for candidature in writing to the class teacher or parent representative.

All parents that have minors in the concerned grade have the right to vote.

Make sure that at the beginning of the school year the majority of students in class are underage.

Otherwise students attend to their own interests

On request of at least a fifth of the parents of minors of a class a parent conference meeting has to be assembled.

That means for all practical purposes that generally in 12<sup>th</sup> grade parent conference meetings are still convoked whereas in 13<sup>th</sup> grade not anymore.

To ensure the participation of the elected parents in conferences, it shall be voted on a substitute (§ 78, para. 6 BbgSchulG.)

#### 10 1.1 Legal Framework of participation

##### Exclusively for you

Right to vote: Every student of a class as well as every member of the student board entitled to vote has the right to vote.

However, to exercise this right you have to be present on the day of vote. You have to vote in person, meaning that you can't delegate your vote to somebody else.

An absentee vote is not allowed.

Eligibility: "Eligible are all students from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade on." (78 Abs. 1 BbgSchulG)

Such a fortunate rule can't be found in every federal state.

Your individual responsibility is supported and you experience democracy very close.

If a student declares his or her candidacy he or she can be voted on even if absent on the day of vote.

##### b) Mandate (§ 78 Abs.3 BbgSchulG)

The mandate starts with the acceptance of the election and ends with taking office of the successor.

However, it ends at the latest with the expiration of the term for the convocation of the conferences.

Also with:

- resignation,
- a successor is elected,
- if a student changes or leaves school (their parents aren't eligible of holding office neither anymore), parents of students that come of age by the end of the school year, a re-election is possible.

##### c) Deselection (§ 78, para. 4 BbgSchulG.)

If a committee has awarded an elective office to a person it can be withdrawn by voting out again.

The voting out makes it possible for a committee to withdraw an exceptional idle representative from office.

To vote someone out at least half of the members have to be present.

##### d) Bye-election (§ 78 Abs. 5 BbgSchulG)

If a conference hasn't voted for a representative on an office, it can be held a bye-election during the legislative period.

The same is valid for a bye-election on an office of a voted out individual.

Taking the office starts with the acceptance of the election.

It ends with taking office of the successor.

##### e) Execution of election (§ 78 Abs. 7- 9 BbgSchulG)

For the supervision of the election is the election supervisor responsible.

He or she can be appointed by acclamation.

Those running for office can't be election supervisor.

The election supervisor is in charge of the election minutes. Elections are secret.

They can be open if everybody eligible for voting agrees.

Here the majority rule is abrogated – all concerned have to be in favor of the open election.

It is voted in separate ballots. The individual with the majority of votes is elected.

The election of several individuals on the same office can be combined if everybody agrees.

A run-off ballot is held when there is a tie. In the case of another tie in the run-off ballot the lot decides it.

An example for you only: The student board is voting at the beginning of the school year for their head girl or boy. He or she is moving the midst of a term. Within a couple of days a new head girl or boy is bye-elected.

His or her successor ends at the latest six weeks after the start of the upcoming new school year.

An example for parents: The members of the school conference can be elected in just one ballot.

In the parent conference seven parents are agreeing on running for office. However, only five parents can be elected.

That's why in a secret vote only five parents can be voted on. If one checks more than five candidates on the ballot paper, it is an invalid vote.

f) Minutes (§ 78 Abs. 7 BbgSchulG)

The election supervisor is in charge of the election minutes. These should be exemplified immediately after the election. Should include the following information:

- • • Name of the conference or board (e.g. „class 9/1 – parent conference“ or „student board of the Friedrich-Ebert-Gesamtschule“),
- • • location and time of the election (start and end),
- • • names of election and individuals who worked for the electoral committee
- • • candidate proposal,
- • • number of valid and invalid votes as well as abstentions,
  - number of votes on candidates,
  - results of possible run-off ballots and drawings,
- • • signature of election supervisor and individuals that work in the electoral committee

Many schools designed preprints of election minutes that are used by the entire school.

If this isn't true for your school you could use the preprint in the annex (annex 1)

The documents should be kept until reelection.

g) Scrutiny (§ 79 BbgSchulG)

Everyone with the right to vote has the right after the announcement of the election to object to the validity of the election in writing within a week with indication of reason.

After a hearing of the supervisors of the election the school authorities decide within a week upon entry of the objection about it.

At violations of legal provisions that have influenced election results the election is declared invalid and has to be repeated.

h) Costs and Space (§ 80 BbgSchulG)

The school authority provides space and tangible means to the boards and conferences.

Tangible means are e.g. copies for invitations and documents.

An example for parents:

The parent conference has chosen their members from the members entitled to vote for the school conference.

However, there was a candidate that wasn't a parent representative but nevertheless run for office in the school conference. The parent teacher association ignored the candidate because they believed that only members entitled to vote in the parent teacher association are allowed to be voted on.

Therewith the education act was violated and the vote declared invalid, the election had to be repeated (§ 79 Abs. 1 u. 2 in in connection to § 82 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG)

After the legal frameworks were represented in the item 1.1.,

The elections of the parents and student committees shall be discussed.

As an introduction the following illustrations give a summary.

1.2 elections in school 15

Election of parent representatives in school by the strength of the Brandenburgian education act

All committees are chosen for a period of two years.  
For every member a representative has to be elected.

School conference

Members are among others five parents,  
With schools arranged in one class three members

One member

District council of parents

Two advisory members

Teacher conference

Two advisory members for every  
Symposium

Two advisory members for  
Student board

School parent representatives  
as well as up to three proxies  
Class conference  
both representatives are advisory members

Elects from the circle of Parents representatives

Parent conference  
Members are all parent representatives to all (= parent representatives of the class)

Parent teacher association

Members are all parents of underage students of the class or grade

Elects two representatives select (=parent representatives of the class)

elects from the circle of all parents

elects from the circle of all parents

elects from the circle of all parents

## 1.2. Elections in School

Elections of student representatives at school after the Brandenburgian education act

All committees are selected for one legislative period of two years.

For each member a proxy is to be selected.

Student representatives of the school and up to three proxies

three guidance teachers

(are elected from the circle of teachers) that School selected

Class conference  
both representatives as advisory members  
District council of students  
One member

Teacher conference  
Symposium

Symposia

Parent conference

for each conference two advisory members  
The student board elects from the of all students members for...

Student board  
Members are all head girl or boys at the school  
Class elects two head girl or boys  
Is allowed to call in at least one class meeting a month

Student representative is head girl or boy!  
Members are, amongst others, five students  
With schools arranged into one class three students

## 1.2.1 Election of parent boards

### 1.2.1.1. Election of class parent representatives

#### a) Preparation of Election

The two class parent representatives and their proxies are elected, as described in 1.1., in open or secret elections. Surely parents agree very frequently on open elections.

Nevertheless parent representatives should be prepared for secret elections, especially in new classes.

It is pretty uncomfortable when you have to prepare the ballots and desperately search for a ballot box at the same evening of election. To successfully run an election you should be thoroughly prepared.

The following check list should help.

Check list in preparation to an election in class

- set the date for the election together with the class teacher
- the first parents meeting has to take place four weeks after beginning of classes at the latest.
- note that not all of the class meetings at the school should take place at the same time in order to make it possible for parents with several children at the school to participate.
- possibly preliminary discussion with possible candidates, in order not to be surprised, e.g. that no candidates are  
to be found or candidates have wrong perceptions of their tasks;
- with newly formed classes it is advisable to prepare name tags;
- written invitation to all parents with indication of the agenda and asking for confirmation of participation in order to ensure quorum;
- ballots and ballot box (an empty cardboard is sufficient);
- Attendance list (appendix 3; example. 3.1: attendance list).

At the execution of the election it makes sense if the class teacher takes over the function of the election supervisor, since he or she is not eligible for office.

Furthermore a parent should be elected, who is in charge of the minutes, since this cannot be expected from the election supervisor. If the Election is secretly carried out, another parent should help in the execution of the election, especially with counting the votes.

Again: a candidate running for office can't be a member of the election board!

These parents are of course entitled to vote. The parents of the class suggest the candidates for the election of the parent representative and their proxies.

This is not easy, particularly if a class is newly formed

Therefore all parents should introduce themselves briefly and indicate whether they are ready to run for office.

Nametags are very helpful to memorize the names of the other parents and can be made by the students.

The suggested candidates – parents of course have the right to suggest themselves too - have to declare that they are available for office.

Nothing is more bothersome than a refusal to accept an election.

All parents should get the possibility of questioning the applicants about the reasons of her candidature.

This cannot be forced, if it should not be possible, to vote for two representatives or even more regrettable for none at all, then that's how it is,

However, it should be clear to the parents that the class as a committee cannot look after their rights and have no representatives in the class or parent conference.

Of course it is possible to hold a bye-election during the school year if there are parents to found that would like to candidate.

At the first parent meeting in the school year where the elections take place it should also be evaluated who might be interested in engaging in cooperation boards of the school. Those members are to be elected from the circle of all parents.

However, it should be asked who is full member in the school conference and district council of the parents and who would be up for election as advisory member for the students board, teachers conference, symposia and other conferences and boards.

## b) Execution of the Election

The Election to the representatives or proxies can take place in one or in separate ballots.

Electing in separate ballots has the advantage that the inferior applicant has the chance to apply for the office of the proxy. If electing in just one ballot this possibility is excluded because you can only be running for one office per ballot.

As already referred to in preparation of the election, the ones in charge should be prepared for a secret election since the voice of just one parent is sufficient to demand a secret ballot.

You have to be prepared. The ballot paper has to be standardized (Example 2).

The parents themselves can fill in the names of the candidates.

Possibly the supervisor of the election writes the names on the black board

The ballot papers are put after the election into a closed, empty container.

Afterwards the election board becomes active by opening and counting out the container with the filled out ballots.

Here it is to be noted that after the school law for each student two votes are cast.

Thus parents, i.e. „father“ and „mother “ can vote differently.

In order to be able to seize the total number of the votes it is useful to design the attendance list like the sample provided in the appendix 3,1. Here no parent may deliver more than four votes after the law:

- the total number of the delivered votes,
- the total number of the valid votes,
- the total number of the invalid votes,
- the number of the votes, which were cast for each candidate and/or each candidate,
- the number of the abstentions.
- the candidate who receives the highest number of valid votes, is elected.
- if only one candidate run for office he or she has at least to receive half of the cast votes.
- ballot papers are invalidly if the decision is not stated clearly or if too many candidates or candidate were marked with a cross.

If two applicants received the same number of votes, then a pass run-off ballot takes place.

With returning equal votes the candidate will be elected by lottery

The election supervisor communicates the result of the Election and is responsible for the preparation of the election minutes (see under 1.1.f appendix 1).

In the end of this section a checklist for the execution of the Election in the class:

- Hand out attendance list (appendix 3);
- Determine quorum;
- Elect election supervisor (open ballot);
- Note that the election supervisor can't run for office.
- Election supervision is responsible for minutes;
- Coordinate whether it should be a secret or open election;
- Inform about the tasks of class parent representatives (see point 2.2.1.);
- Suggest candidates;
- The candidates;
- With secret election explain ballot papers;
- Number of votes: for each student who the two votes are cast.
- Parents with the several children in that class may not cast more than four votes;
- Election in separate ballots, first representatives, and then proxies;
- Counting of votes, with secret election;
- two persons, who do not stand as a candidate for counting of the votes;
- elected is who has the highest number of votes;
- run-off ballots with equality of votes, with equal voices again the lottery decides,
- declaration for the acceptance by the candidates;
- set up minutes, file minutes.

### 1.2.1.2. Elections of the parent conference

#### a) Preparation of the election

The Parent conference is the highest resolution-seizing committee of parents at school.

It consists of the parent representative of all classes of a school.

Depending upon size of the school this board has accordingly members.

If there is an election at school the parent conference meets at the latest six weeks after beginning of school year for its first meeting. For that purpose the school parent representative invites after consultation with the school board for a meeting.

The parent conference organizes also the elections for the committees, for which all parents of the school run for office. Those are the school conference and the district council for the parents.

The advisory members of the student board, the teachers conference, symposia, and other conferences become elected from the entire circle of all parents.

The names of interested parents should be seized and then those parents should be invited to the parent conference (see point 1.2.1.1.). They present themselves there as candidates. The members of the parent conference have there the chance to vote them into the boards.

The following check list should ease the preparation so that if possible nothing is forgotten.

Set date of election with school board considering the convocation time limit of six weeks after the beginning of classes;

Written invitation with agenda and all parent representatives of the classes;

Tip: e.g. the parent conference of a five-track high school has forty members if all parent representatives got elected.

That is why it is important to find an appropriate room in the school for meetings of the parent conference.

Prepare a name list of all elected representatives of the school;

Possible pre-meetings with potential candidates for the to be elected offices;

Prepare nametags and amend for newly elected representatives – especially important for large schools,

Nametags should stay in school and be given to the parents in each meeting);

Set up attendance list.

#### b) Execution of election

For the Election of the election supervisor the same is valid as discussed in the parents meeting already.

Here it is helpful too to elect besides the supervisor two other proxies that are not running for office.

The election supervisor is responsible for the preparation of the election minutes (Appendix 1).

First the election of the election board should take place. This can be openly elected.

The election supervisor explains afterwards the election modalities.

It is appropriate to select in separate ballots in order to give turned down candidates a chance to be elected as proxies.

Before the candidates and candidates are suggested or suggest themselves, parents should briefly introduce themselves and state whether they are interested to candidate for a certain office.

Before the election it has to be explained that the candidates have to publish their name and address in an appropriate. It may be objected to the publication of the address (§8 data protection regulation, GVBl II 402 of May 14th 1997).

The election supervisor has to find consent over whether the election is open or secret.

After that it is most advisable to elect the school parent representative and up to three proxies.

With secret election the election supervisor hands out the ballot papers and explains them.

The parent representatives write on a blank paper the candidates.

Everybody has a vote. The election is based on the principles of the majority vote:

The one with the most votes has won the election.

After that the election of the proxies take place, they may be elected in one ballot.

In another ballot the members of the school conference become elected first and then their proxies.

Note that after the education act the full members and proxies of the school conference, the district council of the parents and the advisory members are all to be elected from the circle of all parents at the school (§ 82 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG).

In addition are members of the district councils and their proxies to be elected.

Thus the demand of the school law – the eligibility in certain conferences or in the district council of parents without being parent representative of the class – is put in practice, this possibility has to be appropriately explained. In case parents do not like to run for office as representative or proxy, but are interested in cooperation with a distinct conference or the district council of the parents, their names should be comprised (Election minutes, S. 1.2.1.1 a).

Their names are communicated to the school parent representative. These designated parents are invited to the parent class conference and can present themselves as candidates. Members of the parent conference can elect those parents into the boards. After each ballot the votes are to be counted out. It is important that for each ballot the number of votes resemble the number of candidates up for election. Apart from that the same is valid with the election of the parents representative including the preparation the minutes.

#### 24 1.2 ELECTIONS IN SCHOOL

Since the Elections of the Parent conference take much time the election on the advisory members in the conference can be held in the next conference.

It gives time to the parents to think about which conference they would like to join.

Checklist elections execution of the parent conference

- Hand out attendance list;
- Check quorum;
- Elect election supervisor (an open election is possible);
- Election supervisor is responsible for the minutes;
- Election in several ballots, i.e. with same offices in the one ballot;
- Election of school parent representative plus up to three proxies;
  - Election of the members of the school conference plus proxy;
  - Election of the members of the district council of the parents plus proxy;
  - Election of advisory members of the student board, the teachers conference,
- Symposia and other conferences and deputy members
- Vote on open or secret election; with secret election explain prepared ballot papers;
- Proposal of candidates;
- Information on publication of personal data of members of cooperation boards
- Presentation of candidates;
- Query to the candidates;
- Counting of votes after each ballot and announcement of the election results by the election supervisor;
- With equal votes – run-off ballot,
- With anew equality of votes the decision is made by lottery of the election supervisor;
- With declaration of acceptance of the election through the elected; write minutes, file minutes until the next election, ballot papers until the end of period of objection.

## 1.2.2. Election of the school board

But if you aren't at school at the day of election, maybe you are at the doctors'?

–You still can be elected! The day for election is commonly set a couple of days earlier. So if you know you won't be there tell your class teacher. Mention also that you would like run for office as head girl or boy or that you would like to become a proxy. This is how you can be elected even when you are not there.

Hand in your candidanship in writing, therefore you declare in case of election your acceptance of the office.

### 1.2.2.1. Election of Head girl or boy

#### a) Preface

With the start of every election period as well as with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade class monitors in each class are elected.

You can inform yourself over their tasks and duties here under 2.3.1

#### b) Right to vote

All students of your class have the right to vote for the class monitor.

In order to vote you have to be present at the election.

You have to cast your vote in person therefore you can't authorize somebody else for you.

Neither can you put the name of your candidate on a sheet of paper and give it to someone that puts it for you into the ballot box.

#### c) Eligibility

Are you in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, or 6<sup>th</sup> grade? Are you attending high school, comprehensive school or grammar school?

If you can answer on of the questions with "yes" then you have the chance to run for the office of the class monitor.

#### d) Execution of the election

Since the newly elected class monitor is supposed to participate in the first student board meeting that takes place six weeks after the beginning of class at the latest, it is advisable to elect as soon as possible.

After all they have to prepare themselves for their tasks as members of the student board.

It becomes difficult when a class is just newly assembled like it is often the case in 7<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Finding a date for elections is therefore a compromise between an appropriate time frame in order to get to know each other first and to find the right date for the first meeting of the student board.

In any case it is commendable to think about the candidates at a rather early stage. Maybe even you would like to candidate!

At the beginning of an election an election supervisor is appointed. Your class teacher would be a good choice for example. However, you don't have to choose your class teacher; every student could fill that position too as long as he or she does not apply for office.

The election supervisor has the chance to appoint helpers (hand out ballot papers, count of votes, copying), however, they are as much as the supervisor not allowed to run for office.

When the supervisor is elected – if necessary with the majority vote - he or she asks for candidates proposals.

You can propose your fellow students or yourself. If the proposed student agrees to run for office it is helpful to put the names up on the board in order to keep track.

If there are none or too few candidates the office can't be filled. An appointment of students for candidanship is not allowed. However it would be a pity if you couldn't actively participate in school life.

When the candidates are determined you can ask them about their intentions, e.g.: "Why would you like to become class monitor?", "What would like to change or achieve if you'd become head girl or boy?"

It is elected in two ballots. The office for head girl or boy is elected first, his or her proxy is elected.

This is favorably since unelected candidates can run for the post of the proxy in the second ballot.

The elections are held secretly. An open election is granted if all students agree. With open election it is voted by a hand sign. With secret elections ballot papers are handed out.

Either those are blank (a) or (b) filled already with the names of the candidates.

In order to do that it is helpful to put up the names of all candidates on a sheet of paper and then copies it.

As ballot paper you could also use copy samples in the appendix No. 2.

Every student of your class receives one ballot paper per ballot. Everybody writes the names of his or her two favourite candidates on the blank papers and checks them off or place the cross at the right spot.

By the way right spot:

In case you checked off at the wrong spot, no problem, as long as you haven't returned the paper.

Just strike out the cross and put on the right spot. You might add your name to it. Finally your ballot papers get collected. A shoebox is perfect as voting box. Then count of the votes and list

- the total number of votes,
- the total number of valid votes,

- the total number of invalid votes (see below),
- the number of abstentions of voting (if no name is checked),
- the number of votes for each candidate

The ballot is not valid if a decision is not clearly identifiable; if more than two candidates are checked, have reservations or insults.

Those two students who got most of the votes in the first ballot, become class monitor.

Those two students, who received most of the votes in the second ballot, become their deputies.

The election supervisor then communicates the results to the class.

#### d) Minutes and scrutiny

The job of the election supervisor doesn't end here. Immediately after, he or she has to write the minutes and hand them in - together with the ballot papers to the school board.

Many schools provide election minutes where only the blanks have to be filled in.

If this isn't the case at your school you find a sample in the annex 1.

It just needs to be filled and handed in. Done!

For the scrutiny everything said under 1.1.1.g is valid.

Therefore every student of your class has the right to object to the election.

#### e) Other offices

The members of the school conference and student district council as the consulting members of the parent-, teacher-, subject conferences are elected from the midst of all students of the school.

However, these elections are not taking place in class but at the school board meeting (see 1.2.2.2).

Therefore it might be advisable to note the names of interested students to invite them to the student board.

They may introduce themselves to the board. The members of the board then have the chance to vote them into the committees.

### 1.2.2.2. Election of the student conferences

Every to years the student board is up for elections for the following offices:

- a) class monitor and their deputies,
- b) the advisory members of parent conference members, teacher conference members, symposia members – including their deputies.
- c) one member and one deputy member for the district council student board,
- d) the members of School conference and their deputies.

As far as possible, offices should be assigned in equal parts to boys and girls.

Additionally up to three guidance teachers can be elected.

An election supervisor is obligatory to all elections.

The supervision of the election does not require a right to vote within the concerned election.

Therefore it is possible for a class monitor deputy to take over the supervision of the election.

Note that the supervisor is not eligible for running for office.

When a election supervisor is appointed he or she then asks for proposals of candidates.

There is something important to keep in mind before the election. Candidates have to know that their personal data like name and address are published. For example on the school black board or the schools own homepage.

You should also know that this is possible to object to the publication of the address (§

8(Datenschutzverordnung Schulwesen, GVBl II 402 vom 14.Mai1997).

In case you are underage, your parents have to agree to the publication of your address.

Elections are secret.

They can be open if everybody eligible for voting agrees.

Here the majority rule is abrogated – all concerned have to be in favor of the open election.

In this case the election supervisor has to check if the number of votes in favor of a candidate and the number of abstentions is consistent with the number of people eligible for voting.

When the ballot papers are handed out everybody writes the names of their candidates on the paper.

Another method: when the candidates are determined their names are put on a ballot paper and copied.

After handing them out the students only need to put their cross next to the name of their candidate.

In any case the ballots are collected screened (shoebox) and counted off by the election supervisor.

He is allowed to get help from others that are not running for office either.

The result is set out and then announced to the student board. The election supervisor then asks the elected if they accept their election. With a positive answer the student takes over his or her office.

Tip: Many times not everyone present is also eligible for voting. Here it comes in handy to find out who has a

right to vote and who doesn't.

In order to do that the election supervisor fetches a names list of all head boys or girls, representatives of the school and their proxies from the school board.

By means of this list (electoral role) the ballot papers are handed out.

In that way it is secured that only people with a right to vote are electing.

Sample ballot papers are available in the appendix No. 2.

a) The election of the head boy or girl

“The student board chooses a head boy or girl and up to three representatives from the middle of her members that are entitled to vote.“ (§ 84 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG)

See under 2.3.2 for the tasks of the head boy or girl and their deputies.

The one who collects most votes is elected head girl or boy.

Deputies are those three students who drew in the highest percentage of the votes.

b) Elections of members of parent-, teacher conferences and symposia

The conference of the Students has the right to delegate two representatives to the conferences as advisory members. The advisory members can be selected from the circle of all students of your school.

This isn't necessarily the class monitor. You can inform yourself over the tasks of an advisory members of the different conferences under 2.4.

c) Election of student district council

Tasks of the student district council:

The student district council serves the acknowledgement of the students interests in school matters on the district council level.

The student district council meets at least twice a year (§ 136 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG).

32

In a nutshell: from the midst of the members means that only the class monitors are eligible to run for the office of head boy or girl. A head boy or girl therefore is always class monitor too!

Members of the district council:

„The student board elects from the midst of their students a member for the student district council.“ (§ 84 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG)

In contrary to the election of the head boy or girl every student has the right to run for office in the student district council. That is why it is especially important to inform about it at the invitation to the first student board meeting.

Your member updates you also on your school. He or she notifies you on a regular bases about the work done.

d) Election of school conference members

There is a whole paragraph dedicated to the election of school conference members in this brochure.

You can inform yourself under 1.2.3 about the election of school conference members.

e) Election of guidance teachers

The school board has the right to decide on up to three guidance teachers.

Their mandate lasts for one year. In this period of time they are allowed to participate in meetings of the school board.

They are not captured by the election rules of the § 78 Abs. 2 BbgSchulG.

The cooperation board does not affect the election of guidance teacher.

## 1.2.3. Election of school conference members

### a) Preface

The school conference is a committee where students, parents and teacher work and decide together with equal rights.

The school conference consults on all important school issues.

The conference conciliates arguments.

Since students, parents and teachers are equally represented everybody is allowed to present their opinions and ideas to the same degree. That is why all votes have to be agreed on with a majority so that a cooperation between the three groups is ensured. Nobody is able to put something thru without a majority!

Nevertheless different ideas of the members lead sometimes to seemingly problems without a solution.

However, for the benefit of the school a compromise should be a major priority.

Ways to succeed are often very different from each other. To negotiate compromises is very exciting but also very often difficult.

The members should be aware that they are in charge of their school. This sometimes takes a great deal of time.

This does not only mean time for meetings but time to inform oneself about problems in school and to obtain background knowledge.

Expeiece in student boards or parent committees are valuable but not a must.

In a nutshell: the school conference is a mutual advisory and decision board in school.

Important school issues are discussed here. Therefore it is important that engaged and active members are elected by the student board and parent conference.

Tip: school conferences decide on many changes in school life. A vigorous engagement from you makes a student-friendly environment and provides you with extensive background knowledge.

#### b) Constitution

Parents, teacher and students are represented equally at the school conference.

Members are:

- Headmaster
- Four representatives of the teacher conference
- Five representatives of the student board
- Five representatives of the parent conference

Thus a total number of 15 members add up.

Constitution at “small” schools:

Schools that have not at least two classes per every grade form an exeption.

At these schools the number of members is scaled down to:

- Headmaster
- Two representatives of the teacher conference
- Three representatives of the student board
- Three representatives of the parent conference

Thus a total number of nine members add up at “small” schools

A sixth form college usually bundles several educational opportunities in a school.

The maximum stay of students constitutes in general three years.

Vocational school students are often the majority of students and are only present for two days of the week or respectively every three weeks in rotation at the school.

This school structure has effects on the commitment of the students to engage in school activities.

Nevertheless, does cooperation with student representatives happen at almost any sixth form colleges of the state.

The conference here is composed differently from any other school membership is equally divided between teachers, headmaster and students of each subject.

Parents take part with their elected representatives,

Other forms of cooperation are pretty much the same as in other secondary school.

### 1.2.4. Elections within the school conference

„The school conference elects a executive board from the midst of their member with a right to vote. It is composed from a chair and up to two representatives” (§ 90 Abs. 6 BbgSchulG)

Every member of the school conference – whether student-, parent-, or teacher representative- may be elected chair or deputy.

It is advisable to elect representatives of all groups in order to represent the interests of all committees.

The office of the chair should be assigned to a representative who is strongly engaged in the business of the

school and has the ability to conciliate between the boards.

## 2. Tasks and functions of the board

### 2.1. Legal framework of the education act

#### a) Work policies

The committees represent the interests of the respective group.

The committees settle their matters in their own responsibility within the legal provisions (§ 75BbgSchulG).

In order to be able to exercise rights of participation, these rights ought to be known.

Information should be made available at schools, school administrative boards and school authorities.

With the school law novella from January 2007 the school was explicitly obligated to inform parents and students about their possibility of cooperation at schools (§ 46 BbgSchulG).

Information are available through the class teacher, the school authority, school boards and the ministry of education, youth and sport. Contact details can be found at the end of the brochure. Class and subject teachers are particularly important to the work of parent conferences regarding their level of information.

The school conference needs particular help and information from the school board, the federal school authority in order to work efficiently.

At the request of the parent conference or the student board one member of the school board should take part in the respective meeting.

Members of the school board have the possibility anyway to participate in all school committees (§ 75 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG).

At the same time it has to be ensured that some particular agenda items can be discussed alone.

An example for parents: A parent meeting may confer without the presence of the class teacher.

Nevertheless should the class teacher participate in the meetings in order to guarantee transparency and a good information flow.

To agenda items regarding the school authority (e.g. constructions, ...) and the school board (e.g. provisions of lessons,...) the concerned should be invited (§ 75 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG).

(Example under appendix no. 5.)

The members are not bound to orders and instructions, they decide solely on their own opinion see § 75 Abs. 6

To fight for mutual interests a member should represent the opinion of his or her committee.

After all he or she wasn't elected to pursue individual interests.

Cooperation within committees include rights of participation and decision making - § 75 Abs. 3 BbgSchulG

The committees should inform one another about their work meaning that parents and students are sufficiently enough informed about decisions of the school and parent conference.

It is equally important that information from classes reach the conferences.

Personal matters that become known from the work within the conferences have to stay confidential according to § 75 Abs. 8 BbgSchulG vertraulich bleiben. The class conference for example debate over discipline problems of individual students. It is highly important to treat the matter with the utmost discretion. The chair should instruct the entire class conference and have it confirmed by the signature of even the advisory members.

Who doesn't abide the rule can be voted out of his or her office with two thirds of the member's votes.

In the following table you find the by law required frequency of meetings for particular boards. If you like of course you can meet more often.

The teacher conference meets according to experience once a month, class conferences meet at least twice a year as so-called report card conferences or if there is a special need for meeting.

The school conference meets usually every two months.

Committee Number of meetings within a school year

Legal rules (BbgSchulG)

Parent meetings at least 3 § 81 Abs. 5

Parent conferences at least 3 § 82 Abs. 5

„Class meeting“ at least 1 hour per school month § 83 Abs. 2

Meetings of all class monitors on primary level at least 2 § 83 Abs. 3

Student board meetings at least 3 § 84 Abs. 5

Class and grade conferences if §§ 88, 89

Teachers conferences usually 6 § 85 Abs. 1

Symposia at least 2 § 87 Abs. 2

## School conference on demand

### b) Rules of procedures:

Sessions of the panels are usually private (non-public) (§ 76 Abs. 1 BbgSchulG). However, guests experts can join the sessions if the panel agrees by majority vote. The panels discuss the agenda, which usually refers to the panel itself. In order to foster an open discussion and argumentation the sessions are held private. An exception is the School conference, which usually meets for public sessions in order to promote transparency of this most important panel of the school. It is recommended that parents, students and teachers use their right as guests in other panels more frequently. To this end public announcements of meetings are useful. The right to speak can be given to guests and experts for special issues on the agenda. The panels meet following § 76 Abs. 2 BbgSchulG by invitation of their chairs. If the chair is inactive a group representing a fifth of the members of a panel can initiate a meeting for a special issue. All school panels can be invited by the head of the school by issuing an agenda or request a statement of e.g. the Parent conference or Student conference within a meaningful deadline. The regulations in BbgSchulG §76 define the necessity for a written protocol. If each member receives a copy or only one copy is accessible for the members has to be defines by each panel separately. Each panel can formulate its own bylaws based on the School Act (for an example see enclosing 7).

### c) Ballots and rulings:

All members of a panel are entitled to vote ( § 77 Abs. 1 BbgSchulG). Deputy members are only entitled to vote if the nominal representative is absent or timid. Consulting members cannot vote but have the right to speak at the sessions (e.g. parents and students during Class conference). Majority decisions are needed for resolutions. Majority means the majority of votes that have been turned in. Tie means rejection of the proposal, abstentions are not counted.

The following information should be contained in the protocol:

2. name of the meeting
3. declaration of constitution and quorum,
4. protocol control,
5. place, begin, end of the session,
6. attendance: attendance list should be included,
7. relevant topics and arguments of the session along the agenda,
8. proposals and decisions (literally),
9. statements that have been stated “for protocol”,
10. signatures of the chair, secretary.

An example for parents: Suppose the Parent conference intends to decide about some regulations for the rules of the house. 42 of 50 members (entitled to vote) are present, 23 vote in favor. The proposal is accepted. In order to declare quorum a certain number of members (entitled to vote) have to attend the session (§ 77 Abs. 3 BbgSchulG):

Quorum for panels of parents and students: The necessary quorum depends on the actual number of members, e.g. in the Parents conference the total number of possible votes (two votes per student). If the attendance is insufficient the invitation has to be renewed with the note that the agenda has been accepted without quorum. Minimum attendance for this process is three members.

Quorum per panel:

- Parent class conference: more than a third of all possible votes (siehe S. 15, § 77 (3) sowie § 81 (4))
- Parent conference: more than a third of all members with votes
- Class conference: more than a third of all members with votes
- Student conference: more than a third of all members with votes
- School conference: more than half of all members with votes

For you: Attention! Even if no students attend the School conference it might have quorum! Hence you have to make sure that the student representatives attend its sessions.

## 2.2. Role of elected parent representatives

### 2.2.1. Class parent representatives

The Parent class conference is intended to provide information about school issues and to provide a forum for discussion regarding school work and related topics. The Class parent representative has to

- advocate the interests of the parents against the teachers,
- attend the Parent conference and the Class conference,
- organize, prepare and chair the Parent class conference,
- be informed about parents' rights in school involvement (see also Skill enhancement...).

Topics for the Class parent conference can be compiled from issues which are important to most of the parents

such as current problems in class, learning environment, homework issues, missing lessons due to absence of teachers, teacher shifts, project days, excursions etc. Hence it is important that the parents of the class and the Class parent representative foster a trustworthy cooperation. The class teacher invites the Class parents conference in consultation with the Class parent representative. A good communication between both ensures the necessary flow of information to organize an effective Class parent conference. It can happen that the Class parent representative appear inactive after their election. In this case the class teacher can inform the parents by calling for a Class parents conference. The Class parents representatives should be active and confident when organizing the sessions without relying on the class teacher. Experienced representatives can provide helpful information for beginners. Checklist for the preparation and the wrap-up of the Class parents conference:

- invitation in understanding (date, time) with the class teacher by the Class parents representative,
- preliminary agenda, do not gather too many topics to assure thorough discussion (maximum of 2 hours for one session!),
- focus on main topic,
- prepare attendance list (e.g. names of parents), use caution with private data!
- write invitation and distribute via class teacher in school (see enclosing 4) at latest 14 days before session,
- day of session: prepare room e.g. arrangement of seats, tables for protocol, checklist
- assign chair and protocol duties for the session,
- pass list of attendance, check quorum,
- welcome parents and guests,
- vote on agenda,
- vote on protocol of last session which has been sent to the parents,
- stay objective and focused on the topic,
- call for short and condensed statements of members.
- summary of the results and if applicable formulations of decisions (c.f. enclosing 6)
- arrangement of the next meeting including its focus

### 2.2.2 School parent representative

The group of all parent representatives of the classes constitute the parent conference. It is suggested that the deputy representatives are invited to the parent conference as well in order to assure that they are informed about the decisions and information discussed at the parents conference sessions. However, the deputy representatives are only entitled to vote if the nominal representative is absent or is personally affected by the issued voted on. The Parent conference has to represent the interests w.r.t. school issues of all parents. The duties of the School parent representative include

- to advocate the interests of all parents in discussion with teachers and principals of the school,
- to be present during school meetings even if the representative is not officially member of the committee,
- to participate in meetings regarding school issues of all kind, e.g. teachers' conference, town conference on relevant topics,
- forwarding of decisions of the Parent conference to the School conference,
- to keep contact with the current student representative,
- to feel responsible for encouraging parental engagement,
- the preparation and moderation of the Parent conference.

Checklist for the wrap-up of the Parent conference:

- write protocol (c.f. 2.1.b and enclosing 5),
- publish protocol: distribute copies via students or provide copy to parent representatives for inspection through parents

For the mentioned reasons it is important to choose a person that is

- interested in holding this position,
- able to advocate the parents' views in an objective and convincing way,
- educated in relevant areas of the legal regulations especially regarding the rights of parental involvement or willing to acquire such knowledge (i.e. by workshops),
- capable to prepare and moderate the Parent conference,
- willing to invest spare time for this position.

It is of special importance that the meetings of the Parent conference are well prepared to ensure that the chosen topics are interesting for the parent representatives and helpful with respect to the engagement of parents (e.g.

information regarding organization of classes, school development plans, general syllabus, evaluation). The Parent conference should offer parents the chance to formulate their problems with the school. It is recommended that one meeting per school year is used as workshop for the Class parent representatives. The invitations for the Parent conference have to be sent timely in order to ensure good attendance. In rural areas car pooling should be organized to allow students to participate. A positive cooperation with the school board and the principal is essential for a significant influence of the parent body in school issues.

## 2.3. Responsibilities of the student's representatives

### 2.3.1 Tasks of head girl or boy

The Head girl or boys and representatives represent you as a class in all questions of the school concerning you. They are active members of the Student conference and they communicate recent issues in class for discussion. These discussions are part of a process leading to the decisions of the Student conference by the Head girl or boys and representatives. Further, they advocate the class' point of view and interests in discussions with the head of the school or the teachers. They are entitled as consulting members of the Parent conference and the Class conference (c.f. 2.4. b). Finally they organize your monthly class discussion, which is held after clearance with your form teacher once a month for a minimum of one period. During the class discussion the class

- discusses relevant school issues,
- attempts to solve problems within the class,
- prepares class projects.

The class has the right to formulate petitions, which are presented by the Head girl or boys or representative at the Student conference.

Tip: The class discussion should be chaired by one of the Head girl or boys or representatives. However, rotation is of course possible. The topics should be announced at least one day ahead and it has proven to be helpful for discussion when the chairs are aligned in a circle. The chair of the session is also responsible to make sure that results are formulated at the end of the session. For later reference and discussion the session should be documented in form of a protocol. Experienced Class representatives can share their experience – just ask them!

### 2.3.2. Student conference

“The Student conference represents the interests of all students in school, participates in the fulfillment of the educational goals of the school as well the promotion of engagement and responsibility among students.” (§ 84 Abs.3 BbgSchulG)

All head girl or boys / representatives constitute the Student conference. The Student conference offers a forum for possibilities, problems, fears, hopes, and wishes of all classes to be discussed. On the other hand this is the place where new regulations and relevant issues are communicated to the classes. Further, the Student conference formulates petitions, which are presented at the School conference by the representative of the student body.

The chair of the meeting has to ensure that the agenda of the session is announced openly (e.g. by writing the agenda on the black board). General rules like an agreement on a speakers list or on simple rules that everybody has a certain amount of time to speak facilitate the work-flow during a session.

Tip: In order to keep your Conference representative updated it is recommended that visits workshops at least once a year (c.f. ).

Method of operation:

a) Constitution: At the beginning of each election period (e.g. beginning of the school year) the class elects two representatives and two deputies. The representatives of all classes and tutor groups form the Student conference. The Class representatives are dismissed from class for the duration conference. For later reference an attendance list has to be maintained by the chair of the Student conference (c.f. enclosing 3.2). In addition to the Class representatives two representatives of the parents and two representatives of the teachers follow the session. If the student body agrees representatives of the head of the school can join as well. However, only the Class representatives are entitled to vote. Even the so called liaison teacher are only allowed to consult the Student conference is asked to.

b) Dates:

The Student conference sessions are usually held during period. Hence the date and the time are set in an agreement with the principal. In order to ensure proper attendance an announcement in form of an invitation has to be made public in advance (e.g. on a public black board). The representatives of the parents, teachers and if applicable the head of the school are invited by letter.

Tip: It is recommended that the deputy representatives join the Student conference if the teachers agree on dismissing them (there is only a right for dismissal if the nominal representative is absent). However, in order to prepare it is highly recommended that the attendance of both is common.

#### c) Agenda/petitions:

A preliminary agenda should be assembled together with the deputy representatives and interested Student representatives consisting of points that might have been taken from other panels (e.g. about the rules of the house, frequency of tests, principals of homework etc.). Based on the agenda the Student conference should discuss possible petitions for the School conference. Votes are held over proposed petitions. One focus of the agenda should lie on concerns and wishes of singular students or classes e.g. notes about grievances or problems with teachers etc. Principally, all proposals have to be added to the agenda. Independent from additional proposals the following items are irremovable:

- vote on the resolution of the agenda,
- protocol of the last session,
- reports from the panels,
- miscellaneous.

At the beginning of each session a vote is held about the final agenda. The agenda is open for urgent addition of items until this very moment. However, this should be only used in urgent cases as no preparation time is left for the late added items.

Tip: If the preliminary agenda is known in beforehand it is possible to discuss about its items and possible additions in class. Hence, the preparation of the session can be extended and petitions can be discussed. It is recommended that proposals are presented in written form at the beginning of the session. If possible, proposals of classes should be added to the preliminary agenda when published. Votes should not be held without thorough discussion of the subject including pros and cons. Attention must be given to give all students the possibility to articulate their opinions.

#### d) Chairing the session / protocol:

Generally the student representative chairs the session. However, if the Student representative participates in the discussion the deputy should temporarily take over the chair. For later reference a written protocol is a must (c.f. 2.1.b and enclosing 5).

Tip: Usually a speakers list is useful: Students signal that they want to state an argument and are added to the list chronologically.

## 2.4. Parents and students as consulting members of the Class conference, Symposia and Teachers conference

#### a) Preface

Parents and students send two representatives each to the aforementioned conferences. They have the right to attend as consulting members but there is no obligation for attendance. However, in order to promote transparency of the different conferences and panels regular attendance should be the goal. In order to be able to attend the representatives have to be invited in beforehand. §76 Abs. 2 BbgSchulG rules that all sessions have to be organized in a fashion that allow all members of the panel to participate regularly. Especially employed parents had been excluded from attending e.g. Class conferences in the past. The new regulation calls for compromises which will be enforced by the head of the school if needed. At this point only a short explanation

of the mechanisms of the conferences is given, for details pls. refer to the BbgSchulG.

b) Class conference

The Class conference is the central panel for all question regarding the educational aspects in class e.g. transfer of students, certificates, diplomas (§ 88 BbgSchulG). The students send the Head girl or boys and the parents the Class parent representative as consulting members to the Class conference. In case of the conference dealing with the school year's certificates and grades the student representatives are excluded from the session. The consulting members have the right to discuss during the sessions but are excluded from votes. However, due to their participation in the discussion they can influence the panel's decisions. Due to the fact that discussion might concern issues of single students all members of the conference have the obligation of secrecy about everything that is said during a session.

The State parent council published a leaflet with information about the Class conference. It can be obtained from the council bureau of the MBSJ or via its website [www.landeselternrat-brandenburg.de](http://www.landeselternrat-brandenburg.de).

c) Symposia:

All teachers of each subject are members of the Symposia. The number and frequency of these subject conferences depend on the size and the profile of the school. The members of the symposia discuss about the admission of selected text books, the selection of other learning aids and materials based on the available funds, as well as the current development and evaluation of the students' level in this field. Due to the high impact of such discussions it is important to include parents and students e.g. when introducing evaluation mechanisms for teaching methods.

d) Teachers Conference:

The Teachers conference consists of all teachers that teach for at least 6 hours per week and other pedagogical staff. The principal chairs the conference. Decisions of the conference concern the following topics: educational principles, standards for evaluation and observation of the learning development, coordination of admitted learn materials (c.f. §85 BbgSchulG). It is recommended that the School parent representative and the Student representative attend the sessions.

## 2.5. The School conference

### 2.5.1. Functions

a) Members:

All elected representatives of the School conference are entitled to vote, each member has one vote.

For elementary schools: Students of the grades 4-6 are consulting members of the School conference.

All schools: The non-pedagogical staff should have a consulting member in order to promote a constructive dialog in the School conference based on their experience.

Schools with partners in after-school programs: The School conference can admit two further representatives of cooperation partners (§ 90 Abs. 1 BbgSchulG). These representatives are meant to improve the cooperation of schools and partners (e.g. sport clubs).

Schools with a ration of 10%-50% students from foreign countries: The School conference should include further one representative of the foreign parents and one foreign student.

b) Guests and experts:

All sessions of the School conference are school public. The responsible body for the school has to be invited to the School conference (§ 75 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG). Its representative is a permanent guest of the conference and is entitled to participate in the discussion. Other guests might participate if the conference decides in favor by majority vote. The School conference can consult experts on special topics. Again, a majority decision is needed to do so. Further, the School conference can extend the group of members beyond the in a) outlined group for a limited period of time e.g. for a certain number of experts.

c) Executive board:

The principal is the executive director of the School conference. Hence, the administrative responsibilities e.g. distribution of invitations and protocols lie in the principal's duties, as well as forwarding proposals, decisions, statements of the School conference to the addressee. The chair of the School conference officially invites the members to the sessions. Thus, a thorough communication between the chair of the School conference and the

principal as its executive branch is necessary.

d) Members of the School conference at the Teachers conference:

“Members of the School conference can participate as consulting members at the Teachers conference in compliance with the participation rules in §91 Abs.2 BbgSchulG.” (§90 Abs. 7 BbgSchulG). In 2.5.2.c) all decisions are given which can only be made by members of the Teachers conference. The right of members of the School conference to participate in such meetings of the Teachers conference is meant to ensure the intentions of the majority of the School conference are represented.

e) Objection / Implementation:

The principal has to check the decisions of the School conference with respect to regulations e.g. given by the responsible body for the school or by law. Objections have to be stated immediately if violation of such regulation is expected. Objections have postponing character and must be explained. If the School conference refrains from changes the the School authority decides about the decision of the School conference.

The head of the school implements the School conference's decisions. Since for a lot of decisions, e.g. a school party, cooperation between all panels is needed, thorough communication and cooperation is key to success.

## 2.5.2. Tasks

a) Preface

The School conference discusses and decides about important school issues. Further, the School conference acts as a mediator if disputes occur. The term principals means in the following, that the School conference sets the general terms which have to be specified in detail by the relevant panels. The relevant regulation (§ 91 BbgSchulG) classifies three decision levels: Paragraph 1 (b) defines decision rights, Paragraph 2 (c ) defines decisions depending on a majority of teachers in favor and Paragraph 3 (d) defines proposal and discussion rights. In the following a concrete example is used to illustrate the different decision levels:

(b) Decision level 1: School conference

The School conference is the only decider on the following topics:

- rules of the house, break regulations, principal rules for the room organisation: e.g. which grades use which rooms; the School conference also determines the rules of the house or the regulations for the breaks (that is when breaks are given and where students can spend them; if you want to change something in this field you have to address the School conference.).
- Exceptions from the 5-day school week, begin of classes, elective holidays: It happens that parents complain about badly adjusted times for the beginning or end of lessons with respect to schedules of public transport. The School conference can adjust these times within the legal frame. Further, the three elective holidays can be freely assigned (however: the responsible body of the school has to agree (e.g. city / district), in case of no agreement decides the School authority (§ 90 Abs. 1 Satz 3 BbgSchulG)).
- principals for the work of student groups: The School conference grants student groups access to rooms and facilities for after-school activities. The principal can only deny the access for significant educational reasons (e.g. conflicts with school interests).
- distribution of funds which the school can dispose freely: The School conference decides about the effective use of the available funding for teaching material. It is useful to prepare proposals for teaching materials etc. within the symposia of the individual subjects.
- principal guideline for the amount and the division of homework: The School conference might define when and in what extent home work is assigned. However, the current regulations concerning the administration and evaluation of education have to be obeyed.
- basic principals for the cooperation with other schools and exterior organizations: Each school can define its own principals for cooperations with sport clubs, music schools, churches, other educational public organizations etc.
- agreement on school-cooperations.

(c) decision level 2: School conference with majority of teacher representatives in favor  
Teachers

d) decision level 3

Decision maker: School conference with majority of the  
Teachers

- summary of the results and if applicable formulations of decisions (c.f. enclosing 6)
- arrangement of the next meeting including its focus

### 3. Further possibilities of involvement of parents and students

The group of all parent representatives of the classes constitutes the parent conference. It is suggested that the deputy representatives are invited to the parent conference as well in order to assure that they are informed about the decisions and information discussed at the parents conference sessions. However, the deputy representatives are only entitled to vote if the nominal representative is absent or is personally affected by the issues voted on. The Parent conference has to represent the interests w.r.t. school issues of all parents. The duties of the School parent representative include

- to advocate the interests of all parents in discussion with teachers and principals of the school,
- to be present during school meetings even if the representative is not officially member of the committee,
- to participate in meetings regarding school issues of all kind, e.g. teachers' conference, town conference on relevant topics,
- forwarding of decisions of the Parent conference to the School conference,
- to keep contact with the current student representative,
- to feel responsible for encouraging parental engagement,
- the preparation and moderation of the Parent conference.

Checklist for the wrap-up of the Parent conference:

- write protocol (c.f. 2.1.b and enclosing 5),
- publish protocol: distribute copies via students or provide copy to parent representatives for inspection through parents

For the mentioned reasons it is important to choose a person that is

- interested in holding this position,
- able to advocate the parents' views in an objective and convincing way,
- educated in relevant areas of the legal regulations especially regarding the rights of parental involvement or willing to acquire such knowledge (i.e. by workshops),
- capable to prepare and moderate the Parent conference,
- willing to invest spare time for this position.

It is of special importance that the meetings of the Parent conference are well prepared to ensure that the chosen topics are interesting for the parent representatives and helpful with respect to the engagement of parents (e.g. information regarding organization of classes, school development plans, general syllabus, evaluation). The Parent conference should offer parents the chance to formulate their problems with the school. It is recommended that one meeting per school year is used as workshop for the Class parent representatives. The invitations for the Parent conference have to be sent timely in order to ensure good attendance. In rural areas car pooling should be organized to allow students to participate. A positive cooperation with the school board and the principal is essential for a significant influence of the parent body in school issues.

### 3. Further possibilities for involvement of parents and students

#### 3.1. School program

The school program defines its pedagogical goals following §7 Abs. 2 BbgSchulG in the School program. The school program is meant to foster the quality of the ongoing school activities. These goals have to be re-evaluated regularly within given intervals (internal evaluation) in order to detect weaknesses or reflect changes in the boundary conditions. Support is offered for the internal evaluation e.g. by the federal school office (department „Beratungssystem Schule“ (BUSS)). Some schools consult external experts regarding the installation of feedback process in the communication between teachers, head of the school, student body and parents. An important result of such feedback structures can be the compilation of a parent-cooperation-database which contains information regarding current involvements of parents and which opportunities are present. The continuous development of the school program can only be achieved by involving all participating groups including parents and students. To this end it has to be specified in which way parents and students can contribute. Students are especially appealed to get involved in projects regarding the improvement of the general

climate in school (e.g. solutions of conflicts, voluntary work after school). In addition to this such project create a bonding between students, parents and the school. The responsible panels should initiate, support and accompany such projects. The School conference decides with a majority of the teachers' representatives about the school program § 91 Abs. 2 BbgSchulG.

The school authorities support the schools in the development of the School program (§ 129 Abs. 4 BbgSchulG). For additional information please visit [www.bildung-brandenburg.de](http://www.bildung-brandenburg.de). The ministry of education, youth and sport published in the series „Schulforschung in Brandenburg“ no. 4 „Schulprogramme Brandenburg“ a newsletter regarding School program development in Brandenburg.

### 3.2. School visitations

The School visitation has been introduced with the goal to continuously improve the quality of the schools in Brandenburg. The framework „Qualitätsrahmen Schulqualität in Brandenburg“ (“quality framework school quality Brandenburg”) offers guidance for schools (§ 129 Abs. 3, § 7 Abs. 2 BbgSchulG). Since the school year of 2005/2006 schools are visited regularly (e.g. in 5 year intervals) by external visitors. To this end information about the visited school are gathered and observation of lessons are performed. Especially the following issues are evaluated:

- social climate of a school and in class,
- constitution of the school as habitat,
- involvement of students and parents,
- cooperation with social partners.

In the field “goals and strategy of the quality development” the School program plays an important role. By interviewing parents and students the visitors gather information about how students and parents shape the school and the learning environment including the relevant school panels. The visitors compile a report (including a statement of the school) which is presented to the school, the responsible body and the school authority. Further, recommendations for the further development of the school are formulated. The report should be thoroughly discussed by all participants. Weaknesses have to be discussed in the relevant school panels in order to find a way to improve the current state. For further information please refer to the flyer of the MBSJ “Schulvisitationen” (“School visitations”), the leaflet “Orientierungsrahmen Schulqualität in Brandenburg – Handbuch zur Schulvisitation” (“frame of orientation School quality Brandenburg – manual for School visitation) or visit [www.isq-bb.de](http://www.isq-bb.de) (pages of the institute for school quality of the states Berlin and Brandenburg). The topic School visitations can also be added to the agenda of school participation seminars of the LISUM if desired.

## 4. Skill enhancement for parents and student representatives

The School Act of Brandenburg defines extensive rights for parents and students participation in school organization. However, experience shows that in most cases parents and students are not aware of these rights and the relevant regulations. This leads to a lack in exertation of these rights. Hence an initiative of the State parents panels and the State student board offers information to enhance the knowledge and skills regarding their rights for parents and students in cooperation with the State institute for school and media Berlin-Brandenburg (LISUM) . The LISUM offers workshops/seminars for students, parents and teacher representatives which brings interested of all groups to a discussion about problems and goals. Each workshop is aligned with the experience level (beginner/advanced) of the participants. Additionally workshops can be offered for Parent conferences or Student conferences. At the beginning of each school year the LISUM distributes leaflets in all schools to inform about dates and contact persons for seminars and workshops. In case of interest please contact the representative of LISUM for your district. Seminar instructors are also open for discussion of the own seminar for your school. If no leaflet is available at school please ask inquire with the head of your school. However, all necessary information can be accessed via [www.lisum.brandenburg.de/mitwirkung\\_quali.html](http://www.lisum.brandenburg.de/mitwirkung_quali.html) . For futher

information please contact Ms Böttger at LISUM:

LISUM

Ms Gudrun Böttger

Referentin für Mitwirkung

14974 Ludwigsfelde/ Struveshof

Telefon: 03378/20 94 12

Fax: 03378/20 94 44

E-mail: [gudrun.boettger@lisum.brandenburg.de](mailto:gudrun.boettger@lisum.brandenburg.de)

## 5. Contacts for assistance

School authorities, federal education authority and the ministry of education, youth and sport (MBS) are contacts for assistance. Within the federal education authority school inspectors are responsible for the cooperation with parents and students.

District counselors are also available for information. The addresses can be acquired from the federal school authority or members of the district school council.

You can find the district executive for parents and students and the federal state school board at the following address:

Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport

Gremiengeschäftsstelle

Heinrich Mann Allee 107

14473 Potsdam

Phone: 0331/866-35 08

Fax: 0331/866-37 88

Ms Silvana Hilliger

Consultant board agency / office of the ministry

Email: [silvana.hilliger@mbjs.brandenburg.de](mailto:silvana.hilliger@mbjs.brandenburg.de)

Further information are available at the homepage of the district council and the federal state school board.

The district executive for schools is accessible under the following homepage:

[www.lsr-brb.de](http://www.lsr-brb.de), the district executive for parents under: [www.landeselternrat-brandenburg.de](http://www.landeselternrat-brandenburg.de).

Information on the federal state school board is available from: <http://www.bildung-brandenburg.de/lsb.html>

The homepage of the ministry for education, youth and sport is:

<http://www.mbjs.brandenburg.de>

69

## 6. Appendix

### Appendix 1 – election minutes

Electoral office: \_\_\_\_\_

In \_\_\_\_\_

Election board school location

Date of election

Date: \_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_ start: \_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_ end : \_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_

Election board

Election supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Name

Assessor 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Name

Assessor 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Name

open election  secret election

Votes: \_\_\_\_\_  
Valid votes : \_\_\_\_\_  
Invalid vote : \_\_\_\_\_  
Abstention : \_\_\_\_\_

Result run-off ballot: \_\_\_\_\_

Name

O equality of votes

Result lottery: \_\_\_\_\_

Name

Acceptance of Election: O yes O no

Signature election board

\_\_\_\_\_

election supervisor assessor 1 assessor 2

(minute taker)

Attachment to election minutes

Attendance list

Ballot papers

Name Number of votes

## Appendix 2 – Ballot papers

72 6. Appendix 3

## Appendix 3 – Sample attendance list from the example of a parent meeting and a student board meeting

Example 3.1. – Attendance list

Parent meeting class 8/1 of the Friedrich-Ebert-Oberschule

2. Session January 9, 2007, 07.00 p.m. - 9.15 p.m.

Example 3.2. – Attendance list

Student board meeting of the Friedrich-Ebert-Oberschule

Session May 8, 2007, 8.00 a.m. - 9.30 a.m.

6. appendix 73

Student „Mother“ „Father“

Kerstin Ahorn U. Ahorn K. Ahorn

Sebastian Funke J. Funke N. Funke

Silvia Lange K. Lange \_\_\_\_\_

U. Lorenz \_\_\_\_\_ H. Lorenz

Christian Müller \_\_\_\_\_

Silke Richter K. Knuth B. Richter

a.s.o.

Class head girl or boy

Deputy other offices signature(s)

7/1 Uwe Müller Katrin Seghers Uwe Müller

Marei Schulz Peter Walter KSR Marei Schulz Peter Walter

7/2

Rene Rogland Sebastian Löwe Schuko Sebastian Löwe

Nicole Niele Silke Urban FaKo

De

Fako

Ma Nicole Niele Silke Urban

7/3 Anna Karenin Hugo Bollmann Hugo Bollmann

Marion Fachini Stefanie Wöhler Schuko Stefanie Wöhler

8/1

Anja Kamm Steffi Zucker Schuko Anja Kamm

Christine Bruch Thomas Möller Fako

Bio

Christine Bruch

ThomasMöller

.....

## Appendix 4 – Sample of an invitation to a parent meeting

74 6. Appendix

Heike Lorenz Luckenwalde, 03.01.2007

Jens Funke

Class parent representatives of the class 8/1

# Invitation

You are cordially invited to the parent meeting of the class 9/1 of the Friedrich-Gymnasium, Parkstrasse 6 in Luckenwalde on Monday, 03.12.2007 at 07.00 p.m. in class room of class 9/1 (room no. 215)

#### Agenda

1. Report on parent work of the past school year (Frau Lorenz)
2. missing lounge for "school bus kids"
3. planning of the next parent meeting
4. Miscellaneous

In case you have amendments to the agenda, don't hesitate to contact me:

0123/4 56 78 90.

Kind regards,

Jens Funke

#### Appendix 5 – sample minutes

6. Appendix 75

Minutes to the parent meeting of the class 8/1 of the Friedrich-Schiller-Gesamtschule

Location: classroom 8/1 date: 05.08.2007

Start: 07.00 p.m. end: 09.15 p.m.

Attendee: see attendance list

Guest: class teacher Ms Schulze

#### Agenda

Agenda item 0 decide on agenda

Agenda item 1 checking minutes

Agenda item 2 Analysis of learning results and discipline problems within the class

Agenda item 3 information on VV- performance assessment

Agenda item 4 Preparation of field trip

Agenda item 5 Miscellaneous

Mr. Funke opens the meeting, welcomes all attendees and acknowledges quorum.

He disclosed the agenda. There are no amendments.

Agenda item 0 the agenda is agreed on unanimously.

Agenda item 1 there are no amendments to the minutes.

Agenda item 2 Mr. Schmidt admits the floor Ms Schulze. Ms Schulze evaluates the learning results of the class of the first school term. She notes that many students improved their performance and are capable of entering the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She asks the parents to carefully look out for the oral homework of their children.

After a short discussion the parents agree to urge their children with more emphasis.

Regarding the discipline problems of individual students parent talks were initialized.

That lead to more punctuality and discipline within the class.

Agenda item 3 Ms Schulze informs about the VV- performance assessment that came into affect at the beginning of the new school year. She addresses in particular inquires of parents on the subject sport. The grading is also influenced by motivation, social behavior and learning progress depending on the physical and mental development of the student.

Agenda item 4 the field trip is well prepared. Mr. Meyer and Ms Müller accompany the trip as custodians on June 8. 2007. A special thanks to both parents.

Agenda item 5 Ms Schulze informs that parents have the option to register for parent meetings with subject teachers.

Since this is the last parent meeting in this school year Mr. Funke gives thanks to the parents for their support and hopes for another year of active and engaged cooperation.

Luckenwalde, 05.10.2007

Heike Lorenz Jens Funke

Parent representative (minute taker) parent representative (session supervisor)

76 6. Appendix

#### Appendix 6 – Sample for a resolution intended to be forwarded to the parent conference.

The parent representative forwards the resolution to the school parent representative for discussion at the next parent conference.

Petition of the class 8/1 to

The parent conference of the Friedrich-Ebert-Oberschule

The parent conference may enact that the students arriving at school by bus get a lounge.

Reason: As we found out from Ms Schulze and our children the present lounge isn't sufficient for an undisturbed stay.

We think it is important to have a second room for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, so that the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade have the other room to them.

The parent representatives of the class 8/1

## Appendix 7 – Sample bylaws

### Bylaws of the parent conference of ...-School, from ...

#### 1 - Convocation

The representative of the parent conference or his deputy invites to the parent conference (see attachment for agenda)

The invitation is to be handed or disclosed by the members and their deputies ten days before the meeting at the latest.

The representative has to call in the parent conference immediately if at least a fifth of the members with a right to vote demand for it.

The petition has to attach a proposal of the agenda by taking into account the invitation period.

The dates are set to the convenience of the employed members in order to ensure their attendance.

#### 2 – right to participate

The meetings are generally not public. Experts and guests can be invited if the majority of present members agrees.

Guests and experts shall be entitled to speak when chartered by the members. With invitation to the meetings the school board may participate.

Consulting members of the parent conference are entitled to speak on all agenda items.

#### 3 - Agenda

The speaker proposes the Agenda. The proposal shall include all agenda items that were filed by the members. At the beginning of the meeting the parent conference decides in the final agenda. Amendments may be added if the majority agrees.

#### 4 – The meeting

The representative or his or her deputy is supervising the meeting.

He or she notes at the beginning of the meeting if the session is called in orderly.

A discussion on the individual agenda items takes place.

The floor is admitted in order of the requests to speak.

The supervisor of the meeting may be included to the discussion as much as any other member.

The supervisor of the meeting is authorized to briefly deliver explanations in order to shorten the discussion.

The floor is admitted immediately regarding the bylaws if not already admitted to other members or a vote had been held. Only one speaker may be admitted to argue against or on behalf of the petition.

The admission to the floor may be restricted by decree.

The supervisor of the meeting is authorized to deprive the floor after admonishing the speaker twice.

They may not be admitted to the same agenda item again.

On request the school board is admitted to the floor.

#### 5 – Voting und resolutions

All members of the parent conference have the right to vote. The deputies have the right to vote if the full member is not present. The parent conference is quorate if more than a third of the members with a right to vote are present.

The supervision of the meeting has to check the quorum.

In case the board isn't quorate the parent conference is called in again on the same agenda item.

If adverted in the invitation and at least three members with the right to vote are present the conference is quorate.

Ballots are open. On the request of a fifth of members with a right to vote the ballot is secret.

After the ballot the result is announced.

#### 6 - Transcript

Minutes are to be made. The meeting supervisor appoints a minute taker. The minutes shall include information on the day and the location of the meeting, an attendance list, if applicable with ascertainment of quorum, the

concerned subject, and the requested petitions as much as resolutions with corresponding results.  
They ought to be signed by the minute taker.  
The minority vote is to noted on demand.

7 – Coming into effect

this bylaw is agreed on by the parent conference at the..... and is coming into effect with the quorum.

Ministry for education, youth and sport of the federal state of Brandenburg

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Geschäftsstelle für die schulischen Mitwirkungsgremien  
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14473 Potsdam  
Phone: 0331/866 35 08  
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