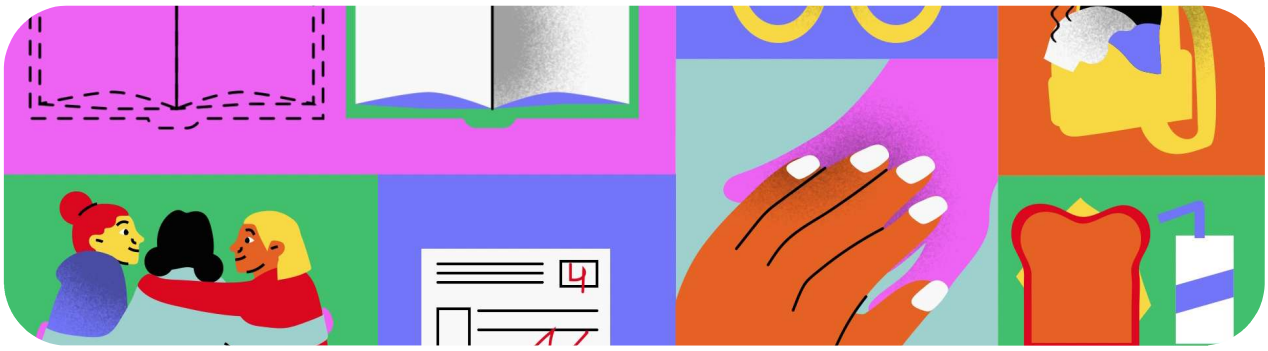
FINAL REPORT · JULY 2026

EVALUATION OF SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES 2024–2025

Lessons from three MBO school assemblies at Firda, Cibap and the HBA



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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION 3

Structure of the report 4

2 METHODOLOGY AND ACCOUNTABILITY 5

2.1 Research from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences 5

2.2 Research from Bureau Burgerberaad 6

2.3 Quality assurance 6

3 PREPARATION AND DESIGN 7

3.1 The central question at each school 7

3.2 Mandate and expectations 8

3.3 Selection by lot and representation 8

3.4 Communication and school involvement 9

3.5 Participation and preconditions 10

4 IMPLEMENTATION 11

4.1 Process facilitation 11

4.2 Discussion facilitation and group dynamics 11

4.3 Information provision and experts 12

4.4 Deliberation and collaboration 13

4.5 Methods, materials and scheduling 14

5 PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE AND DEMOCRATIC LEARNING 15

6 FOLLOW-UP 16

6.1 Quality of the recommendations 16

6.2 Implementation of the recommendations 17

6.3 Communication and impact 18

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 19

7.1 Key insights 19

7.2 Success factors 20

7.3 Areas for improvement 21

7.4 Recommendations for future school assemblies 22

7.5 Input for the further development of the school assembly 22

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This final report examines the process, the impact and the main success factors of three school assemblies held in the 2024/2025 school year at Firda, Cibap and the HBA.

In a school assembly, pupils, students and sometimes staff are selected by lot, so that the group reflects the school as a whole. Participants discuss an issue that matters at the school and develop solutions with broad support.

The three school assemblies took place in different educational settings. Firda is a large regional training centre (ROC) in Friesland and Flevoland. Cibap and the Herman Brood Academie are small creative vocational schools. The participant groups also differed:

- At Firda, both students and staff took part in the assembly.
- At Cibap, only first-year students took part.
- At the Herman Brood Academie, students from all years except the final year took part.

The schools also differed in size, in the number of participants selected by lot and in how the selection by lot was organised.

The table below gives an overview of the main features of the school assemblies:

SCHOOL	TYPE OF SCHOOL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PARTICIPANT GROUP	SELECTION CRITERIA
Firda	Large regional training centre	24,000	Students and staff	Every college represented, student-to-teacher ratio (5:1), all levels represented
Cibap	Small creative vocational school	1,750	First-years only (500 students in total)	2 students from each class, and place of residence
HBA	Small creative vocational school	455	Students from all years except final-years	2 students from each class, all programmes

The evaluation focuses on two parts:

- The effect of the school assembly on participants, studied by the Citizenship Education research group (lectoraat) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA).
- The success factors and areas for improvement of the school assemblies, studied by Bureau Burgerberaad.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

We begin with a brief explanation of the research methods and how the research was carried out. We then discuss the findings according to the phases of the school assembly: preparation, implementation and follow-up. Participant experience is not a separate phase of the process, but we cover it in the Implementation chapter. In each chapter we bring together the findings of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA) and Bureau Burgerberaad.

We close with a conclusion and concrete recommendations for the further development of school assemblies.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

This research used quantitative and qualitative research methods, supplemented by document analysis.

2.1 RESEARCH FROM THE AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

The Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences studied the effect of the school assemblies on participants at Firda and Cibap. Before and after the assembly, students completed a questionnaire on citizenship competences. These included active listening, empathy, assertiveness and collaboration. At Firda, a control group also took part in the study.

The HvA also asked participants how they had experienced the school assembly. Because of school logistics, the HvA was unable to carry out qualitative follow-up research, such as focus groups with participants and non-participants.

2.2 RESEARCH FROM BUREAU BURGERBERAAD

Bureau Burgerberaad studied the process in three ways:

- It used the debriefings with process facilitators and discussion facilitators after each assembly day.
- It held evaluation interviews with participants, discussion facilitators, involved teachers, the schools and the chair of Cibap's Executive Board.
- It analysed written feedback, the school assembly design and the evaluation meeting.

The evaluation interviews with participants are not representative of all participants. Combined with the debriefings of process and discussion facilitators, however, they do give a valuable indication of participants' experiences. The findings in this report are based on this combination of sources.

2.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE

To strengthen the reliability of the findings, the HvA and Bureau Burgerberaad combined different data sources and research methods.



CHAPTER 3

PREPARATION AND DESIGN

3.1 THE CENTRAL QUESTION AT EACH SCHOOL

The relevance and urgency of the central question played an important role in preparing the school assembly. There were clear differences between the three schools.

At Firda, the question about the use of mobile devices tied in directly with a topic that mattered to students and staff. Project leaders described the question as on point, topical and relevant. Participants also recognised the importance of the topic. The question had been prepared in question sessions with citizenship teachers from various colleges, which created engagement within the organisation from an early stage.

At the HBA, too, the question was seen as clear and relevant. The question was how the school could become a place where students also want to be outside of lessons. According to participants, it turned out to be linked to a wider sense of declining cohesion within the school.

At Cibap, things went differently. Discussion and process facilitators often found the question about the "Cibap Flow" abstract and not urgent enough. In their view, not all students immediately understood which problem it referred to. At the same time, the students interviewed said that the question became clearer as the assembly progressed. They did arrive at concrete points for improvement.

3.2 MANDATE AND EXPECTATIONS

All schools agreed in advance that the board would take the school assembly's recommendations seriously, as long as they fell within the agreed framework.

How visible the mandate was differed per school. At Firda, the board played an active role in the run-up to and during the assembly:

- The chair of the Executive Board personally sent the invitation for the selection by lot.
- The chair was present on the first and fourth assembly days.
- On the fifth assembly day, another member of the Executive Board officially received the recommendations.

According to project leaders, this underlined the importance of the assembly and increased its urgency.

The financial framework was not equally concrete everywhere. At the HBA, participants were given a clear budget. At Cibap, proposals had to be financially feasible, but participants said this was hard to translate into concrete proposals.

3.3 SELECTION BY LOT AND REPRESENTATION

At all three schools, the selection by lot produced a diverse group of participants from different programmes, years or school levels, despite the different approaches. Notably, the groups did not consist only of the "usual suspects". Students who would normally be less likely to volunteer, or to be asked for their input, were also represented. The way the selection was carried out differed per school.

At Firda, a two-stage selection by lot was used, so that all colleges and levels were represented. According to project leaders, this approach also made room for students whose level of participation was unclear beforehand. Some of these very participants turned out to be highly engaged during the assembly.

At the HBA, partly because of the school's small size, two students were selected from each class. As a result, all programmes and years were represented.

At Cibap, selection was based on postcodes. Project leaders then made limited adjustments to the selection to take account of students' reliability and study load.

3.4 COMMUNICATION AND SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

The way the schools publicised the assembly varied greatly. All project leaders said that informing the school community took more time than expected.

Firda invested heavily in communication. The assembly stayed visible within the school throughout the process through three means:

- support from the communications department
- a communication plan
- visits to all twelve colleges

At the HBA, the assembly was mainly visible in the run-up. At Cibap, communication focused mainly on students, whereas Firda and the HBA also actively involved teachers. As a result, teachers and staff at Cibap were less well informed, which sometimes led to confusion and practical problems.

3.5 PARTICIPATION AND PRECONDITIONS

All three schools used the same basic design. In it, participants explored the issue, examined different perspectives, developed recommendations and made decisions together.

Dropout rates differed per school. Cibap had the lowest dropout rate, followed by the HBA. At Firda, dropout was higher.

Compensation also differed:

- Cibap offered a financial allowance of €30 per day.
- The HBA offered exemption from parts of the citizenship curriculum.
- Firda offered participation in the elective module "Personal Profiling".

According to participants and project leaders, the financial allowance at Cibap seems to have contributed to the low dropout rate and stable attendance throughout the process.



CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 PROCESS FACILITATION

At all three schools, the school assemblies were experienced as well organised. Flexibility proved to be an important success factor. According to participants and schools, process and discussion facilitators who could respond to the needs of the group helped the process run smoothly.

The role of the project leaders did differ per school. At Firda and the HBA, project leaders were visibly present during the assembly days and actively supported the process. At Firda, they also paid attention to the atmosphere and energy in the group. At Cibap, project leaders were less prominently present. This gave participants more room, but sometimes made the school's perspective less visible in the assembly.

4.2 DISCUSSION FACILITATION AND GROUP DYNAMICS

Discussion facilitators played a central role in creating a safe environment in which participants could talk with each other. Both internal and external facilitation were rated positively. At Firda, using teachers as facilitators increased the school's involvement. At Cibap and the HBA, the independent position of external facilitators was seen as an advantage.

At all schools, strong group cohesion developed during the process. In buddy groups and smaller conversations, trust grew and participants took increasing ownership. Students said that they felt heard and free to share their opinions.

However, participants wanted different things from the discussion facilitators. Some participants found the facilitators too prominent. Others wanted more guidance when conversations stalled or participants disengaged.

4.3 INFORMATION PROVISION AND EXPERTS

Expert sessions were an important part of the assembly days. Participants said these sessions helped them understand the issue better and support their recommendations.

At Firda, being able to help choose the experts contributed to a sense of ownership. Those involved found the experts well prepared and well suited to the questions in the group. At Cibap, too, the conversations with experts were rated positively. Participants asked in-depth questions and actively used the knowledge they gained when developing proposals.

At the same time, the information provided did not always meet participants' needs at Cibap:

- Some experts mainly used the sessions to gather information, while students were looking for answers.
- Participants wanted more contact with school management.
- Participants also wanted experts who could help think through the feasibility of proposals.

Because not all the necessary information was available, some recommendations at Cibap concerned topics that were already part of existing policy. As a result, some recommendations fitted the school's needs less well.

At the HBA, some experts initially caused hesitancy by mainly emphasising what was not possible. At the same time, this motivated participants to develop their ideas further and support them better.

4.4 DELIBERATION AND COLLABORATION

Deep Democracy methods helped participants discuss differences of opinion with each other. In these methods, participants actively seek out different perspectives and minority views are also given room. Many participants initially found it daunting to voice a dissenting opinion. As trust grew, there was more room for critical questions and different perspectives. Students said that they came to understand better why others thought differently, and became more open to other viewpoints as a result.

At Firda, this led to a strong sense of ownership. Participants valued not only the outcomes but also the shared process. The depth of the conversations did vary between schools and between moments in the process.

At the HBA, conversations sometimes lingered on topics where there was already broad agreement, or practical objections took over. At Firda, perspectives clashed more often. This led to more intense conversations and demanded more from the discussion facilitators.

Group composition also played a role. When theme groups were merged, the depth of the conversation sometimes decreased. In addition, participants could not always easily translate shared insights into one or a few recommendations that the whole group supported.

4.5 METHODS, MATERIALS AND SCHEDULING

The variety of methods helped participants take part in different ways. What one person enjoyed worked less well for another. Several methods worked well:

- Buddy groups and check-ins helped participants get to know each other better and contributed to a safe atmosphere.
- Expert sessions helped participants understand the issue better and support their recommendations.
- Deep Democracy methods made different perspectives visible and invited participants to speak their minds. Some exercises were experienced as intense, especially in larger groups.

Creative methods drew mixed reactions. Some discussion facilitators saw that these methods encouraged participation. Participants, however, were not always sure what the methods contributed to formulating recommendations. The values exercise also did not suit everyone. Discussion facilitators noticed that some students found it too abstract. These students found word cards more helpful than the picture cards (Dixit cards). At the HBA, it also turned out that some students found it difficult to associate freely and to look at issues without getting stuck on practical objections.

Scheduling remained a concern at all schools. The first assembly days were often experienced as long and intensive. In the final phase, by contrast, students felt they had little time to develop and support their recommendations. As a result, the step from ideas to concrete recommendations was sometimes taken too quickly. We often see this in citizens' assemblies as well.

CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE AND DEMOCRATIC LEARNING

The school assemblies were more than a decision-making process. Participants learned to collaborate, explore different perspectives and make decisions together. The HvA research shows that participation may be linked to positive development in democratic competences, particularly assertiveness and mobilisation/activism. At Cibap, the researchers also saw positive development in active listening, empathy and the confidence to express one's own opinion. Participants said that they felt heard and had room to share their opinions. Over time, they took the initiative more often and felt more responsible for the shared result.

The exchange of perspectives was also seen as valuable. Students said that they did not always change their minds, but did come to understand better why others thought differently. As a result, differences of opinion were more often seen as a source of new insights than as an obstacle to collaboration. At the same time, formulating joint recommendations proved to be far from straightforward. Both participants and discussion facilitators said there was sometimes too little time in the final phase to develop proposals further and align them with each other.

CHAPTER 6

FOLLOW-UP

6.1 QUALITY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations were well received at all three schools. Those involved particularly valued the students' perspective and the support that had grown during the assembly.

At the HBA, the recommendations were seen as realistic, usable and innovative. According to the project leader, they were a valuable addition to the existing considerations of teachers and school management.

At Firda, too, the quality of the recommendations was rated highly. Those involved attributed this to the careful process and to the diverse group of participants who arrived at the recommendations together. The most widely supported recommendation was backed by 92% of participants.

At Cibap, the recommendations were described as recognisable and valuable. According to project leaders, participants brought important issues to light concerning communication, student guidance and personal development. Participants themselves said the assembly helped them weigh ideas critically and refine them further. At the same time, points of concern emerged at all schools:

- At Firda, some recommendations were not yet sufficiently developed.
- At Cibap, some recommendations turned out to be based on incomplete information about existing school practices.
- At both Cibap and the HBA, there was a need for more time and a clearer format for developing and supporting recommendations.

6.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Follow-up on the recommendations differed greatly between the three schools.

At Firda, the recommendations were taken up quickly. Project leaders presented them to school management together with a participant and then developed them further. The school actively communicated the changes to students and staff and launched a communication campaign that was visible throughout the school.

At the HBA, several recommendations were adopted, but it remained unclear to participants what happened with the recommendations afterwards. A change of management also made it harder to hold on to the original mandate.

At Cibap, too, follow-up was slow to get going. No clear plan had been made in advance for implementing the recommendations, and responsibility lay with a small group of people. As a result, the topic more easily faded into the background.

The experiences at the three schools show how important clear ownership, board involvement and a follow-up plan are.

6.3 COMMUNICATION AND IMPACT

At all schools, communication about the progress of the recommendations proved to be an important success factor. At Firda, students and staff were actively informed about the next steps. At the HBA and Cibap, this happened less. Several participants said they had to ask around themselves to find out what had happened with the recommendations. This created uncertainty about the follow-up to the assembly.

Beyond the assembly itself, the involvement of teachers, managers and other staff also proved important. At Cibap, those involved said it is difficult to keep recommendations on track when responsibility lies mainly with one board member or project leader.

During the evaluation, it was therefore suggested that existing participation bodies, such as the student council, could play a role in monitoring the progress of recommendations.



CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 KEY INSIGHTS

The school assemblies at Firda, Cibap and the HBA show that a school assembly is a useful way to involve students in issues within their school. Participants formulated widely supported recommendations, developed democratic skills and contributed perspectives that would otherwise be heard less often. A school assembly is therefore an excellent way to fulfil the citizenship education mandate.

Several conditions proved important for success:

- a relevant issue
- visible involvement of board members
- a diverse participant group
- a carefully designed process with accessible methods

Flexible process and discussion facilitators played a crucial role in creating a safe environment for deliberation.

The biggest challenges were in follow-up and in connecting with everyone not directly involved in the school assembly. Several areas for improvement also emerged during preparation and implementation. There was particular room for improvement in follow-up, ownership and communication about progress.

7.2 SUCCESS FACTORS

PREPARATION

- Visible involvement of board members and school management.
- Diverse representation of students from different programmes, years and parts of the school.
- Active communication and visibility of the assembly within the school.
- A school assembly that tied in with current themes and challenges within the school.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Flexible process facilitation that could respond to the needs of the group.
- Safe discussion environments in which facilitators actively made room for participants to share their opinions.
- Buddy groups, check-ins and other methods that supported group cohesion and ownership.
- Expert sessions that helped participants understand the issues better and support their recommendations.
- Methods that encouraged perspective-taking, deliberation and collaboration.

FOLLOW-UP

- Recommendations with broad support among participants.
- A valuable addition of the student perspective to school policy.
- Strong board involvement in the follow-up.
- Concrete translation of recommendations into policy, projects and communication.
- Visible feedback on the progress of recommendations.

7.3 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

PREPARATION

- Involve students more in formulating the central question.
- Formulate a relevant question about a topic that genuinely matters at the school and among students.
- Communicate more clearly with teachers and staff, for example through knowledge sessions and a communication campaign.
- Make clear in advance within what framework recommendations can be implemented.
- Better align compensation with the barriers to participation that students experience.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Set aside more time for developing and refining recommendations.
- Provide fact-checking.
- Make the role of experts more explicit.
- Better align methods with the world and language skills of MBO students.
- Simplify tools and formats where possible.

FOLLOW-UP

- Agree in advance on ownership and implementation.
- Develop a clearer format for formulating recommendations.
- Organise structured feedback to participants.
- Embed follow-up within existing school structures.
- Make the progress of recommendations visible to the wider school community.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES

The experiences at Firda, Cibap and the HBA show how future school assemblies can be strengthened.

Start with a question that students recognise as relevant. Where possible, involve students in formulating that question, and make clear from the outset how much room there is to actually change things.

Also pay attention to what happens after the assembly. Agree in advance on three things:

- who is responsible for following up on the recommendations
- how this will be communicated
- how participants will stay involved in the progress

Finally, it can help to connect school assemblies more closely with existing participation bodies, such as student councils. This makes it easier to keep tracking and discussing the recommendations.

7.5 INPUT FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

The experiences at Firda, Cibap and the HBA show which elements need extra attention in future school assemblies:

- the choice of issue
- communication within the school
- methods
- the role of experts
- fit with the MBO target group
- the follow-up of recommendations

Bureau Schoolberaad is an initiative by Bureau Burgerberaad.

Bureau Burgerberaad is the Dutch centre of expertise for citizens' assemblies and democratic strengthening. We are an independent non-profit organisation and a CBF-accredited charity.

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