

Policy Matters Blog #11– Bill 96

FUTURE RESTRICTIONS FOR ADMISSIONS TO ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CEGEPS SCRUTINIZED

February 24, 2022 – The National Assembly’s [Committee on Culture and Education](#) yesterday resumed its clause-by-clause analysis of Bill 96, [An Act respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Québec](#). Committee members discussed clause 58, covering Articles 88.0.1 through 88.0.4 of the soon-to-be modified [Charter of the French Language](#). This controversial clause focuses on the language of collegial and university instruction. It sets out new conditions to restrict which students – and how many – would in future be permitted to attend English-language CEGEPs.

Discussions began with Art. 88.0.1, which designates all CEGEPs as either English- or French-language educational institutions. Parti Québécois MNA Pascal Bérubé proposed an amendment stating that only English-language rightsholders (i.e. historic anglophones, or in this case, students entitled under the Charter to receive education in English) would be permitted to attend English-language CEGEPs. He argued that the use of the French language in Montreal has been in steady decline for years and that prohibiting Francophones and Allophones from attending English-language CEGEPs would provide the only effective action to reverse this downturn.

Opposition by the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government to his amendment, he suggested, would call its nationalist beliefs into question. MNA Bérubé accused the CAQ of practicing what he dubbed “homeopathic nationalism.” His amendment was put to a vote. His vote was the only one cast in favour. The amendment was thus rejected.

Liberal MNA Gaétan Barrette then proposed his own amendment to Art. 88.0.1, to clarify that the provisions of clause 58 only apply to CEGEPs that receive public funds. The intent, he said, was to spare private training courses from the new rules being introduced to the Charter. Language and Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette replied that the articles in clause 58 only apply to college-level institutions that grant a *Diplôme d’études collégiales* (DEC) or an equivalent. The amendment was rejected.

The Committee then proceeded to Art. 88.0.2, which specifies that English-language CEGEPs are allowed to continue to provide educational instruction in English. Minister Jolin-Barrette proposed an amendment that would require all Francophone and Allophone students attending an English-language CEGEP to take at least three courses offered in French (other than a French-language learning course or a physical education course conducted in French) in order to obtain their DEC. The Minister provided examples that would meet this criterion, including classes in geography, history, anthropology, or the humanities.

Liberal MNA Hélène David criticized the amendment. She said it would not make sense to further “francize” French-speaking CEGEP students. She argued that it is Anglophone students who should become more enmeshed in a French learning environment in order to better integrate into Quebec society. MNA David then proposed an amendment of her own: requiring English-language rightsholders attending English-language CEGEPs to complete the three courses in French as outlined by the Minister.

While broadcasting of the Committee's proceedings was briefly suspended, deliberations between Minister Jolin-Barrette and MNA David achieved a compromise sub-amendment. The new sub-amendment would require all students (Francophone, Allophone, and Anglophone) attending English-language CEGEPs to complete three courses in French to obtain their DEC. Liberal MNAs David Birnbaum and David celebrated "with pride" their support for this "historic" sub-amendment, saying it would promote French-language integration for English-speaking students into Quebec society. There was no mention whether such courses would be conducted at beginner, intermediate, or advanced levels of French, a distinction which could impose undue academic strains on English-language rightsholders for whom French might be their second or third language. The sub-amendment was ultimately adopted.

Art. 88.0.3 provides that CEGEPs continue to be permitted to provide language-learning courses in languages other than the official-language designation of their institution. This article means that, for instance, a French-language CEGEP is still allowed to offer language-learning classes to students in Spanish, German, Mandarin, etc. The article was accepted with no discussion or debate.

Finally, the Committee reached Art. 88.0.4, which sparked heated words among members. This article regulates and restricts the number of spots that may be open to students in English-language CEGEPs in a given school year. More precisely, the total number of student openings made available in English-language CEGEPs must be the smaller of the following two proportions:

- (1) 17.5 per cent of the total number of CEGEP students in all of Quebec (i.e. in both English- and French-language CEGEPs combined) for that given school year; or
- (2) The percentage of English-language CEGEP students for the previous school year relative to the total number of CEGEP students in all of Quebec for the previous school year.

Further, Minister Jolin-Barrette introduced an amendment to completely repeal the last paragraph of Art. 88.0.4. This paragraph would have permitted the number of openings for students available in English-language CEGEPs to increase where applicable, but by no more than 8.7 per cent.

MNA David condemned the article and called the Minister's proposed amendment "inhuman" and "cruel" to Anglophone student Quebecers. She argued that as fewer Francophone and Allophone students are permitted to attend English-language CEGEPs, the proportion of students in the English CEGEP network will steadily dwindle. In consequence, she added, with the passage of time the number of student openings made available in English-language CEGEPs will decrease. She called this article an "immense injustice" for Anglophone students in Quebec. MNA David said the Minister's amendment retroactively rationalizes the CAQ government's decision halting the expansion project at Dawson College. This initiative would have substantially augmented the resources of the CEGEP. The effect of the halt, she added, was to not increase the number of openings for students, Anglophone or otherwise.

Minister Jolin-Barrette referenced a statement made by the Liberals in April 2021, expressing that party's support for the "freeze" on the number of student openings available in English-language CEGEPs. He insisted that the number of student openings in English-language CEGEPs will remain the same even as their proportion to the total of CEGEP students in all of Quebec shrinks.

MNA Barrette then raised a pertinent point, that the mechanism limiting availability of student openings in English-language CEGEPs only allows the number to stay the same or irreversibly decrease. Moreover,

he added, the consequences of the minister's proposed amendment could have the following result: In a given school year when more English-language rightsholders are eligible to enroll in English-language CEGEPs than during the prior school year, he suggested, these CEGEPs would not be legally permitted to increase their number of openings so as to be able to accommodate all these additional students with the right to attend CEGEP in English.

The Committee adjourned shortly thereafter. Debate on Art. 88.0.4 and the Minister's amendment resumes today.