



**PROJET 294
PERSPECTIVES FROM PARENTS ON THE OVER-
HAUL OF THE FUNDING AND ORGANIZATION OF
SERVICES FOR HANDICAPPED STUDENTS AND
STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENTS
OR LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**



**English Parents' Committee Association
Association des comités de parents anglophones**

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Perspectives from parents on the overhaul of the funding and organization of services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities

As requested by the *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* (MEES), the English Parents' Committee Association provides the following response to the ongoing consultation by MEES regarding the structure and funding allocations for services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities.

Process

The English Parents' Committee Association completed its consultation with outreach to two distinct groups to assemble the perspectives necessary to address the objective of the MEES consultation within the limited time allotted. In short, we consulted:

- Members of the EPCA Board of Directors, who shared anecdotal evidence they have drawn through their experiences as elected members of parent governance in the English-language public school system:
- Through online surveying and social media outreach, the English-speaking general community of parents handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, due to the limited time frame available for this consultation, EPCA was unable to expand this consultation to other parent governance organizations, including parents' committees, advisory committees on services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities (EHDA) or governing boards.

Final Results

Overall, our survey of the wider parent community resulted in a total of 2325 responses between March 15 and March 19, 2021. Of these, 1,435 respondents completed the survey, demonstrating the complexity of both the survey itself and the subject matter.

Of the respondents, approximately 59.05% of respondents who completed the survey did not have a recognized MEES difficulty code for their students. This indicates that the vast majority of students, who parents believe are struggling, do not benefit from the additional provincial funding that is granted to school boards to support additional services for students with special needs. This is a troubling discrepancy between what parents believe may be in the best interest of their children, what teachers and other professionals believe, and what MEES officials may conclude.

Even for those students who were eventually granted a recognized MEES difficulty code, the delay was extreme. More than 33% of those who received a code had to wait 12 months or more for the diagnosis to be completed. Once the diagnosis was received, 20.13% had to wait an additional 6 months or more to receive a decision from MEES on coding. Even more troubling is that 56.88% of respondents were never informed that there was a possibility that their child's diagnosis and request to receive a difficulty code could be rejected by MEES.

Further, there is no consensus if being granted a recognized MEES difficulty code has allowed students to receive adequate services to ensure their success, with 44.13% agreeing and 44.13% disagreeing with the statement.

We also included several open-ended questions to allow respondents the opportunity to share their experiences in a longer format. This provided over 530 different comments, the majority of which detailed a negative overall experience in either the student evaluation process or the allocation of services. A sample of the comments are below

"My child received a diagnosis of DCD in last two weeks. It took 4 years to receive this diagnosis. I'm assuming my child will get a MEE code this year."

"As my son's special needs are not coded as per MEES, this is a constant struggle for teachers to understand and how they can help him. I would love for him to have additional help so that academically he can continue to have success but unfortunately this lies in my hands."

"The fact that I am not 100% satisfied with the plan and that it isn't fully "functional" has nothing to do with the school staff. They are wonderful and doing everything they possibly can to help. It is simply because there is no "code" for my child's needs therefore no specific help can be attributed to her. They are using the resources they already have in place to help her and for that, I am grateful."

"It is important for making students with special needs felt that they are included and are an integral part of the society, all efforts to enhance their learning abilities are of paramount importance for their integration and future contribution to our society."

The complete EPCA survey, in its original English-language presentation, has been included as an annex to this consultation response.

Key Conclusions

Through our consultation, we conclude that there seems to be significant confusion about the process, specifically in how difficulty codes are administered and granted to students in need, and what the value of such codes actually is. Respondents are not convinced that a MEES code actually brings additional services that will contribute to student success in all cases. Moreover, when an important proportion of the parents of students who are placed on an Individualized Educational Plan/Intervention Plan never even discuss the potential of receiving a difficulty code, it becomes clear that the impression of the current structure of special needs funding requires an overhaul. Additional funding should be allocated to ensure that all students who need special needs services receive them, the administration must become more efficient and nimble, and a thorough rethink of information provided to parents is called for.

This is especially true considering that students do not actually receive additional support services until at least Grade 3, disregarding the crucial impact of the first three years of school on that child's development (Kindergarten/Grade 1/Grade 2). When a student continues to struggle for 3 years, they start to link school with the dissatisfaction and frustration they feel on a daily basis. It becomes increasingly difficult to bring that student back to a level where they feel fulfilled in the classroom, when they remain permanently behind.

It is also important to note that the significant delays in getting a diagnosis and receiving a decision from MEES can have an important impact on a child's development. These students continue to struggle and fall further behind from their peers, without the support to improve their chances while waiting to become eligible. When the diagnosis and review process extends into years, the impact is profound. The impact of the weight of the bureaucratic process and arbitrary age limits must no longer be ignored.

Special needs services cannot be allocated according to some 'cookie cutter' formula. The current heavy structure means many children fall through the cracks, and since recognized MEES difficulty codes are the means by which school boards fund those services, the more difficult they are to obtain, the less resources are available to help the children who need them. Students do not stop going to class while the bureaucratic machine slowly grinds away. Every day counts.

Based on these results, and discussions among our members, EPCA has no choice but to call upon the Government to restructure and rethink policies and procedures related to special needs services in the public education system, and offers its support in conducting further consultations with the English-speaking parent community to help guide that process. The status quo is no longer sustainable.

Consultation Timelines

We feel compelled to note that the tight timelines under which this consultation took place were too short to provide a wider view of the communities' perspectives of the structure of special needs services, and how funding is allocated. Key communities were unfortunately missed – including the vast majority of local school parent governance representatives – as well as other parents in regions outside of the Montreal Metropolitan Area.

We therefore request and recommend that future consultation requests from MEES incorporate a more significant delay of 4 business weeks (or 30 calendar days) to allow organizations like EPCA to launch a comprehensive consultation process that would include parent committees, EHDAA advisory committees and governing boards across the English-language public education network.

About the English Parents' Committee Association

Founded in 2008, the English Parents' Committee Association (EPCA) consists of volunteers working together on behalf of English-language parent governance in Quebec's public education system. The Board of Directors is made up of two directors per school board, elected by their respective Parents' Committee to represent the parents and students of that school board. EPCA is a non-profit provincial corporation funded in part by the Government of Quebec, recognized by the *ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES)* as the voice of anglophone parents.