

## STATEMENT BY ALLIANCE QUEBEC ON THE COMPAS-NATIONAL POST POLL

**Thursday, March 18, 1999** - The COMPAS poll reported today in the National Post sends a message of hope. It reports that 62 per cent of Quebecers find the Charter of the French Language's prohibition on French-speaking Quebecers sending their children to English school either "somewhat undesirable" or "very undesirable." According to the poll, 90 per cent of English-speaking Quebecers share this negative view, as do 59 per cent of the French-speaking Quebecers polled.

That good news must be qualified by another finding of the poll: about 59 per cent of the respondents found the policy a reasonable way of protecting the French language, given the global strength of English.

So we cannot go so far as to conclude, as did the National Post reporter, "a clear majority of Quebecers ... oppose Quebec legislation that prohibits children of French-speaking families from attending English-language schools."

What we must conclude is that French-speaking Quebecers are ambivalent, while English-speaking Quebecers are massively opposed to the restriction on French-speaking children attending English school.

The poll shows English-speaking Quebecers are clearly in favour of free choice for the language of schooling. In fact, during the 1997-98 school year, a majority of all Quebec children whose mother tongue is English studied either in French schools or in French immersion. For the sake of our teachers and our schools, wouldn't it be in the interest of all to press for an open admissions policy?

What is a pleasant surprise is that so many French-speaking people find the restrictions on French children "undesirable," even though there has been so much one-sided propaganda claiming that the French language and culture in Quebec would be threatened with demise unless almost all children are forced into French school. Unfortunately, the case for free choice has rarely been made.

The poll confirms the appropriateness of Alliance Quebec's policy that all children should be free, through their parents, to choose either French or English school. The case for freedom of choice finds powerful allies among French-speaking parents. If we ask that the English school be open only to English-speaking people, we forfeit that source of political support, we turn our backs on the liberal principle that all citizens should be treated equally, and we seem to be asking for privileges for just one category of citizen - the English-speaking minority.

The case for freedom to choose the language of instruction of our children should be made confidently, forcefully and often. We will find allies among French-speaking parents, as the poll shows. If we cultivate that support, the Quebec government could eventually be prevailed upon to liberalize the law.

A disappointing finding from the poll was that 41 per cent of francophones believe that anglophones receive favored treatment from the Quebec government with respect to jobs and services. (31 per cent thought they received worse treatment, 28 per cent thought they received the same.) When we know that English-speaking Quebecers account for only 0.76 per cent of the Quebec public service, it is obvious that old prejudices about the privileged Anglos have not died.