

# **QUEBEC FEDERATION OF HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS INC.**

## **STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

### **A CONSULTATION**

**SEPTEMBER 2010**

The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations Inc. welcomes the opportunity to present this consultation brief to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages.

### **OUR ORGANIZATION**

The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations Inc. (the “QFHSA”) was officially inaugurated in May 1944 and was incorporated by Letters Patent under the *Quebec Companies Act* in August 1959.

The QFHSA is an independent, incorporated, not-for-profit volunteer organization dedicated to enhancing the education and general well being of children and youth. The QFHSA promotes the involvement of parents, students, educators and the community at large in the advancement of learning and acts as a voice for parents.

We are a federation of local Home and School Associations driven by one objective: to provide a caring and enriched educational experience for students. Members of Home and School Associations come from all sectors of society: working parents, stay-at-home parents, grandparents, educational professionals and other ordinary citizens with an interest in maintaining a high level of education in this province. The schools that their children attend are scattered across the province: in Western Quebec, the Eastern Townships, the North Shore, the Gaspé and the Greater Montreal area. They represent the cultural diversity within the minority English-language school system: Anglophones, Allophones and Francophones. Our members pay a modest annual fee through their local associations to the QFHSA. Membership is also open to individuals without any school affiliation. We represent 80 school communities and work with, for example, community learning centers, community organizations, and other associations who share our goals and objectives.

The QFHSA is a charter member of the Canadian Home and School Federation (CHSF).

The roots of the QFHSA run deep in the history of the education system of Quebec. Historically linked to the former Protestant system (both English and French), it has continued to build relationships within the linguistic system. Partnerships with school boards, teacher and administrative associations, community organizations and other parent associations have been long-standing, and necessary, in addressing common concerns affecting the minority language communities as a whole.

For over 65 years, our briefs, position papers and resolutions to various provincial and national governments and agencies illustrate that we have been consistent in stating our beliefs and values, and further demonstrate that we have no affiliation to any political party.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1965, in our Brief to the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, QFHSA, representing 20,000 families, emphasized its support in giving French an official language status in Canada.

*“The Federation is unambiguous in its assertion that it considers it a cultural attribute and a positive quality to be able to speak a second language. For reasons of history, for reasons of proximity, for reasons of common courtesy and, above all, because of its inherent faith in the future of Canada and in the capacity of the French Canadian and the non-French Canadian elements to accommodate to each other, the Federation welcomes French as the other language of Canada.” (1965 Brief, p. 5, No. 5)*

In 1969, with the announcement of the *Official Languages Act*, QFHSA looked forward to having a strengthening of the dual/duality principle as envisioned by the Fathers of Confederation and incorporated into the *British North America Act 1867*. (Section 93 [1-4])

In the *Forward to his Annual Report 2007-2008* (Page V) Graham Fraser, Commissioner of Official Languages stated:

*On the last night of the Confederation Debates, on March 10, 1865, John A Macdonald responded to a question about the status of French in the new political arrangement that was being developed. He said that “the use of the French language should form one of the principles on which the Confederation should be established”. George-Etienne Cartier immediately rose to add that it was also necessary to protect the English minorities in Lower Canada with respect to the use of their language.*

Strong political tensions were on the rise on the issue of the future of the French language and culture in Quebec. QFHSA presented a brief to the *Commission of Inquiry on the Position of the French Language and on Language Rights in Quebec (Gendron Commission, 1969)*, stressing the right to schools in both official languages and the right of parents to choose the language of schooling. We also stressed the importance of a working knowledge of French for all graduates from English schools. Subsequent legislation was enacted: The *Charter of the French Language (Bill 101)*, section 59 of the *Canadian Constitution Act 1982*, the removal, in 1997 of section 93 from the *Constitution Act 1982, Bill 104* (recently declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada) and now Bill 103. They have all had and will continue to have an impact on the ability of the English minority language community to grow and develop, particularly within the English public school system.

Also in 1969 there would be bilateral agreements between the Government of Canada and the Council of Ministers Canada to provide funding for minority language education and second languages instruction. QFHSA began to track these funds from the very beginning and it has been a preoccupation as well as a frustrating experience at times for forty years.

In 1979 the opportunity came to apply for core funding and for special grants under the Secretary of State (later Canadian Heritage) Official Languages Communities Support Programs. Our financial base of membership fees was being eroded due to the effects of the *Charter of the French Language (Bill 101)*. Without these funding programs QFHSA and many organizations would have been unable to continue. We will address funding more fully later in this consultation.

Our relationship with the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL), Quebec region, has always been excellent. Eva Ludvig, Quebec Region Representative and Charles Taker, Liaison Officer, have gone out of their way to meet our needs. Ms Ludvig was key in arranging for QFHSA to host two recent meetings with Commissioners of Official Languages, Dyane Adam (2002) and Graham Fraser (2008). There was a very free flowing discussion and the Commissioners were very attentive and interested in our point of view. Some of the issues addressed then are likely to be repeated here.

OCOL's and QFHSA's partnership project **Come Read With Me** competition was undertaken from 2002 – 2005. A third partner, Literacy Partners of Quebec, no longer exists. The three organizations hoped to raise awareness among young English-speaking Quebecers (elementary school level) of the importance of high literacy levels in improving communication skills. Canadian English books were to be featured. Students and teachers were keen and enthusiastic as winners were recognized at a special ceremony each year. Gift certificates for both individual students and schools to purchase books were deeply appreciated. It was extremely successful but was terminated due to lack of funds. Mrs. Ludvig was an inspired leader.

Section 41 of Part VII of the *Official Languages Act* is designed to promote the full recognition of the use of English and French in Canadian society and to enhance the vitality of the official language minority communities. While we agree with the mandate in principle we have some concerns about its implementation in Quebec. We will be dealing with aspects of Part VII throughout this consultation.

## **OFFICIAL LANGUAGES MINORITY COMMUNITIES (OLMC)**

### **Issues and Challenges to be addressed**

1. Community Growth and Development
2. Official Language Minority Communities Support Programs

3. Wider Access to English Education
4. Accountability for the Funding of Minority Language Education and Second Languages Instruction
5. Language Rights Support Program
6. Conclusion and Recommendations

## **1. COMMUNITY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

For over 65 years QFHSA has been engaged in English minority language community endeavours. Our dedicated volunteer home and schoolers give generously of their time, talent and expertise, not only within our schools, but also they increasingly volunteer with family oriented community organizations. Many schools and community groups have diverse backgrounds comprising Anglophones, Allophones and Francophones, all of whom identify in some way with the English speaking community in Quebec.

The Anglophone population has always had a long tradition of volunteerism, serving in many sectors of community life. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to the enrichment of school life, in particular. Building ever-stronger relationships and partnerships within a shrinking English minority population base is the key to maintaining any sustainability in small communities.

- **Challenges**

The QFHSA Board of Directors itself calls upon its membership to volunteer at the provincial level. The challenge is to recruit for skills. This Board, like many others, needs people who are qualified to handle levels of administration and policy as well as to be a link to our local associations. There is a need for a longer-term commitment as well as the opportunity to build experience and continuity.

Staffing a not-for-profit organization is always a challenge. Salaries and benefits cannot compete with the public and private sector. We have been fortunate in having, until this past year, two well-qualified and enthusiastic staff members who gave countless hours of volunteer time in addition to their work responsibilities. They brought 40 years of experience and dedication to QFHSA.

Inadequate human and financial resources are stretching the abilities of volunteers and present part-time staff to find the time and energy to cover all the bases in fulfilling community development and sustainability projects. Researching, applying for funding and reporting can be a full time job for many. Assessment and evaluation of office resources and management remains a challenge.

Balancing the needs of family life and community development is difficult at the best of times. Home and School volunteers at the level of the local school have a full agenda. This often causes gaps in our need for Board members at the provincial level. When there is little room for growth in the minority language community as a whole it is doubly difficult to maintain the vitality required. If our very bilingual and well-educated youth are unable to meet their economic and social needs in Quebec we, as a community, will continue to shrink. Not a pretty picture.

## **2. OFFICIAL-LANGUAGE MINORITY COMMUNITIES SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

In 1979 the QFHSA membership went into sharp decline due to the effects of *Bill 101* when there was a large exodus of English-speaking families who chose or were required to leave Quebec.

- **Core funding to Enhance General Operations**

From 1979 onwards the Official Language Minority Communities Support Programs were to be a lifeline to assist QFHSA with its activities. Core funding to help meet day-to-day general operations is the key to maintaining the vitality of both our provincial and local associations. It has allowed QFHSA to continue to reach out and sustain leadership among both urban and widely scattered small local Home and School Associations throughout Quebec. It helps to cover costs for travel for off-island representatives to our annual **Fall Leadership Conference** and the **Spring Annual General Meeting**. Workshops for parents and other community participants have benefited by sponsoring speakers and developing resource materials et cetera to meet the needs at the 'grassroots' level of school and community life.

**The QFHSA NEWS**, published quarterly, has been a vital connection to our membership as well as every English school in Quebec, and to a wider general public. It has been in continuous circulation for over sixty-five years. We are indebted to the subsidy for the NEWS as researchers and historians regard it as one of Quebec's most valuable resources of English language community life.

**The QFHSA Leadership Handbook** was first published in 1984 and, subsequently updated and revised in 1992, 1997 and 2003. It is an invaluable resource.

- **Special Projects Funding – recent examples**

### **2005 – The Children's Literacy Resource Guide**

Literacy programs for children and youth are a mainstay of QFHSA's special projects. In 1989 the Canadian Home and School Federation (CHSF) launched the bilingual Literacy in the Information Age Resource Guide with funding from the Secretary of State's literacy division. It was the only program specifically targeted towards children and youth during the 1990 International Year for Literacy and earned a Canada Post Literacy Award.

Based on this resource QFHSA began a series of literacy activities for schools and community groups. By 2003 we needed an update.

In 2003 QFHSA received funding for a comprehensive **Children's Literacy Resource Guide**. It comprised 124 pages in which researchers, academics, authors, publishers, consultants, literacy organizations, parent volunteers, teachers, principals, librarians and community childcare workers gave generously of their time, talent and expertise in helping to bring this Guide to fruition. Special recognition goes to our lead researcher and freelance writer, Dorothy Nixon, a dedicated Home and Schooler and Marion Daigle, co-author and co-ordinator of the project. Topics focused on Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Media, Arts, Community, Parental Involvement and Library.

Sustained community involvement at the 'grassroots' level produced major successes especially related to our Born to Read and Literacy and Libraries projects. Since that time 20 additional supplementary topics have been added. It has also reached other groups and associations across Canada. We have included a copy for each of the Standing Senate Committee Members.

**This would never have happened without the financial support of the Official- Languages Minority Communities Support Programs.**

#### **2006 – Mini Conferences**

A series of three Leadership Conferences took place in the Gaspé, Eastern Townships and Chateauguay Valley region. They were not as successful as hoped, due in large part to the delay at the federal level in giving project approval and providing the funds. Partnerships with regional QCGN members were an important asset.

#### **2009 – 2010 Olympic Torch Event**

Again funding approval for this project came very close to the opening of the Vancouver Olympic Games. An event in December 2009 and a second one in early February 2010 were organized by QFHSA on the West Island of Montreal. Had we received earlier approval we could have included more schools both on and off island.

#### **2010 Yes (Youth Exploring Science) – Say YES to School Project**

QFHSA has recently received approval and funding for this project. It will focus on bringing science programs as an after school activity to the regions. The hands-on bilingual science activities will involve parents and children together and utilize the resources of local Community Learning Centers.

**In Summary**, QFHSA wishes to acknowledge the dedicated commitment of the Official-Languages Communities Support Programs staff to QFHSA over the years. We are especially pleased to have Tarek Toni as our liaison officer again. All have often gone beyond the call of duty to answer questions, offer sound advice and have maintained patience when deadlines are near.

### **3. WIDER ACCESS TO ENGLISH EDUCATION**

The Federation is deeply concerned about the future viability of the English school system.

For QFHSA and its membership the issue of wider access to English education is central to any growth and development in both the school itself and in the community at large. For many English-speaking communities the school is the primary cultural institution. The new Community Learning Centers are bearing witness to that fact as they are most often housed in the school.

- **Challenges**

The challenge is to find the ways and means to retain and foster the English language and culture in Quebec which have historic and legal roots dating back well over 200 years.

For purposes of this consultation, QFHSA wishes to **emphasize the impact of restrictive legislation on the English school system over the past thirty years**. Referred to by name in our Introduction, **these laws have affected the eligibility of thousands of students from enrolling in English public schools**.

On September 10, 2010 QFHSA presented a Brief on *Bill 103, an Act to Amend the Charter of the French Language and other Legislative Provisions* to the National Assembly Committee on Culture and Education. The mandate for this presentation had been voted on by our membership at the 2010 AGM held on April 24, 2010.

**QFHSA believes that all parents in Quebec, regardless of citizenship and linguistic status, should have the right to choose the language best suited for their children. At no time must a child's education be delayed because of a bureaucratic decision on eligibility for admission to an English school.**

This belief is premised in Article 26(3) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948:

*“Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” (“Prior means prior to the state”).*

Parental rights in education in Quebec have over 200 years of historical and legal precedent.

In 1971, prior to the *Charter of the French Language (Bill 101)*, enrolment in English public schools was 250, 000 while today it stands at 93,000, a decline of 62.8%. This is due, in large part to restrictive language laws, but not exclusively. For example, since 1979 the one remaining English school, Baie Comeau High School (K – Secondary 5) has seen its student population reduced by half.

In 2005 – 2006 the combined kindergarten and elementary student population in English schools stood at 58,730. In 2009 – 2010, it dropped to 50,233, a decline of 14.4% in that five-year timeframe.

The impact of this decline is real. In 2006, Northview and Valois Park Elementary schools, located in Pointe Claire, Montreal, were forced to merge as Jubilee Elementary because of a reduced number of students. Only three years later, in June, 2010, Jubilee had to close its doors for good and students have been dispersed to other neighboring schools. This was a devastating blow to these families.

There are approximately 20,000 students, about 21.4% of potential English school enrolment who are currently in the French system. Roughly half are there by choice. The remaining half is ineligible under *Bill 101*, section 59 of the *Constitution Act 1982* and *Bill 104*. Having these families free to choose English schooling could make the difference between keeping schools open rather than having to close their doors.

Let us remember that English-speaking parents, coming to Quebec from around the world, do not have the equivalent right to choose English or French schooling, as granted to French-speaking parents who come to the rest of Canada, from anywhere in the world. This creates an inequality in a parent's right to choose the language of schooling. Access to English schooling for English-speaking families from outside Canada would help somewhat to widen access to English education.

**A positive measure would be for the National Assembly of Quebec to petition for the abrogation of section 59 of the Constitution Act 1982** (See appendix 1 Resolution 2008/1)

This loss of an English language education system in Quebec would be a loss for all Quebecers: socially, economically and above all, culturally. It would add further fundamental change in the fabric of society in Quebec, a society rich in the tradition and history of two founding cultures for over 200 years.

Copies of our Brief on Bill 103 are being made available to the members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages. We hope you will find it informative from a parental point of view.

**One should always seek to expand on rights, never to diminish them.**

#### **4. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE FUNDING OF MINORITY LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND SECOND LANGUAGES INSTRUCTION**

In 1969 the first bilateral agreements were negotiated between the provinces and Canada for minority language education. QFHSA, at this time, was primarily concerned with the Formula Payments, which formed part of the Federal-Provincial Program for the Development of



Bilingualism in Education. We began to track the flow of these monies and have continued to do so for forty years. In the earliest years national standards of disclosure were very diverse and thus reporting by provinces was uneven, accompanied by major contrasts in the information conveyed. This lack of disclosure impeded our opportunity for parental review and remedial response. It was also noticeable that school boards were equally unaware of the measures being undertaken in the use of these financial grants. QFHSA and the former Protestant School Board of Montreal worked closely on these matters over several years.

QFHSA took a lead on this issue, as parents and as taxpayers. Parents in English language schools were adamant that their children become bilingual and that the standard of French instruction be of a quality to allow them to be socially, economically and culturally integrated into the Quebec milieu. This has been our policy as developed in the 1950's.

French immersion programs came on the scene in the late 60's. There were costs incurred in setting them up, developing and improving curricula for both immersion and core programs, hiring and training more French specialists, et cetera. Initially this was covered by budgetary cutbacks in English programs, principally, in the arts and physical education.

It was taken for granted that the 'supplementary costs' clauses in the Canada-Quebec Agreement would be able to offset these costs and give relief from the drain on school board budgets for English language schooling. The *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism Report Volume 2* had understood that provincial governments are responsible for the basic costs of education and the provincial minority (English in Quebec) is included in this responsibility. There was to be provision, however, for 'extra' costs involved in providing education in the official minority language. The official minority language in Quebec was French so the minority language (English) was not a consideration in budgets under these Federal Grants. As part of the funding for minority language education 'extra costs' are also incurred in providing quality English programs in English schools. Improved curriculum, hiring and training of English teachers and specialists, improved services for students with special needs were and are of great importance.

- **Challenge**

All of these concerns and needs were and still are on the minds of parents and teachers today.

**Consultations, resolutions, briefs and correspondence often produced frustrating results in being able to access the accountability procedures and detailed reporting on these funds.**

In 2002, during her QFHSA visit, Dr Dyane Adam, Official Languages Commissioner urged us '*to make a stronger stand on accountability for these funds*'.

In 2008 Graham Fraser, Official Languages Commissioner, visited QFHSA. We reported:

*"At issue is getting our proportional share of minority language funding when the*

*English community in Quebec is essentially a minority within a minority. The accountability report by Quebec for the first year of the Canada/Quebec Agreement 2005-06 to 2008-09 has just been released. It is an improvement over earlier reporting, says Zaferis. It is still not parent-friendly, and not clear enough regarding actual costs, especially when it comes to the heavy costs involved in translating documents. "Parents of children are the only ones left to halt the erosion of everything English in Quebec," he said." (QFHSA NEWS – September, 2008)*

**Transparency in reporting and consultation with stakeholders at the very “grassroots” level of society interested in the education and well being of children is required.**

### **5. LANGUAGE RIGHTS SUPPORT PROGRAM (LRSP)**

QFHSA is pleased to know that a Language Rights Support Program is once again in place. We were one of many official language minority organizations who disapproved of the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program (CCP) in 2006.

In 1978 QFHSA launched a Court Action on *Bill 101* regarding parental rights in education under Section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1982. We received funding from the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) to cover preparation costs. The CCSD was a predecessor to the CCP.

In 1983 QFHSA was called to the Supreme Court of Quebec and we required additional funding for an update. This time we were refused on the grounds that we did not meet the criteria. We met the criteria in the first round, why not later? No solid answers were forthcoming. The Court Action was never resolved. There was a serious lack of representation from the minority language community (English in Quebec) on the CCSD panel of decision makers.

It is noticeable that the new LRSP puts an emphasis on an alternative dispute resolution process rather than financing legal battles up front. QFHSA will be giving particular attention to the new mediation process as we are skeptical that this approach will work in settling language rights disputes in Quebec.

- **Challenge**

In 2007, 26 families of very modest means launched a court challenge on Bill 104 to the Supreme Court of Canada. They had already incurred heavy costs for their earlier action to the Quebec Court of Appeal. The cancellation of the CCP in 2006 dealt a heavy blow to these financially strapped families.

The QFHSA membership was encouraged to donate to a Legal Defence Fund set up by the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers. It was the least we could do to help the cause of these families as the results of their case would affect others in the future to defend their parental rights.

Where parental rights in education are concerned no family should be expected to bear the burden of the extraordinary financial costs of defending their children’s educational needs through the courts.

- **Panel of Experts**

QFHSA appreciates that among the nine member panel there are two representatives from the English-speaking minority of Quebec.

### **CONCLUSION**

QFHSA strongly supports the efforts of the Federal Government and its various departments in strengthening the status of Official Languages in Canada. However, we do wish to emphasize the need for increased recognition of the status of the English language minority community in Quebec. We are a minority within a minority and that is often forgotten when decisions are made affecting the vitality of our very diverse community.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Increased consultation opportunities with both provincial and federal Official Languages departments by the “grassroots” level of stakeholders.
2. Increased support to help widen access to English education, essential for the survival of the schools and communities of the English language minority of Quebec.
3. Increased efficiency in the reporting procedures for the accountability of funding for minority language education and second languages instruction. Increased opportunity for public scrutiny on the spending of our tax dollars in this area must be respected.