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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# ENGLISH-SPEAKING QUEBECERS NEED AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY VOICE

By **Geoffrey Chambers and Sylvia Martin-Laforge**  
QCGN President and QCGN Director General

While the Quebec government is concentrated on the COVID 19 public health care crisis, it has no intention of backing off on key policy initiatives that our community opposes such as the abolition of English school boards. This has a significant impact the vitality and future of Quebec's English-speaking minority.

Now more than ever it is clear that English-speaking Quebecers need an effective advocacy group!

Before and since the coronavirus crisis, the Quebec Community Groups Network has been engaged in a broad ranging conversation with our community. With support from **Canadian Heritage**, the QCGN managed an independent, facilitated process to collect information to guide the development of a strategic community development plan for a stronger and more resilient English-speaking community. This process of active and ongoing consultation was launched earlier this year with a Community Vitality Survey followed by a series of town halls that were to culminate in Community Collaboration Forum at the end of March. While we were obliged to postpone the forum and our Annual General Meeting due to COVID-19 concerns, a consensus emerged from our community that the QCGN should focus on building a stronger community through effective advocacy.



## Renewal Committee

The Board of the QCGN is seeking the community's help and are committed to an ongoing consultation and dialogue moving forward. The next phase in our strategic community-driven plan to ensure community engagement and cohesiveness, we have been actively working to renew the QCGN as a strong and effective voice for our community. The Board has created a Renewal Committee and recruited Matthew Harrington, a law professor at the University of Montreal, to chair this effort. The Renewal Committee has been mandated to make recommendations on the vision, mission, mandate, and structure of the QCGN. We will be recruiting and announcing other committee members shortly. Over the next few weeks, the Renewal Committee will oversee an inclusive

Although it is difficult to foresee what our new normal will look like, the QCGN has not lost sight of its raison d'être. We continue to promote the vitality of our community and defend our rights. For example, we continue to support **APPELE-Québec** in its court challenge of Bill 40 to ensure our community preserves its constitutional right to control and manage its schools. We also support the efforts of provincial and regional committees in securing access programs that will ensure our right to receive health and social services in English. We are also advocating to ensure the needs of our community are addressed in Canada and Quebec's post COVID-19 economic recovery plans. As always, our approach is based on the 'par et pour' – nothing about us without us – model embraced by Francophone minority communities outside Quebec. The work of the Renewal Committee will help ensure we have the capacity to meet these and other challenges head-on.

We are committed to ensuring a stronger and more effective QCGN emerges. Stay tuned!

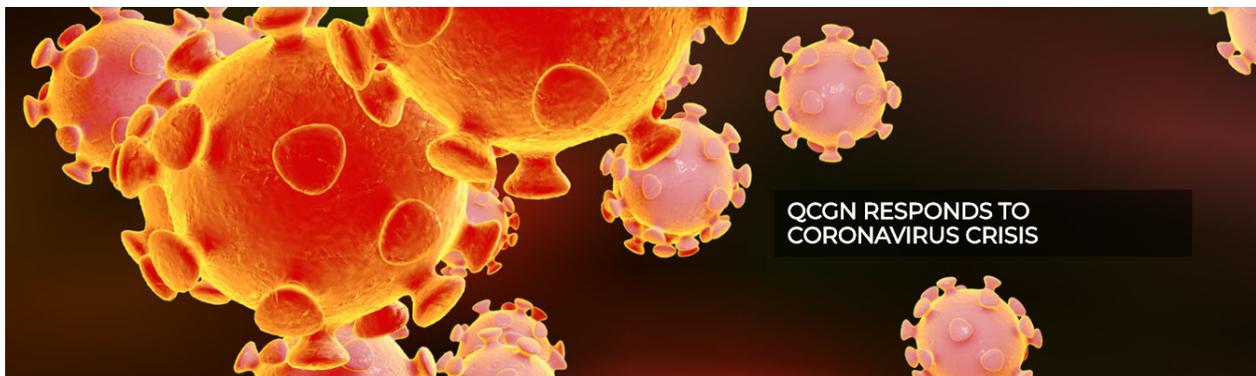
## Rapid Change

The last three months have certainly upended our lives as we have been working, both individually and collectively, to take the necessary measures to minimize the spread of COVID-19; to adapt to lockdown rules and deconfinement guidelines; and generally adapt to a rapidly changing environment and new ways to doing things that have had wide implications for our linguistic minority community.

During this unprecedented public health crisis, most of the volunteer activities within our Network have been suspended. Meanwhile many volunteers are continuing to provide assistance to members of our community through a variety of means including supporting shelters for those who are unable to self-isolate at home and assisting food banks and soup kitchens that are providing sustenance to an ever-growing number of unemployed and needy Quebecers. Many volunteers are delivering meals and groceries to the elderly and others vulnerable members of our community who must stay at home during this pandemic. Others have found creative ways to ways to volunteer during these challenging times, manning the phones to check-in with susceptible community members and dusting off their sewing machines to confection non-medical masks to help protect front-line workers and members of the community.

While the Board and Staff of the QCGN have been working remotely, we want to assure our members and partner organizations that we are continuing to advocate effectively on behalf of Quebec's English-speaking community. In recent weeks, we successfully lobbied the Quebec government to provide essential public health information on the pandemic in English. The QCGN strongly believes that public authorities and public health providers must ensure an 'active offer' of language services during this crisis to deliver effective, fair, safe and high-quality health and social services. Going forward, we will continue to advocate in favour of a clear Quebec government policy that would make a standing operating procedure to send out information in English – especially in times of crisis. The end goal is to ensure that English-speaking Quebecers get the same information as the majority population, at the same time.

## Coronavirus response



Meanwhile the QCGN continues to contribute to community cohesion with an active response to the COVID-19 public health emergency through our **coronavirus response hub**. Early in the pandemic, the QCGN reached out to members and community stakeholders to get a handle on their needs during this public health emergency to assist the us in responding with policies and programs to help them. During this unprecedented crisis, we heard that it is essential that members of linguistic minority communities have access to quality information in our language. In response, QCGN's communications and policy teams created an online information tool that provides access to reliable information in English from trusted sources and by organizing a number of online events and webinars to

a wide inventory of new government programs along with access to additional resources and online tools. We would like to thank our communications and policy staffers working on the hub as well as our members and stakeholders who have provided tools and resources. If you need information that you cannot find in the hub, or if you have further resources to share, please contact us at [coronavirus.response@qcgq.ca](mailto:coronavirus.response@qcgq.ca).

## Engaging with Community Online

One of the significant challenges we heard about during our town hall was access to networking activities in these times of physical distancing. We responded with a number of webinars on subjects ranging from **COVID-19: What are my rights?** with lawyer **Alain Deschamps** from **Éducaloi**; **Hosting a Successful Virtual AGM** with **Kira Page** from the **Centre for Community Organizations (COCO)**; and **Navigating Non-profits Through Uncharted Waters** with community consultant **Marlo Turner-Richie**. We also co-hosted a webinar with the **Association for Canadian Studies** COVID-19 and the perceptions of English-speaking Quebecers. (Read more about that survey later in this newsletter.) Over the coming weeks we will continue to engage our community and create a space for capacity building online through regular online events. If you have a topic you would like to see covered, please reach out to us at [coronavirus.response@qcgq.ca](mailto:coronavirus.response@qcgq.ca). You can sign up to receive details and links to QCGN's webinars [here](#). You can use this same form to ask questions, make comments and requests recordings of past webinars.

Meanwhile we have also hosted virtual town halls with the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, **Mélanie Joly**, as well as Quebec MPs **Anthony Housefather**, **Patricia Lattanzio**, and **Emmanuella Lambropoulos** to discuss the federal government's response to the pandemic and its impact on our minority community. We are planning further webinars and town halls with community and government representatives to listen to and to advocate for the interests of English-speaking Quebecers and their representative organizations.



## COVID-19 Having Huge Impacts on Community Sector

A QCGN survey of community organizations serving English-speaking Quebecers show that COVID-19 is having significant impacts also on our community sector. Results from our **Survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on the English-speaking community** indicate that many of our organizations are worried about project outcomes and funding for the future. QCGN member groups and other organizations serving our community have been forced to cancel major events, many of which were deliverables attached to project funding. Some were forced to cancel fundraisers, which may have a considerable impact on their financial viability. Many reported that because of their

employees, and another 25 per cent anticipate future layoffs if stopgap funding is not found. The delivery of services has changed and, in some cases, expanded as organizations step up to fill the gaps in services in their communities such as establishing and stepping up food resources, combatting mental health issues, and delivering goods and services. Organizations have also had to quickly adapt the delivery of their services. Physical distancing guidelines are impacting the ability of some organizations to combat isolation among the most vulnerable members of our community. Little or no expertise or capacity to operate online – organizations and individuals alike – further exacerbates issues for our community. While most respondents reported being able to successfully work remotely, some are experiencing challenges in changing the way they operate on such short notice. Accessing reliable and comprehensive government information, in English, was also identified as a problem. While more than half found QCGN's [Coronavirus Response Hub](#) useful, some organizations said the response from different levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) has been confusing. Delays in government decisions have increased obstacles for organizations and their members. Funding is also an issue. Some organizations that applied for project funding for 2020/2021 from Canadian Heritage and other sources have yet to receive their first payment. We continue to monitor the situation and will report back to the community. Please contact me, [sylvia.martin-laforge@qcggn.ca](mailto:sylvia.martin-laforge@qcggn.ca) if you would like to signal any major developments that impact the community.

## COVID has Disproportionate Impact on Minorities

COVID-19 is having a huge impact on racialized members of our minority language community. In early May, QCGN joined a coalition of community groups in Côte-des-Neiges and the [Center for Research on Race Relations](#) (CRARR) in demanding that provincial and municipal public health authorities devote more attention and resources to support vulnerable residents in the borough – especially those who are racialized and English-speaking. CRARR also called on federal and provincial public health authorities to collect data on the race, language and household income of infected individuals which is badly needed to better assess and adapt services to the needs of borough residents. (Read [press release](#) and see coverage by [The Montreal Gazette](#) and [CTV Montreal](#). Read also this article in [The Guardian](#) as well as these articles from [Policy Options Magazine](#) and [The Conversation](#) on the broader issue. ) Quebec's health ministry responded that it would collect such data, but walked back that statement. (See story in [The Montreal Gazette](#).) Despite alarming statistics on infections and deaths, **Fo Niemi**, Executive Director of CRARR said residents of Côte-des-Neiges and NDG, and others who live west of Saint Lawrence Boulevard, were not receiving the kind of public attention as other residents in other parts of Montreal. Based on data from [Santé publique-Montréal](#), the borough ranked second after Montréal-Nord in terms of infection and death caused by COVID-19. The data are only available in terms of age and gender. Women make up 59.1 per cent of those infected. **Tiffany Callender**, Executive Director of the [Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association](#) (CDNBCA), which serves, supports and works with thousands of Black and Asian families in Côte-des-Neiges, said many people and families being left behind, because they are English-speaking, they are Black and Brown, and often living at or below the poverty line. The coalition put forward a seven-point Health Equity Plan to end exclusion and to ensure active community participation in public health decisions affecting the community. This included a request for governments to supply free masks and gloves to all citizens on social assistance and pensions and residents of public housing. The coalition is also asking for the creation of an advisory committee to guide provincial and municipal public health officials in coming up with adapted measures for Montreal. The seven-point plan is also supported by the Filipino Association of Montreal and Suburbs, the Council of South Asian Communities, Progressive Chinese of Quebec, the Chinese Association of Montreal, and the Montreal Chinatown Economic Development Council.

## Black Lives Matter in English-speaking Quebec

Already hard hit by the pandemic, members of Quebec's English-speaking Black community are dealing with the additional impact of systemic racism which almost overshadowed the pandemic in the wake of the death of George Floyd, the 46-year-old African American who was killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis on May 25. Panelists and participants in a virtual town hall organized by the [West Island Black Community Association](#) (WIBCA) Sunday called on governmental representatives to denounce systemic racism in Quebec and work with community experts on timely and actionable initiatives to create equity, increase opportunity, and combat racism in the province. Moderated by former Global Montreal reporter and anchor, **Elysia Bryan-Baynes**, panelists addressed the long history and impact of racism on the Black community and the recent events surrounding anti-Black police violence in Canada and the United States. Panelists included **Juanita Westmoreland-Traore**, the first appointed Black judge in Quebec and first Black dean of a law school in Canada's history; **Wusua Mitchell**, Principal at Dorval Elementary; **Stephen Hennessey**, community worker and Psycho Educator at the Jewish General Hospital; and **Alicia Botswain-Kyte**, Assistant Professor at McGill University's School of Social Work. Also on hand for the two-hour gathering were representatives from groups working in mental health, education, justice, social services, community development, and the arts, as well as municipal, provincial, and federal government representatives.

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Relations and many members and stakeholders of our Network who believe, like we do, that Black Lives Matter in our diverse and inclusive English-speaking community in Quebec. Watch a recording of the town hall on [Facebook](#).

## No Student Left Behind

QCGN Board member **Alix Adrien**, president of the [Quebec Board of Black Educators](#), has launched the [No Student Left Behind GoFundMe](#) campaign to raise \$50,000 to prevent students from multicultural communities from falling behind due to the COVID-19 crisis. Due to the pandemic, the 2020 school season ended prematurely on March 15. The regular school season will resume in September whether in the classroom or online. Beyond the global health crisis, there will be long term economic, financial and educational hardships that will be felt by all – but most severely in communities of colour, remarks Alix in his plea for support. “The coronavirus outbreak is having and will continue to have a negative impact on the education of our already at-risk youth. Ensuring the continuity of our programs, we are committed to continuing the DaCosta Hall and Bana summer schools. In addition, we need to step up and make sure that we meet the post-pandemic emerging needs of the community and ensure that our students will have access to online learning and tutoring.” In order to do this, the QBBE has to expand its services and program capacities to include an online platform. The No Student Left Behind GoFundMe campaign aims to raise \$50,000 to accomplish this. To find out more or to donate, click [here](#).

## English-speaking Quebecers More Concerned About Catching COVID

English-speaking Quebecers, including racialized minorities, are more afraid of contracting coronavirus than their Francophone counterparts, and more likely to be afraid of an immediate family member being infected. That’s according to a **Léger Marketing** survey in early May that was commissioned by the Quebec Community Groups Network and the [Association for Canadian Studies](#) (ACS). The Web survey on [COVID-19 and the perceptions of English-speaking Quebecers](#) indicates that members of our community have the highest rate of fear in Canada of contracting COVID-19 while English-speaking Montrealers are most afraid of contracting the coronavirus. This may be due to the fact that English-speaking Quebecers were far more likely than their Francophone neighbours to know someone who has COVID-19, the survey showed. On that backdrop, Anglophones are more likely to want to slow down the pace of return to normal activities than Francophones. The survey also indicated that Quebecers are satisfied with the work of community organizations in the fight against COVID-19. Meanwhile English-speaking Quebecers are somewhat more likely to volunteer or donate to charity in these difficult times. Most are giving to health and local community services. The web poll, which was conducted from May 1 to May 6, surveyed 1,638 Quebecers 18 years of age or older, including 694 English-speaking respondents. See [poll results](#). Also see coverage of the poll in [The Montreal Gazette](#). (Reaction to poll in next story.) The Association for Canadian Studies is the main mover and shaker behind the [COVID-19 Social Impacts Network](#), a multidisciplinary group of some of the country’s leading experts to help identify key issues, indicators and socio-demographics to generate evidence-based responses that address the social and economic dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis in Canada. At that link you will find a library of COVID-19 survey and polling results.

## Premier’s Reaction to Poll Creates Kerfuffle

While QCGN and leaders in English-speaking Quebec are attempting to understand the pandemic and its impacts on our community, the government pushed back against the numbers which indicate our community is reacting differently and more strongly to COVID-19 than the Francophone majority. When asked why English-speaking Quebecers had greater fear of COVID-19 and are more worried about deconfinement, **Premier François Legault** reacted by attacking the messenger. Legault attributed the worry gap to reporting by the English media on the contagion – specifically by the [Montreal Gazette](#) and its health reporter **Aaron Derfel**. The Premier’s reaction was swiftly and widely condemned in the media – both French and English – including by senior **Le Devoir** political reporter and columnist **Robert Dutrisac** in this strongly worded [editorial](#). A few days later, the government’s point man on for relations with English-speaking Quebecers, **Christopher Skeete**, piled on in this interview with [The Gazette](#) saying does not see the purpose of dividing the province by language when it comes to gauging the population’s fear of contracting COVID-19. Reacting to the poll, ironically commissioned in part by the [Secretariat for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers](#), Skeete said he questioned segmenting Quebecers’ concerns “along linguistic lines” and described the poll as “particular”. ACS President **Jack Jedwab** quickly fired back noting the data from the survey shows the divide is not only a Montreal issue — a similar gap exists between Francophones and Anglophones throughout the province. “If we’re all going to come out of this together and get back to work and school we’ll need to identify demographic groups, whether it is on basis of gender, language, immigrant status or visible minority, that are feeling more anxious and try to address the concerns, otherwise the government’s deconfinement efforts risk being unsuccessful,” he wrote. Jedwab commented the kerfuffle in a Gazette [opinion piece](#). A few days later, Skeete and Jedwab also crossed swords in this [CJAD interview](#) with Aaron Rand that turned quickly into a debate.

Over the past few months, QCGN has been insisting that timely communication is critical for rapid risk reduction during public-health emergencies and that all necessary measures must be taken to inform and engage all citizens. Communicating with the more than 1.1 million English-speaking Quebecers that reside in this province is also critical to ensure the health and safety of all Quebecers. In early April, all Quebec households began receiving a French-language Self-Care Guide focused on helping each person to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. The guide, and other useful information, was already posted on Quebec.ca, in both languages. However, the arrival of the Guide in mailboxes signaled the government's awareness that a good part of the population is not connected to the internet or does not use it to get health information or government messages. At QCGN we realized right away that a significant part the English-speaking members of this group was excluded. This includes seniors, families with low revenue, people who are less bilingual, that is people who are more vulnerable. In a letter and a widely circulated opinion piece in mid-April, the QCGN reminded Premier **François Legault** and Health Minister **Danielle McCann** that Quebec's laws accommodate this need and permit the government to communicate to the public in English during emergencies. (Read QCGN's **op-ed** that was published in **The Montreal Gazette**, the **Sherbrooke Record**, the **Gaspe SPEC** and the **Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph**. Following strong advocacy efforts by the QCGN and other community leaders, the Government of Quebec pledged to mail out an English-language version of the COVID-19 guide to the 800,000 Quebecers who file their tax returns in English. (Read QCGN's **statement** and our subsequent **op-ed** on May 11.) More than three months into the pandemic, and two months after the French version was distributed, English-speaking Quebecers finally began receiving copies of the government's Self-Care Guide. QCGN is satisfied that our community's message finally got through to Quebec City. More importantly, we hope the Quebec government – both politicians and civil servants – have learned an important lesson that communications to Quebecers during a public health emergency must be distributed not only in the language of the majority, but also in English.

## QCGN Endorses Open Letter to Governments

In April, the QCGN learned of an **international letter** stating the importance of languages of communication and services in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The letter, endorsed by a worldwide group that includes dozens of linguistics researchers, academics, and other experts as well advocacy and minority language groups, explains to majority language governments that is important to be able to communicate and to receive services in one's own language in times of crisis, whether it be French in Canada, Spanish in the United States, Welsh in Wales, Basque in Europe, Indigenous languages and all other languages in minority situations. The letter points to alarming data that reveals patients are being left behind due to lack of communication in their mother tongue. Coordinated in Canada by the **Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities** (CIRLM), we the QCGN put out an urgent call to our members and stakeholders as well as a number of health and social services institutions who were pleased to endorse the letter. Whether your organization had time to endorse the letter or not, you are encouraged to forward the letter to your Member of Parliament and Member of the National Assembly.

## Commissioner of Official Languages



In the midst of the pandemic, the Commissioner of Official Languages **Raymond Thériault** issued a **statement** noting that members of the public expect to be provided with statements, relevant instructions and information in the interest of public health and safety in both official languages at all times. "Beyond the Official Languages Act, it is a matter of respect and safety for all Canadians," he wrote in March, noting that "Canadians throughout the country, regardless of their official language, must be able to understand messages directed to them from all federal institutions, particularly in the current context." Thériault said his office received complaints related to federal government communications during the pandemic. Some were related to Health Canada's decision to ease restrictions for bilingual labels on some cleaning products coming from the United States during the novel coronavirus pandemic – a decision it was forced to walk back following an outcry from official language minority groups. The **Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes** (FCFA) and la **Société Santé en français** (SSF) criticized Health Canada's **interim measure** on the grounds that it disregarded the principle of equality of our two official languages and constituted a blatant lack of respect for the more than seven million Canadians

whose first language is French. (See coverage by **Global News**, **Radio Canada**, **ONFr**, **Le Devoir**, **La Presse**, and **The Guardian**). The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages announced this week that it is seeking English-speaking Quebec's input on the importance of Canadians receiving information in the official language of their choice from federal institutions in times of emergency. We encourage all English-speaking

important work our community sector is undertaking to provide direct services to members of our community, and the financial concerns of these organizations moving forward. The conversation also focused on the levels of service in English being provided by the Government of Quebec and our community's wish to be included in economic recovery efforts. QCGN also noted that the COVID crisis has demonstrated the importance of language rights protection and the need to modernize of the Official Languages Act.

## COMMUNITY INNOVATION FUND (CIF) 2.0 Update

Despite being slowed down by the COVID-19 crisis, the **Community Innovation Fund** (CIF) 2.0 is moving forward with 10 exciting projects slated to launch over the next few months. Most organizations selected for CIF-2.0 funding were forced to close their doors mid-March to slow the spread of coronavirus, while pivoting programming and services to online platforms to addressing the immediate needs of their clientele. The QCGN quickly adopted a flexible and adaptive response plan with the support of the CIF Advisory and Selection Committees as well as officials at Employment and Social Development Canada, the project's funder. CIF Project Manager, **Bonnie Zehavi**, has been working closely with recipient organizations to assist them in making necessary adjustments to respond and adapt to the emerging challenges of COVID-19. The Community Innovation Fund was designed to help Quebec's English-speaking communities put social innovation in action to address the needs of vulnerable English-speaking Quebecers. Financed by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program – Children and Families Component, and managed by the QCGN, the first round of CIF funding, which ran from 2016 to 2019, injected a total of \$1 million into 10 innovative projects that truly transformed the lives of many individual English-speaking Quebecers," the Fund invested more than \$1 million in social initiatives while building partnerships to increase funds that are injected into our communities. Targeting the particular priorities of our community's youth, seniors and caregivers as well as newcomers, the Fund made it possible for community groups to address social issues more effectively. Almost 2,000 vulnerable seniors, youth and newcomers received new services to help them find jobs, fight isolation, or learn new skills. The 10 selected projects for CIF 2.0 address the needs of a diverse community of English-speaking youth and seniors through innovative and grassroots-led initiatives that seek to reduce isolation, promote inclusion, and improve the socioeconomic reality of our community's most vulnerable members. We are excited to announce the recipient organizations and the funded projects in the coming weeks.

## QESBA Launches Lawsuit on Bill 40

The **Quebec English School Boards Association** (QESBA) has followed through on a pledge to the community and filed legal action on Bill 40: An Act to amend mainly the Education Act with regard to school organization and governance. The Bill, which abolishes school boards and replaces them with service centres, met with widespread opposition from parents and teacher groups across Quebec. In the wee hours of the morning on February 8, the Coalition Avenir Government invoked closure to pass the controversial bill. QESBA along with co-applicants **Adam Gordon**, the Parent Committee Chairman at Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, and the **Lester B. Pearson School Board** filed for an interlocutory injunction and judicial review of the Bill in Quebec Superior Court on May 15, 2020. QESBA President **Dan Lamoureux** admitted the timing was not ideal in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was a pressing matter due to looming school board elections in the fall. The Quebec Community Groups Network and other members of the **Alliance for the Promotion of Public English-language Education in Quebec** (APPELE-Québec) Quebec-wide community coalition of 16 groups representing parents, educators and the community immediately endorsed QESBA's court challenge. The QCGN and several others argue that Bill 40 infringes on the constitutional rights of Quebec's English-speaking minority to manage their schools - rights we believe are guaranteed by Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Former MNA and Minister **Geoffrey Kelley**, chair of APPELE-Québec, said that "over the coming weeks we will be preparing our case, recruiting parents and others to participate as plaintiffs, and determining who will be intervening on behalf of the community." (Read QESBA's [press release](#). Read APPELE-Québec's [press release](#). See coverage by [The Montreal Gazette](#) and [Global Montreal](#).) One June 2, the English Montreal School Board became the last of Quebec's nine English-language school boards to join the legal fight against Bill 40. (See coverage on [Global Montreal](#).)

## School Boards Clash with Education Minister

In the weeks before the lawsuit was filed, school board were already clashing with Education Minister **Jean-François Roberge** and the Coalition Avenir Québec government over a decision to reopen elementary schools. In an [opinion](#)

secondary students. Of particular concern was the level of COVID-19 cases in Montreal and possible serious illnesses in children. The chairs also noted that the necessary conditions required to safely reopen schools on a large scale as recognized World Health Organization (WHO) global standards were not in place. "We cannot, in good conscience, rely on the argument that we are merely carrying out government directives," the group wrote, adding that "Possible responses to this dilemma range from compliance with orders under protest, to the refusal to reopen until risks are properly mitigated." They concluded with the comment that "while the dedicated school board and school personnel were doing their utmost to comply with extraordinary demands, the ultimate responsibility for establishing safe conditions, and the accountability for their consequences, must rest squarely with government." Read the school board chairs [opinion piece](#).

## Victory for Minority Communities in Supreme Court B.C. School Board Case

The **Supreme Court of Canada** has given a generous and broad interpretation of Section 23 of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees minority language educational rights to French-speaking communities outside Quebec and to the English-speaking minority within Quebec. In a landmark decision is a resounding reaffirmation of the rights of official language minority communities across Canada to receive education in their own language. "The purpose of s. 23 is not only to ensure the sustainability of the country's linguistic communities, which is a concern focused on the future, but also to make it possible for those communities to develop in their own language and culture, a concern focused on the present," wrote Chief Justice Richard Wagner in the majority ruling." The Supreme Court also ruled that individual rights conferred upon minority language communities in Section 23 of the Constitution have a collective scope. This is excellent news for parents in B.C., but also for official language minority communities across Canada. The immediate result of the ruling will be improved access to quality French-language education and schools in British Columbia. However, the ruling also sends a message to provinces across Canada to take heed of the rights of their minorities when it comes to the provision of minority language schools. According to the majority of the Supreme Court, "What s. 23 does is to protect an official language minority from the effects of decisions of the majority in the area of education by granting the minority a certain autonomy in relation to its education system. The history of the relationship between the majority and the minority in this area shows that the minority's interests are not well served if it does not have some control over the management and funding of its schools." Chambers said this ruling can only help the aforementioned court action against Bill 40, which abolishes school boards and replaces them with service centres. Read our [press release](#). Also read the [Supreme Court decision](#) as well as the [summary](#) of the case.

## QCGN NETWORK ADAPTS TO COVID-19 REALITIES

Over the past few weeks, members of our Network have been working from home and adapting their programming to the COVID-19 crisis. Here are some of their stories:

### Seniors Action Quebec

As COVID-19 lockdown measures are eased across the province, [Seniors Action Quebec](#) has produced a tip sheet to help seniors in this difficult time. Earlier, the organization produced a [questions sheet](#) for families and caregivers to help them ensure their loved ones are being well-cared for in light of the challenges faced by CHSLDs and private nursing homes and another [tip sheet](#) with considerations and information about moving seniors from residences.

### Phelps Helps Responds to COVID Crisis

CBC's reporter in the Eastern Townships, Spencer Van Dyck, reported on [Phelps Helps](#) has shifted its tutoring and mentorship programs online to address the challenges that its student participants face in quarantine. Spencer also reports on how Phelps Helps now plans to incorporate online tutoring into the organization's regular programming. Read [CBC's report](#). QCGN Board member [Chad Bean](#) recently spoke with Phelps Helps Executive Director, Katie Lowry and wanted to share some positive news coming from the group that is a pillar for the Stanstead community in the Eastern Townships. Many participants were already balancing on the very fine line of failing or dropping out of high school. In response to this situation, Phelps set up a needs assessment and outreach initiative to have a clear understanding of how it could best support their kids. As school closures have a greater impact on high school participants, Phelps prioritized efforts within this vulnerable group. Within one week of the needs assessment, Phelps Helps created a new service to respond to the needs of participants. On April 14 it launched an online tutoring service that, in its third week, is providing an impressive 30 plus hours of one-on-one

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school work can be caught up on and to set up our valued participants for a successful return to school in September.

## Association of English-Language Publishers and Blue Metropolis

The pandemic has brought cultural production to an almost complete standstill. English-language publishers, distributors, printers and bookstores were closed for varying lengths of time over the past three months and events such as book launches, and the Blue Metropolis literary festival were cancelled. (Read story in [The Montreal Gazette](#).) Meanwhile Blue Metropolis launched its **Writing for the Outdoors online platform** which presents an outdoors series of literary events so as to take advantage of Greater Montreal's beautiful parks and natural settings that will take them through to the next edition of the Festival, in spring 2021. In April, Blue Met offered parents and children a daily online rendezvous with **The Blue Metropolis Cosy Story Hour** that featured 10 authors, 10 tales, every morning at 10. Each 20-minute episode, broadcast live on Blue Met's Facebook page, featured the authors reading their own stories. The programming, in English and French, demonstrated the variety and richness of children's literature in Quebec and Canada.

## BCRC Launches Black in Quebec

The **Black in Quebec** project of the **Black Community Resource Centre** (BCRC) seeks to further the understanding of the vitality of the English-Speaking Black Community in Quebec. The project, which was launched shortly before the re-emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis, will offer evidentiary support in the fight against systemic discrimination against Blacks. In the May edition of SEMANJI, BCRC's newsletter, the project reports that despite having a presence in Quebec for four or more centuries, and contributing greatly to the rich complex history of Quebec, there are still barriers to the inclusion of English-Speaking Black Community in the wider socio-cultural life of Quebec. As both a linguistic and racial minority, our Black community faces many different kinds of social exclusion specific to their community. This is manifested through systemic racism, individual prejudice, disenfranchisement, a lack of credible representation and recognition of the contribution of English-speaking Blacks in Quebec and a hesitancy to even study the subject of blackness in Quebec through a critical lens. This progress report infographic identifies differences between the Black community and other sub-populations in Quebec with respect to their well-being. It also identifies gaps in the collection of data pertaining to the social, economic, and psycho-social status of Quebec's English-speaking community.

*Thank you for reading our regular newsletter. For up-to-date news about the Quebec Community Groups Network you can visit our website at [www.qcgn.ca](http://www.qcgn.ca) or follow us on Facebook and/or Twitter.*

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