FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS IN QUÉBEC'S ENGLISH SCHOOLS

Implications for policy and practice

Québec

The mandate of the Advisory Board on English Education (ABEE) is to advise the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports on all matters affecting the educational services offered in English elementary and secondary schools. The Minister may also ask the Board for advice on a specific topic.

The Minister of Education names the members to the Advisory Board. The term of office is normally three years. Candidates are nominated by the various English education associations and organizations that represent, among others, teachers, parents, school administrators and school board commissioners, as well as individuals involved in post-secondary education.

Nominations can be received at any time.

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INTRODUCTION

Success can be anything, from being a garbage man or a very rich lawyer. Success has to be your dream… and always remember everyone has their perspective of success. (KS, Grade 6 student)

According to the Education Act, the mission of the schools is to educate, socialize and provide qualifications to students:

In keeping with the principle of equality of opportunity, the mission of a school is to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and give them qualifications, while enabling them to undertake and achieve success in a course of study.[1]

Mastering and completing a course of study, in other words, staying in school and graduating, is one way to define school success. Educators, such as Nel Noddings, take a larger view:

But we continue to insist that, like it or not, all children should be prepared for college so that they will have a chance at a more affluent life. The purpose of education has been reduced to making money. What about liking one's work? What about feeling useful and competent? What about living a full life in family, friendship, and community?[2]

Mike Rose[3] writes about "number-crunchers" who want to measure everything by tests and thereby reduce education to a "knowledge-delivery system."

The Advisory Board on English Education (ABEE) believes that the attitude identified by Noddings and Rose is prevalent throughout much of Western education, and that the so-called "business" model of education is apparent in recent MELS initiatives, such as the Partnership Agreements. There is no doubt that an educated society is crucial to a successful society, but it is also clear that education comprises more than marks.

The Board is concerned that there is an increasing focus on "qualifications" to the detriment of the educational and socialization aspects of the schools' mission.

The Board encourages reflection on how to maintain all three aspects of the schools' mission. Throughout this brief, we will refer to aspects of the MELS action strategy,[4] developed as a result of serious concerns about retention and graduation rates, particularly in the French sector. The Board welcomes the initiatives undertaken as part of this strategy, but also recognizes differences between the situations in the French and English school systems. It is not always evident that the "13 paths to success" acknowledge the particularities of English schools, and the ABEE believes that some of the initiatives are more applicable to the French sector and are more likely to have impact in that sector.

While no system is perfect, nor should any system be complacent, the English sector has experienced a higher success rate than the French sector in recent years. This brief will identify some of the school success initiatives that are being adopted in the English sector and that show promise for other schools. The Board recognizes that these are just some examples of the work being done and that educators in the English sector may not be familiar with some of these initiatives.

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[1] *Education Act*, R.S.Q. c. I-13.3, s. 36.

[2] Nel Noddings, "Differentiate, Don't Standardize," *Education Week* (January 14, 2010), http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/01/14/17noddings-comm.h29.html?intc=mvs.

[3] Mike Rose, *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

[4] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school – All together for student success* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2009), http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/reussitescolaire/index_en.asp.

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS
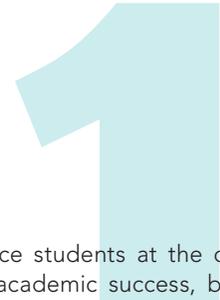
In my opinion, success is achieving your goals in life—graduating from college and university, getting a job, getting married and having children, etc. That doesn't mean that your whole life should be about goals. Success is also about the kind of person you are and about being happy. (KB, Grade 6 student)

Champlain College held a pedagogical day to discuss the meaning of student success at the CEGEP level[5] and their summary may be useful for elementary and secondary schools as well:

The community of Champlain St-Lambert recognizes that the simplest definition of student success requires that the student, completing a course in a reasonable amount of time, meets a minimal standard in the acquisition of content knowledge and intellectual skills. A comprehensive definition, however, must include the acquisition of higher-level intellectual abilities, constructive attitudes toward knowledge and learning, and further, constructive attitudes towards themselves and others involved in the learning process. These attributes lead to and constitute academic success.

By higher level intellectual abilities we mean understanding and applying theory, applying analytical tools to a variety of tasks, applying background knowledge appropriately, appreciating complexity, expressing ideas clearly, solving problems, understanding ethical issues, and drawing connections between knowledge in one course to learning experiences in other courses and in life.

By constructive attitudes toward learning and the learning process, we mean that successful students remain conscious of short term and future goals, and develop attitudes that allow them to sustain their efforts in completing course and program requirements. This includes accepting responsibility for themselves in their learning, maintaining self-motivation, and reflecting on their own contribution to their success.[6]

Faculty and staff, who were once students at the college, predictably spoke in terms of academic success, but also referred to social life, involvement in campus life and fun. They valued the fact that CEGEP had given them time for maturing, intellectual challenge and diversity, and also the quality of the teachers who had "planted a seed." They pointed out that students had chosen to be in CEGEP. When asked how they could help students succeed, teachers never referred to academic subjects, but used terms like "independence," "maturity," "communication," "curiosity," "decision-making" and helping students to "develop as a person."

ABEE realized the need to broaden the definition of success, and thus was faced with its first challenge: What does student success mean? Can one definition of success apply to all students? Many definitions of success emerged during discussions among Board members and their guests, notably regarding the appropriateness of the defined goal for the students concerned, and including intermediate development and changes in attitude towards learning. What aspects of student success can be measured and to what extent can each of these aspects be measured accurately? When should student success be measured? At age 17 or at some later date?

[5] Champlain College, *Student Success Panel Discussion*. October 23, 2009.
[6] Champlain St-Lambert's Current Definition of Student Success, August 20, 2009.

1.1 Success for whom?

Success for the school system means that it provides children with access to the education they need in order to develop as individuals and to participate actively in Québec society or elsewhere. It is clear that the slogan "80% by 2020"[7] means success for the system, rather than for the student, although it also means that students stay in school. A dropout means the system has failed, success means a student has succeeded. What does this slogan imply for the English sector, which on average has already attained the ministerial target of 80% retention? While English school boards continually work to improve the retention rate for all students, it will clearly be more difficult to effect a 10% improvement from 80% to 90%, to achieve a 10% dropout rate, than it will be to make 10% difference between, say, from 60% to 70%, which still allows a 30% dropout rate.

The Board has previously addressed the issues related to the inclusion of children with special needs.[8] It is still worth noting that English schools not only graduate more students, on average, than French schools, but also integrate more students with special needs into regular classes.

On the one hand, there are deeply held philosophical reasons for integration, but on the other hand, in small schools, it is a necessity to have all children in the same class. Unfortunately, this is often done without adequate support.

Recommendation 1

That the metric used to monitor and assess school board achievement of MELS goals for student success be based on a proportional improvement over previous years' results.

Recommendation 2

That MELS, in collaboration with the Leadership Committee for English Education in Québec (LCEEQ), conduct a study and develop an inventory of initiatives that appear to promote student success in English schools.

Recommendation 3

That modalities be established, possibly through the LCEEQ, to share best practices for student success among English school boards.

Recommendation 4

That MELS, through the Secteur des services a la communauté anglophone et des affaires autochtones (SSCAAA), host forums, jointly funded by school boards and the Canada-Québec Agreement on Minority Language Education and Second Language Instruction, to share ideas and expertise on student success initiatives.

Recommendation 5

That MELS, through the SSCAAA, in collaboration with the school boards, and expanding the work of the Evidence-based project, undertake a comprehensive study of the factors that contribute to dropout rates in the English sector and share these results in a timely manner with the boards.

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[7] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school.*

[8] Advisory Board on English Education, *Special Education – Issues of Inclusion and Integration in the Classroom* (November 2006), http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/CELA/anglais.htm.

1.2 Success defined by formal testing

The Board is concerned about how MELS defines success. First, it appears that "success" is used as a euphemism for staying in school and is measured by the number of students in a cohort who obtain either a secondary school diploma (SSD), a diploma of vocational studies (DVS) or other Ministry recognized qualifications. This is one view of success, although it fails to consider student progress, or eschews a more global definition that would include all three aspects of the schools' mission. Nevertheless, if a student is to succeed in school, the first step is to ensure that the student stays in school or returns to school at some point. As a result, this brief will include a discussion of this definition. Second, defining success as "staying in school" is complicated, given the variety of methods used to calculate the number of students who stay in school and the number of those who leave. This may be especially true in the English sector, where greater family mobility means that children may leave a particular school to re-enter school somewhere else in Canada or in the rest of the world. It appears at the time of writing that students who move out of the province are counted as dropouts in MELS calculations, but not in school board data. This discrepancy is being investigated in a study conducted by MELS and the Western Québec School Board.

Recommendation 6

That MELS and school boards cooperate in recording and analyzing dropout figures so as to obtain more precise data.

The Board quickly agreed that numerical data, although relatively easy to obtain, are a narrow measure of success and may even pervert the broader goals of education. The MELS policy on student success also implies a move towards results-based management. The Board questioned whether educators are spending too much time on assessment for the sake of collecting data, whether data collection is taking too much time away from teaching and learning, and whether this leads to good assessment. Too many evaluations result in less time for teaching and learning. The Board emphasizes the importance of assessment "for" learning over assessment "of" learning in improving teaching and learning in the classroom.

Apart from the pedagogical implications, there are financial implications regarding the quantity and type of assessment tools being used. Teachers need adequate preparation time and professional development to develop effective assessment tools, and this time is no longer supported financially by MELS. The Board also questioned the cost benefit of printing the kind of examinations currently being used. For example, the June 2010 mathematics examination for the second year of Elementary Cycle Three consisted of 15 pages for each student.

Assessment that is aligned with learning objectives is invaluable in informing teaching and learning, and good assessment tools help teachers make changes in their practice. The assessments administered at the end of Elementary Cycle Three (i.e. complementary examinations) produce useful information, although it appears that this information is rarely used at the secondary level to help track students during their transition from elementary to secondary school. The Board heard that teachers, whether those who conduct the tests or those who receive the students the following year, often receive little or no feedback on the results of these assessments, even though it may take up to two months of teaching time to administer them, especially in a bilingual setting. Evaluation situations also take place at the end of each cycle, yet few teachers see the statistics resulting from them. What happens to those statistics and whom do they help? With results in hand, teachers could assess the effectiveness of their teaching methods of the previous year or, if receiving a student, have information that might inform their teaching of that student and ease the student's transition between levels and teachers.[9] If it is indeed true that, in many instances, results are not passed along in any way, then the whole exercise is a waste of time and money, and does nothing to improve teaching or learning.

Recommendation 7

That the results of end-of-cycle assessments be given in a timely manner to the teachers who conducted the testing and that the results concerning specific students be given to the receiving teachers.

Recommendation 8

That teachers receive pedagogical training to interpret the results of the end-of-cycle assessments so as to inform their teaching methods for the future.

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[9] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school*, 18.

Parents and educators are buying into the definition of success represented by the school rankings, such as those calculated by the Fraser Institute, published in the media. These data, which are based on the number of students who pass provincial examinations, provide a quick and easy way of defining "successful" schools. The Board points out that many variables, including socioeconomic, cultural, geographical and linguistic variables, come into play when trying to assess a particular school with any accuracy. A school that succeeds in educating, socializing or providing qualifications to disadvantaged students should be commended as highly as a school that succeeds in graduating students with high scores in provincial examinations.

1.3 Comparative success

In the Canadian context, the 71.9% graduation rate for Québec students in 2006-2007 was just above the Canadian average of 71.3%, behind Prince Edward Island (85.4%), Saskatchewan (82.8%), New Brunswick (81.0%), and Nova Scotia (80.1%).[10] Québec's position in this ranking should be no cause for complacency.

Québec students generally perform well in comparison with international indicators such as the OECD measures, PISA and TIMMS, but the Board hesitates to rely heavily on these comparisons for two reasons: they tend, once again, to encourage a kind of complacency that is inappropriate in the context of what we are capable of accomplishing; and they tend to invite comparisons, such as those made with the United States and other societies that have significantly different class and racial structures. Similarly, the Board would be gravely troubled if the MELS' data-driven definition of success were to lead us to emulate too closely the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002 (NCLB) in the U.S. This Act has mandated states to develop standards for student learning at each grade level, and schools whose students do not meet these standards are required to improve or to be closed. Under this top-down, command-economy approach, the success of children, schools and school boards is defined solely by scores on mathematics and English language competency tests. Many children are left behind by this approach.

1.4 Age at which success is measured

At what age or educational stage is it fair to say that a child has succeeded or failed? It is invidious to brand a child as a failure in elementary school, where growth is more important. It is unfair to say that a 17-year-old person is a failure because he or she has not attained an SSD or not met the entrance requirements for CEGEP. The Board applauds the initiative of extending the notion of qualifications beyond the SSD and of recognizing programs that lead to other qualifications.

However, providing for mobility within the system is equally important. Some people do not reach their full potential until later in life, when needs or circumstances make education more attractive or even more possible. The Board notes in the MELS action strategy the recognition of those who benefit from vocational programs and the small number of students who take advantage of these programs. The enrollment of English-speaking students is proportionately even lower. The brief will return to this issue in Section 5.6.

1.5 Success versus achievement

Success may be defined as the attainment of predetermined, externally defined and measured goals, such as standards for reading and provincial leaving examinations.

We can say that if students achieve a certain level, they are successful. But success can also be an internal assessment made by the individual. That is, children should develop an internal gauge that tells them whether or not they have been successful, and not just rely on a measure against some external criteria. This goal setting allows students to take ownership of their education and make a personal contribution to their own success.

> *I think success is something that makes you feel proud, something that no one else can do for you but something you must achieve on your own. (LM, Grade 6 student)*

> *Success is when you accomplish something. Success is in your own mind, it can be whatever you want it to be. Success can be a state of thinking, think successful or don't think at all. (LD, Grade 6 student)*

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[10] Canada, Statistics Canada, *Graduation rate, Canada, provinces and territories, 2000/2001 to 2006/2007*, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/2009078/t/tbla8-eng.htm.

Achievement is a more subjective concept. It can relate to the steps taken by an individual to reach a goal, whether set externally or set by the individual. Since there may be many ways to reach the same goal, achievement is even more difficult to define than success.

> I think that a success is an accomplishment or a working attempt. (CW, Grade 6 student)

> The word success to me means an accomplishment. A goal that you achieve. (KF, Grade 6 student)

Specific achievements, such as obtaining a Secondary School Diploma (SSD), are easily measured and often used as indicators of student success. But while measuring the attainment of specific achievements can be useful to indicate the presence of certain systemic successes or failures, the measurement of such an indicator should not be confused with an unambiguous measurement of student success.

For some students, it is an achievement if they attend school regularly or require decreasing amounts of support or behavioural intervention. One of the Board's guests suggested that school success should be viewed from a developmental perspective, and any progress made by a student should be seen as an indication of success. The Board believes that this kind of development—progress towards a goal—is what achievement means, and could lead to success if ultimately it means that the goal has been reached.

Assessment of student success must involve authenticity, rather than an attempt to inflate a student's self-esteem. Students know when they are not being valued and respected, and meaningful feedback is important to them. One guest described the anxiety that students experience if what the teacher says they can do does not match what they know they can do.

1.6 Success beyond marks

> A whole child is intellectually active; physically, verbally, socially, and academically competent; empathetic, kind, caring, and fair; creative and curious; disciplined, self-directed, and goal-oriented; free; a critical thinker; confident; cared for; and valued.[11]

School was once thought of as a way to develop a democratic society and well-rounded citizens. The Board acknowledges the cost to society of a population that is not fully educated. In its simplest form, education can be said to lead to better jobs for individuals and increased tax revenue for society; lack of education is a burden on social services and society. But some students can fail to graduate after 11 years of school and still lead a fulfilling, productive life; contribute positively to society; be able to set realistic goals; organize time, resources, and self; and be able to relate well to others. These people may have been labeled as students with special needs, be incapable of obtaining an SSD, and be in need of particular support to enable them to be successful adults.

Individual measures are important in assessing children with special needs. They may still be in school at age 21 and never receive a diploma, but if they have developed social networks, learned how to approach self-sufficiency and feel engaged in their environment, they have achieved a considerable amount. More commonly, they may have been badly served by the school system and may return to school at a later date for their own reasons. We will address this in section 5.4.

Success is recognized when achievement is valued by the culture. In the culture defined by the MELS goals for academic success, the success defined and valued seems far too narrow to define the needs of adults in the 21st century.

Recommendation 9

That MELS broaden the definition of student success beyond retention and graduation.

[11] Clare Struck, *Testimony, ESEA Reauthorization: Meeting the Needs of the Whole Student Hearing Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions*, Cedar Falls, Iowa, April 22, 2010.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AFFECTING SUCCESS?

2.1 Universal access to education

Between the 1940s and the 1980s, combined verbal and math scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) did indeed decline (about 10 percent), which would seem to bolster the view that American schools have deteriorated. [2] But today, the SAT is taken annually by roughly two million students of wide-ranging preparation and ability. When it was first administered in its modern form in 1941, it was taken by only around ten thousand students, or less than half of 1 percent of all seventeen-year-olds—a largely self-selected group seeking admission to elite private colleges. And there are other confounding factors, such as the growth of the test-prep industry, which serves the affluent as a sort of school supplement, as well as the growing incidence of allowing students with documented psychological difficulties extra time to complete the test. [3] Such developments make it hard to know how well test scores reflect what actually goes on in the schools.

Meanwhile, graduation rates have been rising while reading scores have been falling. But what does this mean? Are today's high school students less literate than their predecessors, or do the data now include relatively weak students of the sort who would not have shown up in the past because they had left school before the testers got to them?[12]

In some ways, the transition from the 1940s and the schools' adjustments to the shift to mass education have been more dramatic in Québec than in the United States. In these more enlightened times, schools make accommodations for children with physical, intellectual and psychological handicaps. In Québec's English schools, these children are integrated into the mainstream classroom. Québec saw a drop in the pass rate when MELS changed the pass mark, beginning in 1982, from 50% to 60% and raised the school leaving age to 16 in 1988. The success rate has been stable over the last decade. The demands of the workplace are such that jobs for which an eighth grade education would have been adequate in the 1940s now require a high school or college diploma. At the same time, the need for well-rounded individuals has increased even more dramatically. Teachers and schools have taken on a greater role in the socialization of students, contributing at least as much to student success in life as in preparing them for academic success.

2.2 Gender differences and success

Superficially, gender differences are easy to observe and describe, but, in fact, there are few differences in cognitive ability between girls and boys. Girls generally begin with a verbal advantage, although they do not necessarily maintain the advantage into late adolescence. Boys usually score higher in measures of spatial awareness. Yet, even if there is no robust difference in aptitude, the graduation rate for girls is higher than for boys, suggesting that other factors interfere during schooling. What aspects of schooling favour girls over boys?

It has been suggested that, over the past 30 years, with the growing interest in promoting the education of girls, schools have responded well to their needs by using strategies such as cooperative education, group work, collaboration and a focus on interpersonal skills. The Board believes that a more diverse approach is needed to better take into consideration the learning strengths of boys so as to increase their engagement in learning, without sacrificing the positive strategies that have produced gains for girls.

Recommendation 10

That teachers' professional development activities include strategies to address the different learning styles of boys and girls.

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[12] Andrew Delbanco, "Dreams of Better Schools," *The New York Review of Books*, November 19, 2009, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/23377.

2.3 Impact of changes in the curriculum

Is the educational menu appealing to students? It is the Board's opinion that changes in curriculum appear to have had an impact on boys' motivation. To gain the attention of students, we must engage and enthuse them, and boys are more likely to be engaged if they are allowed to move around and to carry out activities that involve the whole body. Today's typical elementary and secondary classrooms reward stillness and compliance, and the hands-on, physical activities favoured by boys have been removed from the secondary school curriculum.

Recommendation 11

That time be allocated to physical activity in the elementary school curriculum.

Recommendation 12

That consideration be given to restoring the practical subjects in the curriculum, especially in the first cycle of secondary school.

Strong work habits tend to erase the academic performance differences between boys and girls, and students of either sex with good work habits, even those with learning difficulties, are more likely to finish high school. Given that the main occupation of school from a student's point of view is studying and learning, it would be useful and relevant to teach study skills as a cross-curricular competency.

Recommendation 13

That MELS develop a program of study skills to be integrated into each level throughout elementary and secondary school.

2.3.1 Secondary mathematics program

Another curriculum concern is the content of the secondary mathematics programs, especially at the Secondary III and IV levels, which appears to be a determining factor for many students who fail to complete secondary studies.

This issue emerged repeatedly during the Board's discussions on student success, raising questions such as: Is the program pitched at too high a cognitive level? Is there enough time to practice the intended skills? Is there enough time to absorb the material? Is the content essential for all school leavers?

Recommendation 14

That the secondary mathematics program be reviewed by MELS for its appropriateness to the needs of the students, especially at the Secondary III and IV levels.

2.4 Literacy development and success

There are many studies relating literacy to school success and demonstrating weaker literacy skills among boys, as well as studies giving evidence of a relationship between investment in early literacy and student success (see Section 5.9). Yet, improving literacy is not a component of "I care about school."[13] Even though technology is a hook for many boys, books can also be motivating. The Board heard of students who *don't* read as well as students who *can't* read. If boys are presented with a variety of texts in a positive way, without being bound by stereotypical notions of what boys like to read, their involvement in reading increases.

Associated with the problems of literacy is the difficulty students experience in reading the examinations at each level of the school system. Both Language Arts and Mathematics assessments are more linguistically demanding than in the past. The mathematics situational problems and applications present difficulties for many students because of the reading involved, rather than for the mathematics being tested. Examinations translated into English are checked for linguistic accuracy, but appear not to be assessed for reading level.

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[13] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school.*

Recommendation 15

That, in order to conform with research-based standard practice, the reading level of all provincial examinations be two grade levels below the grade level of the examination.

The presence of immersion and bilingual programs in many English schools where children have been immersed in French from kindergarten and the first cycle of elementary school seems to have a positive impact on literacy. It is remarkable to note how comfortable these children become in reading in both languages. However, in the early grades, the teaching of reading in French classes emphasizes the development of technical skills, while in English classes, it emphasizes reading for comprehension. For young readers who experience difficulty, the division of time and the different teaching approaches between French and English teachers may have a negative impact.

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS STUDENT SUCCESS?

Students are surrounded by adults, all of whom play a role in the students' education. The Board echoes the view expressed in Dawson College's Student Success Plan that success is "a shared responsibility among the actors,"[14] and in the MELS requirement to "mobilize key players."[15].

3.1 Role of the student

"Success is the completion of anything intended." This means that if you set a goal for yourself and you achieve it you are successful. In conclusion I think you can never succeed if you never try. I also think that an expression in hockey "You'll miss 100% of the shots you don't take" works here also. (DR, Grade 6 student)

The primary responsibility for success lies with the students themselves, and much emphasis in school should be placed on intrinsic motivation. Some students lack a sense of accomplishment because of the pace needed to cover the curriculum, giving them no time to reflect or to learn something for its own sake. The lack of a feeling of accomplishment clearly causes frustration. But many students learn how to succeed and even excel in the educational process and should be recognized for being students who "care about school." These are the students who are not challenged enough by the curriculum, and just like the weaker students, they are also badly served by standardized examinations.

Recommendation 16

That MELS initiate ways to encourage, recognize and celebrate student excellence.

The Board felt the need to look at success through the eyes of the students. What do students think? Survey data, obtained through tools such as "Tell them from me" from The Learning Bar and available for use in all of Québec's English schools, could provide valuable information to help change school practices.

However, ABEE advises caution in interpreting results and recommends that results be validated, as students have been known to answer the questionnaires so as to shock, rather than to inform, the reader.

One strategy for promoting the students' sense of responsibility and ownership of their learning is the student-led parent conference at both the elementary and secondary levels. This model of self-assessment, carried out in conjunction with teachers and parents in a supportive setting, is effective in creating a sense of responsibility in students in defining their own success. The Board was concerned that the opportunity for this valuable exercise for students, parents and teachers would be lost if assessment relied too heavily on standardized testing.

Recommendation 17

That schools implement student-led parent conferences for students of all ages and that students use portfolios to identify personal, academic and social goals, and develop action plans that can be reviewed during these conferences.

3.2 Role of parents

Many studies have shown that a student's school success is related to the socioeconomic and educational level of the parents, especially of the mother.[16] But beyond this, parental attitudes towards education, school and teachers have been shown to be a strong indicator of school success.[17] Children from homes that are supportive, positive and have a realistic attitude towards education are more likely to be successful in school, and parents who support education and their children's school are more likely to support funding for educational projects and to be actively involved in their children's education.

English schools have a long tradition of involvement in the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations. The Federation has encouraged and supported parent involvement in school life and activities and provides a model for such actions.

[14] Dawson College, *Student Success Action Plan*, Part 2.4 (June 2004).
http://dc11.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/dsweb/Get/Document-5784/Final%2BStudent%2BSuccess%2BAction%2BPlan%2BSSAP_%2BAPPROVED%2BBY%2BBOARD..pdf.

[15] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school.*

[16] See, for example:
J. Teachman and K. Paasch, "The family and educational aspirations," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 60 (1998): 704-714.
U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99* (ECLS-K), Fall 1998.

[17] A. Goodman and P. Gregg, eds. *Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, March 2010),
http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/educational-attainment-poor-children.

Many parents have a narrow view of success for their children, and perceive college and university studies as the benchmark. Many students channeled into academically demanding paths would be better served and be more likely to succeed in other available options.

It is therefore important that parents be aware of and open to the various educational paths available and possible for their children, rather than assume that all children will attend university. Although MELS has produced useful information on alternative educational routes, navigating the MELS Web site is very difficult and information is not always available or easily found in English. This becomes more important if fewer hard copies of documents are made available. There is an ongoing concern, as well, about the apparent decrease in the number of documents approved for translation.

Recommendation 18

That school administrators encourage the formal and informal participation of parents in school life.

Recommendation 19

That MELS ensure that school administrators, teachers and guidance counsellors have easy and timely access to information in English that allows them to advise and inform parents on the broad range of educational possibilities available to their children.

Recommendation 20

That MELS review the format of its Web site and ensure that the entire site be available in English.

Parents want the best for their children, but many of them lack the skills and tools to assist them adequately. The Board heard of an example of an extremely popular parent support and training program in one school, implemented through the creativity and initiative of the school's principal.

Recommendation 21

That school administrators be encouraged to invite parents, especially the parents of young children, to parent education programs, and that resources be made available to them to support these programs.

3.3 Role of the school

3.3.1 Role of the teacher

It is impossible to overstate the importance of teachers in helping students to achieve success. This implies a need for excellence in teacher education, as well as dedication to the job. In a recent brief,[18] the board addressed the issue of support and retention of teachers and administrators; however, while the impact of good teachers has often been described, the effect of unqualified teachers on student success is less well documented.

Recommendation 22

That MELS determine the impact on student success of teacher shortages and uncertified teachers in the classroom.

Recommendation 23

That MELS celebrate the impact of highly motivated and engaged teachers on student success by awarding fellowships or other incentives.

From our research and discussions this past year, the Board became aware that, in spite of the ever-increasing number of demands made on teachers, it is also important that they, like parents, be knowledgeable about and open to the variety of education and career possibilities available to students.

Recommendation 24

That school boards make teachers aware of the variety of education and career options available to students.

Teachers are key players in running extracurricular activities. The lack of physical activity in the curriculum is compounded by the decrease in extracurricular activities such as inter- and intramural sports that were often a lure to keep students in school until the end of the day. Board members have experience of the powerful impact of extracurricular activities on student interest and commend the schools and teachers who are dedicated to these activities. Extracurricular activities allow teachers and students to see each other in different spheres and help develop a community around the students. However, too much depends on the goodwill of the teachers who give their time to extracurricular activities. While French schools hire outside

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[18] Advisory Board on English Education, *High-quality teachers and administrators for English-language schools in Québec: preparation, induction and support* (July 2010), http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/CELA/anglais.htm.

instructors for extracurricular activities, English schools rely on teacher volunteers, whose only existing extrinsic reward (as far as the Board could identify) was a "thank you" banquet in one school board. The Board welcomes the Minister's intention to include some compensation for teachers involved in extracurricular activities.

Recommendation 25

That school boards give extracurricular activities more prominence and support, especially in secondary school.

Recommendation 26

That teacher involvement in extracurricular activities be adequately recognized and rewarded.

3.3.2 Role of the whole school community

To be successful, students need to feel safe to explore and experiment without fear of reprisal from other students or authority figures. School boards and schools are institutions that promote safety while developing a sense of community among students and teachers.

Writing in a U.S. context, but ringing true of the general need for school reform and echoed in some of the recommendations made by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation,[19] Linda Darling-Hammond states:

…we must rethink how schools are designed, how teaching and learning are pursued, and how resources are allocated. If we want schools not merely to "deliver instruction" but to ensure that all students learn in more powerful and effective ways, we must create schools that are sufficiently personalized to know their students well, that are managed and staffed by teachers who are professionally prepared and supported, and that are funded equitably in ways that invest in the front lines of teaching and learning. This three-part agenda requires a paradigm shift in how we think about the management and purpose of schools: from hierarchical, factory model institutions where teachers, treated as semi-skilled assembly line workers, process students for their slots in society, to professional communities where student success is supported by the collaborative efforts of knowledgeable teachers who are organized to address the needs of diverse learners.[20]

When a child enters school, he or she becomes part of a community with many different members—fellow students, teachers, administrators, support staff or parent organizations—all of whom act as role models and mentors. All students need affiliation with the group. This sense of belonging begins in elementary school, is important in the transition from elementary to secondary school and acts as the focus of attention for adolescents. Successful students are often the most involved and participate in the most clubs and sports activities. Board members cited examples of weak students who joined a school activity where membership was predicated on schoolwork and behaviour, and whose attitude, attendance, and performance at school improved because of the attraction of membership in a team or group. It has long been known that a correlation exists between sports excellence (or participation in other types of specialty or extracurricular programs) and student retention. This implies the need for a wide range of communities within the school and support for extracurricular activities. Recognition by MELS of the importance of extracurricular activities[21] is welcome.

Recommendation 27

That secondary school administrators encourage a variety of social, cultural, athletic and community-based extracurricular activities to appeal to a broad range of students.

The Board was told about schools where specific activities have been organized to ease the transition from elementary to secondary school, where information about incoming students is used by the secondary school to help support at-risk students, and where older students motivate younger ones. As recognized by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation,[22] the transition from the structure of school to the independence of CEGEP can also be problematic and in need of specific strategies. These strategies might include exchange visits or exchanges between students on social networking sites.

Recommendation 28

That schools, school boards and CEGEPs cooperate to facilitate the transition of students from one level of schooling to the other.

[19] Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation, *A secondary school adapted to the needs of youth in supporting their success*, Abridged version, (Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2009).

[20] Linda Darling-Hammond, "Restructuring Schools for Student Success," *Daedalus* 124 (1995).

[21] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school*, 28.

[22] Québec, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *New perspectives on the transition from secondary school to college* (Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2010).

3.3.3 Role of the counsellor

The work of secondary school counsellors covers a wide range of activities, including academic and psychological counselling, career counselling, testing and recommendations for complementary services. Given their workload, counsellors often have time to deal only with students with overt academic or behavioural problems; yet many students at risk of dropping out of school may not present signs until they are close to crisis. These students who "fly under the radar" might be encouraged to remain in school if closer monitoring by teachers and counselors were available.

Recommendation 29

That MELS dedicate extra resources to school guidance programs so that there are more counsellors to support work with borderline at-risk students.

One reason that students drop out of school is that they are not interested in or do not have the aptitude for further academic study, although they might be candidates for vocational programs. A student who does not have the aptitude for or interest in becoming a dentist might consider becoming a dental technician or a dental hygienist. While the Guidance Oriented Approach to Learning (GOAL) seems to be performing a useful function in informing teachers and parents about alternative routes and in demonstrating that viable alternatives exist beyond a narrow academic focus, school counsellors are key players in introducing alternative career choices to students, as well as to their parents and teachers. The Board showed interest in IDEO (Initiative, Discovery, Exploration and Orientation), mentioned in the "13 Paths to Success," as a counselling strategy for youth between 16 and 35, but regretted the lack of access and the quality of even the scant amount of English on the Web site.[23]

At the elementary school level, there are 12 complementary educational services designed to work together as a team to support students. The difficulty in accessing some of these services in English, particularly outside of Montréal, is a longstanding problem that needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 30

That MELS provide extra financial and human resources to complementary educational services to make them more accessible to the English-speaking community.

Recommendation 31

That MELS, through SSCAAA, report to the Minister on the problems concerning the provision of certain complementary educational services to English schools in order to allow the Minister to take appropriate action.

3.3.4 Role of the school administration

Finally, all the participants in a school—students, teachers, counsellors, paraprofessionals, parent volunteers, governing board members—are under the leadership of the principal. The need for well-prepared, competent administrators as educational leaders cannot be over-emphasized in setting the scene for student success. The Board has addressed this issue in a previous brief.[24]

3.3.5 Role of the Governing Board

In conjunction with the principal's leadership, the school's Governing Board can be influential in student success. It establishes the educational project for the school and plays a role in informing and welcoming parents into the school community. Most importantly, the Governing Board sets the tone for the school and can decide whether the school's educational project will be student-centred, serving the determined needs of the students.

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[23] http://www.cjreseau.org/en/youth/ideo.php.

[24] Advisory Board on English Education, *High-quality teachers and administrators for English-language schools in Québec: preparation, induction and support* (July 2010), http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/CELA/anglais.htm.

3.4 Summary

Up to this point, this brief has attempted to define student success in terms of what it may mean for the knowledge-based society of the 21st century, a world that does not need a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all, academic product. Such a society seems to call for a balance between an individual's sense of self-worth and a respect for and appreciation of the variety of contributions a person can make to the community. The brief has outlined some of the issues that affect the kinds of success a student might achieve and the attitudes and challenges that might colour both the expectations society has for a student and those that the student has for himself or herself: compulsory education, the curriculum itself, differing learning styles and behavioral needs.

It asks the difficult question of who is responsible for student success and describes the responsibility as multifaceted, involving the family, the school, as well as the individual student, once again giving credence to the adage "it takes a village to raise a child." It has become apparent that success rests on knowledge of the child and begins with the child, such that the system must serve every student and not impose a pathway inappropriate for his or her needs and abilities.

Fortunately, the Board has been able to identify a number of student-centred approaches already at work in our schools. The Board invited a number of guests to describe existing initiatives that appear to be successful in promoting student success, both cognitively and affectively. These initiatives fall into two categories: those that occur in schools and those that take place outside schools.

SCHOOL-BASED STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS

Given the MELS focus, the Board was clearly most interested in school-based initiatives, but will include a discussion of adult and vocational education under this heading since these sectors come under the jurisdiction of the school boards.

The English-speaking community has traditionally placed a lot of value on education in general, and parents want their children to do well. On the whole, English school boards are responsive to the values and needs of their communities. The school, especially in underprivileged or rural areas, is a community hub.

A recent U.S. study[25] identified five key ingredients for a successful school:

- Strong leadership, in the sense that principals are "strategic, focused on instruction, and inclusive of others in their work"

- A welcoming attitude toward parents, and formation of connections with the community

- Development of professional capacity, which refers to the quality of the teaching staff, teachers' belief that schools can change, and participation in good professional development and collaborative work

- A learning climate that is safe, welcoming, stimulating, and nurturing to all students

- Strong instructional guidance and materials

The authors conclude with the warning that:

> *A material weakness in any one ingredient means that a school is very unlikely to improve... Often what happens in school reform is that we pick just one strand out, and very often that becomes the silver bullet.*

Bryk et al. investigated 46 "truly disadvantaged" schools in deprived neighbourhoods in the Chicago area and found that the few schools that showed improvement had "wraparound services"; in other words, an integrated set of programs involving not only the school but also the community and social services, similar to the Harlem Children's Zone model.[26] The Board saw similarities between Bryk's integration of school and community and Québec's Community Learning Centres.

4.1 Community Learning Centres (CLCs)

Given the premise that student success depends on many factors outside school, the Board believes that a successful school includes the broader community and supports the existence of Community Learning Centres (CLCs). There are currently 23 CLCs in a system of 340 schools, and an additional 12 may be added in the next year. The CLCs are funded through the Canada-Québec Agreement on Minority Language Education and Second Language Instruction and are supported by their communities, because the communities trust the centres and benefit from the activities they offer. CLCs are becoming community-gathering places; they encourage volunteer involvement and provide a hub for community activities. One of the strengths of the CLCs is their diverse nature and the way they adapt to the communities they serve.

CLCs have two objectives: student success and preserving the vitality of the English community; and there is already evidence that CLCs do have a beneficial impact on student success. Investment in sustainable projects is paying dividends and should be maintained and extended.

Recommendation 32

That MELS give recognition to CLCs, support the staffing requirements of the CLCs and encourage the establishment of new CLCs.

4.2 New Approaches, New Solutions (NANS)

The aim of NANS is to provide students in disadvantaged areas with equal opportunities for school success; that is, to stay in school and work towards graduation. One strength of the strategy is the flexibility it gives each school to develop a portrait of its particular population and environment to assist in the development of its own success plan. Such sensitivity to local needs is characteristic of the English sector and is an important component of the planning process. It is hoped that the possibility of extra accountability does

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[25] Anthony S. Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons From Chicago.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), http://www.press.uchicago.edu/presssite/metadata.epl?isbn=978022607800.

[26] See Harlem Children's Zone, http://www.hcz.org/.

not take away valuable time from educational activities, nor result in a more rigid system. The Board is pleased that NANS and the Beacon Schools are included in the 13 Paths to Success,[27] and hopes that the success of NANS can be extended to other schools.

Recommendation 33

That the NANS project be extended with guaranteed allowance for local needs and extra financial support from MELS for additional personnel at the supervisory and school levels.

Recommendation 34

That there be sufficient flexibility in the NANS funding and its application to allow the schools to implement creative measures that would best serve their communities.

4.3 Work-Oriented Training Path (WOTP)

The Work-Oriented Training Path is designed for students who are at least 15 years old and who have significant learning difficulties. Prework Training is intended for students who have not met the requirements of the elementary-level programs for language of instruction and mathematics, while Training for a Semiskilled Trade is for students who have met the requirements of the elementary-level programs in language of instruction and mathematics but have not earned any Secondary Cycle One credits in those subjects. Both programs enable students to continue their general education as far as possible, while offering them practical training that will prepare them, if desired, for a successful entry into the job market.[28]

The WOTP offers students two streams: prework training programs for students with mild developmental delays and training programs for semiskilled trades (such as Butcher's assistant). The programs offer small classes and include instruction in English, French, Mathematics and work skills.

The WOTP is presently being implemented across the nine English boards and holds promise for students who have been unsuccessful in acquiring qualifications in the past. Although the Board saw considerable potential in the WOTP, it has some concerns. The first concern is the name of the initiative itself. The term "semiskilled," although widely used in society, has a pejorative connotation and sets up the programs to be undervalued, unlike comparable programs in Europe that are skill-based and thus attractive and esteemed.

Recommendation 35

That the name of the WOTP and its two options be reconsidered by MELS.

School boards need to carefully consider how the WOTP is to be set up and staffed and what resources will be available to support it. Qualified technical-vocational teachers should teach the trade-related courses.

Recommendation 36

That the school board's staffing of the WOTP be carefully monitored to include vocational and technical teachers as well as classroom teachers and counsellors.

The WOTP semiskilled stream should not be a dead-end path and should offer a bridge to vocational training, using the potential of the prework programs. Some students may be quite capable yet socially immature, and may have been placed in the WOTP because their academic progress has been affected by behavioural or motivational issues. They may have low literacy levels, be struggling in mathematics and have not completed Secondary Cycle One credits. Some of these students have untapped potential that can be recognized through a WOTP and nurtured by involvement in alternative prospects.

Recommendation 37

That MELS build more flexibility into the WOTP, allowing the possibility for students to move from one path to another.

The WOTP includes work placements for students, and this can introduce problems. Students need to be carefully prepared for their placement but so do employers and their employees who are often unaware of the requirements of receiving a student. Also, the work done during the placement must be as authentic as possible if it is to be useful as job training. This is often easier to accomplish in rural settings, where students are more easily integrated into smaller enterprises.

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[27] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school*, 24.

[28] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, "Work-Oriented Training Path, A Bank of Learning and Evaluation Situations (LES) Under Construction," *Schoolscapes* 8, no. 3 (April 2008), http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/virage5/index_en.asp?page=parcours.

Recommendation 38

That schools choose placement sites for WOTP students ensuring that selected employers and other workers are capable of working effectively for the benefit of the students.

Because some students may lack French conversational fluency, placements may also be difficult in workplaces where French is a requirement, such as in retail. Increasing the time dedicated to French can be a double-edged sword, however, for WOPT students since they also need time to develop English language skills and cannot meet the academic expectations set in French class.

Recommendation 39

That MELS adjust the WOTP curriculum to allow English-speaking students more time to develop oral skills than written skills in French and English.

4.4 Adult Education

The Board reiterates its view that a student should not be labelled a success or a failure at 17 years of age and recognizes the MELS reference to success by 20 years of age[29] as a move away from such premature labelling. Students do not choose to drop out of youth sector schools, but many students are desperate to get out of the formal academic structure. Parents and school personnel need to know enough about the adult education system to be able to advise students before they leave secondary school on paths they can take to obtain further education or job training.

Recommendation 40

That MELS make available to school administrators, teachers and guidance counsellors ongoing information in English about current educational and job training opportunities that are available to students upon leaving the formal school system with or without qualifications.

Adult education centres provide an educational opportunity for students who have not succeeded in the youth sector. If these students succeed in the adult sector, they become part of the "seven-year cohort." Increasing numbers of youth are entering adult education programs, and there is concern that adult education has become a dumping ground for the youth sector. But for adult educators, students who have dropped out of school are not considered failures. These students often have to deal with many problems, and adult education centres help them obtain the support they need (e.g. by referring them to food banks or psychological counselling). They encourage students to persevere and succeed. Once a student's skills have been assessed, an adviser at the adult education centre helps the student establish his or her goals and then designs an individualized program. Goals might include improving language skills, completing the requirements for an SSD or qualifying for entry into CEGEP. A footnote to this pathway is the evidence that academic success spills over and has a positive effect on the student's family life.

While larger boards in metropolitan areas can offer complementary educational services, it is more difficult for boards in outlying regions, with their small per capita budgets, to accommodate a wide range of needs. For example, Eastern Shores School Board may have to place 30 to 40 students working at varying levels (from presecondary to Secondary V) in the same mathematics class because it does not have enough resources to separate the class into distinct levels.

Recommendation 41

That MELS increase funding to rural boards, where necessary, to allow them to better address needs in adult education.

Recommendation 42

That MELS expand the provision of complementary educational services in the adult sector, especially services targeted to young adults.

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[29] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school*, 7.

4.5 Vocational Training

In vocational training, students define their success individually. Rather than marking the end of schooling, vocational training may help the student find a passion, attain self-actualization, or seize the opportunity to qualify in a trade leading to employability. In many cases, students would benefit more if they were specifically directed to vocational training early in their schooling, rather than being given the impression that vocational training is "Plan B."

Recommendation 43

That all professionals in the system share information about the availability and value of vocational training.

Recommendation 44

That parents and teachers be made aware of the potential and benefits of vocational training to students.

Recommendation 45

That school guidance counsellors make every effort to explain to students the potential and benefits of vocational programs and promote the alternative career paths to students as well as parents.

Recommendation 46

That MELS continue to sponsor an advertising campaign in English to promote vocational training.

Successful promotion is useful only if programs are available and accessible. From 2000-2001 to 2006-2007, enrollment of English-speaking students in vocational training increased from 6 245 to 8 057 (12.9%), representing 7.1% of the total student enrollment in vocational training for the province. Notably, more female than male students enrolled in vocational programs. The type of programs available may explain this gender-based difference. The English sector, for example, has fewer equipment-based courses, generally thought to be attractive to male students. In addition, while overall enrollment has increased slightly, the number of students in vocational training in English centres is still low compared with the French sector. Two concerns regarding the English sector are the general lack of awareness of the potential and benefits of vocational training for some students, and the lack

of availability of appropriate programs. English school boards are slowly recognizing the need to offer greater diversity in vocational training, particularly in the heavy trades.

Some French boards are allowed to offer authorizations in English, but there is a concern that the students are not receiving quality complementary services in their own language. There is a need to increase the number of heavy trades options in the English sector and to offer them in a strategic manner that avoids duplications between school boards.

Recommendation 47

That MELS review the availability of vocational programs in the English sector and fund the development and implementation of any new programs required.

Recommendation 48

That English school boards increase the number of trade programs available, while continuing to ensure that there is no overlap of programs offered by school boards in geographically close areas.

4.6 Technology

Technology is increasingly being introduced into schools, notably through initiatives such as the laptop program in the Eastern Townships School Board and, indeed, technology is necessary to carry out the projects that are so important in the Québec Education Program (QEP). The "13 paths to success"[30] make no reference to technology in the classroom, and the Board's guests made little or no mention of student use of technology, although several guests used it in their presentations and data analyses. It is also interesting that, in spite of this increased emphasis, it is still a student's basic ability to read and do mathematics that govern academic success. More intriguing is the fact that technology is so important in students' lives outside school, yet teachers have been slow to use social networking and other available communication media so widely attractive to students. Students learn how to use these media from their peers.

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[30] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school.*

Recommendation 49

That MELS investigate and share information on the introduction of technology into the classroom and the effect it has on school success.

Recommendation 50

That professional development for teachers include the appropriate use of technology in the classroom as one way to improve student success.

Recommendation 51

That professional development for teachers, in coordination with school librarians, include preparation to teach students the ethical issues involved in the use of information and communications technologies.

Recommendation 52

That technology-based communication such as social networking be used to advertise educational opportunities to young people.

For some years now, technology has been used to deliver instruction to small, remote populations, such as providing the opportunity for students in Escuminac to take a physics course. The potential provided by videoconferencing, available in all CLCs, to deliver instruction, to link students with each other and with teachers, and to provide professional development for teachers is enormous, particularly for English school boards that are so widely dispersed.

Recommendation 53

That MELS increase the availability of distance learning modalities in the regions.

4.7 Early childhood education

There is evidence that:

> …high-quality child care is beneficial for all children, and especially for children from low-income families. These benefits are cognitive, academic, social and behavioural. The evidence is strongest for centre-based care and for children between about two and five years of age.[31]

There is also evidence that early intervention works in disadvantaged schools, and 25% of English-language schools are classified as disadvantaged. The fourth of the 13 paths to success[32] addresses the need for early intervention as a way of promoting student success in later years, recognizing that early intervention and student success are closely linked. Although students drop out in secondary school, weak literacy skills are established in early childhood and become more problematic if a mindset of failure is established. The initial financial outlay for early intervention may be costly, but it is highly cost effective in the long run, as has been shown in Québec and in other jurisdictions such as New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, the U.S., Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia. One example of a successful intervention is "Reading Recovery," a one-on-one 20-week program that was designed for the lowest 20% of first-grade students and has shown to permanently address literacy problems among these struggling beginning readers, thereby eliminating the need for remediation throughout the entire school career. Another long-running program is the Abecedarian Project[33] of the University of North Carolina that has been shown to have positive results over 30 years of operation. Certain computer programs show promise of increasing student success, such as Concordia and McGill universities' ABRACADABRA,[34] which helps teach literacy to young children.

But like all new initiatives, teachers need professional development to help them incorporate these strategies into their practice.

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[31] Gordon Cleveland, *The Benefits and Costs of Québec's Centres de la Petite Enfance* (Toronto: University of Toronto at Scarborough, Department of Management, 2007), http://childcarepolicy.net/documents/TheBenefitsandCostsof Quebec.333.doc.

See also: Suh-Ruu Ou and Arthur J. Reynolds, "Preschool Education and School Completion" in *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, ed. R.E. Tremblay et al. (Montreal: Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development, 2004), http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/documents/Ou-ReynoldsANGxp.pdf.

[32] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school*, 9.

[33] The Carolina Abecedarian Project, http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/.

See also: Frances A. Campbell et. al., "Early Childhood Education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian project." *Applied Developmental Science* 6, no. 1 (2002): 42-57.

[34] ABRACADABRA, http://grover.concordia.ca/abracadabra/promo/en/index.php.

Recommendation 54

That MELS, through SSCAAA, seek out and assess programs proposed to be effective in improving literacy in early childhood classes.

Recommendation 55

That MELS invest resources in implementing proven early intervention programs and in training teachers to use them.

Recommendation 56

That school boards monitor and report on the literacy levels of their students in both French and English and prescribe targeted intervention as early as possible.

Even before children enter kindergarten, they benefit from early stimulation activities.[35] In an ideal world, these activities would be carried out with parents or caregivers on a one-to-one basis, but in reality, they are more likely to be initiated in daycare centres. The Board welcomes the financial support for daycare and the promotion of links between daycare and school proposed in MELS' action strategy but would go further and encourage the implementation of early stimulation activities in daycare environments.

Recommendation 57

That daycare centres work closely with early childhood educators to develop and implement age-appropriate stimulation activities for young children.

Recommendation 58

That CEGEPs and universities cooperate in developing their programs to prepare early childhood educators.

Recommendation 59

That schools welcome parents and their preschool children to use their library facilities to encourage exposure to reading as well as to the school milieu.

4.8 Initiatives to improve literacy

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve goals, to develop knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.[36]

Every English school board has some initiative in place to promote literacy, some of which have been discussed in section 5.9. Two others deserve mention.

4.8.1 Action Plan on Reading in Schools

The Board was puzzled that no reference has been made in the 13 Paths to Success regarding the MELS Action Plan on Reading in Schools *(Plan d'action sur la lecture à l'école)*.[37] This action plan was introduced in 2003 to encourage the enjoyment and practice of reading, develop facility in the language of instruction, and promote and enhance the role of libraries within schools. The rationale for the program was supported by research, carried out mainly in the United States, which showed that schools with well-stocked, well-planned libraries, staffed by certified library personnel, regularly produced higher-than-average scores on standardized tests. Given the size of the funding for the action plan—$60,000 a year over repeated three-year periods for schools to purchase library books, plus annual funding for ten years to hire 20 professional librarians at the school board level—it would appear the time has come to assess the action plan on reading, particularly as it relates to the action strategy for student success.

Recommendation 60

That MELS assess the impact of the Action Plan on Reading in Schools *(Plan d'action sur la lecture à l'école)*.

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[35] Goodman, *Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?*

[36] UNESCO, *The plurality of literacy and its implications for policies and programs*, UNESCO Education Sector Position Paper (UNESCO, 2004), 13, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001362/136246e.pdf.

[37] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, "Action Plan on Reading in School," http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lecture/index_en.asp.

4.8.2 The Daily Five

The Daily Five[38] is a framework for classroom management that addresses organizational issues and habits of mind as well as literacy. It makes children partly responsible for their own learning and gives them some sense of control and the opportunity to make decisions about their learning. Thus, it appears that as well as improving students' literacy, the program helps develop their sense of responsibility and organizational skills. The Board does not endorse any particular program but believes that, given the enthusiasm surrounding the Daily Five, it is one of the strategies that might be worth investigating to identify the common elements of successful literacy programs that could then form the foundation of good literacy teaching practice.

Recommendation 61

That MELS, through the LCEEQ, assess various available literacy initiatives, investigate their potential and share the results.

4.9 Reduction of class size

The Board welcomes the Minister's intention to reduce class sizes in the youth sector but notes that of the 233 mainstream English-language elementary schools, 81 (35%) have fewer than 120 students (i.e. an average of 20 or fewer students per grade level) and all but one of these is off the island of Montréal. Thus, rural English-language schools will feel little impact from the reduction in class size.

Recommendation 62

That MELS provide financial support to small rural schools that will not benefit from the regulation to reduce class size.

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[38] Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, *The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2006).

OUT-OF-SCHOOL STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS

The Board supports the need to "Mobilize key players in the regions,"[39] but points out that mobilization occurs differently in the English school boards in general because of tradition, and in the regions in particular because of lack of available services. For example, complementary educational services delivered by CLSCs are rarely available in English outside the metropolitan areas, so other strategies are needed to provide support.

As was explained in Section 4.3.1 of this brief, so much of student success rests on the ability of excellent teachers. What happens when a school does not have enough of these teachers to meet the variety of student needs? In some areas, students with difficulties or students whose parents are unable to provide support because of differences in language or education are fortunate enough to have access to volunteer organizations that supplement the work of teachers. Many of these organizations are staffed by volunteers whose qualifications vary; however, the Board feels that their willingness to help and their concern for the students may be as important as specific teaching ability and experience. As one volunteer said of the children: "They know we care about them."

We present some examples of these organizations.

5.1 Literacy Unlimited

Literacy Unlimited[40] is a one-on-one literacy program offered to approximately 75 adults through funding from MELS (PACTE).[41] The Board was interested to learn that the program is receiving an increasing number of male students, 20 to 25 years of age, who are currently employed but are nonetheless looking to improve their literacy skills for a variety of reasons, for example, to find a better job, help their child with homework, or obtain a driver's licence.

5.2 Oasis

The Oasis program has been adapted from Literacy Unlimited for secondary school learners and operates in three secondary schools on the West Island: Riverdale, John Rennie and Lakeside Academy. This program targets Secondary Cycle One students who have been identified by the school as needing help with literacy. Although these students do not have specials needs, they may have some learning difficulties, have experienced frustration in their schooling, or have no academic assistance at home. They often have difficulty fitting into the academic environment but are nonetheless seen as likely to benefit from the help. The tutors are retired individuals or qualified teachers who receive 12 hours of training in the Oasis method and are then matched with appropriate students, removing them from their regular English class for one hour a week from September to June. The annual cost for each student is $600. The relatively small financial investment and the apparent advantages of the model warrant expansion of the program to benefit more students. At Riverdale, for example, although 30% of the school's students have been identified as needing assistance, only 10% of them receive tutoring because of the lack of available funding.

5.3 Saint Columba House After-School Program

Saint Columba House provides a high-quality bilingual after-school program to 60 children from the community of Point Saint Charles, working in partnership with nine schools, both English and French. The goals of this program are to enhance literacy and numeracy of children through a range of creative and recreational activities, homework help and one-on-one tutoring in both languages. In addition to activities, children receive milk and a nutritious snack daily. They also participate in our weekly student recognition program, "Stars of the Week." Parents participate through parent-child activities, have regular contact with staff, and are welcome to volunteer in the program.

Central to the After School Program is our team of dedicated volunteers. On a daily basis, we have 4 to 5 volunteers helping children with their homework and working individually with students who need extra help in reading. We also have many university students who participate by leading art and theatre workshops, by working individually with students and by supporting the after-school program staff. It is thanks to the dedication of our staff and volunteers that we are able to ensure that this program continues to be a success.[42]

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[39] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school*, 18.

[40] Literacy Unlimited, http://www.literacyunlimited.ca/

[41] *Programme d'action communautaire sur le terrain de l'éducation* (PACTE)

[42] Saint Columba, After-School Program, http://www.saintcolumbahouse.org/programs-and-services/after-school-program/.

There are currently 50 students in the free homework help program, which is funded by the school boards and the schools, as well as various corporations, foundations and churches.

Some students are recommended to Saint Columba House by their schools or by Batshaw Youth and Family Services.

These students are typically bussed to non-neighbourhood schools according to a bussing schedule that does not allow them to stay for after-school activities in their own school, and the program offers children a safe place to go while their parents are at work.

The Centre asks teachers for information to better understand the child's needs. Students from the English Core Program (where students are taught almost exclusively in English, save for the required French classes) have the most problems, especially those whose self-esteem has been affected when they are dropped from a bilingual program (where students spend half of their time studying in English and the other half in French). Homework help reinforces the lessons taught at school that day and helps the students understand and practise the related skills and concepts, using both group tutoring and individual help. This is offered two, three or four days per week, depending on the student's needs. The volunteer tutors are students in social work and other university programs. For example, student librarians from McGill University have catalogued all the reading material at the centre. There are monthly parent-child activities, although parental involvement is not compulsory. Parents often do not have the literacy levels or skills to help their children with their homework, and some cannot even read the notes sent home from the school.

There has been no formal evaluation of the program, but teachers have commended it. One 10-year-old child who could not recognize letters can now do so through the work of a patient tutor. Students come back and say that the program was helpful to them. The organizers define success as development and a change in attitude.

5.4 LEARN homework assistance program

SOS LEARN[43] is a free online tutoring service that connects qualified teachers with students to help with study and homework. It is available Monday through Thursday evenings to Québec students enrolled in English schools. Families must have a computer with Internet access for their children to benefit from this program.

5.5 Summary: Characteristics of all the interventions

It has been informative and exciting for the Board to hear about the variety of activities taking place within the English sector, both in and out of school, to promote student success. While the current MELS action strategy on student success places emphasis on graduation rates, in other words, on the qualification component of the schools' mission, many of these organizations and initiatives also address the education and socialization components. Most are characterized by individualized attention to struggling students and therefore not only enhance the teaching and learning experience, but also foster a sense of belonging and self-confidence that may be lacking or unattainable for these students in the regular school setting.

The fact that MELS includes some of these same programs in the "13 Paths to Success"[44] is noteworthy and commendable. The Board would like to see closer connections between the in-school and out-of-school initiatives and envisions the CLCs as being an ideal nexus for these two types of programs.

[43] LEARN, Services and Publications, Tutorials, http://www.learnquebec.ca/en/services/tutorials.html.

[44] Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I care about school.*

CONCLUSION

Throughout this brief, we have quoted the words of students in a Cycle Three, Year 2 class who were asked what success meant to them. We close with one last definition of success, and while we ponder the challenge of trying to measure success by this definition, we recognize it as the most important and the quintessential definition and goal of educational success:

> *Success is that sweet, victorious feeling you have inside when you have achieved something good. (MS, Grade 6 student)*

The Board wishes all students the opportunity and the wherewithal to experience "that sweet, victorious feeling."

APPENDIX

1- LIST OF GUESTS/RESOURCE PEOPLE 2009-2010

DAVID BRISEBOIS
Principal, New Frontiers School Board, Franklin Elementary School and Ormstown Elementary School

MICHELLE DUCHESNEAU
Youth Programs Coordinator, St. Columba House After-School Program

GLORIA KEENAN
Lester-B.-Pearson School Board, Director of Adult Education and Vocational Training

DONNA LEDUC
Spiritual Development Coordinator, Saint Columba House After School Program

GENEVIÈVE LÉGARÉ
Project Manager, The Evidence-based Project

LUC LÉPINE
Education Specialist, ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, Services à la communauté anglophone et aux affaires autochtones

ANNE-MARIE LIVINGSTONE
Research Coordinator, Community Learning Centre Project

CAROL MARRIOTT
Retired Principal, Member of the School Administrators Support Team (SAST)

LOUISE MARZINOTTO
Education Specialist, ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, Services à la communauté anglophone et aux affaires autochtones

JOY PALMER
Head Teacher, New Frontiers School Board, Ormstown Elementary School

JILLIAN ROBERTS
Executive Director, Literacy Unlimited and the Oasis School Literacy Program

LYNN SENECAL
Learning Resource Centre, Riverside School Board

2- DAWSON STUDENT SUCCESS ACTION PLAN (SSAP)

2.2 Elements on the College's Mission Statement reflected in the new SSAP

The following elements of the College's Mission Statement are reflected in the new Student Success Action Plan.

2.2.1 …Dawson College believes that it is equally important to prepare students for further academic education and for immediate employment.

2.2.2 …to maintain standards of excellence essential to our students' future success and to provide the appropriate programs, services and technology to ensure that any student admitted has the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to achieve these standards.

2.2.3 …to continue to develop innovative and flexible educational approaches to serve the needs of our students.

2.3 Strategic goals reflected in the new SSAP

The following strategic goals (contained in the College's Strategic Plan) are reflected in the new SSAP.

2.3.1 To deliver relevant, high quality instruction, programs and services that meet the changing needs of students and society.

2.3.2 To provide every student the opportunity to succeed and to acquire the knowledge and abilities to lead a fulfilled life as a learner, a citizen and a member of the workforce.

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