

Association des comités de parents anglophones English Parents' Committee Association



Montreal, April 27, 2020

Re: Gradual reopening of elementary schools

Dear parents,

The announcement today of the gradual reopening of Quebec elementary schools by Premier François Legault and Education Minister Jean-François Roberge was met with mixed reaction from parents across Quebec.

While schools outside the Greater Montreal region will reopen on May 11, and those in the Greater Montreal region, including Laval, reopening the following week on May 19, the parameters of the return to school project include elements that are both reassuring and concerning.

The English Parents' Committee Association supports the voluntary nature of the plan; that no parents are obliged to send their children to school, and that children who remain home will be supported by their educators that will support them online.

We also laud the move by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEES) to provide families with technology linked to the cellular network to continue distance learning for those who do not attend classes, as the availability of these tools and internet access is important to close the learning gap, something our parent community has long requested.

Moreover, assurances that the service will improve for those *not* returning, has been buttressed by the government's announced plan to offer all Quebec teachers workshops on distance learning.

As for the in-school plans however, many parents have expressed concerns over how effective social distancing will be maintained, even with smaller class sizes. Measures are to be implemented in transportation and classroom layout to maintain the two-metre distance between students, and high schools may be used to accommodate the overflow following the division of classes to limit each to about 15 students.

While it seems, based on our assessment of parent opinion, that there is no perfect solution, it is important that all points of view are expressed and heard.

We have heard from many families who find it hard to imagine an effective educational project, given the limitations imposed by Quebec public health authorities and the novel challenges it represents, nor do many believe the learning experiences in class and at home to prove equal.

Association des comités de parents anglophones English Parents' Committee Association



EPCA continues to stress the importance to the Ministry of maintaining close dialogue and cooperation with our Parents' association. As we move closer to an opening date, and more details are released, it is important that we, as the official voice of the English school parent network, hear from you, our parent community.

We appreciate that the MEES has committed to a significant upscaling in the maintenance and hygiene practices in our school network, i.e. cleaning of buildings, extra attention to high-contact areas, and availability of appropriate personal hygiene products, that have long been problematic in many schools. We trust that these measures will be applied with vigor, vigilance and consistency.

It is also important, as the Minister has indicated, that parents advise their schools of their intention to send their children back to class with one week's notice to help with the preparation.

EPCA maintains that particular attention should be paid to our special-needs students, who require the help that they have depended on, whether at home or in class. The MEES is encouraging those students to return to class as soon as possible in order to benefit from optimal educational support. Like the wider community, their parents have expressed both enthusiasm and reluctance to send their children back to school for a variety of reasons, all perfectly valid, and all deserving of respect.

The non-mandatory nature and delay of the project are key and should allow all Quebec parents the opportunity to reflect on what is best for their children, and their particular circumstance, whatever their employment status, children's age, accessibility to childcare or region.

Parents whose children or family member have a health condition should, as advised, keep their child at home, and staff over 60 years of age or with medical conditions are advised to do the same.

As we have maintained since the beginning of discussions on the nature of any return-to-school project, EPCA insists that the health and well-being of our students and school staff be *paramount*, and be given the utmost consideration and continued attention in any process.

EPCA will continue to monitor all developments closely and help clarify these issues for parents. We remain in constant dialogue with the MEES and our partners, and it is important that our parent community make itself heard.

EPCA is here *for* you, and we need to hear *from* you.

EPCA President
Katherine Korakakis