



QUEBEC FEDERATION OF HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

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A
REPORT

TO
SUPERIOR COUNCIL OF EDUCATION

ON
THE STATE AND NEEDS OF EDUCATION IN 1985

FROM
QUEBEC FEDERATION OF HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

Montreal
October 1985



A MEMBER OF THE CANADIAN HOME AND SCHOOL AND PARENT-TEACHER FEDERATION

The children we help to-day will lead the world tomorrow"

INTRODUCTION

Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA), founded in 1944, is an independent voluntary parental organization representing approximately six thousand families, mainly within the English speaking communities throughout the province. Parent volunteers are active within local Home and School associations, the provincial organization and at the national level through the Canadian Home and School Parent Teacher Federation.

One of the stated aims of the Home and School movement is to assist in forming public opinion favourable to reform and the advancement of the education of the child. Thus we are pleased to submit this report on the state and needs of education as requested by the Superior Council of Education.

To stop and take stock of the present state of education is difficult when we are involved in constant change. Perhaps it is the fact of change itself that we have to look at. Our response has given us an opportunity to look at our educational system and appreciate those things that are good. In addition, it has raised our expectation that the problems in the educational system can be solved, if all the parties concerned with the education and welfare of our children will actively participate together.

PROCEDURE

QFHSA is aware that often a select group within an association responds on behalf of all the members without due consultation. In order to make this response as representative of our members' opinions as possible, the questions which the Superior Council has asked us to address were sent to all our member associations and to our group affiliated school committees. The questions were accompanied by a questionnaire designed to help these groups focus on the major facets of our educational system. The main items in the questionnaire were Curriculum, including the new curriculum and French second

language instruction; **Teachers and Teaching** including surplus, educational background, and class size; **Student Services; Libraries; Special Education** including mainstreaming; and **Parent Participation**. For each of these categories the local groups were asked to comment on their good qualities, their weaknesses and their deficiencies. In this manner these groups could deduce, in their perception, the major needs to be addressed in the field of education. Replies to these questionnaires were received from 24 school groups out of 81 local Home and School associations and group affiliated school committees. Moreover, these replies represent a wide cross section of the province; eleven replies came from the Island of Montreal and the other thirteen from seven school board areas across the province.

CURRICULUM

Good Qualities The new curriculum provides standard guidelines to both teacher and parent. These guidelines assure that there will be a basic programme throughout the province. Nevertheless there are areas of great concern, aggravated by the long drawn out process of implementation of the new courses. In the area of French language instruction there appears to be general satisfaction; several schools found their local programmes excellent. The French Immersion programmes, where they exist, are providing a good general foundation which can be built on in the following years.

Weaknesses and Deficiencies The whole framework of the regime pedagogique is seen as too rigid. In particular each new course is seen as a series of compulsory objectives time-tabled to the minute throughout the school year. If there is flexibility in the programme then the Boards and schools are either ignorant of this or choosing to ignore it.

Accompanying this rigidity is the impression that no allowance is made for the differing abilities of the students. It appears that standards are being reduced to a common denominator

and consequently the courses lack the challenge and the potential for enrichment needed to stimulate inquiring minds. A country wishing to compete, or even survive, in our troubled world needs to nurture those who have the potential to become its future leaders.

The actual content of some of the courses is causing some unease. The Social Science courses are lacking a "world view". There is appallingly little taught about other lands and other peoples, even about Canada outside Quebec. Important as it is to learn about Quebec, Quebec's position in Canada and the world can only be understood when Canada and the rest of the world has been studied objectively. We cannot begin to understand the global problems of famine, flood, and poverty merely through studying the history and geography of Quebec and Canada.

The French language programmes do not appear to take into account the very differing backgrounds of the students; some come from bilingual backgrounds, some have attended French pre-school or day-care, some have difficulty with the language and others still speak neither English nor French at home. Some, none, or all of these problems may exist in any one school. Another problem within the French programmes is the size of the classes. Many replies stated that smaller classes would enhance the students' opportunity for oral communication. Lastly, French is taught in the English schools often in complete isolation from francophone Quebec.

The foregoing are weaknesses which are capable of being corrected. However, there is a major deficiency which needs to be addressed. Many of the new courses are being implemented without accompanying textbooks. Many of the existing texts are outdated. Almost all of our members mentioned the lack of texts and resource materials. Parents judge a course partly by its text, and when there are no texts parents become even more concerned about the quality of these programmes. The classroom is even more affected; lack of texts makes it more difficult for the student

to learn as well as creating an extra and unnecessary burden for the teacher. When the ministry first introduced the regime pedagogique , one of the promises was a text per child for every subject. Even then there was doubt as to whether there was sufficient funding. The whole question of the place and size of the educational budget within the framework of the total financial demands on the government will be addressed in greater detail later in our final conclusion.

Solutions

The regime pedagogique needs to be modified in order to permit more local adaptation of courses and to permit a greater allowance for individual differences.

The content of the social science courses should be broadened.

New courses should not be required to be implemented at least until students' texts and teachers' guides are available.

The French programme should include interaction with francophones, perhaps through cooperation with the neighbouring French schools by means of exchange of letters, twinning classes, etc. Such interaction would be the responsibility of the school boards and schools involved.

TEACHERS AND TEACHING

Surplus: Good Qualities Teacher surplus is considered to be of some benefit in those areas where school boards have surplus teachers and assign these teachers as permanent support within specific schools. It seems that these surplus teachers are being well used in providing enrichment and support, and in providing permanent supply teachers that the students can get to know within the school.

Surplus: Weaknesses and Deficiencies The process of "seniority and surplus" is seen as leading to instability, disruption and disappointment. Good, experienced teachers are made to feel like nomads. The bumping process generates a continual turnover of teachers at the beginning of the school year. There is a negative spin off effect on those students who have to wait six weeks for their permanent teacher. The rotation of teachers low in seniority forces these teachers to be continually making fresh starts.

Secondly, the all important educational background is of secondary importance when schools are forced to accept teachers regardless of qualifications. It also happens that a teacher may choose to teach a subject for which he or she is unqualified in order not to become surplus. Finally the surplus affecting our younger teachers is such that the younger teachers are the first to go. As one reply stated "the sanctity of seniority is leading to the ossification of the teaching corps".

Solutions

There should be provisions within the teacher contract for earlier pre-retirement and also greater opportunities for sabbatical leaves. This is a continuation of present trends and the responsibility for this lies with the government, the school boards and the teachers' unions.

Educational Background: Good Qualities The educational background of a teacher is something that a parent may be able only to guess. Nevertheless parental impressions have worth. It appears that in those areas where teachers are well qualified, or are teaching their own speciality, there are no problems.

Educational Background: Weaknesses and Deficiencies There is perceived to be a problem, sometimes even publicly acknowledged by the teacher, where teachers are required to teach

courses for which they have little or no background. This occurrence is becoming more frequent. The situations arising out of surplus and seniority, the intricacies of timetabling courses of differing credit value, the pressure from teachers to see fewer students, and the policy of having students interact with fewer teachers all make it difficult to ensure that teachers teach only in their own speciality.

Another concern is the lack of specialist teachers. The elementary schools in particular suffer from the lack of specialists: physical education, music, science, art, drama, computer, etc.. There is concern that art is almost always taught as a craft programme and that many students have no experience in developmental art.

Solutions

Teachers must be qualified in each subject they teach. This may mean an extensive programme of retraining which should be done through in service courses and sabbaticals rather than by pulling the teachers out of school during class time. This might be considered a continuation of the present trend although, in fact, weaknesses in teaching the new courses are the result of the lack of foresight in the implications of such a major change as brought about by the Regime Pedagogique and of the system of seniority and surplus. Learning new courses outside the teacher's normal discipline while he or she is teaching them is not sound pedagogy.

Responsibility for setting up retraining programmes rests with the universities and the school boards. The funds for retraining are the responsibility of the Ministry.

The lack of specialist teachers in the schools can only be solved in the context of changes in the educational budget.

Class Size: Problems Class size is always a current issue. Maximum class size inevitably produces the problem of what to do

with the extra students. Although split classes are becoming more common most parents would prefer not to have them. Notwithstanding the geographical diversity of the respondents an overwhelming number of our replies stated that the maximum class size for regular classes should be 25. Some felt that French classes should be as small as 15 to promote greater student participation. It was also suggested that the maximum class size should be reduced if it contains any special education students.

Solutions

The problem might be solved by a return to an in-school pupil-teacher ratio that excludes specialists and that makes allowances for different types of students. The responsibility for this would lie with the government, the school boards and the teacher unions. See appended resolution 85/5 Pupil Teacher Ratio, passed by QFHSA delegates at the 1985 AGM.

STUDENT SERVICES

The whole area of student services - guidance counsellors, school nurses, psychological support, etc - is riddled with problems. Where these services exist and can be obtained, it has been found that the support personnel are well qualified and do a good job. The problem is that there are just not enough of them. There are three major problems that need to be addressed: The lack of school nurses, the lack of support services in general, and the lack of information to parents.

School Nurses. Any large children's institution should employ the services of a full time nurse. A full time school nurse is even more necessary at the high school level where many students have ceased communicating their aches, pains and fears to their parents. The nurse is able to provide a wide range of support and health education programmes, and at the same time is available to dispense first aid. This is a full time job! There is some debate as to whether the nurse should be employed by the

school board or the CLSC. Perhaps this is not the real issue. What is important is that the school nurse be bound by the policies of the school board and respond to the needs and philosophies of the school and its community. It is essential that the nurse assigned to an English school be fluent in English.

Other Support Services, guidance counsellors, psychologists, speech therapists etc. are either unavailable or far too few to satisfy the demand. It is hypocritical to say that these services are offered when they cannot be obtained when needed. As one high school group commented, "most students do not receive support unless they are in serious trouble, when it is often too late". The personnel supplying these other support services, like the nurses, should be bound by the policies of the school board and the school, and respond to the needs and philosophies of the school and its community, including being fluent in the students' language - in this case English.

Solutions

There must be funds provided to have the necessary personnel to provide each school with a full time nurse and to provide other support services. The responsibility lies with the government and the school boards who must stop passing the buck - each claiming that the other controls the budget.

These support services must be coordinated between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the school boards in a manner that ensures that these services are available when needed. See also appended resolution 85/2, Allocation and Deployment of School Nurses and resolution 85/3 Counselling and Psychological Services in the Schools passed by QFHSA delegates at the 1985 AGM.

The lack of information re support services given to parents is disturbing. Information must be given to all parents on what support services are available and how they may be obtained.

Solution

There must be some person in each school qualified to recommend and obtain these services; a guidance counsellor or a school nurse would fulfill this role competently. The school board should be responsible for appointing guidance counsellors. Both the school board and the school must be responsible for giving information to all parents.

LIBRARIES

Good Qualities There appear to be libraries in all the schools. These provide excellent support for projects, recreational reading, enrichment, etc.. Elementary school libraries are for the most part well used with volunteers or librarians providing an excellent service.

Weaknesses and Deficiencies Most of the problems in this area have their origin in the lack of funds. While volunteer librarians provide good services many of the libraries are run without any professional assistance. It is felt that all libraries should be under the care of a professional. There is a chronic lack of funding for library books. Libraries often lack the books needed to go with the new courses, particularly in respect to the new English language arts programme. Many libraries have outdated books, there are insufficient French books and often a lack of Canadian material. School boards and schools vary greatly in their library policies; some provide funds for the school library, but these are never enough and often have to be augmented by the local Home and School Association; other schools have to rely entirely on funding by the local Home and School association or other parent groups.

There is one other problem that should be noted. It is distressing to learn that while the elementary school libraries are well used the high school libraries are not. Comments like "The library is empty most of the time" and "students and teachers are not encouraged to use the library" show a real weakness in our school system. This is not a new phenomenon and perhaps it is time to consider the role of the high school library.

Solutions

The solution to most of these problems is again more funds.

The problems experienced in the high school library are not new and perhaps it is time to reconsider the role of the library in high school education. The responsibility for this might well be given to the Superior Council of Education.

MAINSTREAMING

Good Qualities The advantages of mainstreaming are understood in theory by most parents. The student is less socially isolated; mainstreaming fosters development in a normal environment; there is the role model of the regular students who in turn become more sensitive to the problems and needs of others. Nevertheless there are some problems and as large scale mainstreaming is a new policy it is difficult to tell whether these problems are temporary or not.

Weaknesses and Deficiencies The lack of student services has already been discussed. Students who are mainstreamed still need individual support and remedial help. Will the funds necessary to provide this support be available? Another point is that there is no compensation in class size for the presence of mainstreamed special education students. It cannot be denied that these students require extra time and effort on the teachers' part.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle that mainstreaming has to overcome is the "other" parents' fear that the mainstreamed students will have a detrimental effect on the other students, both by taking up a disproportionate amount of the teacher's time and by being a disrupting influence. If the problems mentioned in the previous paragraph can be solved then this fear of disadvantaging the regular students may be diminished.

Solutions

Special education students should continue to be identified as such in the school's enrollment list and classes containing mainstreamed students should be proportionately smaller. See also appended resolution 85/4, Integration of Special Education Students, passed by QFHSA delegates at the 1985 AGM.

More support services should be provided, see solution to student services' problems, page 8 of this report.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Regardless of mainstreaming policies there will always be those students whose education is better achieved in a special environment. The Special education classes seem to be meeting the needs of those children. The teachers are well trained, and on the whole the groupings are small enough for students to get the individual help they need. However there are problems. There is the universal complaint of lack of support services and some classes as large as 17 special education students do exist.

In the discussion of special education classes it was pointed out that there is little or no consideration of the intellectually gifted. The lack of enrichment classes is of general concern.

Solutions

More support services !

Enrichment programmes should be set up. The responsibility for these lies with the school board and the school.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Good Qualities The parent groups which answered the questionnaire are obviously made up of willing volunteers. The replies indicated that they feel welcome in the schools and are confident that they are making the school a better place for the students. "Helping and cooperation makes for a happy environment where teachers and parents are working for the common good, and the children know this too." Parents are involved in such tasks as staffing the school library, providing enrichment activities and extra-curricular activities, and helping the teachers in the classroom as well as belonging to the local Home and School executive and being members of the school committee.

It is not only the school that benefits from parent participation. The parents who become involved have a better understanding of school policies, they have improved relations with individual staff members and their children know that they have supportive parents. Parent participation is good and needs to be encouraged.

Weaknesses and deficiencies There are far too few parents volunteering to help in the schools. It is increasingly difficult to get volunteers, and the volunteers who are helping in the schools tend to be the same people year after year. These volunteers are overworked, often being involved in more than one aspect of school life.

There are several causes of the lack of volunteers. Many parents are returning to the work force while their children are still young. There is a feeling among the volunteers that they are being used by the school and the school board to provide services for which there is no funding. Parents have become frustrated because they do not receive enough information about

things that are happening at school. All parents are entitled to know facts about the school, facts such as: the number of students, the list of staff and staff assignments, the course outlines, the changes to the curriculum, etc. Parents should be informed of changes and events before they take place. Parents are told little about their role as school committee members etc and are insufficiently informed to give advice.

Solutions

The poor flow of information must be corrected by the school boards and school principals.

In high schools, where the students are notoriously poor messengers, the information could be included with the report card since most of these are received by the parents.

The principal and the school committees must respect each other's role. The school board should be responsible for having a person attend each school committee once a year for the purpose of discussing the role of the school committee, its powers, responsibilities and its rights.

OTHER ITEMS

The following points arose out of the replies to our questionnaire and they deserve individual attention.

Ethnic Communities

Among the replies received were two from high schools situated in areas with a dense ethnic population. They have some special problems.

Parent participation is difficult in schools with a high ethnic population density. Parents want to participate, but are often ineffectual because of language barriers. An actual working committee in such schools is hard to organize.

Many of the secondary schools in the Montreal area have a high percentage of ethnic students for whom English and French

are third and fourth languages. Their special needs must be considered if we are to develop a literate Quebec society.

The teacher who cannot relate to the ethnic student will find it more difficult to teach these students, the students will not learn so well. The students' attitude to society will be affected if the student is exposed to a teacher who suffers from racial prejudice.

Solutions

Teachers who do not fit into a multiracial environment should be placed in an environment where they are comfortable.

There could be ethnic representation on the Superior Council.

Research is needed into the impact on our educational system of ethnic populations and the special needs of their students. Such research could well be undertaken by the Superior Council of Education.

Implementing change

Many problems in the new courses were cited in our replies. Some of these problems have roots in the lack of funds, others in the fact that many of the courses are only in the developmental stage and that teachers had not yet received training for the new courses.

A solution to the present problem of lack of readiness of the components is probably too late. But we can learn from experience. There is the need to offer the Ministry advice on how to implement change in such a manner that the whole system is not upset. The superior Council of Education might well consider researching the means of implementing change.

Rural Busing

The time spent on a school bus is often too long. Some elementary students are spending three hours a day on the bus.

Funding must be made available so that, by providing more buses, the rural bus routes can be shortened. When small rural schools are forced to close a sizeable portion of the money saved should be channelled into improving busing facilities for the school(s) receiving the displaced students. This is the responsibility of the school board and the Department of Transport.

CONCLUSION

Funding the educational system

We, as parents, have determined many good things about our educational system and we have identified some of the problems. We certainly do not know all the solutions and we are not sufficiently advanced with the present change to be looking forward to the next phase.

When asked to identify those topics that should be addressed during the next few years, the following were placed high on the priority list:

- Student Services - which is clearly the greatest concern.
- Curriculum
- Class Size
- Specialist Teachers
- Information to Parents
- Special Education

In each of these areas our comments and suggestions have already been discussed. It may be that we need to move in new directions to find the solutions.

The deficiencies in our system stem mainly from lack of funding. The solutions to most of the problems involve spending more funds. We have stated that funds are needed for: text books, library books, more teachers, specialist teachers, full time school nurses, more student services, enrichment programmes, smaller classes, librarians, ... The list is endless and the order of priority changes according to the local situation.

A declining birth rate, decreasing school enrollments, school closures, decreed teacher contracts, increasing numbers of surplus and excess teachers, an uneven implementation of new curricula, a lack of material resources - all of these and more have had a dramatic impact on the quality of education being offered to our children. All of these changes currently happening in our school system lead us to ask the following questions:

Is the government spending a sufficient percentage of the global tax dollar on education, considering that our children are our hope for the future and that as they decline in numbers their value and their worth increases?

Are the funds that Quebec receives under the federal-provincial funding for minority language education and second language instruction being allocated in these two areas? We would draw your attention to the "Statement from QFHSA to the Superior Council of Education on Second Language Teaching" (February 15 1984. School boards in Quebec have not been receiving these funds; the question of accountability must be addressed.

Has the Ministry of Education experienced the same dramatic change within its internal structures as the local school has?

Are the funds that are allocated to the educational system being spent directly on the education of the students?

As a "grassroots" organization of parents who have a "vested interest in our children's education and general welfare, we are deeply concerned that the tax dollars allocated to education are not being properly distributed.

QFHSA strongly urges that the Superior Council of Education undertake a major research project on Education and Finance. Questions regarding the funding of education must be answered if we are to achieve the solutions suggested in this report. The future state of education in Quebec must rest on a sound and equitable financial base, thus assuring our children a sound and equitable education.

APPENDIX

RESOLUTION 85/2 ALLOCATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF SCHOOL NURSES

WHEREAS the current allotment, imposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, of one school nurse for 2400 students is totally inadequate to serve the needs of growing children in a health promotion context, and

WHEREAS there is a current shift under way to remove school nurses from the school, the very place inhabited by all children during their formative years, and

WHEREAS the school nurses are currently allowed little input regarding their perceptions of the needs of the students they serve, and

WHEREAS, under centralized Ministry of Social Affairs structures, school nurses are subject to work schedules that often do not correspond to those of the schools they serve,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations urgently request that the Ministry of Social Affairs increase the allocation of nurses to student population and further increase the numbers of nurses serving schools at high risk, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations ask the Ministry of Social Affairs to elicit the input of school nurses regarding their perceptions of children's health needs and encourage them to institute within the schools programs that foster health promotion, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations ask the Ministry of Social Affairs to recognize that the workplace of the school nurse must be the school and that the nurse's schedule must conform to the timetable of the school.

DESTINATION: Ministry of Social Affairs
Quebec Association of Social Service Centers
Corporation of Professional Social Workers of Quebec
Order of Nurses of Quebec

copies to: Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards and
its member Boards.

RESOLUTION 85/3 COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES IN THE SCHOOLS

WHEREAS our teachers and administrators, both elementary and secondary, are seeing more and more students whose academic problems cannot be solved until the psychological and/or developmental problems they face are alleviated, and

WHEREAS staff cuts have seriously depleted the ranks of guidance counsellors, psychologists and other specialists, and

WHEREAS only a very few guidance counsellors are available at the elementary school level, and

WHEREAS the identification of children with problems and the services they require are frequently delayed due to the lack of appropriate personnel, and

WHEREAS, if students are made to wait until high school to benefit from the services of the limited number of guidance counsellors, it is often too late and the problems such students face cannot be solved at the high school level.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations urge the Ministry of Education to make special funds available to the school boards so that mental health services, including guidance counsellors, psychologists and other mental health specialists for both high schools and elementary schools, will be an essential part of all school staffs.

DESTINATION: Minister of Education
Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards
Minister of Social Affairs
Federation of Medical Specialists of Quebec
Corporation of Professional Psychologists of Quebec
Council for Exceptional Children

Background

Dr. Albert Wener's research for the School Council of the Island of Montreal, as reported in the PAPT Sentinel, February 1984.

Child at Risk, a report of the Federal Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science, Minister of Supplies and Services, 1980.

RESOLUTION 85/4 INTEGRATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

WHEREAS special education students are students with difficulties of a physical, emotional and/or educational nature, and

WHEREAS the integration of special education students into regular classrooms can be a traumatic experience for both the special and the conventional students, and

WHEREAS when special education students are integrated with regular classes, too often the teacher of the regular class is faced with options for which he has not been prepared and which may be detrimental to either or both groups when a choice is made, and

WHEREAS the integration of special education students into a regular class without any decrease in class size makes it difficult for the teacher to do justice to both groups, and

WHEREAS one of the priorities of all teacher groups in the province is that of making sure that adequate resources and personnel be made available to all schools undertaking such integration,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations request the Ministry of Education and the school boards to negotiate clauses in the next teacher contract whereby each special education student integrated into a regular class is weighted by a factor of three in calculating the class size, and whereby the teacher who is not provided with sufficient information and support may refuse to accept a special education student into his class.

DESTINATION: Ministry of Education
Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards and its
member Boards
Quebec Association of School Administrators
Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers
Provincial Association of Catholic Teachers
Quebec Association of Catholic School Administrators
Quebec Federation of Catholic School Boards

Background

The Schools of Québec: Policy Statement and Plan of Action, Ministère de l'Éducation, 1979, "Access to Education in the Most Normal School Environment Possible," (5.4.18; 5.4.19; 5.4.20), p. 64

RESOLUTION 85/5 PUPIL/TEACHER RATIO

WHEREAS the pupil/teacher ratio has been part of the teacher contract for many years, and

WHEREAS the pupil/teacher ratio gives a school the opportunity to form classes in accordance with the needs of the students of the local school, and

WHEREAS exceptional children - children with learning disabilities, slow learners, and gifted children - require a lower pupil/teacher ratio to realize their full potential, and

WHEREAS a pupil/teacher ratio is not in the present decree,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations urge that a pupil/teacher ratio be included in the next regular teacher contract as a basis for the calculation of the number of teachers assigned to a particular school, with a special ratio for exceptional children - children with learning disabilities, slow learners and gifted children.

DESTINATION: Ministry of Education
Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers
Provincial Association of Catholic Teachers
Quebec Association of Protestant School
Boards
Federation of Catholic School Boards of
Quebec

copy to: Superior Council of Education