

# THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL NETWORK IN QUEBEC'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MINORITY (OLM) EDUCATION SECTOR<sup>1</sup>

Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN)

By Patricia Lamarre, Debbie Horrocks, and Emma Legault<sup>2</sup>

Community Learning Centres (CLCs), also known as “community schools,”<sup>3</sup> were launched in 2006 in Quebec’s English-language school sector, with the **goal of connecting schools more closely to their local communities**. The CLC initiative is built on three premises:

- Collaboration between schools and communities contributes to student success and better educational contexts, enhancing the school climate and the social, emotional, and academic well-being of all students.
- Schools that engage in partnerships with community organizations and service providers can bring much needed resources and programs not only to school-aged children and youth, but also to their families and the wider English-speaking community.
- Schools can contribute to the vitality of Quebec’s English-speaking official language minority.

<sup>1</sup> English-language schools in Quebec are legally recognized as official language minority (OLM) schools under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, with a mandate to protect and promote the vitality of Quebec’s English-speaking minority. In this and other briefs in this series, the terms “English-language schools” and “OLM schools” will be used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> With special thanks to Michael Canuel, CEO of LEARN, for his pertinent feedback.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see LEARN (2021).

Community schools are funded through the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, which uses Entente Canada-Québec funding from the Government of Canada's Department of Canadian Heritage<sup>4</sup> to support this initiative in the OLM sector. Since 2006, the growth of the community school network has been significant.

**Today, there are 92 community schools<sup>5</sup> located in all 10 school boards, representing nearly a third of schools<sup>6</sup> and reaching over a quarter of the student population in the English-language sector.**

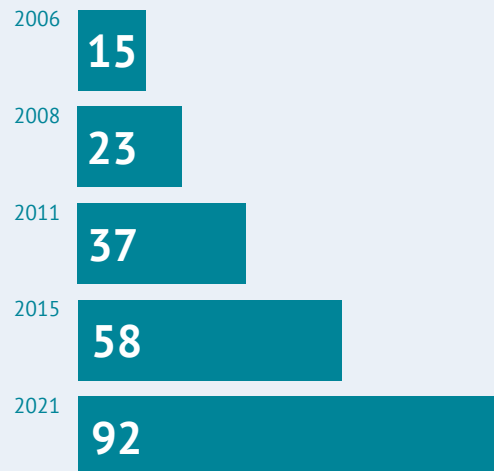
From the outset, it was clear that a “one size fits all” model would not work, given the very diverse settings of Québec's English-language schools. The diversity of local challenges made critical the need for flexibility and adaptability.

A key feature of the CLC approach is the development of partnerships at various levels and between potential collaborators: school teams, parents, local stakeholders, and different levels of governments. School-community partnerships provide students with enriched learning opportunities (for example, a school-community gardening program led by a local ecocentre). Partnerships also facilitate the development of community service learning projects, where teachers connect with community organizations to create student learning opportunities that address authentic needs within the community in line with the Québec Education Plan. CLC schools have also partnered with the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) to offer health and wellness programs and with the English Language Arts Network (ELAN) for cultural activities. Many activities organized in a CLC school open the school to the larger community (for example, intergenerational writing projects organized in partnership with ELAN).<sup>7</sup>

92  
community schools



#### Growth of the CLC network



Source: LEARN

<sup>4</sup> For more information on this agreement, see MEQ/MES (2021).

<sup>5</sup> This is the number as of April 16, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> In 2021, there were 327 elementary, secondary and adult/vocational schools in the English-language public sector. There are also many private English-language and bilingual/multilingual schools. One private school has also adopted a community school approach.

<sup>7</sup> See for example LEARN (2020).

Community schools are supported by community development agents (CDAs), who work closely with school principals, school teams, community stakeholders, and partner organizations to link resources, services, and activities to the students, their families, teachers, and the community at large. CDAs are tasked with outreach to the community and to partners.<sup>8</sup>

To guide the implementation of the community school approach, a provincial resource team (PRT) was created at the outset. The PRT is part of LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network), a non-profit educational organization providing the English-language school sector with resources. The PRT works with the LEARN team to tie community school activities and programs to curricular content, enriching and extending classroom learning. The PRT has been effective in developing networks of partners for community schools at different levels, and is responsible for the training and professional development of community school teams. The PRT pursues research and development activities and contributes to the development of provincial expertise on community schools, essentially acting as a critical backbone for the community school network in Quebec's OLM schools.

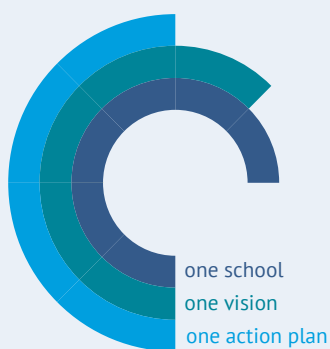
Partnerships have proven to be mutually beneficial, bringing programs, resources, and services to CLC schools, while at the same time providing partners with reach into schools and their local communities. The work of the PRT to bring partnerships to schools provided the catalyst for a much needed network in English-speaking Quebec, creating a structure that Quebec's official language minorities lacked (Bourhis & Landry, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Evaluation studies have supported the implementation and evolution of the community school approach in school and can be found on the LEARN Site under "Evaluation Reports": <https://www.learnquebec.ca/evaluation-reports>

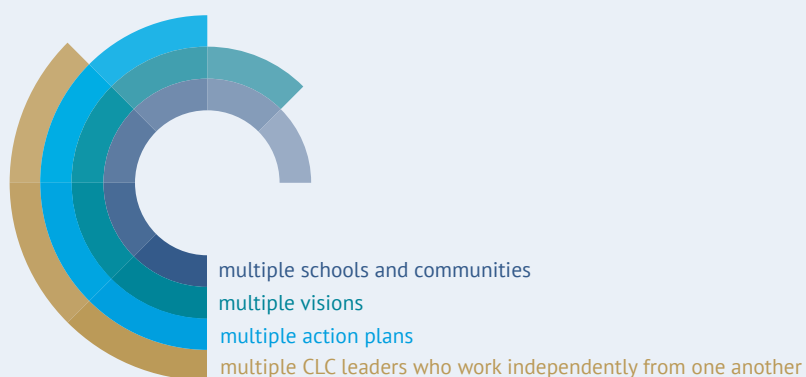
The presence of community development agents on local regional development tables (tables de concertation) provides a voice for English-speaking communities and informs provincial service providers of the needs of local OLM communities. Improved collaboration between the two language groups in many communities has resulted in increased support from the majority, an indicator for community vitality according to the Official Language Minority Communities' Frame of Reference for Vitality (Canadian Heritage, n.d.).

Different models for organizing CLCs have emerged over time. A community school might be:

### Single-site CLC



### Multi-site CLC



### Extended-model CLC



The extended model represents a solution to limited funding, extending the impact of a CDA position by providing greater access to partners and resources for more schools, students, and families. This solution has proved effective in some contexts, but less so in others (LEARN, 2019b).

Community schools have varying levels of impact, and some schools are more effective than others, serving as examples of the full potential of the CLC approach. Evaluation reports show that successful community schools result in improved school climates, greater student engagement, and increased access to services for the English-speaking community. The factors considered key to a successful CLC school are:

- a qualified full-time community development agent
- strong leadership from the school principal
- a collaborative approach to engaging partners, and
- commitment and support from the school board

In 2015, management of CLCs was transferred from the PRT to the English school boards, which now directly receive funding for covering the salaries of community development agents.

As a fairly recent initiative, the CLC network remains vulnerable. To thrive and continue into the future, CLC schools require continued support through Entente Canada-Québec funding – all the more so in a time of declining resources and important challenges facing Quebec's OLM school sector.

The CLC approach has put Quebec's English-speaking schools at the forefront of innovative models for schooling in minority language settings, showing that schools can play a key role within collective impact efforts, and helping schools become key players in cross-sector coordination. Community schools have shown that they can meet their double mandate: mobilizing community stakeholders in support of educational success and mobilizing schools in support of community vitality. Schools and communities are stronger when everyone works together and schools engage in mutually beneficial relationships with community organizations and partners.

## Documents cited in the footnotes

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**To consult any of these references online, see a complete hyperlinked list of documents here:**

<https://tinyurl.com/quescrenbriefs>





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### Education Research Briefs

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