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SPECIAL EDITION

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SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE

Quebec is potentially facing big decisions with regards to the future of linguistic school boards. This Special Edition of the QFHSA News is filled with commentary from concerned members of school boards, provincial, educational and community associations, political MNAs as well as parent leaders. Premier Jean Charest's government plans to impose further cut-backs to school board budgets. Francois Legault, leader of the Coalition pour l'avenir du Quebec (CAQ) and former Parti Quebecois (PQ) Minister of Education, proposes to abolish school boards altogether.

What does all of this mean for the current and future generations of our children? Why should we care? We all need to educate ourselves about the consequences of these proposed changes. They could result in drastic reductions to educational services as well as affect the right for French and English communities to have control of their educational institutions as guaranteed in the Canadian Constitution. QFHSA recommends that everyone take a stand for what matters most: the education of our children and to ensure it is delivered and administered in the best way possible.

To cut or not to cut?

Are there too many commissioners or should they even exist?

Instead of abolishing school boards, could the number of school boards be reduced?

Serge Laurendeau, President Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT)



School boards are our own "anglo" institutions.

Improvements can be and should be made but these proposals are drastic and the students will suffer.

Marlyn Brownrigg, Active Home and School Parent, Past QFHSA Board Member

What do the current model of linguistic school boards in Quebec ensure, if anything?

Democracy in education is vital to the delivery of quality services to our children.

David D'Aoust, President Quebec English School Board Associations (QESBA)

Where will the savings really happen?

Make proposals which will serve the needs of Quebec's students

Michael Canuel, President LEARN Leading English Education and Resource Network

LIETTE CHAMBERLAND

President QFHSA

SCHOOL BOARDS

For the Future of our Children

What is all the fuss about school boards? What do they do? Do we need them? We keep seeing articles in the media, both French and English, and everyone seems to have a different opinion, with different reasons.

Some believe that school boards should remain, either as they are now, or with some changes. Some think that school boards should be abolished altogether and that powers of the school boards should be transferred to regional councils and/or schools. Others consider that the powers of the school boards should be transferred to the Municipalité Régionale de Comté (MRC).

It is hard to make up our minds when we do not have a clear understanding of what school boards actually do for our communities. In response, this Special Edition of the QFHSA NEWS

offers varied opinions on school board governance from the perspective of parents, educators, administrators and politicians alike, in an effort to provide you with the needed information.

School board commissioners are elected by us, the community, to serve our communities in all matters related to our children's education. They are a body of citizens who are elected by their fellow citizens to serve as agents between the community and the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports (MELS). This is why participating in the election of school board commissioners is so important.

Commissioners work closely with a team of experienced administrators to form the school board. School boards are required by law to establish a strategic plan and report

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LIETTE CHAMBERLAND

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it to the schools, the community and to MELS. The school boards, as policy-forming bodies, have to set written goals and objectives for the schools of their communities.

Some of their responsibilities, in close cooperation with administrative teams based in the schools are:

- Adapt curriculum to suit the communities they serve.
- Establish the length of the school term and schools' calendar.
- Manage Human Resources: payroll, hire principals and administration staff, recruitment of teachers, aides, professionals, support staff, maintenance staff, etc.
- Enter into written contracts with professional employees and into collective bargaining agreements with multiple unions.
- Oversee the development of the annual budget.
- Provide necessary grounds, school buildings, furniture, fixtures and telephone and internet services.
- Prescribe, adopt and enforce reasonable rules and regulations regarding school activities, publications and organizations with the safety of the children in mind.
- Provide resources for children with special needs.
- Organize transportation.
- Prepare an inordinate amount of bureaucratic paperwork required by MELS.
- And so much more...

We cannot deny that school board activities cost money. However, we have to admit that if school boards were to be abolished, the work performed by them would have to be done by another body so we

fail to see where the savings would be.

What if the powers of the school boards were to be transferred to the MRCs?

We fail to see how MRC officials would recognize and understand the needs and priorities of the community with regards to education. MRC responsibilities are multi-faceted: snow removal, garbage removal, public transit, public works, environment, by-laws, city budget management, etc... and we would add to it, the schools? We can easily foresee a problem when, for example, street repairs compete with the needs of schools.

We believe that the Government of Quebec should maintain the responsibility for governance of education with linguistic school boards whose commissioners are democratically elected and who are responsible solely for education. We also believe that there is always room for improvement, but abolishing school boards would not improve education in Quebec. Moreover, QFHSA feels our children would be the ones ultimately paying the price.

To present you with additional points of view, there will be a panel discussion on school board governance at our upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) on April 21, 2012. QFHSA delegates will review and vote on our three resolutions. Every local association has received the resolutions package for the AGM. We encourage all members to study them carefully and come prepared to cast your vote.

We would like to acknowledge and thank all of the people who gave of their valuable time and expertise by submitting articles to help us put this Special Edition together.



MARLYN BROWNRIGG

Active Home and School
Parent and Past QFHSA
Board Member

I believe the structure and management of school boards can be improved like any other institution or company. I have sent in comments to the school board administration and commissioners on various topics when I feel strongly about an issue.

So why am I against the abolishment of school boards or the downloading of extra responsibilities to individual schools? Here are my thoughts:

- François Legault started the discussion (abolishment) and the Liberals reacted (downsizing). How much of this debate is to garner headlines and votes?
- Budget tightening should begin at the top. Do we hear of any government department, including MELS, streamlining its bureaucracy? MELS is cutting budgets to the school boards and is doing little to tighten its own belt. Oddly enough, this topic is never mentioned in press conferences or letters to the editor.
- School boards are our own “anglo” institutions. Will English schools run by a municipality with a small Anglophone population get the services they need? There are many small English schools in Québec that need to be preserved.
- Anglophones have not received consistent help from elected politicians in the fight for wider access to English education. Losing school boards would mean losing another partner in this ongoing saga.
- Look at your own municipality. How do they run their own affairs? Think of roads, Bixi bikes, etc. Do you really want city or regional administrators involved in your school?

DON'T ABOLISH SCHOOL BOARDS - A Parent's Perspective

One objective of abolishing school boards is to give schools more autonomy and decision-making powers. In some ways this is attractive but what would schools really want control over? Pedagogy (this would stay with the government), staffing (union seniority would still apply), and obtaining extra resources needed by



the students. The schools may end up with funding for this (with fewer school board staff) but who is going to do it and when? If you have spent any time in your child's school you know that the school principal(s) and support staff are run off their feet now. Who is going to look for the specialists, librarians, and other resources for the school?

I ask parents to think long and hard before jumping on the abolishment or minimization of school boards bandwagon. Improvements can be and should be made but these proposals are drastic and the students will suffer.

CONSTITUTIONALLY GUARANTEED A Historical Perspective

School boards have formed a key institution of local governance in Quebec since the 1840s. The flexibility of this system has proven beneficial to an ethnically complex society, starting with the provision that communities who felt uncomfortable with the program advanced by the religious majority in a township or parish (the historic units of school administration) could secede to form their own boards. This freedom was enshrined at Confederation, and even as the bipartite Catholic/Protestant system took hold at every level of school administration across Quebec minorities found accommodation: English-speaking Catholics under the essentially French-speaking Catholic boards, Jews and other non-Catholic religious groups (including a growing number of French Protestants) under Protestant boards.

These solutions to the challenge of multi-ethnic demographics were more successful in cities than in rural areas. Protestant communities scattered across a wide geographical area were able to create larger boards to serve their educational needs, and if the local connection between families, teachers and administrators was inevitably weakened and children had to travel long distances by bus, the facilities and services available (gyms, libraries, science labs, guidance councillors) in larger, newer schools were much better. By the 1970s, many English-speaking rural Catholic communities were making arrangements with Protestant boards to accommodate their children in these new schools. Protestant boards in the Eastern Townships, the Chateauguay Valley, the Laurentians, and the Gaspé soon became essentially English boards, serving Protestants, Catholics and other groups from wide areas. In the Greater Montreal area and Quebec City, by contrast, Protestant boards served the non-Catholic population, in both English and French sectors.

Quebec's Quiet Revolution aimed to modernize society and its institutions, and it found the "confessional" divisions within the education system hopelessly Byzantine. What made more sense was to organize schooling along linguistic lines.

ROD MACLEOD Member and Past President of Quebec Anglo Heritage Network



Constitutionally, however, religious rights were guaranteed, and various attempts to abolish confessional boards in the 1970s and 80s were overturned by the courts. The general mood was increasingly in favour of change, however. Although they restricted who was eligible to attend, Bills 22 and 101 helped fix in the public mind the notion of the English/French educational dichotomy. Anglophones tended to have mixed feelings about linguistic boards. On the one hand, as the English-speaking population shrank, English boards would provide representative institutions for the wider community. On the other hand, there was fear that the non-denominational curriculum in Protestant schools would be threatened in some areas, and that French-speaking Protestants and other religious groups would again find themselves overwhelmed by Francophone Catholic majorities.

The constitution was finally altered by Bill 180, and in 1998 school boards were reorganized along linguistic lines. In urban areas, the character of school boards was radically different, with new faces at the helm and large numbers of schools changing hands. Many rural boards changed less, having been operating linguistically for some years. In any event, a declining English-speaking population has meant school closures everywhere, although the effect is more devastating in rural areas, where distances are greater. In many rural areas, the rate of school closure has been lessened by the influx of Francophone students; even so, most English schools have seen population decline over the last twenty years. In practice, the shift to linguistic boards has not greatly simplified education in Quebec. School boards remain critical to frontline delivery, knowledgeable as they are about the communities they serve.

DAVID D'AOUST

**President Quebec English
School Boards Association
(QESBA),
Chairman New Frontiers
School Board (NFSB)**

As we begin a new year, our English and French public education system in Quebec finds itself at the centre of an existential debate. The reasons are not entirely clear; your local school board with universally elected commissioners is once again at a crossroads. The management of our schools and services to students remain in the balance.

The debate, as always, unfolds in its distinctive manner for our English-speaking communities across Quebec. Politics seem to have driven the latest chapter: François Legault of the Coalition pour l'Avenir du Québec has identified school boards (expediently and inaccurately, we submit) as bloated bureaucracies, with wasteful and remote managers. He would like to eliminate our last vestige of local English governance. At a time of growing economic uncertainty and with the help of a complicit and accusatorial media, Mr. Legault has created something of a perfect storm that now threatens us with massive and unprecedented cuts to public education, as the government grapples to reduce the provincial deficit. Furthermore, there is an apparent threat of a reduction to the number of school boards in Quebec, including the number of English school boards. This storm is also driving the Charest government to impose further cutbacks to budgets to school boards that will have far-reaching effects and definitely reduce services to our students. The question we are prompted to ask is: "Has the current government simply devised an offensive maneuver to counter criticism from Mr. Legault because it is having difficulty reducing the provincial deficit as promised, and by law by 2013?"

The Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) is determined to refocus this debate on the students we serve, the services they deserve and the real change needed to make sure their best interests are the priority concern. Appropriate pedagogical and complementary services require effective and

THE IMPENDING AND INEVITABLE STORM



responsive leadership and coordination. Our nine member English school boards operate some 340 elementary, high school, adult and vocational centres across Quebec, welcoming 105,000 students each school day. Already, many of our boards cover massive territories, with the communities we serve facing enormous distances to central board offices and between schools and adult centres. Existing legislation is expected to reduce the number of elected commissioners by as much as half. How could any further reduction in the number of English school boards ever be expected to improve quality or accountability?

Our English school boards are now maintaining that quality and accountability while limiting administrative costs more effectively than Quebec municipalities, hospitals and government services. Collectively, our Boards have already reached the 80 per-cent target for high school success set for the Year 2020. English public school students, wherever they live, are benefitting from a commitment to French second-language instruction designed to help them build their futures right here in Quebec. And, despite the allegations of those who are feeding the current storm, our teachers are dedicated and accountable and our parents are involved and participating in the life of our schools.

The Councils of Commissioners that oversee your English public schools decide on the annual budget. They hire staff, set financial, human and material resources for each school and centre, taking into consideration community needs and resources. They set priorities and strategies to increase those graduation rates and produce bilingual graduates ready to meet the challenges of a changing economy and social reality. Yes, we have much to be proud of but we also have much work to do.

Budget cuts are coming, and they will be major. Changes to current school board structures will follow on the heels of these cuts, and they could be major, too.

DAVID D'AOUST

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How, in the interests of our students in the classroom, do we best prepare for this storm? QESBA would suggest that, like any other, this storm is best weathered by careful preparation, clear communication and a transparent and coherent plan of action.

First, we think school boards elected by the communities they serve, are the best guarantors of equitable distribution of financial, human and material resources, accountable performance and steady student success.

Preparing also means being ready. A future government might consider abolishing school boards



totally and replacing them with some vaguely defined regional office which could be a direct arm of the government and not guarantee to the English-speaking community the right to manage its own schools. With that in mind, QESBA is investigating the possibility of commissioning a poll of the communities we serve to determine *your* perceptions of English public education and its performance and management. We will be available to support our member school boards as needed to communicate on how our Councils of Commissioners make decisions that affect students in the classroom, and how those Councils answer for their actions.

To add to this, each of our school boards will begin drawing up contingency plans to deal with the likely and unfortunate budget cuts ahead. First, we will argue that education is an investment not an expense, and that cuts should be absolutely limited if Quebec's future economic development is to be assured. Then, our school boards will prepare the plans to best shield our students from the impact of any cuts. Rather than putting into question the structure of elected school boards, legislators must give us the tools to exercise our duties, and implement budget cuts as we see appropriate. There are mountains of paperwork demanded by government that take time, divert resources and deliver little of value to our students. There are targeted budgets – in times of tight resources – that fail to respond to the classroom needs we have identified. Especially in inclement times, it's best to rely on the community members on the ground who deliver the services. Let our elected school boards, your commissioners and their administrative teams use their expertise to make the right choices for our students. They will answer to you for each of those choices, be there to steer forward for the communities tomorrow as this storm, too, passes.

What can parents do in the meantime? Why not write to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and to your local MNA to express your disapproval of further cuts to public education. Call on your MNA to ask questions about the impending cuts and any plan reducing or merging school boards. Ask whether and how those cuts or mergers will truly save money or improve public education. Invite Ministry representatives to meet with QFHSA to provide you answers. Write to your local paper.

Democracy in education is vital to the delivery of quality services to our children. QESBA and parents across our communities can each play their roles in protecting that democracy.



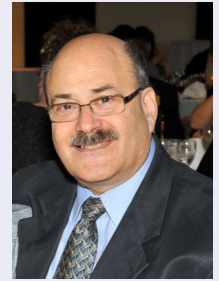
MARCUS TABACHNICK

**Former Chairman, Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB),
Past President, Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA),
Past President, Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA),
Past Executive Member Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA)**

It is important to put the school board debate into its true perspective. The Quebec education system is not broken. The Quebec education system is not failing students. Eliminating school boards will not solve all of the problems that we as a society are facing. There is no evidence that removing school boards will improve educational outcomes or student success rates. Quebec students in the English sector succeed at the highest levels in national and international testing. Quebec students in the English sector graduate at or above the national levels. Quebec students in the English sector go on to post-secondary education at or above the national average. Students, teachers, and administrators from around the world are coming to Quebec in ever-increasing numbers to learn what we do right.

School boards allow in-school administrators and teachers more time to do their jobs. School boards ensure equity in distribution of tax dollars and services. School boards ensure that all staff members have a local authority when dealing with all employment issues, such as wage scales, health benefits, parental leaves, sabbaticals, retirement planning, and a host of other issues. School boards organize transportation, pedagogical services, special needs support services, adult and vocational services, social and health services coordination, food services, legal services, facility and technology services, supplies replenishments, financial accounting, Ministry interface and reporting, local lobbying, interaction with municipalities and regional services, international opportunities for students and staff, and much more.

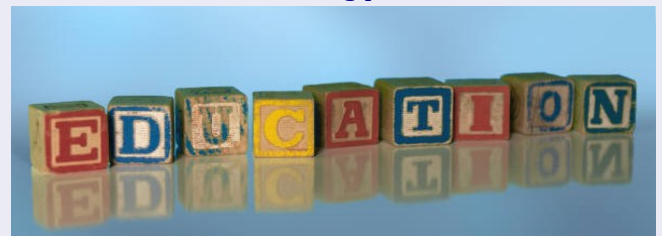
EDUCATION: THE BIG PICTURE



Does anyone really believe that all these jobs should be downloaded to the local Principal's desk?

If it is not reasonable to ask the school principal to do all of the above then should we be willing to give over these services to other decision-makers? To whom, is the question? We could break up the services among several different authorities – some to municipal, some to provincial, some to health care, some to local schools – but then where is the coordination within a given geographical area? How will it be more efficient with municipalities overhead at approximately 15%; healthcare about 15-20%; and provincial departments at about 20+%. Compare that to the 5% administrative costs of the current school boards. That leads to less money in the system, not more.

If all functions are downloaded to local schools then let's look at how the average private school handles these functions. They have a Headmaster or Director General; one or more assistant DGs; a Director for each of human resources; pedagogical services; financial services; facilities and technology; several support people for each of those functions, and more. People costs represent about 80% of school board expenditures and so there will be no savings there. What is left is minor in the big picture of education.



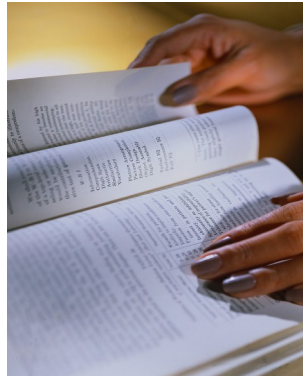
While all the above is important we must not forget that local school management through school boards is guaranteed in the Canadian constitution. Are we prepared to give up that right? Are we prepared to give up community input into regional educational expectations and standards?

I feel there is nothing to support the call for the abolishment of school boards. A lack of understanding by some individuals of the important role that the boards play or, more dangerously, for political gamesmanship could ultimately cost us all very dearly.

MICHAEL CANUEL

President LEARN
Leading English Education
and Resource Network

Fiscal stress combined with rising costs of living, increased levels of taxation, and stagnant employment opportunities can incite politicians to propose extreme measures which address the general population's desire for relief which invariably comes in the form of reduced government spending. All too often these proposals focus on what are perceived to be areas of excess and/or abuse. The real question is whether or not these perceptions are based on fact, or are more a function of political opportunism. In a study conducted by Miner and Ruggiero (1994) they point out how little hard research generally exists which supports any argument related to cost benefits derived from the consolidation of school boards. Their ensuing study on the fiscal advantages of the consolidation of school districts in the state of New York during the 1990's illustrates that subsequent to the merger of school districts, pupil total costs decline "as the number of pupils served increases, but the cost curve flattens out very quickly" (p.274). They conclude their empirical study by pointing out that real cost savings are marginal in large school districts and only slightly better in the small school districts.



What can we learn from this particular example? The first point is that after the emotional arguments have been made, those advocating any course of action should be obliged to demonstrate where the savings will really occur. Sweeping costs under a carpet, or displacing them from one level of bureaucracy to another should not be seriously entertained regardless of appearances. Whether school boards are abolished altogether, or restructured and consolidated, those proposing these solutions have to be committed to moving beyond political rhetoric and to make proposals which will serve the needs of Quebec's students and the general public's desire for reduced government expenditures. The second point is that there are ways and means by which costs can be cut,

BEYOND RHETORIC: Where will the savings really happen?



but these plans need to be formulated outside of partisan political forums which serve the interests of those wishing to retain political power, or to attain it.

In terms of actual cost reductions which will not affect the quality of the services and resources provided to students in the context of their classroom and the school they attend, there are numerous possibilities. These potentially include some of the following:

- Centralizing departments such as those which provide Information and Communication services. Does each board need its own portal and separate IT services?
- Does each board need its own Human Resources Departments? Much of the recruiting and servicing could be easily centralized and regional offices set up to meet particular needs.
- Does each board have to create its own educational resources nine times over? Should these not be coordinated in a more effective and efficient manner?
- Could professional development not be coordinated in a more coherent fashion with resources and services shared among the nine boards?

There are ways to cut costs without affecting students, nor losing the ability to serve particular regional needs. The primary condition for change to happen is to create willingness and readiness to do so. Change which is initiated and embraced by the nine school boards can only be better than the change the government will assuredly impose. The general public feels there is excess, and there must be a response to this perception, whether it is founded in fact or fiction. This should not be an exercise which serves the interests of any political party. Rather it must be an act of reasonable fiscal accountability taken up by the school boards in a coordinated and responsible fashion.

SERGE LAURENDEAU

President, Quebec
Provincial Association of
Teachers (QPAT)



Lately the pertinence of maintaining school boards has been in the spotlight. While Mr. Legault of the Coalition pour l'Avenir du Québec (CAQ) is proposing the abolishment of school boards, Mr. Charest and the Liberals are looking at drastic cuts in education and in the reduction of the number of school boards.

Many questions need to be answered before making sweeping and drastic decisions. Decentralizing decision-making to the school level seems unrealistic in times when school administrators are overwhelmed with responsibilities ranging from the implementation of government and MELS education action plans to accountability and success agreements. Many services such as building repairs and transportation need to be overlooked by a central management body and could not be imposed on principals.

The twinning of municipal elections and school board elections may generate some savings but the question to be asked is are there too many commissioners or should they even exist? My past experience has made me believe that commissioners have moved away from their initial role of parent and student representatives to become "politicians", holding a party line and opposed to any changes in the cast-in-stone board philosophy. While a school board's mandate is to ensure equitable distribution of services into schools, the increasing school board bureaucracies may have driven away the decision-makers from the needs of students.

However a considerable reduction or a complete abolishment of the number of commissioners would probably bring only penny savings and we can still wonder who would be the guardian of the parents and the link between the schools' governing boards and directorates to ensure that the decisions are made in the best interest of all students.

SCHOOL BOARDS: TO CUT OR NOT TO CUT

Instead of abolishing school boards, could the number of school boards be reduced? Obviously it seems to be the intention of the Liberals to reduce the number of school boards and to centralize services. Although some services such as payroll, transportation and maintenance could possibly be centralized, we need to be assured that student services will not suffer from the merging of boards. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees Anglophones the right of management and control of their schools but does not specify which model should be in place. Could it go from 9 boards to 6 to 3 or even to 1 major English school board? Bigger is not always better. Just imagine the difficulty of getting a hold of someone at the main office!

Status quo does not seem to be an option and the proposed changes are only a few elements of the plan to bring major cuts in education. Even though the number of teachers is determined by the number of students, there is no doubt that a reduction of investment in education will have an impact in the classroom and will have a resulting negative effect on the students' success.



CAN SCHOOLS IN LESS FAVORED ENVIRONMENTS BE LEFT TO THEMSELVES?

It is my firm belief that every child in Québec is entitled to quality educational services. These services must be made available wherever the student may live and no matter what his/her economic or family condition may be.



Every child of schooling age must have access to a school which can provide them with the knowledge required to enable them to face their future with proper skills and confidence. Every school must have the necessary tools to answer to the needs of each student's quest for learning in an ever-changing world. The intrinsic purpose of school boards is to ensure that ALL students are treated equally, respectfully and in accordance to their particular needs and learning capabilities. School boards ensure that all material and human resources in the public schools under their jurisdiction are distributed equitably, thereby providing each of their students with an equal opportunity to succeed in his/her adult life.

STEPHEN BURKE

Chairman Central Quebec School Board (CQSB)



The present Québec public school system, through the Education Act, is composed of elected officials and school board staff, which includes principals, teachers, professionals and support staff. Periodically, men and women are elected by their fellow citizens to the office of school commissioner. The Council of Commissioners meets on a regular basis in order to provide direction to the administrators and staff of the school board. Among its many responsibilities, the Council adopts the school board's annual budget, determines the distribution of material and human resources amongst the schools on its territory and maintains a constant link with each school community. Having elected commissioners actively present in their school communities allows for special consideration to be given to particular needs within each community.

Some political leaders of Québec would want to do away with school boards. They believe that schools should run themselves, that the local school community has all of the necessary abilities to do much better than the present school boards. I question the true equity of such a proposal. Schools would return to the era preceding the 1960's. It might well be possible for schools in well-off communities to perform as well as they do now. But what about communities where the socioeconomic fabric is not conducive to self-governance, where opportunities for fundraising are almost non-existent? Who would ensure proper pedagogical development? Who would provide special needs' assistance? Can schools in less favoured environments be left to themselves? Is this the kind of society that we want future generations to evolve in? Honestly, I prefer a world where NO child is left behind and that's exactly what school commissioners and school board staffs constantly strive to achieve!



NOEL BURKE**Interim President of the
Quebec Community
Groups Network (QCGN)****SCHOOL BOARDS
Playing a Vital Role in
Anglophone Communities**

School board governance is a hot topic these days. The Quebec Liberals are proposing to reduce the size and influence of school boards in favour of transferring funding and responsibilities to schools. Meanwhile the Coalition pour l'avenir du Québec (CAQ), which is riding high in the polls, is proposing to abolish them altogether and replace elected boards with regional bodies staffed with political appointees.

For the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), the preservation of English institutions including schools and school boards, is essential to the sustainability of our minority-language communities. For us, the link between schools governed by our community and vital communities is clear.

English schools are more than just centres of education where our children learn to read, write and do arithmetic. In many communities, English schools are community learning centers where teenagers go for technical and vocations training, where adults go for continuing education; and where newcomers go to learn English and French to better integrate into Quebec society. English schools serve as decision-making centres for governing boards, parent-teacher organizations and other community groups. English schools are centres of community leisure and recreation where schoolchildren, parents and the community go to attend school plays and performances, participate in fairs and community events, and take part in after-school sports and community leagues. They are dynamic centres for our English-speaking communities and they are cornerstone institutions in our community.

Historically, Quebec's public schools have been democratically governed by elected school board commissioners – parents and individual community members who have a voice in decisions concerning the operation of schools.

The community's role in governing its institutions including local school boards is particularly important for minority-language communities like ours. In upholding restrictions that prevent Francophones from attending English schools in 2005, the Supreme Court of Canada indicated "The purpose of (minority language educational rights) is the protection and promotion of the minority-language community in each province" and these rights

are "of prime importance given the vital role of education in preserving and encouraging linguistic and cultural vitality."

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees minority language educational rights to the French-speaking communities outside Quebec and the English-speaking minority of Quebec through Section 23. (1) b which states that Citizens of Canada "who have received their primary school instruction in Canada in English or French and reside in a province where the language in which they received that instruction is the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province, have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in that language in that province." These rights are subject to the "where numbers warrant" qualification of Section 23(3) and provinces receive funding from the Federal Government under the Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP) to fulfill their obligations to provide minority-language education.

The English-speaking communities of Quebec need effective, elected and representative school boards to help the Ministry of Education understand the very different realities of English schooling in this province so it can develop realistic policies, programs and budgets to support our schools.

We expect our school boards and school administrators to provide our children with an excellent education. But we must never lose sight of what these institutions mean to our community. To think of school boards and schools as institutions that simply provide our children with English-language education services puts them at risk.

The QCGN urges commissioners, parents and other involved citizens to play a leadership role in advocating to maintain the institutions that nurture our cultural identity and English heritage. We also urge all political parties and elected officials to make a solemn promise to maintain elected school boards to ensure our communities maintain a strong and effective voice in these institutions which are essential to the vitality of the English-speaking communities of Quebec.



CO-SIGNED BY MINISTERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF QUEBEC (MNA):

Geoffrey Kelley, MNA for Jacques-Cartier

Yolande James, MNA for Nelligan

Pierre Marsan, MNA for Robert-Baldwin

Kathleen Weil, MNA for Notre-Dame-de-Grace

Lawrence Bergman, MNA for D'Arcy-McGee

Lucie Charlebois, MNA for Soulanges

Francois Ouimet, MNA for Marquette

SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE DEBATE

The debate surrounding effective management and control of Quebec's schools is one that predates Confederation. The issue encompasses many complex subjects, including the necessary balance between encouraging local initiative and ensuring equal opportunity for all students in our public system. The creation of linguistic school boards has shifted the discussion from concerns regarding Protestant and Catholic school communities to those involving English and French ones; however, the protection of minority rights remains of utmost importance.

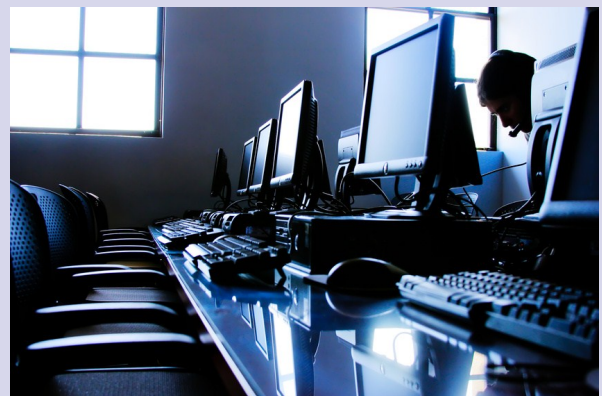
The Quebec Liberal Party initiated the creation of linguistic school boards in 1997, and continues to believe that school boards have an essential role to play in our public school system. Democratically elected, school boards manage school personnel, provide pedagogical support for teachers, design programs for special needs students, and passionately promote our public school system. Were school boards to be abolished, as some suggest, there would be a huge void between the offices of the Ministère de l'Éducation and the local school. The effective administration of our schools requires a regional body accountable to parents and the wider community.

This having been said, there are two key challenges facing our system. The first deals with the "democratic deficit," that is to say, low turnout in school board elections. Far too many seats are filled by acclamation, and in the few seats for which elections are held, the number of citizens who bother voting is low. We must continue to explore ideas to make school board democracy work.

The second challenge is one faced by the entire Quebec public administration: how do we keep management

costs as low as possible in order to invest more money in direct services to the population? Successive Quebec governments have struggled with this question. We all agree that we need to spend more money in the classroom to ensure that our young people receive the best possible education. As taxpayers, we already send a significant amount of money to support educational services. School boards have been asked to find ways to cut their administrative costs to free up resources to support teachers in the classroom. This effort will be difficult, not only for school boards, but for administrators across the public sector (health care, public security, justice, family services, welfare and other domains.)

These challenges are of particular relevance for the English school community. Elected school board representatives have a special link to their community. Their role includes the protection of minority educational rights. The Quebec Liberal Party remains convinced that efficient and representative school boards remain key elements in our efforts to provide our young people with the education they need to advance Quebec society in the future.



DIANE LAMARCHE- VENNE

Commissaire
Présidente de la
Commission Scolaire
Marguerite Bourgeoys
(CSMB)



ENCORE LA CIBLE DE CRITIQUES

Une fois de plus, le système public d'éducation est la cible de critiques...

Au cœur de ce système, figurent les commissions scolaires, instituées en 1841 et reconnues nécessaires vu l'importance de l'éducation pour une société. La consultation des écrits historiques permet malheureusement de constater que les commissions scolaires ont été à plusieurs reprises, lorsque les récriminations surgissent, pointées du doigt, au gré de l'humeur politique.

Est-il nécessaire de rappeler que tout récemment, soit en 1998, les commissions scolaires ont subi un grand chambardement, passant de 230 à 72 et passant d'un mode d'organisation reposant sur la confessionnalité à une structure linguistique. Afin d'asseoir encore davantage le caractère démocratique de leur fonctionnement, un nouveau pallier d'engagement citoyen, les conseils d'établissement, s'est ajouté à l'organigramme de la gouvernance.

Sur fond d'implantation de la réforme, de création des maternelles à temps plein et d'avènement des garderies à 7\$, la loi 88 (en partie appliquée à l'heure présente) était de plus adoptée, en 2008,

dans le but de renouveler notre démocratie scolaire. Il apparaît aujourd'hui judicieux de poser la question suivante : pour la réussite des élèves, avons-nous besoin d'un autre chambardement ?

N'hésitant pas à se questionner, à s'adapter et à innover, les commissions scolaires adoptaient néanmoins, l'automne dernier, un « plan de renouvellement » ayant pour objectifs la simplification de l'administration, la reconnaissance de l'école publique et l'actualisation du sens même de la démocratie.

Dans ce contexte, prenant appui sur l'engagement indéfectible du réseau public en faveur des élèves, je vous invite à y voir l'opportunité de revoir certaines pratiques, afin de diriger le plus de ressources possibles vers les écoles; l'occasion de valoriser les « bons coups » du système public; une tribune pour l'affirmation du rôle des élus scolaires et des services dont ils assurent l'administration; et, enfin, une volonté – à la base même de la création des commissions scolaires – de répondre aux préoccupations des citoyens.

For an English translation, please contact our QFHSА office at info@qfhsa.org.



No Response Received

In an effort to keep the opinions expressed in this special edition balanced, requests for submissions were made to Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) and the Parti Québécois (PQ). However, submissions were not received in time for the extended publication deadline. The following was taken from a press release found on the Government of Quebec Portal News Service website which sums up Parti Québécois (PQ) position.

QUÉBEC, le 22 février 2012, “Avenir des commissions scolaires - La confusion à la CAQ se poursui...

LE PARTI QUÉBÉCOIS A DÉJÀ RÉDUIT DE MOITIÉ LE NOMBRE DE COMMISSIONS SCOLAIRES. Il rappelle que c'est sous un gouvernement du Parti Québécois que la moitié des commissions scolaires a disparu à la fin des années 90. On en dénombrait 153 à l'époque. «C'est un geste majeur qui a été posé par Pauline Marois. On dirait que pour les caquistes, parce que ça ne vient pas de

François Legault, ça ne compte pas », a poursuivi Sylvain Gaudreault.

Il soutient que la présence des commissions scolaires sur le territoire québécois répond au désir de décentralisation et à la nécessité d'une répartition équitable des ressources sur le territoire. « Privilégier le maintien ne signifie pas le statu quo dans la gestion de ces organisations. Il y a des gains d'efficacité à faire. Des changements sont nécessaires afin que les commissions scolaires gagnent en légitimité et que les écoles jouissent de plus d'autonomie », a expliqué Sylvain Gaudreault.

« Notre objectif premier doit viser la réussite scolaire et la persévérance au premier plan de toutes les actions touchant le système scolaire public québécois. Ne voir l'éducation que d'un point de vue bureaucratique nous plonge dans un débat aussi stérile qu'inutile qui n'aidera en rien la réussite de nos élèves », a conclu le député de Jonquière.”

DID YOU KNOW QUEBEC HAS:



- ◆ 69 school boards (of which 60 are French, 9 are English) *
- ◆ A total of over 2800 schools (of which there are 340 English schools and centres, including elementary, high school and adult vocational centres) *
- ◆ almost 500,000 students* in Quebec (with 99,640 students** enrolled in English schools)

*Statistics obtained from MELs 2011-2012

** According to MELs 2005-2006,

total enrollment in English schools was 105,000 students, a decline of 5%

BREAKDOWN BY ENGLISH SCHOOL BOARD

Number of students

Central Quebec	4,735
Eastern Shores	1,359
Eastern Townships	5,745
English Montreal	25,828
Lester B. Pearson	25,967
Littoral	704
New Frontiers	4,435
Riverside	9,306
Sir Wilfrid Laurier	14,350
Western Quebec	7,210



We invite our readers to join the conversation and discussion on our [QFHSA Facebook page](#).

We welcome your comments on education matters.

Home and School Associations

By March 16, 2012, please make sure to send in:

- Resolutions
- Award nominations
- Volunteer pictures
- AGM RSVP

Ensure your membership lists are submitted to us and your association is in good standing. Email info@qfhsa.org.

Next QFHSA News published week of March 12, 2012



Check us out on our QFHSA Facebook page.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2012

STAY WITH US AFTER
THE AGM FOR THE
AWARDS DINNER
AND DANCE

Be sure to join us during our AGM panel discussion on school board governance. Contact our office for more information (see page 2).

MARCH 2012

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QFHSA NEWS

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Mission Statement

The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations Inc. is an independent, incorporated, not for profit volunteer organization dedicated to enhancing the education and general well being of children and youth.

The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations Inc. promotes the involvement of parents, students, educators and the community at large in the advancement of learning and acts as a voice for parents.

