



RESPONSE

BY

QUEBEC FEDERATION OF HOME & SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

TO

THE REPORT OF THE SCHOOL BOARD REORGANIZATION COMMITTEE

OF

THE SCHOOL COUNCIL OF THE ISLAND OF MONTREAL

MONTREAL, DECEMBER 1976

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## INTRODUCTION

(1) Before dealing with the substance of the Report, we find it necessary to criticize, in the harshest of terms, the brief delay which has been granted by the School Council to interested organizations, such as our Federation, to respond to the Reorganization Committee's Report.

We find it totally unrealistic and unacceptable that the Report, which deals with such a fundamental question as the reorganization of a school system after some 100 years of operation, should expect organizations to be in a position to carry out a serious study of the Report and convey its findings to the School Council, in the space of a two week period, or so.

The English language version of the Report was received by our Federation on November 18th, and considering that our 12,000 members reside in every part of our Province (we believe that our membership, both on and off the Island of Montreal, is concerned with the effects of such a reorganizational report) it is hardly physically possible to conduct the necessary communications with our membership to canvass its views within the allotted period of time.

The failure of the School Council to allow a sufficient and reasonable delay to interested parental and other groups to study the Report and respond to it, reveals or betrays a total insensitivity on the part of the Island Council, to the wishes and aspirations of the parents concerned, and the public generally.

The Island Council cannot expect a reasoned and critical analysis of its Report, which took some two years to prepare, within a brief period of two to three weeks.

Despite the preceding remarks we nevertheless intend to respond to the Committee's Report, although we would greatly have preferred to have been afforded a more reasonable and realistic delay in which to respond more fully.

(2) Moreover, we wish to go on record as protesting the delay in which the English language version of the Report was issued. The delay in obtaining copies of the English version of the Report deprived us of the very precious little time which has been allotted to us to reply to the Report. If the Island Council intends to offer services in both languages, one would have expected a more expeditious and a higher standard of translation and distribution of material services.

(3) Finally, we are disappointed in the technical and mechanical production of the Report, or its English version which we have received. There are numerous pages and sections which were left unnumbered and this created much difficulty in attempting to review and analyze it. Once again, we would have expected a much better level of production and distribution of an important document dealing with an educational matter. We resent such a document being issued in such a slipshod manner. We must state that it falls well short of the standards to which we have become accustomed.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

We wholeheartedly agree with the statement in the report which reads:-

"As far as principles were concerned, our decision was intentionally based on the desire to achieve educational excellence. This was our primary consideration which outstripped all others, including political considerations. In other words, we put pedagogical criteria first and foremost.

We also considered that education was primarily the parents' responsibility and that the school should transmit the cultural and religious values to which the latter adhere." (pp. 12-13)

Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations' strongest criticism of the Report is that some of the final recommendations do not support these objectives or principles.

Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations has had and continues to have no reason to change its position as stated in its Brief to the School Council of the Island of Montreal, dated April, 1975, dealing with the whole question of School Board Reorganization on the Island of Montreal.

We now wish to respond to the specific recommendations in the Report, as follows:-

#### SECTION A

We are pleased to note that this Committee's recommendations provides for the three types of school board which we suggested in our Brief, namely:-

1. French Catholic
2. Anglophone Catholic
3. Anglo Protestant

As for the proposed fourth type of Board, French non-confessional, we do believe there may be a place for the creation of this type of Board provided that it is recognized that such a Board does not have its rights protected by Section 93 of the British North America Act and that enrollment in schools under the jurisdiction of such a Board is entirely voluntary and entirely dependent on parental freedom of choice of language of instruction.

#### SECTION B

##### Recommendation 1

We do not agree with this recommendation. We adhere to our position to the School Council of Montreal in our Brief, dated April 1975, pages 19 to 21 inclusive, which reads:-

"Structures should never become more important than the people they serve. Hence we advocate school board units with sufficient responsibility and authority to respond effectively and with competence to the needs of the people within their jurisdiction.

As a consequence we believe that school boards should have more autonomy than they now possess; decisions about curriculum and educational priorities should be made by the Board, in consultation with parents and teachers, and bearing in mind the nature of the community involved and the sociological, cultural, and traditional backgrounds.

We subscribe to uniform basic tax rates for the whole island but we believe that the local school boards should have the right to impose a surtax to improve its educational programme.

#### The School Council of Montreal

At present, in many instances the School Council serves as a buffer between boards and parents and the Department of Education. It passes on many matters of concern, but in many of these the ultimate authority and decision-making rests with the Department of Education. The School Council is sometimes referred to as a 'mini-Department of Education', which seems a



contradiction in terms. Apart from the three commissioners nominated by the Minister, the remainder are elected by parents; they are intended to be representative of parents, and we wonder at the logic of their position as both parental spokesmen and interference runners for the Department. Exactly where the priorities and responsibilities of members of the School Council should lie has never been debated, and perhaps it should be.

#### The School Council of the Future

Should the School Council continue to exist after the reorganization of Montreal School Boards, its activities might well be limited to the following:

It could recommend a unit assessment and a basic school tax for the island.

It could distribute school taxes to the various boards on an equitable, per capita basis, with additional funds, again equitably distributed depending on the number of children involved, for special education, underprivileged areas, cultural alienation, etc.

It could become a clearing house for educational research and theory; a resource centre for educational theory and innovation from the rest of Canada, U.S.A. and Europe; a communication centre for commissioners from Montreal boards where they might

discuss common problems and their resolutions.

It could make a vast contribution in non-pedagogical services and support services, as it has done, for example, with its policy for nutrition in school cafeterias - a very commendable initiative. In this respect, it could investigate the physical education programmes in the different Montreal boards, see what the students are offered in reality, compare these with what is happening in other Provinces, the U.S.A. and Europe and make recommendations. Similarly, library facilities in the high schools and research facilities available to senior high school students are subjects for suitable research to see what actually the standards are.

Indeed, the School Council could make a vast contribution to educational standards and practice on the island of Montreal if it would become representative and more objective; if it would become more concerned about genuine educational policies for children and equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of racial background and language spoken in the home; if it would be less politically motivated and see each child as an individual of great potential worth, rather than as a unit in a political organism. "

This would effectively eliminate duplication of effort by the Island Council, the School Boards and the Department of Education, and help curtail unnecessary bureaucracy.

Recommendation 2 to 4

We do not object to the recommendations, providing that the existing Boards agree that this approach would be equitable and administratively sound.

Recommendation 5

We reject the recommendation on delegating "certain powers" to the School Committees, for the following reasons:-

1. There is no definition of such "certain powers".
2. There is a great disparity in the experience to date of School Committees on the Island of Montreal which would render impractical a general mandating of powers to School Committees "across the board".
3. If additional powers were necessary for School Committees, they ought not to be mandated or delegated by School Boards, but should be legislated by amendments to presently existing law, and conveyed directly to School Committees.
4. Speaking in terms of "delegating" powers to School Committees reveals a lack of understanding of the role which is expected to

be played by such School Committees and blurs their role in relation to School Boards.

5. Finally, if additional powers for School Committees were deemed necessary, they should be legislated by the Government, after consultations carried out by the Minister of Education with all interested parental groups, such as our Federation which carried out in the past and continues to carry out presently, studies in this particular area.

#### SECTION C

We support all four recommendations contained in this section.

#### SECTION D

We reiterate the position as stated in our Brief, dated April 1975, that -

"No Board size should ever be decided upon because it is administratively convenient; Board structures should be designed for the needs of the children, never the number of children for the convenience of Board structures."

The intent of the Committee's recommendation is in agreement with our position, except that the tolerance of 10% appears to be too restrictive. We note that the existing Lakeshore School Board, at approximately 17,000 student population, is adequately meeting

the needs of the children.

SECTION E

We reject this recommendation in its entirety. We consider the contents to be politically inspired and outside the scope of the "general plan of school reorganization" recommended on page 5 of the Report. More particularly, we reject as invalid and unfounded the various premises upon which this recommendation is based. We reject, as unnecessary and foreign to our concept of a democratic society, the compulsory measures envisaged in such recommendation.

We object to the use of certain terminology, ie. "domination of the English language" and "anglicizing a non-English speaking population" which can only have the effect of confusing the debate on these issues.

Finally, we reject this recommendation because we sincerely believe its objectives and conclusions to be as inimical to the aspirations of the French speaking majority as they would be to the English speaking minority.

COMMENT ON MINORITY REPORTS

We wish to emphasize that we have only responded to the recommendations of the majority as contained in Appendix A of the Report.

We have noted the positions, declarations and minority reports and we are not responding to them at this time for the following reasons:-

- (a) The time allotted does not permit a serious study to be made of the minority reports.
- (b) The minority reports, not being recommended to the School Council, we are necessarily limited to responding to the majority members' recommendations.

### FURTHER OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We wish to make two further observations before we conclude our Report.

#### HARWOOD TERRITORY

We particularly wish to emphasize that Recommendation 6 of our Brief of April 1975 appears to have been overlooked or ignored in the Committee's Report. We wish to see a positive statement included in the Island Council's final Report which would recommend that the Harwood Territory continues to be part of the Lakeshore Board, as it has heretofore been.

#### FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

Madame Lavoie-Roux has stated, after attending some French Immersion classes, that this is not the way to teach French culture. Other critical statements have been made about the French Immersion programs, which have been conducted in the Anglo Protestant schools during the past six years.

We wish to go on record as strongly supporting the French Immersion programs. We believe they have been successful. We would have wished that simultaneously experimental English Immersion programs had been implemented by the French Catholic

School Boards. It may, in the end, offer our best hope for the future.

However, it must at all times be kept in mind that the French Immersion classes are not meant to teach French culture, any more **than** English Immersion classes would be intended to teach English culture. It is merely a method of teaching the French language and, considered in that context, the programs to date have produced excellent results and merit our continued support.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we affirm our long established policy, of the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations, that all parents have the right to choose the type of education they wish for their children and the right to select the language of instruction in which such education shall be carried out.

Respectfully submitted,

Quebec Federation  
of Home and School Associations

December 10, 1976