

A brief presented by  
the English Parents Committee Association  
to the Parliamentary Committee of Culture and Education  
of the National Assembly on:

**“Bill 86 An Act to modify the organization and governance of school boards to give schools a greater say in decision-making and ensure parents’ presence within each school board’s decision-making body.**



**ACPA/EPCA**  
**L'Association des comités de parents anglophones**  
**English Parents Committee Association**

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## About EPCA

The English Parent's Committee Association, (EPCA) is a provincial organization representing the Parents' Committees and Central Parents' Committees of Quebec's English school boards. EPCA is a non-profit provincial corporation funded by the government of Quebec.

EPCA is recognized by the *ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* (MEES); as the representative body of Quebec English parents' committees interests and their voice for the official linguistic minority matters when dealing with the Government. EPCA, via its member Parent Committees, assists and supports parents by providing education and, when necessary, advocacy, on more regional matters. By the very nature of this parent association, its main concern is the well-being and education of the students who attend the English public schools of Quebec. With the exception of one part-time employee, **EPCA's Executive and Directors are all volunteer parents who seek to promote an enriched bilingual education for all Quebec children.**

The membership is comprised of two directors per school board, elected by his or her respective Parent Committee to represent the parents and students of that school board. EPCA's Board of Directors meets on a regular basis to discuss issues, derive common policies among the member Parent Committees, and to promote communication and the sharing of information.

EPCA member Parent Committees representing some 75,000 students attending English public schools at the following School Boards:

1. Central Quebec School Board
2. Eastern Shores School Board
3. Lester B. Pearson School Board
4. New Frontiers School Board
5. Riverside School Board
6. Sir Wilfred Laurier School Board
7. Western Quebec School Board

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## Executive Summary

We acknowledge and appreciated the fact that the government has decided to maintain school boards and the acceptance of their utility in helping coordinate pedagogical delivery of educational services to communities across Quebec. We also appreciate the increase in the number of parent representatives sitting on the new School Board top level governance bodies along with the right to vote as being proposed, but would prefer seeing them occupy a majority membership position.

We also feel the transformation of the universal suffrage model of electing school commissioners to the newly proposed school councils is unnecessarily complicated and does not address or facilitate the fundamental right of citizen engagement in the democratic process.

We are part of the English official minority language system that has a proven record of success on many fronts. We question on **how the proposed legislation**, that focuses primarily on school governance structures, **will help improve student success?**

We also feel that prior to introducing such legislation, greater dialogue and consultation was needed. We would have hoped for that greater use of research and data based decision making would have been used for such fundamental changes to our education system. In recent years, we have witnessed successive reductions in financing public schools that have weakened the delivery of programs and incentives for some students to stay on and succeed.

We fail to see how the proposed changes in Bill 86 will improve graduation rates and do make some suggestions that, we feel, will impact positively on student success across Quebec. Changes to the education act must not focus on structural organizational changes but rather on finding ways to help teachers and administrators deliver pedagogy that engages students wanting to learn. We also feel that the functioning and collaborative workings of Governing Boards could be improved upon with a greater focus on training.

Lastly, we wish that the elected representatives to the National Assembly be fully cognizant that the proposed legislation could have a negative impact on the delivery of educational services to the French speaking minority outside Quebec. It is imperative that our elected officials take their responsibilities in hand and defend the collective rights of the official linguistic speaking minority in Quebec, so that the French education in the rest of Canada will not suffer.

We thank you for the opportunity to present and provide our perspective on strengthening public Education in Quebec.

## English minority public schools in Quebec

The English public school system plays a leading role in raising Quebec's overall school success rate average. Not only is our minority linguistic system a jewel of public education in Quebec, but in Canada as well. All 9 English school boards have worked to be among the top 13 spots of graduation rates among all school boards in Quebec. This represents an 85% graduation rate that is based on an inclusive teaching model with an 88% integration rate of special needs students within our schools. Quebec's official minority public education system is distinct and should be heralded as a valuable asset in contributing to Quebec's success on the world stage.

The English public school system plays a leading role in raising Quebec's rate of bilingualism. Over the years the level of expertise, of teaching French as a second language has grown enormously and has benefited our society by graduating bilingual secondary school graduates. The English school system should not be viewed as a threat but as an integral part of the solution for raising success rates. Instead of looking at problem areas and trying to find solutions why not look at areas where things work and then try to emulate them. We would encourage the government to look at taking the “*évaluation affirmative*” approach and use data driven decision making when instituting changes and considering policy changes to Education. The English public school system would be a great place to start and look for ideas on how to improve the education of our youth in Quebec.

Parental participation in our schools has been a mainstay of our success and any modifications to the current governance structures is seen to be disruptive to a system that works. The essential element of our success is working in collaboration within our schools, with teachers, administrators, and school boards with the common objective for the best interest of our students. Our schools do possess a great deal of latitude to deliver services that are appropriate and best fit local needs. The English public school system is distinct, and has been evolving continuously for many years within Quebec's public youth education and is something we clearly wish to maintain and improve upon our acquired level of success.

## Improved universal suffrage model

EPCA has been involved in discussions with previous ministers of education (2014 & 2015) and made simple recommendations to improve participation in school board elections and increase parental participation in decision making. In the summer of 2015, EPCA was an active participant in the Elections Systems Study Panel consultation that was led by the Honorable Marlene Jennings. The report was released on September 16<sup>th</sup> and listed a number of suggestions on how to increase voter participation and improve election procedures. We urge a careful review of this report and its 13 recommendations as they do provide concrete solutions to a problem at hand.

We do see the value of elected commissioners who for the most part have risen through the ranks of school governance and carry a level of experience that is valuable to have for institutional continuity. They have experience and do provide value with constituents in solving matters of concern of parents. Maybe limiting the duration of the term of office to two terms, would be an avenue worth exploring so as to ensure renewing the vitality of school councils. Also, extending the term of office to four years would fall in line with other elected bodies and would be preferred over the proposed 3 year terms. Also, we feel that a controlled and fair remuneration for meeting presence should be provided to School Council members to assist them in fulfilling their role as overseers of school governance.

Why make things simple when you can make them complicated? **A simple solution** *...to modify the organization and governance of school boards to give schools a greater say in decision-making and ensure parents' presence within each school board's decision-making body* **would be by increasing the number of parents to a majority position on the new School Councils and allowing them the right to vote.** Easy to implement without the need for major restructuring of the education system as proposed in Bill 86 that risks raising uncertainty without addressing the fundamental issue of student success.

### **Composition of School (Board) Council**

EPCA favors an increased parental presence to a majority position in school council with full voting rights. The proposed legislation does increase the number of parents on the School Council but their voice is mitigated with the addition of the 4 school board employees who have a right to vote. We welcome that school board employees add their voice and expertise to the School Council but feel it inappropriate that they have the right to vote. They would be the only members of the School Council receiving remuneration and could possibly carry an unbalanced level of power by voting in line with the wishes of their superior; the school board's Director General.

Preferred School Board Council composition, depending on the size of school boards:

4 - 6 parent representatives with the right to vote.

3 - 5 community representatives with the right to vote.

2 - 4 employees from the School Board that would sit as advisors without the right to vote

1 Director General acting in Ex Officio capacity

The chair or vice chair must be a parent (as proposed in Bill 86)

Regional representation of parents is favoured for parent representatives so as to ensure equitable representation in large School Boards along with increased minimum experience requirements.

## **Elections Procedures**

In Bill 86, article 146 repeals the Act respecting school elections and disregards the universal suffrage model choosing representatives to oversee the management of school boards. Instead of making efforts at solving the problem at hand, improving the process so as to increase voter participation, the repealing of this article will weaken the control of the English speaking minority community's right to manage its educational system. The proposed method of surveying school board parents and establishing a minimum number of parents in favor of calling an election of community representatives risk creating a patchwork of possibilities across Quebec. The essential right to control of official minority language school boards, as outlined in Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, risks being weakened by having a variable geometry in its application. Some parent committees might choose to allow elections and some might decide to fill the community positions themselves. This moves the whole concept of acquired rights into the realm of options; diluting rights and replacing with variable options. The constitutional questions raised on this notion must be seriously evaluated prior to changing the method of choosing community representatives.

The political will to encourage and help run successful school board elections has been lacking. The management of the elections by the DGE, who supplied electoral lists to candidates, that were clearly geared towards political parties rather than individual candidates who did not possess organized election teams able to manipulate the electoral list data. In addition, school boards were asked to finance the elections without any compensation and encumbered with an expensive process that did not facilitate citizens to go out and vote.

Suggestions of instituting electronic voting or joining municipal elections was addressed in the Jennings report and previous discussions with the Minister. Also, we feel it important to have the concept of taxation with representation be maintained and encourage that legislators study the sound recommendations provided in the Elections System Panel Report.

## **Ministerial power and equitable taxation**

As per The United Nations INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS it is important that persons belonging to linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture or to use their own language. Schools in regions are just that, focal points for community interaction and the linguistic School Boards themselves act as buffers to ministerial bureaucracy.

We view the increased powers provided to the Minister in the proposed legislation as steps towards centralization and potential loss of control over the institutions that are an intrinsic part of our community and culture. The ability to change school board territories and establish one size fits all policies based on averages, tend not to favor minority groups. A responsible democracy must maintain and instill measures that protect its minorities.

We acknowledge instilling into law that high school graduates, once they turn 18 years of age will now be inscribed and stay on English electoral lists is a positive step. However, this does not solve the problem of inequity that has arisen over the years past when students, once reaching the age of majority, would automatically have their names transferred on the French School Board electoral lists. This is a prejudice, transpired over a number of years that has not only hurt our school boards electoral lists, but also by default, negatively affected our taxation base.

All of society has a stake in the education of our children. If we are to continue using real estate values as a method of helping to finance education, we need to ensure that taxation rates must be equitable across all linguistic school boards within regions.

## Decentralized and cooperative decision making

One of the stated objectives for this legislation is to mobilize the principle stakeholders, bring ways to help decentralize and give a greater say to local schools. For the most part our schools already operate with a great deal of autonomy to address local realities and needs of the school populations. School Boards act as facilitators for our schools. Active parental involvement in our schools dates back over a century and is an inherent part of our success.

Parents do face family/work balance pressures which impact on the recruitment to school governing boards and parent committees at the School Board level. Our schools do run with a spirit of cooperation and decentralization, particularly in the rural areas.

## Focusing on student success

We feel that the proposed legislation that is centered on structural changes has missed the mark on helping improve student success. Budget cuts to education over the years have been particularly hurtful for the English public education system, known for its efficiency and success rates. This is compounded by Quebec's restrictive language law limiting enrollment into English public schools. This has negatively affected the availability of resources needed in delivering quality pedagogy to all our students.

Instead of focusing on structures we would like to see the Ministry address three areas, which, we feel, would help improve student success.

### **1. Commitment to teacher professional development**

In Bill 86 , Article 3 states that the a teacher is viewed “as a key pedagogical expert” and we concur with this but see little commitment in the proposed legislation on how to best help teachers become the key pedagogical experts in their day to day classroom activities. We would like to see more sustained ongoing professional development for teachers. We also see an increased usage of assessment and evaluation tools which would allow teachers more targeted interventions specific to student needs. Particularly we would like to see greater resources allocated to help train teachers and offer them support to deal with students with special needs. Identifying needs is paramount to establishing teaching practices that work and help raise overall student success.



We are also concerned about the perception of a pendulum swing in education focusing on results and efficiency, which could overshadow and create a bureaucratic bias in education that could be detrimental to our students learning. Tendencies of teaching to the test could override the desire to harness the individual strengths of students so that they may fulfill their aspirations and interests.

Another aspect we feel is missing in the proposed legislation, is to help valorize the teaching profession as a whole. We favor the possibility of creating a professional order for teachers that will valorize the important work they do in teaching our children. Time has come to commit to the quality of education and not to structures.

*« Miser sur des enseignants et des dirigeants scolaires très compétents, valoriser ces compétences et les renforcer, c'est cela qui change les choses. C'est ce qui donne les meilleurs résultats », John Hattie - [What Doesn't Work in Education: The Politics of Distraction](#) (Pearson, 2015).*

## **2. Added support mechanisms for school administrators**

There is a need for investment in education to allow school administrators more time to coach and mentor teachers and help reinforce positive teaching outcomes. Effective teachers have good success rates. School administrators should have greater opportunity to devote time to coaching teachers in matters of pedagogy and honing their intervention skills in the classroom. In the current system, there is more emphasis on coaching new teachers early on in their careers and little for teachers entrenched in the system in tenured positions.

The proposed legislation seems to place greater emphasis on efficiency and reporting requirements rather than serve the individual and specific needs of students. Increasing local autonomy in schools must also come with the necessary financial resources and support to make it happen. In recent years we have witnessed a decline in funding that has spilled over into classrooms. Increasingly the school administrators are required to assume a greater load in administrative tasks that takes away from best teaching practices. We urge the ministry to look at finding solutions to this. School administrators are the closest link with teachers and are in the best position to reinforce positive teaching outcomes which would benefit student success rates.

## **3. Improved Governing Board training**

We would like to see modifications be made to the legislation that would facilitate parental participation and engagement in our schools by improving the training they receive. Currently the obligation for training to Governing Boards and Council of Commissioners is left in the hands of individual school boards that results in variances in training which can vary from each school board. We would like to see the government invest some monies into a mandatory universal training program for all.

EPCA would be willing to assist along with other key stakeholders in developing training mechanisms that would help raise the level of understanding of governance, ethics and financial responsibilities of all members. This would provide a greater exposure to school governance at the Governing Board and School Council levels and could possibly act as an aid to recruit more parents.

## Conclusion

We do appreciate maintaining school boards and value of proximity they bring to delivering quality pedagogical education programs in our schools. We also appreciate the right to vote for Parents at the top levels of School Board governance and would like to see them hold the majority of positions on the School Councils. This in itself will help focus School Boards to best serve their populations.

The changes proposed in Bill 86 focus mainly on the governance structure of school boards. This detracts from dealing with the real problem at hand; help improve student success in Quebec. We would like to see pragmatic solutions that focus on the students.

We also ask legislators to bring forth solutions that will create the least instability in the minority English language public schools of Quebec and help maintain their unique specificity. We ask that the elected legislators protect the collective rights of Quebec's official linguistic minority and its historic distinctiveness that is intricately woven into our society so that our children will continue to best contribute to Quebec's success.