



Association des commissions scolaires anglophones du Québec
Quebec English School Boards Association



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Election Systems Study Panel

Comité d'étude des systèmes électoraux

Final Report & Recommendations
September 16, 2015



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Panel

Chair: Hon. Marlene Jennings, P.C., LLB

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Brian Rock
Rhonda Boucher

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Panel Mandate

- Review past elections and election systems and make recommendations on how to improve the election process
- Identify options for selecting School Commissioners
- Collect expert advice on minority language rights in education
- Seek out the views of interested organizations and individuals on school board governance and operational issues
- Deliver a report on community response, input and opinions of experts, and other pertinent information, and recommendations to meet Constitutional guarantees and improve voter participation.



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Panel Timeline

- June 10, 2015 Launch of Election Systems Study Panel
- Week of June 17, 2015 General call and specific invitations sent soliciting submissions
- July 31, 2015 Deadline for receiving written submissions
- July 6 – Aug. 19, 2015 Hearings/interviews (in person, teleconference, videoconference)
- Aug 19 – Sept. 4, 2015 Preparation of final report
- Week of Sept. 7, 2015 Final Report submitted to sponsoring organizations
- September 16, 2015 Public Release of final Panel report
- October 31, 2015 Panel mandate ends



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Panel Activities & Meetings

- 6 Teleconference meetings for Panel members
- 12 “in person” meetings of Panel members
- 40 Briefs and submissions received
- 4 Briefs/documents from out-of-Province groups or associations
- 30 hearings held
- 6 Constitutional and demographic experts consulted
- 3 Election and election system experts consulted
- 2 Returning officers from 2014 school board elections consulted
- 2 Retired school board Chairs consulted
- 3 Meetings with Education Minister Blais
- 2 Press conferences
- Multiple print and electronic media interviews



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Reflecting our community

One of the important elements of our mandate was to listen to input from anyone who wanted to share their point of view. No restrictions were imposed on who could deposit or what they wanted to say. While the focus was and is on English community rights, individuals and groups from across Québec provided our Panel with suggestions, research, and background on school boards, democratic representation, voter participation and non-participation, the voting process, the Canadian Constitution, mergers, efficiency, community involvement, student success, staff support, and more.



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“Our school board commissions have an important role to play. It’s vital that they are not far removed from our communities so they can be made aware of the issues that affect our children. In our case, our daughter requires some special services. Knowing I have the option to contact a local commissioner to bring their attention to a gap in services is comforting and empowering. If my requests for support were filtered through a distant and disconnected office somewhere, they may never be addressed.” – Corrinna Pole, July 2015.



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Reflecting our community - findings

- Current practice of electing English school boards by universal suffrage is the best, and perhaps only, way to fulfill the government's obligation to protect the minority language community's constitutional rights.
- The strength of elected school boards is that commissioners have a special link to the community they serve. Parents know their commissioners and appreciate that they are there to help ensure the education system adapts to students' changing needs and to be their voice in Quebec City.



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Reflecting our community - findings

- School boards are the one element of the public system that the English-speaking minority can call its own, thus giving it a degree of democratic legitimacy that is absent for English speakers dealing with other public services.
- Steps should be taken to facilitate voter participation
- Government should consider introducing measures to strengthen Quebec's English school system including allowing students educated in English outside Canada to attend English schools



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The Canadian Constitution

- Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, a non-exception clause, establishes the Constitutional provisions for minority language education rights in Canada.
- While not specifically designated under Section 23, protection for the right of minority language Community members to elect School Board Commissioners and Chairs from within their communities through universal suffrage is the natural means by which to exercise their right to the management and control of their education system and is common across Canada.
- French-language minority outside Quebec elects its school boards across Canada



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School Board Models

- Panel reviewed other models including:
 - The maintenance of the current model with more clearly defined roles for Commissioners and an expansion of their functions to give them greater latitude in policy implementation;
 - Mixed boards comprised of Commissioners elected by universal suffrage and an increased number of Parent Commissioners appointed by the School Board's own parents' committee;
 - Electoral colleges formed by parent members of governing boards who would be responsible for receiving the nominations for each position and for the selection of Commissioners;
 - Government appointed Commissioners selected from lists of nominated representatives submitted by one or more electoral colleges.



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School Board Models

- Panel recommends that
 - Parent Commissioners continue to be elected through the current Parent Committee Electoral College system with all of the rights, responsibilities and duties of Commissioners elected through universal suffrage but with the addition of the right to vote.
 - Number of Parent Commissioners be increased from 4 to 6 on each School Board.
 - Maintain possibility of co-opting Commissioners based on expertise



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The role of staff and students

- The role to be played by teachers, administrators, and others was also discussed by several groups and opinions varied widely. There is a consultative role for staff to play but it is clear that the line between staff and management must be clear.
- Further discussion is required about Cycle II Secondary student involvement on Council of Commissioners



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Election process

- Despite inaccurate voting lists, long line-ups at the polls and the need to travel long distances each way to exercise one's right to vote, voter participation in English School Board elections increased from 14.60% in 2003 to 16.88% in 2014.
- All students who graduate from English public schools are automatically registered on the French School Board voter list. Parents whose children have graduated from an English public high school are automatically removed from the English School Board's voter list and placed on that of the French School Board.



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Election process

Panel recommends:

- Online, telephone and mail-in ballot elections only;
- Elections Quebec oversee elections;
- English and French School Boards collaborate on revision of voter lists;
- Modifying the voter registration process so that English graduates and their parents as well as English 18 year olds are automatically on English School Board Voting list
- Election day voter registration if online voting is not implemented



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Conclusion

- The Election Systems Study Panel has determined that not only must the English School Boards continue as the primary institutions ensuring the vitality of Québec's English Minority Communities, but also that this school governance system will not benefit from any addition of new governance structures imposed under the guise of improving service delivery to English Minority students.
- Judged by student results, English school boards are a success story. Focus should be on how to make them better. Government should work with school boards to strengthen the system



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Recommendations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.



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Recommendations

7.

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9.

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Acknowledgement

The four sponsoring organizations deserve full credit for taking the bold step of engaging this study. They ensured the independence of the Panel by allowing us to receive input without reserve, to follow the paths that opened to us, and to draw our own conclusions. Panel members thank the sponsors for the opportunity.

Hon. Marlene Jennings P.C., LLB, Panel Chair

Leo La France

Rachel Hunting

Brian Rock

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Panel Report

The full and final report is available on the Panel website at www.electionspanel.ca until October 31st, 2015

The report will be available at each of the sponsoring associations after that date. It is up to each association to decide how they handle requests for copies of, and/or information about, the report.

Submissions from those groups and individuals who have given their permission for public release are also available on the Panel website until October 31st, 2015.