

President's Report

May 28, 2003

The QESBA had its first meeting with the new Education Minister, Mr. Pierre Reid, on May 27th. The Minister has, quite obviously, been doing a lot of homework and was well informed about the major dossiers. The meeting lasted over 75 minutes and allowed the QESBA to bring many current issues to the attention of the Minister. It also gave us the opportunity to give Mr. Reid some background information about the English school system across Québec.

The first item on the agenda was school board budgets for 2003/04, including system costs for 2003/04. Within that topic we highlighted our concerns about the late delivery of the budget parameters and the resulting need for the 2003/04 budgets to stay as close to status quo as possible. We underlined the fact that any major changes in funding would be virtually impossible to implement given the late delivery of the budgetary rules.

Other issues discussed:

- The funding of school board elections, transportation funding and organization
- New technology programs for hardware and professional development and training
- Funding for fibre optic and high speed Internet networks
- Building maintenance and repair and the need for a comprehensive long-term plan to improve the condition of all Quebec school buildings
- The need for a plan to protect the viability of small schools and the particular conditions facing the dispersed English community across the Province
- Funding rules and unrealistic funding caps for Special Needs Students and some background on the inclusion efforts of the English school boards
- The need for additional authorization and access to Technical and Vocational as well as Adult Education
- The ongoing effect of Law 101, the potential effect of Law 104, and our desire to discuss creative ways to ensure the long-term viability of the English system

We found Mr. Reid to be very interested in the issues facing the English community and he expressed a desire to work closely with us. We reiterated that while we consider the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec an important partner, and good friends, we are independent of them and expect to be treated as equal partners in the education system.

In summary, we consider this first meeting a good start, very positive, and we look forward to a close working relationship with the Minister and the Ministry.