



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

The Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) hereby offers its observations on Bill 62. While much lighter and more measured draft legislation than the pre-existing Bill 60, it nonetheless incites worry among our nine non-secular English-language school boards.

### **QESBA and the English language public school network**

The nine member Boards of QESBA serve some 100,000 students in 340 elementary and high schools, adult and vocational centres across Quebec. Each Board has its unique demography, orientations and history. All of them share a “made-in-English-Quebec” sensibility to delivering public education services, with equal regard for all creeds, religions or cultures. That sensibility is vitally pertinent to the discussion of Bill 62, which, by the Premier’s own words, deems to define how we Quebecers will live together in the future. QESBA would point to at least four elements to describe that made-in-English-Quebec sensibility:

- a) *An educational approach based on “teaching the student, not the subject”,* that is, in the spirit of Quebec’s reform, to focus on the acquisition of competencies as well as knowledge, to encourage critical judgment, citizenship, enquiry and teamwork;
- b) *Parent and community involvement:* as our school boards answer to the taxpayers, our schools must be accessible to and transparent towards their parents and community;
- c) *A commitment to preparing our students for a future in Quebec:* This commitment starts with the extensive concentration on French second-language. It is the mission of each of our school boards to provide every student with the opportunity to master French. The commitment

contributes to the francization of Quebec and extends to a general approach to teaching the arts, literature and history and including extra-curricular activities that is cognizant and respectful of Quebec's rich and unique character.

- d) *A recognition of our particular status as English-speaking institutions:* Quebec's English-speaking community, in all its diversity, continues to contribute to the rich tapestry of Quebec life. English public school boards, representing the sole level of elected government answerable to that community, assume as part of their mission, the job of teaching about and strengthening that fundamental contribution.

### **Presumptions of Bill 62**

Bill 62 seems to presuppose an issue across the province between competing religious and cultural values, and those deemed to be common Quebec values. In representing the nine English school boards of Quebec, QESBA has seen little evidence to that effect. Our 340 English public schools are contributing to the future strength of the French language by offering state-of-the-art intensive French second-language programs that often go far beyond the requirements of the government-prescribed curriculum. A growing percentage of English public school students are completing the French mother-tongue exams at the end of their high school studies and succeeding as well or better than their francophone *concitoyens*. The progressive secularization of public schooling in Quebec, fully endorsed by QESBA, represents another element of this success story. The replacement of confessional education with an increasingly recognized study program of "Education and Religious Culture" is helping our students learn the important lesson that religious and racial diversity enrich Quebec and complement rather than threaten any shared sense of Quebec values.

That over-all message of inclusion takes on additional significance with the determined approach of our English school boards to include as fully as possible students of every spectrum of potential and disability in every aspect of school life. This is done with a distinct and, again, complementary approach to our unique position as minority-language educators committed to preparing students for a future in a province where the common language is French.

In our experience, our system has never needed to legislate respect to our Teachers, Professionals and Support staff on any matter let alone religious neutrality. Freedom of religion in Canada is a constitutionally protected right, allowing believers the freedom to assemble and worship without limitation or interference.

Furthermore, numerous Canadian courts have ruled on various religious accommodation cases (Canada vs. Ishaq 2015) and, based on that Federal Court and Federal Court of Appeal ruling, this bill is more than likely unconstitutional and infringes not only on religious freedom but also on the English minority community's rights to manage and control our educational institutions.

There is a Charter of Rights and Freedoms in place, one that has always served the citizens of this country with dignity and respect and alternate legislation is not only unnecessary but does not concur with the subsequent court rulings on religious accommodation and neutrality. In Quebec during the nineteen sixties, Jean Lesage and his government were successful in accomplishing the separation of church and state. That separation is still pertinent and should continue to be respected in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

QESBA supports the separation of church and state. Our school boards and schools ensure, by virtue of Québec's Education Act and the philosophy under which they operate, the separation of church and state. We support the capabilities of our teachers and administrators to convey that respect within all of our institutions. We feel that Bill 62 is unnecessary and divisive as most of these discussions have been over the last number of years.

Respectfully submitted