



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

**Brief presented by**

**the Quebec English School Boards Association**

**to the Culture and Education Commission on**

**Bill 144**

**An Act to amend the Education Act**

**and other legislative provisions concerning mainly**

**free educational services and compulsory school attendance**

September 2017

## **BRIEF**

**Presented to the Parliamentary Commission  
regarding proposed Bill 144 - An Act to amend the Education Act  
and other legislative provisions concerning mainly  
free educational services and compulsory school attendance**

**September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

The Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) hereby offers its observations on proposed Bill 144. The Bill focuses on provisions for homeschooled students, students without proper documentation, and illegal schools. These have been areas of concern in the English public school network as we continue to support these students and families.

Bill 144 seeks to ensure accessibility to education for all children aged between 6 to 16 and adult learners. Given the success of every student is our primary mission, we agree there must be balance and clarity between the rights of the child, and the role of education.

### **Context - QESBA and the English Language Public School Network**

The nine English member Boards of QESBA serve some 100,000 students in 340 elementary, high schools, and adult and vocational centres across Québec. Each Board has its unique demography, territory, orientations and history. All of them share a “made-in-English-Québec” 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 144. QESBA would point to at least four elements to describe that made-in-English-Québec sensibility:

- a) *An educational approach based on “teaching the student, not the subject”,* that is, in the spirit of Québec’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 Québec:* 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 Québec and extends to a general approach to teaching the arts, literature and history and including extra-curricular activities that is cognizant and respectful of Québec’s rich and unique character.
  
- d) *A recognition of our particular status as English-speaking institutions:* Québec’s English-speaking community, in all its diversity, continues to contribute to the rich tapestry of Québec 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.

Our role as educators is to ensure that every student, regardless of background, is offered the best in educational services. QESBA has declared publicly that we welcome Bill 144 and its intentions. That said, we must ensure that the adopted version of this Bill is in the best interest of each and every student in Québec and for the school boards responsible for ensuring quality services.

## **Free Education for All Students**

As the guardians responsible for delivering free and quality educational services to all students in the English public sector, we must underline certain questions in the proposed bill specifically as it pertains to students without proper paperwork. How are school boards to recognize the parental authority, especially in cases where proper paperwork is not available? It must be clarified in cases where school boards cannot verify the proper status or permanent address of the parental authority, whether they are, or are not, authorized to recognize the right to free education to the child in question.

The question of free education must also be clarified in terms of adult learners. Our adult education programs support students who need to finish high school, or need courses to qualify for a trade program or CEGEP. Many school boards also offer courses for adult students with special needs. It is unclear if any of the proposed changes to criteria apply to our future students in continuing education, as it would certainly represent financial implications to school boards. As well, it must be clarified whether it will apply to international students in our adult education and vocation training programs.

School board financing must also be taken into consideration. Many parents register their children after September 30th. As a result, school boards are not financed after that date for registration. Given the fact this community in general is very transient, flexibility in recognizing students following attestation day is important to ensuring free education is viable for all students.

### **Recommendations:**

- That the Education Act guarantees the rights of each child to free education regardless of residence or the situation of the parental authority;

- That free education cannot be refused to any child regardless of their situation;
- That all financial allocations are made retroactive to the date of student entry to ensure free education for all students at the start of their school year;
- That criteria for adult and continuing education is clearly identified in the final version of Bill 144.

## **Homeschooling**

Our English public school network is proud of our homeschooling support, partnerships, and community participation that ensure homeschooled students have the best possible education and experience. In the English public sector, homeschooled students represent a small group of less than 180 students province-wide, not including the Orthodox Tash community which will be addressed further in this brief.

Our homeschool parents are willing and cooperative participants in education. Overall, our school boards experience a genuine willingness on their part to work with our Educational Services Departments to educate their children as required by the Québec Education Act.

Despite our efforts, many students, having not previously followed the Québec Education Act, are not at 'the usual' age-appropriate grade levels, but are progressing well. Like any student in a regular school, adaptation, such as more time in a given subject or at a given grade level is sometimes required. We provide continuous support and services to parents and students in homeschooling programs and over the last years we have worked to improve the structure and implementation of our services. For example:

- With the assistance of our professionals, we provide guidance towards the development of the educational plan, and invite them to complete this in person, by phone, or email;
- We answer questions throughout the year, and provide recommendations for resources and other means of support;
- We have developed a guide for parents that explains each subject, and a guide that explains a portfolio;
- We meet them for a portfolio evaluation and always ask the child to attend, and this is always completed in person.

Above all, we make it clear that we cannot replicate what a teacher would provide in terms of support.

Some of our English school boards, English Montreal and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, provide homeschooling in support of orthodox Tosh communities. In these cases, we go into their community to give presentations as well as facilitate the registration process. We also meet with their liaison regularly, as well as meet with the Department of Youth Protection from time to time. This community represents over 1000 students who require our support. Without increased funding and resources, our Educational Services teams will not be able to continue to meet their needs and provide support.

The expectations of school boards in terms of monitoring progress of these students must also be clarified. How are we to evaluate these children during the course of their schooling considering we have no authority to force parents to submit evaluations? Currently, we evaluate by Portfolio. Home schooled children are not required to take the Elementary Compulsory exams, but we encourage the parent to communicate with the school and request that they write the exams. For example, exceptionally this year, Sir Wilfrid Laurier tested the Tosh community with the CAT

4 in an effort to provide a better picture and support the parents with some concrete direction for reading.

Although homeschooling remains the responsibility of parents, we, as school boards, have an obligation to ensure that the student progresses at the same degree as those physically registered in schools. The current bill does not clarify the expectation of school boards in terms of ensuring student progress, nor does it offer school boards any leeway in ensuring evaluation. Currently, the majority of students being homeschooled do not succeed the Ministerial exams, which is an issue, as they have not achieved the required competencies to ensure further academic training, and suffer from significant educational delays.

Consequently, we are in favour of the development of a Ministerial guide for homeschooling and are in a position to share our current materials to assist in their development. In addition, we are also in favour of the creation of a Québec-wide Advisory Committee, on which QESBA would expect to hold at least one seat to actively participate in sharing of best practices and to ensure the proper implementation of these important amendments to the Education Act.

Recommendations:

- School boards enter into homeschooling contracts with parents and be afforded the professional leeway, by way of mandatory evaluation or other means as deemed required, needed to ensure student success;
- The ministry must recognize that when non-mainstream communities endeavour to enter into homeschooling contracts with public boards, some reasonable accommodations may be required exemptions and special considerations;
- Adequate funding be provided for additional human and material resources to support the school boards and the parents;

- Clear support and mandate be provided to school boards to acquire homeschooled student evaluations.

### **Act Respecting Private Education – Judicial Records**

We commend enforcing this law and agree police checks are vital for the safety of our students (Art. 20, Art. 23). However, judicial record checks is an issue currently facing many of our school boards. For example, the English Montreal School Board is faced with long delays due to thousands of requests for police checks not yet processed at the Montreal Police department (SPVM). This backlog, often weeks long, delays the board's ability to place newly hired personnel in schools. As there are no alternative choices, they must deal with the SPVM. Something must be done to expedite these requests, as well as to offset the cost of these judicial record checks to our school boards.

#### **Recommendations:**

- The ministry implement efficient processes and expedite record checks;
- Adequate financial resources must be provided to support the school boards who submit requests, as we are currently under-funded.

### **Illegal Schools**

QESBA respects the right and decision of the Minister of Education to incorporate what he deems as illegal schools in Bill 144. Illegal schools are not currently an issue for our English public network, and we therefore abstain from commenting on this and trust our parliamentarians to decided what is the best for these students.

### **Conclusion**



The Quebec English School Board Association welcomes this bill in terms compulsory school attendance and supports it in principle.

Our school boards do not oppose the choice of parents to propose a different learning path to their children by way of homeschooling. However, it is essential to have clear guidelines and mechanisms for consultation and evaluation between all stakeholders - students, parents, school boards, parents' associations, ministry, youth protection – to ensure student success.

We are equally confident that providing flexibility regarding eligibility rules for free education would be beneficial for students and support our educational mission. Education transforms lives, and access to education should be available to all regardless of financial means or status.