
QESBA Report to CSBA

July 2017 - July 2018

It has once again been a very busy year in Québec including a very heavy legislative agenda at the National Assembly in matters related to education.

Meeting with the Premier

The QESBA fall session opened with a meeting with the Premier of the province of Québec, Phillippe Couillard, and Minister of Education, Sébastien Proulx. This was a very successful meeting, and the first time since 2012 that QESBA has met with the Premier. Mr. Couillard recognized the very important role our Association holds regarding public education and as community representatives. Our agenda included the request for a public declaration of support regarding local, democratically elected school board representatives, and the improvement of our electoral process. The need for transparency and accountability regarding the Canada-Québec Entente funding, and the position of Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for English minority education, were also agenda items.

QESBA AGA & Elections

The QESBA Annual General Meeting was held in November in St-Sauveur. The AGM re-elected President Jennifer Maccarone for a second term, and newly elected Vice-President Dan Lamoureux for his first term. Professional development sessions included Dr. Steve Edwards, a presentation on NEXTSchool, and a very moving keynote by Elder Fred Kelly.

The Future of Linguistic Duality

QESBA President Jennifer Maccarone was invited by the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) to participate in a panel on *The Future of Linguistic Duality: Our Languages, Our Identity* in Ottawa on November 30, 2017.

She was asked to pronounce on a series of questions from OCOL based on changing demographics to Canada's landscape, on the future of the two official languages, on how we can continue to promote linguistic duality and what we can expect to see in the decades to come with ever-changing languages and cultures across the country.

Minister of Canadian Heritage

QESBA met with the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Honourable Melanie Joly, in February. Agenda items included the need for transparency and accountability regarding the Canada-Québec Entente funding, the Court Challenges, program

Language Rights Support Program component, and the establishment of a Protocol Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Québec English language minority education community. It was a productive exchange and the first of its kind for QESBA.

Québec Budget

The deposit of the Québec budget in March included funding commitments for education. The budget promised, among other specific items, an overall 5% increase, which translates into \$606 million for the English education sector.

Many of the dedicated education funds have already been identified for initiatives such school tax equity, and the implementation of initiatives within the Policy on Education Success. An estimated \$90 million in infrastructure for our sector has been earmarked for preschool, elementary, and secondary educational institutions, based on \$9 billion over 10 years. Funds will be used to add classrooms, gymnasiums and sports facilities, for renovation work, and the implementation of digital technologies to bring schools into the 21st century. Approximately 310 additional professionals will support elementary and secondary school students in their learning paths. As well, \$5.5 million will be invested over the next five years to support business start-ups for adult education and vocational training students.

Secretariat representing the English minority community in Québec

Following the naming of the newly appointed secretariat for relations with English-speaking communities in October, a series of consultations with the English minority in Québec were held with Kathleen Weil, Minister responsible for the Secretariat in February. QESBA actively participated during the sessions and the final forum. The Minister was pleased to receive valuable advice that has given her a mandate to pursue certain key issues with her new office leading up to the next provincial election. The Secretariat has been granted a budget of \$ 25 million over six years to consolidate ties with English-speaking Quebecers and contribute, through developmental measures, to the stimulation of the vitality of communities.

Bill 166

After significant lobby efforts by the QESBA and member boards, we are pleased with the government plan to normalize school taxation rates across the province. Québec's 25-year-old school tax system has resulted in a significant inequity between school board taxation rates within regions, with neighbours paying different rates for equal municipal evaluations depending on the school board. Declining enrolment, and the erosion of our tax base as taxpayers who do not have children receiving educational services would switch school boards, has been a source of great difficulty for the English-language education sector, for our parents, and for our communities.

The creation of 18 school tax regions, derived from the administrative regions system includes payment of a regional equalization subsidies to maintain the levels

of funding of school boards. The tax reform respects the taxation power of school boards allowing Councils to continue to set the tax rates.

There will be a two-year transition period for the implementation of the school tax administrative, and financial activities for each region; school boards will create of a committee to monitor the collection, recovery and apportionment of the regional school tax in each school tax region, including the designation of one board for the collection of school taxes.

Bill 144

Bill 144 - An Act to amend the Education Act and other legislative provisions concerning mainly free educational services and compulsory school attendance - clarifies the framework in which parents operate, gives Québec more powers to oversee and standardize home education, and allows officials to take action if they feel a child's situation needs to be regularized. A Québec-wide advisory panel has been created to make recommendations on the specifics of the regulations, including creating a guide for school boards and parents on good home-schooling practices.

QESBA has analyzed this bill and has recommended evaluation practices by school boards be instituted, and flexibility in programming offered for religious or particular communities. In addition, we lobbied for the religious and special status communities to receive recognition and support, including the application of Law 101's humanitarian clause allowing them continued access to English language school boards despite their lack of eligibility.

School Board Elections Postponed to 2020

QESBA has actively lobbied for years to improve the school elections process. In addition to voter list inaccuracies, distance to polling stations due to large territories, and lack of funding and elections support, fall 2018 elections brought with it the additional deficit of school board elections coinciding with provincial elections. With the advent of this new challenge, the National Assembly adopted Bill 163, postponing school board elections until November 2020, a two-year extension to current mandates. The bill also proposes the establishment of on-line voting for school board elections, a solution QESBA has been promoting for the past four years. Online voting would correct many issues facing our community and would help increase voter turn-out.

QESBA Strategic Planning

QESBA embarked upon an ambitious Strategic Plan renewal over the last year. Working with KSAR to complete this project, QESBA has adopted the following strategies: to build and actively pursue a global 2035 vision of English Language Education in Québec; to ensure long-term existence, growth, relevance and development of English language school boards in Québec; to strengthen collaboration across member school boards; and finally, to adopt a policy of visibility and presence.

QESBA presents to the Senate Committee on Official Languages

QESBA President Jennifer MacCarone presented to the Senate Committee on Official Languages in May, a first for our Association. As the government plans to modernize the Official Languages Act, QESBA joins its voice with that of the Quebec Community Groups Network. We endorse the proposals regarding the need for the Act to require robust, mandatory, and properly-resourced consultation with minority language communities. We also recommended strict transparency mechanisms be placed in the Act to account for official languages investments, as well as revisions to the census that would provide provisions to count all categories of rights-holders under section 23 of the Charter.

In conclusion, Québec is facing a provincial election which has the opposition party, Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), currently leading in the polls. The CAQ platform on Education calls for the abolition of elected school boards, and the replacement of head-offices with “service-centres.” The QESBA will work to ensure our community rights are maintained, that local democracy prevails, and that the collective thinking and efforts of its members and partners to develop, deliver, and defend English language education in Québec, is respected.

Enjoy Congress!