



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

**Quebec English School Boards Association's
Notice to the Minister of Education and Higher Education of Québec
Monsieur Jean-François Roberge**

**On the Resumption of In-School Educational Services
in the Schools and Centres of Québec's English School Boards**

April 30, 2020

(English Version)

Background

On Monday April 27th, the Government of Québec announced a plan to gradually reopen elementary schools throughout Québec. High schools are to remain closed for the remainder of the school year.

The Government's plan requires that elementary schools outside the Montréal Metropolitan Community (CMM) reopen on Monday May 11th. Schools in the CMM are to reopen on Tuesday May 19th.

School attendance is to be voluntary for students. Vocational programs can resume according to the same schedule with reduced group sizes. In-person adult education classes may not resume.

A number of conditions must be adhered to in the reopening of schools (and centres):

- Reduced class size (maximum 15 students)
- Physical distancing requirements (2 metre) to be maintained
- Enhanced sanitary measures
- No group meals
- No physical education classes
- A reduction by 75% of the estimated capacity of school busses (a Public Health Department requirement)
- No school employee aged 60 or over should be in school

The Current Situation

While there remains significant debate about the health and safety risks of establishing large groupings in public institutions, we acknowledge the need to reopen schools in a gradual and manageable way, ideally before the end of the current school year if conditions permit. It is our considered opinion that for the entire elementary school population of Québec, reopening in two stages only a week apart, does not constitute a safe and measurable return to school for our staff and students. This is, however, a responsibility and consequences that the Government of Québec and public health authorities have, thus far, taken upon themselves.

Our concern is with the practical and operational challenges in achieving this across the province by the prescribed deadlines, and its appropriateness on the Island of Montréal given the fact that this region is still very much an active COVID-19 "hot spot".

As of April 30th, there are still far too many unknowns that compromise the ability of school boards to safely and effectively reopen schools. Our assessment is that the implementation of these measures will vary significantly in different school boards and may not even be possible in some areas. We are also convinced that the international health considerations that we outlined in our previous recommendations cannot be met in many schools by these deadlines (these guidelines are contained in the WHO document entitled Considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19 - Interim guidance, 16 April, 2020, found here:

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331773/WHO-2019-nCoV-Adjusting_PH_measures-2020.1-eng.pdf).

The Government announcement was made this week with a lack of proper consultation and with no prior notice to school board officials who have the required knowledge and expertise to effectively develop and implement a workable plan. To make such a significant announcement without sharing the required data, research, and analysis has had the effect of transferring the risks and fallout of a weakly developed plan from the Minister of Education to the administrators of schools and school boards without their essential input to its design.

A proper consultation would require that the data on how many students, teachers, support staff, and bus drivers are available would have been analyzed before announcing a plan to the public. Prior analysis would have revealed the wide disparity in the application of the plan from region to region and in fact from school to school in suburban and rural areas. This is data that should have been collected in the two weeks before a public announcement - not the two weeks after.

Rather than inspiring confidence in the public, this hastily announced plan by the government has had the effect of significantly raising anxiety and stress levels among teachers and parents in particular, as well as the general population. This is clearly evidenced by a petition to delay school reopening until September, already signed by over a quarter of a million citizens.

QESBA's Position

Our nine English school boards maintain that their priority is and always has been the health and safety of our students, staff and their families. While no English school board will reopen any of its schools and centres earlier than the dates proposed by the Government of Quebec, respective English School Boards will decide if and when each of their schools and centres may reopen, once they determine that all the conditions required can be met in each instance.

The nine English School Boards in Quebec wish to respectfully remind the Government of Quebec and the Minister of Education that we continue to assert our legal & constitutional authority to control and manage our minority language school system and it remains our public responsibility to make the right decisions for our communities.