

Brief presented by

**Quebec English School Boards Association
and
Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Quebec**

**To the Committee on Citizen Relations
of the National Assembly**

on Bill 74

***An Act mainly to improve the regulatory scheme
governing international students***

November 2024

Introduction

This brief is submitted jointly by the QESBA and the ADGESBQ, that provide a unique education network approach and expertise that can help the government make the best and most informed decisions possible under Bill 74. This Bill will greatly impact our programs.

Since 1929, the **Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA)** and its predecessors have served as a vehicle through which school boards, elected commissioners, and parents have shared ideas and worked together to achieve our community's common goal of ensuring quality educational services. The member school boards of QESBA serve some 100,000 students in over 300 elementary and high schools, as well as adult and vocational centres across Québec and employ some 20,000 people. Each Board has its unique demographics, orientations and history. All of them share a “made-in-English-Québec” sensibility to delivering public education services, with equal regard for the needs and wants of all students, staff, and communities.

- *Parent and community involvement:* as our school boards answer to the taxpayers, our schools have always been accessible to and transparent towards parents and community;
- *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, assumes as part of their mission the job of teaching about and strengthening that fundamental contribution.

All of the points listed above have elected commissioners on the front lines of all decisions that will affect and ultimately benefit students. Our sector has much to be proud of, including attaining an 86% success rate.

History of the QESBA

QESBA has been advocating for English (protestant boards before 1998) public education in Québec since the association was founded in 1929. QESBA and its predecessors have gone from 129 member boards to 9 since the creation of the Ministry of Education in 1964.

Our enrolment in 1975 was over 250,000 students across the province and has declined to approximately 100,000 in 2015. There were as many as 172-elected Commissioners in 1975 and as of November 2014 there are 95 Commissioners and 9 elected Chairpersons. We consistently register a high above average success rate and our administrative overhead costs are among the lowest of any publicly funded institutions at a 4% average.

The **Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Québec (ADGESBQ)** represents directors general and assistant directors general of the nine English school boards. Its mission is to influence the development of educational policies in Québec and to promote the professional interests of its members. The ADGESBQ promotes collaboration between the various school boards to advance education in Québec. It makes available to its members all useful information concerning the improvement of the education system.

Bill 74

English School boards have greatly contributed to the Quebec work force and economy through their offers in vocational training. The programs have reflected the needs of the various sectors and provided skilled workers to meet the industrial growth of the province. Our vocational training programs are designed to target gaps in the labor market and respond to provincial priorities. International students play a role in ensuring that many programs remain viable and can be offered throughout the English school board network. Furthermore, English boards have contributed to help provide francisation courses to their students, where admissible and possible, to prepare them for a productive future in the Quebec job market.

We believe that the vitality of our vocational offer of service in the English network needs to be considered and special consideration be given to ensure the continuum of educational offer to the English-language minority.

The federal measures already announced and for which many details are still missing will undoubtedly have a profound impact on our centres by imposing enrollment caps, eligibility to the post graduate work permit, just to name a few. The provincial government needs to understand these impacts before implementing further restrictions, which will compound the impact on our sector:

- Some programs are dependent on foreign student registration to open a group. Any restrictions to these programs may result in the cut or scale back of programs, leading to fewer offerings for Quebec residents who wish to be qualified in a trade or skill.

- Many programs have resulted in important government financial investments to design and run. The closure of groups will result in net losses on those investments.
- There will be a significant reduction in staffing needs therefore creating excesses and lay-offs. Many of our teachers and staff are permanent and contractual obligations would have to be maintained. Most vocational education teachers would not have required qualification to teach in any other educational sectors and therefore boards will be saddled with additional financial burdens. This will also create a drain on the network in the future that has invested in qualifying vocational education teachers.
- Our vocational programs are designed to address specific workforce needs. International students often enroll in these programs to gain specialized skills and fill labor shortages in critical industries (e.g., healthcare, construction, and technology).
- Graduates of vocational programs often return to their home countries with skills that establish important international workforce connections. Limiting international student participation could reduce the global workforce pipeline and weaken ties with industries abroad.
- Many vocational programs rely on partnerships with local industries and businesses for internships, apprenticeships, and job placements. The impact of having fewer foreign students and programs could mean reduced demand for such partnerships, impacting local businesses or even generate an employment void.
- Most students avail themselves of the opportunity to work part-time as allowed by their study permit. Their addition to the workforce benefits local businesses to fill vacancies.
- Restrictive measures greatly impact the reputation of our country and our province as an attractive study abroad destination. It has taken years to gain a competitive

advantage over other countries namely the US, Australia and the United Kingdom.
Even temporary measures will have a lasting effect on the system.

Bill 74 seeks to implement additional measures and controls to restrict the number of foreign student enrollment by region, type of educational institution, and program. Although we understand the need to better control the influx of international students into our province so that our infrastructure, social services and economy can support these new arrivals, we urge the government to exercise a high degree of caution in deciding on the controls it decides to implement. A one size fits all approach has never been viable for our system.

With that in mind, we hope that the government will consider the following before applying restrictions to our system:

- That there are no linguistic criteria introduced that would compromise our ability to provide an English vocational training offer, to thrive as a community and continue to contribute to the Quebec job market and economy. As mentioned above, we are committed to ensuring that international students learn French to integrate into the Quebec labour force.
- Given the small proportion of international students in the public English vocational centres, that no caps be imposed on our programs. This is true in both the urban and non-urban boards.
- Given that the federal government has restricted the number of vocational programs eligible for a post-graduate program, that the provincial government consider and analyze the impact before imposing new ones. The desired outcome of reducing the number of international students may already have been achieved by the federal measures.

Conclusion

It is our recommendation that the Government of Quebec postpone the adoption of Bill 74 until further detail is released by the Government of Canada and an in-depth analysis of the impacts to our institutions and programs.

Should the Government and the National Assembly decide to proceed with Bill 74 in its current form, it will impose limitations on the English education network to manage and control our institutions. Furthermore, as mentioned, many of our teachers and staff are permanent and contractual obligations would have to be maintained, directly impacting school board budgets. We therefore request an exemption from Bill 74 due to the small scale of our network and the impacts that this will have on the sustainability of our institutions.