



January 30, 2012

Mme Line Beauchamp, Vice-première ministre
et ministre de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
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Madame la ministre,

The Leadership Committee for English Education in Québec (LCEEQ) during its recent consultations with MELS has been generally open to a “bulletin unique” while at the same time insisting upon a degree of flexibility to allow for adaptation to the needs and realities of the English sector. Following recent meetings with delegates to the LCEEQ, we were deeply disturbed by reports of the stress and anxiety experienced by all English schools in the province, resulting from the implementation of the provincially mandated report card in the English schools of Québec.

The development of an effective reporting tool is a key element in the teaching/learning process. The LCEEQ recognizes that a bulletin should be meaningful to students and their parents, and useful to teachers in communicating progress and acquisition of the competencies outlined in the Québec Education Program. The committee believes it is possible to establish broad parameters that will protect the format and purpose of a provincial report card, while allowing for local adaptations that improve the quality and ease of administration of the reporting process. Without this flexibility, the bulletin becomes an obstacle hindering an accurate communication of learning progress and ultimately affecting student success.

The LCEEQ would like to bring to your attention a number of issues regarding the format of the new bulletin, as well as the problems experienced with the implementation process itself. These concerns can be grouped under the following four themes:

- Timeframes
- Technical Issues
- Pedagogical Issues
- Teacher Training

Timeframes - Even though changes to the Basic School Regulations (BSR) were announced over a year ago, it is our understanding that delays in decision making at the MELS resulted in serious production delays at the Société GRICS (Gestion du réseau informatique des commissions scolaires). These delays created a situation where directives and bulletins from GRICS were not available in a timely fashion to allow for the upgrading of the GPI software program which is used in the public school boards, and COBA which is used in some private schools. This caused much confusion and uncertainty in the system. In many cases, teachers had already entered their marks into GPI when a new update arrived from GRICS, forcing them to re-enter their marks and comments, and in some cases losing information that had been previously saved. Some updates from GRICS arrived after the November 20th deadline for reporting, forcing a majority of schools to use existing report cards, particularly for students with special needs, or sending report cards home after the deadline.

The last-minute nature of the report card implementation process created huge costs to the system as schools and school boards scrambled to update personnel on fundamental procedural and content changes required by the MELS or by GRICS. All school boards report high levels of teacher frustration and fatigue as a result of a bewildering and unrelenting focus on evaluation during the fall semester. Although it is too late to correct timeframe issues, the LCEEQ hopes that the minister will take steps to ensure that the same situation does not reoccur in the next reporting period in February.

Technical Issues – Beyond the difficulties created by an extremely short timeframe, there remain some fundamental flaws in the current bulletin that are creating administrative and pedagogical problems for schools in the English sector. Some of these problems need to be addressed by the MELS through some modifications to the Annual Directives for 2011-2012. Others can be remedied by building some flexibility into the bulletin to allow for local adjustments. The directive received by schools indicates that Section 1 of the report card, which lists General Information for each student, cannot be changed or altered. A desired change is that the student's name should appear in a bold font. Schools would also want to add the student's homeroom number and the name of his/her homeroom teacher to Section 1 of the report card. These adjustments may appear trivial but they would greatly help the clerical staff of the school in sorting the report cards and ensuring a proper distribution.

The committee has compiled a listing of some of the specific issues encountered by schools in the English sector and attaches the listing to this letter in order to initiate corrective measures before the next reporting period.

Pedagogical Issues - There are more fundamental issues with the bulletin which compromise the evaluation process for students in general, and more particularly, for students with special needs and students following specialized programs. The LCEEQ is unanimous in its opinion that the bulletin, in its current format, cannot be used to accurately communicate the academic progress of students with special needs. The method of reporting, as per MELS directives, does not take into account the reality of the English sector where the majority of students with special needs are integrated in the regular classroom and are not placed in self-contained, Special Education classes.

The current bulletin insists that students with special needs must be working at modified instructional levels in all subjects. The reality in the English sector is that the majority of students with special needs are learning at various instructional levels within modified programs and are working at the same levels as their peers in certain subjects. The restrictions of the current report card have required some school boards to develop as many as seventeen versions of the official template in order to adequately reflect the learning progress of students within their schools. This is unsustainable and beyond the capacity of the English sector.

More flexibility should be built into the bulletin so that teachers will be able to fully report when a student is learning at a modified instructional level. If the bulletin is to respond to the diversity and high integration rates of English schools, the bulletin must also allow for feedback on modified competencies. The LCEEQ would ask the minister to take immediate action to initiate modifications to the bulletin to make it more responsive to the diverse learning paths created for students with special needs, and to the integration practices in English schools.

Teacher Training Issues – Although all school boards and private school associations devoted considerable time to training sessions for teachers and administrators on the structure and use of the bulletin, information that was presented last spring and at the beginning of the current school year was contradicted by MELS directives and changes to report card formats that were received in the weeks preceding the school reporting period and deadline. Information that subject consultants received from provincial training sessions was not always the same message that school administrators were receiving from the MELS representatives. Late delivery by GRICS of software updates, tables and report card formats meant that teachers did not have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the bulletin before they had to implement it.

In spite of efforts made by school boards, school administrators and technicians, teachers did not feel adequately prepared for the new report card due to the ever-changing situation of last minute changes imposed by the MELS and GRICS. We, the English sector, are now left with a major burden of offering ongoing training sessions now that the software and report card formats are in place, and also the task of unraveling the misinformation which has led to much confusion and frustration.

Preparing teachers and administrators to meet provincial requirements for the reporting of student performance, as defined in the policies and directives issued by the MELS, is a major challenge for English schools. Training plans will not only have to deal with the new GPI interface and report card templates but must also continue to engage teachers in a reflection process to identify standards and procedures with which to measure student progress in all subject disciplines.

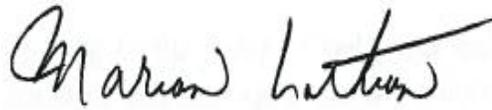
The LCEEQ recognizes that there is a need for a significant investment of resources for teacher training if the implementation of the bulletin is to be successful. Given the budgetary cutbacks imposed on all school boards in Québec, the LCEEQ asks the minister to make additional funding available to support this process.

In conclusion, the LCEEQ, on behalf of the English Educational Community in Québec, remains hopeful that the modifications to directives and report card formats presented in this letter will be addressed within the briefest of delays and that the minister will continue to recognize the unique character and challenges facing English sector schools.

Sincerely,



Sandra Furfaro, Co-Chair



Marian Lothian, Co-Chair

Cc: Monsieur Leo La France, Sous-ministre adjoint aux Services à la communauté anglophone, aux affaires autochtones et au Plan Nord
Monsieur Alain Veilleux, Sous-ministre adjoint, responsable à l'éducation préscolaire, à l'enseignement primaire et secondaire et responsable des régions
Monsieur Guy Dumais, Directeur général des services à l'enseignement
Madame Linda Drouin, Directrice, de l'évaluation
Monsieur Paul Rémillard, Directeur, des services à la communauté anglophone

BULLETIN UNIQUE - SPECIFIC ISSUES

Prepared by the Leadership Committee for English Education in Québec (LCEEQ) on behalf of the English schools of Québec

Administrative/Technical Issues:

1. The printing, sorting, and distribution of the bulletin have become problematic for many schools. Efficiency would be improved by modifications to Section 1: the addition of the name of the homeroom teacher, the addition of the homeroom number, and a reporting template that automatically prints the student's name in bold type.
2. In certain cases, students were given a NE (not evaluated) mark due to a prolonged absence from school or individual circumstances. This option is no longer available with the bulletin and should be reinstated.
3. The number of days a student is absent from school is an important piece of information when it comes to tracking student progress. There is no provision in the bulletin to record student absences and school administrative staff has had to enter this information manually. Modification is needed to create a space for student absences in each subject discipline.
4. A report card is an official document that is approved by multiple administrators in larger schools and is tracked to ensure that parents have received the communication. Modifications to the bulletin are needed to allow for the signature of more than one administrator and a space for a parent/guardian signature.
5. The title of Section 3 in the translated version of the bulletin reads as follows "*Section 3 – Comments on Certain Competencies*". This wording in the English version is confusing and misleading. The title of Section 3 should read "*Comments on General Competencies*".
6. Most English schools offer a French Immersion programme and provide information to parents in English and in French. Modification is needed to permit the printing of a bulletin that allows for subject-specific competencies to appear not only in English but also in French.
7. In some schools more than one teacher provides instruction in any given subject (e.g. French Immersion programme). The bulletin does not easily allow for both teachers to comment individually. Modification is needed to allow more than one teacher to be identified and to comment individually.
8. The use of the Subject comment box and the School comment box led to much confusion in the system. Teachers, for the most part, entered their feedback in the Subject comment box which failed to print out on the bulletin and this information was lost. This is a serious programming glitch that must be addressed immediately.
9. Schools with a high prevalence of students with special needs can issue a large number of report card formats, therefore, more built-in flexibility in the bulletin will reduce the number of reporting formats that may be required.

Pedagogical Issues:

1. The Kindergarten bulletin was over simplified and provided parents with considerably less information than previous school board designed report cards. Modification is needed to include more space under each competency for teacher comments and a space for general observations.
2. It is important that the bulletin signal whether or not a student has an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). The English sector is unanimous in requesting that space be provided in Section 1 of the "Bulletin Unique" to indicate whether or not a student has an IEP.
3. More latitude is needed in reporting on students with special needs to accurately reflect the high level of integration in English schools. Modification to the bulletin is needed to provide the flexibility to report on modified instructional levels on a subject-by-subject basis.
4. In addition to technical and timeframe issues related to reporting in the Work Oriented Training Program major discrepancies exist between the required competencies and the Framework of Evaluation in the Prework Programme and Prework bulletin.

A major problem with the Prework Training bulletin was that the printed version did not display the individual competencies, as required by the MELs, for English Language Arts, French Second Language, Mathematics, Science & Technology, Introduction to the World of Work, and Work Skills. Immediate action is needed to correct this situation which has severely limited reporting on progress in this program.

A second problem is that the template does not allow for the insertion of a course from General Education or the Applied Education pathways to be used for the fifty hours of unapportioned time built into the Prework Training Program, as required by the Basic School Regulation. The current Prework Training Program template must be modified to allow for the insertion of an optional course of a fifty-hour duration, and for the competencies of this course to appear for evaluation.