



**Brief presented
by the
Leadership Committee for English Education in Quebec**

**to the
Commission de la culture et de l'éducation**

regarding

Bill 86

An Act to modify the organization and governance of school boards to give schools a greater say in decision-making and ensure parents' presence within each school board's decision-making body

April 2016

The Leadership Committee for English Education in Québec (LCEEQ) is a collaborative professional learning community established for the purpose of promoting educational leadership in response to the needs of the English educational community of Québec. The Committee is comprised of thirty-one members appointed by the organizations which they represent:

- The Directors General of the English School Boards (ADGESBQ/ADGCSAQ)
- Special Status School Board representatives (Cree, Littoral)
- Representatives of the nine public English School Boards
- Independent School Associations' Table (ISAT)
- Administrators of Complementary Educational Services (ACES)
- Provincial Organization of Continuing Education Directors English (PROCEDE)
- Association of Administrators of English Schools of Québec (AAESQ/AEAQ)
- Québec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT/APEQ)
- Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l'éducation du Québec (FPPE)
- English Colleges Steering Committee (Cégep)
- English Universities of Québec

Preamble

We would like to express our extreme disappointment in not being selected to present our position in person at the hearings established for this purpose. Regardless, we feel it essential as an English representative committee to have our voice heard and so submit this written brief. LCEEQ anticipates that our concerns will be given the utmost consideration in the preparation of the final law.

In keeping with its mandate to respond to issues facing the English educational community, the LCEEQ examined the articles of the proposed Bill 86 to identify the provisions that will have an impact on the educational system in Québec. The following statements reflect the concerns of the committee with the proposed Bill and the impact it will have on the educational services provided by English schools, centres, colleges and universities in Québec.

Statement:

The English educational community as demonstrated by its high academic success rates thrives on its ability to find creative educational solutions in partnership with educational experts, its parental communities, and its elected officials. Given the proposed drastic shift in this delicate balance of power and support, Bill 86 is not in the best interest of the English educational community. LCEEQ is concerned that this legislation will not serve the interests of Quebec students and will create additional strains on the operations of English schools and centres in Quebec. This, in turn, will ultimately negatively affect the colleges and universities in the province.

Discussion:

- ❖ There is no link whatsoever to the proposed changes in governance and the ultimate goal of every educational institution in the province, namely that of student learning and success. The English sector has both high expectations and a proven record of such success. We are concerned that changing the existing governance model will have a detrimental impact on the students the system is designed to serve.
- ❖ The goal of the Quebec Education Programme (QEP) is to instruct, to qualify, and to socialize. As educators, we strive to achieve success in all three of these areas. There is no argument that evidence-based decision making and qualification rates are critical elements to consider when determining student success. However, there are numerous factors that contribute to a successful educational experience. The desired outcomes for Quebec students are to become well educated, contributing members of Quebec society with an appreciation of Quebec society and its members. This desired goal is not achieved by numeric targets.
- ❖ It is LCEEQ's assertion that one major reason for the English Educational community's high rate of success is due to the existing positive relationships with both parents and the community at large. Parents understand the important role they play in the functioning of our schools and work collaboratively with educators in this regard. By the same token, schools and school boards within the English educational school system acknowledge the role of parents and community in student success, and encourage their contributions. However, there is an important distinction to be made between collaboration and decisional power. The Bill proposes to recreate the role of parents in a manner not necessarily conducive to student success. It would afford parents much more responsibility for pedagogical decisions for which many will not have the requisite competency, experience, nor desired neutrality to comprehend the big picture and competing interests and needs of an ever increasingly diverse and complex student enrollment. These matters are better left in the hands of educators. School Board officials, in-school administrators and teachers must assume pedagogical leadership, working in partnership with parents and community representatives to ensure continued success for all students.

- ❖ Bill 86 is grounded in a “one-size-fits-all” model of governance that is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, the creation of a uniform School Council made up of the same number of parents, school board employees and community representatives does not take into account the particular needs of each region. Given the demographics and geographical realities of the English sector and the diversity of programmes offered, there must be more consideration given to local needs and particular school cultures. Our current reality includes rural and urban settings, large and small schools, students who regularly spend hours being transported to and from the closest educational institution, schools with more financial independence than others, and those with extremely low socio-economic indicators, and the list goes on. In addition, we offer high quality French second-language programmes to ensure that our graduates can succeed in a bilingual setting. A governance model that does not appreciate such diversity will not serve the English sector well nor Quebec society as a whole.
- ❖ Secondly, the dissolution of a democratically-elected school board structure in favour of a School Council that is largely determined by parents is flawed. From our perspective as a linguistic minority group in the province, this aspect of the Bill is particularly troubling. Any legislation that removes the right of the populace to govern its publically-funded institutions is a threat to democracy. Education is an important value for all of society, and each citizen should have the right to contribute to the public good. Participating in school board elections is an important way to exercise this right. All taxpayers, not just parents, should be involved in the decision-making process for school board governance. If the issue the government wishes to address is low voter turnout for school board elections, then efforts should be made to increase voter participation, not limit it. If the goal of the legislation is to empower parents, then giving parents voting rights on existing school board councils should be considered. In its current form, the impact of Bill 86 would serve to disempower the entire community, including parents.
- ❖ Thirdly, the proposed structure of the School Council is skewed in favour of non-educators. Although the Bill creates limited opportunities for participation of principals, a teacher and a non-teaching professional, the majority of seats would be held by parents and community members. While parent and community members may have the best of intentions for serving the needs of the student population, they do not necessarily have the expertise to do so. Moreover, if the goal is to have a fully-informed council, there needs to be representation from all levels; elementary, secondary, adult and vocational education, as well as, post-secondary institutions. An effective governance structure requires a competent and healthy balance in membership.
- ❖ A major presumption of the Bill is that parent and community participation is lacking and thus must be enhanced. This presumption requires closer scrutiny to understand the English context. The Governing Board structure has been in existence for a significant period of time and has generally worked well. This structure recognizes the crucial role that parents play at the local level within the educational framework. It also includes representation from other members of the educational community, including staff and students. However, there are

challenges with the existing model that must be addressed before having parents sit on an additional centralized structure, the proposed School Council. In some cases, it is very difficult to recruit parents to sit on Governing Boards. English schools often have a large catchment area which can make it difficult for parents to agree to serve in this important position and attend meetings. Is it realistic to expect parents and community members in spread-out communities to serve on a School Council? In other cases, the number of school families is limited and/or in decline, thereby seriously limiting the number of potential candidates.

Even if interested parties do step forward, they sometimes lack understanding of the system. Often, parents of children entering a school for the first time are encouraged to participate in school life by joining the Governing Board. However, they often need a period of internship to understand their role and responsibilities and are most appropriately guided by the leadership of the school administration and teachers. Extension of existing training to support parents and community members who sit on Governing Boards would be an appropriate way to increase their participation.

- ❖ The proposed Bill places much more pedagogical responsibility on parents who may not be adequately prepared to make decisions in the best interest of all students. Examples of this include widening the mandate of Governing Boards to “adopt” rather than “approve” policy as well as having parents participate in the selection of the school principal. There is little argument that accountability is important: educators need to be evaluated on a regular basis and in a systematic manner. There is strong doubt, however, that parents would be in the best position to carry out these tasks. There is a well-established process that exists in law whereby a Governing Board sets the criteria for the selection of a school administrator. School Board officials who are in a better position to understand the needs of the school network can respond to the proposed criteria when deciding on administrative assignments. Mandating the Governing Board to evaluate and select the school administrator could result in a number of undesirable and unforeseen outcomes: competition between schools to solicit particular candidates, decisions being made with a view to garner favour with the Governing Board rather than what is best for students, to mention a few.
- ❖ Diminishing the collective authority of the School Board in favour of the individual Governing Board is problematic. The School Board structure provides stability, constancy, and equity across a network of schools in that the authorities are able to appreciate the overall needs of the entire student population and are not solely focused on the needs of a particular institution. Governing Boards should continue to be expected to address the needs of the particular school within the organization of the School Board.

- ❖ Other provisions in the Bill are unnecessary and will create redundancy, thereby reducing the efficiency of the English system which is already acknowledged to be high performing. For example, the creation of a Resource Allocation Committee could easily result in ever-diminishing resources being distributed in a less than equitable manner without the participation of the Director of Finance and Director of Human Resources. Another example is the requirement to have outside experts sit on committees to advise the school council on matters involving resource allocations and finances. Such expertise currently exists within school boards and should be recognized as such.

- ❖ Finally, Bill 86 significantly extends the discretionary powers of the Minister. The role of the Minister of Education should be one of overseeing and ensuring the smooth operation of the educational system as a whole. The fact that the Minister would become the immediate superior of each Director General is too far-reaching. We agree that when there is a serious issue that must be addressed, the Minister should take appropriate action. However, this is already possible; further broadening the powers of the minister is unnecessary. Any direct intervention by the Minister should only be in exceptional cases. This is another example of how this legislation would serve to create a “one size fits all” form of governance that would undermine the vitality and success of the English educational community.

This position paper began by stating that the proposed changes to the Education Act as specified in Bill 86 do little to support the essential objective of student learning and success. It highlights a number of specific issues stemming from this proposed legislation that may be considered counter-productive, unrealistic, unnecessary and, in some cases, detrimental to this ultimate educational goal. The LCEEQ adopts the position that Bill 86 be withdrawn and reconsidered in light of what is best for the students served by our educational system.