

ASSOCIATION DES COMMISSIONS
SCOLAIRES ANGLOPHONES DU QUÉBEC

ACSAQESBA

QUEBEC ENGLISH SCHOOL
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

**QESBA Presentation following
the Pre-Budget Consultation**

Presented to Finance Minister Éric Girard

From the Quebec English School Boards Association

January 22, 2024

The Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) has been advocating for English (protestant boards before 1998) public education in Quebec since the association was founded in 1929. QESBA represents the interests of the nine English language school boards and the Centre de services scolaire du Littoral, a special status school service centre. The QESBA and its predecessors have gone through many changes since the creation of the ministry in 1964. It has gone from 129 member boards to ten. Our enrollment in 1975 was over 250,000 students and has declined to stabilize to approximately 100,000 in 2015. There were 172 elected Commissioners in 1975 to the current 95 Commissioners and 9 elected Chairpersons. The reduced student population and representation have impacted the services offered by many school boards compared with the larger educational institutions in Quebec.

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 330 elementary and high schools, as well as adult and vocational centres across Quebec and includes some 21,000 employees. Each school board has its unique demographics, orientations, and history. The English sector boards, through the many transformations, all share a sensibility to delivering public education services, with equal regard for the needs and wants of all students, staff, and communities.

Each school board, through its commitment to success plan, strives to contribute to all the objectives set by the Minister of Education. To achieve their goals, school boards must be creative, diligent, and efficient in planning their operational and capital expenditures to meet the needs of their students. Despite the financial challenges in the last few years, we consistently register higher than the average Quebec success rate and our administrative overhead costs remain among the lowest of any publicly funded institutions at a 4% average.

General Comments:

Since the pandemic, economists have assumed the arrival of an economic recession caused by the robust measures put in place by the Bank of Canada to curb inflation rates. Indeed, the inflationary context of the recent years has impacted our school board network. It is however important to recognize that performance of the Quebec economy compared to others has demonstrated the ability to prioritize and maneuver to continue reinvestment in its services, specifically education.

School boards and school teams in Quebec make public schools an outstanding learning environment that has received world-wide recognition. This includes high results in the PISA international student assessment and the model for inclusion that it is. This is something that we can all be proud to have contributed to. For school boards to remain contemporary and offer quality education in modernized

facilities, investments in the future, our students, is of paramount importance. Material grants and human resource allocations must reflect inflation to help us continue our efforts to ensure meaningful learning for all students in the youth sector, Adult Education and Vocational Training. Our collective graduation rate, which stands at 87% overall in the English sector, will surpass the targeted Ministerial goal if the proper financing and conditions are provided.

We have feared the impacts of inflation on our network. In fact, inflation rates regularly exceeded 5% in 2023. Despite signs of deceleration, inflation rates remain well above a controlled situation, i.e. a range of 1% to 3%. In this context, we expect an increase in spending.

We wish to highlight in three sections: general system-wide needs, specific English network budget considerations and regional particularities. These are directly linked to the Minister of Education's priorities.

General system-wide needs

- *Continued investment in the expenditure budget of the MEQ*
 - System costs must reflect the increase in inflation and the additional costs related to the new collective agreements in process of approval.
 - The increased flexibility for school board with “measures” to meet the specific needs of their community has been very appreciated.
- *Attraction and retention*
 - Personnel recruitment and retention must remain a government priority with significant investment in teacher qualification, employment benefits, added incentives province-wide and promotion.
- *Building improvements and new construction*
 - The government must consider the current inflation reality in general and in the construction industry in particular when authorizing projects.
 - Orientation 1 of the ministerial strategic plan includes a substantial increase in the number of 4-year-old kindergarten students over the next 4 years. This will require building expansion.
 - Orientation 2 of the ministerial priorities seeks to improve student health and the use of facilities for the community. This will therefore require prioritizing schools without adequate gymnasium facilities.
- *Digital Technology*
 - Update digital devices, systems, and resources for staff and students.
 - Ongoing professional development for personnel.

- Support to school boards to improve their cyber security, storage and data management.

English Network specific

- *Special additional envelop for French instruction*
Many boards have instituted French enhancement programs while other boards have limited funds to develop similar immersion or Français+ instruction.
 - Especially true given the new additional requirements for French courses at English-language CEGEPs.
- *Transportation*
Funding for transport needs to reflect the fact that in the English network, our school boards cover much larger territories with longer routes than most school service centres.
- *School Board Elections in November 2024*
Funding for school board elections (which are maintained in a different form in Bill 40) is necessary.
 - French sector no longer has to organize school elections but its budgets were never reduced.
 - This is a question of equity.
- *Canada-Québec Entente on minority language education and second language instruction*
 - This agreement functions more like an equalization program to the Government of Québec rather than a genuine support program for English language education.
 - The English education network and MEQ need to receive a greater proportion of the funds transferred to Quebec:
 - 59% (\$38.3M) of the \$65M goes to the Treasury Board
 - Only 32% (\$20.8M) of the \$65M transferred annually from the Government of Canada to the Government of Quebec goes to the MEQ to support the English educational network
 - 20% (\$13M) to support the minority language network and French second language instruction. These projects render important results that improve collaboration, enhance best practices and respond to the specific needs of the English network. This allocation has not changed in more than a decade, we wish to expand on local and shared projects for the offer equitable services for the English education sector.
 - In most other provinces, roughly 80% goes to the departments of education.

Regional particularities

- *Subsidize additional transportation costs assumed by school boards*
 - Some school boards are required to subsidize additional transportation to get students to their home school from the neighboring school service centre drop off point. The funding is only provided for the CSS for these students but not for the additional amount to school boards who must hire another carrier to complete the route to the students' home school. A "péréquation" is required to offset the school boards' incurred costs.
- *Professionals and consultants*
 - Due to the large distances travelled by consultants and professionals in our vast territories to render services to students, additional costs are incurred for over-time by boards without subsidy to provide equal services to their students.
- *Recruitment*
 - Implement incentives to school boards who are more impacted by workforce shortage due to their geographic location or difficulty to find qualified personnel.
- *Vocational Education opportunities*
 - Provide smaller centres with base funding to compensate for smaller classes. These programs are often the only English-language training available to go into the workforce.

Conclusion

At this time last year, we feared the effects of high inflation on the school network. The situation remains worrisome for this current year. The seven provincial priorities of the MEQ and its adoption new strategic plan reiterate the importance of reinvestment in education. If the overall increase in expenditure is in this perspective, the fine detail of the planned budgetary rules reveals gray areas, which deserve close attention.

Inflation has severely affected the school network, which has been catching up on its budget for several years. Thus, its effects will still be felt and will undermine the government's desire to improve the state of its educational institutions, both in terms of maintenance, repair and construction. To rebuild the school system on solid foundations, it is important to continue the work started several years ago despite our current economy.

If inflation constitutes a cyclical challenge, the shortage of personnel in the education sector is also a structural issue. It therefore requires global solutions, adapted to the realities of each environment, to attract more people to choose a career in education and commit to staying in the network for years to come.

The technological advances of recent years have reminded us how our ways of working and living together will further evolve through digital technology in the coming years. More than ever, digital technology must not be considered as a simple accessory, but as a vector for teaching and learning. The school board network must therefore be equipped and financed accordingly to meet the challenge.

Let us not forget that Quebec's economic growth relies on a qualified workforce. In this sense, all our efforts must be devoted to strengthening the quality of general education services for young people. This is where the future is formed. Adult education is equally important to allow as many people as possible to acquire the tools necessary to fully participate in Quebec society. Vocational training, for its part, constitutes a considerable asset in overcoming the labor shortage in many strategic areas. To fully play their role, their financing must be more open, flexible and, in the case of vocational training, modernized.