

ABRIDGED VERSION

SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES: PLACING QUALITY AT THE HEART OF PRIORITIES

BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORTS September 2006

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INTRODUCTION

Since the Quiet Revolution, major social transformations have taken place in education, religion, family, and the very nature of work itself. New trends have emerged: A significant increase in the presence of women in the workplace, a rise in the number of single-parent families, the establishment of shared-custody arrangements; in brief, new ways of organizing the family have begun to take place. It is against this backdrop that balancing work and family responsibilities has become a major issue—both for the family and Québec society as a whole—and that the network of school daycare services dedicated to young children first and later school-age children has gradually developed.

The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is aware that finding balance between work and family should be a key priority, not only for the Government of Québec, but also for businesses and family support organizations. We must understand the nature of the “demand” by families for school daycare services, assess the effect of the response to this demand on quality of family life, and define the most appropriate social measures for balancing work and family to ensure the well-being of the family and the child.

In this Brief, however, the focus of the Conseil is not on the issue of family demand for school daycare services, nor on the balancing of work and family, but rather on the service itself. This perspective is in keeping with the Conseil's primary mandate, which is to advise the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports on education-related issues. Therefore, while the Conseil recognizes the need of Québec families to have access to daycare services for their school-age children, it has opted to focus its study on the nature of the mandate of school daycare services, on developing their quality, and how these services can complement the tripartite mandate of Québec's education system (to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and give them qualifications).

The Conseil has therefore chosen to expand on the considerations begun in 2001 by the Auditor General of Québec, by proposing a motivating approach that would encourage all education stakeholders to include the development of quality of school daycare services at the heart of their priorities. Throughout the preparation of its Brief, the work of the Conseil was based on the scientific literature published to date on the issue, on statistical and financial data, and consultation with daycare stakeholders and experts in the field, but equally on an in-depth analysis of experiments carried out by five school daycare services recognized for their excellence.

In the pages that follow, the Conseil will present a quantitative overview of the network of school daycare services and its recent evolution. It will also introduce the four cornerstones which have provided the foundation for the preparation of the Brief throughout. Following this, the Conseil will propose five challenges for school daycare services which it deems should be the object of particular focus for the next few years. Lastly, to help meet these challenges and achieve overall excellence in school daycare services, the Conseil will formulate 25 recommendations relevant to six levers for the development of quality.

PART 1

SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES: A YOUNG AND RAPIDLY-EXPANDING NETWORK

Since the 1970s, the path taken by Québec's network of daycare services has been a lengthy one, and much progress in these services on an organizational level has been observed. First founded on good will and volunteering, daycare in schools has now become a service whose value is widely acknowledged, its infrastructure better defined, and that benefits from a more stable and better-paid staff.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, family policies and notably Québec's education reform in 1997 allowed for the creation of a climate more and more favourable to daycare services, first for preschoolers and later for school-age children. The evolution of these services has not been a linear one, however, and many obstacles have slowed its progress.

From 1998 to 2006, following a firmer political will to help balance work and family, the network underwent a major expansion. A regulation specific to school daycare services provided guidelines for the organization of these services and recognized their complementary educational mandate. For their part, school boards now had the obligation to establish daycare services in their schools when requested by the school governing board. A new collective agreement also allowed for major advancements for staff members regarding work conditions, job security and salaries in particular. The establishment of low-cost placement in daycare services (\$5 per day in 1998, later \$7 per day in 2004) consequently led to a considerable increase in their clients. However, since the implementation of the education reform in 1997, the education system has undergone many transformations. In fact, this reform involved administrative, regulatory, curricular, and pedagogical changes which have taken up most of the efforts of education stakeholders.

In December 2001, the Auditor General of Québec devoted an entire chapter of its report submitted to the National Assembly on the state of school daycare services (AGQ, 2001). This report had quite a ripple effect. Overall, the Auditor General stated that the quality of the services varied and emphasized that after having focused on accessibility, the network should now address the issue of quality in its services. Following the publication of this report, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) and the school boards established a series of working groups and adopted measures to improve the situation.

A statistical overview of the network of school daycare services indeed reveals that the expansion has been quite rapid, particularly since 1998. Consequently the number of daycare services has increased by approximately 75% from 1997–1998 to 2004–2005. Currently, the growth rate has slowed somewhat, but the number of services continues to increase, thus allowing for greater accessibility. In 2004–2005, there were 1,613 daycare services in Québec schools. In total, 81% of public elementary schools now provide these services.

The average size of daycare services has also increased, by approximately 6% from 2000–2001 to 2004–2005. In 2003–2004, nearly half of the services (45%) accommodated 50 to 100 children, and there were just as many very small-sized services (less than 50 children) as there were large-sized services (more than 250 children), around 13%.

Moreover, there was a strong growth of regularly registered clients (clients who attend daycares at least three days per week), particularly until 2001, but a drop occurred in 2004–2005, albeit a very small one. It is important to be vigilant in the next few years, for a forecasted drop in population growth may have an effect on the clients of the network, given its eventual impact on staff and availability of space. Regional population growth trends must also be considered. In 2004–2005, 230,698 children attended school daycare services. This represents 39.6% of children in public elementary schools in Québec. It should be noted that 29% of Québec pupils are registered regularly.

In general, daycare service staff follows the expansion of its clients and the number of services; in other words, it increased up to 2003–2004, and dropped thereafter. In 2005–2006, 11,304 educators as well as 1,573 coordinators worked in school daycare services.

A survey conducted among school boards by the Conseil also provided an overview of the education level and specialization of daycare service staff through September 30, 2005. The results of this survey showed that the education level and specialization of educators is higher overall than the minimum required by the *Plan de classification des emplois de soutien technique et paratechnique, des emplois de soutien administratif et des emplois de soutien manuel* (MEQ-FCSQ, 2000), that is, a secondary school diploma. Indeed, as of September 30, 2005, 52.9% of educators had a post-secondary diploma (college or university). Despite this, 58.5% of educators did not have a work-related diploma.

With regard to daycare service coordinators, their level of education and specialization has yet to reach the requirements specified in the *Plan de classification*, but this will stabilize over time due to new training requirements for hiring new coordinators. The level of education for coordinators is higher overall than that of educators: 80.8% of coordinators had a post-secondary diploma. Yet 30.4% did not have a work-related diploma.

This brief overview of the evolution of school daycare services clearly shows that it is still a fledgling network. Although the services have been in place for over 20 years, it is mostly since 1998—less than a decade—that the number and volume of clients and staff have grown considerably. In addition, the Conseil believes that these services, given their value to schools and family life, have become, over the years, a valuable and indispensable player in the education system.

PART 2 THE CONSEIL'S FOUR CORNERSTONES

Four cornerstones underlie the Conseil's considerations in its preparation of the present Brief. Firstly, an analysis of Swedish education reform has allowed the Conseil to better understand the potential between education and school daycare services in the objective of the child's overall development, and the conditions needed to capitalize on this potential. Secondly, the Conseil has also examined various means of perceiving quality in daycare services, in order to better understand the criteria of quality itself. Thirdly, it studied the impact of the *Regulation respecting childcare services provided at school*. Beginning with the objectives found therein, the Conseil has focused on mandate and functions, which, in its opinion, should guide the practices of school daycare services. Lastly, the Conseil found support for its work in case studies it conducted at five daycare services. This enabled the Conseil to include the viewpoint of front-line daycare players in its study.

1 THE SWEDISH EDUCATION REFORM: AN INSPIRATION FOR QUÉBEC SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES

Before 1996, Swedish daycare services, both in early childhood centres and schools, were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs, while compulsory education was under the Ministry of Education. In 1996, a reform was implemented to integrate educational services in early childhood centres and in school daycare services under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education. This reform was a response to economic and pedagogical needs. The goal of integrating all early childhood and education tools was to promote a continuity conducive to life-long learning, a requirement in today's knowledge-based society. From a pedagogical perspective, the objective was the promotion of a more unified and broader concept of learning by integrating services dedicated to the overall development of the child (early childhood education and school daycare services) with purely academic services. The aim of the Swedish reform was thus to enable compulsory education to widen its application by borrowing from the culture and practices of the early childhood sector and from the school environment, and integrate functions related to child care, supervision, and education.

To promote this integration and foster the concept of lifelong learning, the Swedish Government established three curricula that are part of the cohesive vision of knowledge, development and learning entrenched in Swedish values:

- educational services in early childhood daycare (ages 1–5);
- compulsory education, modified to integrate: kindergarten class (age 6), compulsory education (ages 7–16) and school daycare services;
- upper secondary school (ages 16–19).

Implementing the compulsory education curriculum thus became the responsibility of both the school (including kindergarten class) and the school daycare services.

The training of teachers and educators was also the subject of a reform. Before 2001, training teaching staff and educators both required university degrees, yet the two types of training were completely separate. Since 2001, kindergarten, compulsory school and upper secondary school teachers, as well as daycare staff, all have a common 18 months of training, which then leads to more specialized training.

Since the reform, Swedish early childhood and daycare educators now have access to administrative positions in school. Currently, approximately half of elementary administrators are trained in early childhood education services or school daycare services and not as elementary or secondary school teachers. These employees are indeed considered fully qualified to exercise their positions. Kindergarten teachers and daycare service staff are equally qualified to work in the classroom alongside compulsory education teachers. This partnership, largely made possible thanks to the philosophy underlying the Swedish reform, has the objective of promoting collaboration to allow a greater interpenetration of the two professional cultures.

A decade later, the Swedish reform seems to have produced a certain number of hoped-for results. A greater synergy between teaching and daycare staff was observed. Some work alongside one another in class teams planning more of their activities together (or in collaboration). More focus is also placed on the child's overall development, and consequently a picture of the school as a place for the overall development of the child has begun to emerge. The appearance of a new "teaching profession" with variations on the theme of basic training and functions also seems to have facilitated recognition of the different professional groups. Lastly, benefits related to the contributions of daycare staff in the classroom are also evident.

Of course, controversy often accompanies reform. For example, contributions by daycare service staff in the classroom can often create unequal partnerships, with members of the daycare staff at times playing more of assistant role. Moreover, these members do not have the same working conditions, including salaries, as their teaching colleagues. There are also those who worry of the

“institutionalisation” of children’s education, which hitherto had been mainly under state jurisdiction. Others fear a certain “colonisation” of daycare services by schools, ultimately resulting in a loss of the richness of a specific culture.

In the Conseil’s view, the Swedish reform—which, it should be reiterated, represents the first cornerstone—is an inspiring one, notably because it promotes a greater integration of the complementary education functions of the various sectors, which come with their own history and culture. However, the adoption of outside models is always a sensitive issue, as they are, in essence, not always fully adaptable. In Sweden, several favourable conditions for this reform were already present at the time of its implementation; for example, the existence of a child daycare service network for children aged one to twelve, a network which had its own identity and a well-entrenched professional culture, a recognized and widely-accepted educational mandate, as well as teaching professionals with specialized university training. That being said, certain similarities do exist between Sweden and Québec with regard to the development of daycare services.

From the Swedish model, the Conseil has retained four elements that provided benchmarks for its own study. Firstly, the idea of bringing closer together purely educational services and daycare services for school-age children (in the overall development of the child) is indeed attractive. This could foster, as it did in the case of Sweden, a more encompassing concept of learning and positive reciprocal influence.

Secondly, the notion of a structural and administrative continuity is equally promising. In Québec, daycare services and other services offered in schools (teaching services, complementary services, special services) are already the sole responsibility of one person (the administrator) and one decision-making body (the school governing board). However, the consultations carried out by the Conseil show that that when it comes to integrating daycare services in school, there is still room for improvement.

Another interesting element is the convergence of the professional identities of the Swedish teachers and daycare educators. The Swedish reform also implemented common university training of 18 months for both teachers and educators. This convergence has favoured the development of a true collaboration between the two groups. Yet the equivalent level of education of the two groups already entailed more egalitarian relations. In Québec, however, the education gap between two groups is considerable. Nevertheless, at minimum the basic and shared cultures and competencies between the two professions could be taken into account, without having to consider standardized common training, be it basic or ongoing.

Lastly, in the Swedish model, the importance of preserving the cultures and practices of school and daycare networks has led to a consideration of possible closer ties between the two, rather than integration solely for the sake of standardisation. In Québec, although the culture and practices of school daycare services are relatively young, the issue of preserving the functions, cultures and practices of each service seems equally important.

2 UNIVERSAL QUALITY FOR SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES: WHAT DO WE WISH FOR THE CHILD?

The quality of a service may be considered from different angles: according to the satisfaction of clients, according to its mandate, or even according to the very definition of quality itself. Consequently, there cannot be one single answer to the following question: Do school daycare services provide quality service?

One way to gauge the quality of a service is to measure its users' satisfaction. It may be an indirect measure of quality, but at least it could be said that a service that meets the needs of its users is in general a quality service. Two studies commissioned by the Ministère de l'Éducation (Impact Research, 1998; Office of Professional Interviewers, 2001), showed that a great number of parents were very satisfied or satisfied with services provided by daycares attended by their school-age children. Yet evaluation studies paint a less-glowing picture of the quality of these services. In fact, three Quebec studies revealed that in general the quality of school daycare services was rated between "adequate" and "good" (White et. al., 1998; Jacobs, Mill and Jennings, 2002; Japel, not yet published). In other words, the authors suggested that while the quality of the service did not compromise the overall development of the children, neither did it promote it optimally.

The issue of the quality of school daycare services is a complex one. Behind each tool or evaluation matrix, behind each satisfaction questionnaire, lies a list of criteria that denote a specific notion of quality. This explains the gaps observed, notably between parents' ratings of satisfaction and researchers' more structured evaluations. Who is right and who is wrong? The Conseil deems that it is useful to include all these viewpoints, as they reflect the different needs and expectations. In addition, the Conseil maintains that regardless of the type of evaluation, it is not enough to publish results and criticize problem situations; we must above all build upon the knowledge gathered, and ultimately, it is the well-being of the child that must be at the heart of the issue.

The second cornerstone of the Conseil's considerations, then, is an analysis of measuring tools for assessing quality in school daycare services. In general, from this analysis, it is evident that a quality daycare service is a service:

- where the staff is competent, knowledgeable and skilled in the field of child development;
- where the staff has access to professional development activities;
- which has an activity program that fosters the overall development of the child by offering a range of activities, a program whose implementation is periodically evaluated;
- which is properly managed, both in its financial and material resources, as well as human resources and information management;
- where the educator/child ratio enables the service to carry out its mandate;
- where the relations between staff and children is welcoming and characterized by respect, and where developing independence is valued;
- where regular communication with parents is consistent, respected and valued;
- where the relations between staff members are constructive, the work climate amicable, and where team meetings are opportunities for improvement;
- where relations between the service, school and the surrounding community promote continuity in the experience of the child and the optimization of resources used by all;
- where rules and regulations concerning a child's health and safety are well-defined and understood by all;
- where the physical environment is attractive and functional and where supplies are appropriate and sufficient for carrying out activities.

3 THE IMPACT OF THE *REGULATION RESPECTING CHILDCARE SERVICES PROVIDED AT SCHOOL*: A COMPLEMENTARY MANDATE TO EDUCATION

The third cornerstone of the Conseil's considerations is an examination of the impact of the *Regulation respecting childcare services provided at school*. This regulation provides information on the mandate and objectives of school daycare services. Following its consultations, however, the Conseil is of the opinion that not all stakeholders are aware of the impact of this regulation and its consequent implementation on the day-to-day operations of school daycare services. It is therefore necessary to herewith review the nature of the mandate and functions of daycare services and the impact of the *Regulation* on their practices.

Based, then, on its interpretation of the *Regulation*, the Conseil formulates the mandate of school daycare services to be as follows:

- To ensure the care of school-age children outside classroom hours and to foster their overall development within the scope of the school's educational plan, while considering the interests and needs of the child.

According to the Conseil, the functions of school daycare services are as follows:

- with regard to children themselves:
 - To ensure the health, safety and well-being of the child;
 - To provide educational services that complement those offered by the school, while considering the interests and needs of the child;
- with regard to the school:
 - To contribute in implementing a success plan, in collaboration with other school players;
 - To welcome parents and forge ties with families;
- with regard to family and the surrounding community:
 - To facilitate a balance between work and family;
 - To prevent the risk of isolation and its resulting problems when children are left too long without any supervision outside school hours;
 - To support families, particularly by allowing children to do their homework during daycare hours, and by collaborating with community organizations.

In addition, the mandate and functions of daycare services are not concurrent with those of Québec schools, rather they complement them. In other words, school daycare services and other services provided in schools all contribute to a common universal mandate. The Conseil believes that the various aspects of personal development concern all school services, both educational services—be they specialized or complementary—as well as daycare services. In fact, this is what the *Regulation* stipulates for school daycare services. However, daycare and classroom services do not have the same function, necessitating a distinction both in the manner of intervention among children and in the objectives pursued. The Conseil believes that school daycare services should not be merely an extension of services provided in the classroom. Therefore the whole school team must concur on the value of a balance between the various aspects of the child's development.

The Conseil proposes two principles that could make this balance possible. Firstly, the principle of fairness; as all pupils are not all registered in daycare services in school, attendance to these services should not be a requirement for the fulfilment of educational plans, nor the academic success of the pupil. It is for this reason that the educational services of a daycare service are offered to complement those in a classroom. Nevertheless, this should not prevent the daycare services from proposing enriching educational activities. It is possible for daycares to offer services that foster the development of school-age children without endangering the principle of fairness underlying the framework of public education services. Secondly, because the overall development of the child concerns all education stakeholders, the distinct duties of each requires that all players clearly understand the functions and responsibilities of each.

4 SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES IN FIVE DAYCARE SERVICES: A CORNERSTONE AT THE HEART OF FRONT-LINE EXPERIENCE

From the outset of preparation work for the present Brief, the Conseil has undertaken various analyses and consulted many stakeholders in the daycare service network in order to more clearly define the current conditions. The Conseil has noted that while problems of the network appeared to be readily recognized, initiatives which could promote their solutions were less readily perceived. The Conseil heard a series of concerns, namely:

- there is no clear-cut consensus on the mandate of daycare services;
- daycare services are not all well-integrated in schools and some daycare services are isolated;
- daycare services have difficulty at times meeting special needs of some clients;
- training of educators is at times inadequate;
- a gap exists between the sharing of responsibility as defined in regulations and what occurs in practice;
- support provided to daycare services differs from setting to setting;
- dissatisfaction is evident with regard to funding and financial choices;
- dissatisfaction with the legal framework has been voiced by some stakeholders who feel that regulations are inadequate.

Overall, the Conseil has observed that there are weaknesses in the network of daycare services (as it is still relatively new), that managing the rapid expansion of these services has always been and still is difficult in some areas, and that daycare service players often feel unacknowledged and isolated.

The Conseil found that some daycare services do provide quality service, have a valuable place in the school and have become over time true partners in the school's educational plan and the academic success of pupils. This raises several questions. How are quality daycare services developed, organized and operated? Which challenges did they face? How did they overcome these challenges? What are the necessary conditions for the development of quality? These are questions that are yet to be well researched, but it appears to the Conseil that they are at the heart of the issue of developing quality in school daycare services.

Consequently, the Conseil has chosen to also base its considerations on successful practices, in order to better understand the processes by which the development of quality can be promoted. Five daycare services recognized for the quality of their service were chosen to carry out case studies. In each of the settings, the Conseil had met separately with the school administrator, the care service coordinator, a team of educators, teachers, as well as a group of parent users of the services. In total, 54 people were consulted during the case studies. During the interviews, various subjects were discussed, not only to understand the current conditions, but the processes which had enabled the daycare services to improve their quality.

Starting with a cross-sectional analysis, a general set of findings began to emerge, notably:

- Certain modifications of the daily operations of daycare services appear necessary before fully investing in the educational function. The stakeholders met by the Conseil also spoke of some basic conditions (sufficient material resources, stable workforce, etc.) which, when met, allowed efforts to be channeled into other areas;
- The recognition of a daycare service's possible contribution to the educational plan of a school and the overall development of the child is an equally important factor. In the schools visited, it was acknowledged that there are some advantages in considering members of the daycare service staff as partners. A number of factors promote this recognition, namely:
 - the concept that school is a life-learning experience promoting the overall development of the child, not solely as a place for academic learning, and the establishment of an educational plan aligned with this vision;
 - the recognition of the advantages of continuity of daycare services and school for the well-being of the child;
 - the recognition of the educational function which daycare services provide in complement to other school services;

- the presence of better-educated daycare service staff able to collaborate with teaching staff on issues concerning child development;
 - the existence of an activity program that clearly embodies the educational function of daycare services.
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- In the development of a quality daycare service that is well-integrated with the school, the strong leadership of a school administrator is equally fundamental. School administrators should be able to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, so as to take advantage of the differences often generated by the expansion of daycare services. The administrator must show fairness in the mediation of conflicts, as all stakeholders are sensitive to the recognition given to their position, be they teachers or educators;
 - Daycare service coordinators are often seen as point persons who must team up with school administrators. Coordinators take on the role of pedagogical leader, liaising with the teaching staff, and presenting the concerns and needs of services and children to the school's governing board. In some schools visited, the coordinator was practically viewed as an assistant to the administrator, while in others the coordinator's leadership was more centered on the educational aspect of the position. The recognition of the coordinator's competencies is an important element for his or her credibility, as much with teachers as with his or her own team, and this credibility is often accompanied by a higher level of education;
 - The support role played by the school board is just as crucial, according to those met by the Conseil. This support was carried out, however, with varying degrees of intensity according to the setting. The importance of countering a certain isolation of daycare services seems necessary, particularly when there is only one coordinator carrying out this function on a regular basis;
 - Parents want to know what their child experiences in a daycare service, but they seem to believe that developing quality is more related to staff competence. The role of the parent user committee is sometimes questioned, and many are unsure of its usefulness and influence. It is believed that the contribution of parents to care services should be revisited;
 - Meeting the needs of handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities, children aged 9–12, and clients from multi-ethnic and disadvantaged backgrounds: all are important challenges for daycare services, yet some services struggle to meet them.

These findings have enabled the Conseil to better understand the challenges daycare services have had to overcome, as well as possible courses of action. These challenges and approaches, as well as all the analyses of case studies, have largely inspired the Conseil in the preparation of Parts 3 and 4 of this Brief.

PART 3

QUALITY OF SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES: CHALLENGES FOR THE COMING YEARS

In Part 1, the Conseil noted that school daycare services have made great strides in the last 30 years. The great challenge of the past few years has consisted mainly in managing the rapid growth of its clientele. It is the opinion of the Conseil that, while still pursuing the objective of accessibility, school daycare services should henceforth be more focused on the challenge of their quality. It is in this context that the Conseil herewith elaborates five challenges to be met by school daycare services in order for them to develop a greater quality of service. These challenges are based on the conditions outlined in Part 1 and on the four cornerstones presented in Part 2. The Conseil deems that by taking on these challenges, daycare services would then be able to offer better quality service and fully carry out their mandate with children, schools and the community. However, this does not by any means encompass the whole issue of developing quality daycare services. There are a number of other challenges for each type of service that will not be addressed in this Brief. Nevertheless, with regard to the network, the Conseil considers that the five proposed challenges should be priorities which all daycare services should adopt.

CHALLENGE #1

ENSURING SOUND MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES AND ADEQUATELY MEETING BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

The consultations carried out by the Conseil reveal that school daycare services can be more readily integrated to the education system and offer quality activities when basic organizational needs are met, and that before anything else, any organization must first ensure its “survival” and that of its members. If the safety of the child is compromised, if the premises are inadequate, if there are no materials for activities, if the coordinator can barely use the required management software, if poor financial management puts the survival of the service at risk—these are all concerns which daycare service staff must address first.

The quality of school daycare services must first have an efficient management and adequately meet basic organizational needs, namely:

- an adequate infrastructure to meet the needs of pupils (sufficient physical space, amenable settings, washrooms, sinks, material for activities, etc.);
- administrative regulations outlined in a management policy, precise and pertinent information provided to parents, duly filed attendance records, up-to-date accounting, command of computer skills, etc.;
- compliance with clearly-defined hygiene, health and safety regulations (washing of hands, reception and dismissal, regulations concerning medications and food allergies, evacuation plans, etc.).

The Conseil also calls attention to two important elements for the quality of service in daycare. Firstly, the issue of ratios: the educator/child and the child/space ratio. The Conseil believes that there is reason to examine these conditions in order to determine if the daycare service is truly able to carry out its mandate and if the conditions are beneficial for the overall development of the child.

Secondly, the sharing of premises within a school is also of concern. In theory, all pupils in a given school should have access to daycare services. This means that the services must be able to use any area in the school, including classrooms, when there is a high volume of clients. During consultations, it was noted that the daycare services had access to common areas in a school (e.g. gymnasium, music room, computer lab). The same cannot be said, however, when it came to accessing classrooms, which in fact presented a real problem. This inconvenient double-booking of rooms should be minimized, notably by scheduling in advance the use of the rooms to be shared, by promoting dialogue between the users and setting up work spaces for teaching staff. The quality of teaching should not be to the detriment of the quality of daycare services and vice versa. While this might inevitably lead to the adaptation of one or the other, the well-being of the child largely justifies collaborative efforts between the stakeholders.

CHALLENGE #2

INTEGRATING SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES

The choice of establishing daycare services within school premises can be reasoned in different ways. Daycare services can benefit from existing infrastructures, materials and services, consequently keeping the costs of building a new and separate structure down. Also, children can remain on the same premises when they are in daycare. It is easier, faster and safer, and parents only have to deal with one organization: the school. Yet this creates a special challenge for daycare services: making room for themselves in the existing organization.

Integrating school daycare services can take on various definitions, definitions which can be expressed differently in reality. It may appear that the integration process is a linear one, moving from simply sharing the same premises to integrating the functions related to caring for, supervising and teaching children and the common responsibility of establishing a compulsory education curriculum, as in the case of Sweden. But in between the two, a range of scenarios is possible. The Conseil believes that daycare services, all the while preserving their own mandate, should be better integrated with the school rather than simply sharing premises and services.

There are many arguments in favour of a greater integration of school daycare services. Scientific literature provides us with ample evidence: this ranges from the ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner (1979) to research such as that of Jacques and Baillargeon (1997), which shows that continuity of different settings is favourable for the child's development. The importance placed on creating an educational community also makes a strong argument. Several researchers recognize the value of a greater common effort among school stakeholders and the surrounding community. Some advocate the development of an "educational community" (Deslandes and Bertrand, 2001), others a "community" school (Working Group On the Development of Community Schools, 2005). While there are many views on this issue, one thing appears clear: very few credible theories uphold the separation of school daycare services and schools.

The Québec Education Program of 2001 itself calls for a greater harmonisation of initiatives by various players. Some areas of the program are indeed the responsibility of all education stakeholders: for example, the development of cross-curricular competencies and the use of general training. Policies included in this reform also reflect concern with regard to community commitment, but most of all concern with respect to the entire school team (teachers, administrators and support staff). For example, the Policy Statement on Integration and Intercultural Education of 1998, the Policy on Special Education of 1999 and even the guide to Complementary Educational Services of 2002.

The Conseil, therefore, deems that school daycare services should be better integrated into schools because they are a partner in the educational community, because the reform calls for a greater synergy between stakeholders, and because the ultimate objective is the well-being of the child. The Conseil, insists, however, on the need of studying the issue of integrating school daycare services with the child's continuity of experience in mind (Betsalel-Presser et al., 1998). It is important, then, to first examine the child's daily experience, and thereafter focus on structures, management, values and practices in order to promote this continuity.

CHALLENGE #3**UPGRADING THE COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION FUNCTION
OF EDUCATORS IN SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES**

Although the overwhelming discourse shows a certain consensus that the role of daycare services involves more than simply supervision of the child, the consultations carried out by the Conseil revealed a considerable gap between theory and practice. Consequently, the complementary educational functions of daycare services are not always up-to-date in actual practice, and the implementation of activity programs currently seems to vary depending on the setting. Even so, it is often by proving their pedagogical competencies that educators can make others recognize their skills and bring the advantages of closer ties with the school to the fore. This, however, can only result from a planned approach, which requires time and enough competency in the field of child development and activity leadership.

Some would argue that school daycare services have very little time for carrying out educational activities. In fact, routine activities (meals, snack, etc.) and the period allotted for homework and lessons do take up a large part of time spent in daycare. The Conseil nonetheless believes that establishing an activity program is essential, not simply to provide a choice *per se*, but also to foster educational guidelines that will be rooted both in the intervention of the staff and in the educational activities. By doing so, the educational aspect of the daycare service is not therefore simply reduced to a choice of activities, rather the entire daycare staff participates equally in the development of the child. For example, the social, emotional and ethical development of a child can occur just as much when learning non-violent resolution of daily conflicts as when participating in sports activities designed to promote team spirit.

A daycare service activity program, then, should comprise specialized educational guidelines emphasizing the range of development intended by the various activities, clearly define links with the school educational plan, and assess evaluation methods for the establishment of the program as well as its channels of distribution.

CHALLENGE #4**STRENGTHENING TEAMWORK TO DEVELOP COMPLEMENTARY
DAYCARE SERVICES FOR CLIENTS FROM MULTI-ETHNIC
OR DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS**

Children from multi-ethnic or disadvantaged backgrounds are faced with special challenges. Services exist to support the development of these children, both in the early childhood network and in school. And yet school daycare services, which receive these same children, have very few means to exercise a complementary educational function with them. The consultations

carried out by the Conseil showed that daycare staff is at times ill-equipped when it comes to meeting the needs of these children and very rarely benefits from similar support provided in classrooms. However, the contribution of daycare services to the overall development of these children is concrete, albeit of a different nature than the services provided in the classroom. Moreover, the Policy Statement on Integration and Intercultural Education of 1998 emphasizes that all school players have the responsibility to facilitate the integration of newly-arrived pupils.

Support measures for school-age children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds also acknowledge the significance of synergy between all stakeholders (school, parents and community) rallied around the common objective of success in school. And yet, during the consultations, the Conseil learned that support measures for children from disadvantaged backgrounds were very rarely extended into daycare service hours. However, seen in the perspective of a successful comprehensive education, the role that school daycare services can play, notably with regard to prevention, is not to be underestimated.

The Conseil deems, then, that school daycare services could play a larger role with children from multi-ethnic or disadvantaged backgrounds. This is not a question of establishing new measures specific to daycare services which would be separate from existing activities in the school. Conversely, the Conseil believes that it is more a matter of integrating daycare services as partners in an educational community. This is in keeping with the concept of the continuity of the child's experience—which the Conseil wishes to promote—and with research findings that show the most efficient strategies are those that centre on the harmonised initiatives of community stakeholders working at various stages of the child's development. For daycare services to become credible partners in the eyes of other stakeholders, all school players must then recognize the potential of these services' mandate and the competence of their staff working with clients from multi-ethnic or disadvantaged backgrounds, while ensuring the respect of the functions carried out by each player.

CHALLENGE #5

MEETING THE NEEDS OF SPECIAL CHILDREN AND PRE-TEENS

The Conseil has distinguished two groups of children that require particular attention which, at times, daycare services can barely meet: handicapped students or students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities (students with varied needs who require constant support), and pre-teens aged 9–12 (who do not attend daycare services as the activities of these services only partially meet their needs or interests).

Accommodating these children is a reality for many daycare services, and meeting their needs presents a considerable challenge. In schools, all children have access to daycare services, including these special needs children. In 2003–2004, of the 14,429 special needs children attending public elementary schools, 4,211 used daycare services. Of these students, 29.2% attended daycare services either regularly or infrequently. During the consultations carried out by the Conseil, it was noted that daycare services at times experienced difficulty adequately meeting the needs of these children. In some daycare services, special needs children rarely benefited from the same support provided in the classroom, and educators were not often included in work undertaken in class. Specific funding for these children attending daycare services was commonly singled out. It was often deemed inadequate, or, at the very least, its allocation carried out by school boards did not always meet specified needs. Also, in the majority of cases, educators did not receive any special training to better understand the needs associated with different handicaps and specific disabilities of the children.

Meeting the needs of children aged 9–12 is equally challenging in some daycare services. Firstly, statistics on attendance in these school daycare services clearly show that very few children in this age group use these services; in 2003–2004, 14.9% of children in Cycle 3 (aged 10–12) were in a daycare service on a regular basis, compared to 30.6% in Cycle 2. Yet, registration for infrequent attendance remained the same from Cycle 1 to Cycle 3, at approximately 9%. The statistics show, then, that in theory children in Cycle 3 do not move on from regular to infrequent attendance of daycare services, but rather “drop out” completely. And yet, some studies show that many parents would like their children aged 9–12 to attend a daycare service (Maheux, 1998; Lafleur, 1994). Some U.S. studies also reveal that being left home alone for long periods of time may put the well-being of these children at risk, while others show the possible benefits of attending a daycare service in school.

Placing a child in a school daycare service is a decision that rests wholly with the parents, and the Conseil has no intention of substituting their judgment nor promoting daycare service at any cost or at any age. However, since school daycare services can offer a safe environment and most of all a stimulating and enriching setting for 9- to 12-year-olds, there are certain advantages in promoting attendance for these children. A daycare service in school should nevertheless be able to offer programs specific to the needs of these pre-teens and adapt its organization and activities so as to become more inviting.

PART 4

SIX LEVERS TO MEET THE FIVE CHALLENGES AND DEVELOP QUALITY IN SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES

The five challenges the Conseil proposed to school daycare services in Part 3 could be successfully met if the latter would receive the necessary support. Developing quality school daycare services is not an issue strictly limited to parents and daycare service staff. To be sure, the latter are front-line players, and their responsibility for the quality of these services is unquestionable. Yet some levers for developing quality do not belong to school or daycare services players, particularly those related to regulations and funding. For this reason, in Part 4 the Conseil proposes six levers for developing quality that involve local players as well as regional and provincial stakeholders, such as daycare services, schools, school boards, colleges and universities, and the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports. Implementing these levers could support daycare services so that they may meet the proposed challenges and enable them to improve the quality of their services.

LEVER #1

RAISING THE BAR ON TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATORS AND PROMOTING ACCESS TO ONGOING TRAINING

One of the essential elements for developing quality school daycare services is the competence of its staff. Four of the five challenges presented in Part 3 clearly demonstrates the importance of competence in the field of child development and activity leadership. Integrating school daycare services (Challenge #2), upgrading the complementary education function of educators (Challenge #3), collaboration among stakeholders who work with children from multi-ethnic and disadvantaged backgrounds (Challenge #4) as well as meeting the needs of special needs children and children aged 9-12 (Challenge #5) all require a highly-skilled staff. The Swedish model also shows the advantages of the convergence of professional identities of the teaching staff and educators. In Sweden, teacher and educator training share 18 months in common, making it easier for these two to jointly assume responsibility of the compulsory curriculum. Recent scientific literature also points out an evident correlation between the training of educator staff and the overall quality of a daycare service (Drouin et. al., 2004; Japel, Tremblay and Côté, 2005; Goelman et. al., 2000). Studies on work conditions undertaken at the time of establishing early childhood education programs at the college level also reveal the complexity of the competencies required to work in this profession.

However, the overview of education and specialization of daycare service staff as presented in Part 1 shows that, although their level of education is aligned with the general requirements of the *Plan de classification*, many employees do not have specialized training related to their position. For example:

- 58.5% of educators do not hold a diploma related to their position, even if a percentage of them (19.4%) have a post-secondary diploma;
- 30.4% of coordinators do not hold a diploma related to their position, even if a percentage of them (36.8%) have a post-secondary diploma.

In addition, a certain percentage of staff holds only a secondary school diploma (47.1% of educators and 19.2% of coordinators). The Conseil believes that carrying out an educational function constitutes a considerable challenge for these employees.

The issue of training is, then, according to the Conseil, a major lever in developing quality daycare services in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- the correlation that exists between training of educators and the quality of daycare services;
- the function of an educator in school daycare services requires specialized skills and competencies;
- the function of a coordinator requires basic competencies in financial, material and human resources management;
- the current level of education and specialization of school daycare service staff, particularly that of educators;
- the significance of raising the level of education of daycare service staff;
- the level of specific competencies required to meet the second, third, fourth and fifth challenges proposed in Part 3;
- the value of preserving a certain diversity of staff expertise in school daycare services;
- the importance of facilitating access to ongoing training;
- the difficulty of attracting more qualified staff and the barriers to ongoing training;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports, school boards and union leaders:**

- 1) to amend the *Plan de classification* by 2010 to raise the requirements for education and specialization related to obtaining a position in or working in school daycare services, so as to ensure that educators have at least one of the following qualifications:
 - a diploma of college studies directly or indirectly related to the position, either:
 - an attestation of college studies (AEC) or a diploma of college studies (DEC) in school daycare services or childhood education;
 - an AEC or a DEC in related fields, such as special education, leisure studies, social service;
 - a university degree directly or indirectly related to the position, either:
 - a bachelor's degree in the field of school daycare services;
 - a bachelor's degree in education or in a related field, such as psychology, social service, psychoeducation;
- 2) to improve the working conditions and salary of staff in school daycare services to attract more qualified employees to a career in this field (financial incentives for training and the option of flexible hours);

- **to the school boards:**

- 3) to jointly adopt with school administrations a professional development plan for school daycare service staff, following staff consultation carried out by the administrators in compliance with article 96.20 of *The Education Act*.¹ This plan should promote:
 - access to training programs for qualifications related to position (AEC, DEC, university degree);
 - participation in conferences and seminars;
 - organization of and participation in training (in the workplace, as part of pedagogical days or off-site) to meet specific needs, taking into account the need for professional staff support;

¹ Article 96.20 of *The Education Act* stipulates that school administrators consult the entire staff with regard to their training needs and duly inform their school board. School staff includes daycare service employees, who are therefore encouraged to express their training needs.

- **to school daycare services:**
 - 4) to facilitate access to ongoing staff training activities enabling educators and coordinators to develop the required competencies for their positions;
- **to college and university teaching institutions:**
 - 5) to incorporate in their training programs for daycare service selective courses enabling students who are interested in becoming coordinators to develop the required competencies;
 - 6) to develop diversified programs for basic and ongoing training needs expressed by the different stakeholders and for the necessary upgrading of their education and specialization. This training should be adapted to the various school settings and, in the case of coordinators, to the specific nature of their functions.

LEVER #2

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES

Following the examination of shared responsibilities and obligations of the various partners in school daycare services, the Conseil believes that the accountability practices of the network are currently insufficient to adequately support the development of quality. Although accountability practices do not currently prevent the various partners from pursuing the development of quality services, very few tools are specifically concerned with this quality, and no guidelines oblige governing boards, school boards, or the MELS to include this issue in their list of priorities. According to the Conseil, these conditions are not conducive to ensuring that all stakeholders place enough value on the development of quality daycare services.

The Conseil has noted that currently the MELS plays a nominal leadership role when it comes to developing quality school daycare services, as the MELS deems this to be a responsibility of school boards and schools. The MELS has nonetheless produced a number of documents providing guidelines, notably *Guide For Developing Activity Programs For Service School Daycare Services: A Flexible, Practical Tool* (MELS, 2005a) and *Self-Evaluation Instrument For Improving Quality in School Daycare Services* (MELS, 2005b). In theory, then, the school boards should be taking on more leadership in this aspect. And yet, during its consultations, the Conseil found that school boards carried out their daycare services mandate rather inconsistently. Some were very proactive and provided networks for seminars and

training, while others only occasionally met the demand, not actively participating with local players. Some school boards also hired a full-time resource person to work on and support the development of quality daycare services. Others still have assigned a point person responsible for daycare services, but in fact this person may have to share his or her time and skills with many other responsibilities. Governing boards, too, tended to be very inconsistent. Some schools had an educational plan and a success plan, yet daycare services were not part of them, while in other cases, daycare services were more of an integral part of these plans.

The study of the current situation indeed shows that developing quality rests mainly on the efforts of local players (administrators, daycare service staff, parents). In retrospect, the Conseil deems that it is in fact a local responsibility, because on the one hand, the parent users should have their say when it comes to the quality of services which they fund in large part, and on the other, daycare services must have the necessary autonomy to meet the diversified needs of parents and pupils of its community. That being said, the fact remains that this is a considerable responsibility for local players.

The development of quality school daycare services and in particular the pursuit of the five challenges proposed by the Conseil call for strong leadership, firstly by school administrators, then from daycare service coordinators and lastly, parents. School administrators and coordinators have seen their responsibility increase considerably in the wake of the rapid expansion of school daycare services. Managing a daycare service at times can be a huge challenge, particularly a service that has a high volume of children, or where the number of school staff members increases, almost doubling in a few short years. As for parents, the Conseil found that their participation in daycare services is limited and that, for the time being at least, these services can barely count on their efforts to assume leadership in developing quality. The Conseil also believes that the MELS and the school boards should better support the development of quality school daycare services. Indeed, the services have at their disposal tools for supporting the entire network: regulations or funding, for example, or better yet, possible support for management and staff training issues.

For these reasons, the Conseil submits that it is important to include a number of requirements in the current accountability practices carried out by governing boards, school boards, and the MELS regarding the development of quality school daycare services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- that in light of the recent expansion and weaknesses of the network the sharing of responsibility in developing quality school daycare services entails to a large extent the participation of local players;
- that current accountability practices are not conducive to ensuring that stakeholders place enough value on developing quality school daycare services;
- that the value placed on developing quality school daycare services by targeted partners is inconsistent;
- that there are tools available for school boards and the MELS to promote the development of quality school daycare services;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**
 - 7) to incorporate into his strategic plan guidelines on the means for carrying out his two principal responsibilities with regard to school daycare services, namely:
 - assessing the allocation of funding for school daycare services so they may carry out their mandate;
 - establishing appropriate regulations for school daycare services;
 - 8) to designate a provincial respondent to oversee the entire network of school daycare services in Québec, reporting to the Secteur de l'éducation préscolaire et de l'enseignement primaire et secondaire, thus reflecting the complementary nature of educational services provided by school daycare services;
- **to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports and school boards:**
 - 9) to establish co-jointly Québec-wide guidelines which would permit the school boards to be accountable in carrying out their primary responsibilities in the area of school daycare services, namely:
 - daycare service support at all levels (financial, material and human resources management, training support);
 - compliance with regulations by schools under their jurisdiction;

The inclusion of these guidelines in strategic plans by the school boards should be compulsory;

- 10) to preserve, in the general framework of accountability practices, the autonomy of schools with regard to day-to-day operations so that they may be able to meet the needs of their communities;
- **to the governing boards:**
- 11) to clearly incorporate the issue of developing quality daycare in schools into their education plan and success plan and to include this in their annual reports.

LEVER #3

ENSURING ADEQUATE FUNDING, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT NEW COST-SHARING BETWEEN PARENTS AND GOVERNMENT

During its consultations, the Conseil has observed that the question of funding is often at the heart of debate. Even if players can overcome many difficulties through their creativity, the level of funding inevitably paves the way to a world of possibilities, and consequently becomes an important lever for the development of quality school daycare services. The five challenges proposed by the Conseil in Part 2 are demanding both for schools and school daycare services, and the Conseil is aware that these come with a price tag. However, given the potential contribution of school daycare services, the fulfilment of a school education plan and the support to the families and the community, the Conseil deems that this is an investment that is largely justified.

As the five challenges have financial ramifications, the Conseil wished to study the current fiscal state of school daycare services, in order to better estimate the additional operational costs for their realization.

Firstly, during the consultations, the Conseil received many mixed signals on the fiscal state of school daycare services. On the one hand, there were many criticisms about the levels of daycare funding, as well as allocation of this funding. Some stakeholders declared, in fact, that the level of funding was clearly inadequate, and in many areas. On the other, some stakeholders reported to the Conseil that school daycare services accrued budget surpluses enabling schools and school boards to tap these funds for supplementing materials and infrastructures and making them available for the entire student population. Indeed, stakeholders questioned the amount of these funds tapped by some school boards and schools in order to cover daycare service management costs. For its part, the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec (FCSQ), in its various memoranda, does not issue specific details on the fiscal state of school daycare services. Its analyses are more centered on funding regulations and their overall impact on the financing of school boards. The FCSQ emphasizes, for example, the need of adjusting funding levels so as to cover salary indexation and other types of costs.

In light of these observations, the Conseil could not help but note a difference of stakeholder opinion with regard to the financial state of school daycare services and the allocation of funding. While the various points of view relayed to the Conseil are based on real cases, they do not, however, permit an accurate overview of the situation to be drawn.

Secondly, in order to study the fiscal state of school daycare services in greater detail, the Conseil examined financial data available from the MELS. These figures show that from 1998–1999 to 2004–2005, school boards have accrued significant surpluses. The total surplus for this period corresponded to a yearly average of \$23,333,928, or an average of about 8% of the daycare services' operating revenues. In reality, however, the specifics of these financial statements require prudent interpretation of the data. Indeed, some revenue entered in financial statements were not specifically allotted for daycare services while some expenses were not entered in these statements, but figured in school board financial statements. In short, the available data do not allow an accurate picture of the financial state of school daycare services to be drawn. Moreover, the financial statements examined also did not provide guidelines to facilitate their interpretation. Many questions therefore remain unanswered. Is it a sizeable surplus? What percentage of the surplus is needed to ensure some financial manoeuvring? How is the surplus reinvested in the school boards, schools and school daycare services?

In sum, the Conseil deems that the financial data at its disposal currently provides an incomplete overview. Although the data does show that school boards in general post surpluses for school daycare services, it is impossible to ascertain if the latter benefit from an adequate level of funding to carry out their operations and most of all, if this funding would be sufficient to meet the Conseil's five challenges in order to promote the development of quality.

The Conseil also considered the issue of an adequate cost sharing of school daycare services by parent users and the Government. The Conseil has carried out two estimates of the share paid by parent users and that paid by the MELS. In general, the two sets of figures revealed similar trends. From 1998–1999 to 2003–2004, overall the parent users' share decreased somewhat, while that of the MELS increased as a result. However, when \$5.00-a-day daycare placement was raised to \$7.00 a day, a significant increase for parents was recorded. Since the increase of subsidized places (as of 2004–2005), parent users now pay about two-thirds (64%) of the cost for daycare service.

Given the mandate of school daycare services, their contribution to the educational plan of schools and the role they could play with a specific clientele (namely, 9–12 year-olds, children from multi-ethnic or disadvan-

taged backgrounds, and special needs children), the Conseil believes that school daycare services contribute to the mission of education in Québec. Lastly, these services are part of a range of social measures aimed at balancing work and family and contribute not only to the individual interests of children and their parents, but the collective interest as well. The Conseil considers, therefore, that there is reason to review the funding shared by parents and Government, in order to reach at least a more equitable share.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- school daycare services have a self-financing obligation;
- the funding needed to develop quality school daycare services, and in particular for the pursuit of the Conseil's five challenges;
- the overview of the current fiscal state of school daycare services does not allow to determine if these services benefit from an adequate level of funding to carry out their functions;
- the responsibility of the MELS in determining the optimal level of funding for school daycare services to carry out their mandate;
- the importance of access to financial information on school daycare services, both for parents and community stakeholders;
- the sizeable share that parents pay to fund school daycare services;
- the contribution of school daycare services is a collective concern;
- the equivalent cost-sharing prevailing at the inception of subsidized daycare placement in 1998–1999;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**
 - 12) to study the fiscal state of the entire network of school daycare services and determine if the current level of funding is adequate to promote the development of quality school daycare services and in particular to meet the challenges which these services must face, namely:
 - ensuring sound management and adequate response to basic organizational needs;
 - pursuing the integration of school daycare services;
 - further upgrading of the complementary educational function of educators in school daycare services;
 - strengthening the collaboration of all stakeholders who work promoting complementary daycare services in schools in multi-ethnic or disadvantaged areas;

- meeting the needs of certain children, particularly special needs children, as well as children aged 9–12;
- 13) to review the cost-sharing of school daycare services between parent users and the Government, with the objective of at reaching least a more equitable apportionment;
- **to the School Boards and Schools:**
- 14) to provide clear and accessible information to parent users and community stakeholders so that they may be informed of the fiscal state of school daycare services and understand the financial decisions which affect them.

LEVER #4

STRENGTHENING THE *REGULATION RESPECTING CHILDCARE SERVICES PROVIDED AT SCHOOL*

The *Regulation respecting childcare services provided at school* has only been in effect since 1998. This regulation briefly outlines the nature and objectives of these services as well as a few guidelines on accessibility, staff, hygiene, health and safety. Unlike early childhood centres, school daycare services appear to be not as regulated. Jacobs, Mill and Jennings (2002) noted similar findings in three Canadian provinces with regard to children aged 5–12 in daycare services.² According to the researchers this could be explained by the recent expansion of these services. The same study also showed that regulations are very powerful guidelines for organizing school daycare services. In fact, although regulations are but a minimal framework and that school daycare services can, in theory, adopt higher standards, the organization of these services reflect in large part current policies (Jacobs, Mill and Jennings, 2002). Regulations, then, appear to be an attractive lever for development, as they require a minimum of infrastructures and guidelines, and a needed level of funding at the same time.

The Conseil therefore believes that strengthening existing regulations would allow to raise minimum requirements for providing quality service. The Conseil is also aware that the current trend is moving more toward decentralisation and scaling back regulations rather than the opposite. Nevertheless, the Conseil emphasizes that current needs for developing quality school daycare services require a stronger stewardship on the part of the Government. Yet the Conseil maintains the need of preserving the general principle of decentralisa-

2 Ontario, British Columbia and Québec. The study was conducted from September 1998 to June 1999.

tion in the education sector. It is preferable that the stewardship of the school daycare service network be carried out in the same manner as that of other school services, via accountability practices which both respect the principle of decentralisation and require transparency of the processes and results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- the structuring effect regulations have on the organization of school daycare services;
- the requirements set by the Conseil's five challenges;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**

15) to include in the *Regulation respecting childcare services provided at school*:

- specifications regarding minimum space standards required for school daycare services, according to the number of clients, as well as standards for the maximum number of children per space;
- a requirement for school daycare services to adopt an activity program that includes upgraded educational guidelines, a schedule of varied activities and evaluation measures for the implementation of this program;
- a requirement for school boards to adopt a management policy for school daycare services and make it public. This policy should incorporate, particularly, specifications on the following:
 - the financial management of school daycare services, namely:
 - allocation of funding among daycare services;
 - budget forecasts;
 - use of surplus funds to offset management costs of daycare services;
 - guidelines regarding the utilization of surpluses or management of deficits of daycare services;
 - the general organization of school daycare services, namely:
 - fees;
 - information on the accounting procedures for school clients;
 - guidelines regarding the application of hygiene, health and safety rules;
 - the management of human resources, namely:
 - job titles and grades;

- hiring of staff;
- salaries;
- time off, vacations and statutory holidays;
- staff personal development plans;

16) to review Article 6 of the *Regulation respecting childcare services provided at school* so as to decrease the overall educator/child ratio in schools situated in disadvantaged areas or in the case of special needs children.

LEVER #5

ESTABLISHING AND SUPPORTING LOCAL APPROACHES FOR ONGOING IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL DAYCARE SERVICES

Improving the quality of school daycare services must be based on a well-defined approach, but it must also be shepherded by local leaders in tandem with school administrators and daycare coordinators. The consultations carried out by the Conseil are quite clear in this regard: The pursuit of quality must be a well-defined approach, must involve the participation of all daycare staff, must be led by leaders such as school administrators and daycare coordinators, and must also include the participation of parent users.

Accountability practices: an exercise in transparency and a major lever for improving quality

Although the Conseil recommends that provincial and regional bodies assume firmer stewardship of the network, the fact remains that schools and daycare services in schools are inevitably the first players targeted by measures promoting the development of quality. Even governing boards are required to submit an annual report on the quality of school daycare services. These accountability practices, according to the Conseil, could form the starting point of an approach of ongoing improvement of these services, as this is an exercise that encourages questions and challenges ways of doing things. The Conseil believes, then, that school daycare services could count on the obligation of the governing board to be accountable for the quality of school daycare services, and to embark on an approach of ongoing improvement in this regard.

Currently, school daycare services have self-evaluation tools to assess the quality of their services, which could serve as the foundation for this approach. However, the mechanisms of this self-evaluation and the frequency of their implementation must result from a management decision taken by the school administrator jointly with the daycare service coordinator. This self-evaluation must also be carried out in a collegial and constructive manner. It should not be perceived as a threatening process but rather as an opportunity to improve and revitalize the services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- the responsibility of local players for quality school daycare services;
- the obligation of school governing boards to be accountable for the quality of school daycare services (*The Education Act*, article 83);
- accountability practices should be both an exercise in transparency as well as a process to promote the development of quality;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to school administrators together with daycare service coordinators:**
 - 17) to establish and implement ongoing procedures for the self-evaluation of the quality of school daycare services and to integrate this approach with the annual accountability practices of the institution.

A strong but shared leadership: a basic condition for implementing an approach of ongoing improvement of quality

During the consultations, the Conseil noted that school administration leadership is pivotal to the development of quality school daycare services. Many researchers also concur on the key importance of the school administrator's leadership role in managing change in a school, whatever that change may be. This leadership becomes essential, moreover, when it comes to promoting the integration of school daycare services. If an administrator were to perceive the daycare service as a separate entity from the school and attach very little importance to it, it would follow that the rest of the school staff would act accordingly. In actuality, school administrators are often the only person in the school to be familiar with both organizations. They have an broad perspective which allows them to easily see the advantages of harmonising school and daycare services. School administrators must work, then, to show that a greater integration of the daycare service is possible and even essential to promote continuity of experience for the child. The consultations carried out by the Conseil revealed that the integration of school daycare services is always promoted whenever all school players recognize the advantages for the well-being of the child.

Daycare coordinators, too, are often seen as key figures in the settings studied by the Conseil. They often play the role of intermediary between the "school setting" and the "care setting" and in many cases the family, all while being an important resource for the advancement of their staff. Therefore their compe-

tencies must be acknowledged by all stakeholders. Some school administrators met by the Conseil declared that many responsibilities could be delegated to daycare coordinators provided that some conditions are met: for example, if the coordinators had specialized training, sufficient credibility both with their own team and school teachers, some experience as coordinators, showed openness, and had earned the respect of parents. When an administrator is responsible for more than one school, as is often the case in outlying areas, the coordinator's leadership becomes more crucial than ever. For educators, it is essential their coordinators show proof of leadership so that the school daycare services may gain and preserve their value in the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- the value of the leadership of school administrators in establishing and shepherding an approach of ongoing improvement of school daycare services;
- the value of the role of daycare coordinators as intermediaries between daycare staff, other members of the school staff, parents and community;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports, to the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec and to the Quebec English School Boards Association:**

18) to conduct a study on the work of daycare service coordinators with regard to their actual tasks and, where justified, review the sharing of responsibilities between school administrators and coordinators as well as the professional status of the latter;

- **to school administrators:**

19) to exercise a stronger leadership with regard to the development of quality school daycare services, namely:

- by promoting their integration with other school services;
- by supporting daycare coordinators so they may play an intermediary role between school daycare services and educational services provided by the school;
- by promoting collaborative initiatives whenever continuity of the child's experience justifies it.

Promoting parent user participation

The Conseil believes that parent users have an essential role to play in the quality of school daycare services. Indeed, continuity of the child's experience involves the harmonisation of school and daycare services, in a similar manner to the organization of school and family. According to a study conducted by Jacobs, Mill and Jennings (2002), parents are not very familiar with regulations, yet they do have opinions on how a daycare service should work.

During its consultations, the Conseil has noted disparities in parent user participation in school daycare services. In general, although the *Regulation respecting childcare services provided at school* provides for the creation of parent user committees, very few school daycare services have such committees. According to some stakeholders this is because parent participation in school is generally not very widespread, because these are working parents, and also because it is difficult to find mandates bound to interest potential members, given that these committees are typically for consultation only.

Just as it did for governing boards—who are accountable for the quality of school daycare services—the Conseil recommends putting into practice a self-evaluation process for school daycare services that would allow for both ongoing improvement of the services and accountability practices with regard to quality. Given the valuable role of parent users in school daycare services, the Conseil considers that one of the mandates of parent committees could be to collaborate with staff on the implementation of this self-evaluation process to support the governing board in exercising its responsibility. The Conseil emphasizes, however, that this does not mean simply passing the mandate of evaluating the services to the parent user committee. This approach must be a self-evaluation process and must be the responsibility of all daycare stakeholders, a constructive process that allows everyone to be an integral part of decision-making and change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- the irregular parent participation in school daycare services;
- the value of parent users' role with regard to improving the quality of service;
- the measures in the *Regulation respecting childcare services provided at school* with regard to the role of parent user committees;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to school administrators and daycare coordinators:**
 - 20) to ensure the creation of parent user committees, as stipulated in the *Regulation*;
 - 21) to encourage collaboration of parent user committees in the self-evaluation process for improving quality in daycare services and to advise the governing board of any proposal that may promote ongoing improvement;
- **to the Québec Federation of Parents' Committees together with school administrator associations:**
 - 22) to implement various initiatives to increase parent participation in parent user committees;
 - 23) to promote among their members the value of having a parent user committee member sitting on the governing board.

LEVER #6**SUPPORTING AND SHARING INSPIRING PROJECTS**

During its consultations, the Conseil noted that school daycare services put many projects into action in order to adapt themselves to the needs of children of varied backgrounds. These projects rallied and brought together staff and effort around a common goal. A Canadian study has also shown that a correlation can be made between innovating school daycare services and the ensuing quality they provides (Mill, Jacobs and Jennings, 2002). Therefore, the Conseil believes that there is good reason to establish and disseminate inspiring projects.

These projects can be varied in nature. For example, a daycare service visited by the Conseil had integrated the school's extracurricular activities as part of their service. Another had created a management committee for the daycare that included Cycle 3 pupils, enabling them to play roles tailored to their abilities and ambitions. Yet another set up micro-businesses which worked with others already established in the classroom. Other daycares created smaller-scale projects to meet specific needs. For example, with very little money and a modicum of flexibility, some daycare educators were able to make cycle staff meetings possible for the teachers and more, supervising recess periods while at the same time turning them into a time for fun, not confrontation.

These few examples show that it is possible for school daycare services to truly contribute to the well-being of the children in their care and also (in some cases) all the pupils in the school. In the end, it is up to the daycare service to prove that its contribution to the school is tangible and beneficial for the children.

From all these projects, the Conseil upholds the usefulness of networks to rally target stakeholders. For example, the many Association des services de garde du Québec (ASGEMSQ) conferences, or school boards that promote the sharing of successful practices, namely by organizing regular meetings for daycare coordinators. Although many of these projects are not entirely adaptable from one school to another, they do give food for thought to stakeholders and can inspire other similar projects which could then be adapted for specific needs. Better still, they can encourage completely new projects whose inspiration began somewhere else entirely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering:

- the correlation made in a study by Mill, Jacobs and Jennings (2002) between quality as a whole and the existence of innovative projects in school daycare services;
- the contribution that inspiring projects bring, both for problem-solving in schools and school daycare services and for advancing the daycare service network for the well-being of the child;

the Conseil recommends:

- **to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**
 - 24) to fund the creation and dissemination of innovative projects in school daycare services;
- **to school administrators, school boards and professional associations:**
 - 25) to widely disseminate inspiring projects initiated in school daycare services, by highlighting the needs that these projects could meet, the requirements for their success and the support needed for their implementation.

CONCLUSION

Placing the development of quality school daycare services at the heart of our priorities—this is what the Conseil wishes to convey to all target stakeholders.

Does this mean, however, that quality was previously lacking or was never included in the priorities of education stakeholders? In this Brief, the Conseil would like to reiterate that accessibility to school daycare services has improved considerably since their inception in the 1970s. But it was on managing their growth that most of the effort was focused, and it should not be concluded that quality was never a concern for the stakeholders—far from it! The evolution of school daycare services seems to have followed the same path as that of the education system. In fact, it is accessibility to education for all that had been the priority for education stakeholders, even though the issue of quality had never been entirely left behind. It was only later, after “accessibility to education for all” had been achieved, that “accessibility to success for all” then became a common priority.

The Conseil deems that for the network of school daycare services to advance, it must now gain a new impetus. Following the quantitative growth of the network and a veritable increase in accessibility to its services, quality of school daycare services must now be placed at the heart of priorities.

Improving this quality ultimately rests on the participation of various players, those whom the Conseil calls upon in its six levers. It also requires a more assertive stewardship of the network on the part of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and school boards as well as broader and more clearly-defined support by the latter. Moreover, improving the quality of services must inevitably be supported by the day-to-day work of the frontline daycare service staff, both educators and coordinators. Thus far, the network has been able to count on dedicated employees who have worked to the best of their abilities in far-from-ideal settings.

The Conseil submits that the development of quality in these services will require much more, however, and that in this respect, the level of education—and particularly the specialization of the staff in this field—becomes a key issue. The great challenge for quality could be met, then, if daycare staff would have the competencies required to carry out their mandate. From this standpoint, although all levers appear equally fundamental to the Conseil, it strongly emphasises the value of staff training. The Conseil also invites daycare service staff members to take ownership of their professional development and to seriously invest in complementary

education, a function belonging to them.

Lastly, the Conseil invites all education stakeholders and the surrounding community to take a new look at the network of school daycare services. It is a network which, given the volume of its clientele and staff, has shaken the status quo and obliged school stakeholders to rethink their way of doing things. In fact, a considerable number of children spend time in school daycare services, either occasionally or on a daily basis. What do we wish for them? Simply a safe environment until they return home? Or a place that fosters their well-being and provides them with the possibility of meeting challenges according to their potential and talents, thus contributing to the ultimate goal of education: the holistic development of the child?

It is evident to the Conseil that school daycare services can meet this quality challenge and that they can contribute immensely to the development of children in their care. Therefore the Conseil invites education stakeholders and the surrounding community to consider school daycare services as a key partner in the educational community of the child.

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The full text (in French) of the Brief

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