



8 Education Reform and Parents

Fédération des comités de parents



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Resources

For answers to your questions, to learn more about a subject or to find the right tools or resources... contact the FCPPO.

We offer:

- Advice;
- Information brochures;
- References;
- Training workshops.

Visit our web site www.fcppq.qc.ca or contact your regional association through the Parents' Committee at your School Board.

Acknowledgement

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Contributors to the Production:

- Coordination, research: Multi projets
- Text: Claudine St-Germain
- Graphics: Groupe Zone Communication
- Printing: Litho Acme-Renaissance

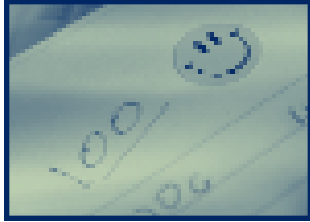
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The reform: More extensive than you think!



Discussions about the education reform focus mainly on the overhaul of the curriculum programs at the elementary and secondary levels. Obviously, this is a fundamental and essential element of the reform. However, the reform is much more extensive than that. It involves major changes to Quebec's education system that directly affect parents.

This document presents an overview of the reform begun in 1996. It deals in particular with the following points:

- The origins of the reform;
- The different studies and consultations leading up to it;
- The changes that have had an impact on the schools and the school boards;
- The role that parents must play in this reform.

Why reform education?

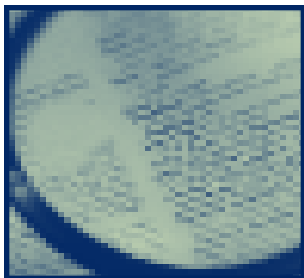
The last major education reform in Quebec took place in the 60s. It came in the wake of the Parent Commission report and was a part of the broader movement of the Quiet Revolution. The main objective of the reform was to democratize schools and to facilitate access for all: Since then, these objectives have largely been reached. Over the last three decades, a number of changes were made to the educational system, without substantially altering it.

During this same period, Quebec society underwent profound upheavals. Family life, work, the economy, social relations, technology, all these aspects of our lives evolved in an extraordinary way. The qualities expected today of a worker and a citizen are not what they once were. Adapting the school system to these new realities became a necessity.

Moreover, the rate of school dropout, the number of young people with behavioural, or learning difficulties and the number of functionally illiterate adults demonstrated the urgent need to carry out an in-depth reform of Quebec's education system.

The objective of making schools accessible to all has been reached. We now have to ensure that the greatest number of students experience success. To do this, schools must take into account the new realities of society, improve the equality of opportunity, and encourage everyone concerned to become involved: Students, parents, school staff, and members of the community. This is the overall spirit of the education reform.

Where did the reform start?



The education reform is the product of many years of study involving several groups and individuals.

A first report released in 1994 by a task force and entitled *Preparing Our Youth for the 21st Century* (often called the Corbo Report) demonstrated the need to revise the elementary and secondary school learning profiles so as to take into account major current trends.

In 1995, the Commission for the Estates General on Education was convened with the mandate to determine the state of education, the current and future orientations, and the needs of the school system. The Commission thus touched off a movement of extensive social debate on education. The Commission's report was tabled in 1996. It prioritized ten actions for the renewal of the education system.

To follow up the Estates General, in October 1996 the Minister of Education at the time, Pauline Marois, published the major orientations of the reform that would take place. The objective of the ministerial plan of action entitled *A New Direction for Success* was to move from access for the greatest number to success for the greatest number. This policy includes seven components that will be reviewed in the following pages.

In 1997, the task force on curriculum reform at the elementary and secondary levels tabled its report entitled *Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools* (known as the Inchauspé Report). The *Ministère de l'Éducation* followed up the report by pre-senting its educational policy statement: *Québec Schools on Course*.

A reform that affects schools first



The reform has a major impact on the school. It brings with it new structures, a new division of roles and responsibilities and, above all, a new way of looking at and thinking about school.

Institutions that are more autonomous

One of the main objectives of the reform is to allow each school to adapt its services to the needs and characteristics of its community. To do this, the school must be allowed to make decisions and implement them. The Education Act was therefore amended to this effect in order to bring the powers of the school in line with this new thinking.

Since then, the school has exercised a set of functions and powers that once belonged to the school board. These new responsibilities are educational, budgetary, and administrative. They affect in particular the organization and evaluation of educational services, the management of resources, and the development of a partnership with the local community.

Giving greater autonomy to the school also means giving it to those who make up the school. The reform reaffirmed the role of school principals as pedagogical leaders. Teachers have a greater flexibility and latitude than in the past. The new Education Program increasingly calls on their professional judgment and pedagogical expertise to adapt their teaching to the needs of their students.

The creation of Governing Boards

The obligation to form a Governing Board was also a significant change in the schools. The role of the Orientation Committee and the School Committee that preceded it had been almost exclusively advisory, contrary to the Governing Board which replaced them, and which has important decision-making powers. Made up of parents, students in schools that have Secondary 4 and 5 classes, staff members, and community representatives, the principal role of the Governing Board is to ensure that the services offered at the school effectively meet the needs of the students. The intention of the legislature was to assign enough functions and powers to the Governing Board so that it could orient the school in the direction desired by the principal players in the school.



The creation of the Governing Board introduced a completely new dynamic to the school. Parents and staff members now have a special place to communicate, test their ideas, and work together for the success of the students. The community also has the opportunity to participate directly in the school, and the school can benefit in concrete terms from the resources and know-how the community has to offer.

In order for this new authoritative body to work, all of those involved in the school had to redefine their contribution to the school, assimilate their new responsibilities, and learn about each other. It is a long-term process, one that will develop over time.

A change of culture

Because of the transformations it imposes on schools, the reform clearly identifies the essential cultural elements of Quebec's schools:

- It reaffirms that learning should be student-centred;
- It places paramount importance on the partnership within the school;
- It is not a closed unit. It fits into a given community since, as the African saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child."
- It must promote teamwork; for example, it looks toward setting up cycle teams made up of teachers and professionals working in the same cycle and school teams made up of the whole school staff.

This is an important change of attitude. The pooling of expertise and experience, including that of parents, introduces a very positive strength and cohesiveness for students, school staff, parents, and the community. This pooling is necessary for the application of the new Education Program that calls for cross-curricular learning and making connections between learning and real life.

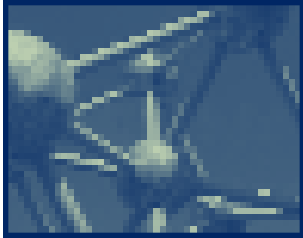
The three-fold mission of the school

To its credit, the reform has clarified the school's mission. This mission includes three important elements:

- To provide instruction, that is to ensure that the students acquire knowledge and know how to use it in everyday life;
- To socialize, that is to teach students to live together and to evolve in the society;
- To provide qualifications, that is to give students all the advantages necessary for their integration into society and the workplace.

In this redefinition of the school's mission, reference is also made to academic success which enables them "to undertake and achieve success in a course of study".

A reform that affects school boards as well



The reform had a major impact on school boards by bringing a new division of powers and responsibilities. The principal mission of the school board has been redefined: Above all, a school board must ensure that the persons under its jurisdiction receive the educational services to which they are entitled, that is pre-school, elementary and secondary education, vocational training and adult education. The school board's powers are now more centred on planning, evaluation, and support to the institutions as well as on the allocation of resources.

School boards also see to the allocation of various educational services such as complementary services, services for special needs students, and room and board.

New school boards

As a result of the social consensus identified by the Estates General on Education, the government created an entirely non-denominational school system, which had been planned since 1988. Until that time, the Quebec system was divided along religious lines, on one side the school boards for Catholics and on the other, school boards for Protestants. To take into account the changes in Quebec society, linguistic boards – French-speaking or English-speaking – were established in 1998. In so doing, the government also reduced the number of school boards by half, by linking their territories to those of the regional county municipalities.

The other major components of the reform



The education reform affects all levels of education, from preschool to university, and focuses on all aspects of the school system. Along with the changes introduced in the schools and the school boards, major components defined in the ministerial plan of action *A New Direction for Success* were adopted to achieve the objectives of the reform.

Providing services for young children

Children who are guided and encouraged from a very young age succeed better, both socially and academically. That is why the reform includes a component relating to early childhood intervention.

The first action taken by the *Ministère de l'Éducation* was to extend the offer of educational services for young children. In September 1997, full-time kindergarten was made accessible to all 5-year-old children. It is not compulsory, but today, the large majority of eligible children attend full-time.

Then, early childhood centres gradually began to develop services for 4-year-olds. These services allow children to become progressively familiar with a stimulating learning environment and to acquire the skills that will give them equal opportunities for success in school. Additional services are also offered to 4-year olds with special needs, particularly those living with a handicap or coming from disadvantaged areas.

The preschool education program has also been modified to take into account these changes and to better meet the needs of the children.

Leaflet n° 9 deals exclusively with this aspect of the reform.



Teaching the essential subjects

The revision of the elementary and secondary level Education Program is one of the most important components of the reform. The word "curriculum" is now routinely used to designate the programs of study but it also has a broader meaning. It describes the contents of students' education, that is subject-time allocations, teaching time, programs of study, evaluation of learning, approval of study programs, and organization of the various educational branches. All these elements are reviewed by the *Ministère de l'Éducation*.

Supporting Montreal's schools

The multiethnic character and the poverty of certain Montreal neighbourhoods present major challenges for some city schools. There are many more instances of academic delay in students from these neighbourhoods than elsewhere.

Therefore, the education reform includes a component specifically devoted to Montreal's schools. First, schools from the most underprivileged areas are to be targeted in order to offer them additional financial and technical support, and to actively involve the community in the success of the students attending its school.

In 1998, the MEQ worked out a policy on integration and intercultural education intended not only for the students of Montreal's schools, but for all students. This policy deals with the school's responsibility in regard to linguistic, academic, and social integration and intercultural education. The policy also focuses on methods for fostering openness to ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity and on methods for ensuring a fair representation of the members of the cultural communities within the schools and school boards.



Intensifying the reform of vocational and technical training

Vocational and technical training offers interesting employment perspectives, but too few young people choose this route, through lack of awareness or prejudice. Girls, in particular, are largely under-represented in these training programs.

Thus, the goal of the reform is to upgrade vocational and technical training and to better adapt it to the reality of today's young people. The reform also aims to create ties between the learning profiles, for example by facilitating the passage from vocational training at the secondary level to technical training in CEGEP. In this way, young people who hope to train immediately for the job market are not cutting themselves off from postsecondary education.

We also believe that by allowing students earlier access to vocational training, we can contribute to the fight against school dropout. As well, the *Ministère de l'Éducation* promotes measures such as work-study programs.

Consolidating and rationalizing postsecondary education and providing better access to continuing education

These two components in the reform are of less immediate concern for the parents of elementary and secondary schools, although it is important to know that, here also, changes stemming from the reform are taking place.

Thus, at the college level, institutions now have more responsibilities related to training and to certain administrative questions.

At the university level, the reform deals mainly with administration, financing, and performance; as well, it is concerned with relevance and the complementary nature of the programs of study. With respect to universities, some of the many preoccupations of the *Ministère de l'Éducation* include: Access to university studies, excellence in research, meeting the needs of society, and openness to the world.

The final component in the reform deals with adult education. In a world that is perpetually changing, an increasing number of people will have need of continuing or additional education. The education system must meet these needs with the appropriate programs and tools.

Parents, essential partners in the reform



See Leaflet n° 12
on the Governing Board.

For more information,
consult leaflet n° 1, Parents let's go!
Parent Participation Organization,
Helping schools be their best!, and
leaflet n° 3, Getting the Facts About
Parent Participation in the School.

You can obtain a copy of leaflet n° 14,
The Parents' Committee, Focal Point of
Parental Participation.

Such major changes to the school system inevitably affect parents, who, more than ever before, are called upon to become involved in their children's schooling.

A decision-making role for the school

The creation of Governing Boards marked an important turning point in regard to the involvement of parents within the school system; up to that time, parents had played an almost exclusively advisory role. In effect, this body gives parents the opportunity to share in the important duties and decision-making powers concerning the school's orientations. Since parents have the same number of votes as the school staff on the Governing Board, and since the Chair must be a parent, the parents' points of view and their ideas can truly influence their children's school life.

The PPO, another way of getting involved

The reform also resulted in the creation of Parent Participation Organizations (PPO). Their role is to promote the parents' participation in achieving the school's educational project and the academic success of their children. This participation can take many forms, depending on the needs of the school and the strengths of each community.

In particular, the PPO can play a very useful role in relation to the success of the students by further expanding the information offered to parents and by supporting their participation.

The reform is also the concern of the Parents' Committee

In its role of advisor to the school board, the Parents' Committee can contribute a great deal to the success of the reform. Parent representatives of each school and of special needs students have first-hand knowledge of the needs of each milieu and can support the school board action in implementing the reform, especially in respect to the decentralization of powers towards the schools and the allocation of resources.

True partners

Partnership is at the heart of the education reform. The children's academic success is not only the teachers' responsibility; the school team, the community, and the parents are all called upon to work together to promote academic success.

If, because of the reform, schools must adapt their educational services to the needs of the students, the schools will also require the contribution of parents to better evaluate these needs. The closer the relationship between the school and the parents, the more the educational project will reflect the expectations of the community and the more the services will be well targeted.

Overall, the aim of the reform is to make parents true partners in the educational system. From the decentralization of powers to the introduction of new authoritative bodies in the schools, everything is converging toward an association that has the success of the children in mind. It is now up to parents, and to the others involved in the school system, to make the best possible use of their new position and to fully assume their new role.

