

TO BE ENDOWED WITH ONE OF THE BEST EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN THE WORLD BY 2020

As part of the initiative announced by the Coalition for the Future of Québec last February 21, we are presenting this consultation paper on education. We hope it will serve to provoke discussion with the population on this issue, which in our opinion, should be the absolute priority of our society.

Since the Quiet Revolution, Québec has made remarkable progress from an education standpoint. Close to a million students per year attend classes in some 3,000 elementary and high school institutions of learning in the province of Québec. Some 110 collegiate learning establishments and about 200 professional training centres contribute to the individual, social and economic development of our society and prepare a great many students for higher learning. Québec's 18 universities currently award close to 45,000 degrees¹ per year. In 40 years, the university diploma rate has almost tripled and the median scholastic level has gone up by six years².

Meanwhile, Québec students that stay in school do well on international tests, such as the TIMSS or PISA, and the percentage of our population aged 25 to 65 that have a university degree is currently comparable to the average seen in countries of the OECD³ – even though the leading countries in this regard still manage to produce up to 45% more university graduates than we do for the same population figures. The gap has narrowed over the last 20 years, especially in the 1990s.

TROUBLING BUT UNDENIABLE FACTS

Still, these achievements mask some troubling issues for our future. We have to admit that over the last few decades, our education system has not been able to adapt to today's economic and social realities.

To get a better grasp of the issues confronting Québec in the area of education, nine facts are notable:

A dropout rate that is too high⁴. Only 72% of Québec youngsters complete their high-school or professional studies before the age of 20. This problem is particularly troublesome among boys (a success rate of 66% compared to 79% among girls). Despite the significant resources devoted to the problem and the diligence of interveners in educational and social areas, the graduation rate for students under the age of 20 has remained relatively stable over the last two decades. The fact is clear: results in the fight against school drop-out rates are stagnating in Québec.

This situation carries serious socio-economic consequences for Québec. To illustrate – besides the human impact – the loss of earnings and social cost related to a high-school drop-out represents \$120,000 in present value⁵ compared to a high-school graduate.

There are a combination of factors that account for Québec's high drop-out rate. They include:

- a. **a poor allocation of resources between privileged and underprivileged areas.** The current system favours a scattering of financial resources among the school boards and schools, rather than a targeted approach aimed at areas and clientele most at risk. Moreover, our school system has about 2,460 public and 330 private schools. Since private schools accept very few students with learning difficulties, the pressure on public schools becomes even greater.
- b. **the inability of school boards to attract the most experienced teachers into the schools that need them the most.** Experienced teachers are often prevalent in privileged areas, while newly minted teachers inherit the more difficult areas while they accumulate enough seniority to go and teach at another school. The constant turnover of teaching staff in the at-risk areas creates a climate of instability that is hardly conducive to students' success. Such movement also prevents the formation of real school-teams that are so essential to ambitious

¹ *Le Québec chiffres en main*, Institut de la Statistique du Québec, 2010

² Statistics Canada

³ Statistics Canada, Conference Board of Canada

⁴ Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec; Rapport du Groupe d'action sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires au Québec

⁵ Rapport du Groupe d'action sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires au Québec

educational projects and getting teachers to fully commit to a specific school. We note a similar problem of instability at the school administration level, which does not facilitate the teachers' task and makes it difficult to implement measures for long-term improvement in our schools.

- c. **a lack of autonomy for school administrators** . School administrators are not given the autonomy they need to make the proper decisions on human and pedagogical resources, more specifically as it pertains to professional staff. Also, school administrators spend a major part of their time rendering performance reports to their respective school board.
- d. **a limited appreciation of education in our society**. Over the years, our society has, bit by bit, gotten away from extolling the values of effort, group success and overall excellence that should embody our education system. This situation creates myriad problems that require collective awareness.

First, the teaching profession is clearly undervalued in our society, mainly because of:

- a. an autonomy that is too restricted in the classroom when it comes to which pedagogical approach to use,
- b. insufficient salaries considering the important role and responsibilities that come with teaching,
- c. accepting weak students into teaching programs, and
- d. courses of studies that do not properly prepare our teachers at the start of their career and do not promote continuing education.

This lack of valorization and appreciation tends to make it increasingly difficult to attract and hold on to the best teaching candidates and curbs the motivation of the teaching staff, which can extend to the point of removing any sense of responsibility toward the success of their students

Too little importance given to the role and education of school administrators. The positions are often held by high-performing teachers, but these teachers do not receive enough training in subjects such as administration or talent management, or their training does not always reflect the reality of the work that needs to be done heading an institution of learning.

This lack of proper education, combined with a lack of decision-making power and support in their administrative duties, leads to administrators having to spend too much of their time bogged down in rendering performance reports rather than focusing on pedagogical issues.

1. **Parents' role in the system is still too limited.** A lack of information, a misunderstood role in relation to school administrators and the teaching body, and some disinterest in certain areas, have distanced parents from the school over the years. Parents have to be more involved in the education system. Their mobilization – from the standpoint of participating in school activities to their everyday support to children in the education system – is needed more than ever.
2. **Less than average class time**⁶. Québec's elementary and high-school students are in the classroom 180 days a year. This is slightly less than the OECD average of 187 days, but considerably less than the some 195 days our Ontario neighbours spend in the classroom.

The same is true for the number of hours per week spent in school. While Québec is in the Canadian average (25 hours in Québec and Ontario, compared to 24 to 26 hours in Alberta and British Columbia), the gap is wider when compared to the United States, where every student spends 6 to 7 more hours a week in school.

3. **An education reform that did not fulfill its promises because of mistakes made when it was implemented.** The many miscues that plagued the implementation of the education reform diverted it from its initial objectives. We note an over-emphasis on teaching by way of projects, to the detriment of more traditional methods, an inordinate emphasis on the development of competencies over knowledge, a lack of pragmatism in evaluation methods, the non-repeating of grades regardless of the circumstances and, especially, a lack of teacher training. We dare to hope the recent changes proposed by the Ministry of Education will result in the rectifying of some of these problems.
4. **Under-funding of the university system.** This circumstance is leading to the slow but sure decline of our universities (dilapidated infrastructures, reduced ability to attract or retain professors and highly regarded researchers, lacking the means to attract international students, inadequate research budgets, etc.), and this translates into a weakened competitiveness on the international scene.

⁶ OECD, Ontario Ministry of Education, Québec Ministry of Education

This chronic under-funding gradually turns our university system into a second-rate system, with an increasing inability to produce the high-calibre graduates our society will need to continue to develop over the coming decades. This situation is especially critical in a context where the economy is based more and more on knowledge – and often cutting-edge knowledge. More than ever, Québec needs to be able to rely on a highly skilled labour force to attract the new businesses and research centres that are vital to its socio-economic development.

In its March 17 budget, Québec announced a major reinvestment over the next six years. It's a step in the right direction. We also need to closely follow the reinvestments that are made in North America in the coming years, so that we don't lose ground in relation to our peers.

5. **Low graduation rates at the collegiate and university levels.** While graduation rates have been on the rise at the collegiate and university levels, there is still a lot of room for improvement (63% of the students that start Cégep earn a diploma, compared to 70% at the university level⁷).

Lightening the administrative load of Cégeps and universities. This situation translates into an unacceptable increase in managerial costs. The account rendering has to be focused on achieving results and performance measurement, and not on the means of action or processes implemented by the institutions. The government should not interfere in the internal management of the institutions by determining the budget cuts that have to be made in certain positions without considering the reality each specific institution is experiencing. Administrators should have the freedom and latitude they need to attain the set objectives in a manner they deem to be the most appropriate for their institution.

OBJECTIVES THAT MEET THE CHALLENGES

Quality education is more than an individual growth tool: it is a condition of our collective success.

In the inescapable international competition game, a society such as ours cannot hope to stand out by leaving things up to its workers or its labour costs. If Québec wants to close the gap in productivity it has to lean on the quality of training of its citizens, their creative ingenuity and their ability to adapt to a fast-evolving world.

It is also through quality education that we are able to ensure the perpetuity of the Québec language, culture and identity. School is an important developmental tool, but it is also a strong social cohesion factor. As an example, 84% of university graduates exercise their right to vote, compared to a rate of 52% among drop-outs⁸. Thus, it is important to provide education with the proper means so it can continue to play the crucial role it does.

Winning the stake in education would allow Québec to ensure a prime place in the new world social and economic context, and we cannot let this opportunity go by. To get there, we need to set a clear and ambitious objective: to be endowed with one of the best education systems in the world by 2020.

More specifically, this system will allow Québec to:

1. raise to 85% (compared to the current 72%) the percentage of the population receiving their high-school diploma by the age of 20;
2. remain in the top 10% of international test results for passing grades in reading, mathematics and science;
3. raise to 75 % (compared to the current 63%) the graduation rate for students starting college;
4. raise to 80% (compared to the current 70%) the graduation rate for students starting university.

To restore the enthusiasm to succeed, Québec must, above all, rely on excellence from every standpoint – teachers, education and research – rather than level off near the bottom, as it has too often done.

CLEAR AND COHERENT PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE OUR ACTIONS

To attain these objectives, some major foundations of our current education system will have to be reviewed. We propose firmly rooting the solutions around seven major principles:

1. **Schools that are responsible for the success of their students**, more autonomous, and supported by regional offices providing targeted services;
2. **Competent teachers that are accountable** for the individual and collective success of students;

⁷ Statistics Canada, Fédération des cégeps

⁸ Rapport du Groupe d'action sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires au Québec

3. **Increased powers for school administrators**, making them better equipped to respond to the needs of their students and more responsible for their school's performance;
4. **School councils where the parents** have more of an input in the school's major strategic decisions;
5. **Trimmer administrative structures** to enhance the flexibility and efficiency of the system in allocating resources, laying the cornerstones of sound performance management at every echelon of the system;
6. **Cégeps and universities accountable** for their results.
7. **International calibre universities**

These principles will shake up the establishment in the education field. But we believe it is high time Québec tackles these issues from a new angle and makes this turnaround to break with the current status.

BOLD BUT REALISTIC SOLUTIONS

We are proposing three major initiatives:

Initiative no. 1: A new contract with the teachers.

We believe there is nothing more important for achievement in school than a competent and motivated teacher. That is why we plan to invest in our teachers. It's time to sign a new contract with the teachers to restore the profession to its rightful place in our society.

The new contract would be aimed at revalorizing the teaching profession, by means of:

1. **a pay raise averaging 20%**. Every teacher will see his/her salary increase, but the raises might vary in order to target schools deemed to be more difficult.
2. **more autonomy in the classroom**, where every teacher can choose, the methods they want to use in relation to the needs of his/her class,
3. **more rigorous selection and training of future teachers and school administrators**, combined with measures that will allow other university graduates to obtain teaching certification in their field of expertise in quicker and easier fashion.
4. **personal accompaniment for new teachers**, including mentoring programs by experienced and top-notch teachers to ease the transition between their university training and the reality of teaching in a school.
5. **A sharing of best practices** that encourages teamwork, not only in the same school but between schools. Teachers will thus be exposed to innovative and promising approaches, developed by their peers, as is the case in the world's top-performing education systems.
6. **Well-defined advancement opportunities for top-notch teachers** to maintain their level of motivation and stimulation. Along with the usual career development path (promotion to an administrative post), it is conceivable top-notch teachers that wish to remain in the classroom would be given the option of becoming a mentor or specialist in teaching practices.

We estimate these measures would collectively cost about \$950 million per year.

Meanwhile, we believe two major changes need to be made:

1. **A teacher evaluation system** should be implemented to measure their competencies and motivation.

First, it is important to note that, in our opinion, the great majority of our teachers are competent.

The evaluation of the teaching staff would be done twice during the school year by the school administrator and would address many elements, including the students' success rate (obviously taking the socio-economic environment and the potential of these students into account). Parental satisfaction would be taken into consideration for the evaluation.

A teacher that doesn't reach the expected performance level could initially take advanced training courses, receive mentoring from a peer or pair up with a stronger performing teacher. If, despite these measures, the performance isn't up to standard, the teacher would be relieved of his/her duties. Every student must have the opportunity to learn from proficient teachers.

2. **Hiring rules** for teachers and school administrators must encourage greater stability. We recommend implementing three-to-five year contracts.

Such a contract with the teachers would require new collective bargaining agreements and a redefining of job security. It would be a unique opportunity to lay the cornerstones of an education system that better responds to the needs of the Québec of the future.

Initiative no. 2: Reorganize the system to increase the autonomy of school administrators and teachers

We are proposing a fundamental revision of the roles and responsibilities of the various Québec education system procedures, which would mainly lead to a decentralizing of powers to the benefit of schools, school administrators and teachers, and a scale-back of administrative structures. The main changes would include:

1. **Abolition of school boards and restructuring of regional offices.** We believe major changes are needed at school boards. The 60 francophone school boards would be regrouped within 30 regional offices and the nine anglophone boards would be converted into nine regional offices. The Ministry of Education's current offices would be merged into 39 new offices. The role of the nine new entities would be completely revised to focus their field of endeavour on the allocation of financial resources, assignation of students to respective schools, selecting and evaluating school administrators (with the school Council having the final decision), transportation and school organization and providing certain support services. But the bulk of the school boards' work relating to human resources, educational, equipment and computer operations would be scaled down or transferred to schools.

Since it has been shown there is virtually no interest expressed by the population in specific issues pertaining to the administration of a regional school organization, school board elections and commissioners' posts would be abolished. We would favour a local government process around each school. School tax would be maintained at its current level but it would be collected at the same time as property tax by the municipalities (administratively compensated for doing so) and remitted directly to the Québec government.

We estimate these changes would generate savings in the area of \$280 million per year, which is about 50% of the current costs of school boards.

2. **A Ministry of Education that focuses on objectives and policies.** The role of the Ministry of Education should be limited to setting national objectives, establishing major policies, determining educational program content and allocating resources to the regional offices. Thus, the role of teachers and school administrations would be increased.
3. **More autonomous administrators.** School administrators would have added responsibilities. They would oversee:
 - a. the evaluation of teachers under their responsibility, and
 - b. the allocation of available resources in relation to the real needs in their school

To better manage these new responsibilities, school administrators could be supported by administrative assistants, who would be more involved in administration-related tasks. The Ministry of Education reserves the right to put a school under trusteeship in the event the administration is unable to fulfill its new duties.

4. **More parents on school councils** making strategic decisions for the school's future. Parents will keep all of their current powers, including participation on regional councils (on student assignation and school transportation, for example). By emphasizing parental involvement and participation in decisions relating to their school, we believe it will be easier to encourage local government rather than participation in school board elections.
5. **Scaled-back, more efficient boards for Cégeps.** We propose reducing the number of people on Cégep boards to fewer than 15 members and increasing the portion of people that come from outside the system. These measures will attract candidates that are likely to make a bigger contribution to the institutions.
6. **Performance report replaced by a results-oriented performance management structure staked on the success of every student.** The current performance reporting activities are onerous, cumbersome and have very low added value. These rules would be significantly simplified (both with the Ministry of Education and the schools and Cégeps) and they would basically be replaced by a global structure which would not only provide a better school performance measurement but also a better dispersion of human and financial resources. The structure would strive to measure the results of the different schools in relation to their socio-economic environment and their clientele. It would then pinpoint, in the top-performing schools and Cégeps, the initiatives or practices that promote student achievement. The indicators of such a management structure would be targeted, geared toward the successful achievement of every student and based on new annual standardized evaluations, administered starting in the 1st grade. Tests on basic subject matter would be done every year and would be corrected independently. Programs would be more standardized at the collegiate level to reduce the amount of time teachers spend on various committees and to facilitate a fair comparison of results among the Cégeps, while continuing in the aim of finding practices that lead to student success and making these practices available to everyone.

The allocation of resources for students encountering learning disabilities should be done in relation to the needs of every Québec school. Testing of students that show signs of having difficulty adapting or learning should be done systematically, right from the first year of school entry, which means at the pre-school level. The same applies to any non-diagnosed disabled student.

Initiative no. 3: Increase the number of university graduates and improve the performance of our universities to make them real social and economic development engines

Québec needs to improve its university graduation rate. To do this, we need to valorize higher learning and fight against high-school and collegiate drop-outs, particularly in under-privileged areas. Contrary to what some people contend, tuition fees are not the biggest factor in the decision to attend university: the tuition-fee increase announced in the recent Québec government budget was needed.

But major chances are required:

Universities must engage in raising the graduation rate by providing a better support structure to students.

Universities need to be engaged in making better use of professors and bachelor-program lecturers. They should also commit to signing performance contracts attesting that their public funding will be used to meet the agreed-upon performance objectives, particularly in terms of graduation and research. The objectives would be geared toward improving the overall performance of the university system, which means less bureaucracy and more student services.

Elsewhere, the current performance reporting regulations for universities should be simplified to limit the bureaucratic aspects and allow for a real performance dialogue between all parties concerned. Students should be put to good use in conducting this performance evaluation.

The current structure of the Université du Québec system should be reviewed. Every university in its system should have a performance reporting link with the Ministry of Education – like the other Québec universities. The Université du Québec head office should be abolished.

This measure would generate about \$10 million per year in savings.

Encourage the emergence of a limited number of centres or niches of excellence. A growing number of states or cities are looking at setting up centres of excellence in education or research. These centres of excellence strive to train critical masses of expertise and graduates specialized in key sectors, thereby supplying local companies with a highly skilled labour force.

We believe Québec could position itself as a world leader in certain research sectors or fields of study:

- a. by encouraging its universities to combine forces in an effort to develop international-scope training and research programs; and
- b. by allowing universities to adjust tuition fees for certain programs, thereby providing more favourable revenue potential. To maintain access to studies, 35% of the additional fees assessed by the universities should be used to improve the student loans and bursaries program.

WELL CALCULATED AND RESPONSIBLE PROPOSALS

These proposals would be implemented over a four-year period. With the exception of the centres of excellence (funded by an increase in tuition fees in some of the university programs), the proposals represent a recurring cost of \$950 million per year. We believe it is a solid investment in the generations that will shape Québec's society of the future.

These investments would be funded in the following manner

Efficiency gains at Hydro-Québec ⁹	\$600 M
Restructuring of school boards	\$280 M
Freeze on private-school funding for 4 years ¹⁰	\$60 M

⁹ We believe Hydro-Québec's operational costs should be reduced by 23% over a four-year span, representing a savings of \$600 million starting from the fourth year.

¹⁰ We believe, considering the private schools' exceptionally high rate of government subsidies (about 60% of total costs), it would be fair to ask that they absorb their system costs for a four-year period, for an annual saving of \$60 million starting from the fourth year)

Closing of the Université du Québec head office	\$10 M
Annual recurrent total:	\$950 M

The Québec government should be more insistent in its demands that the federal government increase its funding to post-secondary learning institutions.

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Our coalition realizes there are many other issues related to the Québec education system, including the integration of youngsters with severe learning difficulties, the revision of the role of Cégeps and the funding of early childhood assistance programs (to name a few). All of these issues merit government attention. But we have noted that, in the past, governments have often tried to please everyone by scattering ineffective measures without any sustainable or measurable impact. We believe it is better to devote our efforts to a limited number of problems, so they can be efficiently and promptly addressed.

We can be justifiably proud of our education system, which over the course of a few decades has raised its performance to that of the average of developed countries. But our system continues to lag significantly behind the leaders – including our Canadian and American neighbours.

In the current economic context, developed societies have to base their economic, social and cultural emergence on the distinctive know-how and knowledge of their population. The same is true for Québec. Our education system cannot be allowed to fall behind the rest of the world. The quality of its institutions and the students they train must instead become a world reference point. Previous reforms have played a role, but they are now ineffective. A new wave of changes and investments is needed to achieve our objectives. Education must be the absolute priority of the government.