

Monitoring the Education Reform

Information for Parents

A word from the Minister

Dear parents:

This year, some seven years after the education reform first began in our elementary schools, it is being implemented in Secondary Cycle Two.

As you know, much has been written about the reform. Indeed, there is a lot to be said about it, since this is a major undertaking that will have an extensive impact on the future of those we hold most dear, namely, our children. This is why it seems essential for me to talk to you about this matter.

Let us keep in mind that the education reform in no way calls into question the broad objectives of Québec's schools. On the contrary, it reaffirms the schools' mission. They will continue to give priority to reading, writing and mathematics, because these are the keys to knowledge.

Québec's schools are changing, even though they still transmit knowledge and use traditional

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A word from the Minister (continued)

ways of teaching, like spelling tests. The education reform has made it possible to conceive of new approaches and develop new methods that complement the usual teaching practices. It is up to the teachers, however, to choose the ones best suited to their students.

I firmly believe that the education reform is essential to give Québec students, as individuals and citizens, tools that they can use

throughout their lives. This means that schools must, now more than ever, prepare young people to adapt to change and to life both as it is lived now and as it will be lived in years to come. There is no denying that the world has changed. In the past, we could see ourselves ending our working lives in the same careers in which we started, or doing the same job throughout our lives. Today, we change jobs regularly and, when we do not, it is our work habits that change.

All around us, the world is changing. Nations that are successful educate their children not by having them memorize facts, but by making sure they understand what they learn and are able to put it into practice. That is how the education reform sees the acquisition of knowledge and competencies.

I would like us to pursue this path so that young Quebecers can develop the same tools that others in the Western world have at their disposal.

Jean-Marc Fournier, Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports,
August 24, 2006

Today's schools still use traditional ways of teaching, like spelling tests.

We must prepare our young people to take their places in this continually evolving world. School has always been a place that facilitates learning, and it must continue to do so. But, faced with the challenges of the future, it must do much more: it must enable young people to learn how to learn, so that they can continue to acquire new knowledge throughout their lives. It must enable them to develop their potential from the start!

It is true that we demand much from our schools and the teams of professionals who work each day to transform them. All those staff members who prepare our young people to take up the challenges that this century poses in terms of knowledge and innovation are deserving of our respect!



This document takes stock of the education reform. It gives information on the evaluation of the reform conducted in the spring of this year, and on the steps that have already been taken to overcome problems. Please take the time to read it attentively. The implementation of the education reform is such an important process that we are monitoring it very closely in order to make the adjustments that are only normal and to be expected in a project of this scope.

Jean-Marc Fournier
Minister of Education,
Recreation and Sports

The ministers recognize that education systems should focus on developing intellectual capacity, not only in the mastery of content but in processing, adapting and applying existing information, and, most importantly, in creating new knowledge.

The G8 Education Ministers, June 2, 2006

Today's school must, more than ever before, prepare young people to adapt to change. Indeed, I would go even farther and say: not only must it prepare them to adapt to change, but the greatest possible number of young people must themselves become agents and initiators of change. Here in Québec, we have to develop strength through innovation. Were we to confine ourselves to importing the innovations of others, we would condemn ourselves to going backward. For we, too, have to innovate and extend our influence outward into the world.

Jean-Marc Fournier, Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports,
October 16, 2006

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The education reform: A necessary change

In the 1960s, the first objective of our education system was to give all people access to education. Another objective has now come to form the crux of school life: the success of the greatest possible number of students.

Québec schools are intended to offer your child the best education possible. The education reform is far from a passing fad, something put together on the spur of the moment. Begun in 2000, it is the outcome of an extensive process of reflection developed through the Estates General on Education, a series of public hearings that took place over the course of several years and ended in 1996.

Why reform the education system? First, because a quarter of a century had elapsed since the main programs of study, which are the teacher's essential tools, were last subjected to a thorough revision. In a society evolving at great speed, this in itself is a sufficient reason to consider an overhaul.

Second, even though our schools are already quite effective, there are still too many students failing or dropping out. The education reform will make it possible to develop more targeted measures in the battle against dropping out.

Among the changes that have been made, let us mention the fact that the schools now offer students more stimulating and concrete learning opportunities. They are now called upon to spark students' interest, and must enable them to understand the importance of acquiring new knowledge and to use it. Striving to interest students does not mean making things easier for them. On the contrary, when students are interested in what they are learning and find school meaningful, they become

Our young people are continuing to learn. But they must also learn how to learn, something that will be useful to them throughout their lives.

more involved and develop their potential more fully. In other words, interest is a path to involvement and rigorous study habits.



Education reform to foster young people's success

At the elementary level:

- Nine hours per week (instead of seven) in Language of Instruction in Cycle One
- Seven hours per week (instead of five) in Mathematics in Cycle One
- Five hours per week (instead of four) in Mathematics in Cycle Two and Cycle Three
- An additional 90 minutes of teaching time per week
- More time for Arts Education, French as a Second Language and Physical Education and Health

At the secondary level:

- An additional 150 hours of instruction in History and Citizenship Education spread over four years; teaching time will therefore increase from 200 to 350 hours for secondary school as a whole.
- More stringent requirements for obtaining a Secondary School Diploma (SSD): in addition to meeting the requirements already in place, as of June 2007 students will have to have successfully completed a Secondary IV Mathematics program and a Secondary IV Science program. (Presently, there are no Secondary IV science or mathematics requirements.)
- New education paths adapted to the needs and potential of each student: to begin with, a general education path, an applied general education path and a work-oriented training path
- A new Science and Technology program offered from Secondary I to IV: this program takes a more concrete approach to learning and stresses the connections between scientific concepts and their applications using the new technologies.
- Compulsory Arts Education courses in Secondary IV and V

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Children practise what they learn

The new programs of study are designed to transmit knowledge and to ensure that young people are able to use it. This is what we call the "acquisition of competencies." In the Science and Technology program, for example, students can see how energy is transformed in the construction and use of a wind power plant. In the process, they develop one of the competencies associated with the Science and Technology Program and with the Applied Science and Technology Program: Seeks answers or solutions to scientific or technological problems.

The school is still a place where students acquire knowledge. It also gives your child opportunities to use his or her knowledge in concrete situations. Thus, in addition to assimilating the content specific to each subject taught, particularly English, French and mathematics, your child is encouraged to apply what he or she has learned. This way of doing things sparks your child's curiosity and enables him or her to develop

good work habits. In fact, your child both learns and learns how to learn.

Clearly, the implementation of these new teaching methods is a very demanding task, and one that requires the support of teachers. They are the people in the best position to make professional decisions with respect to their students' learning. They therefore have all the autonomy they need to adapt their teaching methods. They are free to choose project-based learning, lecture-based teaching or any other method, depending on the needs of the class.

Report cards that are easier to understand

Because you are the person with the strongest interest in your child's success, you need to be kept informed of his or her progress. In this endeavour, the report card and the competency report constitute highly effective means of communication between the school and parents. But the information you receive must be clear and easy

to understand if it is to be effective. You can let your child's school know how you feel about the type of report card it provides, for this will serve to improve it. In fact, the Minister has tabled a bill that, if passed, will amend the *Education Act* to ensure that the school's governing board consults parents on this matter.

It is up to the teachers in each school to determine the type of report card and competency report that are most appropriate for the students. But this choice is subject to the approval of the school principal. Thus it is these education professionals, the teachers and administrators, who must develop and adopt these documents. In the future, the parents should also be consulted. Please note that a school can also opt to use a model proposed by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS).



The evaluation of the education reform at the elementary level

A comprehensive survey conducted by the MELS in 2006 gathered responses from some 2000 homeroom teachers, 1000 subject specialists (arts education, physical education and health, and second language teachers), 500 special education teachers, 650 school administrators and 240 elementary education consultants.

The preliminary report tabled in the wake of the survey shows that the implementation of the reform is progressing well despite some difficulties. The final version of the report, slated to be released before the end of this year, will contain other findings, such as those obtained from special education teachers and subject specialists (notably in Visual Arts) as well as additional recommendations.

Most of the teachers who responded to the survey stated that it is easy for students to acquire knowledge in each subject and to use this knowledge in new situations.

The Education Reform Steering Committee (Table de pilotage)

All of the schools' partners are involved in the implementation of the education reform and contribute to its success. They come together at meetings of the Education Reform Steering Committee, which is made up of representatives from the MELS and its main partners in education—teachers, parents, school administrators, school boards, private schools and universities. The Committee identifies issues and obstacles, takes stock of the situation periodically and suggest changes when necessary. It also develops permanent mechanisms to assess and monitor and make adjustments.

Thus implementing the education reform and monitoring it are responsibilities shared by the MELS and all its partners in the education system. The Education Reform Steering Committee promotes this sharing of responsibilities.

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Remedial measures

The preliminary survey report also highlighted some of the difficulties encountered in implementing the education reform. In light of these findings, which it fully supports, the Steering Committee tabled twelve recommendations that will soon result in concrete measures being taken. The Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports, Jean-Marc Fournier, reacted positively to the recommendations and has already begun to follow up on them.

Here are a few of the new measures that are of particular interest.

Reading in school

A command of reading skills is essential to student success. Teachers know this, which is why they consider reading in class so important. This work must be maintained since good reading skills have a positive impact on the quality of students' writing. To support efforts in this direction, the Steering Committee has recommended that the possibility be studied of extending the Action Plan on Reading in School and of hiring librarians or specialists trained in teacher assistance, school library management and organizing activities.

Various steps have been taken with the Corporation des bibliothécaires professionnels du Québec and the École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l'information with respect to the component of university library studies programs that deals with school libraries. The current Québec government has already approved investments of \$60 million in this area, over a three-year period. The MELS is also working on a plan that will combine the financing of library book purchases with the hiring of specialists in reading activities for young people.

If we want Québec to be a truly innovative society with a worldwide reputation, our adults of tomorrow must be able to deal with ongoing change.



Measures for students with special needs

Half of the teachers of regular classes who responded to the survey stated that it is harder to ensure that students with special needs succeed in school. This observation invites a closer examination of the situation. The question will be analyzed in greater detail in the final report, which will also contain data provided by special education teachers working with students. The final report on the progress achieved in implementing the QEP will soon be tabled. Already, in addition to the \$20 million invested in 2005-2006, \$60 million of the \$100 million to be allocated over three years have been earmarked this year for hiring the resources required in schools.

When it adopted its budget for 2006-2007, the government announced an additional investment of \$660 million for education. Initiatives like homework assistance programs, increased teaching time in elementary school, and support for students from disadvantaged communities and for those with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties help keep the school effective by enabling it to offer students a balanced education and to help them succeed.

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It's important for you to be involved

If students are to succeed, their families must be involved in their education. And this requires clear and open communication. As a parent, you can play an active role in the operation of the school by participating in its activities and in those of the governing board. The educational project and success plan of the school your child is attending are excellent tools that provide you with information on the objectives and means selected to help students succeed.

You also have certain rights as a parent, particularly the right to be informed of all decisions pertaining to your child's education, to be consulted on mat-

ters concerning your child's progress in school, and to have access to teachers, the governing board and the school administration.



The role of the governing boards

The governing boards were created to enable each school to adapt its services to the characteristics of its community and the population it serves.

The governing boards are made up of parents, school staff and community representatives. The chair is always selected from among the parents. Governing boards make decisions relating to class schedules, the time allocated for each subject, the school's budget, the use of school property and other matters.



The Homework Assistance program is another way of helping young people succeed. In 2006, nearly 2000 homework assistance programs were operating, aided by investments in the amount of \$20 million.

Should you wish to know more

Should you wish to know more about the education reform, please contact the administration of the school your child is attending, your school board or one of the MELS regional offices. You can also consult the MELS Web site at: www.mels.gouv.qc.ca





A school that does more

- The school transmits knowledge and enables students to develop competencies.
- While teachers still use traditional methods like spelling tests, they do so much more: through various projects they show students how they can use the knowledge they have acquired. This makes school meaningful.
- The new report cards provide more detailed evaluations. And they are required to be clear and easy to understand.
- The school must prepare our young people to take up the challenges of our century, which is one marked by innovation. To do this, the school itself must be innovative. The new teaching methods call upon teachers to continually upgrade their skills.
- The application of the new teaching methods is a very demanding task, and one that requires the support of teachers, who are in the best position to make professional decisions with respect to their students' learning.
- The implementation and monitoring of the education reform are responsibilities shared by the MELS and all its partners in the education system.

Graphic design: Mac Design

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Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2006—06-00691

ISBN 2-550-48345-6 (Print version)
978-2-550-48345-8
ISBN 2-550-48346-4 (PDF version)
978-2-550-48346-5

Legal Deposit — Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2006