



QAIS POSITION ON BILL 40

APPELE-Quebec Hearing on Bill 40

November 19, 2019

On behalf of the Quebec Association of Independent Schools (QAIS) I wish to start off by congratulating APPELE-Quebec for hosting these hearings. We are faced with a massive transformation of the governance of our public-school system, and it is critical that multiple voices be heard. This is an essential part of our democratic process, and we regret that the Government has opted to limit participation in its hearings which ended a week ago.

Let me start off by explaining who we are. The Quebec Association of Independent Schools is an organization consisting of English elementary and secondary independent schools licensed in the public interest and located in Quebec. You might be surprised that we are here today to comment on Bill 40 since the legislation focuses solely on the public-school system. Our 23 member schools are not affected by the Bill.

Yet it does concern us.

Most importantly we are talking about our young people and the future of English-speaking Quebec. It goes without saying that we have to get this right. As members of the English-speaking community we all know that schools, whether public or private, are at the heart of our community. They are gathering places which offer a host of programs and play a key role in ensuring our vitality and identity.

We are also here for selfish reasons. We benefit from a strong public-school system on a number of levels. Our students, for example, compete on sports fields and hockey rinks as well as in robotics and debating. Our faculty and staff may transfer from one system to the other. But the most important benefit is that strong schools, whether public or independent, that ensure our young people have the skills and education necessary to live and work in Quebec are critical to our vitality.

And we have particular concerns with the Bill because its governance provisions run contrary to accepted best practices. In this regard I wish to stress that our member schools, represented by the Head of School, are not for profit, fiscally sound educational institutions governed by, and responsible to, an arm's length Board of Governors.

I stress this because our Boards of Governors are in many respects equivalent to a school board, but obviously smaller.

Our Boards of Governors are elected by the school community or more precisely graduates and current parents. The precise membership of the Boards varies from school to school. But in almost all cases it is a mixture of graduates and parents. At Selwyn House School, for example, the majority of members have to be Old Boys, while at Centennial Academy the majority have to be current parents. And in some cases, experts from outside the school community are invited to join the Board. At Trafalgar School for Girls, a seat is reserved for a representative of the Anglican Church.

The Board is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the school which involves, for example, ensuring its financial stability and that its programs respond to the needs of the school community. Just like our school boards which introduced French immersion on its own without government support and intervention, our schools too have enhanced our French instruction. At most of our elementary schools 50% of the elementary school programming is taught in French.

The bottom line is that our Boards form a critical link between the school and its stakeholders, from faculty to alumni and parent.

I should also stress that being an effective Board member is a volunteer job, but it is a demanding one. The time commitment is significant and should not be underestimated

I raise all of this because of the parallel with school boards or the proposed Service Centre Boards. These bodies are most effective when they are comprised of parents and community representatives.

In looking at the draft legislation, we are concerned about a number of elements.

Firstly, parents are busy people. By definition they have children who likely have a host of after school activities, from sports to music lessons and community service. And then of course there is homework duty and making dinner and lunch for the next day. To suggest that a parent can serve on the governing board of a school and on a Service Centre Board is unrealistic. There simply is not enough time in a day.

Secondly community representation on a board beyond parents is vital. At QAIS schools community representatives bring key skills ranging from finance to fundraising and strategy. It is essential to have broad representation, and the restrictive criteria for candidates that are set in the legislation are once again impractical and counter-productive.

I would like to comment on one other element of the Service Centre Board composition. The proposal to have staff representation on the Boards will put these members in challenging positions. It will be difficult for a teacher to be on the Service Centre Board while reporting to the Director General who reports to the Board. The Quebec model is for the Director General and his colleagues to attend meetings but not to have the right to vote. The same approach should be adopted for Service Centres.

In conclusion, stakeholder involvement is a key ingredient for a successful school system. We should be doing everything we can to encourage it. Unfortunately, Bill 40 seems to be moving in

the opposite direction, adding unnecessary layers of complication. We support APPELE-Quebec's call for significant amendments to the Board composition.

I would now be pleased to answer any questions you may have.