



BRIEF

of the Canadian School Boards Association
on Bill 40 An Act to amend mainly the Education Act with regard to
school organization and governance

November 2019

The Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) is the national voice of school boards and represents governing school board members from across the country through their provincial associations. The CSBA is a champion for collaboration and innovation in public education for both the delivery of education, governing systems and working with government. Governing school boards connect with their communities to set policies that reflect the needs of their students and schools, holding systems accountable to citizens for achieving student success. The CSBA is committed to effective governance of public education and the well-being and achievement of each and every Canadian student. Trustees are a key to supporting student success through local input and are willing to work to strengthen mutual outcomes for the system, instead of rushing to an ill-planned process. There is no evidence that the proposed legislation is linked in any way to improved student outcomes.

The CSBA and the members and communities we represent across the country are shocked and saddened by Bill 40, which, if adopted, will rob majority French-speaking citizens of a public education system governed by democratically elected community members dedicated to public education, and will significantly reduce the democratic process and representation for English minority language students and their families. The service centres proposed do not reflect full representation or participation of all citizens affected by education investments and outcomes. In a democratic society, all should have the opportunity to vote (not only those with direct involvement), and similarly all should have the opportunity to run to represent – education is a societal investment.

The democratic practice of electing representation to serve the needs of citizens is a cornerstone of Canadian society, and this applies to representation supporting public education. Governing school boards are members of the communities they serve, dedicated to the public education system, providing access and transparency to local decisions. [Democracy is a fundamental right in Canada that should be strengthened as opposed to eroded.](#)

The solution to concerns with a democratic system is to improve it, not to eliminate it or reduce it to a level that erodes Charter rights. If the provincial government of Quebec has concerns with governing school boards, we call on them to work **WITH** the provincial school boards associations to strengthen these roles in service of students to whom they are accountable.

Recent research strongly indicates that “high functioning governing school boards support student success and quality public education”, found here <http://www.cdnsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Elected-School-Boards-Literature-Review-FINAL.pdf>.

We also call on the government of Quebec to revise the election process for governing school boards if voter turnout is a concern. Low voter turnout is a challenge that touches all levels of government. In other jurisdictions across Canada, school board elections are tied with municipal elections to support voter turnout, reduce duplication of costs and improve accessibility. Quebec should consider following a similar approach, further strengthening community engagement. Well-informed effective leaders understand that the decision of citizens not to vote does not justify the elimination of the citizens’ right to vote.

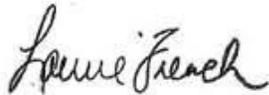
All people of Quebec have a right to democratically elected governing school boards in their public education systems, regardless if schooling is in French or English. We have seen the loss

of majority English governing school boards in Nova Scotia and the negative effect this is having on the education community. Parents, guardians, students and education staff have spoken out that they no longer have access to policy and decision makers. This elimination of community voice has not improved public education. Having community members govern public education is vital for both majority and minority communities. There is no evidence that erosion of democratic process and elimination of universal suffrage for English minority language systems will have a positive impact on student well-being and achievement.

Public education deserves community representation via all governing school boards who have the autonomy to make the best decisions for their students. Of national importance, and certainly in Quebec, one of the key enablers to the Calls to Action of the TRC relies on school boards, and this has been evidenced specifically through examples of developing relationships with school boards across Canada - often with a dedicated Indigenous Trustee or Indigenous Education Committees involving local Indigenous representatives. Centralizing this, or relegating it to purely advisory is another way this legislation is not true to the right to manage and control education for minority groups. We urge the Minister to reconsider this legislation and work with school boards to strengthen student success for all citizens, for now and future generations.

We strongly recommend that the government of Quebec examine and model its plan for public education on areas of the country where school boards and provincial governments collaborate and shared governance is in place. It is clear that such collaboration is working very well for students, their families and all citizens.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie French". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laurie French
President, CSBA