



OFTP

The Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents

A Provincial Organization for Homeschooling Families

www.ontariohomeschool.org

Commentaire sur le projet de règlement de la Loi sur l'instruction publique publiée dans la Gazette officielle du Québec du 27 mars 2019

May 6, 2019

Dear Minister Roberge,

We, the members of the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents, stand in solidarity with homeschooling families in Quebec in opposition to the proposed changes to the regulation of home education in that province.

We urge you to work with Quebec homeschooling parents in the following ways:

Give the current unmodified regulation a chance

The Education Act and Homeschooling Regulation of 2018 already provide extensive supervision of homeschooling families. You have given the legislation less than a year to prove its efficacy, so there is no data upon which to base notions that stricter measures are warranted.

We urge you to cancel the modification proposal and to wait a minimum of three years for the current legislation to have a chance to prove itself. If changes are then warranted, they could and should be based on factual evidence.

Give homeschooling parents a say

Homeschooling parents were consulted during the process leading up to the 2018 Act and Regulation. As a result, they are invested in meeting the current requirements and collaborating with the Direction de l'Enseignement à la Maison (DEM). However, you did not consult with homeschooling parents before drafting your proposed modification of the law. It will be hard for parents to believe in your respect for them and for democracy if you push the proposal through in its currently drafted form.

We urge you to re-establish the issue table that was suspended in August 2018, and not to ignore the input families and homeschooling organizations submit as part of the public consultation process.

Heed and implement the Ombudsman's recommendations

In 2015 and 2018, the Quebec Ombudsman made specific recommendations regarding homeschooling. Supplemented by the testimonials and information provided by homeschooling families themselves, the Ombudsman's research into the issues provides you with all the context, analysis, and recommendations needed to shape regulations in an appropriate way. The Education Act and Homeschooling Regulation of 2018 were intended to address the concerns raised by the Ombudsman in a way that protects parents' freedom and flexibility as well as the Province's desire for oversight. An additional, stricter modification such as you are proposing, is neither needed, justified, nor fair.

We urge you not to ignore the Ombudsman's work and recommendations, but to stay within the framework of flexibility, freedom, and respectful collaboration and support that the Ombudsman outlined.

Example: "Le Protecteur du citoyen constate que la possibilité pour les intervenants scolaires d'offrir aux parents un choix parmi différents moyens d'évaluation favoriserait la collaboration et renforcerait leur capacité à évaluer l'équivalence de l'expérience éducative et de l'enseignement reçu par leurs enfants."

Understand the implications of what you're proposing

You insist that your proposed changes will not greatly affect homeschooling families who are doing their job properly. This is not true. Contrary to your statements, 99% of Quebec's homeschooling families state that they would, in fact, be significantly and negatively affected, according to a recent survey conducted by the Association québécoise pour l'éducation à domicile (AQED). By imposing ministerial exams, the proposed regulation would impose the Quebec curriculum upon which the exams are based, since it would make no sense to require a child to be tested on material which they had not yet studied. The project of following the government's standardized curriculum and grade system cannot be undertaken as a simple supplementation to parents' existing approach to their child's education. Not only would it take up time currently used in the parents' educational methodology, crowding out available hours in which to pursue alternate forms of education, it would also require sabotaging certain kinds of approaches altogether, since they are rooted in avoiding the kind of coercion and restrictive directives involved in imposing specific lessons within a specific time-frame and in a specific manner that prepares a child for standardized tests.

We urge you to allow homeschooling parents to continue having the option of portfolio assessments as an alternative to ministerial exams, so that you are not inadvertently imposing an institutional curriculum and approach.

Be honest about what you are trying to accomplish

If the imposition of the school system's ways is not inadvertent but deliberate on your part, we urge you to reconsider, for at least these reasons:

- You have stated yourself: the school system is failing too many students.
- It doesn't make sense to force a replication of a failing standardized system at the expense of a customized education tailored to a given child's own unique needs, abilities, interests, stages of psycho-cognitive development, learning style and pace, learning path and pattern, and natural curiosity and delight.
- It would not provide any additional boost to the government's ability to monitor children deemed at risk of educational neglect, nor any illegal schools the government suspects of hiding under the guise of homeschooling.

An overly restrictive and authoritarian stance tends to backfire, pushing those considered neglectful to hide even deeper, while those who were never a problem in the first place are punished by the overreaching, restrictive, ineffective measures.

We urge you to recognize that all the relevant laws as they currently stand are adequate to address any perceived problems with illegal schools and neglect of education.

Recognize what is not working

In the introduction to your book *Et si on réinventait l'école?* you deplore the state of literacy in Quebec, noting that “over half of the population (53%) has such a weak mastery of reading that they cannot function normally in society.” This is part of why you suggested it was time to reinvent school. It is the institutional school system that is responsible for those literacy statistics, since only a very small proportion of the population has been homeschooled. However, little has changed in the last three years since your book was published. If the school system as it is now is failing over half of its students, why do you want to remove homeschooled children from their custom-tailored and successful alternative approaches to education, and impose the same standardized approach to education that is failing in schools? Your book includes a quote attributed to Albert Einstein, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

We urge you to acknowledge that the system does not work for all children. For children who were removed from the school system precisely because it wasn't working for them, homeschooling offers a totally different approach that allows them to learn so much more and so much more easily. We know, from the experience of homeschooling families whose children have now grown up, that today's children who struggled in school and are now homeschooled have a much greater chance than they did in school, to be literate by the time they enter the workforce and adult life. For it to work, they need to be able to follow their own pace, which is not necessarily the same timetable as

the standard tests would require. To force them to revert to an approach geared to standard exams would damage not only their ability to progress academically but also their mental, emotional, and social well-being and self-esteem.

Even for students without learning difficulties, standardized tests would be detrimental to homeschooled children for the same reasons that they are criticized within the school system. Many object that standard tests do not measure what they're designed to, that they promote test-oriented studying at the expense of true learning, that they provoke stress and anxiety, and that they often undermine a child's self-esteem. In its report, "Évaluer pour que ça compte vraiment," the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation stated that the excessive focus on exams encourages superficial learning strategies instead of helping to develop 21st century competencies.

We therefore urge you not to impose the school system's failing approach on homeschoolers by imposing ministerial exams and the kind of preparatory work that they require.

Understand and support the value of educational freedom and diversity

There is no perfect one-size-fits-all way to educate children. The standardization of the institutional school system was designed around the logistics of mass instruction, not any given child's best interests. The system's curriculum, compartmentalization of subjects, and grade structure, may be loosely based on the statistical norms of childhood psycho-cognitive development, but individual children are not statistics. Each child has their own unique natural learning path. Some children adapt easily to standardization, but even those who perform well in the system do not usually enjoy or retain their learning as much as they might if their school days were not so regimented.

If we wish to reinvent school – which we could probably agree that we all do – wouldn't the goal be to tailor it more to each individual child, so that each child's needs could be met? In other words, wouldn't we want the system to be more like homeschooling, rather than the other way around?

There is another aspect to diversity, aside from the benefits at the personal level. At the group level, enforced uniformity stifles innovation and improvement. When parents are allowed to depart from the teaching norms of institutional schools to make pedagogical discoveries about what works for their own particular child, this contributes to a pool of knowledge and experience that can benefit the school system as well.

Does the government not trust its own citizens as parents? Is Quebec a province where children belong to the State more than to their own families? Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education their children shall receive." Is the province not then bound to give parents the freedom to choose between more than one option? More importantly, why would a government claiming to want what's best for each individual child, deny a homeschooled child the pedagogical approach that has proven itself to be

best for that particular young mind? Where is the child's right to an education, if that education cannot be tailored to the child's own needs?

Minister, we are sure that you do not seek to make the homeschooling children of Quebec be the sacrificial lambs of an effort to prove the previous government's regulation is "insipid." We are sure that, given a chance to measure the politics against the lives of real children, when it comes down to it, you want what's best for all the children of Quebec. We ask you to recognize that the parents of Quebec's homeschooling families do as well. Is it not in the best interests of the children that the government and homeschooling parents get along and work together as they have in the past? **We urge you to demonstrate your goodwill to do so**, by cancelling the current modification proposal, re-establishing the issue table, and waiting a minimum of three years for the 2018 legislation to show results before considering any changes to it, in consultation with those affected.

It is not too late to do the right thing by allowing this consultation period to have meaning and impact, manifesting as the above actions.

We ask it for the welfare and harmonious development of all Quebec's homeschooling children.

Respectfully yours,

The Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents / La Fédération ontarienne de parents enseignants

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