

CHALLENGES AROUND RESOURCES AND SERVICES IN QUEBEC'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCHOOLS¹

Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN)

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English-language schools² in Quebec struggle with diverse challenges, from urban and rural poverty to being located in isolated and remote areas.

These issues impact the services and resources available to students and schools already constrained by a declining student population (Advisory Board on English Education [ABEE], 2018).

Schools in remote areas with isolated communities are in special need of additional support, since they tend to serve students who do not have access to many services and resources outside of the school (ABEE, 2018). Many of these schools have very small student populations, which impacts the funding available. Community Learning Centres (CLCs), an initiative in the English education sector, have already proven to be very beneficial in remote areas, helping these schools, student populations, and their communities access more resources and programs, both educational and social (Gonsalves, Kueber, Langevin, & Pocock, 2014; Langevin & Lamarre, 2016).³

It is not only remote areas, however, that have **schools with small student populations**. They can also be found in rural, semi-rural, and even some urban settings. Small student populations in urban settings make schools vulnerable to closure. This is a recent issue that the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) experienced as three schools in the east end of Montreal underwent mergers and transfers as a result of the lack of students and the urgent need for school buildings within the Francophone sector. This resulted in some EMSB establishments consolidating, as well as two schools being handed over to the Commission scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'Île (CSPI) (EMSB, 2019, 2020).

¹ This document draws primarily on the Advisory Board on English Education (ABEE) report of 2018.

² English-language schools in Quebec are legally recognized as official language minority (OLM) schools under section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, with a mandate to protect and promote the vitality of Quebec's English-speaking minority. In this and other briefs in this series, the terms "English-language schools" and "OLM schools" will be used interchangeably.

³ For more information on CLCs, see Research Brief 8 in this series.

⁴ Some schools like General Vanier had enrolment rates that represented less than half (45%) of the school's capacity (191/422 for 2018-2019), and their projections for the coming years suggested a continued decline (English Montreal School Board [EMSB], 2019).

Faced with the desire to maintain educational institutions, even when the school population drops below 200 or even 100 students, the English-language school system has sought creative organizational solutions. One solution is to provide elementary and secondary schooling in the same building rather than in separate facilities, allowing students to remain in their communities for the duration of their studies. A second, but less common, solution has been to share a school building with the local French-speaking community, particularly interesting when the school-aged population of both communities is small, and long bus travel to the next OLM school can thus be avoided (Quebec English School Boards Association [QESBA], 2002).

According to the ABEE report (2018), rigid funding parameters require a school to have a minimum number of students for it to receive financial support, thus making it harder for small schools. Some English-language school boards have small numbers of students in schools dispersed over large geographic areas, and students are required to travel great distances to attend an OLM school when a French-language school is closer—in some cases, students can travel up to two hours every morning and every evening to be schooled in English (QESBA, 2002).

There are also challenges around offering support services to students in the English-language education sector.⁵ One reason is that support professionals need to pass a government-required written French test. Some leeway in this area would allow school boards to recruit professionals from outside the province to fill this need. Furthermore, many professionals have to travel great distances to provide services, increasing costs and leading to minimal and sporadic provision of help. The **lack of support services** (speech therapists, psychologists, etc.) is felt most acutely in remote schools that are too small to attract professionals (ABEE, 2013, 2018).

With the inclusive education model favoured in English-language schools, **students with special needs** are for the most part being integrated into the regular classroom (90% in 2020-2021) (ABEE, 2021). According to ABEE's report (2018), the integration of students is not sufficiently funded, and there are extra costs associated with the support services needed.

In addition to disadvantaged English-speaking communities in remote settings, such as the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands, poverty also exists within urban centres, notably within the Anglophone⁶ community in the Montreal area (Pocock, 2018a, 2018b). On the island of Montreal, 19 elementary and 10 secondary schools currently serve students from neighbourhoods with low socioeconomic status, representing 32% of the English-language public elementary and 40% of the English-language public secondary schools in the area (MEQ, 2022).⁷ A particular issue in urban English-language schools is the growing number of students from disadvantaged families, an indirect consequence of the outmigration of young, educated English-speaking Quebecers over the years. The number of English-language schools eligible for additional financial support has doubled in recent years, as a growing body of students meets criteria for support (ABEE, 2018; Lamarre, 2012).

⁵ For more information on this topic, see Research Brief 4 in this series.

⁶ Until recently, the provincial government defined "Anglophone" as someone for whom English is their first language learned and still understood. The statistics here reflect this definition of the English-speaking community, which excludes "Allophones" who are more proficient in English than French.

⁷ In 2021-2022, 14 out of 32 elementary schools and 8 out of 16 secondary schools within the English Montreal School Board, as well as 5 out of 35 elementary schools and 2 out of 11 secondary schools within the Lester B. Pearson School Board, were considered disadvantaged (MEQ, 2022).

To meet the needs of marginalized or underprivileged students, initiatives such as the New Approaches /New Solutions (NANS) program⁸ have been implemented along with others undertaken by Community Learning Centres (CLCs) (Langevin & Lamarre, 2016; LEARN, 2016).

In Quebec, **Indigenous students** are mostly educated in English-language schools and are a very diverse and often forgotten population within the OLM education sector. Support is needed to make the curriculum more flexible and culturally relevant to them. The First Nations Education Council Regional Education Agreement signed in 2022 is a positive step in that direction. A few initiatives at the university level have been implemented,⁹ but more and continued cooperation and communication are also needed between educational institutions and essential services in the community to assure the health and well-being of these students (ABEE, 2017, 2018). Some innovative partnerships and solutions can be found in CLC schools, where a focus on community has contributed to the emergence of this challenge and to initiatives to promote recognition of Indigenous peoples and reconciliation.

A further concern across educational institutions in Quebec is the condition of **physical and structural environments**. Thirty-nine percent of all primary and secondary schools were in good condition in 2023; the remaining 61% were reported as sub-par (Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor [SCT], 2023). It is not clear how many of these schools are in the English sector. On a positive note, in February 2020, the Quebec Premier and the Minister of Education and Higher Education announced their new vision and the architectural design developed for the “new generation of schools” that will be used to build new schools and renovate current ones (MEES, 2020b). It has not yet been specified how many English-language schools will be part of this project, but a few new schools are in the works.¹⁰

To better manage the challenges facing English schools, ABEE (2018) is calling for more flexibility from the ministry and proposes that “equity, not equality” should guide how official minority schools are funded and supported. English-language schools must deal with problems that face all schools, but with the added challenges of preparing English-speaking students for life in a French Quebec, as well as promote the culture and vitality of the official language minority. They must do all this with a declining English-speaking student population that is increasingly from a disadvantaged demographic. As student population declines, so do much needed funds and resources.

Montreal Region English-Language Schools with Student Populations from Low Socioeconomic Neighborhoods, 2022

30%

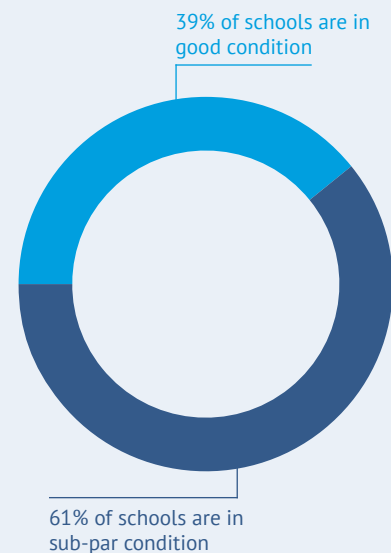
of public elementary schools

40%

of public secondary schools

Source: MEQ, 2022

Physical and Structural Condition of English-Language and French-Language Schools in Quebec, 2023



Source: SCT, 2023

⁸ This is a provincial government initiative that also exists in French-language schools under the name “Agir autrement.” For more information see <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/teachers/student-retention-and-student-success/action-strategy-on-student-retention-and-student-success/13-paths-to-success/7/>.

⁹ Initiatives include McGill University’s space for Indigenous learning in medical school and Université Laval’s Maison des savoirs.

¹⁰ An English-language elementary school (Eastern Townships School Board) opened in Drummondville in 2022, a new English-language elementary school (Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board) is planned for Saint-Lin-Laurentides in 2024, as well as the New Liverpool Elementary School (Central Quebec Schools Board) in Lévis in 2024.

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Education Research Briefs

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