

# PROVISION OF SERVICES TO SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN QUEBEC'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>

Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN)

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In Quebec, a growing number of students are identified as having special needs, and it is currently estimated that this population represents one in five students (22.4%) in the public school system (Ministère de l'Éducation [MEQ], 2021).

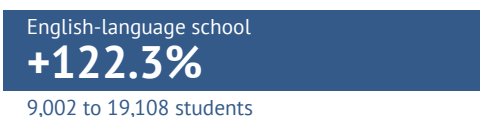
## The increase of special needs students in English-language schools<sup>2</sup> has been especially significant, despite a greater decline in the total student population of these schools.

Between 2001 and 2016, Quebec's English-language school boards reported that the number of students with special needs increased from 9,002 to 19,108 (a 112.3% increase), compared with a much lower increase in French-language schools, from 108,252 to 173,061 students (a 59.9% increase) over the same period of time (CDPDI, 2018).

<sup>1</sup> This document draws primarily on the Advisory Board of English Education 2018 and the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse 2018 reports.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

### Comparison of Number of Students with Special Needs, Quebec's English- and French-Language Public schools, 2001 to 2016



Quebec's *Politique de l'adaptation scolaire* calls for the integration of special needs students into regular classes, since this is deemed beneficial to their success.

## The rate of integration of special needs students into regular classes throughout the years has been consistently higher in English-language schools than in French-language schools.

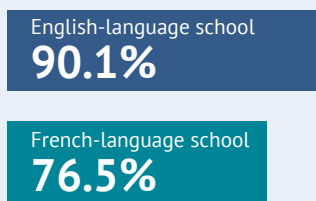
In 2020-2021, the rate of integration was 90.1% in English-language public schools as opposed to 76.5% in the French-language sector (ABEE, 2021). A higher integration rate does not necessarily guarantee a higher rate of student success if schools lack resources (e.g., classroom aides, psychologists, speech therapists, and social workers) to address special needs.

Integration comes with many challenges and costs. Some English-language schools have limited or no ability to provide adequate support. Identifying students' learning needs is a multi-step process. As a result of administrative requirements that slow the process, there can be delays in putting adapted services in place. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of access to qualified professionals to do the diagnostic assessment and ensure follow-up. Some parents turn to private resources and clinics to get quicker diagnoses for their children, but these are not always recognized by schools. Increased classroom resources to help support special needs students is a request made repeatedly in the English-language public education sector. Other challenges include attracting English-speaking professionals, who have to meet French-language proficiency requirements to become members of a professional order in Quebec. In some situations, French-speaking professionals are considered a shared resource. These professionals do not always have the adequate language abilities to work with English-speaking students (Protecteur du citoyen, 2022; ABEE, 2018; CDPDJ, 2018).

Despite widespread recognition of the critical importance of early intervention, many students remain undiagnosed, and their risk of academic failure increases over time. Additionally, the push for students' integration into mainstream classes creates environments in which teachers face situations for which they have not always been prepared, resulting in students failing to receive properly diagnosed support (ABEE, 2006; CDPDJ, 2018).

**In short, there are not enough professional resources for special needs students, and teachers do not always have adequate training to deal with children in difficulty.**

### Rate of Regular Class Integration in Public Schools for 2020-2021



Source: ABEE, 2021

The general short supply of support personnel in English-language schools is even more acute in remote regions. This is in part due to the lack of incentives to attract English-speaking professionals to these regions. Moreover, small regional schools can refer only a certain number of students to psychologists per year because of the lack of available professionals, irrespective of the actual number in need (ABEE, 2018).

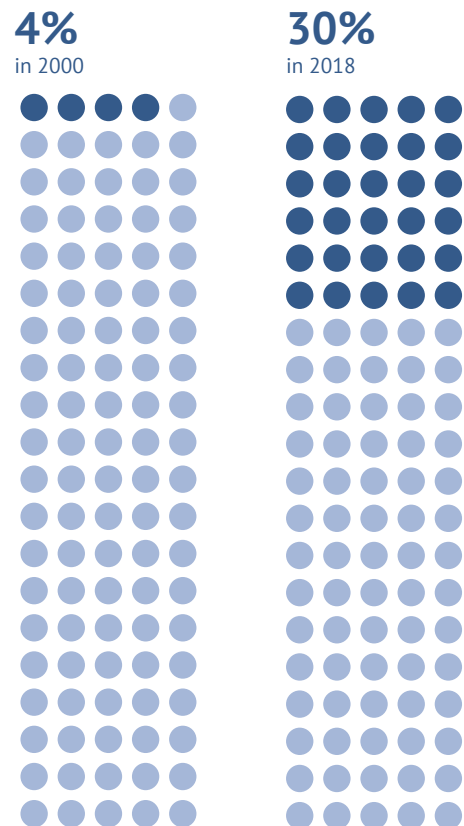
Finally, English-language schools in remote areas frequently take on a community support role, since they are often the only English-language institutions in the local community. Other organizations (e.g., those offering health and social services) often have limited ability to provide services for English-speaking communities, which “places a great burden on the English school system to be the primary provider for all these services, whereas these external agencies should be supporting the school system” (ABEE, 2018, p. 23). On a more positive note, recent reports show that, when a school adopts a Community Learning Centre (CLC) approach, access to health services for students is increased through partnerships of CLC schools with the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) (Gonsalves, Kueber, Langevin, & Pocock, 2014; Langevin & Lamarre, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

Across the province, the CDPDJ has seen an increase in complaints regarding services for special needs students. Around 30% of the active complaints in 2018 related to the English-language system, a large increase from 4% in 2000. In 2018, the CDPDJ concluded that the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur must set standards to ensure that an adequate number of professionals can assess the needs of these students, recommend and provide appropriate accommodation measures, and offer support to teachers in regular classes (CDPDJ, 2018). It would be beneficial if these standards addressed the specific challenges faced by English-language schools, particularly small schools and those in remote areas.

In summary, evidence suggests that there should be a stronger support system available for students with special needs in English-language public schools. Collaboration and assistance should come from organizations in early childhood educational services and health and social services, such as those emerging through the CHSSN and CLC school partnerships. Help is needed, not only with the assessment and diagnosis of special needs students, but with the promotion of early intervention and support services (Protecteur du citoyen, 2022; CDPDJ, 2018). This is true for the whole public school system, but even more so in the English-language public education sector.

<sup>3</sup> In 2019-2020, 82% of parents stated their child received support from a community organization (Protecteur du citoyen, 2022).

**Percentage of Complaints to the CDPDJ on Services for Special Needs Students that Relate to the English-Language Public School System**



Source: CDPJ, 2018

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To consult any of these references online, see a complete hyperlinked list of documents here:

<https://tinyurl.com/quescrenbriefs>



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### Education Research Briefs

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