



Research Brief no. 5

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF QUEBEC'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCHOOLS: COMPLEXITY, CHANGES, AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN)

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The definition of English-speaking Quebecers is complex, evolving, and varies according to different political stakes and jurisdictions. The narrowest definition limits the population to those with English as their sole mother tongue. The broadest definition includes non-native speakers who use English with greater or equal frequency than French (Jedwab, 2010; Donovan, 2015).

Quebec's English-speaking community is demographically complex and has always been heterogeneous, marked even in the early years by members' ancestry from different parts of Britain (England, Wales, Scotland) and Ireland, but also other places of origin, including Blacks with African ancestry. They had a variety of heritage languages and tended to divide the institutions and schools they founded along religious lines, predominantly Catholic/Protestant. In the 20th century, as newcomers arrived from a broader range of countries, community ethno-linguistic diversity correspondingly grew.¹ Thus, today's community members have identities influenced by multiple linguistic, ethnic, and regional backgrounds.

What is more, regardless of linguistic background, English-French bilingualism is on the rise in Quebec. In 2016, the province's Anglophones were more bilingual than Francophones: the rate of French-English bilingualism for people with English as a mother tongue was 67%, followed by 51% for those with a mother tongue other than English or French, and 42% for those with French as a mother tongue. This rate was even higher among youth (Norris, 2022).

2021 French-English Bilingualism Rate

67%
with English
as a mother tongue

51%
with mother tongue
other than English or French

42%
with French
as a mother tongue

Source: Norris, 2022

¹ For further information on the historical portrait of the changing makeup of the English-speaking community, see Donovan (2015).

The relationship between English-speaking Quebecers' language and identity is also complicated. Magnan et al.'s (2018) study of youth in official language minority (OLM) schools² outside Montreal argues that “feelings of language competence and insecurity play a large role in the identification process of young people” (p. 113). This does not mean that language skills directly translate into identification as a member of a language community. Other studies on young people show that, while some youth in English-language schools identify as bilingual, most bilingual youth retain a sense of belonging to either the French- or English-speaking communities of Quebec, regardless of high-level competence in both languages (Côté, Lamarre, & Razakamanana, 2016; Côté, Lamarre, & Lavoie, 2022).

The backgrounds of students in English-language schools are also diverse and changing.

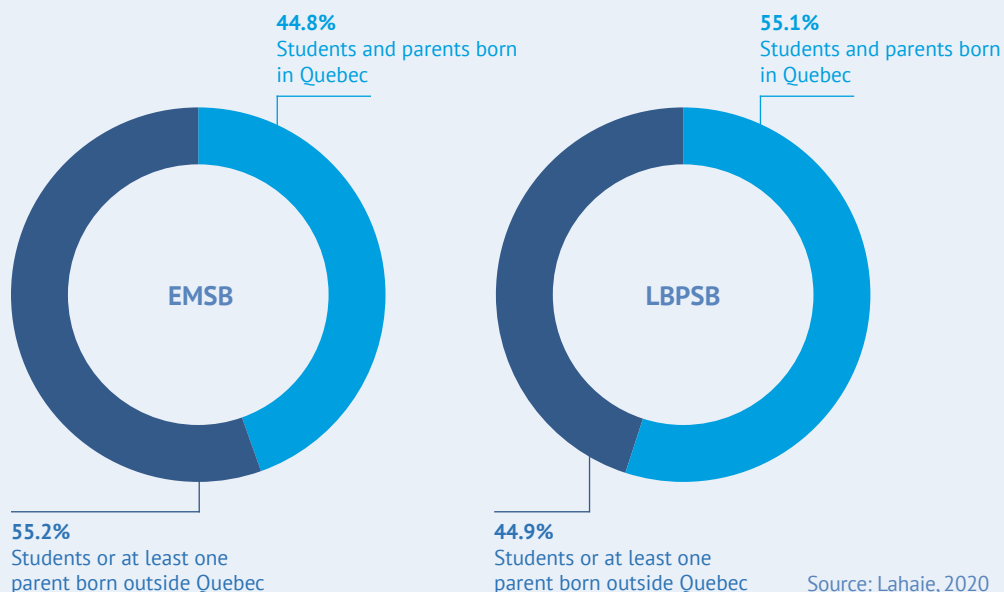
One element of the diversity is place of birth. In 2021, 41.7% of children who had attended an OLM school had an immigrant background (Statistics Canada, 2022).³ Table 1 presents 2019 data on this for the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) and the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB), both on the island of Montreal,⁴ showing that around half the students have at least one parent born outside Quebec. It is worth noting that these percentages are even higher in French-language public schools on the island, where over three quarters of the population have at least one parent born outside Quebec (Lahaie, 2020).

² English-language schools in Quebec are legally recognized as official language minority (OLM) schools at the federal and provincial levels, with a mandate to protect and promote the vitality of Quebec's English-speaking minority. In this brief, the terms “English-language schools” and “OLM schools” will be used interchangeably.

³ Immigrant background refers to people born outside Canada or with one or both of their parents born outside Canada.

⁴ The LBPSB territory also includes parts of the Montérégie region to the southwest of Montreal.

Percentage of students and their parents born outside of Canada in two Island-of-Montreal English-language school boards for 2019



There is also considerable linguistic diversity in the student population in English-language schools. **Over a third of students in the English-language sector do not have English as their mother tongue.** In 2021, the Greater Montreal Area English-language schools were made up of 73% Anglophones, 17% Francophones, and 11% Allophones in comparison to regional schools which were comprised of 54% Francophones, 43% Anglophones, and 3% Allophones (Quebec English School Boards Association [QESBA], 2021). The proportion of French mother tongue students in English-language schools has more than doubled since 1986, while the proportion of Allophones has gradually decreased in this same period. Since the 2006 census, there have been more Francophones than Allophones in the public English-language school system, particularly outside Montreal.⁵ EMSB schools are an exception, with Allophones (22%) significantly outnumbering Francophones (7%) in 2020-2021 (QESBA, 2021).⁶

The composition of Quebec's English-language school personnel has also changed. The adoption since the 1970s of French immersion and other forms of bilingual education in the English sector requires teachers with high-level French language skills to teach French language and grammar and subjects taught in French, such as history. Many such teachers are Francophone, and may be less invested in English-speaking community identity, vitality issues, and community history. Zanazanian (2008) conducted a study including Francophone history teachers in OLM schools and found that “[w]hile respectful of the Anglophone milieu in which they work, they are aware of the differences between them and the English and don’t seem to be concerned with merging any gaps” (p. 124). Going beyond the staffing question, elsewhere Zanazanian (2016) suggests that the content of the Quebec history curriculum needs revisiting to include English-speaking Quebec history.⁷ This is all the more pertinent for the curriculum being taught in OLM schools.

Impacting the English sector is the **increasing number of English-speaking families sending their children to French-language schools.** The 2021 census shows that 304,000 children are eligible for instruction in OLM schools, and that 23.8% of school-aged children never attended an English-language school (Statistics Canada, 2022).

All of these complex, changing realities give rise to important discussions within the English-speaking community about the role of its English-language schools. Schools have a role to play as a primary institution in linguistic and cultural OLM community “reproduction” and in promoting OLM community vitality. They must do so while preparing students for life in an increasingly diverse Quebec and while recognizing the diverse backgrounds of all students in the sector.

⁵ In 2020-2021, the Central Quebec School Board's families were 72% Francophone and 4% Allophone (QESBA, 2021).

⁶ The EMSB territory roughly covers the eastern two-thirds of the island of Montreal, including most of the city of Montreal proper.

⁷ The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) established a History Experts Committee to review the secondary III and IV history curriculum and textbooks. For more information on their findings, see EMSB, 2018.

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