



Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers
L'Association provinciale des enseignantes et enseignants du Québec

QPAT Position on Distance/Online Learning During the COVID-19 Outbreak

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Since the closing of schools due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the question of the possibility of providing distance/online educational services to students has arisen. Initiatives taken by private educational institutions and by educational systems in other jurisdictions have also raised questions as to solutions that may be implemented to ensure that some form of learning is happening at home during the period of the school closure. While the Quebec government has decided to close all educational institutions until at least May 1st, the date at which educational institutions will reopen is still uncertain.

Since the beginning of the school closure, the Minister of Education has given a number of directives and put forth solutions to provide access to online pedagogical activities and resources on the MEES website aimed at students and parents. It was clearly stated that all suggested learning activities are optional for students and parents, that they should be aimed at consolidating knowledge already acquired in the course of the school year, and that no formal evaluation of learning should take place. Starting this week, teachers are also expected to meet with the school team and discuss the support to students while they are at home.

In this context, QPAT is strongly opposed at this time to any **formal** distance/online instruction or evaluation. QPAT's orientation is based on the following:

- The Minister of Education has made clear that students are not expected to complete distance/online learning and are not to be evaluated for it;
- In the current context, it is QPAT's view that there is no ability to ensure consistent quality of students' formal education through distance/online learning across schools, school boards and the province due to:
 - A lack of knowledge as to the eventual length of the school closure;
 - Issues of equitable access to online learning for technological reasons (students' access to computers, bandwidth, etc. at home);
 - Lack of access to necessary technology, tools, materials, support and proper preparation for teachers;
 - The inability to effectively monitor and support students, particularly those with low school motivation, making it impossible to ensure their attendance and quality participation in their learning;
 - The lack of access to support resources and services normally accessible to students with special needs in a school setting;
 - The impossibility of implementing and monitoring valid evaluation pieces;

- The unclear evidence about the value of distance/online learning and its impact on students, particularly when there is little direct interaction between students and the teacher and other adult professionals who are meant to support them in their learning.

Attempting to compensate for missed instructional time through mandatory distance/online learning undoubtedly would lead to further inequity in our system, notably across socio-economic lines, and cause further inconsistencies across the province in providing fair and quality education. Further, many students and their families are likely experiencing increased levels of stress and anxiety at this time; mandatory expectations of them through distance/online learning to which they may not have access or proper support will only exacerbate this stress and anxiety.

It is also important that QPAT members be on the same page about this matter; while QPAT recognizes that teachers may use digital tools in their teaching, this is not the same as trying to deliver curriculum through distance/online learning only. An actual, real presence between the teacher and their students is essential for the full value of the pedagogical experience for students. In addition, a significant proportion of QPAT members have the primary responsibility for their family's care at a time when children are home from school and elderly parents need particular care. Consequently, in the present context, they do not have the same capacity to carry out such activities as other QPAT members may.

QPAT recognizes that the current situation is unlike any other. As such, QPAT has engaged in dialogue with educational partners with a view to ensure quality and equitable educational opportunities for all of our students. It is important to remember that at some point the situation will return to normal and that an examination will have to be made about how to go forward at that time to make sure that all students are treated fairly in their educational opportunities.

In light of the foregoing and the recent ministerial directives, QPAT has adopted the following positions:

1. QPAT's priority is the health and safety of its members;
2. QPAT is opposed to any formal or mandatory form of distance/online learning imposed on students;
3. QPAT recognizes that informal, non-mandatory contact online between teacher and students may be beneficial for both;
4. QPAT is open to discussing alternative solutions with educational partners that ensure quality and equitable educational opportunities for all of our students;
5. Optional learning materials and activities made available to students and parents should seek only to consolidate learning already acquired and not introduce new learning;

6. These optional learning materials should be used to facilitate the establishment of daily routines as opposed to the introduction of new learning;
7. QPAT members' interaction with students should be of a general or educational nature and QPAT members should not become involved in cases that require the intervention of professional psychological or social services;
8. QPAT members who become aware of significant concerns with a student's situation at home should signal the situation to their principal and suspend contact pending further investigation or resolution of the situation;
9. QPAT members' personal or private information must be protected if contacting students.