



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

QPAT's Reflections and Recommendations on the Proposed Scenarios for Reopening Schools in Fall 2020 (COVID-19)

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First, QPAT and the members it represents believe that in-person teaching in schools is the best means of ensuring not only quality of learning but also fair access to educational services for all students. However, the health and safety of students and school staff members alike must be a priority in all the decisions that are made.

Since we are not public health experts, it is difficult for us to state a preference for one scenario over the other. In addition, QPAT does not know what the situation will be in the fall, and believes that other scenarios, in addition to those already submitted, should be considered so that school teams are able to prepare for every eventuality.

Regardless of the school-reopening scenario chosen by the Public Health authorities, QPAT believes that the decision should be guided by a certain number of principles:

- Give priority to protecting the health and safety of students and school staff members. When schools are reopened, all the necessary steps must be taken to minimize the risk of contagion.
- Make protective equipment available to all school staff members.
- Given the context, pay special attention to the mental health of students and staff members.
- Ensure a certain level of standardization and fair access to good quality education and support services for all students in Québec.
- Ensure fair access to and continuity of complementary services for all vulnerable students and students with special needs.
- Ensure continuity of educational services in all subjects, not just basic subjects.
- Allow schools a certain amount of flexibility to address their own particular situation when implementing the chosen scenario.
- Provide teachers and students with fair access to sufficient quantities of adequate material resources (equipment, information technology, etc.), so that access to educational services is equally fair.
- Allow sufficient preparation time so that teachers and school teams are ready for all potential scenarios when educational services resume in the fall.

- Respect the teacher's workload, as set out in the contract of employment (for in-person and distance teaching alike).
- Ensure that school attendance is compulsory (in person or distance learning).

Scenario A:

Scenario A would mean a return to normal. As mentioned earlier, we are not public health experts and will therefore simply ask Québec's Public Health authorities to answer the following questions:

- Have Québec's Public Health authorities established projections for increases in the number of cases and deaths (risk factors) among children, their parents, caregivers and extended families, teachers and support staff, if schools are reopened on a full-time basis?
- Given the inherent constraints and conditions in schools, would students and staff members be safe if schools were reopened on a full-time basis before a vaccine becomes available?
- If so, on what conditions? (Wearing of masks, installation of acrylic plexiglass-type panels in classrooms, etc.)

Scenario B:

Challenges to be overcome if schools are reopened on a part-time basis (50% for elementary schools and 33% to 50% for secondary schools) in the event that exceptional sanitary and social distancing measures must be maintained:

- Challenges in terms of student motivation and commitment when at home (based on the experience of recent weeks).
- Teaching time for students cut in half by part-time school attendance.
- In the English sector, most special needs students have been placed in regular classes (inclusive model), with only a small number in special classes. This situation makes it more difficult to maintain full-time instruction for these students in most English schools.
- Overcrowding and lack of space in many of our schools, especially in urban areas, considerably increases proximity levels. If the two-metre

distancing rule were to be applied, most classrooms could not host more than nine or ten students. It would be difficult to host half the students in most of our schools and still apply the required hygiene and distancing measures.

- Difficulty of enforcing social distancing in a school setting, especially for students with special needs. The younger the students, the more complex the task.
- Lack of access to adequate sanitary facilities for hand-washing (washbasins, soap distributors and paper towels) in many schools. At the present time, many schools are using hydro-alcoholic gel alone for hand hygiene.
- Challenges relating to the cleaning and disinfection of common areas, objects and surfaces, especially with daily student rotations.
- Challenges in many schools due to out-dated ventilation systems and general air quality issues.
- Challenges in some schools during warm weather and heat waves (because fans cannot be used).
- Issues with access to school transportation. Many of our school boards share school transportation through agreements with French school boards in their regions. This makes the situation more complex.
- Challenges in connection with staff availability due to the general shortage and special health conditions that prevent some staff members from resuming work in the short term.

Recommendations for Scenario B:

1. To ensure a consistency in the provision of educational services, the MEES must establish clear expectations applicable to all students in Québec, with regard to essential knowledge and learning as well as expectations regarding school attendance (in-person or distance learning).
2. Review program content (QEP) to account for the reduction in teaching time.
3. With this in mind, set up MEES committees composed of teachers and educational consultants, to be responsible for identifying the basic learning

- that must be covered in each subject, given the teaching time available in each case.
4. Regardless of the scenario chosen, each subject should be taught proportionally to the time allocated to it before the pandemic.
 5. Ministerial examinations and evaluations by school boards or teachers should be adjusted accordingly (content, frequency, report cards, number of terms.)
 6. Teachers must not be assigned to both in-person teaching and online teaching at the same time.
 7. Groups should be closed and teachers should move from room to room, in both elementary and secondary schools.
 8. The 2019-2020 school year should end earlier, so that school teams have sufficient time to prepare for the new school year.
 9. Estimate the space available in each school before deciding on the number of students who may attend on the same day. With this in mind, consider the possibility of setting a maximum number of students per school.
 10. Where applicable, consider solutions to mitigate the lack of space (use of other premises such as community centres, public libraries, and so on).
 11. Provide for the installation of additional temporary sinks in schools, so that students and staff members can wash their hands with water and soap instead of using hydro-alcoholic gel.

Other recommendations:

- ❖ Consider adding other scenarios to address every eventuality (not reopening schools in the fall, closing schools in the event of a second wave, whether throughout Québec or in specific regions).
- ❖ Delay the addition of new Kindergarten classes for 4-year-olds, to mitigate shortages of staff and premises.
- ❖ Add mental health support resources for students and staff (training, psychologists, school guidance counsellors, social workers).