



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

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Document submitted by the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) for the Consultation Initiated by the MEQ on the ***Strategy to attract, mobilize and recognize the value of school staff*** (Fall 2021)

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QPAT acknowledges the need to consider this issue and feels it is high time for the Québec government to move forward with a series of initiatives and concrete actions that will provide recognition for education staff members generally, and especially for the public education system teachers we represent.

Serious thought must be given to the underlying causes of the teacher shortage that Québec has had to deal with in recent years. According to the MEQ's own projections, it is not likely to be resolved in the short term. We are clearly facing a crisis, in terms of both the lack of interest in university teacher training programs among young CEGEP graduates and the fact that a large percentage of young teachers (25%) abandon the profession within five years of starting their careers.

QPAT, along with our colleagues in other union organizations, have long emphasized the importance of recognizing the teaching profession and, in broader terms, our public education system as well, which is suffering in numerous ways.

The consultation document identifies three principles on which the strategy should focus, namely recognition, attraction, and mobilization. Some of the strategies for recognition listed in the document seem to us to play a key role, in that they have a significant impact on both the intrinsic recognition and the professional satisfaction of teachers. Accordingly, the MEQ should take them into account when deciding on the steps to be taken. QPAT supports the idea that the objectives set out in the consultation document, namely, to enhance teachers' sense of self-efficacy and professional satisfaction, can only be achieved by acting on the objective conditions of teaching, and not simply on perceptions, which would be a futile and superficial exercise. Only by improving the objective conditions of teaching will it be possible to achieve the first objective, that of improving the perception of teaching as a career.

Regarding recognition, QPAT therefore believes that actions focusing on two aspects in particular – working conditions and professional autonomy – should take priority.

#### QPAT's observations:

- 1) The main concerns of and motivating factors for teachers in our public education network are student well-being and student success.
- 2) Increasingly, teachers in the network, whether at the beginning of their careers or with several years of experience under their belts, feel powerless to deal with a workload that is becoming more cumbersome. In some cases, it even causes them to feel that they have failed or that they are incompetent.



- 3) This feeling is becoming more common among teachers. It is not due to any one factor in particular, but to a combination of factors:
- a. More problems with class composition:
    - i. There are proportionally more students with special needs in the system, and most are placed in regular classes, especially in the English system.
    - ii. A survey of teachers in the English system, carried out by QPAT in 2019 and 2020, revealed, among other things, that having too many students with too broad a range of special needs in a regular classroom, without having enough adequate support resources, is a major obstacle to success and well-being, not only for the special needs students themselves, but for all the students in the class.
    - iii. The growing number of specialized and selective programs available in public schools has made the task of forming so-called “regular” classes even more difficult.
  - b. The cumbersome nature of the curriculum (the content of the QEP) is a problem, especially in elementary schools, and the broad areas of learning add to this:
    - i. Teachers must race to cover all the elements of content in the QEP. They tell us that, as a result, they find it difficult to consolidate their students’ basic essential learning because they simply do not have enough time.
    - ii. The pandemic year, 2020-2021, was revealing in that it led many teachers to realize that cancelling the compulsory ministerial exams and focusing instead on essential knowledge gave them, as teachers, more time to teach and consolidate their students’ basic knowledge and competencies. It also gave them more room to apply their own competencies as professionals.
    - iii. The fact that teachers have so little time significantly limits their professional autonomy, in terms of choosing pedagogical methods and evaluation tools.
  - c. Results-oriented management, which remains a basic element of management agreements and educational success:
    - i. Compulsory ministerial exams in elementary schools, in terms of both their form and their content, are stress factors and place additional pressure on an already overloaded curriculum.
    - ii. This type of management limits professional autonomy.



- d. The large number of related administrative tasks for teachers, in addition to the workload that should constitute their main focus, i.e. teaching and assisting students with their learning:
  - i. Management of multiple individualized education plans within a single class group, a task that becomes proportionally more complex due to all the related obligations.
  - ii. Numerous and more frequent follow-ups with parents and students in difficulty.
  - iii. Numerous meetings organized by school administrations and school boards.
- 4) In the spring of 2018, QPAT surveyed its members about physical and psychological violence in the workplace. In all, 56% of respondents said they had been victims of at least one incident involving physical and/or psychological violence (including cyberbullying) in the preceding two years. Roughly 47% of these incidents were perpetrated by students and 33% by parents.
- 5) Surveys and consultations with teachers have confirmed that most are involved in professional development and ongoing training. For example, the Convention organized each year by QPAT attracts more than 3,000 teachers from Québec's public English school system.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Gather data on the reasons why teachers leave the profession and what can be done to recognize and promote it.**
  - Before suggesting potential concrete actions, it is important to define the problem clearly and identify its deep-rooted causes in order to be able to devise short, medium and longer-term solutions that will have an impact by helping to attract young people to the teaching profession and retain existing teachers. To do this, it would be a good idea to survey the people concerned – in other words, teachers – to identify the problems that are at the root of the challenges currently affecting our profession.



## 2. Take steps to promote education within society in general.

- Promote a broader vision of the value of education in our society by moving away from the utilitarian, market-oriented vision that is unfortunately still common, by making a direct connection between society's social and economic progress and the level of education of its citizens.
- Pay attention to the terminology used in education. Education is a social service and should not be associated with terms used in business (e.g. *client*).
- Make sure the physical environment in which teachers and other staff members work is attractive, inviting, and safe (improvements to buildings, proper ventilation, etc.).
- Encourage good communication practices between families and school staff members, for example by setting guidelines and providing a code of conduct for parents based on respect for the school staff members with whom they interact.

## 3. Take the steps needed to make meaningful improvements to the working conditions of teachers by:

- Taking the steps needed to balance class composition and recognize the value of the people who work in public schools.
- Terminating the subsidies paid to private schools and prohibiting selective programs that filter students from regular classes.
- Ensuring balanced distribution of students among class groups.
- Making sure teachers have access to sufficient, adequate support services for themselves and for their students with special needs; this is far from being the case at the present time.
- Reducing the number of hours during which preschool and elementary school teachers must be in the classroom with their students, which would give them more time to work with their colleagues, prepare courses, evaluate learning, communicate with parents and so on.
- Continuing the process begun during the last negotiations and by increasing the remuneration for all teachers to a level that reflects the work they do and the requirement for a university education.



- Reducing the number of steps before a teacher reaches the top of the scale. They should not need to work for 14 to 16 years before being considered experienced enough to obtain the maximum salary. In other Canadian provinces, teachers reach the top of the scale much more quickly.
  - Improving and speeding up the pay equity complaint process. Female teachers, who account for 75% of all teachers, must wait for several years before their complaints are heard. This is unreasonable.
4. **Take steps to recognize and take into account teachers' expertise and show more respect for their professional autonomy by:**
- Moving away from the top-down approach in education. Teachers should be involved in important decisions. Their expertise should be recognized by ensuring that they are consulted early in the process of developing programs or devising new ministerial policies.
  - Moving away from results-oriented management, which is still present in education, and by allowing teachers to focus on the quality of their students' learning rather than on numerical success targets.
  - Recognizing their expertise in selecting the pedagogical methods and teaching materials to be used in the classroom with their students.
  - Respecting their autonomy of choice regarding professional development and ongoing training and increasing the amount of money allocated annually for it.
  - Revising, adapting, and refining the QEP, with input from teachers, to give teachers more time to consolidate their students' basic knowledge and leave more room for them to apply their pedagogical skills and creativity as education professionals.
  - Giving teachers the time they need to implement new programs and new approaches.
  - Minimizing administrative tasks, unnecessary meetings, and so on, so that teachers can focus on teaching and supporting their students.



The results of surveys carried out among our members on specific educational issues in recent years and, more broadly, the results of QPAT's own consultations of its members, reveal several elements that have an impact on the intrinsic recognition of teachers as education professionals, as well as on their motivation and job satisfaction, and on the image of the profession and the associated working conditions.

The pandemic has clearly shown the importance of education in Québec. We now need to ask ourselves about the type of society in which we want to live: a society that values education, or a society that lets it fall by the wayside. If we value education, we should invest in the system. Above all, we should invest in the people who work in the system daily. We should recognize what they do by providing them with a safe environment, fair and advantageous working conditions, and by respecting their professional autonomy.