QUESCREN

POLICY BRIEF / MÉMOIRES

CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES FOR QUEBEC'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION CONTINUUM

Brief prepared for the Standing Committee on Official Languages in the context of the study on the minority-language education continuum

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Purpose of the brief

This brief aims to inform the Standing Committee on Official Languages about challenges experienced in Quebec's English-language minority education sector, and their impact on the education continuum from early childhood to post-secondary education and beyond. It summarizes findings from 11 research briefs on English-language education that QUESCREN produced and commissioned between 2021 and 2024. Additionally, it outlines priority areas for development in addressing these challenges.

About QUESCREN

Housed at Concordia University in Montreal, the Quebec English-speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN) was launched in 2009. It is a collaborative network of researchers, stakeholders, and educational and other institutions that improves understanding of Quebec's English-speaking communities. Its mission is to provide opportunities to promote the understanding and vitality of Quebec's English-language minority communities through research, knowledge mobilization, training, networking, and outreach.

QUESCREN's work on education

QUESCREN is a key contributor in producing and disseminating research on English-language education in Quebec. Its Inter-Level Educational Table (ILET), founded in 2017, supports the sector with research, knowledge mobilization, and educational activities. Since 2018, QUESCREN has hosted three bi-annual Education & Vitality Forums to share research and best practices for inclusive and high-quality English-language education. In 2023, QUESCREN launched the ILET Research Hub to make knowledge on English-language education accessible to broader audiences. Additionally, its education brief series, started in 2021, provides valuable insights into the challenges that the sector faces. QUESCREN has also commissioned and produced other research on education including working papers and additional briefs.[1]

[1] See: Joanne Pattison-Meek and Andréanne Langevin, "Rural Schools, Linguistic Identities, and Official Language Minority Rights: Insights from Rights Holder Parents in Quebec" [Working Paper no. 9], Montreal: Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), March 2023, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Working_Paper_9_PattisonMeek.pdf; Lorraine O'Donnell, "The Importance of the University Research Ecosystem for Quebec's English-Speaking Official Language Minority Community," [policy brief], Montreal: Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), August 2022, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/QUESCREN_brief_for_Action_Plan_OL.pdf

Introduction

Defining the education continuum

The "continuum of education" is a development concept. Ideally, in the case of official language minority communities, it would represent a cohesive and integrated network of educational institutions and cultural and community organizations that provide educational opportunities in the minority language, supporting individuals in their learning journeys throughout their lifetimes. It would feature seamless transitions between educational levels and the availability and accessibility of services and resources to address the unique needs of linguistic minority groups.[2]

Even if it is not in this ideal state, the continuum of education is an essential element of linguistic minority community growth and vitality. The Canadian government has highlighted the concept in various documents, most recently in the *Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028*, which also asserts the vital role of the education continuum in fostering bilingualism and social cohesion.3 Supporting official-language minority education and second official-language instruction remains a key government priority.[3]

[2] In 2023, the Table nationale sur l'éducation, on the initiative of the Réseau pour le développement et l'alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC), proposed an expanded definition of the education continuum for French-speaking linguistic minority communities in Canada to incorporate the concept of lifelong learning and skills development. For more on this process and to read the full definition, see Marc L. Johnson, « Le droit à l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie dans la langue de la minorité », *Minorités linguistiques et société / Linguistic Minorities and Society* No. 20 (2023), para. 8. https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1112424ar.

[3] Canada. Canadian Heritage. "Pillar 2: Promoting Lifelong Learning Opportunities." In the *Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028: Protection-Promotion-Collaboration*. Gatineau, Quebec: Canadian Heritage, 2023. https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/official-languages-action-plan/2023-2028.html#a11. See also Canada. Canadian Heritage, "The Government of Canada Invests $121.3 Million over Three Years to Support Post-Secondary Minority-Language Education" [news release], August 11, 2021, https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2021/08/the-government-of-canada-invests-1213-million-over-three-years-to-support-post-secondary-minority-language-education.html.

Challenges and priorities for Quebec's English-language minority education continuum

1. Declining English-language student populations and outmigration

This section summarizes findings from the following QUESCREN research briefs:[4]

- "Decline of Enrolment in Quebec's English-Language School Sector"
- "Outmigration of Quebec's English-Speaking Youth"

Enrolment in Quebec's English-language schools has declined since the 1977 adoption of the *Charter of the French Language* (Bill 101), which limits access to English elementary and secondary education. Between 1971 and 2022, enrolment in the sector dropped by 61.4%. Other contributing factors include the outmigration of English speakers from Quebec and some parents' preference for enrolling their children in French-language schools. This preference is often driven by a desire to equip children with strong bilingual skills and facilitate their integration into Quebec's culture and society. Additionally, in regions with limited access to English-language schools, logistical challenges such as long commutes compel some families to choose closer French-language schools instead.

In contrast, enrolment in English-language universities and in the colleges known as CEGEPs has grown over the past decade. Registrations from Francophone, Allophone,[5] international, and out-of-province students drives the change. For instance, enrolment in English universities rose by 13.9% between the school years of 2009-2010 and 2021-2022.

Moving beyond the QUESCREN briefs for a moment, it is worth pointing out that recent provincial initiatives such as Law 14 (Bill 96), which caps French-language student enrolment in English CEGEPs, and policy-driven increases in tuition for out-of-province students at English universities in Quebec, are reversing this trend. In 2024, Bishop's University reported a 10% drop in domestic out-of-province enrolment and a 30 to 40% decline in international registrations, while Concordia University saw decreases of 28% and 11%, respectively.[6]

Declining enrolment leads to devitalization of communities. Another contributor to this phenomenon is youth outmigration. The proportion of Anglophone youth (15–29 years old) in Quebec's English-speaking population has gone from 21.7% in 1996 to 20.8% in 2021—figures partly explained by outmigration. Among their reasons for leaving home regions and Quebec altogether, English-speaking youth cite the lack of post-secondary education institutions in rural areas, linguistic tensions between English and French, difficulties

[4] Full references to the briefs cited are in the bibliography of this document.
[5] The term "Allophone" is used here to describe a person whose first language is neither English nor French. It is a term the Quebec government uses.
[6] Academica Group, "QC's English Universities Report Registration Drops from Out-of-Province Students," Sept. 3, 2024, https://academica.ca/top-ten/qcs-english-universities-report-registration-drops-from-out-of-province-students/.

finding jobs in their field of study, and lower wages. Despite being highly bilingual and educated, Anglophone youth face higher unemployment (13.3% vs. 9.8% for Francophones in 2016) and lower incomes, prompting many to seek better educational and professional opportunities elsewhere.

Impact on the education continuum

Declining enrolment has a direct impact on the sustainability of English-language education in Quebec. Smaller student populations in primary and secondary education mean reduced funding and services, and even school closures. It also means limited access to diverse courses, extracurricular activities, and specialized programs which are essential for preparing students for higher education and career pathways. Youth outmigration, driven in part by limited English-language post-secondary opportunities in rural areas, compounds these challenges. Declining enrolment and outmigration devitalize institutions and communities.

In an effort to sustain services despite declining numbers, some school boards consolidate schools or share facilities with French-language institutions. That said, the sector would benefit from targeted policies and community support that are vital to retaining English-speaking youth and from strengthening the educational offer on all levels. More funding and resources are needed to address specific needs of English-language schools, particularly those in remote and rural areas.

2. Inclusive education and access to resources for students with special needs

This section summarizes findings from the following QUESCREN research briefs:

- "Challenges around Resources and Services in Quebec's English-Language Schools"
- "Provision of Services to Special Needs Students in Quebec's English-Language Public Schools"
- "Challenges in Early Learning and Child Care for Quebec's English-Speaking Community"

The number of special needs students in Quebec's English-language public schools rose by 112.3% between 2001 and 2016, compared to a 59.9% increase in French-language schools. The Quebec government's *Politique de l'adaptation scolaire* promotes integrating special needs students into regular classes, and by 2020-2021, 90.1% of special needs students in English-language schools were integrated, compared to 76.5% in French-language schools.

English-language schools face significant challenges in this context. A shortage of qualified professionals, such as psychologists and speech therapists, delays assessments and interventions, particularly in remote areas where attracting English-speaking professionals is difficult. Administrative barriers further hinder timely identification and diagnosis. In addition, teachers need adequate training to effectively support special needs students in integrated classrooms.

These issues also exist in the early learning and childcare sector. Anglophone children in Quebec are more vulnerable in key developmental areas, such as communication skills and cognitive development, yet access to specialized services like speech-language therapy is limited.

Community organizations play a crucial role in addressing these gaps. For instance, Community Learning Centres (CLCs) enhance health service access in schools through partnerships with the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), and CHSSN also funds programs like Healthy Early Years and Bright Beginnings to support younger children.

Impact on the education continuum

The lack of necessary resources and services across the English education sector impacts the continuity and quality of education for many students, particularly those with special needs. Early diagnosis, intervention, and collaboration between educational, health, and social services are crucial to ensure timely support for students and prevent academic failure. Challenges such as a shortage of specialized staff, and socioeconomic barriers further strain small and remote schools.

Supporting community-led initiatives that address the unique needs of English-speaking families can enhance early childhood development and school readiness. Another priority is developing and funding post-secondary training programs to increase the pool of English-speaking early childhood educators and support professionals.

3. Bilingual education

This section summarizes findings from the following QUESCREN briefs:

- "The Demography of Quebec's English-Language Schools: Complexity, Changes, and Community Issues"
- "Issues of Bilingual Education in Quebec's English-Language Schools"
- "French and English Universities in Quebec: Is It Really a Zero-Sum Game?"

English-language schools play a central role in fostering bilingualism among Quebec's Anglophone youth through French immersion and enriched second-language programs. Despite challenges such as a shortage of qualified French second-language (FSL) teachers—particularly in rural areas—and socioeconomic disparities, these schools equip students with the bilingual skills essential for career development and full participation in Quebec society.

Between 2016 and 2021, the rate of English-French bilingualism in Quebec's general population rose from 44.5% to 46.4%. In 2021, young Quebecers exhibited the highest bilingualism rates, with 65% of 15–19-year-olds and approximately 70% of 20–24 and 25–29-year-olds being bilingual. Notably, Quebec's Anglophone youth are the most bilingual and they achieve bilingualism at a younger age than their Francophone and Allophone peers. However, it is also important to note that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often do not achieve the same level of French proficiency as their more affluent peers, impacting their ability to fully participate in Quebec's labour market.

French immersion programs, introduced in the 1960s, have become popular among parents and are widely offered in Quebec's elementary and secondary schools. Despite this, and as mentioned earlier, in their effort to provide their children with high-level bilingual skills, some families opt to enrol them in French-language schools. In 2021, 23.8% of school-aged children in Quebec eligible for English-language education had never attended an English-language school.

English-language schools are also linguistically diverse, with over a third of students not having English as their mother tongue. Research emphasizes the need for English-language schools to promote not only bilingualism, but also biliteracy and biculturalism, helping students feel comfortable in both English and

French cultural contexts. This includes authentic language learning experiences and cultural exchanges with French-speaking students

At the post-secondary level, English-language universities can also be seen as institutions promoting bilingualism. They serve not only English-speaking students, but a broader population, which includes Francophones and international students. Research recommends that higher education policy should recognize the value of both English- and French-language universities and promote effective *francisation* measures and equitable funding.

Impact on the education continuum

Effective bilingual school programs, such as French immersion and French as a second language, equip English-language students with the skills to succeed in Quebec's diverse, multilingual society and workforce. Without these programs, English-speaking students may face limited post-secondary and career opportunities.

To ensure equitable access to bilingual education, schools must address the diverse linguistic and socioeconomic needs of their students. Providing targeted support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is critical to closing achievement gaps. Additionally, equitable funding for both French- and English-language universities is essential for sustaining a robust higher education system that benefits all Quebecers.

4. Representation in educational policymaking and curriculum development

This section summarizes findings from the following QUESCREN briefs:

- "Representation of English-Speakers in Quebec's Education Ministries and Curriculum Development"
- "Three Approaches to Writing School Programs with Official Language Minorities"

English speakers are underrepresented in Quebec's education ministries. In 2022, only 2.0% of public service employees in the Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ) and 1.2% in the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES) were Anglophone. This lack of representation extends to leadership roles and decision-making positions. The restructuring of the Secteur des services à la communauté anglophone at the MEQ into a broader sector, the Réseau éducatif anglophone, has further reduced the specific focus on English-language education, diminishing the influence of Anglophone representatives on educational policy and curriculum development. As a result, English education policies are often translations of French policies and do not always address the unique needs of English-speaking communities. This lack of representation also limits the development of culturally relevant curricula and access to English-language textbooks.

When it comes to the involvement of minority communities in the writing of school programs and curricula, three approaches can be identified: advisory, dual, and partnership. Quebec uses an advisory approach, in which representatives of English-speaking communities have a consultative role in the process without direct involvement. In contrast, Ontario employs a dual approach, creating separate programs for Anglophone and Francophone students, while Alberta uses a partnership model, which involves

Francophone, Indigenous, and Anglophone representatives as equal partners in writing school programs.[7] It is importance to involve minority communities in program development and as part of the writing teams. This will ensure their perspectives and contributions are adequately and accurately represented.

Impact on the education continuum

The underrepresentation of English-speaking voices in Quebec's education policymaking impacts its cultural relevance and responsiveness. Unique needs of English-speaking communities—as well as other minority groups—are often overlooked. Effective educational pathways rely on inclusive policies that reflect the realities of English-speaking students and their communities. Programs that accurately portray the histories and contributions of minority groups can enhance student engagement and foster a sense of belonging. This, in turn, creates more supportive and inclusive learning environments and increases motivation to learn.

5. Community support and the vitality of English-language schools

This section presents a summary of findings from the following QUESCREN brief:

- "The Community School Network in Quebec's Official Language Minority (OLM) Education Sector"

Community-driven initiatives are crucial for the sustainability of Quebec's official language minority education sector. The network of Community Learning Centres (CLCs), established in 2006, is a unique model connecting schools with local communities to enhance student success and strengthen community vitality. It includes 91 community schools (schools with a CLC) across all 10 of Quebec's English-language school boards, representing nearly a third of English-language schools and reaching over a quarter of the student population. CLCs offer flexible solutions for diverse challenges, particularly in rural and remote areas. They provide resources and programs that might otherwise be unavailable, such as access to health care and support for special needs students. Moreover, they enhance support for students from immigrant backgrounds and their families and help them integrate and succeed academically and socially.

Impact on the education continuum

Connecting schools to their local communities can enhance student retention, improve education outcomes, and ensure that students feel a sense of belonging. CLCs play a vital role, especially in rural schools facing declining enrolment. Through partnerships, schools gain resources while communities benefit from extended services.

[7] However, a recent reform of Alberta's social studies program drew criticism for not upholding the partnership approach and marginalizing minority perspectives.

Conclusion

In summary, this brief identifies the following barriers to students' full participation in Quebec's English-language education continuum, and priorities in addressing them:

Early childhood

- English-speaking parents have issues accessing early childhood services in Quebec's minority official language.
- Developmental challenges in early education can hinder children's future academic success in primary and secondary school. Early diagnosis is critical; it requires more professionals and better communication between pre-K, kindergarten, and primary education levels.
- Another important priority is the development and funding of post-secondary programs to train a greater number of English-speaking early childhood educators and support professionals.

Youth sector

- The process of curriculum and school program development for primary and secondary education lacks adequate representation of English-speaking communities and other minority groups. This results in insufficient acknowledgment of their contributions, particularly in culturally sensitive subjects like history, which could negatively affect students' sense of identity, belonging, motivation, and learning performance.
- Limited availability of educational tools in English compromises academic progress. Teaching materials created in French should be translated and available in English for schools and parents.

Post-secondary

- Quebec's rural and remote areas have limited access to post-secondary institutions, leading to outmigration of students to urban centres or outside the province.
- Socio-economic barriers prevent some English-speaking students from accessing higher education. They need financial support to travel within the province to minority-language post-secondary institutions, particularly where programs are unavailable locally.
- Higher education policy should recognize the value of both English- and French-language universities in Quebec and promote effective *francisation* measures and equitable funding.

The overall continuum

- Funding and resources should be allocated based on the specific needs of English-language schools, particularly those in rural and remote areas.
- Targeted support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is critical to closing achievement gaps at all levels of the continuum.
- Supporting community-led initiatives that address unique needs of English-speaking students and their families can improve student wellbeing, school readiness, student retention, and educational outcomes.

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