



QUEBEC FEDERATION OF HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS INC.
LA FÉDÉRATION QUÉBÉCOISE DES ASSOCIATIONS FOYERS-ÉCOLES INC.

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Statement on the abolition of the "Ethics and Religious Culture" programme

The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations

February 2020

The Québec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA) is an independent, incorporated, not for profit volunteer organization dedicated to enhancing the education and general well-being of children and youth.

The QFHSA promotes the involvement of parents, students, educators and the community at large in the advancement of learning and acts as a voice for parents.

The QFHSA is organized on a local school basis, with associations extending from the Gaspè in the east, Gatineau in the west, La Tuque in the north and North Hatley in the south. Our members assist teachers in the classroom and resource centers; they staff libraries, help supervise field trips, organize after-school extracurricular activities and, through various fundraising activities, provide schools with improved libraries, computers, lab equipment, and music and art programs. In many and various ways, our parent volunteers enrich the educational experience of all children. We have over 4000 family members in 84 local associations across Quebec.

The QFHSA has observed the evolution of religious and spiritual education in Quebec public schools over the past 75 years, from education becoming the responsibility of the provincial government in 1964 to the new perspectives of the Proulx Report in 1975, from the implementation of Bill 118 which ensured spiritual care and guidance and community involvement for every student in 2000 to the launch of the Ethics and Religious Culture program in 2006.

QFHSA is committed to the well-being of all children and youth and as a result, our informed parents have adopted resolutions over the years voicing our concerns.

Resolutions 1990/04, 1991/03, 1995/05 all dealing with children at risk (see background) and the following resolutions specific to moral and religious education (see background for complete resolutions).

Resolution 1999/14 Flexibility in moral and religious education

Urging the minister to take steps to make time allotted for moral or religious education more flexible and schools able to choose whether to offer a single form of moral or religious education

Resolution 2004/04 Government consultation of parents





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calling upon the government to ensure that governing boards consult parents when deciding to go with a local program in place of the Catholic or protestant moral and religious instruction

The QFHSA's Education, Rights and Resolutions Committee welcomes the opportunity to comment on the following: The abolishment of the Ethics and Religious Culture Course and the *Consultation On The Ethics And Religious Culture Program Of Study*.

A) The Ethics and Religious Culture Course (ERC)

- **Why this program is important:**
 - Articles 6 and 226 in the current Education Act encourages the fostering of spiritual development of students.
 - The cross-curricular nature of the MEES curriculum encourages the development of independent, critical thinkers.
 - Quebec today is an ethnically and culturally diverse society, which thrives in an interconnected global world.
 - Quebec students need a basic understanding of different world religions and cultures to be able to: harmoniously interact with all the citizens of Quebec, understand world history, understand the contemporary world and effectively function in our interconnected world.
 - This program encourages students to get involved in their surrounding community and the global community.
 - Today's youth are global citizens studying or doing humanitarian work outside of North America and need effective tools to navigate cultural differences.
 - Today's world is full of misleading and false information, so it is imperative that students learn about other cultures from non-biased, trained professionals and not the digital world/social network
 - Instills compassion and understanding of others which leads to well-rounded, empathetic citizens.
 - Psychiatrists say what is needed today is the introduction of a mental health course in elementary schools to better educate young people about how to acknowledge and manage their emotions, as well as learn about the causes and risks factors of mental disorders (see background). Anti-bullying initiatives, *WE Day*, events and activities supporting self-esteem are often currently led by Spiritual Animators benefitting both elementary and high school students.
- **Consultation/Evaluation/Questions:** Since its' inception in 2006, the outcomes and value of the current ERC program have not been evaluated. The following questions need to be answered before the program is terminated or revamped:
 - Was the spirit of the program embraced evenly across the province?
 - Were sufficient funds allocated to make the program a success? Were these funds fully accounted for?
 - Where were the programs successful and why?





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- Were the educational consultants, Spiritual Animators, teachers' unions and students asked for their feedback?
- Which staff members will take over the initiatives organized by the Spiritual Animators? Examples: Orange Shirt Day (establishing relationships with First Nations, intergenerational activities in the community, multicultural days, etc).
- **Recommendations:**
 - Maintain or expand the current focal points of the ERC program while removing the word "religion" from the title – Ethics and Societal Culture Program.
 - Continue to encourage the development of the whole child: academically, socially, culturally and spiritually.
 - This program should be implemented equally across the province so that all Quebec students become critical thinkers and contributing members of their community and the world-at-large.

B) MEES Online Consultation On Ethic and Religious Culture program....

The QFHSA's Education, Rights and Resolutions committee finds value in all the topics presented in the survey.

Comments/Concerns:

- The title of the survey is misleading. It is not a survey on the existent ERC program, but rather a survey of opinion on components of a proposed program.
- Some of the topics are part of a student's life from pre-kindergarten to secondary five (5). Examples: Sexuality "stranger danger" (K) to consensual relationships (high school). Additionally, the continuous, persistent problem of bullying which may be covered in both ethics and digital citizenship and is needed at all levels of education. To assign these topics to only the elementary or secondary sector is not a reflection of their importance and their prevalence throughout a student's school experience.
- Some topics like citizen participation and democracy can be woven into the current history or *Contemporary World* (recently changed to a half-year course) curriculums but others such as sexuality, legal education, etc. require their own curriculum as well as specialists to teach them. There is a teacher shortage now so where will these specialists come from?
- Currently on the website of the Ministry of Education, there is no information available on Guidance and Support for Students. This concerns us.
- According to a study done by the Institut de la Statistique du Québec (2016-2017) suicide attempts leading to hospitalization for youth ages 10 to 19 have more





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than doubled between 2007 and 2017. Anxiety levels and ADHD diagnoses have nearly doubled in children from grades one to five between 2010-16.

- <http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/sante/enfants-ados/adaptation-sociale/sante-jeunes-secondaire-2016-2017-t2.pdf>. There currently is not enough health and social services to meet the needs of our children. The Minister of Education should not be removing yet another service that is there to support our students: spiritual care and guidance and community involvement.

Questions on the proposed program:

- Will the program be piloted in a few schools in different cycles before being rolled out to all students?
- Will there be English translations of the program available at the same time as that available for the French sector?
- Will the pilot program be evaluated to provide for adjustments and improvements before being rolled out to all students?
- Will there be a comprehensive consultation with all stakeholders: parents, teachers, principals, students (at all levels) and the community, to determine if the objectives are being met?
- What training will be provided to teachers or will funds be allocated for specialists?





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