

Fact sheet for taxpayers January 6, 2016

Myth Busters – Bill 86 on the reform of Quebec’s school boards

Myth 1: *The Minister claims that the main objective of Bill 86 is to give more powers to parents at the heart of a new school governance system.*

Fact: Bill 86 is a creatively-worded draft law that does little to increase parents’ decision-making powers. The Bill is essentially about management and control; however this control is centralized in the hands of the Minister and government, and not in the hands of parents.

For example, under the proposed system, the Minister of Education could hold veto powers over any decisions taken by future school councils. She or he could have full control over the academic policy, educational programming and human resource policies of these bodies. The reforms could make school board Director-Generals report issues directly to the Minister, by-passing council. The Minister could likewise force through school closures and board mergers, and make changes to the territories of school boards.

Myth 2: *The Minister claims that elections to future school councils will still be possible following his reforms.*

Fact: The Minister has drastically reduced the ability to hold elections for future school councils. As a result, the proposals in Bill 86 are undemocratic. The new law could give the Minister the authority to dictate what types of community representatives are allowed to sit on school councils, and if and how these representatives are elected by the public. It is unlikely that elections will ever take place as a series of requirements must first be met to hold an election. **It is highly regrettable that one taxpayer will decide whether gets to vote.** Taxpayers have the right to freely and fairly elect their representatives. This is the basis of democracy, and the way our current Minister of Education was himself elected to the National Assembly. Universal suffrage is not a choice but a right of all in our minority language community. It is not negotiable.

Myth 3: *The Minister claims that our minority community rights are protected in Bill 86.*

Fact: Our minority community rights are substantially weakened by the proposals in this draft law. The SWLSB routinely delivers top-ranked student success rates, year after year, as a result of our community having a direct say in the management and control of our schools. This right is exercised by all in the election of our school board representatives. This also makes them accountable to us as the electorate. Unfortunately, this fundamental right of our community is dashed by the government’s proposals. For example, when looking at accountability in the new governance system, parents who are elected to future school councils must not already be a member of an existing parent group or a committee. Therefore, who will they be accountable to? The Minister’s claim that Bill 86 will increase power for parents does not stand up to scrutiny. Unfortunately, power is being centralized in the hands of the government.

Myth 4: *The government is looking to save money by restructuring the school governance system, and will reinvest these savings in our schools.*

Fact: The elimination of elected school boards in Quebec is not a cost-saving measure. The administrative costs of school boards are roughly 4.2% of total operating budgets, which compares very favorably to any public or private organization. Though it is important for the government to invest in our schools, it is difficult to see how the elimination of boards will free up money towards that objective. This includes the savings on commissioner salaries that are being discussed in the media, which represent only a modest saving for the government across all of Quebec's 72 school boards.

Myth 5: *The Minister implies that his reforms will benefit students and their ability to learn by bringing school administration closer to home.*

Fact: The government's proposals for reform will introduce considerable uncertainty into Quebec's education system for the foreseeable future. As a result, there is a real risk that Bill 86 will destabilize the policy and programming frameworks that have been put in place, by the SWLSB and other Anglophone school boards, to guarantee student success. This must be avoided at all costs. Debates have taken place in other provinces across Canada on the merits of eliminating elected school boards. However, these boards have not been abolished due in large part to widespread community fears over the instability that would ensue in the education system. This is an important consideration that the Quebec government needs to take into account.