

## **Brief on Bill 86 and other School Board Reforms**

To: Richard Merlini – MNA- La Prairie  
Jean Guy Tremblay- Political Attaché – La Prairie

From: Douglas Smyth, Commissioner -Riverside School Board,  
Theresa Aguiar, Parent Commissioner -Riverside School Board  
Monica Rayes, Parent Commissioner -Riverside School Board

February, 18, 2016

Dear Mr. Merlini and Mr. Tremblay,

We are submitting the following comments on Bill 86 and other School Board reforms to give you a sense of what we consider should be the priorities for the Liberal Government when it comes to reforming the system of Education in Quebec. The views expressed below are our own and not that of Riverside School Board's Council of Commissioners' recognising that The Education act of the province identifies the Chair of The Board as our official spokesman. Nevertheless we do have our opinions.

Regarding Bill 86:

- Previous reforms and the reform intended by Bill 86 do not go far enough to **reduce the size** of School Board councils. We recommend that Council's **be limited to 8-10 members** to promote efficient and democratic discussion and limit divisions in council between those whose opinions are favoured and those who dissent. It has been our experience that with such a large number of representatives cliques and factions evolve limiting the effectiveness of council.
- Given that the government wants to put School Board governance closer to the schools, in the hands of parents, and that council should be limited to 8-10 members we recommend the following composition for council:
  1. 6 parents
  2. 1 teacher
  3. 1 principal
  4. Out of the 4 community representatives only **2 of the four** positions would need to be filled in each council.
  5. The Director General (Non-voting)

This structure would facilitate development of a more unified council reducing the formation of cliques. It would also give parents majority status which several parents have indicated does not happen in the current proposed structure. Having only to choose 2 out of 4 community representatives will also make filling the positions less onerous for provisional councils.

- Bill 86 does not provide salaries for Council Members. It is our **recommendation that salaries to council members be reinstated**. Many parents have voiced the concern that Council's membership, if the Bill would pass as is, would be **limited to parents who could afford the**

**luxury of the volunteer position. This would limit the democratic make-up of council.** Costs to council members could include, mileage, child care, occasional meals and parents with limited means would not be able to wait for reimbursement of expenses.

- Bill 86 does not address the inequities of School Board taxation in the province of Quebec. The **Liberal Government has missed an opportunity to encourage a positive acceptance of Bill 86 with English voters by not including tax reform in the Bill.** This is one of the first complaints of English voters that we often hear as elected Commissioners. Why do we pay more for the same public education?
- **Bill 86 does nothing to redress the effect of recent budget cuts in English School Boards.** This year 700,000 dollars is being cut from Riverside School Board budgets in the form of salaries due to retirements, abolishment and/or recombination of administrative positions after cutting 9 million over the last 4 years. English School Boards have nothing left to cut except for the quality of education they wish to offer. In last year's budget cuts direct services to students were affected including support services for special needs students
- At present we have a concern that a parent representative on council will participate in the provisional council when he no longer has a child in any Riverside Schools. We question his status as a parent Commissioner who is in fact no longer a parent. **Parent representation in the provisional council, needs to be restricted to current Parent Commissioners who still have children attending school within their school board and have experience as specified for the School Council as Bill 86 states.**
- Bill 86 needs to specify which parents can present themselves to become the Parent representative for Special needs. The range of I.E.P.s represented in any School Board is momentous, some have accompanying "Ministerial Codes", while others do not qualify for a specific code and fall under "at risk students". The reality of special needs services for special needs students is dramatically different when you compare Elementary and High schools. **We recommend that 2 of the six parents be elected to represent special needs at future councils, one for Elementary schools and one for High Schools.**

Unfortunately, Riversides' Council of Commissioners and the QESBA have taken an oppositional stance to any changes in School Board governance. We have taken this opportunity to express our view that diverges from theirs. We believe that the mandate of all school boards and Commissioners should be to work with the Provincial Government to improve the system of Governance that regulates School boards and not blindly defend the status quo. I met with MNA for La Prairie Richard Merlino on Friday February 19, 2016 to discuss my views and submitted this brief to him.

Submitted Respectfully,

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Roussillon  
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