



**A PUBLIC CONSULTATION BRIEF ON BILL 94**

**An Act to, in particular, reinforce laicity in the education network and to amend  
various legislative provisions**

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M-C Paquette**

**Presented by:  
The English Parents' Committee Association**

**to:  
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**English Parents' Committee Association of Québec/  
Association des comités de parents anglophones Québec  
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## INTRODUCTION

### Acknowledgements

The English Parents Committee Association (EPCA) extends its gratitude to the Commission de la culture et de l'éducation and the parliamentary groups for the opportunity to represent the perspectives of parents of students in the English public school system during consultations on Bill 94 - *An Act to reinforce secularism in the education network and to amend various legislative provisions*.

### The English Parents Committee Association

Since 2009, the EPCA has been dedicated to advocating for and promoting the rights and interests of parents and students in Quebec's English public elementary and secondary schools. Our mission emphasizes quality education and student success. Parent volunteers contribute their time and expertise through various participatory bodies, including Parents' Committees, Advisory Committees on Services for Students with Special Needs, Governing Boards, and Parent Participation Organization. The EPCA supports parents through communication platforms, mentoring, training, and consultations, positioning itself as a leading voice for Quebec's English-speaking parents and students.

### BILL 94

Introduced on March 20, 2025, by Minister of Education Bernard Drainville, Bill 94 aims to strengthen secularism in Quebec's education system and amend various legislative provisions. The EPCA has identified four key themes in the bill: secularism, quality of educational services, use of notwithstanding clauses, and governance. This brief addresses these themes based on consultations with our member Parents' Committees. The EPCA recognizes the distinct character and governance of English-language school boards, as protected by section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This section guarantees minority language educational rights, including the management and control of educational facilities by the English-speaking community, encompassing decisions on expenditures, staff appointments, instructional programs, and cultural values. The Quebec Court of Appeal's ruling in *Procureur général du Québec v. Québec English School Boards Association* (2025 QCCA 383) reaffirmed these rights, highlighting that Bill 94's centralized approach may infringe on the autonomy of English school boards, particularly in matters of laicity and governance, which could undermine community-driven education tailored to local needs.

### Objective and Methodology of the Brief

The EPCA seeks to amplify the voices of its member Parents' Committees regarding Bill 94's proposed measures. Our goal is to strengthen the Education Act's implementation to promote student well-being and success. This brief draws from:

- EPCA board meetings were held on February 22 and March 22, 2025.
- Consultations with member Parents' Committees conducted from March 31 to April 20, 2025

## MEASURES TO PROTECT THE SECULAR CHARACTER OF THE EDUCATION NETWORK

At the EPCA March board meeting, parent delegates discussed the Minister's intent to introduce a bill reinforcing secularism. No widespread issues of non-compliance with secularism were reported, except in schools already under ministerial inquiry (e.g., Bedford School). Opinions on the necessity of Bill 94 varied:

- Parents said that existing Canadian and Quebec laws suffice, and that the bill risks overreach, violating the principle of subsidiarity. Bedford School's issues were attributed to management failures and non-compliance with the Education Act.
- Recent consultations revealed concerns about the use of the term "Quebec values" and the inclusion of "state secularism" in the bill's statement that the public school system is founded on democracy, Quebec values, gender equality, and state secularism. Some parents suggested removing "state secularism" to maintain neutrality, arguing it could conflict with gender equality and anti-bullying goals. Others supported state secularism as a neutral stance that respects religious freedom. The ambiguity of "Quebec values" prompted calls for clarification.

### Ban on Showing Religious Affiliation

Bill 94's measures to ban religious symbols, mandate uncovered faces and prohibit school premises for religious purposes sparked debate. While some Parents' Committees leaned in favor, no clear consensus emerged:

- **Ban on Religious Symbols:** Extending the ban to all school personnel, contractors, and volunteers raised concerns about volunteerism, particularly in English schools reliant on parent involvement. Parents questioned the definition of religious symbols and enforcement practicality, citing potential double standards (e.g., Catholic crosses in schools). Many felt the focus should be on preventing religious imposition rather than banning symbols.
- **Face Uncovering:** This requirement was widely supported for security and identification purposes.
- **Prohibition of Religious Use of Premises:** Some parents expressed discomfort, noting inconsistencies with existing religious symbols in schools.
- **Religious Accommodations:** Strong opposition was voiced against banning accommodations, such as absences for religious holidays or dietary needs. Parents argued that schools already accommodate secular absences (e.g., vacations) and dietary preferences (e.g., vegetarianism), and religious accommodation should be treated similarly.

## Principles Integrated into the Code of Conduct

The EPCA supports integrating gender equality and prohibitions on violence and bullying into school codes of conduct, using a ministerial template adaptable to local needs. However, the bill's language suggests an optional role for parents in developing codes of conduct, which the EPCA opposes. Parents' roles should be mandatory, and Governing Boards should adopt, not merely approve, these codes.

## MEASURES TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

### An Educational Services Quality Committee in Each School Board

The EPCA supports establishing a Committee on the Quality of Educational Services in each school board, provided it avoids duplicating existing responsibilities (e.g. Governing Boards). Critically, the bill omits a reserved seat for parents on these committees, undermining their essential role in student success. Research highlights parental involvement's positive impact on academic outcomes. The EPCA recommends that each Parents' Committee designate a parent representative to ensure meaningful parental input.

## USE OF NOTWITHSTANDING CLAUSES

Parents strongly oppose the bill's use of the notwithstanding clause to override the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Constitution. Schools should foster the same acceptance and tolerance that is taught to students. The clause risks legal challenges and may disproportionately affect minority communities, including English-speaking families, while deterring volunteerism.

## MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN NETWORK GOVERNANCE

### A Code of Ethics for Governing Boards

The EPCA endorses a code of ethics for Governing Board members to promote accountability and transparency, provided it is not overly restrictive. A national template should be adaptable to local school realities, respecting Governing Boards' internal governance rules. The code should include a commitment to mandatory training for all members, including principals, and apply uniformly without differentiating member categories. Governing Boards should adopt their own codes, supported by school boards, to ensure local relevance.

The EPCA recommends mandatory training for Governing Board members and principals to clarify roles and responsibilities. A monitoring mechanism is needed to ensure compliance. The code of ethics should reinforce these training requirements.

## CONCLUSION

The EPCA underscores the critical role of Governing Boards and parent volunteers in fostering student success. Bill 94's implementation must avoid discrimination, ensure equitable application, and prioritize inclusion, equality, and educational quality. Existing tools, such as codes of conduct and ethics, should be leveraged to address compliance issues rather than introducing restrictive measures. Quebec's inclusive society demands respect for diversity and fundamental rights.

Parents emphasized that issues like staff shortages, infrastructure decay, and access to psychological support warrant greater priority than secularism enforcement, as non-compliance is not widespread. The guiding question for Bill 94's implementation must be: *Is it in the best interests of our students?* This principle ensures a fair, inclusive, and forward-looking education system.

The EPCA acknowledges the dedication of its Parents' Committees, whose volunteer efforts deserve greater recognition. Their input, even on measures perceived as less urgent, reflects their commitment to student well-being.

## **LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation 1**

The EPCA recommends that school rules of conduct be adopted by the Governing Board, based on an editable ministerial template tailored to local needs.

### **Recommendation 2**

The EPCA recommends that the Parents' Committee designate a parent to sit on the Committee on the Quality of Educational Services in each school board.

### **Recommendation 3**

The EPCA recommends a national template for Governing Board codes of ethics, respecting internal governance rules and adaptable to local school communities.

### **Recommendation 4**

The EPCA recommends that Governing Boards adopt a code of ethics applicable to all members, regardless of category.

### **Recommendation 5**

The EPCA recommends removing the prohibition on religious symbols for school personnel and volunteers to protect volunteerism and parental involvement.

### **Recommendation 6**

The EPCA recommends provisions for exemptions in exam schedules for schools with special populations.

