



Townshippers' Association March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 presentation re: *Bill n°86: An Act to modify the organization and governance of school boards to give schools a greater say in decision-making and ensure parents' presence within each school board's decision-making body*

**\*\* This is a translation of the presentation summary. The final version of the transcript is published within 2 to 4 months following the date of the meeting of the commission and will be available here, it will not be translated: <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cce-41-1/journal-debats/CCE->**

## Overview

**Townshipers' Association fully supports the position that parents, education professionals and community members need to have a greater voice in the governance of schools and the services they provide to both students and the community.** This bill provides an opportunity to closely examine the importance of these governance structures and find solutions for improving decision-making processes that will enhance the quality of education for English-speaking minority students, especially in regards to curriculum, pedagogy and student success. However, we respectfully **insist** that, before this government moves forward with its reform, it carefully examine the questions and concerns we raise today within the context of their impact on a rural minority population that continues to struggle with poverty, employability, the renewal of its population and the loss of its heritage.

## **Concern number one: This bill refuses to recognize the constitutionally supported status of the English-speaking minority community.**

In Bill 86 we find a complete omission of the constitutional rights and related special needs of the English-speaking minority. Townshippers' Association wishes to remind the government of the reality that the Eastern Townships School Board is the **only** institution the English-speaking population of the Townships can still call its own. Our community members value this institution and the schools within its jurisdiction for their historical, political and cultural contribution to the development of the English-speaking population of this part of rural Quebec.

The abolition of elected Commissioners to be replaced by "school councils" as laid out in Article 39, does not reflect our minority community's constitutional right to select the individuals who govern our schools. The selection process is consolidated almost entirely in the hands of parent representatives, who may or may not be representative of the English-speaking minority community and who may or may not decide to recommend elections for the six seats reserved for community representatives. While the assumption is that this change

will be efficient and cost saving, **it violates the principles inherent in representational democracy**. How can a community be asked to support its schools, in practice and through paid taxes, if it is only the parent representatives who determine the extent of community implication? We advocate that, **in keeping with both the spirit of the constitution and respect for our status as an official language minority community, a clear majority of the seats on any model proposed be allocated to representatives elected by our community and that the election process be simplified and strengthened through the implementation of recommendations 6 through 8 as proposed by the English School Boards Election Systems Study Panel Report (referred to as the “Jennings Report”).**

**How does this government plan to ensure that our rights as a community are not further decimated by new legislation that categorically refuses to recognize our minority status?**

### Concern number two: Lack of input into the English language curriculum

Bill 86 asserts that, in areas related to curriculum, the Ministry will retain much of the decision-making power at the provincial level. If student success is a major target of this Bill, is not the desired outcome to ensure that the curriculum prescribed for the English-language education sector receives a **much higher and more hands-on level of input from the community it serves?** The aim of our intervention is not to challenge the authority of the Ministry but rather to encourage the ongoing cooperation and involvement of our community in an area that is **crucial to our future** as fully participating members of Quebec Society.

### Concern number three: The centralization of power and potential for forced mergers

**In fact is it not true that this Bill essentially grants the minister the power to fuse school boards together without consultation?** Is this not an attempt to centralize power and control within the hands of the ministry similar to what has been accomplished in the health sector? Where is the reassurance for our minority community as more and more sectors directly affecting our vitality become centralized in the hands of your government? Where do these changes leave our community following an election and change in government or a change in Minister?

## Concern number four: Bill 86 will have a negative impact on the vitality and identity of the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships

Since the English-language school boards are the last remaining institutions that English-speaking citizens of rural Quebec can call their own, this is not only a **community vitality** issue, but an **identity** issue which must be taken seriously. English-language schools are not just places where our children are educated; they are essential places for **the transmission of the cultural, social and historical identity of one of the founding peoples of Quebec**. The English-speaking communities in Quebec are not a recent immigrant group or population, and it is in this context that the question of our community involvement in the governance of these schools and the development of their curriculum becomes an issue of vitality and identity for the English-speaking minority language community in the regions of Quebec in a very significant way. As such, they must remain within the control of that community at large, rather than in the almost exclusive domain of parent representatives and the ministry.

### Conclusion

While Townshippers Association recognizes many positive aspects of Bill 86, we strongly believe that the Quebec government needs to address the concerns we've raised today. **We need to see, in law, an affirmation that our school governance structures will:**

- a. **Remain within the control of the communities they serve, as a matter of legal right, community vitality and identity and**
- b. **Be given the responsibility to provide solid input into a curriculum that truly reflects the unique heritage, nature, and needs of the English-speaking minority.**

In March of 2012 in a Quebec Federation of Home and Schools Association bulletin, several Québec Liberal Party MNAs acknowledged the important role English school boards and their commissioners play in relation to maintaining vital English Minority Communities (Kelley et al. 2012), declaring that “[d]emocratically elected, School Boards manage school personnel, provide pedagogical support for teachers, design programs for special needs students, and passionately promote our public school system...Elected School Board representatives have a special link to their community. Their role includes the protection of minority

educational rights. The Québec Liberal Party remains convinced that **efficient and representative** School Boards remain key elements in our efforts to provide our young people with the education they need to advance Québec society in the future” – is this no longer the case four years later? Are you asking us now in 2016 to sacrifice our rights to representative school boards to meet your current definition of efficiency?

## Annex

Excerpt from the *2015 English School Boards Election Systems Study Panel Report, page 26*

6. That English School Board elections be conducted through online, telephone and mail-in ballots only;
7. That English School Boards be given the legal authority to collaborate with their French School Board counterparts to revise voter lists for School Boards on their territories;
8. That the voter registration process be modified so that:
  - a. English Minority tax payers who pay into the English School Board system are automatically registered to the English School Board voting list;
  - b. Graduates of English public high schools are automatically registered to the English School Board voting list;
  - c. English Minority youth who turn 18 are automatically registered to the English School Board voting list;
  - d. Parents of children who have graduated from an English public High School are automatically registered to the English School Board voting list;
  - e. In the event that the Québec government does not implement ESSP recommendations 6 and 7, that voters in English School Board elections have the ability to identify their respective School Boards and be registered to vote for the appropriate candidates by showing proper identification on the day of the elections at their polling station;