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Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Bill 100, Protecting What Matters Most Act (Budget Measures), 2019

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FRENCH-LANGUAGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO) is hereby submitting its recommendations to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs regarding Bill 100, *An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes*.

ACÉPO represents the four French-language public school boards of Ontario. Its mandate is to support its members in order to ensure the sustainable development and vitality of the French-language public education system of Ontario. Ontario's 129 French-speaking public schools offer high-quality, inclusive education. With an impressive growth rate of 73% since its creation by a Conservative Government 20 years ago, the French-language public education system has had, by far, the largest enrolment growth in the province. Our system perfectly meets the needs of a multicultural population living in a modern and democratic society, as demonstrated by the enviable academic results of our students. In Mathematics, in 2017-18, 80% of our Grade 6 students met or exceeded the provincial standard, compared to the provincial average of 49%, and our graduation rates are the highest in the province at 88%. It is our desire to develop the full potential of each of our 33,500 students.

The success of French-language public education is all the more remarkable given that only four school boards cover the entire province of Ontario (an average of 55,000 square kilometres per French-language school board vs. 5,000 square kilometres for English-language school boards), which makes our education system the most effective in terms of maximizing the use of Ontario's resources.

In a world where economic success is closely linked to access to outstanding educational services, it is primarily by leveraging its human resources that Ontario is able to effectively position itself in a globalized economy.

ACÉPO is still analyzing the repercussions that Ontario's 2019 budget will have on French-language schools, but would already like to draw the Government's attention to the fact that any budget decisions must take into consideration the specific nature of the French-language public education system in order to ensure that Francophone students have access to in-school programs and services that are equivalent to those available to Anglophone students.

Developing the province's school system must be an essential priority for the Government in order to ensure the best employment opportunities, in Canada's two official languages, for future generations.

As the representative of the four French-language public school boards, it is important for ACÉPO to collaborate with the Government of Ontario to ensure that education in Ontario is developed harmoniously, by taking into account the needs of the linguistic minority.

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ACÉPO's Recommendation:

ACÉPO recommends that the Government of Ontario takes into consideration the specific nature of the French-language public education system when making and implementing decisions in education, so that Francophone students have access to in-school programs and services equivalent to those available to Anglophone students.

Indeed, decisions made for the majority can sometime have negative impacts on the minority. It is a matter of gaining a better understanding of how French-language schools work and keeping in mind their dual purpose, education and the transmission of the French language and culture, in order not to jeopardize the quality of teaching and the sustainability of our school.

Classroom size

The increase in class size, announced by the Ministry of Education, undermines our accomplishments in general and, more particularly, our exemplary success in Mathematics, to which the three other systems aspire.

If there is a decrease in the number of teachers in secondary schools, the sustainability of our French-language schools will be in jeopardy. In fact, the four French-language public school boards are made up of small- and medium-sized schools, which are spread out over a large geography. Therefore, they cannot achieve sizeable economies of scale and cannot reduce the number of teachers in a large school to allow smaller schools to continue providing a wide selection of courses.

According to our estimates, the class size changes proposed by the Ministry of Education will result in the loss of 21% of our teaching positions at the secondary level. This significant decrease in the number of teachers will inevitably reduce the number of available courses, which will lead to students moving to the English-speaking education system, which in turn will result in a greater assimilation of Francophone youth and closing of numerous French-language schools throughout the province.

A fast-growing school system

Our system is expanding rapidly. In 2019 alone, we will open seven new schools. Each school opening is an accomplishment in itself and offers Francophone families a world of possibilities. However, it takes a number of years for a school to become established and to increase its student enrolment. We will need to ensure that we are providing these schools with the resources they need to thrive in their new environment.

A shortage of teachers

Ontario's French-language schools are struggling to find qualified staff. This shortage is exacerbated by the success of French immersion programs in English-language schools. It is essential for all Francophone students in Ontario to be able to access high-quality education in French. Close to 110,000 students and their families are affected by this shortage of teachers and qualified staff. Budget restrictions could further complicate the recruiting of qualified French-language teachers.

CONCLUSION

We would like to thank the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for giving us the opportunity to present our recommendations on Bill 100. We reiterate our desire to collaborate with the Government so that, together, we can find solutions and continue to grow.

School boards play a key role not only in the education of Ontario's students, but also in the vitality of the Francophone community. It is important that our recommendations be taken into consideration to enable the French-language public school boards to continue to offer a highly effective education system. Through quality education, our youth will be able to make an engaged contribution to Ontario's economic, cultural and social development, and ensure the development of a strong Francophone community.