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**Questionnaire on the positions of education councils regarding the Corona Crisis**

**Input by the Conseil Supérieur de l’Education, Québec**

1. **Policy issues**

Describe the main policy issues regarding the COVID 19 education policy

* Which were the main measures adopted during the lockdown (particularly those measures related to teaching and learning), Specify if relevant the education level concerned e.g. primary, vocational, higher education, special needs, others, …
	+ On March 13, 2020, the Québec Government declared a state of public health emergency and ordered all educational institutions across the different levels of instruction to shut down between March 16 and March 27. During this period no educational services were provided throughout the entire public network; some private elementary and secondary institutions continued to provide instruction remotely. Higher education institutions were asked to find ways to continue their activities through distance education.
	+ Daycare services were maintained for children whose parents were deemed to work in essential services.
	+ On March 27, the school closure was extended until May 1. In the weeks that followed, the Québec education system entered a phase of rebuilding and “going back to normal,” comprised of legislative amendments, directives, numerous actions and initiatives to address—over the medium and long-term—all the different components and structures of the system impacted at the outset of the crisis.

**Directives for Elementary Schools, Secondary Schools and Vocational Training Centres During the Lockdown (March 13—May 2020)**

* Teaching staff were not to be allowed in schools and vocational training centres pending the development of alternative, non-mandatory instructional measures.
* Students in vocational training and in adult general education were to continue their learning remotely using existing distance education resources online or by telephone.
* The school year still counted for students in preschool, elementary and secondary education, and advancing to the next grade level was to be left to the professional judgement of teachers, based on previous student evaluations. Provincial ministry examinations were cancelled.
* School teams, administrators, professionals and technical support staff working with at-risk students prior to the lockdown were required to carry out individualized weekly followups with the latter, by telephone or other technological means.
* In vocational training and adult education,priority was to be given to recognition of prior learning in granting diplomas, attestations and certificates, and to leveraging distance education initiatives. To encourage students to continue on their education path, remote formative assessments for adult students in general education were exceptionally allowed, again based on the professional judgement of teachers. Provincial ministry examinations were delayed. In vocational education, teachers were to provide followups to ensure consolidation of student learning. Special attention (via telephone or video messaging) was to be paid to students with learning difficulties or specific characteristics, such as immigrants.
* At the end of March, the Ministère de l’Éducation announced the proposal of optional educational activities.

**Initiatives Implemented to Support the Continuity of Learning and Other Educational Services**

* + - Voluntary weekly course packages developed by the Ministère, individualized based on needs by teachers or a member of the school team;
		- Weekly followups by teachers or a member of the school team;
		- Online launch of the [École ouverte](https://ecoleouverte.ca/fr/)/[Open School](https://ecoleouverte.ca/en/) platform to consolidate learning through targeted content for students with disabilities and/or learning or adjustment disabilities;
		- Educational programs for all students broadcast on Québec’s public educational television network [Télé-Québec](https://enclasse.telequebec.tv/).
		- School feeding programs typically offered in schools redirected through community organizations across the province.
		- Free online [microprogram](https://jenseigneadistance.teluq.ca/course/view.php?id=2) on remote delivery platforms for teachers and education professionals to upgrade their skills in the use of technological tools.
		- Loan of IT equipment to students and investment in the procurement of technological tools.
		- Online [guide](https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/salle-de-presse/covid-19/Pages/outils-secteur-education.aspx) for the education network on how to minimize the risk of contracting COVID-19 and ensure staff and student safety.
		- Amendments to the *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education* (three regulations established under the *Education Act*)to ensure the current school year is not lost (amendments to the academic calendar, final report card and certification of studies). Regarding evaluations, teachers are required to express results through qualitative grading rather than assigning marks, based on evaluations done prior to the lockdown. Conditions for students to receive free educational services are also revised, as are those governing formal diplomas, certificates or attestations needed to continue an education path or enter the labour market.
		- In-person educational support services for elementary and secondary students with learning difficulties (non-mandatory learning camps).
		- Resumption of in-person summer courses for Secondary 4 and Secondary 5 students at risk of failing core courses needed to graduate.

**Measures Implemented at the College Level (Higher Education - Pre-University)**

* + - The 2020 winter term proceeded, following amendments to college regulations.
		- New mechanisms allowed students to receive an “equivalency” grade when professors or teaching assistants deemed the work completed by students to be sufficient. Students could drop courses without penalty or a failing grade.

**Directives for Universities**

* 2020 winter term courses were to continue remotely, depending on the institution’s capabilities.
* Academic leadership was urged to mobilize all staff in providing educational and mental health support for students.
* Faculty members and teaching assistants were urged to facilitate the recognition of credentials and promote other means of acquiring competencies, so students did not have to retake a term or an internship.
* New mechanisms were to be implemented so that students could receive a “pass” or “achieved” grade when faculty and teaching assistants deemed the work completed by the student to be adequate. Students could drop courses without penalty or a failing grade.

Describe the ‘normalisation’ process

* Which were the main measures adopted during the normalisation process (particularly those measures related to teaching and learning)? Specify if relevant the education level concerned e.g. primary, vocational, higher education, special needs, others, …

**Reopening Preschool and Elementary Schools Outside the Greater Montréal Area as of May 11**

* Regular before- and after-school programs were resumed outside Montréal (Québec was the first jurisdiction in North America to reopen its schools outside its major metropolitan region). The return was voluntary, and those parents who opted to have their children continue consolidating their learning and completing their schooling from home received pedagogical support from their schools.
* Schools were required to prioritize reaching out to at-risk students.

**Secondary Schools Remain Closed Until September 2020**

* Secondary students were required to complete learning deemed essential by the end of the academic year. Benchmarks for and guidelines on support measures for distance learning were established (for example: the number of direct interactions quantified for each level of the education system.)
* Educational services and in-class instruction were resumed in vocational training. In adult general education, taking provincial ministry and local examinations was allowed following established public health guidelines.
* Loans of technological equipment were made possible through large-scale procurement of technological tools.

**Measures Implemented for the New 2020-2021 School Year**

* Students from Preschool to Secondary 3 are to attend full time in standard-sized classrooms, with the cohorts of students remaining in their designated classrooms. Fifth and sixth graders are required to wear face coverings.
* Secondary 4 and Secondary 5 can return to classrooms where maintaining cohorts is feasible. Secondary students are required to wear face coverings.
* In vocational training and adult general education, in-class instruction is preferred wherever feasible.
* All students are to have access to a tool, technological or other, for them to continue receiving remote educational services in the event of another school closure.
* Institutions must prepare an emergency plan.
* New funds were allocated to foster learning and school engagement, youth retention, procurement of safety equipment and refurbishing institutional buildings (ventilation, windows, bathrooms, etc.).
* Schools will have a choice of resources (personalized learning support, prevention workshops, extended hours in supplementary services, more hiring).
* Budgets earmarked for at-risk students are to be renewed without preconditions or the need for administrative evaluations (saving time to be reinvested in direct services).
* Production of instructional videos to be posted on the Web.
* Online [training](file://Charlemagne/don/EndNotes/CREBE/CREBE%202020-2022/BD%20directives%20Ligne%20du%20temps/Lettres%20et%20Directives%20MEES/Formation_rentr%C3%A9e%20scolaire_2020-2021_21%20ao%C3%BBt%202020.pdf) on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7xK7_BJ0pSUIzLJbL94tKvBltUxJa2K8) on implementing programs of study and the resumption of school-based learning.
* Dissemination of a handbook of tips to assist teachers and guidance counsellors on how to determine essential learning.

**Measures Implemented for Returning to Higher Education**

* To accommodate the specificities of students, academic institutions will have flexibility in implementing the necessary means to attain the highest in-person attendance possible. Institutions will be asked to prioritize newly admitted students, those with disabilities or those with special needs.
* Higher learning institutions will have to shift to blended models (part in-person, part remote) that must include frequent student followup and feedback.
* All institutions will have to adopt an emergency plan to quickly switch to distance education in the event a second wave of the virus forces a partial or full shutdown of campuses. This plan must notably ensure maintaining a working staff and student support services for the continuation of instructional activities.
* Repayment of student financial assistance loans will be deferred for a period of six months.
* What were the main pitfalls to overcome? e.g. continuing education activities, impact on learning outcomes, inequalities, infrastructure, impact on wellbeing of pupils (psychological, social, … )

**Preschool and Elementary Education**

* Complex logistical challenges for administrators, created by social distancing rules in organizing classrooms and the gamut of educational and transportation services. Changes in government directives have necessitated the capability of adapting to the environment.
* Management and use of personal protective equipment.
* Increase in teachers’ workload (planning for in-class and online courses). Communication at a time of uncertainty with parents (particularly parents of students with disabilities), vulnerable families, or students with learning difficulties and/or adjustment difficulties (most of whom have not returned to school).
* Managing remote classrooms, student followup, scant support resources and professionals.
* Digital disparities revealed by the crisis (regional, between households, between schools, public vs. private, vulnerable or marginalized groups, etc.) as well as a gap in digital skills among educational staff, school administrators, parents and students. The loan of technological tools for students in distance learning was also less than optimal during the first few weeks of the new school year.
* Issues related to mental health (anxiety, stress, burnout) that have affected stakeholders in educational communities, learners and parents alike.
* Issues related to student evaluation and placement.

**Secondary Education**

* Certification of studies. Temporary evaluation methods have not motivated students to continue with their learning.
* Challenging one-on-one interactions and followups between teachers and students.
* Professional development for staff on distance learning.
* Planning the new school year in accordance with public health guidelines and the physical features of buildings.
* Managing information and many evolving directives, as well as their interpretation and communication to the different stakeholders.
* Classroom management and raising awareness among students about ethical issues related to online behaviour.
* The issue of transitioning between different levels of the education system.
* Pedagogical-related issues and prioritizing instruction of essential learning.
* Support for parents of at-risk children and insufficient supply of services due to restrictions.
* Uneven digital skills and commitment among teachers in terms of remote followups.
* Increase in workload for different school actors and reduced availability of support professionals for teachers.
* Addressing the needs of adolescents in a time of crisis.
* Parental pressure and fears.
* Low attendance from students from disadvantaged communities (less than half of the families from this group sent their children back to school during May and June) and struggling students.
* Lack of consistency in student services (disparities) between schools.

**Higher Education**

* Transition between levels of instruction.
* Uneven digital skills among faculty and students.
* Quality of distance education.
* Continuing technical training in labs and internships.
* Lack of standardized tools used in distance learning.
* Plagiarism and cheating in distance education.
* The geographical digital divide, particularly among First Nations and Inuit students.
* Access to online courses for some students with disabilities.
* Increase in teaching workload for faculty.
* Partnership and collaboration among education actors in the area of telecommuting.
* Work-family balance for both faculty and students.
* The perception among students that distance learning is less valuable (dropping out, questioning tuition fees).
* Funding at a time of unpredictable enrolment undergraduate and graduate programs of study (particularly for international students).
* Secondary-to-college transition in terms of student perseverance, social relations and missing prerequisites.
* Balancing public health guidelines and the reality on the ground—particularly in urban settings—in terms of buildings, calendars, and schedules.
* Academic research in a context of increased instructional workloads and preparation of remote teaching.
* Student mental health and increased workload.
* Student access to technological tools.
* Increased demand for childcare services, mental health and technological support.
* Job security for non-permanent teaching posts.

**Adult Education and Continuing Education**

* Scant IT resources and low digital literacy among some learners, notably among adult learners whose first language is other than French.
* Management of prerequisites for continuing studies for students in adult general education, as well as evaluation and certification.
* High dropout rates in adult general education and in vocational training.
* Access to the Internet and IT tools for disadvantaged students and the sharing of these tools at home.
* The infeasibility of continuing instructional lab activities, some programs or types of evaluation.
* Lack of clarity in government directives as well as synergy between the different ministries involved in the adult general education sector.
* Availability of sanitation facilities.
* Observance of rules in workshops, labs and computer classrooms.
* Pedagogical support for allophone students.
* Study-family balance for adult learners.
* Balancing public health guidelines and the physical features of buildings with the reality on the ground.
* Funding for adult education (job loss due to the pandemic).
* Contradictions in and interpretation of some government directives.
* Increased workload for teaching staff.
* What were the main innovations that opened new opportunities for renewal in education policies? Are there any lessons learned for new approaches in education (e.g. added value of blended learning, blended counseling of pupils, …)? What was the role played by distance learning? Blended learning? What are the lessons learned by these innovations?
* In compulsory education, the rollout of distance learning during the COVID-19 crisis laid bare different types of digital inequality and disparity, particularly in the areas of accessibility and digital literacy. This reality and the looming prospect of a second wave of the virus has prompted the Québec Government to invest heavily in acquiring digital tools and ensuring their accessibility to all learners.
* With regard to teacher training, during the pandemic free online and non-mandatory training was disseminated in the wake of government investment. Also, this crisis has created an opportunity for many institutions to promote a better coordination between their IT support staff and teachers and to revise their digital security policy and choice of digital platforms.
* School closures and the use of distance learning have also revealed a wide range of student needs. These needs were incorporated into the various measures announced for the new school year.
* Social distancing rules to minimize the spread of COVID-19 have led many Québec colleges and universities to shift to distance education. Yet not all institutions, their faculty and students are starting out on an equal footing in tackling such a significant change. In 2018, 88% of universities and 56% of colleges in Québec offered distance education to varying degrees. Yet only 20% of university student populations as well as 4% of college student populations had previously taken at least one distance course. Thus, for many, the pandemic was an opportunity to experience distance learning firsthand. As for the institutions themselves, some already had a dedicated infrastructure for distance education, while others had to create one.
1. **Positions and recommendations of education councils**
* Did your Council release recommendations on education in pandemic times? Or are recommendations planned? In progress?
* What is the main focus of those recommendations?
* What are the most relevant recommendations produced by your Education Council?

To address the new reality imposed by the pandemic, the Ministère de l’Éducation had to introduce a number of amendments to the education regulations governing the various levels of instruction. Under its incorporating act, the Conseil is mandated to present an opinion on these amendments, which led to the preparation and dissemination of **four briefs**. A number of the recommendations set out in these briefs were adopted by the Ministère de l’Éducation.

**The Conseil’s Opinion on Amendments to Regulations Enacted by the Government During the Pandemic**

1. In response to temporary amendments made to the *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education* related to student evaluations and the academic calendar, in its brief to the Minister the Conseil emphasized the importance of school success for all students and the need to provide actors in the education community with the necessary support and flexibility to deliver an adapted response not only in terms of pedagogy, but also for the emotional and social needs of students. The success plan introduced by the Ministère de l’Éducation for the new school year is in keeping with these needs. This resulted in additional investments, notably to increase the number of psychosocial professionals available to support teachers accompanying students, as recommended by the Conseil.
2. In response to the proposed temporary amendments to the *Basic adult general education regulation* and the *Basic vocational training regulation*, in a mindful approach the Conseil recommended namely to make available the necessary professional resources for the success and well-being of learners. A number of measures to foster student success being implemented for the new school year discussed above take this recommendation into account.
3. In response to the draft temporary amendments to *College Education Regulations* and seeking to ensure that the 2020 winter term still counted, and student progress was not compromised, the Conseil acknowledged that these amendments confirmed a *de facto* situation in colleges. It thus recommended that the Minister plan for the reopening of colleges in the fall by considering a set of specific recommendations. The Conseil notably cautioned that alternative teaching delivery methods used during the pandemic were putting certain vulnerable groups—notably Indigenous and Inuit populations—in an even more precarious situation *vis-à-vis* success. Some of the measures announced by the Government for the new 2020-2021 school year acknowledge this concern.

**Other Publications Produced by the Conseil in Response to the Public Health Crisis or Adapted to Education Community Concerns**

In addition to the aforementioned briefs, Conseil has also posted online a series of **information** **capsules** in response to needs expressed during the pandemic by decision-makers, education stakeholders, parents and students. These capsules are based on earlier briefs and were shared on social media to swiftly fill the void in information and stimulate debate on some live issues. The themes covered were:

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| March 31 | The evaluation of learning |
| April 7 | Vulnerable student populations |
| April 14 | Distance education |
| April 21 | An inequitable education system |
| April 28 | Dropping out of school |
| May 5 | Elementary, secondary, college and university transitions |
| May 12 | Returning to class in the time of COVID-19: the key role of social and emotional skills |
| May 19 | Societal perception of the digital world |
| May 26 | The R score |
| June 2 | Supporting parents in homework |
| June 9 | Release of a brief on student well-being and its companion publication on risk factors and protection for children at school |
| June 16 | Adult general education vs. general education in the youth sector |
| June 23 | COVID-19 and its impact on international students |
| June 30 | The well-being of the child during COVID-19: behavioural management and rules of conduct |
| July 7 | The impact of COVID-19 on university internships |
| July 14 | The importance of digital literacy and francization for adults in general education during the pandemic |
| July 21 | Release of a brief on accelerated pathways in university studies |
| July 28 | Youth mental health (distress, stress, anxiety) and the importance of having timely access to social and mental health resources |
| August 4 | Drop-out rates in Master’s and PhDs  |
| August 11 | Class management |
| August 18 | The importance of a learning community: the upside of COVID-19 |
| August 25 | Entering the teaching profession: a need for support |
| September 1 | Screen time during the pandemic |

In response to some concerns arising from the pandemic, the Conseil has released **four documents based on studies and research** that were adapted to reflect the new reality of 2020. Related to briefs or reports previously prepared by the Conseil, these documents contain a wealth of potentially useful information that justify their publication.

1. The lockdown, remote schooling and restricted outdoor activities have all made technological tools essential, increasing already existing parental fears about their use, including time spent in front of screens. In [*Les discours sur le temps d’écran : valeurs sociales et études scientifiques*](https://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/50-2110-ER-Temps-ecran.pdf)[Talking About Screen Time: Societal Values and Scientific Studies], the Conseil outlines the latest research findings and includes an overview on this issue. It also notes that screens can be both a learning and entertainment tool, and can be good for children and youth provided that they are used judiciously and in moderation.
2. Long before the pandemic, the well-being of the child at school had been a major preoccupation for the Conseil, and had noted the psychological distress that some students experience. With this in mind, in its brief [*Le bien-être de l’enfant à l’école: faisons nos devoirs*](https://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/50-0524-SO-bien-etre-enfant-3.pdf)[The Well-being of the Child in School: Let’s Do Our Homework], the Conseil formulated eighteen recommendations, including one to the children themselves. In response to concerns highlighted in the brief, the Québec Government this past August announced a number of measures for the new 2020-2021 school year. In this brief the Conseil emphasized, *inter alia*, the importance of delivering available mental and social resources in a universal and timely fashion. To make this happen, the Conseil called for a revision of the mandate of school psychologists and other professionals to lighten their administrative workload, freeing them to be better able to support students and those working with students. The Conseil also released a companion publication, [*Le bien-être de l’enfant à l’école primaire : Un regard sur certains facteurs de risque et de protection*](https://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/50-2107-ER-Bien-etre-enfant-facteurs-risque-protection.pdf) [The Well-being of the Child in Elementary School: Risk Factors and Protection at a Glance]. This document outlines factors which stem from universal practices that can significantly impact the well-being of children, factors which the education system can influence or is able to address.

1. In the middle of a pandemic that has turned education systems worldwide upside down, digital technologies have proven to be a lifeline. The public health crisis has forced institutions to implement alternative measures for distance learning, measures for which not all of them were equally prepared. The Conseil’s [*Discours, imaginaires et représentations sociales du numérique en éducation*](https://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/type_de_publication/rep-sociales-numerique-en-education-50-2109/)[Digital Technologies in Education: Debate, Societal Perceptions and Views]delves into the issue of societal views that could explain the reasons for embracing*,* rejecting or taking ownership of digital technologies in education. The wide range of rhetoric noted is indicative of the differing opinions, values and beliefs that need to be considered in order to fully understand the challenges in integrating digital technologies in education. The Conseil’s findings reinforce the need for dialogue between pro- and anti-technology camps.
2. The rules on social distancing to contain the spread of COVID-19 have led many colleges and universities to shift to distance learning. The inherent flexibility in this mode of delivery offers a clear advantage given the circumstances since last spring. However, not all institutions, faculties and students are on the same footing in tackling such a significant change. Once the emergency phase of the pandemic is over, academic institutions will be able to carry out post-mortems and examine the place of distance learning in their education offer and how to incorporate and respect the principles of accessibility, feasibility and quality. To both support and put this introspection into a historical and theoretical context, the Conseil in April released *[Définitions et modalités de la formation à distance](https://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/type_de_publication/formation-a-distance-50-2108/)* [Distance Learning: Definitions and Methods].