Advisory Board on English Education

Brief to the
Ministre de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
July 2006

Decentralization, Regionalization and Adaptation (DRA):
Jamais deux sans trois

Contents

The presentation of the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports to the Table Québec-Régions (TQR) on February 9, 2006, on the topic of **Decentralization, Regionalization and Adaptation (DRA)** <http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/CPRESS/cprss2006/tqr.pdf> is seen by the members of the **Advisory Board on English Education** (ABEE) as a significant pronouncement.

While the Advisory Board understands that the dossier is an evolving one and that there will be various developments and policy and structural adjustments involving the MELS and the school system, in concert with the government and the other ministries, in the months and years to come, the Advisory Board decided that it wanted to communicate its observations to the Minister at this time so that certain aspects of DRA as they affect the English-speaking community and the English-language educational institutions can be taken into consideration as the Minister's reflections progress.

1) The Context

The issue of regionalization—not just in education but also across the entire spectrum of government policy making and service delivery—is not a new one. In recent years two successive governments have made discussion of regionalization and decentralization a priority with a view to making government policies and services more responsive to local and regional needs.

In 1998, the Advisory Board on English Education issued a report entitled *Regionalization and Vocational Education: A challenge for English School Boards* <http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/CELA/pdf/reg_form-prof_a.pdf>, in which some of the issues currently under study, concerning regionalization and particularly the means of balancing the requirements of regionalization with the specific needs of the English community in that context, were examined.

Among the recommendations in that report are:

- That the Ministère de l'Éducation collaborate with the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité and the Ministère des Régions to assure appropriate English-community representation on ministerial and regional management and decision-making bodies.

- That the Ministère de l'Éducation assure full representation of the English community on the Comité national des programs d'études en formation professionnelle et technique.

- That the Ministère de l'Éducation facilitate English-community collaboration in the Politique active du marché du travail (PAMT), especially in the Montréal region, through the offices of the Ministère des Régions and the Ministère de la Métropole.

- That the English school boards and the English CEGEPs harmonize their services in vocational studies and training

The March 2004 government policy paper *Briller parmi les meilleurs* <http://www.briller.gouv.qc.ca/publications_briller.htm#briller > (*Shine Amongst the Best* <http://www.briller.gouv.qc.ca/publications_briller_en.htm>) further examined the issues involved in regionalization:

> What we are proposing in this regard is to put the levers for economic and regional development back into the hands of the citizens of the regions and their municipal representatives by taking the unprecedented step of decentralizing and devolving responsibilities and resources. ("Taking Charge of Development: The Strength of the Region," p. 7)

In the fall of 2005, the report of the Équipe de travail sur le maintien de l'accès à des services éducatifs de qualité, *L'Éducation, l'avenir du Québec – Rapport sur l'accès à l'éducation* (the Gervais report) <http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/Acces_education/454332.pdf> examined hypotheses that would see a massive regionalization in education and child care.

In this context, the Advisory Board understands that the Minister's declaration to the TQR on February 9, 2006, is just a first instalment of a larger regionalization policy and that there will undoubtedly be further steps to come soon.

In the medium term, the Ministère might be moving additional resources and functions into its regional offices, and certain functions, including financial allocation might be decentralized.

In the short term, the Minister is announcing new mandates for the Tables inter-ordres (TIOs).

The Principles of DRA

The principles of decentralization, regionalization and adaptation present no problem for the Advisory Board. Its members agree that a government policy cannot be applied in a one-size-fits-all approach across the province and be expected to achieve uniform success, given the substantial differences in population density, geography, culture, local tradition and, especially, the different social and economic problems present in the different regions. Transferring responsibility for delivery to levels closer to the populations served and allowing the regional determination of priorities and the adaptation of delivery to local needs—as well as providing the tools required for implementation—is likely to make government policies more relevant, appropriate and successful.

The English-speaking community well understands the importance of structures which regionalize priorities and decentralize delivery while allowing for appropriate adaptation: the very existence of English-language school boards is a reflection of the wide acceptance of this principle of public administration, enabling educational services to operate throughout Québec in response to the specificities of the English-speaking community.

The Advisory Board notes that these are not partisan political concepts. In 2003, Sylvain Simard, Minister of State for Education and Employment in a previous government, stated in addressing a conference of English-language adult educators:

> I know that in addition to facing many of the same challenges as their French-speaking counterparts throughout the province, English school boards must deal with some of their own specific challenges.
>
> We all know that in most parts of Québec, English school boards serve small numbers of adults; that the population wishing to be served by English school boards in the adult sector is spread thinly over large areas; that travel and communications are often more difficult and more costly to the individual; and that many potential adult learners, who lack access to English-speaking resources and support structures, find the many challenges and obstacles involved in continuing their education just too difficult to overcome on their own…
>
> These challenges mean that in devising each strategy used to implement this policy, the government must reasonably take into account the particular needs and circumstances of the English-speaking population, its community groups and organizations and its school boards…
>
> The new curriculum will require the development of competencies related to citizenship, culture and employability. These important dimensions of adult life are experienced differently in the various linguistic and cultural communities of Québec. School boards, and especially their teaching staffs, will have a large role to play in ensuring that the curriculum in these areas is sensitive, realistic and adapted to the lives of their adult students.
>
> <http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/MINISTRE/minis2003/a030110.htm>

2)   The Minister's February 9, 2006, DRA Presentation: a New Challenge

The preoccupations of the English-language educational community with regard to DRA are:
- What impact will this have on the ability of the community's institutions to carry out their mandates?
- What effect will it have on access to services, especially in the regions far from Montreal?
- Will it provide additional benefits to English-language institutions or will it reduce their level of resources?
- How will it affect the support that these often small and far-flung institutions have shared with each other in order to survive?

As the government develops and implements its strategy for DRA, the English-speaking community, as well, must develop its own awareness of DRA's potential impact on current practices and future needs—and communicate this to the

government—in order that it can participate knowledgeably and constructively in the evolution of DRA.

The Advisory Board has examined the details of the Minister's February 9, 2006, presentation and notes that only a limited modification of current practices is being proposed at this time. The Minister is calling for TIOs to be formed in each region where there is a willingness to do so, and asking that these tables establish a regional diagnosis of service organization within the region and draw up plans for the redeployment of services in order to optimize the use of resources and maintain access. The availability of vocational and technical training would be a priority for these tables.

There were no new funds announced in February for the partners at the regional tables, but money saved through the optimization of services could be reinvested according to the tables' priorities.

The Advisory Board has noted that there was no explicit mention of English-language institutions or services in the Minister's presentation. The Advisory Board has therefore undertaken a discussion of the impact of these proposals on the English-speaking education community: what are the effects on the English-speaking sector when the major template for planning and delivery of services becomes a regional one?

The Advisory Board feels that while this particular proposal—in which participation is voluntary and in which every partner retains its sovereignty— should not be cause for opposition, it does raise substantial questions for the English-speaking community.

The first concern is that the model currently being proposed does not, in fact, guarantee that all the English community's educational institutions will have effective access to participation in the regional bodies in certain parts of the province. There is a risk for English-language educational institutions if they are not full participants in regional bodies where, increasingly, discussions about resource allocations may take place.
- Will these institutions be invited to attend in all appropriate cases?
- Will they have the resources to be able to participate?
- What adaptations to this DRA model are necessary to make their participation meaningful?

As the Minister has asked the TIOs to undertake a diagnosis of all education services in the region, it is essential that the English-language institutions be active participants at the tables. If TIOs are to respond appropriately to problems encountered by the English-language institutions, these institutions must be present to state their case.

In examining the impacts of regionalization, English-language school boards have to look at more than merely what affects them as anglophones: there are other concerns and there are alliances to be maintained, based on common issues with their French neighbours.

The Advisory Board has been told that, at present, in some regions where there are TIOs functioning, English-speaking educators find their activities productive and relevant. However, since urban and rural educational institutions are serving different clienteles and are different in their resources and their organizational culture, it is likely

that the English-speaking community will have to define its needs and suggest what level of involvement in the new structures is most appropriate at this time.

Recommendations Concerning the Current Proposal

Concerning the **formation**, the **membership** and the **functioning** of the TIOs, the Advisory Board recommends the following:

> **1. When TIOs are being formed or reinstated, the Minister should ensure that all English-language educational institutions operating in the region be invited to participate as a matter of right.**

Given that many of the English-language **school boards** operate in several different administrative regions of the province (the Central Québec School Board's territory covers nearly half the area of Québec!) (See appendix listing English-language school boards/regions), the Advisory Board recommends the following:

> **2. English-language school boards should be invited to participate in the TIOs in every region for which they have an educational responsibility, and not merely the region in which their head office is located.**

Given that there are only four public and one private English-language **college** serving the entire province, with their students coming from many regions, the Advisory Board recommends the following:

> **3. English-language colleges should establish a mechanism, in concert with the TIOs, so that the colleges can monitor TIO activities and participate when appropriate.**

Given that there are only three English-language **universities** serving the entire province, the Advisory Board recommends the following:

> **4. English-language universities should establish a mechanism similar to that proposed for the colleges.**

> **5. As colleges and universities increase their distance education activities, the presence of postsecondary students residing in a region, making use of distance education, could be taken into consideration when examining TIO membership.**

Given that TIOs are composed of publicly funded bodies, there is a need for their activities to be publicized and to be transparent to all in the education system.

> **6. TIOs should be required develop a communications strategy respecting access-to-information principles, including the posting of all relevant information on Web sites.**

Two other issues flow directly from the establishment of TIOs, for which the Advisory Board suggests that an **adaptation of the DRA model** is necessary in order to make it appropriate for the needs of the English-speaking community.

Capacity Issues

The first relates to the capacity (human and financial resources) of an institution such as an English-language school board to participate in several TIOs. English school boards off the island of Montreal tend to be small in size but cover extensive territories.

Already, it is difficult for a school board whose staff is limited and whose territory may cover that of a dozen CLSCs to maintain adequate contact with these institutions. A school board straddling more than one region cannot, in the current state of the organization of public administration, expect nurses from one region to visit schools in another.

If TIOs are to count on the meaningful participation of the English-language school boards in their regions, additional resources must be made available to those English-language school boards that span more than one region.

The Advisory Board therefore recommends the following:

> **7.   English-language school boards whose territory covers more than one region should be given additional resources to cover the costs of personnel and travel inherent in full participation in the TIOs.**

The Ministry might examine the possibility that the Direction générale des régions submit a request to the Entente Canada-Quebec for Second Language and Minority Language Instruction for funding, which it could distribute appropriately to the English-language school boards to enable them to acquire the capacity to participate fully.

Participation of English Institutions: Horizontal and Vertical

The second issue concerns the effect that future English-language participation in TIOs and other regional bodies might have on existing structures and activities across the English-language sector.

Over the years, starting well before the reorganization of the education system into linguistic school boards, there have been differences in the ways the anglophone and francophone education communities have addressed certain issues, such as education for students with special needs and literacy. These differences have resulted in the development of English-sector measures, activities, strategies and programs responding to a variety of needs.

There exist linguistically based organizations of staff at every level; there are professional development and training activities; there are pedagogical exchange activities of every stripe. From many perspectives, the English-language school boards operate as if they are part of an English-speaking "virtual region."

In many of these activities, there is collaboration with the Secteur des services à la communauté anglophone of the MELS, which, while not a regional office, carries out many activities of *accompagnement* and *co-pilotage.*

If the individual parts of the English-speaking network are isolated in their regions, they cannot form the critical mass required for the community to be a significant player in decisions relating to the adaptation of the educational priorities to the needs of the English-speaking community. It is in no way clear how English education services could find representation in the existing regional demography. On the other hand, the English education community, working as a "region," has until now been able to address the far-flung community's particular needs.

The perennial question as to the place of English-speaking institutions in the Ministry's regional map—do they form part of the 17 administrative regions, or do they represent an 18th "virtual region"—again raises its head in the context of implementing DRA.

The Advisory Board fears that many existing activities shared among English-language school boards could be put into jeopardy by the current regionalization model if that model were to have the effect of limiting collaboration to one's immediate geographic neighbours.

The challenge for English-language school boards is how to adapt the proposed regional model so as not to "throw out the baby with the bathwater"; how to integrate into and to participate in their respective regions (vertically) while maintaining the strengths of working (horizontally) with the other English-language school boards in a supraregional approach.

Current examples of horizontal planning and operation of services include
- the Centres of Excellence for students with special needs <http://www.qesnrecit.qc.ca/insight/coe.php>
- the recent Strategic Plan for Vocational Training adopted by the nine English-language school boards
- LEARN, the Leading English Education And Resource Network <http://learnquebec.ca/>

English-language institutions will continue to meet with each other in intra-level and inter-level groupings. While the Advisory Board is not proposing that special steps be taken to form an English TIO, it is clear that common strategy and shared resources will continue to, and should continue to, play an important role in dealing with common challenges. It will be up to English educational institutions to identify which topics can and should be shared horizontally across linguistic and cultural lines.

The Advisory Board therefore recommends the following:

> **8.   When the English-language community starts to move towards the optimization of services as invited by the Minister, it should examine what can be shared horizontally (across an anglophone "virtual region" in English-sector committees) and what vertically (in individual geographic regions via a TIO or CRE).**

3) Challenges for the Future

While the proposals made in the Minister's February 9, 2006, presentation may with some adaptations be quite workable, the Advisory Board wishes to draw to the Minister's attention other difficulties that may lie further down the road for the English-speaking community in the implementation of DRA.

As was mentioned earlier, the Minister's presentation speaks of tables and analyses that are voluntary, in which any changes to current practices will flow from the cooperative desire of the partners around the table. However, if and when the TIOs and the CREs are granted decision-making powers that will bind or otherwise have a direct impact upon the educational institutions in the regions, this is likely to trigger new concerns.

There is a concern about ongoing participation and representation of the English-speaking community in bodies where decisions are made. If, among the members of a CRE, there were to be one seat reserved for educational institutions, it is not assured that the English institutions would be present or feel that they were being represented. In such circumstances, there is a fear that English-language institutions would have little chance of having their preoccupations voiced and heeded when decisions are made.

If a relatively rigid model of regionalization without reference to the minority situation of English institutions eventually emerges, it will also make the access to health, social and employment services difficult if not impossible. Already the availability of English-language services in parts of the province is problematic. Some parts of the policy will need to be adapted in specific ways to serve the needs of the English communities in the regions.

Other institutions in a region are often not aware to what extent the English-speaking schools in rural areas tend to be the only community institution specifically identified as English, and thus sometimes carry a larger responsibility as a form of community centre for the English, playing a somewhat different role (and requiring somewhat different human and financial resources) from that of their neighbours.

English-language institutions located off the island of Montreal, being generally smaller organizations than their urban counterparts, are likely to be much more affected by changes brought about by DRA. As an example, some English-language school boards have huge territories and do not serve dense communities clustered near the schools, as many French-language school boards do. There are concerns that a small organization, without substantial staff or resources, may not be able to hold its own in a region of larger partners in the absence of norms that will guarantee minimum standards of support for the foreseeable future.

There is concern that the needs that affect the English-speaking community differently may be overlooked if regional priorities are determined merely by majority rule. The distinct nature of the English community needs to be acknowledged in any regional plan. The principle of priorities for the English community has to be firmly articulated in relation to the specific powers that the Minister or the government would transfer to regional bodies. Too often, English institutions have to remind their neighbours that

they operate on rhythms that reflect the life of their community and cannot merely copy their neighbours while translating into English.

Some examples of differences to which not all regional groups may be sensitive:
- There is potentially greater mobility for English-speaking workers, and therefore their vocational training needs may be wider than merely what the local job market can provide; the offer of vocational and technical training based exclusively on local needs would undoubtedly result in more English-speaking students leaving their region at an earlier age.
- The economies of scale resulting from cooperation among English-speaking institutions could be jeopardized if the English institutions' ability to contribute to these supraregional services is impeded through decision making at regional tables.

The principal purpose of regionalization is to allow for priorities to be focused on needs of the region. However, the Advisory Board is concerned about the possibility that changing priorities as determined in a region could result in a decrease in services the English-speaking community values. Any specialized services involving delivery in a specific language (for example: literacy, services for special-needs students) may suffer unless there is a commitment of a critical mass of resources to serve the clients.

In short, "acquired rights" of the English-speaking community should be protected in the rules to be established for expanding the powers of regional bodies within the DRA policy.

The Advisory Board proposes that the following guideline be used:

> **9.   When new functions and powers concerning education and related services are transferred to regional bodies such as the TIO and the CRE, the level of services in these areas for the English-speaking community should be guaranteed, so that the agreement of the appropriate representatives of the English-speaking community is required for their modification.**

4) Conclusion

The Advisory Board would like to underline the importance for the government to recognize **adaptation** as an essential component for the English-speaking community in the move towards **decentralization** and **regionalization**. Decentralization and regionalization alone cannot ensure the maintenance of the quality of services that the government wants to deliver.

There is a risk for English-language educational institutions if they are not full partners in regional bodies where, increasingly, resources may be allocated; if they cannot exercise their full partnership, an unintended consequence may be their exclusion. The challenge for English-language school boards is how to integrate into and participate in their respective regions while maintaining some form of supraregional safeguards. This supraregional dimension could be described as an adaptation of the regional approach.

If "the adaptation of services to needs in each region" is to apply to the English-speaking minority in each region, then ways must be found to integrate English educational institutions into the development plans of each region. Constructive adaptation will facilitate the inclusion of the minority. The inclusion of the English-speaking community as full partners enriches the whole region. Dealing equitably and productively with the issue of capacity will allow full participation of the English-speaking population in their regions and allow them to serve the needs of their own communities while working towards the overall goals for their respective regions

English-speaking Quebeckers want to play a role in their regions; that is why they continue to live there.

Appendix

Number of administrative regions in the territories of English-language school boards

Central Québec	6	Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean, Capitale-Nationale Chaudière-Appalaches Mauricie Centre-du-Québec Nord-du-Québec
Eastern Shores	3	Bas-Saint-Laurent Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Côte-Nord
Eastern Townships	1	Estrie
Riverside	1	Montérégie
Sir-Wilfrid-Laurier	3	Laval Laurentides Lanaudière
Western Québec	2	Outaouais Abitibi-Témiscamingue
English-Montréal	1	Montréal
Lester-B.-Pearson	2	Montréal Montérégie
New Frontiers	1	Montérégie

Recommendations

1.   When TIOs are being formed or reinstated, the Minister should ensure that all English-language educational institutions operating in the region be invited to participate as a matter of right.

2.   English-language school boards should be invited to participate in the TIOs in every region for which they have an educational responsibility, and not merely the region in which their head office is located.

3.   English-language colleges should establish a mechanism, in concert with the TIOs, so that the colleges can monitor TIO activities and participate when appropriate.

4.   English-language universities should establish a mechanism similar to that proposed for the colleges.

5.   As colleges and universities increase their distance education activities, the presence of postsecondary students residing in a region, making use of distance education, could be taken into consideration when examining TIO membership.

6.   TIOs should be required develop a communications strategy respecting access-to-information principles, including the posting of all relevant information on Web sites.

7.   English-language school boards whose territory covers more than one region should be given additional resources to cover the costs of personnel and travel inherent in full participation in the TIOs.

8.   When the English-language community starts to move towards the optimization of services as invited by the Minister, it should examine what can be shared horizontally (across an anglophone "virtual region" in English-sector committees) and what vertically (in individual geographic regions via a TIO or CRE).

9.   When new functions and powers concerning education and related services are transferred to regional bodies such as the TIO and the CRE, the level of services in these areas for the English-speaking community should be guaranteed, so that the agreement of the appropriate representatives of the English-speaking community is required for their modification.