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Conseil  
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ADVICE CONCERNING PROPOSED AMENDMENTS  
TO THE REGULATIONS RESPECTING THE BASIS OF  
SECONDARY SCHOOL, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND  
PRESCHOOL ORGANIZATION

Advice to the ministre de l'Éducation  
September 30, 1982

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**CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION**  
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## INTRODUCTION

The ministre de l'Education requested the opinion of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation on the intended amendments to the «Regulation respecting the basis of secondary school organization» and to the «Regulation respecting the basis of elementary school and preschool organization».

At the secondary level, the Ministre proposes to provide for the gradual implementation of a new passing mark, which is raised from 50% to 60%. At the elementary level, the Ministre proposes to provide the parents with a summary of the programs once a year, as is the case at the secondary level, instead of twice a year. He also proposes that the students in need of special education services in remedial French, mathematics or a second language be exempted from studying one other subject.

The following pages contain the views of the Conseil on the above three questions.

I - AMENDMENTS TO THE REGULATION RESPECTING THE  
«RÉGIME PÉDAGOGIQUE AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL»

● *Gradual implementation of the new passing mark*

In its advice on the new «régime pédagogique», the Conseil recommended that the passing mark for secondary level examinations be raised to 60%. It emphasized the symbolic aspect of 50%, which «projects an image of mediocrity by creating the impression that success is achieved by accomplishing only half of anything<sup>1</sup>». In its recommendation, the Conseil expressed the hope that school communities would be encouraged to improve the quality of education. However, as a broad study of a «régime pédagogique» in its entirety was being undertaken, the Conseil could hardly elaborate on the modes of application of such a measure. The Ministre's request now gives the Conseil an opportunity to do so.

Thus, the Conseil agrees with the intention of the ministre de l'Éducation to gradually implement the 60% passing mark. In view, however, of one of the very reasons which brought about this modality, i.e. avoiding a change in the rules of the game for those students already enrolled at the secondary level, the Conseil recommends that such implementation take place over a period of five years instead of four. It hereafter explains its reasons.

The Conseil observes that a gradual implementation of the new passing mark accompanies a gradual implementation of the new rules respecting the sanctioning of studies. Moreover, the coming into force of new programs with more precise objectives, should bring about more accurate evaluation of learning and should result in more

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1. Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1980-1981 Report, Vol.1, p.69.

meaningful marks. From the inception of the present school year, the new programs are being implemented in the first grade of the secondary level and, by 1986, new programs will be in application in all five years of the secondary level.

*Improving the  
quality of  
teaching*

The extent to which raising the passing mark will mainly contribute to the desired improvement of the quality of education provided to the students depends upon the fulfilment of many conditions. These conditions involve especially a sharing of responsibility between all participants in the education of young people.

Raising the requirements for students is desirable provided they are given a teaching of quality. The pedagogical measures described in the plan of action entitled L'Ecole québécoise aim to improve teaching - for example, by providing more precise programs and more balanced timetables and by making pedagogical instruments such as manuals more available. Moreover, the very activity of the administrators, parents, teaching and non-teaching personnel remains important. Meeting the challenge of the new and higher passing mark cannot be left only to the students, although the latter must be encouraged to furnish greater efforts.

Raising the passing mark would, on the other hand, be counter-productive if it further crystalized the attention of both teachers and students on the examination marks. It would thus only contribute to the aggravation of a state of affairs which the Conseil deplored in its recommendation of last May concerning evaluations of learning at the secondary level. In its report, the Conseil drew attention to the problem (amongst others) that students give disproportionate attention to their marks compared to the quality of their education. Raising the passing mark must therefore bring the school communities at the outset to improve the quality of education as much as possible.

*A more meaningful pedagogical evaluation*

Raising the passing mark takes on its full meaning to the extent that the examination marks are themselves meaningful. Too often they are characterised by the inclusion of all sorts of questionable results, from the evaluation standpoint. Even classroom attendance forms part of the marks. As well, various types of evaluation, whose raison d'être is based upon their relation to their specific objectives, are mixed up. For example, in theory, one should not include in examination marks, evaluation results which, at the outset, are of a diagnostic nature. These results are thus called to play a role which does not belong to them.

Moreover, instead of an evaluation based on a standard which consists in giving marks whereby students are classified as «strong», «average» or «weak», would it not be preferable to use criterion-referencing, leading to an analysis of the students' academic results in regard to the attaining of specific educational objectives? Such an approach would be more fair to the students; somewhat artificial comparisons among themselves would thus be avoided.

The new policy of the ministère de l'Éducation with the respect to pedagogical evaluation contains various measures to improve present evaluation practices. One of the most important is to provide the teachers with sufficient technical assistance to improve their evaluation methods. The school administrations must themselves participate in the preparation of worthwhile instruments of evaluation.

*Gradual implementation*

Last year, certain school boards, following the example of communities which were already applying this standard, raised the passing mark to 60% in many grades. In the course of the school year, the failure rate increased in these groups, which brought the school boards to adopt measures to enable some of those who had failed to make up. This helped to reduce the failure rate, while raising the

educational level. Implementing the new passing mark in all grades of the secondary level therefore requires that methods of detecting students experiencing problems be used, and that the means for these students to catchup in their studies be provided. This should be done from the beginning of the secondary level. It will therefore be easily agreed that a gradual implementation of the higher passing mark will facilitate the task for all school milieux and allow them to elaborate forms of assistance adapted to the students' needs, especially those having certain problems.

*Spread over  
five years*

However, the Conseil believes the implementation period should be spread over five years. In the Conseil's opinion, there should be no exception for students who are presently in Secondary II and who, when reaching Secondary V, would have to submit to the 60% passing mark, when, during their previous years of study, they were under the old system. This would happen if the implementation were spread over four years only. The intention is presumably to avoid that four years hence, within the same curriculum, students in their 4th or 5th years be imposed different passing standards. However, this situation is becoming increasingly rare, most of the schools having an insufficient number of students to be in a position to duplicate curricula. It would therefore be more equitable to apply the same principle for all students, i.e. that the rules of the game remain unchanged while it is being played. By spreading the implementation of the new passing mark over five years, the present students of Secondary II will be allowed to finish their course of studies under the same conditions as those prevailing when they started.

## II - AMENDMENTS TO THE REGULATION RESPECTING THE «RÉGIME PÉDAGOGIQUE» AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

### A - Informing students' parents at the elementary level

The Conseil agrees with the proposed amendment requiring that once

only, at the beginning of the school year, rather than twice a year, the schools remit to the parents a summary of the educational program, the school calendar, and the evaluation criteria. This renders the section of the regulation more realistic. This kind of information should preferably be communicated at the beginning of the school year. It is moreover a particularly tedious operation at the elementary level where most of the teachers have to deal with several curricula.

The Conseil, however, questions the information content intended for the parents, particularly as concerns the «summary of the educational activities program». The number of interpretations of this «summary» presently seems to be running as high as the number of schools.

For some, a simple statement of a number of activities more or less directly related to the educational activities program suffices; for others, it implies sending a list of the program objectives, often expressed in technical terms which do not provide the parents with adequate information.

The school boards must therefore, in cooperation with their schools and the parents, determine the information content to be given the latter in accordance with their needs. At the outset however, it is important that the ministère de l'Éducation state precisely in the remarks accompanying draft sect. 23 the type of information contemplated by expressions such as «summary of the educational and motivational activities program». Moreover the ministère should provide such summaries while leaving the communities free to adapt them to their own local needs. It seems relevant at this point to recall that the requirement to provide the parents with summaries of the educational activities programs must not be confused with the requirement to proceed to planning of the school year, considering that such planning goes beyond the preparation of this «summary».

## B - Exemption from the study of a subject at the elementary level

The Conseil disagrees with the proposed amendment to sect. 33 of the «régime pédagogique» at the elementary level, namely that the regulation provide for the exemption from one subject for those students requiring special education services in a first or second language, or in mathematics.

This position is based on several reasons:

- a) At the elementary level (in contrast to the secondary level, where students can progressively choose their subjects), children are entitled to an education which develops awareness of general fields of knowledge and provides for a reasonably complete and balanced basic development. This is the objective pursued by the inclusion of various disciplines in the educational activities programs of the elementary level. To accept that some students should be exempted from a subject would, in fact, confirm the idea that certain subjects are actually less important, that they are minor or «secondary». The Conseil has recently clearly opposed this view in its recommendation on «The state of the so-called *secondary* subjects».
- b) The proposed amendment gives much importance to the time element, since it advocates adding a number of teaching periods for subjects which already take up more than half of the school timetable. For its part, the Conseil believes that emphasis must above all be placed on improving pedagogical activity and learning conditions rather than on simply increasing study time in certain subjects. One way would consist in a greater integration of orthopedagogy into the classroom. Such an integration, by bringing the teachers and the orthopedagogues to work together among

the students could encourage an activity that would be more coordinated and better adapted to the students' learning disabilities. Indeed, the present *modus operandi* of orthopedagogy, outside the classroom, leads to a more obvious breaking up of the class-groups and more complicated work for the home-room teachers in teaching the various subjects. This is especially true at the elementary level where, concerning the timetable, there is no systematic separation between subjects, as is the case at the secondary level.

There are cases of students who accumulate difficulties and failures and who fall badly behind. As far as these students are concerned, the Conseil believes no efforts should be spared to motivate them and find the best possible pedagogical means of supporting them in their studies. Furthermore, these are the terms under which it is possible, if need be, to offer supplementary activities to help them catch up. This would not be the case if exemption from one subject or another were resorted to.

Educators find that the success of orthopedagogy, or any catching-up activity, is enhanced if this activity takes place as soon as students experience their first difficulties. It is therefore appropriate to recall that detection and orthopedagogy will be all the more effective if practiced at the beginning of the elementary level, i.e. during the first cycle.

- c) One should also consider the possible psychological impact for a child, first, of being kept even longer at studies which, for him, are a source of particular difficulty and,

secondly, of being at the same time deprived of activities which would probably be more attractive.

It is often through those subjects which are a source of interest that students experiencing problems accept school more easily and gradually adjust to it. In its recommendation concerning the so-called «secondary» subjects, the Conseil explained that learning of the basic skills, such as language and mathematics, can also be accomplished through these other subjects.



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