

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION

ABRIDGED VERSION

**NEW PERSPECTIVES  
ON THE TRANSITION FROM  
SECONDARY SCHOOL TO COLLEGE**

BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORTS

May 2010

Québec 

The present document is an abridged version of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation's brief ***Regards renouvelés sur la transition entre le secondaire et le collégial***. The Conseil has mandated the preparation of the brief to the Commission On College Education, comprised at the time of its adoption of the following members: Keith W. Henderson (Chair), Éric Blackburn, Patrick Brunet, Helena Dedic, Luc Desautels, Anne Filion, Malika Habel, Simon Larose, Jocelynn Meadows, Christian Muckle, Sophie Poirier, Éric Potvin, Véronic Proulx, Michel Simard and France St-Amour.

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# LE CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION

Established in 1964, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is an arm's-length advisory body to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports. It is comprised of 22 members representing the education community and other segments of Québec society. Intended as a forum for the advancement of a comprehensive vision of education, the Conseil is mandated to advise the Minister on any education-related matter.

The Conseil includes five commissions, one for each level or sector of the Québec education system: Commission on Preschool and Elementary Education, Commission on Secondary Education, Commission on College Education, Commission on University Education and Research, and the Commission on Adult Education and Continuing Education. The Conseil also includes a committee mandated to prepare a regular report on the state and needs of education every two years, which the Conseil submits to the Minister to be tabled in the National Assembly.

The work of the Conseil and its commissions is made possible thanks to the civic engagement and participation of close to one hundred dedicated volunteers.



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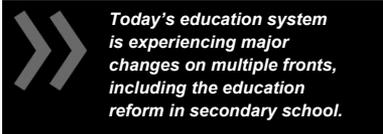
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# INTRODUCTION

Transition from secondary school to college is often simply defined as students finishing the former at the end of an academic year and starting the latter some two months later. Yet this is merely the most obvious definition of what is by far the most common path leading to college, and fails to consider that it is indeed part of the broader education system that establishes the rules governing promotion from one level of instruction to the next. This definition also omits the front-line role of secondary and college teachers, who as they pass the baton need to preserve both the continuity of learning and ensure the attainment of standards set for each respective level of instruction. It follows, then, that students do not bear the responsibility for transitioning from secondary school to college alone; but share it with the entire education system.



In addition to students transitioning into college, today's education system is experiencing major changes on multiple fronts. Both secondary school and college have changed over the past 20 years, each undergoing a

reform of its own somewhat independently of the other. In 1993, in an effort to enrich their curricula, colleges shifted toward a more competency-based approach, designing programs to be more integrative. Twelve years later, to enhance the quality of their own education program, secondary schools began their reform. Today, the convergence of these two distinct reforms represents an opportunity to re-examine the continuity of knowledge: the education reform has taken root in secondary schools, and colleges will soon be faced with integrating a new generation of students instructed under a different curriculum and new approaches. Despite having undergone a reform of its own, the college network must once again re-establish its position regarding the knowledge, practices and measures that fall under its jurisdiction. Québec colleges are thus called on to embrace a new "transitional" period of adjustment.

It must be emphasized, however, that this adjustment is not solely the consequence of the education reform in secondary school; it is also closely linked to recent amendments introduced to official regulations governing promotion between levels of instruction. (Indeed, the rate of secondary students admitted to college has remained constant over the past few years.) Amendments have also been introduced to the respective regulations on secondary education and college education to reduce potential barriers for those wishing to pursue post-secondary studies.

As an integral part of a society undergoing rapid change, colleges will always need to adapt and adjust. Links between new technologies, the workplace, education and knowledge are constantly being reconfigured, with colleges and their students as stakeholders playing the dual role of provider and end user. For their part, colleges have adopted a number of measures aimed at supporting student integration over the past 15 years, measures that appear to be effective in most cases. Nevertheless, there will be some students willing to study and succeed in college studies who may have special needs. It is therefore important to establish the right conditions for success that would enable these students to pursue their education and achieve their goals.

To identify both current challenges and initiatives in the area of secondary-to-college transition, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation carried out a two-stage survey among college players. First, in the fall of 2008, a questionnaire was sent to directors of studies in public institutions, private subsidized institutions and government schools in the college network. Second, in the winter of 2009, six institutions were chosen to take part in focus groups comprised of college teachers, administrators and professional staff. This enabled the Conseil to identify the range of current transition measures and challenges as perceived by the various players, as well as emerging broader issues.



*The Conseil proposes a systemic analytical framework founded on three different aspects of secondary-to-college transition.*

In its Brief, the Conseil examines the issue of secondary-to-college transition from a college perspective in fostering success among students wishing to pursue their education. The main

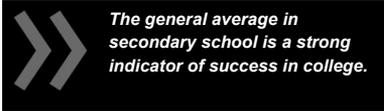
objective of the Conseil's work is not to measure the impact of the Québec Education Program on the knowledge acquired by college-bound students, but rather to propose a systemic analytical framework founded on three different aspects of secondary-to-college transition. Starting from this framework, education players could then cohesively articulate structures, seamlessly align knowledge and pedagogical and evaluation practices, prepare prospective college students for their transition as early as Secondary Cycle Two, and ultimately fully integrate them into college.

The Conseil would like to express its gratitude to the teachers, administrators, directors of studies and professionals who participated in the survey and focus groups. It would also like to thank the members of the Commission On College Education and all those who have in any way contributed to the preparation of the Brief.

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON SECONDARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION

Existing research work on secondary-to-college transition covers a spectrum of distinct themes, such as the role of secondary school in successful college studies, the theoretical foundations of support measures in college, and structural constraints that can determine the education paths of students.

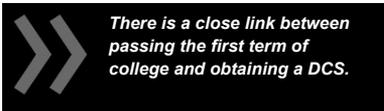
### ○ THE ROLE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL



A number of studies have focused on establishing a representative profile of new college students. Many indicate that the general average in secondary school is a strong indicator of student

success in college, and there appears to be a clear correlation between it and the likelihood of obtaining a Diploma of College Studies (DCS) (Gingras and Terrill 2006; CSE 2008). The time devoted to studying during secondary school and performing well in college also seem to be closely linked (Gingras and Terrill 2006). Secondary school thus plays a vital role in preparing students for college, both through the knowledge it imparts and the study skills it instills in them.

### ○ THE ROLE OF COLLEGE



While the prime importance of knowledge acquired and study skills developed in secondary school is universally accepted, research also shows that it is equally important to

provide new college students with the right tools for success, regardless of whether or not they have developed the necessary study skills for college. In fact, there is a strong correlation between passing the first term of college and obtaining a DCS: the number of failed courses during the first term—and not gender—appears to be a determining factor in certification, even among weaker students (Gingras and Terrill 2006).

Indeed, recent studies reveal that a successful college education rests on an array of interconnected factors that stem from the students themselves and their relationships with family, peers, and the college itself (Tremblay et. al. 2006; Bourdon et. al. 2007; Mackay et. al. 2006).

## ○ THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In most literature, academic achievement is a *de facto* institutional indicator of a successful transition from secondary school to college. This conclusion, however, begs the following question: how can structural conditions—which largely determine the possible paths in the education system—be taken into account?

In fact, students' choice of path, as well as their educational and career goals, are not solely dependent on individual self-perception, aptitudes, and aspirations. Students make their choices in an education system that ranks them according to academic achievement and which sets admission requirements for all programs of study (Doray et. al. 2009).



*The education system has a structuring effect on students who progress through levels of instruction.*

To consider the structuring effect of the education system on the individual progressing through it, some researchers have defined transition as two complementary

currents: completing one level of instruction and commencing another. When students leave one level—in this case, secondary school—they bring with them an accumulated body of knowledge, an attitude toward school, and study habits shaped by a given cultural context. This becomes their capital, similar to the knowledge acquired during their “apprenticeship” as students. Upon arriving at the next level—in this case, college—a process of integration begins that may see this capital clash with the underlying choices of career (Chenard, Francœur and Doray 2007). In addition to being conducted by students, these two currents are directed by the education system as well, for the latter determines the paths corresponding to the requirements of various programs, and sets restrictions or alternate paths (Doray et. al. 2009).

## THREE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SECONDARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION

In its Brief, the Conseil employs a systemic approach to examine secondary-to-college transition. This allows for the consideration of institutional, educational and social contexts in which this process occurs, as well as the guiding principle that transition is a shared responsibility between students and the entire education system. Three different aspects of secondary-to-college transition are thus analyzed:

- *Articulation*, or the institutional structures through which students progress;
- *Alignment*, or the linkages of knowledge and pedagogical and evaluation practices;
- *Integration*, or the process of incorporating new students into college life.

### ○ ARTICULATION

*Articulation* refers to the process in educational structures that allows students to transition from one level of instruction to the next, from one program of study to another, or from the education system to the workplace. Articulation thus pertains to the education system, its structures, the rules governing certification of studies at one level and the admission requirements at the next.

### ○ ALIGNMENT

*Alignment* refers to the linkages established for a seamless transition from one level of instruction to the next in one or more courses. Alignment focuses on knowledge and pedagogical and evaluation practices, and as such is the domain of teachers.

### ○ INTEGRATION

Based on Legendre's definition, *integration* is the process of incorporating the individual (i.e. a student) into a new environment (i.e. the college community) (Legendre 2005, p.784). Examining transition from this perspective would place students and colleges front and centre, where both share responsibility in undertaking a four-tiered process of institutional, intellectual, social and vocational integration (Tremblay et. al. 2006).

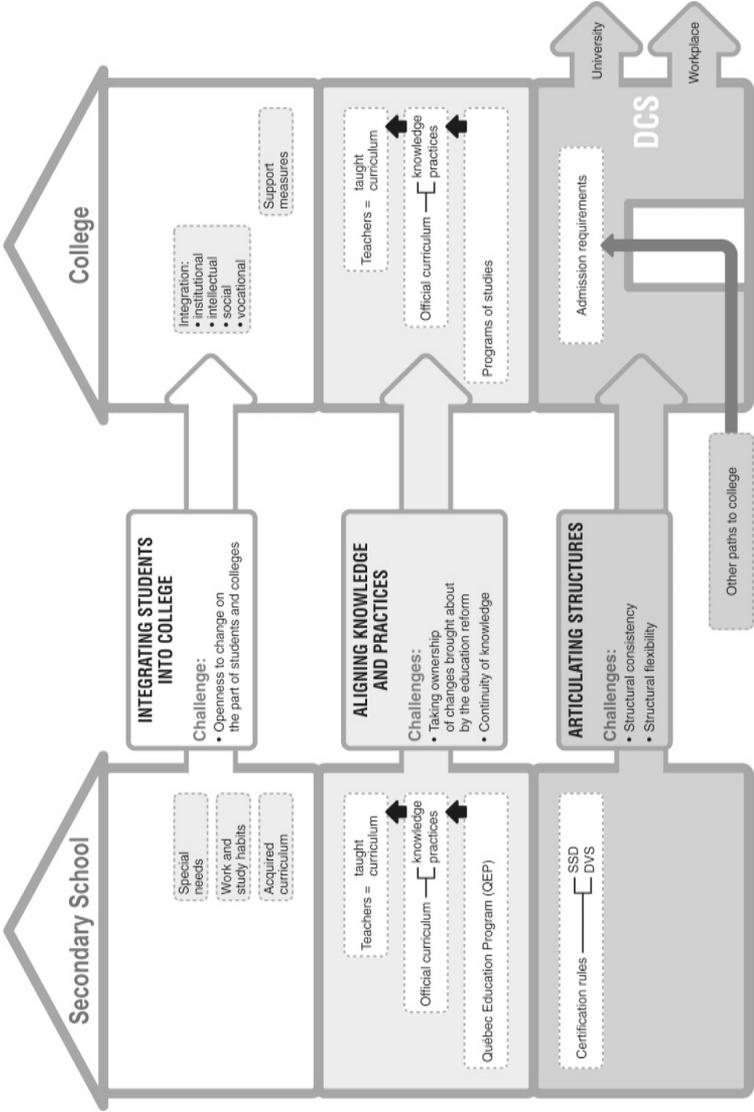
### ○ A SYSTEMIC ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF SECONDARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION

The diagram that follows summarizes the framework of three different aspects of secondary-to-college transition and how they interact.

SYSTEMIC ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF SECONDARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION

Secondary Student Culture

College Student Culture



## SECONDARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION: ARTICULATION

### ○ NEW REALITIES, NEW STRUCTURES

Articulation of structures refers to mechanisms in the education system that allow students to transition from one level of instruction to another. Rules governing certification of studies—which signal the completion of one stage of an education path—are one such mechanism. Once secondary certification (a Secondary School Diploma [SSD] or Diploma of Vocational Studies [DVS]) is complete, it is the *College Education Regulations* that stipulate college admission requirements. However, some programs of study may have additional prerequisites, such as specific credits in sciences or mathematics.

The current context of articulation in Québec reflects a post-reform education system:

- The majority of new students enrolled in college<sup>1</sup> hold an SSD and arrive directly from the youth sector of secondary school;
- Following the implementation of the education reform in secondary school, rules governing certification for an SSD were amended (new education paths were added in Secondary Cycle Two), while college admission requirements and prerequisites were also revised;
- Concurrent with these amendments, new provisions were introduced to make college studies more accessible to students with atypical education paths who otherwise would not have been able to enrol. Consequently the *College Education Regulations* were revised to include new admission eligibility criteria: conditional admission or admission based on instruction considered sufficient by the college;
- Measures exist to facilitate the continuity of an education path between a DVS and a DCS.

 *Both the education reform and new admission regulations for college have affected articulation.*

1. For all full and part-time DCS programs in mainstream education.

## ○ CHALLENGES OF ARTICULATION

Following a review of existing measures and concerns expressed by college players during the survey, the Conseil identified two broad challenges in the area of articulation: ensuring structural consistency, and allowing for structural flexibility.

In Québec, a tension exists between the need to preserve the unique characteristics and mission of each level of instruction and its position along the education continuum. Nevertheless, the internal consistency of a given level with its mission needs to be reconciled with the consistency of the education network as a whole. For example, although the primary objective of secondary school is not to prepare students for college, it appears that this mission is squarely aligned with its position along the continuum. As for college, although it operates independently from secondary education, it cannot completely distance itself from what precedes it. Consequently each level must be sensitive to any systemic changes that occur in the other, for the role of both in the area of access to and success in college converges at the same point along the education continuum.

For colleges, structural consistency in the education system requires standardized application of college admission requirements, while structural flexibility requires discretionary decision-making powers. With this latitude, colleges could take into account the particular needs of their students and unique environment of their institutions.



*Reconciling consistency and flexibility is influenced by students' individual life plans, aspirations and abilities.*

Lastly, reconciling consistency and flexibility is also influenced by students' individual life plans, aspirations and abilities. Flexibility could provide alternatives for those students with

an atypical education path, both in terms of admission as well as pursuing college studies. The need for consistency is reflected in rules governing promotion that allow students to transition from one level of education to the next and determine the paths which would best guarantee success at the next level. However, these rules can at times act as barriers for some students. Consequently, this need for flexibility in the education system necessitates compensatory mechanisms starting with regulations, such as conditional admission and admission based on instruction considered sufficient by the college, or the *Session d'accueil et d'intégration*.<sup>2</sup> Properly deployed, these mechanisms can offer sufficient guarantees of success, facilitate access to college studies for some students, and support them as they progress along their education path.

## ○ ARTICULATING STRUCTURES: THREE COURSES OF ACTION

To reconcile structural consistency and flexibility in today's new education environment, the Conseil proposes three courses of action:

### **1. Monitor the long-term effects of structural change on education paths and student success**

To document the effects of the education reform in secondary school and the amendments and additions to general admission conditions for college, long-term assessment should be carried out across Québec. This course of action would not only enable timely and necessary modifications, but would concurrently identify those practices in which the new generation of students admitted to college under the new criteria show a high success rate. The Conseil believes that colleges, school boards and private secondary schools should partner on such a project, not just to provide the necessary logistical support, but to be full stakeholders in any solutions adopted.

2. The *Session d'accueil et d'intégration* [orientation and integration program or SAI] was introduced throughout Québec colleges in 1993. Designed for first-year college students, the program's objective is to provide special pedagogical guidance to those with a weak education profile who need to take one or more remedial courses to meet prerequisites for a given program of study, or who have yet to clearly define their educational goals.

## 2. Support collaboration between secondary schools and colleges

At the regional level, *Tables régionales d'éducation interordres* [intra-level regional consultation groups] could assume a new mandate in the area of articulating structures between secondary schools and colleges.

To ensure consistency across all local initiatives, secondary schools and colleges could mutually benefit from implementing mechanisms that support dialogue between their respective personnel. In fact, given the new changes introduced in recent years to the rules governing promotion<sup>3</sup> and the DVS-to-DCS path, colleges and school boards could jointly broaden the practices related to their application. They could then disseminate this information to all their staff and ensure ongoing professional development for those directly involved. Lastly, this dialogue would also make it possible to better organize programs that straddle the two levels, for example, courses that could help students satisfy any requirements they may lack for SSD certification or college admission.

## 3. Encourage students who wish to continue their education path

An analysis on the provenance of college students in their first term of college shows that only a small percentage of them hold a DVS or come from the adult general education sector. In either case, it would seem fundamental to have a better understanding of the goals of these students at the time they pursue their education. For some, an SSD might be the qualification they are seeking and the culmination of their educational goals. However, plans can change, and in a perspective of life-long learning, bringing all the necessary conditions together would enable these students to continue their education path, whether today or in the future.

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3. In both the abridged and unabridged versions of the Brief, rules governing certification for an SSD or a DVS and college admission requirements are sometimes referred to as "rules governing promotion," as they both comprise the basic regulations establishing all possible paths leading to college education.

## ○ RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ARTICULATING STRUCTURES

To implement the above three courses of action reconciling structural consistency and flexibility in today's education environment, the Conseil submits the following recommendations:

### RECOMMENDATION 1

Considering that general admission conditions and requirements for college have been amended in light of the education reform in secondary school;

Considering that the education reform has introduced new education paths in Secondary Cycle Two (general education and applied general education);

Considering that recent amendments to the *College Education Regulations* have added new college admission regulations;

Considering the importance of understanding the effects of these changes on education paths and student success;

**The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports, in collaboration with Québec colleges, school boards and private education institutions:**

- To monitor, on an ongoing basis, the long-term effects of structural change on student transition to and success in college, and undertake any modifications required at each level of instruction.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

Considering the recent amendments to the *College Education Regulations* related to college admission;

Considering the amendments to the rules governing certification of an SSD brought about by the education reform;

Considering the need to fully understand the rules governing promotion between levels of instruction to guide students who qualify on the range of possible access paths to college;

Considering the guidance role of professional staff in secondary school and college (namely in providing information and references on school and education paths);

Considering that all secondary school staff are stakeholders in supporting students;

Considering the importance of ensuring consistency in any initiatives between the two levels of instruction;

Considering the importance of ensuring the continuity of education paths for those wishing to pursue their education;

**The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**

- To support collaboration at the regional level by granting *Tables régionales d'éducation interordres* a special mandate on the articulation of secondary and college structures;

**The Conseil recommends to colleges, school boards, secondary school administrators, and directors general of private institutions:**

- To organize forums to share information on the implementation of the rules governing promotion between the two levels of instruction, and to inform their respective members of any outcomes.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**

Considering that a Secondary School Diploma (SSD) and a Diploma of Vocational Study (DVS) are both official certifications of individualized education paths of some students seeking a qualification, and for whom this diploma may represent the culmination of their educational goal;

Considering that the objective of an education path can change over time and that the education system must promote continuity in such paths for individuals who desire to pursue an education;

Considering that an SSD in the adult general education sector and a DVS attest to the acquisition of a set of core competencies required for college studies;

Considering that only a small number of students who pursue college studies hold an SSD from the adult general education sector or a DVS, and this may be an indication of structural barriers in the continuity of education paths;

**The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports, colleges and school boards:**

- To conduct research on students enrolled in vocational training in secondary school or adult general education to identify the needs related to their goals, and to support those who wish to continue their education path.

## SECONDARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION: ALIGNMENT

### ○ ALIGNING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES IN A POST-REFORM CONTEXT

Through its overhaul of the curriculum in secondary school, the education reform has brought about major changes to the education system in Québec, and has called on secondary school teachers to adapt their teaching practices to these changes:

- In introducing a new education program—one founded on integrated subjects, broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies and one giving greater importance to the concept of competency—the reform modified the subject timetable, eliminating some subjects and adding and/or reconfiguring others;
- While it does not prescribe pedagogical practices *per se*, the reform does encourage teachers to innovate their practices by embracing a student-centred approach and “collegiality” with other teachers and professionals;
- The reform prescribes evaluation practices based on teachers’ best professional judgements.

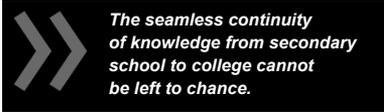


*The new curriculum currently exists in three different forms: official, taught and acquired.*

However, as the new curriculum has yet to be fully implemented, it currently exists in three different forms: official, taught and acquired. The *official* curriculum is the one found in the programs of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport; the *taught* curriculum is the one teachers understand, interpret and share with their class, and the *acquired* curriculum is the content students actually learn. College teachers would thus greatly benefit from working closely with their secondary counterparts, as this would allow the former to start modifying their practices in light of the effects of the education reform.

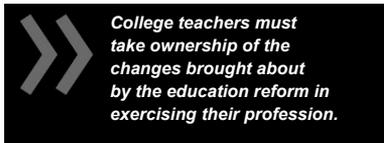
## ○ ALIGNING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES: TWO NEW CHALLENGES

After reviewing existing alignment measures and conducting a survey among college players on perceived challenges in this area, the Conseil identified two major challenges: the seamless continuity of knowledge from secondary school to college and the ownership, at both levels, of changes brought about by the education reform in secondary school.



As an intermediary link between secondary school and university or the workplace, colleges need to ensure that their programs of study meet post-secondary standards, and

that the exit profiles of their graduates meet social, work and educational expectations. However, this cannot occur without first considering the entry profiles of their new students. Indeed, the seamless continuity of knowledge from secondary school to college cannot be left to chance; it requires organization. Advocating this continuity, however, need not impinge on the autonomy nor the specialization of colleges. In fact the opposite holds true: it would recognize the very essence of the “transitional” role of colleges in the education and career path of post-secondary students. Changes introduced by the education reform in secondary school should therefore be viewed as an opportunity for colleges to take stock of the taught curriculum as well as existing pedagogical and evaluation practices at the secondary level. Armed with this insight, colleges could assume their mission by increasing the complexity of knowledge taught within the ambit of their mission and avoid overlap with secondary schools.



The need for continuity of knowledge from secondary school to college therefore depends on taking ownership—at both levels—of the changes brought about by the education reform. To be sure, taking

full ownership of the reform is a much greater concern for secondary school teachers, as college teachers need not fully implement the entire reform, only those changes that affect their teaching practices. Ownership of the reform by secondary teachers will, however, have an impact on college teachers, as the latter will not be able to test the effectiveness of any changes until the former have integrated them. Any changes must also consider the taught curriculum as well as the official curriculum at both levels.

## ○ ALIGNING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES: TWO COURSES OF ACTION

In light of the official and far-reaching curricular changes brought about by the education reform in secondary school, college teachers can no longer rely on traditional points of reference to modify their own practices. The Conseil therefore proposes two courses of action to align knowledge and pedagogical and evaluation practices at both levels of instruction:

### 1. Engage college teachers in the seamless continuity of knowledge

- For college teachers to be aware of the impact of the education reform in secondary school on their own practices, colleges must first facilitate the exchange of information on the reform and establish forums between teachers from both levels of instruction.
- Colleges must then support their teachers in assessing the impact of the reform on the latter's own practices:
  - > Firstly, by providing teachers with the necessary tools for an in-depth examination of the reform's scope. This should be followed by discussions among colleagues during program or department meetings. In fact, during this process decisions may be required on what constitutes the continuity of knowledge, notably in how to create, at the college level, the necessary bridges with secondary school, university and/or the workplace. The answers to this are not predetermined, and must be agreed upon by all.
  - > Secondly, with regard to aligning pedagogical and evaluation practices, the Conseil believes that college teachers should not limit their practices to those students may have already been exposed to at the secondary level. While they should be sensitive to these practices, as professionals and experts in their disciplines college teachers should continue to employ the pedagogical and evaluation practices of their choice, consistent with the content and competencies established for their courses.
  - > Lastly, once decisions are adopted, college teachers would then be able to integrate the relevant changes into their programs accordingly, for ultimately the classroom will bear witness to this collective engagement in the continuity of knowledge.

## 2. Formalize dialogue between secondary and college teachers

- Formally pairing secondary school and college teachers in this process would open a forum for dialogue on the curriculum taught at each level of instruction, as well as on their respective pedagogical and evaluation practices. Colleges and secondary institutions will need to forge official ties for this new dialogue to become both statutory and entrenched in their respective institutional cultures. The Conseil therefore invites the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports to support local, regional and Québec-wide pilot projects undertaken jointly by colleges and secondary schools. This would ensure that aligning knowledge and practices between these two institutions would not be left to chance.

## ○ **RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ALIGNING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES**

To implement these two courses of action to align knowledge and pedagogical and evaluation practices, the Conseil submits the following recommendations:

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Considering that alignment concerns the necessary linkages between knowledge and pedagogical and evaluation practices;

Considering the importance of placing knowledge taught in college on a continuum between that of secondary school, and that of university and/or the workplace;

Considering the need to engage college teachers in the seamless continuity of knowledge;

Considering that the Québec Education Program has changed how knowledge is integrated;

Considering that the education reform in secondary school proposes the adoption of innovative pedagogical practices based on a student-centered approach and “collegiality”;

Considering that the education reform in secondary school prescribes adopting new evaluation practices;

#### **The Conseil recommends to colleges:**

- To support college teachers in taking ownership of the changes brought about by the education reform in secondary school and to facilitate decisions on necessary modifications at the college level;

#### **The Conseil recommends to college teachers:**

- To better understand changes introduced by the education reform in secondary school and facilitate decisions, within departments and/or programs, on the modifications required to knowledge and pedagogical and evaluation practices at the college level.

**RECOMMENDATION 5**

Considering, in light of changes brought about by the education reform at the secondary level, the need for college teachers to define the necessary modifications to their own teaching practices;

Considering that in both secondary school and college, the official curriculum takes the form of a taught curriculum and pedagogical and evaluation practices;

Considering that forums between secondary school and college teachers are very often ad hoc in nature;

Considering that pairing teachers from these two different levels of instruction requires resources and poses logistical challenges;

**The Conseil recommends to colleges, school boards and particularly secondary school administrators:**

- To formalize dialogue between secondary and college teachers in the spirit of true collaboration, on a local, regional and Québec-wide basis;

**The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**

- To support formalizing dialogue between secondary and college teachers, notably through local, regional, and Québec-wide pilot projects.

## SECONDARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION: INTEGRATION

### ○ FIRST TERM AT COLLEGE: SITTING ON THE FENCE

For most students, applying to college takes on a special meaning, as it not only marks the end of secondary education, but also represents the beginning of adulthood, with greater freedom from parental authority. Yet even after arriving at college, students remain in a transitional phase—the duration of which varies according to the individual—where they are expected to adopt behaviours expected by college and adult life. A full and successful integration into college typically occurs when it is fulfilled:

- **Institutionally**, through the bond students forge with the institution as a physical place, social environment, and education setting (Bégin et. al. 2009).
- **Intellectually**, through the connections students establish with the content and pedagogical and evaluation practices in their programs or courses (based on Bégin et. al. 2009).
- **Socially**, through the interpersonal relationships students develop with their peers during study-related or other activities (Bégin et. al. 2009).
- **Vocationally**, through the manifestation of a clear and defined goal of educational objectives with regard to personal and/or career aspirations (Tremblay et. al. 2006, p.12).

During the integration process students can rely on a range of support options, starting within their own social network, where parents continue to play an important role.

Alongside this social network, an array of support measures is often available on campus to assist new college students in overcoming potential barriers. For example, during the fall 2009 term, more than 14% of Québec students admitted for the first time to a DCS program were also enrolled in a *Session d'accueil et d'intégration* or a *Session de transition*.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these two programs, colleges have also established a number of other measures.

4. Students may enroll in a *Session de transition* [introduction to college studies course] if: 1) they were full-time students in a *Session d'accueil et d'intégration* [orientation and integration course] during the previous term and are either transferring into a program leading to a DCS yet are missing the program prerequisites, or it was not possible for them to start in the winter term; 2) they are first-time college students enrolled in the winter term in a program leading to a DCS for which it was not possible to start in the current term.

## ○ STUDENT INTEGRATION INTO COLLEGE: A NEW CONTEXT



*The current context of student integration into college is influenced by various factors, including the education reform.*

The current context of student integration into college differs from that of recent years:

- Beginning in August 2010, colleges will welcome the first generation of students to have graduated under the education reform in secondary school. Yet while the official curriculum is known and the taught curriculum can be shared among teachers, it is too early to evaluate the effect of the changes brought about by the reform on the curriculum these students have acquired. What students will retain from it remains to be validated;
- Student culture evolves in step with social transformation. Indeed, college student culture is not solely the product of the education system; it is equally influenced by new technologies, by the importance of work in students' lifestyles and by the value they place on their studies;
- In recent years, new college admission conditions have been added. It is now possible to be admitted into college based on either 1) a DVS under certain conditions; or 2) training or experiential knowledge deemed sufficient, provided applicants earn the equivalent of up to six missing secondary-level credits during their first term (conditional admission);
- There is now a greater number of students with disabilities calling for equal access to higher education.

## ○ THE CHALLENGE OF STUDENT INTEGRATION INTO COLLEGE



*Being receptive to change lays the groundwork for integration into college.*

Based on the current context in which students integrate into college, a review of measures promoting student integration, and a survey of front-line players in the college network, it is

clear that this context is constantly evolving. Since secondary school is changing, student culture is changing, and colleges are called on to change as well. For the Conseil, being receptive to change lays the groundwork for integration into college.

Firstly, this receptiveness to change must be expressed by students themselves. Students need to be aware of what is expected of them in college; for some, study habits developed during secondary school may be insufficient to succeed in college studies (Gingras and Terrill 2006). For others, the challenge will lie in balancing their course load with the demands of a paying job. For others still, leaving home to study will mean having to assume greater responsibility for themselves. The extent of the adjustment will vary depending on the student, and on other changes that occur beyond the transition to college. It is therefore important that students fully consider how they envision integrating all aspects of college life with their own personal plans or goals.

It goes without saying that this receptiveness to change also involves colleges. This openness will be embodied primarily in how colleges view the first generation of the education reform. During the course of its survey the Conseil noted some college players were apprehensive over the education reform in secondary school: Even though it provides for a more rigorous curriculum, some nevertheless remain cautious. This reticence could create resistance to the changes the reform has brought about. While some research is currently underway to evaluate the impact of the reform on the academic functioning of students, college players must continue their effort to integrate students arriving from secondary school, regardless of what curriculum the latter may have acquired. In light of new college admission regulations, this receptiveness would also entail reviewing existing integration support measures for those admitted under these new regulations. Lastly, for students with disabilities, this receptiveness to change is closely linked to the fundamental right of access to education and success.

## ○ **STUDENT INTEGRATION INTO COLLEGE: THREE COURSES OF ACTION**

While some students arrive at college self-assured and full of confidence, others need additional support and tools to find their place in this new environment. Consequently, no two students integrate into all aspects of college life the same way. With the goal of supporting students during this crucial transition, the Conseil proposes three different courses of action:

### **1. Start preparing students for college as of Secondary Cycle Two**

As students need to quickly integrate into college in a single term, it follows that some would benefit from an earlier introduction to the world of college—as early as Secondary Cycle Two. This would better prepare them for the demands of college and fully engage them—as of their first few weeks on campus—in adopting the behaviours that can lead to success. Also, from the time students first apply for admission, colleges should take the baton from secondary schools (via information and communications technologies such as social networks and RSS) and provide secondary students with an preliminary immersion into college life. Ultimately, colleges should be motivated to look beyond recruitment objectives and see this as an opportunity to help prepare their future students for integration into college.

### **2. Engage students in their own integration**

Integration is a shared responsibility between colleges and the new students who arrive at their gates. To engage students in the process of their own integration, colleges should reach out and encourage them to consider their needs at the time of transition. This exercise could be organized and mentored either by teachers or second-year college students. Regardless of the method used, this experience could lead students to reflect on their transition and direct them to various available integration support measures.

### **3. Provide an all-inclusive college integration**

Students arriving at college cannot be defined simply as the sum of their previous education path. To be sure, the academic experience—in which the curricular reform in secondary school plays a part—has shaped the body of knowledge they have acquired. However, other experiences in secondary school—learning modes, teamwork habits, use of new technologies, foreign student exchanges, cultural trips—can equally contribute to their college aspirations.

From such a perspective, students' expectations and needs are not dictated by level of instruction or field of study. Including cultural factors such as the relationship with new technologies, work, studying and knowledge obliges colleges to ensure that their integration support measures meet current student needs. The integration of students admitted under the new regulations also merits special attention: diversifying access paths to college entails not only acknowledging the value of personal life plans, but also providing the necessary tools for success in college studies.

The Conseil believes colleges should conduct research on the end-to-end secondary-to-college transition experience of their students, and that the latter should also be engaged in any evaluation of integration support measures. In both cases, colleges could gain valuable feedback that goes beyond the quantitative and that could guide them when making any necessary modifications.

Lastly, a small but increasing number of students with disabilities are calling for equal access to higher education and success in college. For the Conseil, colleges should establish conditions to prevent the secondary-to-college transition from becoming a stumbling block against which the education and career dreams of these students would founder.

## ○ RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING STUDENT INTEGRATION INTO COLLEGE

To implement the above courses of action that support the success of students who integrate into college, the Conseil submits the following recommendations:

### RECOMMENDATION 6

Considering the central role students play in their own integration into college studies;

Considering that many studies have shown adopting study and work habits as early as secondary school can lead to later success in college studies;

Considering that student integration into college would greatly benefit from an earlier start in Secondary Cycle Two;

Considering the role of secondary schools in student guidance;

Considering that new technologies make it easier for colleges to reach prospective students before the official start of college;

#### **The Conseil recommends to colleges:**

- To create, primarily via information and communication technologies (ICTs), regular and sustained contact with prospective students during Secondary Cycle Two to raise awareness of the requirements for a successful integration into college studies.

#### **The Conseil recommends to secondary institutions and colleges:**

- To jointly establish pilot projects—such as pairing secondary and college students—to prepare students as of secondary school for college studies, focused on defining career plans and behaviours leading to success in college studies.

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

Considering the central role students play in their own integration into college studies;

Considering that the curriculum acquired by students is the product of their academic experience, in which the reform in secondary school can play a part;

Considering that cultural factors such the relationship with new technologies, work, studying and knowledge shape the needs and expectations of new college students;

Considering orientation and support measures in place for college students, particularly those related to student success;

Considering that the *College Education Regulations* have adopted new admission regulations that may introduce special needs;

**The Conseil recommends to colleges:**

- To fully integrate new students by modifying support measures to consider acquired curriculum and student culture, in light of research on the secondary-to-college transition experience of their students.

**The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**

- To support research projects on pedagogical issues at the college level to gain insight into the curriculum acquired by students in the post-reform era.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

Considering the existing policy promoting social participation of people with disabilities;

Considering the increased demand for assistive services for students with disabilities;

Considering that integration into college can pose considerable challenges for some students with disabilities;

Considering that the organization and offer of services varies between the secondary and college levels;

Considering that the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport allocates specific funding for research projects on students with special needs;

**The Conseil recommends to colleges:**

- To adapt their policies to include measures promoting equal access to higher education and success for students with disabilities;
- To support the modification of practices through raising awareness and teacher training on the experiences of students with disabilities;
- To raise awareness among the college student community and their parents of assistive services available for students with disabilities;

**The Conseil recommends to school boards, in partnership with colleges:**

- To raise awareness among students with disabilities and their parents about the assistive services provided by colleges;

**The Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports:**

- To adjust the allocation earmarked for special needs to support colleges in meeting the needs of students with disabilities;
- To continue her support of research projects on issues related to equal access and disseminate the outcomes throughout the Québec education network.

## CONCLUSION

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In its Brief, the Conseil has proposed an analytical framework to examine secondary-to-college transition that looks beyond the traditional boundaries of secondary education and college studies. This framework can serve as an important tool allowing players from both levels of instruction—within the ambit of their respective roles—to articulate structures, align knowledge and practices, prepare college-bound secondary students for their transition as early as Secondary Cycle Two, and ultimately integrate them fully into college.

The secondary-to-college transition will be shaped by many different contexts in the coming years. It cannot be defined by the education reform in secondary school alone, for transition is more than just curricular content and pedagogical and evaluation practices to be aligned between two levels of instruction. Indeed, it is also a function of obstacles and opportunities placed along the education continuum. Neither are students merely children of the education reform—they are today's workers and citizens, individuals bearing their own technological culture in addition to the learning they acquired in the education system. Lastly, secondary-to-college transition also includes the integration of students into college life, a shared responsibility where students engage in their own education plans and where colleges ensure the right support measures for success are in place.

For students, the leap from secondary school to college, like any inter-level transition, simultaneously represents an end and a beginning. The real education reform is undoubtedly not where we expect it, rather it is where students enter a new stage of their lives, a chrysalis that emerges from students adjusting to the system and the system adjusting to students. The Conseil invites all stakeholders to welcome and support this new transformation.

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The full text (in French) of the Brief entitled ***Regards renouvelés sur la transition entre le secondaire et le collégial***, as well as its abridged versions in French and English (**New Perspectives On The Transition From Secondary School To College**) are available on the website of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation at [www.cse.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca). Printed versions are available upon request to the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation:

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