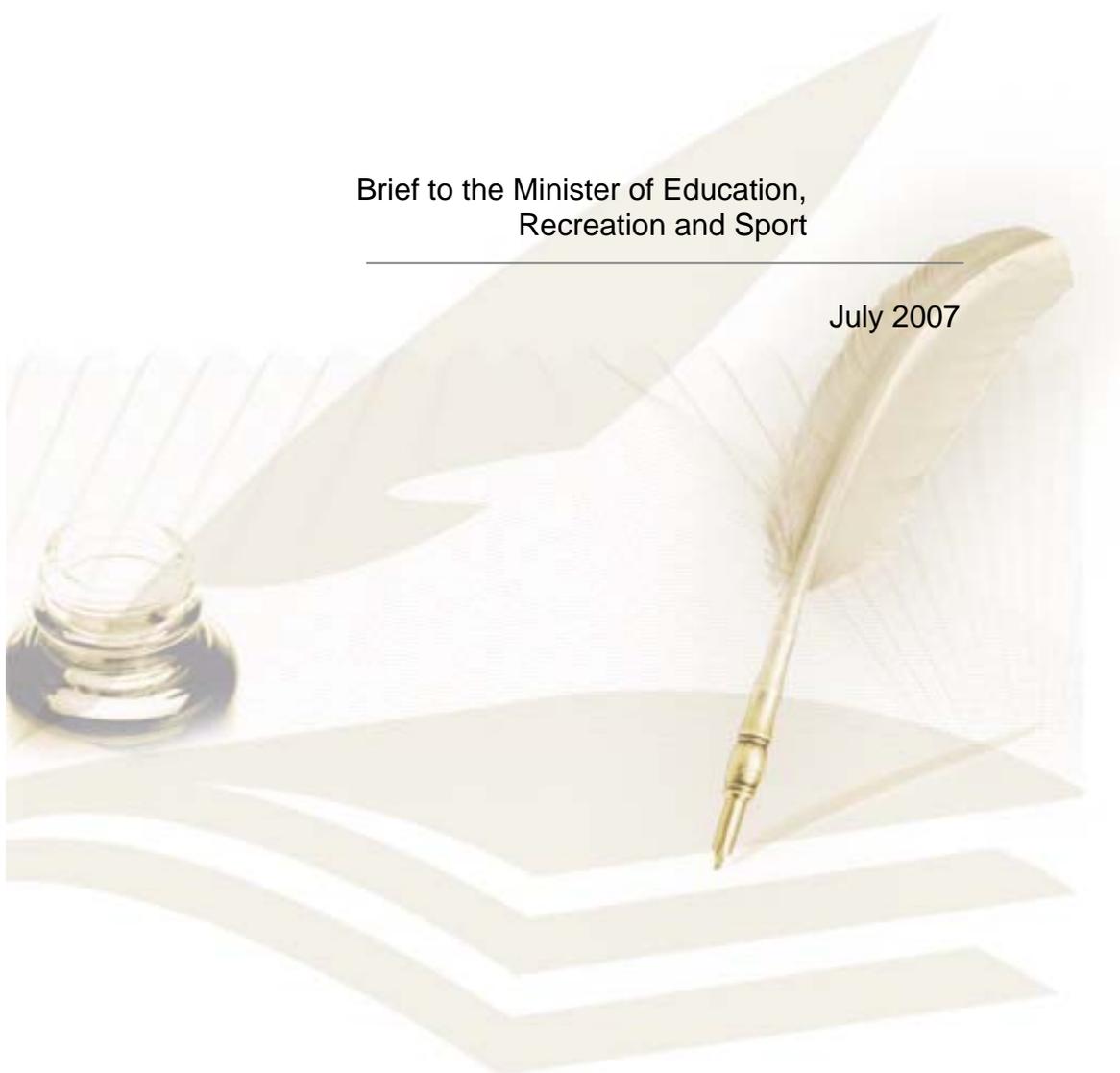


**THE DRAFT REGULATION AMENDING  
THE BASIC SCHOOL REGULATION  
FOR PRESCHOOL, ELEMENTARY  
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Brief to the Minister of Education,  
Recreation and Sport

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July 2007



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## INTRODUCTION

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The present Brief examines the *Draft Regulation to amend the Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education*. This Brief addresses the request made by the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport, Michelle Courchesne, to the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation on June 27, 2007, in accordance with the provisions stipulated in *An Act governing the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* and section 458 of the *Education Act*.

The *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education* has been amended twice since it came into force in July 2000, for the first time in 2001 and for the second time in 2005.<sup>1</sup>

The amendments proposed in the draft Regulation are designed to clarify some of the measures in the *Basic school regulation* and to modify some of the methods of communication between schools and parents. The amendments relate primarily to:

- Indicating competencies in ordinary terms on report cards and in competency reports sent to parents;
- Expressing, as a percentage, student results on report cards and in competency reports sent to parents;
- Expressing, as a percentage, a student's group average on report cards and in competency reports sent to parents;
- Including comments on achievement related to cross-curricular competencies on end of year report cards;

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1. In 2001, measures were added relating to moral instruction or confessional, religious and moral instruction. In 2005, other measures were introduced, notably on increasing the instruction time in elementary schools; establishing the number of communications sent to parents; extending for one year, in exceptional cases, Cycle One or Cycle Two for an elementary student; restructuring secondary education into two cycles of instruction; raising the requirements for obtaining a Secondary School Diploma; establishing a work-oriented training path for students 15 years of age or older; establishing two paths in Cycle Two leading to a Secondary School Diploma (a general education path and an applied general education path); and, at the Secondary level, increasing the instruction time allocated to personal development courses as well as offering compulsory arts courses.

- Allowing, in exceptional cases, an elementary student to “remain for a second year in the same class,” even after the first year of a cycle;
- Replacing, in Secondary V, the compulsory subject “Contemporary economic environment” with the compulsory subject “Contemporary world,” both for the general education path and the applied general education path.

Given the short time frame, the Conseil was unable to conduct consultations with the relevant principal education stakeholders. It has, however, duly noted letters sent by some organizations and positions publicly expressed by some groups and associations.

In the present Brief, the analysis of the amendments will be presented in the following order:

- The context of the proposed amendments and the framework for the Conseil’s analysis;
- The expression of competencies in ordinary terms;
- The indication of student results;
- The inclusion of a student’s group average;
- The extension of an instruction cycle’s duration in elementary education.

The Conseil did not deem it appropriate to give its opinion on the proposal to replace the compulsory subject “Contemporary economic environment” with “Contemporary world” in Secondary V, as content and goals of the latter are not yet defined.

# 1 THE CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS AND THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE CONSEIL'S ANALYSIS

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## 1.1 Context of the Proposed Amendments

The Conseil interprets the proposed amendments in the draft Regulation as an expression of the Government's will to meet the need of parents to understand their child's progress and achievement during the course of his or her education.

The Conseil acknowledges the significant role that parents play in the success of students. For this reason, it believes that it is essential to establish a clear, extensive and ongoing communication between schools and parents so as to involve them in supporting both their child and his or her school. Information on achievement and academic progress should be easily understood by parents, and be instructive regarding any efforts on their part likely to encourage the development of their child. A bond of trust can thus be established between school and parents, a must in the educational success of the student.

## 1.2 Framework for the Conseil's Analysis

As the Conseil's mission rests on an all-inclusive vision of education, it studied the amendments in the draft Regulation in light of both the supporting role of parents and the overall scope of the education system. Therefore, while always taking into consideration parents' need to understand, the Conseil has approached the Minister's request in the wider view of the effects the amendments would have, both on the educational development of the student and on the education system.

The Conseil based its study of the draft Regulation on principles, values and benchmarks included in many of its previous briefs. These are:

*The clarity, relevance and accuracy of information sent to parents*

- Clear, simple and accurate information sent to parents, so as to involve them in the success of their child;
- Relevant information on student achievement and progress to advise parents of the kind of support they could offer their child, complementing that of the school staff.

The report card and competency report are two basic tools of communication with parents. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students with learning disabilities is both a communications tool and a means of collaboration between parents and the school players.

*The consistency of the amendments with the orientations of the education reform*

Among the factors to be considered:

- The educability of all children and success for a greater number of students;
- The importance given to local responsibility (autonomy) in pedagogical matters and accountability;
- The partnership between parents and the community in the educational success of the student;
- The consideration of differences in student learning patterns, notably by organizing instruction into cycles and by differentiating teaching approaches;
- The prevention of marginalization that may lead to exclusion.

*The consistency of the amendments with the objectives of the Québec Education Program*

- The effect of the amendments on the consistency between the objectives of the Québec Education Program, the evaluation of competencies, the evaluation tools supporting the professional judgement of teachers and the grading system.

*The applicability of the amendments and the means to support change*

Among the factors to be considered:

- The impact on preparing and training school staff;
- The availability of necessary tools and resources to implement the amendments.



## 2 EXPRESSING COMPETENCIES IN ORDINARY TERMS

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### 2.1 The Proposed Amendment

*Section 30 is amended*

*(1) by replacing "evaluated." at the end of paragraph 15 by the following:*

*"evaluated; the status of the development of the competencies for elementary and secondary education is expressed by a percentage. The competencies are indicated on the report card in the terms used in the programs, with preference given to ordinary terms;"*

*(2) by adding the following after paragraph 15:*

*{...}*

*(15.2) for an end of year report card for a student in the first, third or fifth year of elementary school or for a student in the first year of secondary school, comments on the student's achievement during the reference period in relation to one or more cross-curricular competencies, with reference to the standards and procedures for the evaluation of student achievement approved by the principal under subparagraph 4 of the first paragraph of section 96.15 of the Act; the competencies are indicated on the report card in the terms used in the programs, with preference given to ordinary terms;"*

*Section 30.1 is replaced by the following:*

*"30.1. The competency report of a student in primary or secondary education must include*

*{...}*

*The competencies in the program of studies and the cross-curricular competencies are indicated in the competency report in the terms used in the programs, with preference given to ordinary terms.*

It should be noted that the current Regulation stipulates that schools must send parents at least five report cards per cycle and one competency report at the end of that cycle. However, the Regulation does not specify their contents; this is left to the discretion of schools, who may include any information they deem relevant.

The effect of the amendments would be to make it mandatory to indicate on report cards and in competency reports competencies expressed in ordinary terms specified in the Québec Education Program

(QEP).<sup>2</sup> To do so, the wording in ordinary terms will be combined with the specialized language used in each of the competencies outlined in the QEP. These simplified terms would appear in standardized form on report cards and in competency reports throughout all schools.

Moreover, it would still be possible for schools to enhance the format and content of their report cards and competency reports by adding their own elements.

## 2.2 The Conseil's Position

As noted above, the report card and the competency report are two of the basic tools of communication between schools and parents.<sup>3</sup> The Conseil thus deems it important that these tools contain information pertinent to the student achievement and progress and that they inform parents accordingly so as to involve them in efforts to support their child and his or her school. To do so, parents need to have some understanding of the programs' content and evaluation practices and be able to interpret the codes used in school report cards. It is crucial, then, to use a language, approaches and tools parents can understand (CSE 1992, p. 45). The Conseil also believes that parents should not be treated like children and it should not be wrongly assumed that they will only understand an overly simplified report card. Rather, relevant information should be used to engage parents in the objectives pursued in the new evaluation methods and lead them to find alternative methods of communicating student achievement and progress (CSE, 2001, p.32).

For the Conseil, clear, simple and accurate information must, then, be a key aspect of communication with parents, namely in the form of the report card and the competency report. Parents would then be able to make informed decisions, encouraging them to become involved in their child's success.

- 
2. The "Québec Education Program" is the term used herein to refer to the new curriculum. The term "program of studies," however, is the term used in the *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education*.
  3. Other examples include: portfolios, messages in student agendas and meetings with parents.

**Consequently, the Conseil supports:**

- Any approach simplifying the wording of competencies in terms expressed in a clear and accurate language;
- The proposal that the wording on report cards and competency reports sent to parents be expressed in ordinary terms;
- The proposal to make the use of ordinary terms mandatory on report cards and in competency reports throughout all schools.

The Conseil cautions, however, against the risk of “over-simplification.” Simplifying the wording should not reduce it to being overly generalized or ambiguous. The Conseil trusts that all the wording expressed in ordinary terms be clear and accurate enough to better reflect the objectives of the competencies to which they refer.

Moreover, the new measures related to report cards and competency reports would not prevent schools from adding or keeping information they deem relevant. Schools could also develop their own communication tools adapted to the needs of their community. It is thus the responsibility of the school boards to support school efforts to improve parents' understanding of the Québec Education Program and its curriculum, as well as evaluation practices.



### 3 INDICATING STUDENT RESULTS

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#### 3.1 The Proposed Amendments

##### *Regarding Report Cards During a Cycle*

*Section 30 is amended:*

*(1) by replacing "evaluated." at the end of paragraph 15 by the following:*

*"evaluated; the status of the development of the competencies for elementary and secondary education is expressed by a percentage. The competencies are indicated on the report card in terms used in the programs, with preference given to ordinary terms;"*

*(2) by adding the following after paragraph 15:*

*"(15.1) the student's result and the group average for each subject taught, expressed as a percentage;*

*(15.2) for an end of year report card for a student in the first, third or fifth year of elementary school or for a student in the first year of secondary school, comments on the student's achievement during the reference period in relation to one or more cross-curricular competencies, with reference to the standards and procedures for the evaluation of student achievement approved by the principal under subparagraph 4 of the first paragraph of section 96.15 of the Act; the competencies are indicated on the report card in the terms used in the programs, with preference given to ordinary terms;"*

*(3) by adding the following paragraphs at the end of the section:*

*"The status of the development of the competencies referred to in subparagraph 15 of the first paragraph and the student's result referred to in subparagraph 15.1 are based on the conversion table established by the Minister for the program of studies.*

*Subparagraphs 15 to 15.2 of the first paragraph do not apply to a student in pre-work training. Instead, the report card for that student must contain an indication of the student's progress in relation to the objectives set for the student by the teacher, with reference to the objectives of the program of studies established by the Minister."*

## ***Regarding the Competency Report at the End of a Cycle***

*Section 30.1 is replaced by the following:*

***30.1.*** *The competency report of a student in primary or secondary education must include*

*(1) an indication, expressed as a percentage, of the level of development achieved by the student for each of the competencies in the program of studies;*

*(2) comments on the student's achievement during the reference period in relation to one or more cross-curricular competencies, with reference to the standards and procedures for the evaluation of student achievement approved by the principal under subparagraph 4 of the first paragraph of section 96.15 of the Act; and*

*(3) the student's result and the group average for each subject taught, expressed as percentage and, for a secondary school student who passes, the credits for the subjects.*

*The level of development of the competencies referred to in subparagraph 1 of the first paragraph and the student's result referred to in subparagraph 3 are based, where applicable, on the scales of competency levels and conversion tables established by the Minister for the program of studies.*

*Subparagraphs 1 and 3 of the first paragraph do not apply to students in pre-work training for whom the result of each subject is expressed by a rating.*

*The competencies in the program of studies and the cross-curricular competencies are indicated in the competency report in the terms used in the programs, with preference given to ordinary terms.*

***30.2.*** *The competency report of a student in preschool education must include an indication of the level of development achieved by the student for each of the competencies in the pre-school program of activities.*

*The competencies are indicated in the competency report in the terms used in the program, with preference given to ordinary terms.*

***30.3.*** *Every school board may, to the extent and on the conditions determined by the Minister, exempt handicapped students referred to in section 1 or 2 of Schedule II from the application of subparagraphs 15 to 15.2 of the first paragraph of section 30 and from section 30.1."*

It is important to clarify that the evaluation of competencies developed by the student occurs twice: during a cycle and at the end of a cycle. The results of evaluations **during a cycle** are indicated on report cards to show the level of development of competencies achieved by the student according to stages of progress. The results of the evaluation **at the end of a cycle** are indicated in the competency report to express the level of mastery attained by the student in the given competencies.

The amendments in the draft Regulation would make it mandatory to express student results as percentages on report cards and in competency reports sent to parents. This will be effective as of the 2007–2008 academic year, that is, the first report card of Fall 2007. Results would appear for each competency (excluding cross-curricular competencies) or subject taught (the group of competencies for English, for example) on which the student was evaluated. These amendments would also stipulate that report cards and competency reports include a student's group average for each subject taught.

In addition, the draft Regulation stipulates that the report card at the end of the first year of a cycle must also contain comments on the level of development of one or more cross-curricular competencies for which the student was evaluated, as is required for competency reports in the current *Basic school regulation*. Schools, it must be noted, would continue to have the choice of which cross-curricular competencies to include.

The draft Regulation does not appear to affect the evaluation standards and procedures for competency development, nor the tools that support the professional judgement of teachers. In principle, these measures would be strictly related to converting student results (indicated by ratings, for example) into percentages strictly for communication with parents.

To this end, the draft Regulation specifies, for report cards, the use of a percentage conversion table established by the Minister. As for competency reports, the draft Regulation stipulates that “scales of competency levels”<sup>4</sup> and, where applicable, percentage conversion tables be used. It would appear, then, that schools must eventually adopt scales of competency levels and percentage conversion tables (see section 3.2.2).

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4. The “scales of competency levels” developed by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport for Cycle One in secondary schools are comprised of an evaluation aid tool to support the judgement of teachers, and a rating system (scales) to indicate the results (MELS, 2006).

Students in a pre-work training path, pre-school students and handicapped students referred to in section 1 or 2 of Schedule II of the *Basic school regulation* would be exempt from these provisions. Yet other children with learning disabilities or behavioural problems, subject to an “adapted report,” would not.

## 3.2 The Conseil’s Position

### 3.2.1 Including Comments on Cross-Curricular Competencies

The draft Regulation stipulates that the report card at the end of the first year of a cycle and the competency report must contain comments on the development level of one or more cross-curricular competencies a student was evaluated on. In its brief on cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning, the Conseil had deemed it important that space be provided on report cards for the inclusion of comments on the student’s progress in developing cross-curricular competencies (CSE 2007, pp.59–60). The Conseil’s opinion remains unchanged. Consequently, it supports the measure as is.

**The Conseil concurs with the provision that the report card at the end of the first year of a cycle and the competency report contain comments on the level of development of one or more cross-curricular competencies that a student was evaluated on.**

In addition, the Conseil is pleased that the choice of cross-curricular competencies to be included in the report card and competency report remains with the school.

### 3.2.2 Expressing Results as Percentages

The current *Basic school regulation* allows individual schools the choice of reporting student results in whatever form they deem appropriate. There is nothing, then, preventing a school from showing results on a report card or in a competency report in the form of ratings or as percentages.

The new element in the proposed amendment is to make it mandatory to express student results as percentages, both in elementary as well as in secondary education. These measures, however, would not prohibit schools from reporting the results in other ways as well (as ratings, for example).

The Conseil has studied this amendment primarily with regard to the clarity and relevance of information sent to parents, to the changes that it would entail, and the consideration of special needs students.

### *Clarity and Relevance of Information Sent to Parents*

The Conseil reaffirms the principle that a distinction must be made between evaluating the development of competencies and indicating the results on report cards and in competency reports. In fact, "evaluation is a professional activity performed by a teacher that requires a methodological approach. [...] As for communications to parents, this consists of methods by which teachers convey the evaluation results to parents" (CSE 2007, p.54).

For the Conseil, it is important to ensure that the information sent to parents be clear and relevant so as to enable them to understand the progress of their child. It is therefore essential that report cards and competency reports contain information that accordingly advises parents on their child's achievement and progress. It is equally important to ensure consistency between the objectives of the QEP, the evaluation procedures and tools and the grading system used when indicating the results. In a 1992 brief, the Conseil recommended that report cards be harmonized with teaching and evaluation practices so as to safeguard the former's relevance and value (CSE 1992, p.52). In 2005, the Conseil also expressed concern with the consistency of the proposed grading system and evaluation of competencies for secondary Cycle Two (CSE 2005, p.30).

The Conseil deems that mandating the expression of results as percentages does not constitute the best means to help parents better understand the academic progress of their child.

The Conseil bases this opinion primarily on the following considerations:

Firstly, the requirement to express student results as percentages would entail a considerable change, if not a break, from current practice in many schools, particularly at the elementary level. Indeed, percentages have not been used in elementary schools for several years now, and that a majority of schools were using ratings (for example, 1 to 4 or A to D) well before the implementation of the education reform. Since the reform, the use of percentages is rare. At the secondary level, percentages are more

common, although a decrease in Cycle One has been noted as the implementation of new evaluation practices related to the QEP advances. The Conseil believes, however, that to encourage the continuity of basic education through Cycle One in secondary school, it would not be prudent to require the use of percentages in Cycle One at the secondary level.

Secondly, inasmuch as evaluation procedures and tools remain unchanged, converting a rating into a percentage does not provide any additional information, neither does it increase its accuracy. Moreover, although percentages might be more familiar to some people, the amendment does not provide anything new that would enable parents to better understand the QEP, and consequently gauge their child's progress.

In fact, to maintain consistency between the grading system and the evaluation tools and practices currently in use, the draft Regulation would make it mandatory to convert ratings into percentages strictly for the need of communicating with parents. It would not, however, alter the process of evaluating competencies itself, nor the system of grading student results. Teachers would continue to assess the development of the competencies according to existing evaluation methods and procedures, to support their judgement with the same evaluation tools and to use the same grading systems as before. They could then employ the same evaluation criteria and grade students with comparable scales. At the elementary level, the result of evaluating the development of a competency is often indicated using a rating (of 1 to 4 or A to D, for example) that corresponds to one of the levels in the scale of competencies. The changes introduced by the draft Regulation would require that henceforth schools must take student results as indicated by ratings and convert them into percentages with the help of conversion tables.

### ***Changes Entailed By the Proposed Amendments***

The Conseil also finds it necessary to express a number of concerns regarding the consistency of the amendments with the objectives of the education reform.

The Conseil notes that all the necessary tools to support the proposed changes in the draft Regulation are not available. Indeed, the requirement of including percentages obliges schools to develop and adapt conversion tools for converting ratings into percentages. Many of the tools for facilitating this remain

unavailable, yet the changes will be coming into effect as of the first report card sent to parents in Fall 2007.

In Cycle One of secondary education, the scales of competency levels required by the Minister are now beginning to be used in schools. These scales enable the evaluation, at the end of a cycle, of a student's mastery of competencies in relation to set standards. They comprise a grading system of five levels or categories. Each level contains a plus (+) modifier, making a total of ten grades possible (1, 1+, 2, 2+,... 5+). Conversion tables were established by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport to convert into percentages the student's results based on this grading system. These tables will be made available when the draft Regulation comes into force.

At the elementary level, however, evaluation and grading tools were proposed in schools, but were not made mandatory by the Minister. As a result, many schools have developed their own evaluation and grading tools.

In order to implement the measures proposed in the draft Regulation, the Minister will make mandatory **in elementary schools** scales of competency levels similar to those required for secondary Cycle One. Their application and implementation would begin for Cycle Three in elementary schools in June 2008, followed by Cycle Two in 2008–2009 and Cycle One in 2009–2010. Thus, for the Fall 2007 report card as well as the June 2008 competency report for Cycle One and Cycle Two at the elementary level, schools must review their own grading scales and harmonize them with the percentage conversion tables stipulated by the Minister as of September 2007.

In addition to the fact that the tools required to support the changes proposed in the draft Regulation will not all be available by Fall 2007, the Conseil also notes that the scheduled implementation does not appear to consider the time allocation needed to adopt both new methods and new evaluation and conversion tools. There appears to be a wide gap between what should be coming into effect as of Fall 2007, the coherence of the system and evaluation tools developed for the elementary level over the past few years. The Conseil also has cause to question the realistic expectation of requiring school staff to adapt to these new ways of doing things in such a short period of time.

As well, new approaches resulting from the mandatory use of percentages would add to the current implementation process of evaluation methods in a competency-based approach. While this implementation is already in progress, some training and integration work remains to be done. In this light, the use of percentages may slow the implementation and perhaps lead to a return to the old ways of doing things, which would not be consistent with the Québec Education Program.

### *Special Needs Students*

Lastly, the Conseil is concerned how the draft Regulation applies to students with learning disabilities. Indeed, with the exception made for students in a pre-work training path, pre-school students and handicapped students, the draft Regulation does not address other students who are the subject of an "adapted report card." Whereas the draft Regulation acknowledges the special needs of some students and allows for their report cards and competency reports to indicate their progress according to objectives set by their teacher, the Conseil questions why the same would not be possible for other students with learning difficulties. Moreover, the amendments regarding the format and content of report cards and competency reports raise questions about the power institutions have in proposing solutions that would best meet the needs of these students.

**Consequently**, for the abovementioned reasons, the Conseil is of the opinion that expressing student results as percentages would not make information provided to parents any clearer or more relevant.

**The Conseil does not concur with the amendment that would make it mandatory to express student results as percentages on report cards and in competency reports.**

It appears to the Conseil more advantageous to build on local autonomy, on all the work accomplished thus far by school communities and their ability to develop, in partnership with parents, communication tools that can meet the expectations of the latter. Report cards and competency reports, it should be noted, are not the only communication tools between schools and parents, and it is the responsibility of the school community to convey consistent and detailed information to the parents and provide them with the necessary tools to follow their child's progress.

## 4 INCLUDING A STUDENT'S GROUP AVERAGE

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### 4.1 The Proposed Amendment

*Section 30 is amended*

*(1) by replacing "evaluated." at the end of paragraph 15 by the following:*

*"evaluated; the status of the development of the competencies for elementary and secondary education is expressed by a percentage. The competencies are indicated on the report card in the terms used in the programs, with preference given to ordinary terms;"*

*(2) by adding the following after paragraph 15:*

*"[...]*

*(15.1) the student's result and the group average for each subject taught, expressed as a percentage;*

*[...]"*

*Section 30.1 is replaced by the following:*

*"30.1. The competency report of a student in primary or secondary education must include*

*[...]*

*(3) the student's result and the group average for each subject taught, expressed as a percentage and, for a secondary school student who passes, the credits for the subjects.*

*[...]"*

The above amendment of the draft Regulation would make it mandatory to include a student's group average on report cards and in competency reports for each subject taught in elementary and secondary school.

### 4.2 The Conseil's Position

Results indicated on report cards and in competency reports currently provide parents with information on the progress of their child in relation to the QEP. Including a student's group average would be an additional benchmark for parents to understand where their child stands compared to other students. This additional information thus might allow in some cases parents to better gauge their child's progress and the kind of support they should be providing him or her.

The Conseil recognizes this expectation, quite valid in itself, expressed by some parents. It questions, however, whether knowing where one's child stands compared to his or her group would be the best means of acquiring additional information on the child's achievement or academic progress. Indeed, indicating a student's group average is only constructive when the information contained therein is truly meaningful and relevant.

In the current context, calculating a group average raises many questions that might affect the quality and relevance of this information. For example, should the results of students with learning disabilities who benefit from an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) be included in the calculation? Should handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities be included as well? How will the average be calculated in mixed or multi-grade classes, quite common in smaller schools? How significant would an average based on a group of four or five students be? And what would be the value of an average based on a grading scale of four or five levels? Relying on such benchmarks may only confuse parents, if not give them a false sense of accuracy. Would it not be more advantageous, then, for parents to have extensive communication with their school and receive meaningful information on their child's progress that is both clear and accurate?

Including a student's group average on report cards and in competency reports might also raise doubts whether this practice is consistent with some objectives of the education reform. It should be noted that the reasons behind organizing the curriculum into cycle-based instruction over two years were, among other things, to allow for the diversity—and in particular the different learning patterns—of students. Is it consistent, then, to acknowledge, on the one hand, students with different learning patterns and, on the other, to compare students among themselves?

Moreover, the objective of success for all students calls for emphasis to be placed primarily on mastering the competencies outlined in the QEP. This also includes the evaluation practices underpinning individual effort and surpassing oneself, rather than comparing the student to his or her group. This is especially true at the elementary level and in secondary Cycle One, which together form the common basic education.

Indicating a student's group average could have a negative effect on the perception of competence and self-esteem of many students. Indeed, research on the subject reveals that evaluation practices that compare students among themselves or in relation to the average could have an undermining effect on those who are not among the top ranked, and this may lower their self-esteem and expectation for success (see, for example, Ames 1992). "These practices lead a considerable number of students to have negative feelings and to engage in self-depreciating and avoidance behaviours that discourage their development of competencies" (Chouinard 2002, p.10). This is all the more true at the elementary level, particularly in younger children, at a time when they are shaping their perception of their competence, forming important relationships with other students and establishing a bond with the school staff.

**Consequently**, the Conseil deems that in the common basic education a student's group average would not constitute a practical benchmark for parents. Rather, it would be more beneficial to rely on other, more effective, forms of communication between school and parents.

**The Conseil does not concur with the amendment that would require the inclusion of a student's group average on report cards and in competency reports, both at the elementary level and in secondary Cycle One.**



## 5 EXTENDING THE DURATION OF AN INSTRUCTION CYCLE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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### 5.1 The Proposed Amendment

*Section 13 of the Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education is amended by striking out the last paragraph.*

*The following is inserted after section 15:*

*"15.1. For elementary education, the school principal may, exceptionally, in the student's interest, allow the student to remain for a second year in the same class if it is evident from the student's individualized education plan that such a measure is, among possible measures, a measure more likely to facilitate the student's academic progress despite the fact that the duration of the first or second cycle for the student would, because of the measure, be three school years.*

*The measure, which may be used only once during elementary education, must not result in the student being promoted to secondary school after more than 6 years of elementary school studies."*

In the current *Basic school regulation*, the last paragraph of section 13 makes provisions for an extra year of instruction to be added, only **at the end** of the first or second cycle of elementary education. The addition of a year at the end of the third cycle, prior to a student's promotion to secondary school, is permitted under the *Education Act* (R.S.Q., chapter I-13.3, s.96.18). Extending a cycle remains, however, an exceptional measure, and may **be used only once** during elementary education. This measure, it must be noted, is in accordance with a recommendation the Conseil made in its 2005 brief (CSE 2005, p.7).

The above amendment would retain the exceptional nature of such a measure and its one-time use during elementary education. The amendment also stipulates, as in the *Education Act*, that it must be sanctioned by the school principal.

This amendment would introduce two new elements regarding the use of such a measure. First, it would henceforth allow a student "to remain for a second year in the same class," even at the end of the first year of a cycle of instruction. Second, it would require schools to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) beforehand outlining the various support initiatives for the student, as stipulated by the *Education Act*

(R.S.Q., chapter I-13.3, s.96.14). This additional year would only be permitted when it is “among possible measures, a measure more likely to facilitate the student’s academic progress,” which presupposes that the support strategies in the IEP had been carried out and their results assessed.

## 5.2 The Conseil’s Position

The Conseil notes that the wording “allow the student to remain for a second year in the same class” suggests the notion of repeating a year (grade retention). The Conseil has expressed concern on different occasions about the negative impact grade retention or adding a year would have on the education development of an elementary student, both for the student’s well-being and for his or her subsequent academic progress. As the Conseil had noted in a 2002 brief, many studies conducted in Québec and elsewhere indicated that [grade retention] is not beneficial for the student, as it often contributes to reinforcing a sense of failure and a feeling of exclusion which may lead the student to eventually drop out in secondary school (CSE 2002, p.7). In 2005, the Conseil reasserted that such a measure might be detrimental to the student’s academic progress (CSE 2005, p.6).

Recent literature on grade retention<sup>5</sup> confirms that, in general, this practice appears to be harmful to the student, for it decreases motivation and alters self-esteem. Repeating a grade could impact the student’s perception of his or her abilities with a consequent negative effect on motivation and performance.

In the case of a group of students with similar characteristics, those who pursued their education without repeating a grade achieved greater success and benefited more on an academic level than students who had to repeat a year to complete their instruction as outlined in their programs of studies. Moreover, students who benefited from the appropriate support were more successful in their education.

**Consequently**, the Conseil is of the opinion that to “allow [a] student to remain for a second year in the same class” is not suitable for two reasons. Firstly, this would imply an automatic re-taking and repeating of the same instruction, which is not an effective solution for students with learning difficulties. Secondly, it would contravene the notion of a continuous development of competencies.

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5. Namely, Jimerson (2001); Cosnefroy and Rocher (2004); Haut Conseil de l’évaluation de l’école (2004).

### *Extending a Cycle in Elementary Education, An Exceptional Measure*

The Conseil believes that in exceptional cases it is best to allow a student to extend the duration of a cycle in elementary school up to one year, a measure permitted only once. This decision should ensure that the student continues with his or her instruction to achieve set competencies by building on that which he or she has already learned. It should also allow the school to propose the best solution for the student, taking into account the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the availability of resources and services.

A student would then be able to benefit from the guidance of school staff, the structure of a cycle-based instruction, and all support measures outlined in the IEP, including an approach that provides many learning conditions or environments for greater motivation. The cycle team's work should involve collectively supervising the student with learning difficulties and expanding its approach, notably by using alternative tools and methods of intervention. In order to accomplish this, it is important to ensure schools have sufficient available resources.

The Conseil believes then that extending cycle-based instruction should remain an exceptional measure and one of last resort, to be used only once during the course of elementary education, and that adding a extra period of time up to one year should enable a student to pursue his or her learning based on previous achievement.

This opinion is consistent with the positions adopted by the Conseil in many of its previous briefs. In 2002 the Conseil remarked that students should be able to continue their learning at their level of achievement and at their own pace, rather than permitting them to stay in the same grade for a second year and re-learn what they already know (CSE 2002, p.47). Furthermore, in 2005 the Conseil stated that extending the learning process at the elementary level should be an opportunity to help students advance, to strengthen their competencies by other pedagogical approaches where needed, rather than merely repeat the previous year's instruction (CSE 2005, p.6).

### *The Mandatory Individualized Education Plan<sup>6</sup>*

The Conseil welcomes the express inclusion of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in the draft Regulation; thus making it mandatory as an adjunct to the provision in the *Education Act* (R.S.Q., chapter I-13.3, section 96.14). The Conseil interprets this amendment to mean that the extension of a cycle is permitted, provided that the student has an IEP and the support measures therein have been carried out and the results assessed.

The implementation of such a plan would motivate school players to pool all the needed resources to support a student with learning difficulties, to inform his or her parents on past and future strategies, and to encourage the student's and parents' participation.

This provision introduces an important element which had been the subject of a recommendation by the Conseil in one of its 2005 briefs, and which had not been included in the current *Basic school regulation*. The Conseil had recommended that adding a year to the education program of an elementary school student should be an exceptional measure and should occur only when all other measures, in particular those outlined in the IEP, had been implemented and assessed (CSE 2005, p.7). The Conseil is pleased to note that this recommendation has been included in the current draft Regulation.

Moreover, as the decision to establish an IEP occurs when the usual support measures prove to be inadequate or insufficient, the Conseil reiterates the importance of early detection of at risk students in order to provide early intervention guidance and limit potential delays.

**Consequently**, the Conseil does not concur with the stipulation to "allow [a] student to remain for a second year in the same class," as the wording of this measure is too closely associated with grade retention, and implies the student re-takes or repeats learning in identical contexts.

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6. An IEP is the definition, application and evaluation of a range of measures to meet the needs of handicapped students or students with learning difficulties. The plan also outlines communication methods with parents. It is developed by the school administration in collaboration with educators, teachers and parents. The student can also be involved. The plan is reviewed yearly to take into account the student's development.

The Conseil is of the opinion that it is preferable to extend, in exceptional cases only, the duration of a student's cycle of instruction. This decision may be taken during or at the end of a cycle.

In addition, the Conseil concurs with the proposals:

- Making it mandatory to establish an IEP prior to implementing any measure to extend a student's cycle of instruction;
- Stipulating that extending a cycle of instruction may not be permitted unless all measures outlined in the IEP have been implemented and the results assessed, and only when this appears to have the best chance of helping the student advance;
- Stipulating that extending the duration of a student's cycle of instruction, up to a maximum of one year, remains an exceptional measure and one of last recourse, to be applied only once during the course of elementary education.

In the opinion of the Conseil, paragraph 15.1 of section 15 of the draft Regulation could therefore be amended as follows:

*"15.1. For elementary education, the school principal may, exceptionally, in the student's interest, allow the student **to extend the duration of a cycle of instruction up to one year** if it is evident from the student's individualized education plan that such a measure is, among possible measures, a measure more likely to facilitate the student's academic progress despite the fact that the duration of the first or second cycle for the student would, because of the measure, be three school years.*

*"The measure, which may be used only once during elementary education, must not result in the student being promoted to secondary school after more than 6 years of elementary school studies."*

In addition, the Conseil interprets that the subparagraph of section 15.1 of the draft Regulation specifies "six years" as an adjunct to the *Education Act*, since the seventh year before promotion to secondary school is authorized by the school principal in accordance with the *Act*.

## CONCLUSION

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The Conseil recognizes the rightful and ongoing need of parents to have clear, accurate and relevant information on the academic progress of their child so that they may better understand and adopt the most effective support strategies. As parental support is crucial to student success, the Conseil indeed hopes that communication with parents best reflect the spectrum of achievement and competencies acquired by the student, while being simple, clear and accurate, and practical as well.

Moreover, the Conseil acknowledges the scope of the changes entailed by the implementation of the new curriculum of the Québec Education Program (QEP), but also believes it is necessary to consider the varying timetables for its implementation and to build on the achievement of school communities. For these reasons, the Conseil deems it important to take into account the school's effort in forging and maintaining a bond of trust with parents, notably by developing communication tools that meet the expectations of the latter.

Some of the amendments proposed in the draft Regulation are designed to improve the presentation of information, both to students and to their parents. Other amendments, however, appear inadequate or unsuitable, notably because they provide no additional or relevant information, nor do they consider the different learning patterns of students, nor the characteristics of the various school environments. In the opinion of the Conseil, it would be best to continue to give schools time to take ownership of the new approaches that accompany the reform, and support their efforts in developing communication tools that best meet the needs of parents of each school environment.

Therefore, the positions of the Conseil can be summarized as follows.

The Conseil concurs with the amendments pertaining to:

- the inclusion of comments on the achievement in cross-curricular competencies;
- the mandatory inclusion, on the report card and in the competency report, of competencies expressed in ordinary terms, provided that the wording is clear and accurate;

- the decision to extend the duration of a student's cycle of instruction, during or at the end of a cycle, by considering pre-established benchmarks (prior establishment of an IEP and an assessment of the results);
- the requirement of an IEP as a condition for any decision to extend a student's cycle of instruction in elementary education;
- the upholding of the extension of a student's cycle of instruction as an exceptional measure, to be used only once during elementary education.

The Conseil does not concur with the amendments pertaining to:

- the stipulation to express student results as percentages on report cards and in competency reports sent to parents;
- the stipulation to indicate a student's group average on report cards and in competency reports sent to parents.

It recommends, rather:

- to invest in the range of communications tools currently in use;
- to encourage the school to adapt these tools for different environments, with the support of the school board where applicable.

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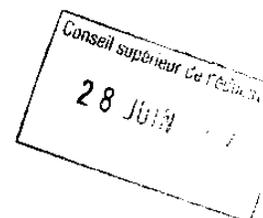
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## APPENDIX



Gouvernement du Québec  
La ministre de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport  
et ministre responsable de la région de Laval



Québec, le 27 juin 2007

Madame Nicole Boutin  
Présidente  
Conseil supérieur de l'éducation  
1175, avenue Lavigerie, bureau 180  
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Madame la Présidente,

Conformément à l'article 458 de la Loi sur l'instruction publique, je soumetts à l'examen du Conseil supérieur de l'éducation un projet de règlement visant à modifier le Régime pédagogique de l'éducation préscolaire, de l'enseignement primaire et de l'enseignement secondaire. Je vous demande de me transmettre l'avis du Conseil au sujet des modifications qui y sont envisagées.

Les modifications au régime pédagogique qui sont soumises à votre attention visent à rendre le bulletin et le bilan des apprentissages faciles à comprendre par les parents. Le projet de règlement précise que les résultats des élèves seront désormais exprimés en pourcentage et que les compétences seront libellées selon des termes usuels. Vous noterez aussi que ce projet prévoit que le redoublement sera possible après l'une ou l'autre des années du primaire.

Par ailleurs, devant les préoccupations de certains relativement à l'approche par compétences et au niveau d'acquisition des connaissances par les élèves, je demande au Conseil de produire un deuxième avis dans lequel sera examinée la manière de rendre compte des connaissances acquises par l'élève dans le bulletin et le bilan des apprentissages. Je vous demande de bien vouloir me transmettre cet avis au cours de l'automne 2007.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Madame la Présidente, l'expression de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

MICHELLE COURCHESNE

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