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# The Inclusion of Immigrant Families: For A Greater Synergy in Adult Education

Summary

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“The obstacles were really the language at first. But then, the obstacles also to lead, to knowing what I can do, let someone advise me. I have a lot of friends and families here. They welcomed us at the beginning. But in terms of advice....”  
Mariam, Syria

The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation's brief entitled ***The Inclusion of Immigrant Families: For A Greater Synergy in Adult Education*** explores the contribution of the Québec education system in the inclusion of immigrants, immigrant families and refugees. It highlights the diversity, migration plans and educational needs of newcomers to Québec.

The Conseil first outlines the educational services available to adult immigrants as they adapt and integrate into their new host society, providing an idea of their reach. Secondly, it focuses on the experience of immigrants and immigrant families through an in-depth analysis of their paths within the education system and—more broadly—within Québec society. To do so, the Conseil met about 60 immigrants as well as representatives of over 80 organizations in the education system, conceptualized here in broad terms to document the process of adaptation and integration. An analysis of the different paths enabled it to examine how the offer of educational services intended for immigrants and immigrant families is implemented, and arrive at a comprehensive understanding of how it works and of its effects.

This analysis reveals a number of frequent obstacles in the paths of newcomers that could be prevented by ensuring a greater synergy between different players in the education system. Seen in four recurrent knots, these obstacles speak of the challenges adult education and continuing education are called to meet in fostering the educational success of immigrants and immigrant families. Lastly, the Conseil makes 18 recommendations intended to enhance the inclusive character of the Québec education system and society through improved educational services and greater synergy between the different actions in adult education.

## A Land Attracting Thousands of Newcomers Annually

Québec attracts tens of thousands of permanent immigrants every year. For example, around 50,000 people were admitted annually between 2014 and 2018<sup>1</sup>. In 2016, the rate of the Québec population born abroad was 13.7%.

## Adult Education's Challenge of Inclusion

Immigration represents a great potential for Québec, not only in tackling its future demographic and labour challenges, but also in contributing to the vitality of the French language and social and economic innovation. For Québec society to fully benefit from this potential, the inclusion of immigrants and immigrant families is an important issue. The same can be said of the well-being and success of the immigrants themselves, who bring with them their own settlement plans and dreams they wish to realize here in Québec. In this respect, it was noted that social and economic integration can greatly differ from newcomer to newcomer, with some experiencing a smooth transition and others encountering significant obstacles.

The process of adapting to a new society can be very demanding for newcomers. Once settled in, they are very quickly obliged to make choices that will significantly impact their integration, without necessarily having fully mastered all the necessary elements or having the timely information needed to make informed decisions. It takes many months to settle a family, and several years to realize a migration plan. Cases vary depending on family characteristics and the individuals making up the family.

Québec thus places great importance on the challenge of developing an inclusive society that supports the participation of newcomers in its growth. In broad terms, the education system falls within the means introduced to foster this inclusion, and parts of this system designed for adults have played a central role in the journeys of families the Conseil met. The effectiveness and inclusive character of this educational action are therefore of vital significance and as such must be examined.

An **inclusive society** seeks the full engagement of every person by taking into account individual needs and aspirations. It considers the conditions for all people to participate in its different spheres by adapting its workings in light of diversity. Diversity is the standard by which processes and mechanisms for the recognition, integration and participation of all people and groups in the different spheres of society must operate. Based on a bi-directional rationale, an approach of inclusivity engages both newcomer and host society in the adaptation process.

1 Compounded by the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic since March of 2020, the effect of Québec government choices and policy since 2019 has resulted in a drop in immigration. The Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration is planning to gradually increase the number of immigrants admitted over the next few years to return to the same levels as those of the 2010s.

## **An Extensive and Complex Educational Services Offer**

For the Conseil, making the vision of an inclusive society become real rests on, among other things, an education system that can cover the gamut of needs that arise as immigrants adapt and integrate into their host society and fulfill their aspirations. For immigrants to be able to fully participate in all spheres of society, this system must be a vector of social change. To do so, the system itself must be inclusive, designed to consider the characteristics and plans of immigrants and immigrant families in addition to facilitating their adaptation.

The Conseil's analysis first made it possible to produce an overview of the educational offer available to adult immigrants and define the areas of learning covered. From this perspective, the overview reveals varied means for supporting the realization of immigrants' plans for living in Québec. Through the diverse players that constitute its makeup and the breadth of its reach, the Québec education system serves as a sound pillar that can facilitate the adaptation and integration process and foster the inclusion of immigrant families in the various social spheres of society (i.e. economic, educational, associational, familial, civic). Decentralized, the system is built on the actions of many governmental and non-governmental organizations found in different sectors (i.e. Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration; Ministère de l'Éducation; Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur; Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale; Services Québec; Commission des partenaires du marché du travail, all the way down to individual educational institutions and community organizations). Their collective offer covers a wide range of the educational needs newcomers typically have (i.e. learning French, understanding how institutions work, updating their skills, knowing their rights and responsibilities, having their prior learning and experience recognized).

At the same time, the Conseil's analysis also revealed a striking complexity. For example, while there may be a large number of actors, many tend to offer similar services. Moreover, one single educational need may at times require coordination between several organizations. The numerous frameworks (i.e. legislation, policies, strategies) covering the offer of educational services add to this complexity. Examining them closely suggests many different directions that do not always converge. This has the effect of placing the education system under tension and narrowing its reach as a driver of inclusion. Over the past few years, some improvements have been made to increase synergy between government actions—notably in the area of learning French—but complementarity and the seamless aspect of many other parts of the education system remain to be consolidated, notably in better coordination between players.

What then of the actual rollout of the offer of services and its impact on the paths of immigrants and immigrant families?

## **What Immigrant Paths Reveal about the Education System's Contribution**

The factual perspective of immigrants and immigrant families on their journey within Québec society further enriched the Conseil's analysis, as it provided an insight into the real functions and contribution of the education system to their inclusion and educational success, defined here based on their real needs and aspirations. This perspective also made it easier to better understand the immigrant experience and draw attention to elements that could influence the contribution of the education system itself.

## Diversity of Immigration and Migration Plans

Permanent immigration is highly diversified, a wide swath of identities, experiences and characteristics (i.e. age, gender, education, ethnic identity, mother tongue, life experience) that education actions ought to consider. In this regard, the situation of immigrant women is of particular concern, as family responsibility can often hit the brake on their journey and put a damper on their education. Also noted was how gender-based social, cultural and religious construction and family roles can affect the likelihood of some immigrants to use educational services.

The migration plans newcomers bring with them are equally diverse. Not always driven by work or economic considerations, they are often tied to family reasons (i.e. security, education, well-being, human rights, and the livelihood of relatives back home). In fact, a review of literature and documented paths confirm the importance family in all its forms—nuclear, extended, transnational—in the migration process. In many cases, family reasons can influence migration plans even before arriving in Québec, as well as their ultimate realization. A plan to emigrate is thus first and foremost a life dream—not only does it answer to individual aspirations, but is also part and parcel of family dynamics that shape individual paths, particularly when it comes to education.

## Paths Requiring Multiple Types of Learning

Far from being seamless, adapting and integrating into a host society is littered with obstacles and challenges. In fact, immigration is an exacting process for newcomers, who, in order to adapt must acquire different types of learning in making the necessary transitions easier. In many cases, transitioning between two societies puts practically every aspect of life to the test. Realizing a migration plan is also a challenge for many.

As the journeys of many immigrants the Conseil met reveal, the act of migrating is consequently accompanied by an array of learning to fully grasp the specificities of and flourish in Québec society, regardless of their starting point. Seen this way, fostering inclusion in a new society calls for a strong educational component. Yet far from being organized in a curriculum, the different types of learning that support this process are not always clearly defined. In addition, educational needs are likely to manifest themselves over the course of several years after arriving. Newcomers thus find themselves by definition students of lifelong and lifewide learning.

At the same time, using the education system is very often a rite of passage. While some steps have long been planned (i.e. francization), others (i.e. those related to socio-professional integration into the workplace commensurate with education history and experience) were not. Viewed from this angle, a return to school often indicates an initial failure in socio-professional integration (i.e. an unsuccessful job search in one's field without the input of the educational system). In such a context, the relationship with education might be tarnished.

## Four Recurrent Knots in the Paths of Immigrants and Immigrant Families

The documented paths of immigrants all tend to share similarities. In particular, they reveal four recurrent knots found not only in socio-professional integration but also in the fulfillment of migration plans that encompass goals of well-being, active civic participation and contribution to the host society. In its brief, the Conseil examined current educational services to untangle these four knots, which are as follows:

- **Understanding and being understood in Québec society**, that is, the need to acquire language proficiency in Québec, including vernacular French used here, as well as understanding and grasping terms of reference, subcultures, codes and ways of doing and thinking unique to Québec. Learning French and the ability to communicate in different settings (informal, formal, work) remain an especially tall order. The same can be said of digital literacy, all too often taken for granted by education players.
- **Obtaining timely information and advice to realize migration plans, mindful of individual characteristics**, which calls for reception, education and career guidance and referral services that contribute to the continuity and success of learning or training paths. Key to ensuring a seamless path, these services are still too often unknown or require improvement.
- **Recognizing the validity of credentials and experience** by employers to promote integration in the workplace, a transitional process that presents major obstacles, despite a number of existing measures.
- **Finding sustainable employment commensurate with skills and aspirations**, or socio-professional integration that considers individual aspirations, for which different options are available yet appear to remain untapped. The issue of socio-professional integration is a particularly sensitive one for many newcomers who feel that the Québec promise of a job that matches their skills has been broken, as the information provided and immigration selection criteria based on education and professional experience—particularly in the sub-category of skilled workers—have raised expectations. The Conseil’s analysis shows that this issue goes well beyond simple recognition of prior learning and skills, and borders on some forms of discrimination.

“Québec says, I don’t know, 100 requests for permanent residency this year. In other words, if we’re chosen, it’s because we’re the best. So here we are. Why then, once we’re here, we’re not hired? It’s kind of contradictory if they let us come without informing us well. We’re here because we’ve already done a lot of schooling, we already have a lot of work experience, a lot, a lot in our country of origin. So, here we are. Why aren’t we hired when we get here? It’s kind of contradictory.” (Luna, Mexique)

Examining how educational services are currently being delivered shows that change is needed to enhance their reach, reduce the effect of the knots that immigrants and immigrant families encounter in their paths, and expand the inclusive nature of the various sectors of society, including the workplace.

## Findings Noted Across the System

The views of players the Conseil met and the outcome of its analysis also produced some notable findings applicable across the education system. First, the right conditions to foster the engagement of newcomers in their educational process and success are often lacking. Family constraints and a sense

of urgency primarily due to financial vulnerability—which many families all too often experience—often steer the course toward alternative solutions that can temper aspirations and plans. An education offer should consider these obstacles as a matter of priority.

Second, as the different paths attest, viewed from the ground the education offer appears unwieldy and difficult to comprehend, particularly for newcomers. It would be better bundled with coordinated initiatives and efficient cross-sector referencing. Otherwise, synergy of services becomes difficult to achieve, and access to an actual continuum of services rare. This tends to only partially meet needs or prolong the duration of education paths. These findings underscore the need to offer immigrants enhanced support by adopting different strategies, which is what the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration is currently doing in rolling out the *Accompagnement Québec* service and promoting closer alignment between the different players in education communities. It is abundantly clear from the analysis that it is also important to strengthen links with the workplace, which can be a learning environment that could be leveraged more.

Furthermore, the education offer varies from region to region. In some, where immigration is a more recent phenomenon, there is a lack of financial resources or expertise to offer adequate services and play an effective role in attracting and retaining immigrant families.

Moreover, there is a great need for the development of intercultural skills, as enabling the inclusion of immigrant families requires a strong commitment on the part of all concerned parties: immigrants themselves, government structures and institutions, and society as a whole, including the workplace and the education sector. This commitment should take the form of actions entrenched in education and specific to each of these parties. The inclusion of immigrant families cannot rest solely on their shoulders.

Lastly, the views of players consulted by the Conseil spoke of a number of administrative or systemic barriers that blunted the reach and effect of education actions. They point to, among other things, administrative and budget rules that lack consistency between the various ministerial players and that limit the opportunity for cooperation on the ground.

In short, all these findings point to the call for a greater synergy between actions in adult education.

### **Three Key Ideas—and Recommendations for a More Inclusive Québec**

The work carried out by the Conseil reveals that the Québec education system is in need of some major improvements so that a greater number of immigrants and immigrant families can access the educational services they require. These improvements should also better consider the heterogeneous profiles hidden behind the term “immigrant”, and which can influence commitment to education paths. It also calls for improved flexibility and complementarity of these services, to fully meet the needs and reflect the dreams of newcomers.

The Conseil's analysis also underscores the importance of shifting the rollout of educational services intended to support the integration of immigrants from preset and segmented services to a model where the education demand is at the core of their implementation. This renewed vision precisely positions the needs and aspirations of immigrant families as keystones education players can use to build and develop their services. Such an approach demands refashioning their rollout into a continuum characterized by cooperation between all players, making these services more user friendly for immigrant families in light of their needs, aspirations and responsibilities they are obliged to fulfill.

Moreover, the development of an inclusive society rests on a shared responsibility, which extends beyond efforts on the part of immigrants to adapt, to the education system, workplace and society as a whole. While society is called on to help support the path of immigrant families and in building inclusive environments where each citizen's skills are justly recognized for their worth, the education system too must be inclusive and play a fundamental role in necessary social change by ensuring stakeholders are provided with adequate tools or by supporting the intercultural skills demanded by in an increasingly diverse society. The education system must act as a driver of societal change, in which every person is engaged.

To widen the reach of adult education and for a greater synergy between its actions in supporting the development of a more inclusive society, the Conseil puts forth three key ideas that both complement one another and underpin its 18 recommendations.

### **Better Support for Immigrant Families in Learning about Québec Society**

The first key idea and set of recommendations are intended to broaden the reach of means available to immigrants and immigrant families to **learn about the host society and French** in a Québec context. The Conseil also recommends the **consolidation and development of a long-term diversified approach** to support families. Additionally, it calls on the different players to facilitate **access to clear and simple information** that can assist newcomers in their paths and their efforts to **improve their digital literacy and language skills**.

### **Socio-Professional Integration and Recognizing the Value of Immigrants in the Workplace**

The second key idea brings together recommendations aimed at facilitating the socio-professional integration of newcomers and recognition of their prior learning and experience. The Conseil namely recommends **broadening the role of educational and career guidance** in paths leading to the job market, **revising and improving recognition of prior learning and skills acquired outside Québec**, **ensuring better support for the workplace as an environment for learning, recognition and training**, as well as **strengthening inclusivity in the workplace** through educational approaches.

### **A Coherent and Practical Education Offer and Fostering the Engagement of Society as a Whole**

This last set of recommendations considers means to optimize the efficacy of education actions in supporting the adaptation and integration of immigrants as well as to increase inclusivity on the part of society as a whole. The different findings and the importance of greater synergy between actions largely hinges on the **adoption of a government policy on adult education** prioritizing, among other things, support for a greater inclusion of immigrants. Such policy should be centred on improving synergy between government actions as well as between different education players. To complement this, the Conseil calls on the different education communities to **strengthen coordination, cross-sector referencing and partnership** and translate them into a **continuum of services that supports immigrants** in succeeding with their dreams. Keeping a system-wide view, the Conseil reiterates the importance of **considering the right conditions for educational success** of immigrant family members and recommends providing the necessary support to this end.

Lastly, **learning to live together** is an issue that should be a global concern for both Québec society and the entire education system, as are **staff training** in stakeholder organizations and **an optimal dissemination of information** to the former to maximize their work.

## Conclusion

The inclusion of immigrants and immigrant families in society is a tall order that extends well beyond the job market. We must not lose sight of the dreams that inspire these newcomers to come to Québec. The Conseil formulated its recommendations to foster the creation of favourable conditions for a seamless path for all newcomers, extending their reach into other spheres of life, namely by promoting the rollout of a continuum of services adapted to immigrant needs and realities.

The recent changes made to economic immigration selection criteria have undoubtedly helped integrate a greater number of people settling here. However, educational needs required to foster the integration of newcomers into Québec society, its language, its terms of reference, as well as learning to live together, will remain. Québec will also continue to welcome, for family or humanitarian reasons, people whose journey will involve the contribution of the education system. For these individuals to meaningfully contribute to a dynamic Québec and to ensure their well-being, a synergistic effort between adult education players is vital.

## Appendix 1. Summary of Recommendations\*

### Better Support for Immigrant Families in Learning about Québec Society

#### Acquiring French Proficiency in a Québec Context

##### Recommendation 1

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration and to the Minister Responsible for the French Language, jointly with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity and their partners:

- to continue efforts to increase French language proficiency among immigrants by developing a coordinated governmental strategy aimed at:
  - informing everyone, at appropriate times along their path, of all available means for learning French;
  - ensuring the availability of regional francization services;
  - developing the offer to cover the diverse learning needs identified, including the need for advanced French proficiency, notably through adopting francization and work-study strategies in the workplace.

#### Support for a Continuum of Personalized Education Services

##### Recommendation 2

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration, jointly with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education, and the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity:

- to continue the rollout of the Accompagnement Québec service to reach the greatest number of immigrants before they arrive, and maintain this support as long as necessary after arrival by 1) calling on all education players to facilitate the implementation of a continuum of personalized education services in each region, and by 2) ensuring that all newcomers are aware, at appropriate times along their path, of relevant services, particularly those provided by community organizations.

\* Chapter 4 of the Conseil's brief presents the considerations that led to these recommendations.

## Accessibility of Information and Organizational Support

### Recommendation 3

**The Conseil recommends** to Ministries, educational institutions as well as players in community and employment organizations that provide services to immigrants and immigrant families:

- to take all necessary steps to create or refine, at the organizational level, an inclusive environment mindful of newcomers and based on their needs, and disseminate, through a variety of communication means, up-to-date, clear and simple information about services available to support them in their efforts to enhance their digital literacy and language skills.

## Learning How Society Functions and its Terms of Reference

### Recommendation 4

**The Conseil recommends** to players across all sectors who work with immigrants and immigrant families, jointly with the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration:

- to work collaboratively in their respective regions to:
  - raise awareness among immigrants and immigrant families of the different means available to gain a better understanding of Québec society, how it functions and its terms of reference, and be able to fully participate and have the opportunity to interact in it;
  - document the best practices implemented and disseminate them in the relevant communities.

## Socio-Professional Integration and Recognizing the Value of Immigrants in the Workplace

### Educational and Career Guidance

### Recommendation 5

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration, jointly with the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Higher Education:

- to inform about and offer free of charge educational and career guidance services in all regions to individuals who desire them as early as possible in their settlement process and as needed, to ensure they can reach their career goals through an optimal path.

## Recognition of Prior Learning, Skills and Experience Acquired Outside Québec

### Recommendation 6

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration, jointly with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education and the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity:

- to continue efforts to increase awareness among immigrants and employers of offers that recognize prior learning and skills as well as the value of these processes.

### Recommendation 7

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Education, Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity, the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration and the Office des professions du Québec, jointly with players involved in the recognition of prior learning and skills:

- to collectively take steps to improve and facilitate, at every level of the education system and for all trades and professions, the recognition of prior learning, skills and experience acquired outside Québec by reviewing and revising the global offer to clarify its goals, broaden its scope, improve its requirements and ensure, through a variety of means, upskilling and access to any lacking or refresher training.

### Recommendation 8

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education and to the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity:

- to draw on models developed here and in other jurisdictions and conduct the research needed to develop and implement an approach that would highlight, legitimize, document and make visible all professional credentials and experiences of adult immigrants, facilitate their analysis by employers and therefore foster the integration of newcomers into a workplace matching their skills<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> In December 2020, the Conseil mandated its Commission of Adult Education and Continuing Education to prepare a brief on this very theme.

## The Workplace as an Environment for Learning, Recognition and Training

### Recommendation 9

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity, the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail and the Office des professions du Québec:

- to jointly establish a strategy that encourages employers as well as players in the education and employment sectors to support the socio-economic integration of immigrants through the development and rollout of education projects services based in the workplace that:
  - allow for learning or training and the recognition of prior learning and skills;
  - leverage work-study and workplace training formulas and internships in particular.

### Recommendation 10

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education and the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity:

- to improve and broaden the guidance, assistance and follow-up of the offer to immigrants during and after their learning path or workplace training by ensuring adequate financial support to educational institutions and employability services.

## Inclusivity In the Workplace

### Recommendation 11

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity and the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration, jointly with the business services of their respective networks and involved organisations:

- to collectively take steps to raise awareness among employers of the educational services offer and incentive programs, particularly among small and medium enterprises, and to develop this offer to foster the inclusion of immigrants in the workplace as well as support the necessary organizational change and training to accommodate them.

## A Coherent and Practical Education Offer and Fostering the Engagement of Society as a Whole

### Synergy and Coherent Actions

#### Recommendation 12

**The Conseil recommends** to the Government, jointly with stakeholders:

- to prioritize education and learning that fosters the inclusion of immigrant families in adult education policy, thus ensuring complementarity of educational services, and to globally review administrative and budget rules to increase coherence of actions and better consider the reality of immigrant families.

### Supporting Immigrants and Cross-Sector Referencing

#### Recommendation 13

**The Conseil recommends** to educational institutions as well as community and employment players that provide services to immigrants and immigrant families:

- to pay particular attention to the support and followup of newcomers who use their services and to strengthen, in their respective regions, the necessary coordination, referencing and partnership for a personalized response to the comprehensive needs of immigrants and immigrant families and thus foster educational success and inclusion.

### Conditions Fostering Educational Success

#### Recommendation 14

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration, jointly with those government partners that provide educational services to immigrant families:

- to ensure that the commitment and success of immigrants—particularly women—in structured educational steps is underpinned by timely conditions that consider their family reality and allow them to fully focus on their learning.

## Learning to Live Together

### Recommendation 15

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration and the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity:

- to make the issue of learning to live together a concern borne by the entire education system, and to enhance existing means for intercultural training, rights education, and civic education in the digital age.

### Recommendation 16

**The Conseil recommends** to economic players and union organizations:

- to continue and broaden their actions for raising awareness and equipping the labour market to support the inclusion of immigrants in the workplace and society.

## Training Staff and the Optimal Dissemination of Information

### Recommendation 17

**The Conseil recommends** to players in the education system who provide services to immigrants and immigrant families:

- to periodically hold training and upgrading activities for all their staff members to acquire the necessary intercultural skills as well as an adequate understanding of the reality of immigrants in Québec.

### Recommendation 18

**The Conseil recommends** to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity as well as the Minister of Immigration, Francization and Integration:

- to ensure that staff in their respective networks that provide reception, advice, and guidance and reference services to immigrants in the education system have readily available information that is up-to-date, clear, simple and consistent with the global offer of services.

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**Conseil supérieur  
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**Québec** 

   @csequebec  
cse.gouv.qc.ca