



## Tis the season to consult!

After what have been known as the “lean” years—which ultimately progressed into the skinny then downright emaciated years—the Liberal government has decided to do something besides making sweeping cuts to education.

So here we have two of its ministers—Education Minister Sébastien Proulx and Higher Education Minister Hélène David—launching wide-scale consultations in view of major educational reforms.

Regional tours and an online call for opinions are some of the tools that will serve to inform Québec’s new Policy in Educational Success. Minister Proulx has thrown out 50 topics for discussion and wants to know what we think of them—all in a brief of no more than 10 pages in length. Already, this isn’t boding well for the future...

The consultation document includes everything but the kitchen sink: from kindergarten at age four and the introduction of new technologies to the academic achievement of boys in intensive English, the education and training of teachers and the educational success of Indigenous populations. Even long-discarded ideas have made their way back to the fore, like the creation of a professional order for primary and secondary teachers. This proposal has already been given the thumbs down by the *Office des professions*, not to mention by the vast majority of those it directly concerns, namely the teachers themselves. Having a professional structure imposed on us that we don’t want is squarely out of the question.

On the higher education front, some of the ideas put forward during the short-lived PQ government’s Summit on Higher Education have resurfaced, such as the creation of a council of universities. Not to be outdone, the Liberal government also wants to establish a council of colleges along with a joint commission of colleges and universities to serve as an interface between these two councils. For the CSN and FNEEQ, our position is clear: “yes” to the creation of new structures that help promote greater cohesiveness and stronger partnership among the various educational institutions and between the different systems; a categorical “no” to using these structures for quality assurance and the standardization of education for the sake of snagging a top spot in international rankings. In our view, one thing is evident: to be beneficial, these councils must be made up for the most part by the artisans of higher education, in other words by the different categories of staff working in the system day in and day out, such as professors, course lecturers, professionals and support staff, who should all have the right to appoint those they wish to have representing them.

The Couillard government is now saying it wants to make education its top priority. Judging from its track record, it’s hard to be sure if that is cause for celebration or for worry. But what we do know is that the last few years of budget restraint have been painful, especially for those most vulnerable. All the reforms and new structures in the world can’t repair the damage that has been done. We’re not so naïve as to think the government’s sudden interest in education has nothing to do with election strategy. As educators, it will be up to us to defend the core mission of education in a society that considers itself democratic.

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