

# carnets 49

SPRING 2026



**IN THE STREET  
AGAINST CUTS  
AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC LAWS**

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PHOTO : DOMINIC MORFETTE

Benoît Lacoursière

**AS** I reflected on what to write for this editorial, I had the sense that I've been repeating myself over the past few months. But as we all know, education often involves repetition. Faced with a wave of regressive policies from the CAQ government, we have no choice but to continue our work of mobilization, advocacy and political education. We need to pursue these efforts in our workplaces, our gathering places and even with our families. (It's helpful, for instance, to be ready with some [comeback lines](#)).

On the legislative front, the CAQ has recently introduced or passed scary laws that undermine fundamental rights. In this issue of Carnets, we examine Bill 9 on the secularism of the state, which adds another turn of the screw to Bills 21 and 94. Then there's Bill 13, which restricts the right to protest; and Bill 3, which targets union autonomy, after Bill 89 restricted the right to strike.

These attacks on labour rights are clearly meant to weaken us at a time when we are on the frontlines of the fight to improve living conditions for all Quebecers. Union action cannot be reduced to bargaining and enforcing collective agreements alone. Workers are also citizens; they have rights and needs that extend beyond the workplace. Our union's political action is grounded in a long tradition of political engagement and of fighting the powerful.

Bill 7 has also been adopted. While the long-awaited abolition of the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial (CEEC) is welcome, the bill also eliminates several public agencies and wipes out the independence of the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse. There's also the government's proposed constitution, which it is trying to push through without any genuine democratic process. On the housing front (Bill 20), the CAQ government's unwillingness to address the housing crisis hurts tenants and housing organizations such as cooperatives.

Amid this tsunami of legislation, austerity policies continue. Public services, starting with the schools and higher education, remain underfunded, and the state of educational institutions is deteriorating to the point where some are forced to cut essential services. For example, Cégep de Saint-Laurent recently decided to shut down its francization program.

As Marcel Pepin, former CSN president, said, it isn't enough to be right; you also need the might to fight for what's right. Faced with these developments, we must draw on our capacity to mobilize and say: enough is enough. We must bring the same resolve and effectiveness we demonstrate at the bargaining table to our political action. This is an existential struggle for the labour movement and for Québec society as a whole.



PHOTO : MARTIN ROBERT

Joint protest by the CSN, the Conseil central de Québec-Chaudière-Appalaches and the FNEEQ in the lobby of Complexe G in Québec City against the CAQ's authoritarian bills, under-investment in higher education and the erosion of the social safety net (April 2026).

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## Secularism: Listening to the voices the CAQ government chooses to ignore

Interviews by Martin Robert

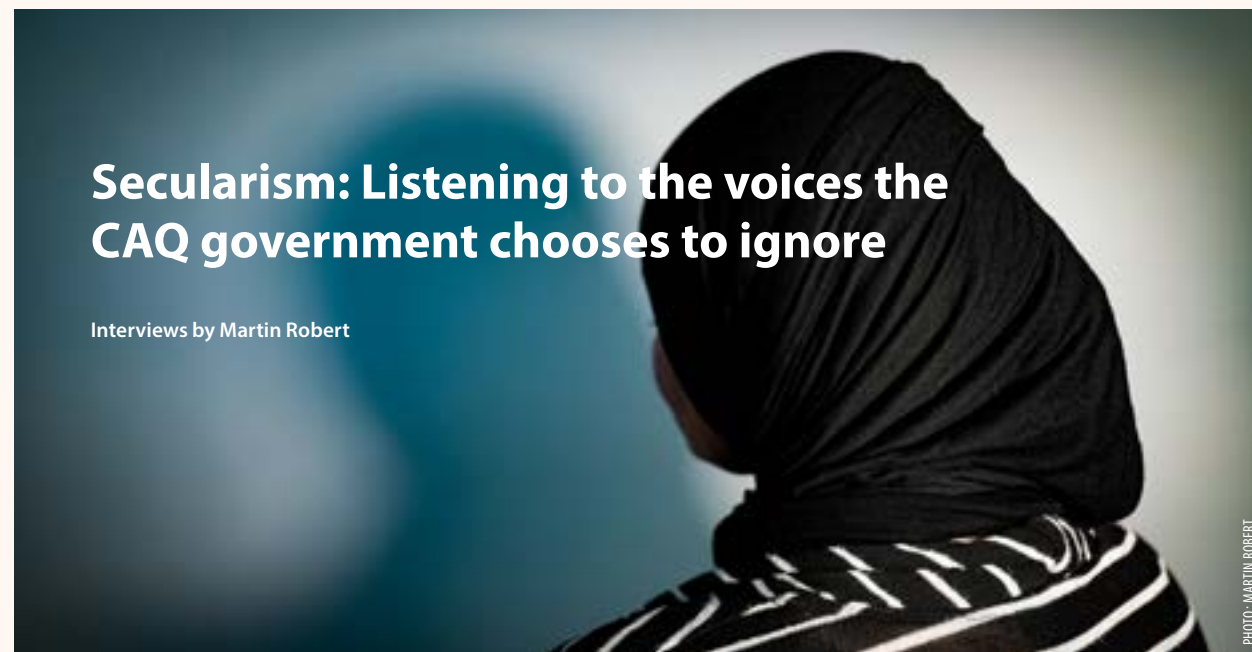


PHOTO: MARTIN ROBERT

**In this issue, we feature the voices of women members from minority communities who seldom speak publicly on secularism. This sensitive issue has been turned into a partisan battleground by the CAQ government with the adoption of Bills 21 (2019) and 94 (2025), and the introduction of Bill 9, which has now been passed and became Act 6 in spring 2026. The women we interviewed express their concerns about these authoritarian laws and ask: where will it stop? Here are their words.**

**R** Kitouni, a lecturer at a Montréal university, has lived in Québec for 15 years. In her experience, Québec has always been welcoming—but somewhat less so in recent years. She agreed to share her thoughts with Carnets, provided we didn't publish her photo. "I want to share my fears about these laws, but I don't want any fallout to hit my friends and especially my family here."

"Y" was born in Montréal, speaks French with a Québec accent and teaches computer science at a CEGEP. She also wanted to stay anonymous. "It's also to protect my students. I wouldn't want them to be identified as students of that prof and have to face questions."

The request for anonymity by these women, both of whom wear a hijab, is troubling and surprising in Québec, with its reputation for openness, inclusivity and freedom. Neither woman believes that most Quebecers reject them. They are, however, appalled by the CAQ bulldozing through law after law over the protests of rights bodies and in violation of the charters of rights. The CAQ has also pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause to block any legal challenge. The Supreme Court will have to rule on the legality of this strategy.

The CAQ's latest attack, Bill 9, extends to CEGEPs and universities the measures that had already been applied in the schools: a ban on full-face coverings and prayer rooms. Previous CAQ legislation added another layer of prohibitions for workers such as school support staff, early childhood educators and health care workers, who can no longer wear religious symbols. There's a grandfather clause for current employees, but they will have to remove their hijabs to be eligible for a transfer or promotion. R. Kitouni and "Y" are saddened to see how these laws, imposed without level-headed debate, are undermining social cohesion and lending legitimacy to intolerant and racist discourse.

Behi Fatholahzadeh is a physics teacher at Marianopolis College who doesn't wear a hijab. As a member of the FNEEQ's Interculturality and Systemic Discrimination and Racism in the Workplace and in Education Committee, she speaks out on behalf of colleagues who are too apprehensive to share their views. She believes the authoritarian laws introduced by the governing party open the door to discrimination and degrade the social climate.

"I am Iranian," she said. "I come from an Islamic country ruled with an iron fist by an ideological dictatorship. I strongly agree with the principle of secularism, but I don't think the CAQ's laws address the issue properly."

She believes these laws are moving Québec away from a truly secular state, understood as a way of organizing society that promotes respect for rights and freedoms. R. Kitouni adds, "I understand that the state has no religion, but citizens should be free to believe. Currently, aren't we promoting non-belief? That's what I don't understand."

### Removing the veil

The government now requires anyone receiving state services to have their face uncovered at all times. The three women agree that women who receive services should be required to show their faces for purpose of identification. That's not an issue. But once they've been identified, why is it necessary to ban them from the classroom, for instance?

"The government claims it wants to liberate women, as though the hijab were a symbol of submission," says R. Kitouni. "Paradoxically, they're also afraid of us—as if supposedly submissive women had the power to indoctrinate young people. No one is forcing me to wear a hijab. It's part of my identity."

Behi Fatholahzadeh believes the CAQ focuses on marginal extremists and uses isolated abuses to target the entire Muslim community. "They want to fight the fundamentalists, and the whole community is paying the price. It's really serious. Workers who wear the hijab are losing their jobs in Québec because they refuse to remove it. If that's not discrimination, what is it?"

These women want to be part of the conversation and part of the solution. Instead, the CAQ's laws exclude them from the conversation and are liable to confine them to the home rather than allowing them to build rewarding careers. Whether born in Québec or not, they have become the Other.

### Prayer spaces

The CAQ government's Bill 9 also prohibits prayer spaces in post-secondary institutions. The women we interviewed question the purpose of this measure, when distress and anxiety among their students has been a concern for years.

R. Kitouni asks ironically whether yoga might be banned as well, given its spiritual roots. "Prayer is a way to calm yourself, relax and self-regulate. I need my half hour. It doesn't hurt anyone. How does it bother or inconvenience others? The same goes for the students."

The women agree that this provision of Bill 9 also targets an imaginary problem in order to discriminate and ostracize, rather than to respond to any need identified by school

administrators. On the contrary, this type of government micromanagement reduces the autonomy of educational institutions.

"Y" says that if she could speak directly to Québec's new premier, Christine Fréchette, she would tell her that minorities make a tremendous effort to integrate. And these laws target the most integrated members of the Muslim community: people like her, who are open-minded, speak French and contribute to society.

"I give my all to my department," she says. "I have a lot to offer the education system. These laws put up barriers based on how I look. We lack resources, our classrooms are overcrowded and students are struggling. What we need is not these laws. It's the last straw."



PHOTO: MARTIN ROBERT

Behi Fatholahzadeh, member of the interculturalité, discrimination et racisme systémiques au travail et éducation (IDRSTE) Committee

### Excerpt from a motion adopted unanimously by the FNEEQ at its 35th Convention in December 2025

It is moved that the FNEEQ:

- ▷ Condemn the way the CAQ is using Bill 9, An Act respecting the reinforcement of laicity in Québec, to divert attention from its disastrous record;
- ▷ Condemn the climate of mistrust, stigmatization and discrimination toward people from immigrant backgrounds fuelled by the prejudices of the CAQ government;
- ▷ Condemn the lack of serious studies and evidence to justify restricting workers' fundamental rights.

# No more college courses for Québec inmates: Correctional Service Canada sends rehabilitation to the hole

“My reaction? I can’t understand it. It’s a total shock.” Marc-André Lacelle, a teacher at Cégep Marie-Victorin and co-holder of the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison, is still stunned by the announced elimination of CEGEP courses in federal prisons in Québec.

BY MARTIN ROBERT

The Canadian government likes to say that rehabilitation of inmates is a priority, but a recent Correctional Service Canada (CSC) decision flies in the face of this claim. To absorb \$132 million in budget cuts, the agency has decided to stop funding college courses for inmates of federal penitentiaries in Québec—inmates who still cling to the hope of reintegrating into society once they have served their sentences.

At first, the federal government had planned to eliminate this funding completely as of March 2026, but after negotiations, it has granted a reprieve until June 30, so that inmates who are already enrolled in college programs can complete them. CSC hopes these cuts will save \$200,000 per year—a paltry sum compared with the impact that these cuts will have on inmates’ chances for rehabilitation.

According to Laura Chabot, president of the teachers’ union at Cégep Marie-Victorin, “All of us who teach courses at penal institutions are proud to say that we and our departments are contributing to former inmates’ re-entry into society. So we are all the more surprised and deeply disappointed by the federal government’s decision.”

In Québec, only two college programs are still offered in prison settings, both of them through Collège Marie-Victorin. One is a pre-university program in the humanities for male inmates at the Cowansville institution.

The other is an Attestation of College Studies in Office Technology for female inmates at Joliette. In past years, there were many more college programs in prison, but unfortunately they fell victim to budget cuts by successive federal governments.

## Valuable courses that have proven their worth

According to Cégep Marie-Victorin, these courses are very popular at the two institutions where they are offered. At Cowansville, on average, more than 25 inmates have been enrolled in the humanities program every semester since 2021. In fall 2025, enrolment reached a record high with 30 students enrolled and active. At the women’s institution in Joliette, the average number of students enrolled per semester is 5.2.

So why cut education programs that have been so successful? From a scientific standpoint, college courses in prison settings have been proven to deliver a substantial payback. According to Marc-André Lacelle, who has been researching education programs in prison settings here and abroad for many years, “This is time spent on a useful activity that doesn’t cost much, has an impact, is positive and, most of all, reduces the risk of recidivism. For people who are incarcerated, these programs provide one of their rare contacts with the outside world—a contact that is more neutral and involves no security concerns.”

Lacelle stresses the importance of the principle of universality, which is one of the CEGEPs’ key strengths. The natural pedagogical relationship with someone who is not seen as associated with the correctional system supports the humane treatment of inmates. More important still, many of the populations targeted by these programs are marginalized and are resistant to education because of past failures. While education in prison happens in a harsh environment, it can break down inmates’ prejudices and feelings of incompetence and make it a little more possible for them to go on to post-secondary education.

Moreover, by ending funding for college education in federal prisons in Québec, the federal government is not only attacking Québec’s specificity and its distinctive CEGEP system, but also treating Québec inequitably compared with the rest of Canada. In English Canada, high school goes up to grade 12, instead of grade 11 as in Québec. So that’s a year of federal funding lost in Québec. As Laura Chabot sadly notes, “The fact that the federal government is refusing to acknowledge a specificity of Québec—the CEGEPs—is symbolic. It betrays a lack of recognition that should be condemned.” Her union is contributing to efforts to devise solutions.

# Identifying, correcting and reporting psychosocial risks in education workplaces

By Joseph-Fernand Ouellette, for the Health and Safety Committee

Psychosocial risks (PSRs) in the education workplace affect health, motivation and the quality of instruction, among other things. With the most recent data from the INSPQ showing a troubling picture of the teaching profession (heavy workload, burnout, absenteeism, intention to quit), there are three actions our members should take.

## What are psychosocial risks in the workplace ?

The Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ) defines psychosocial risks in the workplace as “factors related to work organization, management practices, employment conditions and social relations that increase the probability of generating adverse effects on the physical and mental health of exposed individuals.” Examples include heavy workload, low recognition at work and lack of support from coworkers and supervisors (INSPQ, 2016).

## 1) Look for the following symptoms of PSRs

Personal symptoms: persistent fatigue, disrupted sleep, irritability, cynicism, poor concentration, recurrent illness, isolation and feelings of meaninglessness.

Occupational symptoms: unusual errors, lateness, tensions and fears surrounding classes and meetings. Collectively: increased absenteeism and conflict, chronic work overload, unrealistic deadlines and contradictory communications. Factors to watch for include clarity of expectations, work volume, pace of work, real autonomy, recognition, support, access to resources, predictable schedules, change management, exposure to incivility and violence, and digital overload (proliferation of communication channels and notifications).

## 2) Take steps to correct and prevent PSRs

To achieve lasting reductions in PSRs, organizations must make systematic adjustments. Priorities: calibrate teaching loads and task assignments to match the time actually available, clarify roles and priorities to avoid “mission creep”, control the load of digital communications (official channels, response times, right to disconnect) and strengthen professional support.

It is also essential to make invisible work (such as coordination, pedagogical innovation and peer support) visible, to use protocols and targeted training to prevent incivility and violence, and to program some slack into the work day (flexible schedules, meeting-free periods, rotation of demanding tasks).

The OHS committee, OHS representatives, the administration and union representatives must monitor PSRs using indicators such as average load per course, response times, incidents reported and dealt with, and teacher satisfaction.

## 3) Report PSRs and request support to deal with them

The first purpose of reporting is prevention. Document the facts (dates, locations, persons, requests, impacts), incorporate key messages, describe the effects on teaching and on the students, and describe the desired

steps (e.g. workload adjustment, support, protocols).

The usual channels: immediate superior, OHS committee, union representatives, incident reports and records, and, in case of serious incidents, the institution’s procedures, with support from the union and, if needed, the CNESST.

Reminder: You’re not alone; the union is there to provide advice and support, and to advocate for permanent corrective measures.

## A piece of advice

There are a few habits that you can apply in your daily work to help prevent PSRs. For example, plan realistic blocks of work time and reserve real blocks of recovery time, standardize what you can, set limits on your digital availability, communicate them and ask for help early to facilitate organizational adjustments.

For more information, visit the [CNESST](#) and [INSPQ](#) websites.



BY THE SCHOOL AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE

**It can be difficult to talk about the issues raised by artificial intelligence<sup>1</sup> in our line of work without falling into a polarized debate, in which school administrations push training about AI's benefits while unions warn of its risks. Many people are asking how these opposed arguments stack up.**

**S**etting aside for a minute the looming risks of using AI in education, what are the potential benefits? What does the latest research tell us about its effects on learners? Can we use AI while safeguarding intellectual autonomy and critical thinking?

The School and Society Committee's latest report, *IA en éducation : Regard sur certains effets de l'IAg sur les plans cognitifs, épistémiques et relationnels*, seeks to give a partial answer to these questions.

**Real effects on cognitive development**

Our relationship to knowledge has already shifted due to widespread use of the Internet and social media. Artificial intelligence adds another layer to this transformation. Research shows that AI use can reduce mental effort and critical thinking, create dependence on AI tools, diminish memory work and even lower brain activity in the case of generative AI (GenAI). The pejorative terms used to describe the effects of GenAI (laziness, cognitive offloading, "digital dementia") aren't just moral panic—they reflect valid concerns about learners' cognitive development. However, the effects vary depending on the type of student and other factors. While some studies and pedagogical experiments have found positive outcomes in specific contexts, we must identify which pedagogical tasks truly benefit from AI assistance without compromising learners' cognitive development.

**Faking it with AI: Zombie knowledge walks amongst us**

There's strong pressure to integrate GenAI into teaching and learning practices, especially for professional skills and knowledge. Yet the risks are undeniable. Academic dishonesty in higher education has reached alarming levels—and AI-generated content has made it worse. Since the advent of GenAI, the amount of fake scholarship produced by these tools in whole or in part has been growing exponentially. The sheer volume of AI-produced articles makes it nearly impossible to verify all references. The opacity of many widely used AI tools further complicates that task of distinguishing genuine work from fabricated content. With researchers struggling to sift through the data and teachers finding it increasingly difficult to assess student assignments, what expectations should we have of both teachers and students? This calls for a fundamental reflection on each program's objectives and how to achieve them.

**AI and interpersonal relationships: Potential benefits, definite risks**

Many student challenges aren't strictly cognitive but more relational or social. One reason students give for using AI is the ability to ask questions without fear of judgment. Interacting with a chatbot, which presents itself as "neutral," is a stress-free experience that can enhance psychological well-being. It can offer perceived social support, reduce loneliness and alleviate emotional distress. Chatbots are said to serve as a "rich source of emotional support," fostering self-reflection and providing "a non-judgmental space for expression that facilitates self-disclosure."

But the neutrality of GenAI is an illusion. The flattery built into all the major platforms (albeit to different degrees) is a telling example. AI tools often mimic human interaction

so convincingly that users may see them not as tools but as confidants capable of offering psycho-emotional or therapeutic support. There is a real risk of emotional dependence, especially for vulnerable individuals.

AI tools can significantly influence a learner's sense of self—not just as a student or future professional, but as a social and emotional being. But, instead of eliminating the danger, namely the fear of human judgment, by offering a mechanical tool that simply skirts it, shouldn't we be focusing on strengthening the person's relational skills, particularly their ability to present themselves to others without undue fear?

Ultimately, one of the greatest challenges posed by AI—at the cognitive, emotional and interpersonal levels—is that its perceived benefits can become pitfalls. The speed of execution ruptures time and the ability to reflect, and the appearance of non-judgment undermines the learner's ability to relate to the Other, which is essential for their full development as citizens.

**(Union) action is both possible and necessary**


AI can support human learning and capabilities only on the clear condition that it is used critically and with guardrails. As Silicon Valley pushes to embed GenAI in every aspect of life, we must reclaim agency wherever we still can. Our report concludes with suggestions for risk mitigation—and also for union action. By deepening our understanding of AI's promises and effects, and by supporting dialogue and advocacy, we can take collective action rather than passively enduring

the fallout from artificial intelligence. AI can support human learning and capabilities only on the clear condition that it is used critically and with guardrails. As Silicon Valley pushes to embed GenAI in every aspect of life, we must reclaim agency wherever we still can. Our report concludes with suggestions for risk mitigation—and also for union action. By deepening our understanding of AI's promises and effects, and by supporting dialogue and advocacy, we can take collective action rather than passively enduring the fallout from artificial intelligence.

<sup>1</sup> In this text, we distinguish between AI—understood as artificial intelligence as a whole—and GenAI, the branch of AI known as generative AI, which mimics human intelligence and generates new content, including images, music, text and drawings.


FNEEQ Members

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## Coordinated bargaining: An essential collective instrument for university lecturers

Pierre-David Desjardins  
COORDINATOR, REGROUPEMENT UNIVERSITÉ

For over 40 years, coordinated bargaining by the FNEEQ's Regroupement université has been a key strategic tool for improving working conditions for lecturers and other contract teachers across the university network.

Since local bargaining talks aren't all conducted at the same time, coordination and solidarity among unions are essential for maintaining our bargaining power over time. By aligning priorities, demands and messaging, coordinated bargaining breaks the isolation of local unions and allows them to speak with a strong voice to university administrations across Québec. Currently, four unions are in negotiations; the Regroupement is supporting them by organizing meetings at their universities and mobilizing delegates from other unions in order to demonstrate our collective strength.

### Eight core principles

In the current bargaining round, our demands are based on eight principles from the coordinated bargaining platform adopted in May 2025, when a solidarity protocol was signed. These principles include fighting precariousness and protecting the integrity of teaching work against AI and other threats, strengthening academic freedom and professional autonomy, improving support for contract faculty, recognizing the essential role of lecturers within universities and protecting

mental health in the workplace. Cross-cutting issues such as pay, the fight against mass layoffs and collegiality in the use of AI round out the demands.

This year, our province-wide mobilization and visibility efforts focus on five key themes that resonate with all lecturers, whether or not they are currently in bargaining talks: psychological well-being at work, which is being undermined by precariousness, increased teaching loads and professional isolation; deteriorating teaching conditions that directly affect the quality of the student-teacher relationship; recognition in the workplace, acknowledging that the contribution of lecturers extends far beyond the sum of their contracts; technological transformation, particularly guardrails for artificial intelligence to ensure it doesn't undermine conditions of employment or academic freedom; and pay and benefits, to ensure financial security commensurate with lecturers' contributions to the university's mission.

The current bargaining round, which began in 2025, is being conducted against a backdrop of cuts to higher education funding and persistent

challenges—precariousness, excessive teaching loads, lack of recognition, erosion of purchasing power, compounded by new pressures related to transformations in teaching work, including the growing use of AI and its detrimental impacts on learning, fragmented teaching loads and the potential dehumanization of the pedagogical relationship. In this context, coordinated bargaining and the mobilization that accompanies it are indispensable tools for collectively defending working conditions, protecting the essence of the profession and reaffirming the centrality of the human element in university teaching.

We must stand together in solidarity for university teaching !



## Teaching for the ecological and social transition: Innovation and transformation

Nova Doyon  
MEMBER OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

The General Assembly on Education for Ecological and Social Transition (EGETES), held from January 7 to 10, 2026 at Collège Montmorency, was attended by over 250 people, primarily from the teaching and student communities in CEGEPs and universities across Québec, along with volunteers who helped make this unprecedented event a success at several levels.

EGETES is part of the *Transformations en cours: l'enseignement pour la transition écologique et sociale* project,<sup>1</sup> a collaboration between the FNEEQ and Workers for Climate Justice (WCJ) that calls for a fundamental rethinking of curricula, teaching practices and educational governance to address the socio-ecological crisis in a fair, sustainable and systemic way.

The socio-ecological transition requires a collective and democratic approach. Yet students are rarely consulted about the future of education, and still less about educational policies or environmental governance, although these issues will determine their future living conditions. From Day 1 of the project, students were involved in the organizing committees and their voices helped shape the project's direction. EGETES provided a framework for discussion designed to ensure no voice carried more weight than another by using a decision-making process based on consent rather than consensus, particularly during deliberations in subgroups. The goal was to reach common

ground on proposals that didn't necessarily enjoy unanimous support.<sup>2</sup> This process produced roughly 200 proposals, which will be summarized and shared with teachers' unions and student associations for debate and dissemination. The process also aimed to identify common positions to build an action plan for implementation quickly following EGETES. A dozen working groups were created to tackle broad subjects: greening of curricula, the teaching community of practice, teacher and union mobilization, and student and student organization mobilization.

The effort to provide students with a space for dialogue on socio-ecological transition issues succeeded in forming a movement following EGETES with the goal of uniting student initiatives across the college and university communities.<sup>3</sup> On the faculty side, the collective work to transform Québec's education system has only begun. The new phase of the project aims to develop educational and policy tools informed by the common positions and directions established at EGETES.

Anyone interested in mobilizing for the socio-ecological transition in higher education is encouraged to join one of the already active working groups.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For more information, see <https://www.transformationsencours.ca>

<sup>2</sup> See the project website for a summary of the deliberative process used for EGETES: <https://www.transformationsencours.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Resume-des-methodes-de-deliberation-VF-2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> A second provincial student meeting was held in hybrid format on April 1 under the theme "relaunching provincial ecological mobilization together."

<sup>4</sup> To join a working group email [info@transformationsencours.ca](mailto:info@transformationsencours.ca)

## MOBILIZATION CONTINUES

**Yves de Repentigny**  
VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT CÉGEP



Once again, we have to talk about the CAQ government's austerity-driven, authoritarian, anti-union and anti-social nature in this column. At the time of writing, the National Assembly has just passed Bill 3 (on transparency, governance and the democratic processes of various

workplace associations) and Bill 9 (on strengthening secularism), and work on adopting a highly controversial Québec constitution is continuing. While the 2026-2027 budget tabled on March 18 by Finance Minister Éric Girard is not the disaster for the CEGEP system that we had feared, it falls far short of meeting the needs, even when it comes to infrastructure. The cap on the number of paid hours and the hiring freeze remain in effect, although with more exceptions.

At each of its meetings, the Regroupement Cégep continues to update its action plan from October 2024, part of the CSN's Stand Together / Faire front campaign. Over the past few months, this has included sharing daily posts from the *Nous sommes des milliers au Québec à réclamer* advent calendar on social media, sending postcards to the Minister of Higher Education, an email with New Year's resolutions sent by members to François Legault with a copy to his local MNA, banners, flash actions, a week of local inter-union actions in February, support for the pressure tactics of community groups and the Coalition de résistance pour l'unité étudiante syndicale (CRUES), support for workers at the CPE Le Jardin de Robi in Roberval—the first victims of Act 14, which limits the right to strike—an op-ed denouncing the government's lack of legitimacy and calling for prorogation of the National Assembly, and participation in a number of demonstrations. For the current period, the culmination will be disruptive actions on May 1 and a major provincial demonstration the following day.

At the same time, the conversations about a possible general strike continued; it was discussed at the meetings on January 29-30, March 12 and March 26. Some unions in the Regroupement even adopted mandates for a walkout on May 1, subject to certain conditions (such as a minimum number

of participating organizations and the support of the CSN, the FNEEQ and the central councils).

### Other issues

Other issues the Regroupement has recently addressed include the review of the Nursing program (we protested to the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur that the consultation period on the proposed program was far too short), the École ensemble collective (its coordinator, Stéphane Vigneault, came to explain its objectives), the decolonization of CEGEP education (a talk on the subject was presented), research in CEGEPs (including the problematic timeline for PAREA grant applications), artificial intelligence (development of a tool to support discussions at general assemblies), work between bargaining rounds and preparations for the next round, the realities and challenges of small-town CEGEPs, the slashed funding for the Centre collégial de développement de matériel didactique and the total termination of federal funding for Cégep Marie-Victorin's prison-based training programs (see the article on page 6 of this issue of *Carnets*).



One of the workshops organized by the union side of the inter-round committee on research in CEGEPs.

## UNIVERSITIES ARE STANDING ON SHIFTING SANDS

**Christine Gauthier**  
VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT UNIVERSITÉ



It looks like 2026 will be a year of three premiers in Québec. And the already winding path of government priorities and political commitments to the universities is likely to become still more tortuous.

### Political U-turns undermine the mission of universities

In the past few years, it's been difficult to keep track of the CAQ's priorities in higher education. Take the Perspectives Québec scholarship program, introduced by former Minister McCann in fall 2022 to provide additional (and conditional) funding to students in targeted sectors deemed priorities by the government. It was abolished just a few semesters later, in winter 2025, by former Minister Déry. The FNEEQ had argued from the start that this apple had a rotten core: a utilitarian vision that twisted the mission of universities to serve the needs of the labour market. It is far preferable to promote universal access to academic programs and let the universities manage admissions. Instead, the government forced the universities to do administrative somersaults to meet its latest whims, which didn't last long.

It's been the same pattern with international student admissions, where the government's chaotic policies have left turmoil in their wake. Minister Roberge closed the door to immigration in fall 2024, imposed quotas on institutions of higher education to restrict the number of international students and dramatically increased tuition fees for international students. But in March 2026, Minister Biron was touring Europe to tout the appeal of Québec's colleges and universities to foreign students. Clearly, the government is scrambling to repair the damage it caused. In 2025, the number of international students was down 12% from the previous year.

And then there's the budget. After starving universities with a 0.7% budget cut last year—which unsurprisingly caused several universities to run a deficit—the CAQ increased funding by

5.5% in 2026. The underfunding had terrible consequences for universities. This increase will let them breathe a little more freely, come to agreements with their unions, and pursue their missions.

One word to sum up the CAQ's approach to universities? Improv.

### Important election year

The Québec election campaign will be an opportunity to draw attention to important demands for the future of universities. If we look at what is happening in France, where nearly 100% of universities are projecting deficits, we can clearly see the spiralling effects of chronic underinvestment: funding cuts, deficits, job cuts, admission restrictions, reduced access to higher education, program cuts, and more.

In a time of multiple social crises—climate change, social inequality, political wreckage and the ravages of war—universities can play a pivotal role in transforming our world for the better. They must be able to rely on stable, long-term public funding to do it.

## A PROMISING AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE AT MASHTEUIATSH

Léandre Lapointe  
VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT PRIVÉ



**ON** March 30, 2026, the Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de l'éducation de Mashteuiatsh took an important step forward when 94% of the members present at its general assembly voted for a tentative agreement.

This agreement achieves significant progress for all staff. In particular, it provides a pay increase to catch up with the public sector, an increase in homeroom hours, and recognition of several tasks through pay for supervising stages. In addition, this agreement streamlines assignment mechanisms for all employees.

These important gains were achieved through the union's determination and the mobilization of its members. Congratulations to everyone for their solidarity!

### A disturbing trend in student evaluations of teachers

At some institutions, the administration has recently introduced evaluation of precariously employed teachers based on student satisfaction. This practice raises serious concerns.

The questions used in the student surveys are often arbitrary, resulting in judgments that are not based on the teachers' professional competence. Students, especially at the elementary and secondary levels, do not have the necessary perspective or judgment to evaluate teachers' skills properly. It isn't just a question of principle. The impacts are very real and can cause teachers to feel unfairly treated, lose motivation and, in some cases, question their future in the profession.

In response to this situation, the Regroupement Privé has taken a clear position:

- ▷ Teacher evaluations must be conducted in accordance with principles of equity, objectivity and non-arbitrariness ;
- ▷ Student satisfaction surveys must be strictly formative and voluntary and be solely up to the teacher ;

- ▷ Any administrative or disciplinary use of these tools must be rejected ;
- ▷ Results may not be placed in a teacher's file or used in decisions regarding permanent status ;
- ▷ Quality education depends first and foremost on support, assistance and professional development.

The Regroupement thus reaffirms the importance of protecting professional autonomy and ensuring respect for teachers.

### Special programs can have troubling effects on school climate

At the meeting of the Regroupement Privé last April, the members heard Julie Boissonneault of Université Laval present the results of her research on the effects of special programs.

Entitled *Les programmes particuliers avivent-ils la violence entre les jeunes ? (do special programs fuel violence between young people?)*, this presentation highlighted some disturbing findings. Julie's results suggest that carrying out projects and teaching groups around special programs can aggravate dynamics of exclusion, foster intolerance and, ultimately, lead to certain forms of violence between students. These findings led to the adoption of a recommendation to encourage teaching students in more diverse groups and to promote universal access to special programs.

These recommendations reflect a clear desire to preserve an inclusive educational environment in which diverse backgrounds are not a divisive fault line but a collective asset.

## DRASTIC CUTS TO FRANCIZATION PROGRAMS

Saleha Hedaraly  
VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE STUDENT WORKER CAUCUS AND UNIONS OUTSIDE THE REGROUPEMENTS



**ON** April 9, Cégep de Saint-Laurent abruptly announced the closure of its francization program, resulting in the layoff of about 15 people, including half a dozen facilitators.

Aren't schools and institutions of higher education the most effective settings for providing quality services to immigrants? The answer is obvious. These educational institutions are places where people from all backgrounds mix, which can only be beneficial to the integration of immigrants into Québec society.

The sudden closing of the francization program, which has existed for over 20 years, deprives a vulnerable population of teaching expertise and dismisses the work and dedication of the staff who have been delivering the program.

We strongly condemn the austerity policy behind this drastic cut.

### The Caucus looks to the future

Drawing on lessons learned in its first year and a half of existence, the Caucus is striding into the future.

A Caucus working committee, composed of members from the FNEEQ and the unions in the Caucus, made a series of recommendations to advance the Caucus's integration into the Federation. The Caucus endorsed these recommendations and presented them to the FNEEQ's Federal Bureau.

The working committee identified and addressed issues related to the clarity of the Caucus's role, the annual turnover of union teams and the language of communication. This work led to concrete resolutions, such as implementing workshops, follow-up and action plans to put into practice the ideas in the presentations made at the meetings. In addition, enhancing existing initiatives, such as the executive onboarding process, modelled after the Regroupement Cégep, will continue to strengthen communication channels between the FNEEQ

and the unions. In short, despite limited union leave for its members, the Caucus is stabilizing its operating methods and concentrating on its integration into the FNEEQ.

### Toward coordinated bargaining

The report *Une négociation coordonnée... Pourquoi pas?* shows that there are many opportunities on the coordinated bargaining front. It recommends implementing joint projects to recognize student workers and improve their working conditions, including coordinated bargaining.

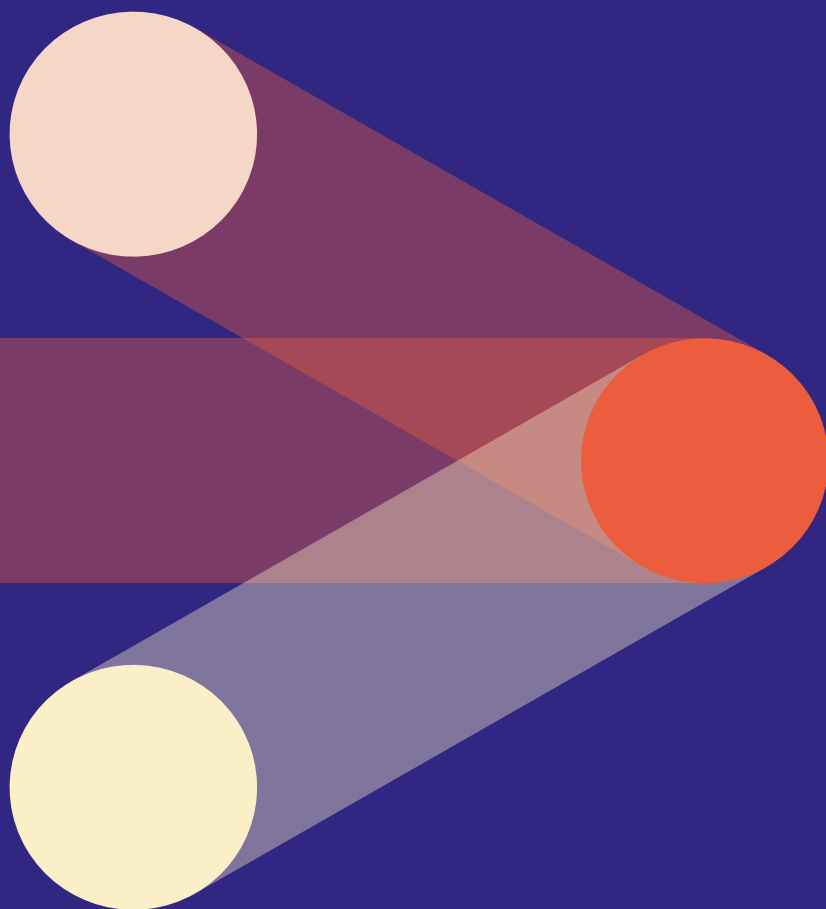
After the report was approved, the Caucus adopted a resolution at its March 10 meeting mandating its coordinator to work on establishing a process for coordinated bargaining and called on its member unions to pass similar resolutions in their decision-making bodies.

Within weeks, the unions in the Caucus met with the FNEEQ to lay the groundwork for this initiative, and adopted resolutions or positions at their general assemblies or executive committee meetings.

As we know, the administration is not making things easy for the Concordia Research and Education Workers Union (CREW-CSN), which is entering bargaining talks. The same challenges face the two units of the Teaching Support Union at McGill (TSUM, formerly AGSEM), which have been negotiating for several months.

It is by working together that we will succeed in improving our members' working conditions.

# Transformer, humaniser... ENSEIGNER!



Grand rendez-vous de  
l'éducation de la FNEEQ

4-5 décembre  
2026 à Québec