Implementation of Education Reform in Secondary Schools as Viewed by School Administrations

A survey conducted among 360 school administrators as part of the ERES Project found significant variations among schools in terms of their respective commitment to the major principles of Education Reform (ER) and the implementation in Cycle One of the services and programs featured in this Reform.

Education Reform was introduced in September 2005 to Secondary Cycle One and then gradually implemented until September 2009 in the last year of high school.

In conducting the research, the ERES Project team was mindful of the fact that different schools may have adopted ER reform in varying degrees, resulting in a gap between the official prescribed curriculum – which includes, among other things, "programs of study, the respective place of each subject, an evaluation of learning, certification rules..."[1] - and the curriculum actually taught and learned in schools. For that reason, we have created a classification of "schools," to present the variety of forms taken by the Reform in its implementation, as well as allowing us to better understand the impact of the Education Program on the performance of young people.

As part of the ERES Project, each school administration of Cycle One students participating in this Project was asked to fill out an online questionnaire between April 2008 and August 2009. The description of the 360 school administrations which responded can be consulted at this address: **http://www.eres.fse.ulaval.ca/en/high_school/participants**. Respondents reported on their level of commitment to some of the main principles and orientations of ER, their perception of the implementation of programs and services and their views on the dedication and commitment of teachers at their schools. The classification was designed using this feedback

Table 1 presents eight of the elements[2] featured in this survey. Generally speaking, the averages indicate that school administrations demonstrate commitment to the main principles of ER and perceive teachers as doing so as well. They recognize that the subject-specific programs are implemented in compliance with recommended guidelines (3.54/4), but mention that cross-curricular competencies are not given significant consideration outside the classroom, for example in the planning of services, extracurricular activities and special projects, such as exhibits and shows (2.35/4).

TABLE 1:
Elements evaluated through a survey of school administrators

Element evaluated		Average / 4	Standard deviation
Commitment	• Commitment to academic organization of multiyear learning cycle (5 items)	2.82	0.59
	• Commitment to the Education Program based on the development of cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies (8 items)	3.04	0.45
	• Commitment to diversified learning paths for students of Cycle Two (general education, applied general education, work-oriented training paths) (5 items)	2.98	0.57
	• General commitment of teachers to Education Reform (10 items)	3.1	0.42
Implementation	• Integration of Broad Areas of Learning to the school environment (5 items)	2.89	0.66
	• Integration of cross-curricular competencies when planning the school's activities and services (4 items)	2.35	0.81
	• Standardized application of math, history and citizen education, French or English language of instruction programs (3 items)	3.54	0.46
	• Implementation of complementary educational service programs (4 items)	2.85	0.69

[1] Gosselin, G., et C. Lessard, (2007). *Les deux principales réformes de l'éducation du Québec moderne.* Québec : Les Presses de l'Université Laval, p. 450.
[2] Each element features 3 to 10 items. Respondents were asked to give their views on each, using a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree).

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Evaluation
of the Reform
at the Secondary
School Level

While the results are generally positive, some variability was found among different schools in terms of the commitment to and agreement with each of the elements of the survey, as indicated by the standard deviations. To illustrate this variability, we conducted cluster analyses using the eight elements of Table 1. These analyses allowed us to group together schools based on their similarities and differences according to the answers provided by school administrations in response to the series of elements. Using these analyses, a classification comprising three groups was found to best reflect the responses of participants. As shown in Graph 1, 26.7% of respondents expressed a strong commitment to the principles of ER, but witnessed average implementation of ER in their schools. An almost identical proportion of respondents were ranked in the "strong commitment, strong implementation" category. However, the majority of participants ranked in the "average commitment, average implementation" category (47.8%).

In order to clearly understand the specific qualities of each group, we examined the links between the classification and certain characteristics of schools, respondents and families participating in the ERES Project. The following table presents some of these characteristics for two of the three groups.

TABLE 2: Characteristics of schools and respondents according to each group	Average commitment Average implementation	Strong commitment Strong implementation
• Number of students and teachers in Cycle One	+	-
• Students with learning disabilities integrated in regular classrooms	-	+
• Language of instruction	French	English
• Language spoken at home by parents and students	French	English

The likelihood of belonging to the "average commitment, average implementation" was found to be greater in more populated schools (as determined by the number of students and teachers in Cycle One) and for schools whose language of instruction and language spoken at home by parents and students was French. This group was also found to have fewer students with learning difficulties in regular classrooms. As for the "strong commitment, strong implementation" group, it displayed characteristics that were at times contradictory, at others different than those of the previous group.

In addition, certain characteristics were not associated with any of the three school groups. These were:
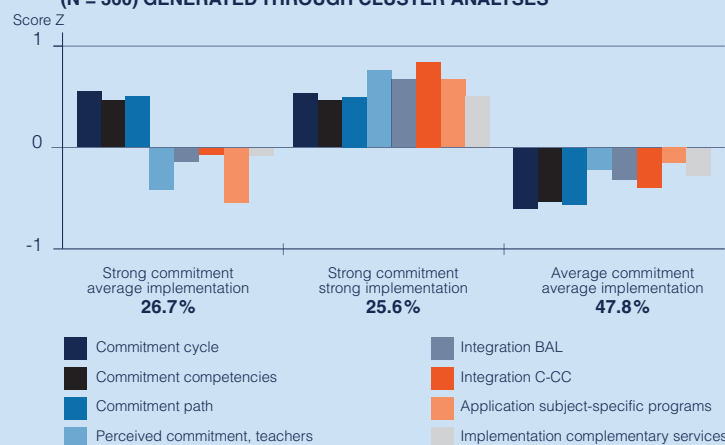
Characteristics of the school

- Physical location of the school (rural or urban environment, outlying region in Quebec)
- Public versus private education system
- The *indice de milieu socio-économique* (IMSE[3]) (Index of socioeconomic status)
- Level of education and years of experience of the respondent

Characteristics of the family

- Level of education of parents
- Full-time or part-time working status
- Household income

The classification featured in this report will allow us to better document the impact of ER on the academic performance of young people. In addition to verifying the effect of "Education Reform" (by comparing the performance of students exposed to ER with that of students not exposed to it), it will be possible to assess the "implementation" effect. As a result, we will be able to distinguish the official curriculum from the actual curriculum implemented in schools, thus enabling a clearer understanding of the effects of ER.

Graph 1
GROUPS COMPRISED OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIONS OF CYCLE ONE (N = 360) GENERATED THROUGH CLUSTER ANALYSES

Score Z

| Strong commitment
average implementation
26.7% | Strong commitment
strong implementation
25.6% | Average commitment
average implementation
47.8% |

Legend:
- Commitment cycle
- Commitment competencies
- Commitment path
- Perceived commitment, teachers
- Integration BAL
- Integration C-CC
- Application subject-specific programs
- Implementation complementary services

[3] The IMSE is constituted of families with children whose mothers do not hold a diploma, certificate or rank (two-thirds of the index), and the proportion of households whose parents were not employed the week of the Canadian census (one-third of the index). http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/publications/index.asp?page=fiche&id=956