

News

Curriculum reform results not positive so far

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The Gazette

712 mots

19 mai 2011

Montreal Gazette

MTLG

Final

A8

Anglais

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Quebec's **curriculum reform** was supposed to be the envy of the world. But is it?

Under the new regime, students are supposed to learn how to better apply what they learn in the classroom to the real world and to become better critical thinkers, among other improvements.

But a preliminary evaluation at the high school level, done by the education faculty at the Université Laval, shows that students exposed to the reform feel less welladapted to high school, highrisk students are less engaged in school work and boys have lower self-esteem.

Furthermore, at a time when the Education Department has told school boards to boost graduation rates across the province, parents of students in the reform were more likely to report that their child had failed a class in high school and taken a summer course.

About 36 per cent of parents of the reform group reported their child had taken a summer course, compared with about 32 per cent of parents whose children were not part of the reform.

One area that seems to have improved under the reform is mother-tongue instruction, which was viewed as more useful than it was by students not in the reform.

Overall, however, students and parents who have been among the first to experience the **curriculum reform** at the high school level have not been impressed, according to the ERES report - an Evaluation of the Reform at the Secondary School Level commissioned by the Education Department in 2007 that will follow students through CEGEP.

Simon Larose, director of the ERES project, said this stage of the progress report has studied mainly perceptions by students and parents. Later this year there will be an examination of standardized testing, comparing students of the reform with those who didn't experience it.

Larose said that although the findings might be surprising to those who instituted the changes, he didn't know what to expect from the survey, which compared the views of 1,190 Grade 10 students not exposed to the reform with the views of 883 Grade 10 students exposed to it.

"It seems the perception is a little less positive than before" the reform was instituted, Larose said.

An Education Department official cautioned Wednesday that these are only preliminary results based solely on perceptions.

"It must be considered that when the data was collected, the **curriculum reform** was in its second year of operation," said Esther Chouinard, a press aide to Education Minister Line Beauchamp. "The perceptions of students and parents possibly reflected this situation of adjustment and change."

She noted that the Program for International Student Assessment - standardized testing administered to 15-yearolds - showed that students exposed to the reform performed equally well as those before the reform was instituted.

The report found that anglophone students exposed to the reform had lower levels of identified motivation than anglophone students not exposed to it.

As well, parents of students in the reform assessed the quality of their children's education in a less favourable light, were less satisfied with their relationship with the school and held a less positive view of report cards.

Nan Beaton, a parent commissioner for the Lester B. Pearson School Board, said she's not surprised

that parents aren't pleased with the reform.

"The reform has a lot of flaws," she said. "I had a child in school before the reform, and one during it, and I feel that it was better before the reform."

But Diane Lamarche-Venne, chairperson of the Commission Scolaire Marguerite Bourgeoys, said she believes the reform has more good than bad in it.

"Everyone wants to bitch these days but most people don't really know what they're talking about," she said.

David Birnbaum, executive director of the Quebec English School Boards Association, said he hadn't seen the study but noted that a full cycle of the reform was only completed last year.

"The dust has to settle," he said. "We've always said the basic principles in it are the envy of other countries. I'm sure there have been bumps in the road, but that doesn't mean the reform was a mistake."

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