



Parents speak out on Québec schools and the quality of their children's education

Comparison data from parents of secondary IV students exposed to Education Reform vs. parents of students not exposed to the Reform

According to the preliminary data of the ERES Project, parents of secondary IV students exposed to Education Reform (ER) know little about some of the changes made to the academic path of their youth following the ER. These parents also hold a less positive view of their children's learning compared to parents of students not exposed to the ER. Moreover, they were more likely to have reported that their child had failed a class during high school and taken a summer course. These were the views to come out of the data collected among parents of secondary IV students in spring 2008 (group not exposed to ER) and 2010 (group exposed to ER).

A few changes to the academic curriculum in the new Education Program

Some of the changes introduced by the new Education Program have had an impact on the academic paths offered to students. For example, a General Education Path, Applied General Education Path and a Work-Oriented Training Path are now made available to youth starting in secondary Cycle Two. In theory, only the first two paths lead directly to college studies. Both differ in terms of the math, science and technology component, with the General Education Path offering Science and Technology and the Applied General Education path providing a program focussed on Applied Science and Technology. "Both of these programs are considered equivalent: they lead to the same secondary school diploma, develop the same competencies and share approximately 70 percent of the content [...]."¹ A new compulsory program, the Personal Orientation Project, has also been introduced; it replaces the Career Education program removed from the curriculum² of mandatory courses. It can, however, be selected as an optional course by students in the General Education Path.

Secondary IV students are also required to select a mathematics path from the following three options: Cultural, Social and Technical (CST), Technical and Scientific (TS) and Science (SN). The option chosen "[...] must be as consistent as possible with their aspirations, interests and aptitudes."³ Each of the different options is intended to better prepare students to pursue their studies in a given field. For example, students who complete the CST option will have acquired knowledge that will "[...] specifically prepare them for studies in the arts, communications, the humanities and the social sciences."⁴ The TS and SN options, while deemed equivalent, differ in their manner of introducing and putting forward the subject matter being addressed.⁵ Both lead to pre-university programs and technical training programs offered at the college level.

Methodology

The parents of 883 secondary IV students exposed to ER completed a questionnaire, which asked them to express their level of satisfaction with Québec schools, their views on report cards, their understanding of the changes brought by the ER and their perception of their children's progress (see Table 1). All of these questions – with the exception of changes made to the academic curriculum – were also directed to 1,190 parents of secondary IV students not exposed to the ER.⁶ Statistical analysis was used to verify the presence of significant differences between both groups of parents – of students exposed to ER vs. those not exposed to it – and control a series of factors to ensure that any differences found were not due to these factors.⁷

Table 1
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

Dimensions measured	Definition
Overall satisfaction with the school	Satisfaction with the contact and exchange with the school and quality of the information received by the school. <i>Ex: I feel welcome in my child's school.</i>
Opinion of report cards	Assessment of report cards in terms of clarity, quality of the information provided and level of complexity. <i>Ex: The methods used by the school to communicate my child's results are sufficiently comprehensive for me to follow his progress (including strengths and weaknesses).</i>
Information on changes to the academic curriculum	Evaluation of the level of information on changes made to the academic curriculum, especially the paths available, math options and the optional Personal Orientation Project.
Quality of learning	Perception of parents regarding the education their child is receiving. <i>Ex: School has helped my child enrich his/her knowledge.</i> Failure in one or more courses in high school Attendance in summer school

¹ Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (2010). *New Perspectives on the Transition From secondary School to College*. Sainte-Foy: Le Conseil, p. 73 (Free translation).

² Catholic or Protestant Religious and Moral Instruction, Moral Instruction, Home Economics, Family Economics and Personal and Social Development were also replaced in the new Education Program. The new compulsory courses include, Personal Orientation Project, Ethics and Religious Culture, Contemporary World and the Integrative Project Program.

³ Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (2007). *Québec Education Program, secondary Cycle Two*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, Mathematics, Science and Technology, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 72. (Free translation)

⁶ The sample of students was selected using a random draw from the total number of students who started secondary school in September 2004 for those not exposed to the ER, and in September 2006 for those exposed to it.

⁷ Factors included parent education and income, paid employment, gender, student risk status (scale composed of items answered by parents, measuring their child's level of aggressiveness, attention deficit and prosociality), school system (Anglophone vs Francophone) and socio-economic background of schools (SEEI ranking).



Findings

Knowledge of changes made to academic curriculum

Table 2 presents descriptive data to the question: "How well informed do you feel about the new program your child is following"⁸:

Table 2
RESPONSE BY PARENTS

	Not at all / A little	Moderately	Strongly / Very strongly
The paths available	46.6%	34.8%	18.5%
The mathematics options	46.6%	32.9%	20.5%
Personal Orientation Project	59.7%	24.9%	15.4%

Generally speaking, parents reported an information gap in terms of some of the changes made to the academic curriculum in the new Education Program. Slightly less than half mentioned not having been informed on the new paths and math options. Their knowledge of the program on professional development is even lower, with 60 percent of them reporting that they had not received information on the optional Personal Orientation Project.

Comparing perceptions of both groups of parents

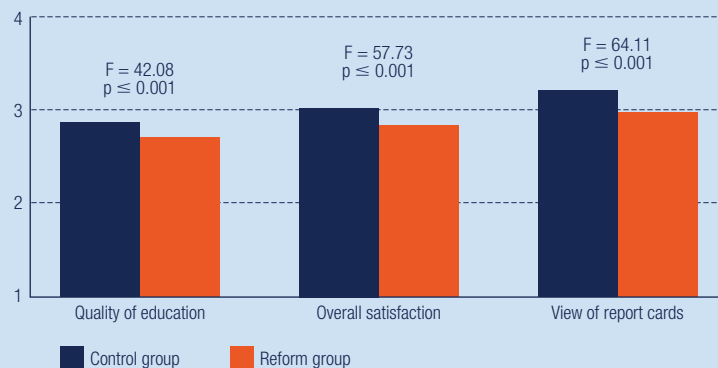
As can be seen in Graph 1, parents of students exposed to ER assessed the quality of their children's education in a less favourable light, were less satisfied with their relationship with the school and held a less positive view of report cards when compared to parents of students not exposed to ER.

In addition, parents of students exposed to ER were more likely to report that their child had failed a class in high school (36.1%) and taken a summer course (21.8%) when compared to the other group of parents (32.2% and 17.5% respectively). Graph 2 presents these findings.

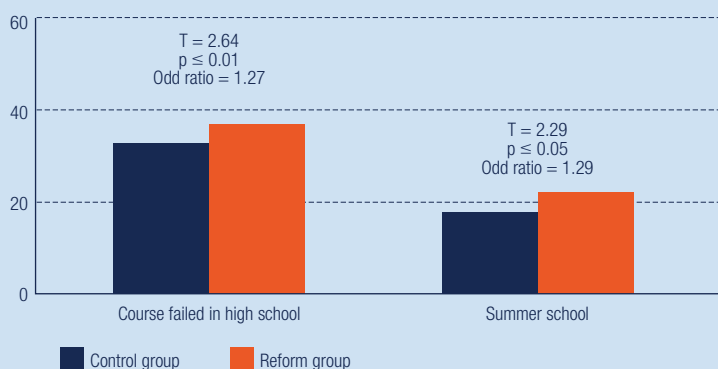
Conclusion

The preliminary results presented in this bulletin suggest that parents of students exposed to ER know little about the changes made to their child's academic curriculum. Moreover, they have a less positive assessment of the quality of their child's education, when compared to parents of students not exposed to the ER. It should be noted that at the time of the survey, the Education Program had been in place for only two years. While parents did receive information on the new Education Program, it would appear that it did not reach the parents participating in our study. The situation as described in this bulletin warrants further analysis in order to verify whether the differences in perceptions are still present in a third group of parents of secondary IV students, namely youth exposed to the ER who started high school in September 2007. Furthermore, the parents whose views we have presented in this bulletin will once again be surveyed when their child enters secondary V. This information will be collected by the ERES team in the spring of 2011.

Graph 1
STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AVERAGE SCORES⁹ OF PARENTS OF STUDENTS EXPOSED VS. NOT EXPOSED TO THE REFORM REGARDING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SCHOOL AND OPINION OF REPORT CARDS



Graph 2
STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES¹⁰ BETWEEN THE FAILURE RATE OF HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES AND PARTICIPATION IN SUMMER SCHOOL AS REPORTED BY PARENTS OF STUDENTS EXPOSED TO ER VS. THOSE PARENTS OF STUDENTS NOT EXPOSED TO IT



⁸ 5-point scales were used for these items, where 5 means *very strongly*, and 1 means *not at all*. The results presented here are based on the sum of the scores obtained for levels 4 and 5 (*strongly/very strongly*) and levels 1 and 2 (*not at all/a little*).

⁹ Using a 4-point scale, where 4 means *strongly agree*, and 1 means *strongly disagree*.

¹⁰ Observed only after estimation of missing information.