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Reform doesn't sit well with Quebecers: poll: Most want focus on transfer of knowledge

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Education Poll – Most Quebecers give school reform failing grade



MARCOS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE

BACKLASH TRACKED Eight-year-old Catherine Paulszta concentrates on her Italian lesson yesterday at General Vanier elementary school in St. Léonard. The school's principal says teachers there have embraced Quebec's curriculum reform, but a new poll finds Quebecers are dissatisfied.

A majority of Quebecers are dissatisfied with the province's controversial curriculum reform, a new poll suggests.

Commissioned by a federation of teachers opposed to the reform, the poll found that 56 per cent of Quebecers are against the reform and critical of several elements of the program.

Among the findings:

- 81 per cent of respondents are in favour of making children who are having difficulties repeat their school year.
- 67 per cent support giving students a failing grade if they can't pass a certain threshold.

- Only 30 per cent are in favour of using letters instead of percentages on report cards.

- 59 per cent of parents say the transmission of knowledge should be a school's top priority, whereas only 23 per cent believe a school should focus on giving students the tools necessary to acquire knowledge, one of the benchmarks of the reform.

-48 per cent of parents chose the new system of report cards, which uses jargon like "cross-curricular competencies" to rate a child's development, as the aspect of the reform that annoyed them most.

- 59 per cent are against putting students with learning difficulties in regular classes.

"The response of Quebecers and parents is clear," said Nicole Frascadore, president of the Federation autonome de l'enseignement, which represents 27,000 teachers in the province.

"A large majority ... rejects the ideas of the reform and prefers that we refocus Quebec schools on the transmission of knowledge, and an evaluation of how students are taking in that knowledge."

The federation is among a handful of groups calling for a moratorium on the reform while they're being re-evaluated.

Progressively introduced into Quebec's education system since 2000, the reform has taken the emphasis off of rote memorization in favour of teaching children how to learn.

Critics, however, worry that students are losing out on knowledge and vague report cards fail to give parents a clear picture of how their children are faring.

The Education Department responded yesterday that the reform is constantly being evaluated and modified. Measures have already been taken to make report cards clearer following the recommendations of a steering committee's report, said Marie-Claude Lavigne, press aide to Education Minister Jean-Marc Fournier.

Schools never stopped teaching knowledge, she added, and children can still be kept back a year if necessary.

Nick Katalifos, principal at General Vanier elementary school in St. Leonard, says his teachers have embraced the program, although more training for educators would be appreciated. A lack of communication might account for the public backlash, he said.

The poll of 1,245 parents and non-parents conducted by the SOM research firm between Feb. 19 and March 5 noted only 47 per cent of Quebecers in general, and slightly less than two-thirds of parents, know the reform exists.