## Quebec's Bill 96 Continues to Jeopardize First Nations Student Success

**Wendake, September 29, 2021** – The First Nations Education Council (FNEC), Mr. Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) and the Chief Responsible for Education, John Martin, are calling on the Quebec government to listen and pay attention to First Nations children. This comes on the heels of the AFNQL's plea made to Minister Jolin-Barrette in special consultations and public hearings on Bill 96 to respect the fundamental rights of Indigenous students.

"The Minister Responsible for the French Language, Simon Jolin-Barrette, understands firsthand the negative impact the Charter has on our children, languages, cultures, and communities. We have recommended simple solutions to remove the obstacles to First Nations student success in Quebec. Now it is Mr. Jolin-Barrette's turn to take action," said Chief John Martin.

Even though the *Charter of the French Language* does not apply in First Nations communities, over half of First Nations students must receive instruction off reserve, forcing them to enroll in French language schools even though their mother tongue is an Indigenous language or English. Many of these students struggle to obtain their high school or college diploma because of French second language requirements imposed on them.

The AFNQL and its affiliated regional organizations and commissions have submitted a document recommending technical solutions that would enable all our students to have an equal chance at success. These recommendations include:

- Implementing the same language of instruction principles applied to Cree and Inuit students in Chapter VIII of the Charter, and applying college or university policies on the use and quality of the French language under Chapter VIII.1 to all First Nations in Quebec.
- Eliminating legislative subtleties in the *Education Act* requiring First Nations students to pass the standardized French test in order to graduate, even if they are native English speakers or have received instruction in their Indigenous language.
- Reviewing access to English-speaking education professionals that would allow them to provide services to English-speaking students in our schools.

"The Quebec government cannot ignore the devasting effects that are maintained through Bill 96—the latest rendition of Bill 101. Both bills create systemic barriers to the academic success of thousands of First Nations children and young people in Quebec," said FNEC Director General, Denis Gros-Louis.

"Premier Legault says he is ready to develop a partnership built on mutual respect between his government and First Nations governments. This intent led to the establishment of a joint political table that has already met twice, and may meet again to discuss issues raised by Bill 96. First Nations also have their own *official languages* and demand that they be regarded as such. What the Legault government is putting forward with this bill is inconsistent with a genuine government-to-government relationship, as well as being inconsistent with the principle of reconciliation with First Nations," concluded Chief Ghislain Picard.

**Link to the committee audience (French only):** http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/video-audio/archives-parlementaires/travaux-commissions/AudioVideo-91359.html

**About the AFNQL**

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador is the political body that brings together 43 Chiefs of the First Nations in Quebec and Labrador.

**About the FNEC**

The FNEC has been working for over 35 years to fulfill the right of First Nations to have complete authority over their education through the implementation of an education system that has adequate resources, and that is developed and managed according to their values and cultures. Further information is available at www.cepn-fnec.com.

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**Source:**

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|---|---|
| **Alain Garon**, Communications Advisor | **Thanissa Lainé**, Communications Officer |
| **AFNQL** | **FNEC** |
| Agaron@apnql.com | TLaine@cepn-fnec.com |
| 418-842-5020 # 4010 | 418-842-7672 |