



BILL 96: MINISTER JOLIN-BARRETTE CONTINUES TO COLONIZE QUEBEC FIRST NATIONS WHILE HIS GOVERNMENT INVESTS IN DECOLONIZING HISTORY

Wendake, February 28, 2022 - The National Assembly Committee on Culture and Education has resumed clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 96, which proposes reforms to the *Charter of the French Language*. Committee members are examining sections of chapters VIII and VIII.1 affecting elementary and secondary education, as well as college instruction.

Unfortunately, Simon Jolin-Barrette, the minister responsible for the French language, has decided to ignore the rights of First Nations children and students by undervaluing Indigenous languages to what he [considers](#) a “free choice” between “French or English.”

“Minister Jolin-Barrette and his government have clearly chosen paternalistic rhetoric over the academic success of our children, and have refused to revoke assimilationist charter provisions maintained in Bill 96. Our students are the innocent victims of legislation that compromises the languages, cultures, and traditions of First Nations in Quebec. Considering that barriers to First Nations student success are still present in Bill 96, the Minister obviously knows that by imposing French proficiency requirements and regulations equivalent to those applied to native French speakers, he is preventing First Nations students from furthering their education and jeopardizing their future,” said Denis Gros-Louis, director general of the First Nations Education Council (FNEC).

Most First Nations elementary schools in Quebec offer Indigenous language immersion programs that not only meet provincial standards, but they also preserve and safeguard the Indigenous language of their nation.

Under Chapter VIII of the *Charter of the French Language*, students in the Quebec school system whose second language is French are required to pass a standardized French exam in order to obtain their high school diploma. Students studying in English-language educational institutions have to pass a French-second-language exam. The issue that concerns us comes from the fact that the provincial government does not want to apply the same accommodations offered to the English-speaking community as well as Cree and Inuit communities when hundreds of our students only speak French as a third language.

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First Nations college students also have to fulfill requirements on the use and quality of the French language (as stipulated under Chapter VIII.1 of the Charter). Government interference in First Nations education is clearly the underlying problem.

These three provisions remain unchanged in Bill 96 tabled by Minister Jolin-Barrette.

The FNEC participated in drafting a position paper submitted by Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador Chief, Ghislain Picard, and Gesgapegiag Chief and Chief Responsible for Education, John Martin before a parliamentary committee on September 28, 2021. This [position paper](#) contains amendments and recommendations promoting student retention in culturally safe learning environments through First Nations language preservation and instruction.

“Members of the Government of Quebec must certainly agree that the school system is failing students when even just one drops out. An exemption to some of the language requirements in the Charter could prevent and remedy this without undermining further development of the French language,” said Mr. Gros-Louis.

In fact, only a limited number of students whose rights are protected under the *Constitution Act, 1982* would be affected by an exemption. According to the FNEC Student Information System (CANO), 209 students were enrolled in Secondary IV and V French language of instruction and French second language courses in eight FNEC member community high schools.

“Are a few hundred students in remote communities really a threat to the French language? Minister Jolin-Barrette can still change tack and recognize our vision of education to give First Nations students the opportunity to succeed. All the legislative mechanisms he needs are at his disposal,” said Mr. Gros-Louis.

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 on [the FNEC website](#).

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