



Association des commissions scolaires anglophones du Québec  
Quebec English School Boards Association



## Québec's English Education Sector Stands Collectively Against Bill 21

In presenting its joint statement today on *Bill 21, An Act respecting the laicity of the State*, representatives of Québec's English education sector including school boards, teachers, in-school and centre administrators, directors general and parents expressed their deep disappointment with and opposition to the draft legislation. They maintained that Bill 21 does not reflect the values and mission of Québec's school system, and that it contravenes the Constitutional rights of Québec's English-speaking minority.

The delegation released the following statement:

"Going further than the 2008 Bouchard-Taylor report, "BUILDING THE FUTURE: A Time for Reconciliation," Bill 21 proposes to ban the wearing of religious symbols by public sector employees, including new teachers and administrators in our schools. Although it allows current employees who wear religious symbols to keep their current positions, it prohibits any future career development, which is unacceptable.

**We maintain** that our role in public education is to be open minded, accepting and respectful. We celebrate the diversity of our province, which is also represented in our schools and centres. Indeed, the QEP (Québec Education Program) refers specifically to promoting acceptance and understanding of the diverse ethnic and religious groups who live with us in Québec.

**We affirm** that inclusion, inquiry and fairness are basic values that inspire the vision and mission of all nine English school boards across Québec. We share a common focus on ensuring the best for our students and employees, and we are committed to promoting the values of openness, tolerance and mutual understanding that are so crucial to our society. Bill 21 does not represent or support the values that are taught in our schools and centres.

**We believe** that Bill 21 is divisive. It is an unnecessary piece of legislation that can only lead to societal discrimination. The government is proposing to legislate to

address a problem that does not exist. Québec's public schools have a proud record of inclusion and of celebrating the different ways to be Quebecers and Canadians. Our staff and our school boards have always found ways to strike a positive balance between religious differences and common values. We would far prefer the government to be working with us to address the real issues, such as student success and increased services in the classroom, that matter most to the future of young Quebecers.

**We believe** that since the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled, in the landmark 1990 *Mahé v. Alberta* decision, that “the minority language representatives should have exclusive authority to make decisions relating to the minority language instruction and facilities, including: recruitment and assignment of teachers and other personnel”, prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols by new teachers and principals and vice-principals in the English education sector infringes on our Constitutional rights.

Therefore, by virtue of the constitutional rights of Québec's English minority community, as interpreted by various Supreme Court decisions and in particular *Mahé v. Alberta*, Québec cannot impose a prohibition of religious symbols worn by teachers and principals in the English public school network.

**We categorically** state our opposition to Bill 21 from a basic human rights perspective.

**We cannot agree** as leaders in English education, schools and centres, with a law that we believe is unethical, unnecessary, difficult to enforce and infringes on our Constitutional right to control and manage our educational system.”

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