

Quebec increases funding for homeschooling



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Quebec Education and Family Minister Sébastien Proulx during question period on Thursday, June 2, 2016 at the legislature in Quebec City. *JACQUES BOISSINOT / CP FILE PHOTO*

QUEBEC — The president of an organization representing Hasidic Jews in Outremont believes an

additional \$1 million for homeschooling this year is “very good news.”

Quebec’s education minister has announced he will double his department’s spending on homeschooling in 2016-17, bringing the government’s subsidy to school boards for each homeschooled child to \$1,000 from \$616.

The decision comes as many parents in Montreal’s Hasidic community are turning to homeschooling to make sure they are complying with the education law.

About 300 Hasidic children from the Satmar and Viznitz communities are registered at the English Montreal School Board this year and will be homeschooled, the board said.

Many Hasidic and Orthodox schools are starting to go in that direction, said Alex Werzberger of the Coalition of Outremont Hassidic Organization (COHO) on Tuesday.

“This is a solution acceptable to both the government and the Orthodox community,” he said. “There has been a lot of friction between not-official schools (and the government) ... but right now there seems to be a modus operandi accepted by everybody and it’s working.”

The issue of illegal schools has confounded politicians in Quebec City for years, leaving many education ministers scratching their heads over what to do for the children.

There have been several police and youth protection raids of ultra-Orthodox schools over the years (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/police-raid-ultra-orthodox-jewish-school-on-parc-ave>), with politicians each time saying the schools did not qualify as teaching establishments because they did not follow the Quebec curriculum.

In November 2014, then-Education Minister Yves Bolduc reached an agreement with the Satmar community of Outremont (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/quebec-reaches-agreement-with-montreal-hasidic-school>) that the government would provide homework assistance and other services if parents of Hasidic students turned to homeschooling.

This has allowed students to attend religious school during the day, and

learn Quebec's curriculum at home in the evening.

School boards are responsible for following up with students, checking their portfolios, and administering exams at the end of the year.

EMSB chair Angela Mancini said that at first glance the new sums appear to be enough for the board to keep track of students' progress — that is, if the number of students stays at 300. But Mancini said she is expecting more registrations this summer.

"The board, the administration is looking at it ... will we need to hire more people? There's a whole bunch of things being looked at," she said.

The Parti Québécois said in a statement the problem remains unsolved.

"It certainly isn't a sufficient solution to the larger problem of illegal schools," said PQ MNA and leadership hopeful Alexandre Cloutier. "The education minister is trying to mask his government's improvisation."

Cloutier said [the Liberals have tabled Bill 105](http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-105-41-1.html)

(<http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-105-41-1.html>), which re-opens the province's Education Act, and nothing in the bill addresses the problem of illegal schools.

"We have no portrait of the situation, no report, no additional legislative tool which the minister himself admitted he needs to tackle the problem," Cloutier added.

"Meanwhile, hundreds of young Quebecers continue to be denied an education that is in line with the Education Department's requirements."

Education Minister Sébastien Proulx refused to be interviewed by the Montreal Gazette on Tuesday.

His press attaché, Marie Deschamps, said the additional sums, which were announced as part of this year's budget rules, will be available to school boards across the province.

While applauding the new funding as a "step in the right direction," Werzberger maintained his community will always "absolutely refuse" to teach the province's religion and ethics course, as well as the sex education program.

"Everybody wants their child to be educated ... but they would like to have

education which is acceptable to their religious and cultural requirements,” he said.

There were 1,300 homeschooled students in Quebec in 2014-15, according to the Education Department.

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