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Is Quebec's teacher shortage being caused by new laws, poor working conditions?

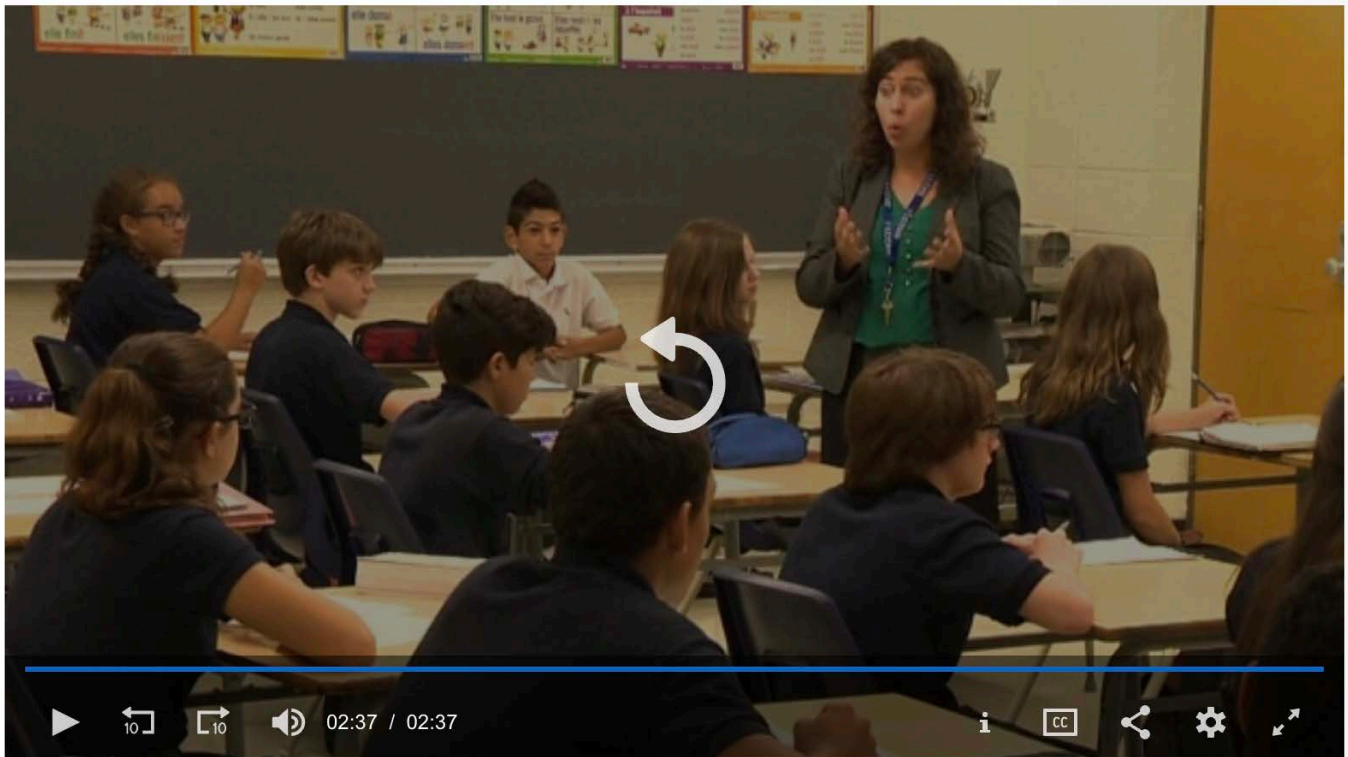
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MONTREAL -- Teachers in Quebec are blaming the province's new laws, as well as longstanding poor working conditions for a shortage of people looking to enter the profession.

Earlier this month, dozens of people looking for jobs streamed into the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) vocational centre in Montreal's LaSalle borough.

Representatives at one particular table, the one marked 'Teachers,' seemed the most eager to speak to hopeful candidates.

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"I haven't stopped speaking since about 2:30 p.m.," said Matt Wilson, who works as a teacher. "I mean, straight conversations with people."

The LBPSB said it is working hard to [remedy a difficult teacher shortage](#).

"Particularly in the French categories – French as a second language, French resources, French social studies," Wilson told CTV News. "The teaching profession isn't being valued. So, just in general, we're having trouble finding people who are interested in doing the job."

The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) added it has also been forced to promote hiring year-round – and they're even fighting with the French boards for teachers.

"That's made it very difficult, where it wasn't an issue before," said Mike Cohen, EMSB spokesperson.

Alain Breuleux, associate dean of academic programs at McGill University's faculty of education, noted things seem to be getting out of hand.

"Right now in the French sector in the Greater Montreal area, I would say it's catastrophic," he said.

WHAT'S CAUSING THE TEACHER SHORTAGE?

The situation has been attributed to a complex confluence of factors that have surfaced simultaneously, including a wave of retirements, a baby boom and a recent influx of asylum seekers.

"Some of the school boards have seen an extra 1,000 students since Sept. 1 on the Island of Montreal," said Carol Heffernan, LBPSB assistant director-general.

Not to mention, the provincial government recently pushed through two pieces of legislation that promised to directly affect the schools.

The first was the [addition of pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds](#) across the province.

"For 2021 we're hoping to have an extra 30 classrooms. So, that would be an extra 30 teachers teaching four-year-old kindergarten next year," Heffernan said.

The second was Bill 21, [Quebec's controversial secularism law](#) that prohibits new teachers from wearing religious symbols.

"We've had a number of qualified teachers whom we could not hire," Cohen said. "That's regrettable."

POOR WORKING CONDITIONS

The Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) noted about a third of young teachers quickly leave the profession due to poor working conditions, especially after recent cut-backs in staffing for special-needs work.

"Teachers are putting out fires," argued QPAT President Heidi Yetman, who added a starting teacher's salary "comes in around \$44,000 and hits the top around \$88,000 – and it takes 15 years to get to the top."

According to Statistics Canada, elementary and high school teachers in Quebec continue to be one of the [lowest-paid in the country](#).

Some teachers reported they can languish as a substitute for years without the prospect of full-time employment. Nevertheless, some recent graduates say they're still looking optimistically to their futures.

"For me, personally, we're doing it for the love of the profession," said Kassia Amato, a fourth-year McGill student. "Not just for the love of money."

LOOKING ELSEWHERE

Some Quebec teachers told CTV News they decided it was better to pull up stakes in search of greener pastures.

Zach Daunoravicius, a McGill University graduate specializing in physical education, recently moved to Calgary after meeting a recruiter at a job fair.

"I was able to, after my first two years, secure a permanent position," he told CTV News over Skype. "Starting salaries for teachers in Alberta are roughly \$20,000 more than for teachers in Quebec."

Last August, Quebec Education Minister Jean-François Roberge told reporters he planned to [raise the starting salary for teachers](#) to \$50,000.

"We will recognize their work," he said. "We will work with them. We are listening to them."

The minister did not say when that increase could happen.

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