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# Quebec launches consultations to overhaul ethics and religion program in schools

**Rachel Lau**

Digital reporter, CTV News Montreal

[@rachel\\_lau](#) | [Contact](#)

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MONTREAL – Quebec’s education ministry is looking to overhaul the province’s controversial ‘Ethics and Religious Culture’ program, acknowledging the course has been the subject of criticism since its adoption by Jean Charest’s Liberal government in 2008.

"The process of reviewing the Ethics and Religious Culture curriculum...is part of the government's desire to offer students a modern education program focused on respecting oneself, as well as others," Education Minister Jean-François Roberge insisted. "We want the revised course to address current subjects of interest that will allow young people to fully assume their place in Quebec society."

The 2008 curriculum replaced the subject of religious and moral education in Quebec schools.

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At the time, the government insisted the goal was to develop ethical thinking and dialogue skills in response to the everchanging cultural and religious landscape, while teaching children about Quebec's religious history.

It has been opposed by several groups, including secularists who believe ethics and religion should not be taught together, French nationalists who accuse the program of being a kind of 'Multiculturalism 101' and the Coalition pour la liberté en éducation, which condemns it as contrary to their faith.

Two legal challenges were launched against the program, one by Loyola High School in Montreal, which won its Supreme Court of Canada (SCOC) case to be exempt from teaching the course, and one by two Catholic parents who, in the eyes of the SCOC, were not "able to prove their case."

Roberge notes the new program will most likely focus on democratic participation, legal rights, eco-citizenship, sex education, self and interpersonal development, ethics, digital footprints and culture.

Joseph Lamantia, a teacher at John F Kennedy High School defended the current curriculum. The religious and cultural elements of the curriculum are important, he said.

"Children need to learn about tolerance, they need to learn about respect of other religions. I think informing them about these different types of religions is the best way to do that," he said. "It's a very informative and neutral standpoint that we teach the curriculum from."

Another teacher, Sabrina Jafralie said the course was extremely important.

"What it did for me was open my kids' minds. It also allowed safe space discussions," she said. "We want our students to be people who understand each other and what makes us click."

Consultations start Friday with [an online survey](#), which will be available until Feb. 21.

In addition, three public forums will be held on Feb. 7, 14 and 21, respectively in Trois-Rivières, Quebec City and Montreal. Various players in the province's education community will be invited to share their views on the reform.

Following that, a report will be submitted to the education minister in the spring of 2020, which will be used to draft a new curriculum that "will be tested in some schools during the 2021-2022 school year."

The ministry says the goal is to introduce a new version of the program at the start of the 2022-2023 academic year.

*With files from Matt Grillo.*

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