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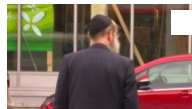
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The English community will be spared from the brunt of school board reforms: CAQ source



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Published Wednesday, September 11, 2019 9:20AM EDT
Last Updated Wednesday, September 11, 2019 6:52PM EDT

The English community could be spared from the brunt of the Legault government's forthcoming plan to reform Quebec's school board system, according to a government source.

The news was first reported by Bernard Drainville, political columnist for Montreal talk radio station 98.5, Wednesday morning.

Drainville reported that the Legault government considered the deep unpopularity of Bill 21 - its controversial ban on religious symbols in the public service - among the English-speaking communities of Quebec in its decision to spare English governance over the its own school community, as well as the elections that form their membership.

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While stopping short of fully confirming Drainville's report, a government source told CTV News Montreal that English-speaking communities can expect good news.

"Our proposal will surprise the communities concerned in a positive manner," the source said. "People will be happy with the proposal that will be submitted to cabinet."

The source added, though, that the CAQ government is likely to propose a "streamlined" version of the current school board system, though would not offer details.

PHOTOS



Education Minister Jean-Francois Roberge will present the education reform legislation to the CAQ at its pre-session caucus in Riviere-du-Loup later this week.

According to the government source, the CAQ plan for the English school system would include the following measures:

- School boards would be modified and structured differently, and would be called 'School Service Centres'
- There would be governing boards composed of elected parents, community representatives and a small number of peer-appointed education professionals
- Rights and services associated with current system would be maintained

Legault has said he wants to decentralize the province's education system and give more powers to the people managing each school.

Liberal interim leader Pierre Arcand said many details of the CAQ education reform remain to be seen.

"This is always something that is improvised," he said. "You know we have been supporting school boards and of course the government will have to propose a plan - a plan that will be coherent for the future. I know this is something controversial to a certain degree. We're going to wait for the government to really come up with a precise plan and once he comes up with the plan, I think our position will be very clear on that."

English groups skeptical

The news comes just one day after the EMSB announced it would be going to court to fight for its survival, arguing that the CAQ government's stated plan to abolish school boards was not constitutional.

"We have not had any confirmation, but would of course very much like the news to be true," said English Montreal School Board spokesperson Mike Cohen.

The Quebec Community Groups Network has advocated strongly in defence of English school boards and said Roberge had promised to meet with the community again before presenting the final decision on school boards, but it hasn't heard from his office.

"What's important for us is independence and community control for whatever future governance model we have - and independence because we believe these institutions need to have some independence and some distance from the government of Quebec. Secondly, they need to be controlled by the community through universal suffrage not just through certain components of the community."

A spokesman for the QCGN added that this would not be the first time the CAQ government has said that the English-speaking community would be pleased with a government policy, only to present a policy that does not meet the needs of the community.

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