

For immediate release

## QCGN Opposes Holding School Board Elections in Red Zones

**Montreal, November 14, 2020** – The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) shares the disbelief of parents and school board officials who have just learned that English school board elections will be held December 20 – despite the sustained surge in COVID-19 cases.

“This new date is valid for all school boards, even if their territory is considered to be located in a ‘Red Zone’ by public health authorities,” Education Minister Jean-François Roberge announced Friday. He noted that the election process will be “adapted” to “ensure that school elections during the COVID-19 pandemic take place in a safe manner, both for electors and election staff.”

“This can only be described as a blatant attempt at voter suppression,” QCGN President Marlene Jennings said in denouncing the decision. “Is the Coalition Avenir Québec deliberately endeavoring to ensure failure for our English school board elections by intentionally impeding access to the voting process for significant numbers of English-speaking Quebecers who cannot or will not be willing to get out and vote?”

In a letter to school board officials late Friday afternoon, Roberge declared polling will take place December 19 and 20, with advance polls on December 12 and 13. He stated that the education ministry is working with Elections Québec to ensure polling is held in compliance with public health guidelines that promote social distancing. Those include measures to limit the number of individuals in polling stations, an extra day for advance polling, an extra day for the vote, and also extended hours for polling stations.

Mail-in ballots will only be possible for individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19; those showing symptoms; those who have been in contact with a suspected, probable, or confirmed case in the previous 14 days; as well as people awaiting a COVID-19 test result. Residents of CHSLDs and private nursing homes will also be permitted to cast mail-in ballots. No such allowances are being made for others, including many seniors or individuals with underlying health issues.

Meanwhile, the province Friday reported 1,301 new cases of COVID-19 and 30 more deaths attributed to the novel coronavirus. Nine of these deaths occurred during the previous 24 hours. Earlier in the week, Premier François Legault mused that his government was considering extending the winter break to keep children home from school.

“To make a decision to hold such board elections in this dangerous context also shows incredible disregard for the health and welfare of our minority language community,” said Jennings.

The news that elections are going ahead despite the pandemic met with anger by members of APPELE-Québec – a broad-based alliance to promote the continued existence of English school boards governed by school board commissioners democratically elected by the English-speaking community at large. The QCGN, the Quebec English School Boards Association, the English Parents Committee Association and the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations, all members of APPELE-Québec, concur that

school board elections during the pandemic will not be conducive to getting people out to vote, to allowing candidates to get out and knock on doors to campaign, or to recruiting poll workers.

“The government position is completely illogical,” Jennings said. “In September, the government postponed school board elections in Red Zones. Now it is going ahead with elections in Red Zones with absolutely no explanation on why it has now somehow become now safe to do so.”

“The government must reconsider this folly. This makes no sense. There is no urgency. The only acceptable course would be for the government to roll back this decision.”

If the government refuses to see sense, Jennings added, it must broaden mail-in voting to ensure wide public participation in the elections.

The Quebec Community Groups Network is a not-for-profit organization bringing together English-language community organizations across Quebec. As a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action it identifies, explores and addresses strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec and encourages dialogue and collaboration among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions and leaders.

**For further information:**

Rita Legault, Director of Communications | [rita.legault@qcgnc.ca](mailto:rita.legault@qcgnc.ca)

Telephone: 514-912-6555