

Policy on Language Development and Delivery Models

Preamble - The Riverside Teachers' Union officially expresses our concerns regarding the Riverside School Board proposed *Policy on Language Development and Delivery Models* (hereafter — the Policy). As the potential impact of the Policy on staffing or enrolment has yet to be explored, the RTU believes that imposing a blanket policy on all of RSB schools will have negative impact on the job security of teachers, and will not meet the needs of all school communities.

Development of Policy - RTU was informed by Educational Services that much of the impetus for the Policy came from a board committee of teachers who felt that the current FSL program didn't offer enough alluring content, and that switching to a French Immersion model, with additional courses taught in French, would better engage some students.

As this board committee may not have been a representative sample of the board-wide teaching staff, it is troubling that a potentially far-reaching policy could be proposed by a small subset of employees. This type of non-standard policy development is not something we would encourage our members in which to participate.

Objectives - The objectives of the policy remain unclear. At the October 17, 2017, Council of Commissioners, the Director General stated that the Policy would help RSB graduate bilingual students; however RTU believes that the current success rates of our graduating students, in both English and French, are already quite high. The quality of instruction and service to our community, in both languages, has never been greater.

Our staff and community is often reminded of the successes of our students, with RSB consistently placing among the top school boards with the highest graduation rates within the province of Quebec, and as such, it leaves teachers to question whether there is a necessity for the proposed changes. If there is an issue with our students' success, there should be data to support the Policy.

Impact on Staffing - At present, RSB has yet to project how the Policy would impact staffing. Teachers have been asked to trust that the Policy will mostly impact part-time teachers and that the implementation of this Policy will not result in any staff being in excess to the board. The RTU does not believe that RSB can make such a guarantee.

- At the elementary school level, RSB should be able to project how Policy implementation would impact the 2018-2019 staffing at each school, but as enrolment may not always remain stable, it's hard to determine what the community picture will be when the Policy comes up for review again in three years, if approved by the Council of Commissioners.
- At the high school level, parents would have to “opt in” to *science humaines* (in place of human sciences). If this option is wildly popular, it could have a dramatic and immediate impact on staffing. The casual opinion we were offered that courses in French aren't usually favoured, is of little comfort to RBS employees who have legitimate concerns regarding their future career prospects.
- While RSB sees the Policy as mostly impacting part-time teachers, they are still full members of the RTU, and employees of the board, many of whom have spent a significant number of years on the priority of employment list, serving the needs of the RSB community.
 - The majority of teachers on the priority of employment list have made great commitments to their schools.
 - RSB has made investments in them, in terms of time, financial resources, and training, supporting them through professional development.
 - RSB must consider these teachers as well, when determining how the Policy will impact staffing.
 - In 2016-2017, 30 regular contracts were available to teachers on the priority of employment list. Of those, seven were General Subjects positions (the 7th contract given to #44 on the priority list), and 10 French Immersion positions (the 10th contract given to #100 — 9 of the 10 contracts to teachers lower than the last General Subjects contract awarded). In addition, there were three FSL positions accepted at the elementary school level.
 - In 2017-2018, 21 regular contracts were available to teachers on the priority of employment list. Of those, four were General Subjects positions (the 4th contract given to #66 on the priority list), and 10 French Immersion positions (the 10th contract given to #133 — 8 of the 10 contracts to teachers lower than the last General Subjects contract awarded). There were no FSL positions offered at the elementary school level.
 - At the beginning of the 2017-2018 staffing, there were 70 teachers on the General Subjects priority of employment list, while there were 24 French Immersion teachers.

- 2017-2018 - At the elementary level, there were 13 Special Education and 4 *enfance inadaptée* teachers on the priority of employment list, while at the secondary level, those numbers were six and one respectively.
- 2017-2018 - For human sciences, there are 12 teachers on the list, including three teachers with more than six years service with the board, all of whom would accept a regular contract if offered. For *science humaines*, there are two teachers on the priority of employment list.
- The Policy does not address the potential impact on resource teachers and what qualifications may be needed to support students in both languages.
- In looking at the above data, there is no question that the composition of staffs continue to change, and as the Policy will further expedite said change, RSB must carefully consider all potential consequences of the Policy.

Needs of the School Community - In the feedback received from teachers in writing (Appendix I) or in our meetings with teacher groups, all have expressed concerns that the Policy does not meet the needs of their school community, or questioned the necessity.

Each school serves a different community, the composition of which may vary due to linguistic background, culture, socio-economic status, access to resources, and number of students with special needs, most of whom follow an *Individualized Education Plan*.

As RSB professionals, we often refer to the "culture of the schools"; it would be counterintuitive to implement a policy that could limit the autonomy of a school to determine what is best for their students and staff.

Subject-time Allocation - RSB provided RTU with a "*Curriculum Information at RSB*" document (Appendix II) which gave an overview of the number of hours of instruction in both English and French at each of the elementary schools.

While the document provided insight into the delivery of curriculum, it further raised questions as to whether all schools are respecting the subject-time allocation as outlined in the *Basic School Regulation*, and while modifications are permitted, perhaps a more detailed review of each school could determine which subjects are under and over allocated.

It is to the credit of all teaching professionals that they want more time with their students. As the Policy states that, "at least one additional course will be taught in French in Cycles 1, 2, and 3," the potential for a subject-time allocation imbalance is of concern.

Impact on English Language Instruction - While the objective of the Policy is to promote proficiency in both English and French, there is no direct reference to how the Policy would improve students' English language abilities. It is difficult to support a policy where the content can be considered incongruous with the stated objective.

English Language Arts and General Subjects teachers continue to see a reduction in the quality of written work. At the elementary school level, it seems counterintuitive that proficiency in English can be achieved with less hours of English language instruction.

Questions - Through consultation with our members, prospective issues emerged:

- Has a formal Policy consultation report been received from each school's Governing Board and School Council, or has each administrative team transmitted their staff consultation to RSB?
- As Bill 105 decentralizes many responsibilities, can RSB mandate the Policy, insisting on modifications to a school's Educational Project?
- Was the Policy piloted in any RSB schools, where parental interest and impact on staffing could be measured?
- How might the Policy affect Centennial Regional High School's Middle School model?
- As the programs of Heritage Regional High School reduce instruction time in favour of specialized training, is it feasible to implement the Policy?
- With less English instruction, could the number of prospective international students be negatively impacted?
- Could having less English instruction impact the grade 6 MEES mandated ELA exams?
- How will administering immersion assessments to *de facto* FSL students impact results?
- As recruiting teachers, especially those qualified to teach French Immersion, continues to be a challenge, will schools have to settle for a lesser accomplished or experienced teaching professional due to the Policy?
- As many military parents choose St-Johns school due to the Bill 101 exemption, could the Policy negatively impact enrolment?
- Has it been considered that if all schools opt for more than one additional course taught in French in Cycles 1, 2, and 3, the subsequent impact on staffing would be even greater?



Conclusion - The Policy as proposed could impact enrolment, the composition of the school communities, the quality and diversity of instruction, the educational paths of all students, especially those with special needs, staffing, and the lives and careers of employees.

The Policy does not identify a specific need at the school-level, and has not been supported by data or documented teacher experience. The objectives, while noble, do not seem to address a true problem at the school level, and implementation could prevent front-line professionals from making decisions based on the best interests of the communities they serve. There are many questions that remain regarding potential outcomes that require careful consideration.

The Riverside Teachers' Union cannot support the *Policy on Language Development and Delivery Models*. It is the school, the societal standard of collaboration and caring, that should determine what is best for their students, staff and community.

Respectfully submitted by the Riverside Teachers' Union.

Note - All efforts were made to ensure the opinions expressed in this consultation document are accurate. At the time of production, RTU did not have access to all staffing data, student results, or school and board-level meeting minutes.