

Ministerial Exams in a Home-Education Context

Recommendations for the Direction de l'enseignement à la maison



For a Personalised Education

Presented by:

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Summary

In July 2019, a new law, amending the existing homeschooling regulation, was adopted. The new regulation includes changes that AQED believes are unfair in a homeschooling context. One of these, which will come into effect on July 1, 2021, is the requirement for all home-schooled children to take ministerial examinations.

In light of the impending implementation of this requirement, AQED makes the following five recommendations:

- 1. Ministerial examinations must remain optional for Homeschoolers**
- 2. Ministerial exams must be administered in a safe and familiar environment;**
- 3. Homeschoolers must be provided with sufficient preparation equivalent to that offered in a school setting;**
- 4. Pedagogical differentiation adapted to the specific needs of the child must be offered**
- 5. Ministerial examinations must be administered appropriately and fairly.**

These recommendations will be elaborated in the following pages.

About AQED:

The Association québécoise pour l'éducation à domicile (AQED) is a citizen and volunteer-led organization founded in 1997 by home-educating families who wanted to better support each other in their education project. In 2021, the association is composed of more than 2,600 families, which represents a membership of more than 5,500 home-educated children in Quebec.

AQED is a non-profit and secular organization. Its decisions and actions are based on facts and scientific research related to learning, home education, and the well-being of children and their families.

AQED's mission is three-fold :

- To inform and support Quebec parents who choose to home educate.
- To represent its members to the Ministry of Education, school service centers and other organizations related to youth and education.
- To support and defend the rights of parents to educate their children according to the pedagogical method they prefer, while protecting the right of the child to receive a healthy and balanced education.

Context

Over the past four years, the legal framework for home education in Quebec has undergone many changes. AQED was consulted early in the process, during the parliamentary commission for PL 144, and we have a place on the *Table de concertation nationale en matière d'enseignement à la maison (National Consultation Table Regarding Home Education)*. The collaboration between the Minister, the Ministry of Education and AQED has allowed for a better understanding on all sides of the issues that affect homeschooling. Listening to the concerns of families, setting up the Direction de l'enseignement à la maison (DEM) and hiring staff who are humane and respectful of families were important factors in the acceptance of these legal changes by families.

This is why the suspension of the *Consultation Table* and the subsequent release of a new regulation less than a year after implementation of the original, despite positive collaboration from the home-education community, was met with incomprehension.

Among the changes to the regulation is the requirement that all homeschoolers take the Ministerial exams as of July 1, 2021¹. **AQED disagrees with this change.**

We request that the writing of Ministerial exams remain optional. First, this requirement is inappropriate in light of the reality of home education. In addition, each home educated child is already subject to an annual assessment in all subjects, which is further complemented by two progress reports given at the halfway point and at the end of the school year.

We are aware, however, that Ministerial Exams play a key role in the sanctioning of studies. Thus, for those homeschooled youth seeking a high school diploma, we recommend that these exams be accessible in a manner equivalent to those who attend an educational institution.

Therefore, **we recommend that the Direction de l'enseignement à la maison (DEM)** be the **entity responsible for the management of departmental examinations** (including preparation and administration), replacing school service centers and school boards. A relationship of trust is, in general, already established between families and their resource person. The resource person, who knows the child and has assessed the supervising documents (learning project, status report, progress reports and portfolio, if applicable), would therefore be able to offer appropriate support to families, particularly with regard to differences in educational models among families.

¹ Quebec Official Gazette, [Regulation to Amend the Homeschooling Regulation](#), 17 July 2019, Vol. 151, no. 29

In light of the above, AQED makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Ministerial examinations must remain optional for Homeschoolers**
- 2. Ministerial exams must be administered in a safe and familiar environment;**
- 3. Homeschoolers must be provided with sufficient preparation equivalent to that offered in a school setting;**
- 4. Pedagogical differentiation adapted to the specific needs of the child must be offered**
- 5. Ministerial examinations must be administered appropriately and fairly.**

Recommendations

1. Ministerial examinations must remain optional for Homeschoolers

Taking Ministerial exams is not an effective way to assess childrens' progress and does not provide an accurate picture of the learning progress of the child being assessed.

In February 2019, the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (CSE)* released a Report on the state of education: *Évaluer pour que ça compte vraiment*² [*Evaluating so that it really counts*]. It states that tests:

do not communicate clear information about what the individual has achieved and what remains to be mastered. They therefore do not support learning and do not necessarily give a true picture of achievement. In addition, they prematurely rank individuals, which leads to significant drift. (p.38) [Unofficial translation]

Requiring Ministerial exams is therefore contrary to what is recommended in this report.

Furthermore, in his May 11, 2018 letter to the minister after the initial regulation on home schooling was adopted, the Quebec Ombudsman wrote:

I endorse the fact that parents are offered a choice of evaluation methods for monitoring the student's learning progress. I am confident that this innovative approach will make it possible to generate the information needed for a clear picture of the student's progress and for making adjustments if needed.

² Conseil supérieur de l'éducation. 2018. [Evaluating so it truly counts](#), *Report on the State and Needs of Education 2016-2018*, Québec, Le Conseil, p. 38 (Full report only available in French; a summary in English can be found [here](#)).

Thus, the regulation allows parent-educators to choose, as is most appropriate for their situation, from among 5 different evaluation methods, one of which is to take the Ministerial exam. This choice is meant to allow for equivalence between the monitoring of the Progression of Learning by the Direction de l'enseignement à la maison and the pedagogical approach favoured by the parent-educator.

In fact, it seems that standardized exams are not the best tool for evaluating children, their learning progress in particular, as evidenced by the fact that public alternative schools are exempt from them. Moreover, in Quebec, the ministry's primary school exams were intended to be a temporary measure, implemented only to validate that students had the necessary learning for entry into secondary school, a measure that was put in place at the time of the school reform nearly 20 years ago³.

2. Ministerial exams must be administered in a safe and familiar environment.

In the school setting, students take their tests in an environment that is known to them, in which they feel comfortable and safe. To be fair, the same consideration should be given to home-schooled children - a safe and familiar environment in which to write their tests.

The following options can be considered; we recommend the first option, the familiar environment in which the child's educational experience takes place.

- A. **Home-based delivery**: This option can be used with single children or with a group of children, whether or not they are at the same level. Remote supervision, such as videoconferencing, as tested during this pandemic year, would allow for simultaneous testing of multiple children or groups of children, as well as the implementation of preparation activities, regardless of the children's geographic location. Supervision by an evaluator, such as a teacher who is certified to evaluate other non-exam subjects, would also allow the child to remain in the familiar educational environment. This seems to us to be the most secure and easily implemented option and is therefore our main recommendation.
- B. **Testing in a familiar environment other than the home**: This option has similar advantages to the home-based option, as it offers the advantage of a place where the child is relatively familiar, either regularly or occasionally, such as a community center, library or learning center.

³ Cormier, François and Nathalie Lemieux. [La Vérif: faut-il réduire le nombre d'examens pour les élèves du Québec?](#) Article published on Radio-Canada, 7 June 2017, updated on 18 June 2019 (article available in French only)

- C. **School-based delivery:** We are of the opinion that this option is not appropriate in a home schooling context. Many children have been removed from the school setting because of a negative experience, while others have never attended school. The Quebec Ministry of Education's [Policy on the Evaluation of Learning](#) states, among other things, that "For certain students who receive their education outside a school setting, evaluation practices may sometimes need to be adapted" and that "evaluation in the course of learning must be an integral component of all aspects of the learning process"⁴. In addition, the Policy calls on school authorities to consider assessment as a component of learning rather than an entity in itself. For a home-schooled child, it is clear that an examination conducted in a school service center office or in a school setting, entities separate from his or her learning method at home, clearly violates the spirit of the Policy. If, regrettably, this should prove to be the only choice, the following measures should be considered:
- a. Testing in a separate and specific environment, for example, a room in the school service center. If this is not possible, we recommend that the parent be given a choice of schools and that it be possible for the test to take place in a separate room, especially if bullying has been experienced in the school setting.
 - b. Presence of a safe person for the child, his/her parent or, for example, a specialist known to the child if he/she is receiving services, a teacher's certificate holder who has previously worked with the child, a guardian, etc.
 - c. Adequate preparation for the environment, e.g., a pre-trip tour of the site or a meeting with the people who will be present during the test.

3. Homeschoolers must be provided with sufficient preparation equivalent to that offered in a school setting.

In home education, the homeschooling parent has the choice of teaching the child in English or French. It's not necessary to hold a certificate of eligibility to teach in English at home. Therefore, it's essential that the ministerial examination preparation materials be offered to the child in the language of instruction.

⁴ Ministère de l'Éducation. Policy on the Evaluation of Learning, Québec, 2003. p. 12, 15

Among other preparedness measures to offer, we recommend:

1. Provide explanations for the homeschooling parent regarding exam procedures, the skills and concepts evaluated, and the preparation schedule, right from the start of the school year. The guides⁵ available on the Ministry of Education website provide relevant information for parents who delegate the education of their children to a school, but are insufficient in a homeschooling situation.
2. Provide access to at least two recent sample exams, the same ones used in school for student preparation, several months before an exam is taken.
3. Provide the opportunity, when offered during the course of the exam, to participate in exam preparation activities in the same setting in which the exam will be administered. For example, we recommend that preparation can be done remotely if the family wishes to do so.
4. If the test is to be administered in an unfamiliar context, school setting, or by people unknown to the student, provide the student with opportunities to understand the context, explore the environment, and meet the people who will be present several weeks before the test.

4. Pedagogical differentiation, adapted to the specific needs of the child, must be offered

Like some students in the school setting, some homeschooled children benefit from some form of educational accommodations. Again, since the homeschooling parent has the choice of teaching the child in English or French, it's essential that any accommodations be offered to the child in the language of instruction.

As stated in the *Outil de référence en matière de différenciation pédagogique*⁶, adapted instruction can be offered in three forms:

1. **Flexibility:** The nature and requirements of the task don't change. It can be applied to all children; it's the flexibility needed to provide planned choices that facilitate the completion of a task.
2. **Accommodation:** The nature and requirements of the task don't change. In a school setting, it can be applied to a child with an intervention plan or special needs. It's based on an analysis of the child's needs, not a diagnosis. Sometimes external professionals suggest adaptations to be implemented, for example, the use of software, a computer or a calculator to complete certain tasks.

⁵ <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/teachers/references/examens-et-epreuves/guides-parents/>

⁶ Service des ressources éducatives, commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys. *Outil de référence en matière de différenciation pédagogique*, Québec, 2016, 37 pages.

3. **Modification:** The nature and/or requirements of the task change. In a school setting, it can be applied to a child with an intervention plan. It's an exceptional measure for a student who has benefited from systematic, frequent and targeted interventions and for whom the flexibility and adaptation measures are no longer sufficient to enable him to continue learning at the same pace as students of his age level. Modifications are based on an analysis of the student's needs, whether or not a diagnosis is made.

While it's common for students in a school setting to have an intervention plan when the educational adaptation is at the level of accommodation or modification, this is not the case for all homeschooled children. Adaptation for homeschooled children is then usually, but not exclusively, presented in their learning plans and assessments, which are reviewed for compliance by the Direction de l'enseignement à la maison (DEM). These measures should then be taken into consideration when taking ministerial exams.

The following are some examples of educational differentiation measures that can be applied in homeschooling. Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and therefore any other flexibility, adaptation or modification indicated in the learning plan should be accepted in a testing situation.

- In a homeschooling context, we consider cycle-age to be irrelevant. Thus, testing should be done according to the grade level indicated in the learning plan, not according to age.
- If a subject is exempted from the learning plan, it should not be tested.
- The use of computers, software or other computer equipment necessary for the child's learning must be accepted during the exams, in the same way that students in school are entitled to it when necessary.
- Additional time must be allocated to children for whom this is necessary.

In addition, as described in our other recommendations, it's necessary to provide educational differentiation according to the test-taking conditions if these differ from the learning conditions experienced at home, even if no measures are named in the child's learning plan or assessments.

5. Ministerial examinations must be administered appropriately and fairly.

The consequence after taking ministerial examinations should, like the other preparation and review stages, be handled appropriately and fairly.

To this end, we recommend to:

- A. Make the exam available to parents after the exam is taken or, at the very least, make it available for review. According to the homeschooling regulation, the exams must allow the parent to follow the child's progress. Thus, if the parent does not have access to the exam, it is contrary to the intent of the regulation as no qualitative feedback to the child, nor adjustments to the teaching, can be implemented.
- B. As the results of the exam are known after the deadline for submission of end-of-project reviews, parents must not be required to change their documents after June 15th. Parents who wish to do so will be able to use the results of the examinations to adjust their learning project for the following year. There should be no consequences associated with passing or failing ministerial exams.
- C. In school settings, teachers grade their students' exams. Equitable measures should be put in place so that the parent who wishes to do so can have a proactive role in the grading of their child's exams. For example, the parent could have access to the correction grid or do the grading themselves. At the very least, parent-educators who hold a teaching certificate, and are authorized to do their child's annual assessment themselves, must have access. Similarly, any holder of a teaching certificate chosen and designated by a parent should have the same right of access to a child's exam.
- D. Given that, in the context of educational certification, the ministerial examination is only a partial component of the overall assessment for the awarding of credits, the weighting assigned to these examinations for homeschooled youth should then be equitable and consistent with what is provided for in the Basic School Regulation.

Conclusion

These recommendations are based on the reality of home education in Quebec, as reported to us by our members, as well as in consultations with other Quebec homeschooling parents who are not members of AQED, and in consultations with education professionals, particularly in special-ed, and experts in the field of grading and evaluations.

We wish to restate that our primary recommendation is to maintain the **optional nature of ministerial examinations in a homeschooling context** and that subsequent recommendations are aimed at a fair and appropriate process for ministerial examinations chosen by



home-educated youth and their parents and preferably under the responsibility of the Direction de l'enseignement à la maison.

We firmly believe that these will contribute to the appropriate monitoring of home education in Quebec. Allowing adequate supervision of the education received outside school, by more than 14,000 children, while respecting the choice of an alternative education made by parent-educators, in the best interests of their children.