

Legault calms Anglo fears of school board proposal

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Coalition Avenir Québec leader François Legault is telling anglophone Quebecers that the abolition of school elections, which the CAQ has promised, shouldn't frighten English-speaking communities. Anglos "have nothing to fear" from that promise, Legault told a party dinner in Bromont Monday.

The party wants to turn school boards into 'service centers' that have to answer to schools rather than the other way around, he says, and it should be up to school teams, made up of leaders and people from the community, to appoint the members of the board of directors of these service centers.

Legault says the new arrangement "will be even more decentralized than it is now," pointing out that there are nine anglophone school boards in Quebec and that they will have nine service centers under the new set-up. "There will be no loss of power," he told his audience.

Legault shared a belief that rather than lose influence, anglophone communities, would come out on top in the exchange and said there will be "less accountability from schools to service centers," and more autonomy for schools, which will have more choice in terms of how they carry out their mission.

Legault added that abolishing school board elections in favour of his new proposal would save the government about \$20 million for each election. In an interview in April, Education Minister Sébastien Proulx put forward a \$13M tab for the school board election held in 2014.

"We can't call it democracy when only 3 per cent of eligible voters participating," Legault says. "The last school election attracted 4.85 per cent of Quebecers to the polls, a rate that rises to 17.26 per cent in the English-language network."

Legault was in town to extol the virtues of the CAQ's Brome-missisquoi candidate Isabelle Charest, who he says knows "not just sports and education, but also other issues affecting young people."

A PQ response

Guillaume Rousseau, the Parti Québécois candidate Sherbrooke and a constitutional expert, responded to Legault's statements by saying that the abolition of school boards promised by the CAQ would be quickly challenged in court, as it would contravene the Canadian Constitution which Legault has sworn to uphold

"On the one hand, in French, François Legault promises to abolish elections and school boards, much as the Liberals tried to do two years ago," he said. "On the other hand, in English

he says he wants Quebec to stay in Canada at any price, even in the absence of constitutional reform. It is totally contradictory, because the Canadian Constitution protects English school boards. It proves once again that the CAQ is making unrealistic proposals that are close to those of the Liberals, in addition to not saying the same thing in French and in English."

Rousseau, has just published a book on linguistic rights. and in particular the school rights of Anglophones in Quebec.

"The last major reform of school boards was done by the Parti Québécois," he says. "This year again, we have realistic proposals to reform the world of schools. It is hoped that municipal elections and school board elections will be held at the same time, in order to increase participation in school elections. More broadly, we want to bring school boards and municipalities together, with the aim of making better use of public buildings and thus offer more leisure activities to the public without costing taxpayers more."