
EDUCATION, FAR FROM A PRIORITY IN QUEBEC

Montreal, January 25, 2016 – Contrary to its claims, the Quebec government does not appear to be making education a real priority. Since the early 2000s, real per capita spending on health and social services has grown five times faster than spending on education, with the result that the Quebec government needs to inject another \$1.5 billion if it hopes to restore its education spending to a level near the Canadian average. This rather disturbing observation is contained in the 2015 Overview of Productivity and Prosperity in Quebec, released today by the HEC Montréal Centre for Productivity and Prosperity (CPP).

“If Quebec is aiming for long-term economic growth, the government will have to find a way to establish a lasting culture of innovation, and that has to start with prioritizing education in order to train skilled and qualified workers,” says CPP Director Robert Gagné.

The CPP study shows, however, that Quebec is doing less to fund its education system than other Canadian provinces and many OECD countries. Although public funding is in line with the province’s ability to pay, not enough money is being allocated to meet Quebecers’ training needs. Indeed, the proportion of young Quebecers ages 15 to 19 who have left school is higher than in most countries, and the university graduation rate is also lower.

Some recommendations

To make education a real priority, the government will have to do more than simply inject money on an ad-hoc basis. The study identifies two target initiatives in this regard: offering optional, free and universal kindergarten for four-year olds, and improving the Secondary Cycle 2 program to ensure that young people leave school with a specialized diploma.

“Our first recommendation is to start early, by introducing optional, free and universal kindergarten for four-year olds. While many OECD countries offer preschool education as a normal part of the schooling process, this is quite rare in Quebec,” Gagné says. “Instead, the province favours a system of daycares, administered by the Ministère de la Famille. This means that children who are old enough to attend school are kept in a parallel system. Although institutions affiliated with the daycare network are supposed to offer an educational component, the teaching they offer is not strictly regulated, with the result that children do not all have the same skills when they start school. Moreover, the close to one-quarter of all children who do not attend these daycares almost all have their first experience with the school system at age five.” It is worth pointing out that 98% of five-year olds attend kindergarten, an optional, free and universal system offered throughout Quebec.

According to the study’s authors, starting schooling at an earlier age would allow for better control over what is taught, speed up the process of diagnosing and addressing learning problems and ensure consistency in children’s schooling.

The second recommendation involves offering more options to Secondary Cycle 2 students to prevent them from dropping out. This practice, which has proven effective in some countries, emphasizes vocational training as a way of ensuring that as many students as possible leave school with at least a specialized diploma. At the same time, coercive measures could be introduced to discourage students from dropping out before earning a diploma. For instance, some countries make education compulsory to age 18, unless students earn their diplomas earlier. Others oblige unemployed youths under age 25 to take 18 months of training in order to specialize. Benefits for unemployed young people could also be limited to loans and bursaries, as a way of encouraging them to go back to school.

Taken together, these two measures should allow the government to better tackle the school dropout phenomenon, while guaranteeing companies the human capital they need in order to grow. “To close Quebec’s significant productivity gap, companies must be able to count on properly trained workers, in terms of both professional and technical skills and higher education,” Gagné says. “This skilled workforce will help them adopt new technologies, introduce new processes and develop new products and approaches, all of which are essential to their success and Quebec’s prosperity.”

Much more than just a study aimed at enhancing Quebecers' schooling, the CPP 2015 Overview proposes a real economic development policy that includes a review of government support for companies, a prerequisite for boosting productivity in Quebec. Also see the [Economic Development: Quebec's Strategies Are Inconsistent](#) press release.

For more information:

- Consult the report (in French), entitled [Productivité et prospérité au Québec – Bilan 2015](#);
- Téléchargez le communiqué [en français](#).

About the Centre for Productivity and Prosperity

The HEC Montréal Centre for Productivity and Prosperity, created in 2009, has a twofold mission. First of all, it is devoted to research on productivity and prosperity, mainly in Quebec and in Canada as a whole. The Centre then shares its research findings, making them widely accessible and, in the end, educating people about productivity and prosperity. For more information on the Centre, visit www.hec.ca/cpp.

Source:

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