

FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND EXCLUSION IN QUEBEC'S EDUCATION SYSTEM DURING THE YEARS 1945-1977

Two-year research project (2025-26) conducted by Guy Rex Rodgers
funded by *Le Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois
d'expression anglaise*

First preliminary report for the period January-June 2025

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If you wish to participate in this on-going study and share your story, contact
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Or you can fill out the Quebec Schools Question survey at the link below
<http://tiny.cc/QSQ>

Reasons for this Research

In 1997, historian Robert Gagnon wrote an influential paper¹ entitled : *Pour en finir avec un mythe : le refus des écoles catholiques d'accepter les immigrants*². Immigration, education and language have been controversial in Quebec since the 1960s. The percentage of immigrants students enrolled in French Catholic schools declined steeply between the 1930s and the 1970s. But why? Did immigrants increasingly reject French Catholic schools? Or did French Catholic schools increasingly reject immigrants? Researchers on this topic have consulted bureaucrats, administrators, historians and statisticians. No one has consulted parents and students. They are the primary focus of this research project.

Gagnon's paper presented 23 pages of evidence to 'prove' that allegations of Catholic schools refusing to accept immigrants were an outrageous 'myth.'

*« Cette idée que les communautés immigrantes ont choisi l'école anglaise parce que les écoles catholiques les refusaient est l'un des stéréotypes les plus **persistants des 20 dernières années**. C'est là un bel exemple de ces incantations qui, à force d'être **répétées ad nauseam**, acquièrent la force de la vérité à tel point qu'il ne vient plus à l'idée de s'interroger sur leur bien fondé. »*
(Emphasis added)

Let us briefly consider the context of Gagnon's indignation that affirmations of rejection by immigrants had been made *ad nauseam* **for the past 20 years**. Gagnon wrote his paper in 1997. What was happening 20 years earlier? Three governments passed increasingly coercive language laws in rapid succession: Bill 63 (1969), Bill 22 (1974) and Bill 101 (1977). All three of these laws were responses to the heated controversy in Quebec over the language of education and immigrants.

Bill 101 in particular – which became law 20 years before Gagnon wrote his paper – was based on the belief that immigrants had rejected Quebec's French language and culture *en masse*. It is not surprising that immigrants falsely accused of rejecting French Catholic schools would want it to be known that Quebec's French Catholic schools had rejected them. In 1997, if ex-students were still repeating this claim *ad nauseam*, it was because their story was (and still is in 2025) dismissed as a myth.

It is also noteworthy that Gagnon wrote his paper shortly after the 1995 referendum, one of the most polarising political events in Quebec history. The

¹ Robert Gagnon. Le Bulletin d'histoire politique Volume 5, numéro 2, hiver 1997

² Busting a Myth: That Catholic Schools Refused to Accept Immigrants

second referendum will be forever associated with Premier Jacques Parizeau's emotional outburst as he conceded that the majority of votes had not supported his dream of an independent Quebec. « *C'est vrai qu'on a été battu. Au fond, par quoi? Par l'argent et des votes ethniques, essentiellement.*³ »

We will examine Gagnon's arguments and reasoning in this project's final report. At this interim stage, it is sufficient to note that Gagnon's paper made a strong case that French Catholic schools had no reason to refuse admission to 'ethnics.' The cornerstone of Gagnon's argument was that French Catholic schools were legally obliged to accept all students who requested admission. In rejecting immigrant students, French Catholic schools were breaking the law.

This all happened a long time ago, before the deconfessionalization of schools (1997), and before Bill 101 (1977). Why does it matter now? There are several reasons.

1. Irreconcilable Narratives

Gagnon made the bold affirmation that no immigrant students were refused admission to French Catholic schools. Not one. Ever. This version of history is widely held among francophones who cannot believe that French Catholic schools would have broken the law. They also find it unbelievable that the Catholic Church, and its schools, would have been responsible for 'anglicizing' untold numbers of immigrants by forcing them to attend English schools: Catholic or Protestant.

The immigrant version of the situation is different and more complex. No one claims that all immigrants were denied admission to French Catholic schools. And no one denies that many immigrants preferred English schools. Families chose schools for different reasons, involving religion and language, as well as pragmatic factors such as proximity of the school to the family home and quality of education. However, some immigrants chose French Catholic schools and were turned away.

Which immigrants were most likely to prefer French Catholic schools? Catholic francophones and Catholic immigrants whose mother tongue was a romance language. The largest wave of immigration after the Second World War fit this profile. Italian immigrants had a complex relationship with Catholic Quebec. They were surprised – and disturbed – to be turned away.

³ It's true we have been beaten, but by what? Essentially by money and the ethnic vote!

During the period under examination (1945-1977) non-Catholics (e.g. Protestant and Orthodox students) were less likely than Catholics to seek enrollment in Catholic schools, and they had a much higher probability of being denied admission. Non-Christians (e.g. Jewish or Muslim students) were least likely to seek enrollment in Catholic schools. The few who did were almost certain to be denied admission. This memory is widely shared among immigrants and non-francophones-de-souche.

Until 1977, parents in Quebec had four education options: French Catholic, English Protestant, English Catholic and French Protestant. Immigrants, historic Anglos and francophones-de-souche were free to choose any of these options. English Protestant schools were attractive to immigrants, historic Anglos and francophones-de-souche. Historian Gagnon offered a number of reasons for this. Protestant schools had more money, greater resources and better options for higher education. Gagnon fully sympathised with immigrants and francophones-de-souche who exercised their legal right to enroll in English Protestant schools. Because he viewed English schools⁴ as superior, Gagnon concluded that every immigrant, given free choice, would logically choose English schools. He also concluded, with a puzzling leap of logic, that since no immigrants applied to French Catholic schools they could not have refused admission. This research presented here reaches a dramatically different conclusion: many Catholic students, most non-Catholic students, and almost all non-Christian students who tried to register in French Catholic schools were turned away.

2. The Saint-Léonard Riots (1968) and Subsequent Language Legislation

The Saint-Léonard Riots in 1968 are also remembered in conflicting narratives. The francophone majority in Quebec remembers them as a battle between French and English. Félix Rose's 2024 film *'La Bataille de Saint-Léonard'* perpetuated the narrative that immigrants rejected Quebec's French language and culture, and therefore, to avert disaster, the government of Quebec was compelled to impose strong language laws.

The Italian perspective is quite different. Italian immigrants sought education in French, English and Italian. The conflict in Saint-Leonard was about bilingual education, which was both legal and popular, verses unilingual French education, which was unpopular among all Quebecers, and has never been Quebec's chosen education model.

⁴ Except Collèges Classiques, frequented by Quebec's francophone elite who could afford the fees.

Christophe Chikli wrote a Master's Thesis⁵ reviewing media coverage of the Saint-Léonard crisis from 1968 to 1970, which presents an unfiltered view of what politicians were saying and thinking as they struggled to formulate language laws: Bill 63 in 1969, Bill 22 in 1974 and Bill 101 in 1977.

René Lévesque, a Liberal MNA in the 1960s and later founder of the Parti Québécois⁶, never supported unilingualism or violence-prone advocates who stirred up trouble in Saint-Léonard.

Pour sa part, René Levesque dénonça la L.I.S.⁷ au cours de la crise de Saint-Léonard. Effectivement, il dénonça l'imposition forcée de l'unilinguisme français à Saint-Léonard. Pourtant souverainiste reconnu, il alla à l'encontre de bon nombre de ses collègues et de ses partisans proclamant des 1968 l'inefficacité de la L.I.S. et la dangerosité de son action pouvant conduire à des dérives.⁸ (Emphasis added)

Jean Lesage, who led the Liberal government during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, accused the Union Nationale government of inaction regarding immigration and education, but also stated that the francophone majority's 'attitude' (toward immigrants) was part of the problem.

Si les immigrants choisissent de s'intégrer à la minorité anglophone du Québec, a expliqué M. Lesage, cela est dû d'un part à l'inaction du gouvernement et aussi à cause de l' **attitude des Québécois à leur égard.**⁹ (Emphasis added)

Paul Gerin-Lajoie, Minister de Education in Robert Bourassa's Liberal¹⁰ government, supported the traditional right of parents to choose the school -- Catholic or Protestant, French or English -- that would provide their children with the best education.

« I favor the freedom of choice of the language of instruction by the parents. If a family wishes to choose a French language school or an English language school that liberty must be respected.¹¹ »

⁵ Christophe Chikli Master's Thesis 2006 Université de Sherbrooke

⁶ The Parti Québécois passed Bill 101 in 1977.

⁷ The Mouvement d'intégration scolaire (MIS) became la Ligue d'intégration scolaire (LIS) in March 1969. Firebrand Raymond Lemieux was president of both.

⁸ Le Devoir le 10 septembre 1968

⁹ La Presse le 9 septembre 1968

¹⁰ The Quebec Liberal Party passed Bill 22 in 1974.

¹¹ The Gazette 28 September 1968

It is surprising now to hear a Minister of Education arguing that all parents, including immigrants, should be free to choose an English school. But why did Gerin-Lajoie also mention the freedom to choose a French Catholic school, unless that choice was restricted at the time?

Daniel Johnson, whose Union Nationale¹² government was the first to wrestle with an equitable solution for conflicting positions on immigration, education and language, expressed his views in *La Presse* on June 13, 1968, as the Saint-Léonard conflict was veering out of control.

*M Johnson a ensuite critiqué sévèrement une fois de plus, ce qui s'est fait jusqu'ici pour l'intégration des immigrants, particulièrement au niveau de la Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal (CÉCM). «Contrairement à ce qui s'est fait jusqu'ici, a dit le premier ministre, il faudra fournir aux immigrants l'occasion de s'intégrer au milieu français **volontairement**. Ils n'ont jamais eu cette chance. Bien au contraire, la CÉCM et d'autres organismes ont **automatiquement rejeté tout ce qui n'était pas Canadien français catholiques** vers les écoles où la langue d'instruction est l'anglais.» (Emphasis added)*

This 'automatic rejection' is precisely what immigrants have been saying for 50 years.

3. Lessons For Today

Quebec is once again struggling with immigration in record numbers, and with the challenge of integrating foreign students. The Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) party has imposed strong new language legislation with Bill 96, which presumes that immigrants must be 'forced' to integrate within Quebec society. The immigrant version of this story is quite different. Immigrants are more than willing to learn French but they also want to learn English. They want to live in *Québec Français*, but not in *Québec unilingue*. The battle now is the same as it was the in the 1960s: not French versus English but bilingualism (and multilingualism) versus unilingualism.

4. The Clock is Ticking

The final reason for conducting this research is that students who began their education in the 1940, 50s and 60s are now senior citizens. They have important stories and first-hand information to share. We need to speak to them now. It will be too late in 25 years.

¹² The Union National party passed Bill 63 in 1969.

Purpose of the Interim Report

This interim report covers the first six months of a two-year project. In order to complete the research, we are looking for the following material:

1. Additional accounts of students who wished to attend French Catholic schools but were denied admission. This information is necessary to identify enrollment patterns. How did they vary over time, from region to region, and from parish to parish?
2. Additional accounts of students who wished to attend French Catholic schools and were successful. We want to test the theory that Catholics were most likely to be admitted, and non-Christians were the least likely. We want to speak to Catholics educated in French Catholic schools, and also non-Catholics. We would particularly like to speak to non-Christians educated in French Catholic schools. This group appears to be extremely rare.
3. Additional accounts of students who preferred to be educated at English Catholic or English Protestant schools. We want to better understand the motivations for choosing English schools.
4. A significant number of students moved from the English system to the French system and vice versa. Did these shifts reflect dissatisfaction, or were they a pragmatic strategy to become bilingual in the absence of quality second-language instruction? In other cases, children were educated in one language if the other language was spoken at home. We want to understand these strategies.
5. Additional media coverage and documentation from the period that sheds light on this subject.

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Overview of Student Experiences Based on Surveys and Interviews

The basic education model for Quebec after Confederation (1867) was a dual system of Catholic and Protestant schools. Prior to 1977, Quebec's education system also offered sub-sectors based on language (French and English), giving four options for public schools: French-Catholic with a smaller English-Catholic sector, and English-Protestant with a small French-Protestant sector.

The basic model was simple for English-speaking Protestants. There is no record of an English-speaking Protestant denied admission to an English Protestant school. For French-speaking Catholics the system was also simple, although we have many examples of immigrant Catholics turned away from French Catholic schools.

The binary system was complicated for students who were not French Catholic or English Protestant. Take the example of an allophone immigrant who tried to enroll at the neighbourhood school, which did not accept immigrants, particularly those who could not speak French. The immigrant family was directed to the local English school, which accepted allophones. However the English school was Protestant and did not accept Catholics, and the immigrant family was Catholic.

In a small town with two schools -- one French Catholic and the other English Protestant -- what was an allophone, Catholic, immigrant family to do after being rejected by both schools? The family was utterly baffled until they learned that the English Protestant school would admit an immigrant student if the parents were willing to sign a form renouncing their Catholic religion. A standard form was available for this bureaucratic renunciation of faith.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I the undersigned, do hereby solemnly declare that for the educational purposes of my children, I hereby renounce the Roman Catholic religion.

Date

Sworn before me on _____

at _____

Commissioner for Oaths

82. Form for the renunciation of the Roman Catholic religion [LBPSBA, standard form]

The binary system was complicated for children of mixed marriages: one parent Catholic and the other Protestant. The Catholic Church permitted a Catholic to marry a Protestant provided that the Protestant spouse vowed that the children would be raised and educated as Catholics. Protestant schools were prepared to admit 'Catholic' children, when one parent was Protestant, if the family paid school taxes AND a special monthly compensation. The system was byzantine.

Quebec's education system became increasingly complicated for students who diverged further from the binary model. Immigrants who spoke languages other than French might or might not be accepted into French Catholic schools. If they were Catholic and living in Montreal¹³, they had the additional option of enrolling at an English Catholic school. We have found no examples of a Catholic immigrant turned away from an English Catholic school.

French-speaking Protestants were present in Nouvelle France and continued to exist in small numbers. When English Protestant schools began to offer immersion classes in the mid-60s, the French Protestant sector increased, and enrolled increasing numbers of students after Bill 101 came into effect, providing an alternative to the French-Catholic system. The French Protestant sector was particularly popular with non-Catholic francophones, e.g. immigrants from Haiti and the Maghreb. Thus far, we have only two interviews with ex-students from the French Protestant sector. We would like to interview more.

The French Catholic system was a logical choice for Catholic francophones or those who spoke a romance language. As noted above, the French Catholic system did accept some immigrants, although it is not clear why some immigrants were accepted while others were denied admission. Some parents 'fought like hell' and triumphed, while others 'begged and pleaded' but were turned away. Was there a pattern that varied over time, or from parish to parish? Was acceptance or rejection determined by individual schools or principals? To elucidate this mystery, we need to speak to immigrants who were accepted into the French Catholic system prior to Bill 101. We have conducted a few interviews, but need more.

Evidence thus far collected corroborates the 'common knowledge' that Non-Catholics were most often obliged to enroll in English Protestant schools. This policy was not surprising for 'Protestants' (e.g. Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc) but it was surprising for Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox immigrants, whose religion was far closer to Catholicism than any Protestant denomination.

¹³ English Catholic schools were not available in small towns or some rural regions.

We would like to interview non-Catholics who were admitted into the French-Catholic system.

During the early 20th century, as Robert Gagnon reported, there were conversations and experimental collaborations between Montreal's Jewish community and the French Catholic school commission. However, by the 1930s the Jewish community and French Catholic schools had agreed to go their separate ways. The only Jewish students we have found who still attempted to enroll in a French Catholic school after the 1930s were French-speakers. None of the non-Christians who have participated in this research were accepted in a French Catholic school. We would like to interview non-Christians who were educated in the French Catholic system.

Many people continue to agree with historian Robert Gagnon's claim that no immigrants were ever turned away from French Catholic schools. In order to make this bold claim, they must have abundant evidence of immigrants accepted by French Catholic schools. We request that they share names and contact information so that we can speak to these ex-students and document their experiences.

Reasons for Rejection From French Catholic Schools

Immigrants have often speculated about why they were not permitted to enroll in French Catholic schools. Was it a provincial law? The opposite is true. A provincial law¹⁴ obliged ALL schools in Montreal to accept ALL students. Immigrants have speculated that they were turned away from French Catholic schools because of a directive from the Archbishop of Quebec. Robert Gagnon – in his *Histoire de la Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal* (Boréale 1996) and his influential paper *Pour en finir avec un mythe: le refus des écoles catholiques d'accepter les immigrants* (1997) – demonstrated that the Catholic Church and the Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal (CÉCM), were well aware of their responsibility to educate immigrants, and they developed policies and programs to attract them. Did immigrants fail to respond? Or did schools fail to implement official policies and programs? If so, why?

It was 'common knowledge' by the end of the Second World War that French Catholic schools would not accept non-Christians, hence they did not seek

¹⁴ The Education Act was amended in 1870. « Le législateur précisera que les écoles des commissions scolaires protestante et catholique ne peuvent refuser un enfant qui réside sur le territoire de la municipalité scolaire de Montréal parce qu'il n'est pas catholique ou protestant. »

admission. Only non-Christians immigrants who were francophone or francophile attempted to enroll. One Jewish student in this study reported that her mother 'spoke excellent French' but she was turned away. In two cases, the Jewish families were francophone, but were turned away. In two other cases (one Jewish, one Muslim) the mothers had been educated by French nuns in their home countries and expected their children to be welcome in Quebec's Catholic schools. They were not admitted.

It was also 'common knowledge' among non-Catholics that they would not be accepted in French Catholic schools. Nonetheless, some immigrants attempted to register. Two Orthodox students (one Greek, one Russian) believed their religion was almost identical to Catholicism. French Catholic schools rejected them as Protestants. Two other non-Catholics simply wanted to be educated in French. They were not admitted.

Michael D Behiels presented the demographic and political context of 20th century immigration in his book, *Quebec and the Question of Immigration: From Ethnocentrism to Ethno Pluralism 1900-1985*¹⁵. Behiels showed Quebec transforming from a French and British society (95.5% in 1901) to a pluralist society in 1971, with large communities of immigrants, particularly a Yiddish-speaking Jewish group and an Italian-speaking Catholic group.

	1901	percentage	1941	percentage	1971	percentage
French	230,067	63.9%	699,517	62.2%	1,115,625	59.0%
British	113,99	31.6%	273,370	24.5%	333,340	17.0%
Jewish	6,962	1.9%	63,898	5.7%	101,390	5.2%
Italian	2,102	0.6%	25,281	2.3%	148,725	7.6%
Other	7,201	2.0%	59,605	5.3%	219,372	11.2%

Montreal Population by ethnic group (from Behiels)

¹⁵ Canadian Historical Association 1991.

*"The Commission des Écoles Catholiques de Montreal (CÉCM) had two linguistic divisions, a majority one for French-Canadian Catholics and a minority one for anglophone Catholics - Irish, Scottish, English and increasingly after the turn of the century, Poles, Ukrainians and Italians. The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal attracted non-Catholic children because the language of instruction was English and the religious demands were few. On the other hand, **Catholic school officials actively dissuaded non-Catholic children from enrolling in their system** because they would threaten both the faith and the language of the French-Canadian children. (Emphasis added)*

"Neither francophone nor anglophone community leaders wanted the provincial government to alter the dual ethnic and religious constitutional structure. Their respective unwillingness to come to terms with religious and ethnic pluralism set the pattern for nearly seven decades and contributed in no small measure to the linguistic and cultural crises of the 1970s and 80s."¹⁶

Catholics have responded to this research in large numbers. They were the one religious group that naturally expected to be accepted by Catholic schools. The choice of French or English schools has often been attributed to high-level political decision or economic strategies. In fact, immigrants often simply wanted to enroll their children in the school closest to their home. They wanted a neighbourhood school where their children could make friends.

Political and economic strategies have also been attributed to the fact that immigrants who successfully registered their children in French Catholic grade school later switched to English high school. The primary motivation reported by participants interviewed in this research was to ensure a high level of bilingualism because neither the English nor the French system offered good second-language instruction. A pragmatic solution was to learn French in elementary school, because French grammar is difficult, and then to learn English in high school. Other students we have interviewed chose to go directly to an English school.

Many Catholic students would have preferred to be educated at a French Catholic school, and were surprised or shocked to be turned away. There was no consistent reason. Sometimes it was because they were 'immigrants' or because they 'did not speak French.' Sometimes one parent was not Catholic or didn't speak French and, although the other parent was Catholic and did speak French, the student was still not admitted. Reasons appear to be arbitrary and/or improvised.

¹⁶

Michael D. Behiels *Quebec and the Question of Immigration*

In one case, the family was turned away ‘because the school was full and there was no room.’ This seems reasonable and benign, except that English schools were also crowded during the baby boom years, yet they managed to find room for students. It is impossible to imagine a French Catholic school telling a francophone family from Lac St-Jean, ‘The school is full. There is no room. You’ll have to enroll at the English school on the other side of town.’ But of course that never happened to francophones-de-souche. It only happened to immigrants.

Student Experiences - Thumbnail Profiles

The following thumbnail profiles are taken from 75 interviews conducted during the period ending June 30, 2025. One hundred and sixty-four ex-students filled out an on-line survey and answered questions about their family’s language(s), religion(s), arrival in Quebec, the first year the student enrolled in school, if they had been accepted into the school of their choice, or not, and why. Seventy-five of 164 ex-students surveyed agreed to a personal interview, which ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes.

The survey questions can be seen here <http://tiny.cc/QSQ>

The thumbnail profiles below are presented in chronological order. Ex-students who have signed a public declaration are identified by name. The anonymity of the other participants has been respected. They are identified only by initials, which have also been anonymized.

Note that all ex-students were asked two contextual questions.

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare /frequent /very common

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? Yes / No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare /frequent /very common

Their answers reflect the ‘common knowledge’ in their various communities.

Abbreviations used in these thumbnails

EPS	English Protestant school(s)
ECS	English Catholic school(s)
FPS	French Protestant school(s)
FCS	French Catholic school(s)
K	kindergarten
HS	high school
GM	grandmother
GF	grandfather
QC	Quebec

English Catholic School Thumbnails

Ralph Mastromonaco

Declaration Included

NDG (region) – 1962 (First year of school)

His parents just wanted to enroll him and older brother at the nearest (French Catholic) school. They were turned away and had to enroll at nearest English Catholic school. The ECS was a very positive experience.

'An accepting school will attract other students'. RM subsequently received all his education in English but is fluently bilingual and works in both language as a lawyer. Has become an advocate for recognition that FCS pushed untold numbers of immigrant children into English schools.

RM has presented a petition at the National Assembly, on behalf of Italian students turned away from FCS.

Claudia Ottaviano-Maheux

Declaration Included

Ahuntsic – 1964

Parents arrived in 1951. Mother directly from Italy, father had worked for 5 years in Paris. Her parents spoke French and Italian at home. Neighbour kids spoke French. Parents tried to enroll her older brother at local FCS in 1958, but were turned away. The family tried again for her in 1964 at St Simon Apôtre school. The administrator said, «Vous êtes des immigrants. Il faut aller à l'école anglaise.» COM enrolled at John Cabot and struggled to learn English in grade one, receiving zero assistance.

Irene Ioannoni

Declaration Included

Tétreaultville – 1967

Most of the neighbourhood was French and Italian but older cousins and neighbours had already been refused admission to FCS so she entered directly into English system. However, her spoken French skills were very good because of social contacts. Enrolled at Lawrence O'Toole ECS.

LB

Tétreaultville – 1965

Most of the neighbourhood was English and Italian. Did not have a lot of social contact with francophones. Older cousins and neighbours had already been

refused admission to FCS so he entered directly into English system.
Enrolled at Saint Gerard's elementary school. HS in Rosemount then Marianopolis and McGill.

CR

LaSalle – 1971

Parents Portuguese via India and Pakistan. Neighbourhood was mostly English and immigrants.

CR not sure why his parents enrolled him in English school. (Laurier MacDonald) They are deceased. CR loved his education. Higher education was encouraged. Went directly from HS (LaSalle Catholic) to Acadia University in Nova Scotia.

RF

Rosemount – 1972

wFather arrived from Italy in 1954, mother in 1963. The parents spoke French at home and so English was to be learned at school. Parents enrolled her at Edward Murphy school. Parents chose English school for practical purposes, particularly language acquisition. She had never heard of students rejected from FCS prior to reading Ralph Mastromonaco's articles.

RF's husband's Italian family converted to a Protestant faith. He attended ECS elementary then EPS HS.

LQ

Chateauguay – 1961

Father came from Dublin 1952. Mother's family had been in Quebec several generations. Parents were Irish Catholics who lived in Verdun then moved to Chateauguay.

Parents enrolled her at Christ Roy FCS, where she stood out as bilingual with a 'foreign' name. During the FLQ crisis, the high school 'could not guarantee her safety' so after a delayed period out of school she enrolled at Howard Billings HS. LQ struggled to catch up on her written English.

LB

Verdun – 1951

Mother came from UK (1928). Father arrived from Cape Breton. Parents were English-speaking Catholics. Family chose St Willibrord's ECS (1-11) because it was the neighbourhood school. Education was very important for her mother but LB's stepfather didn't think higher education was necessary for girls. LB paid her own way to Marianopolis, which was still an all-girl school. (Loyola was boys only). LB became a teacher and taught English Second Language with a French schoolboard.

RL

Vinton – 1950

Ancestors had been in Quebec many generations. One branch of the family went back to Normandy, giving RL a francophone family name. RL's mother spoke some French, his father none. The Pontiac region of West Quebec is predominantly English-speaking. RL enrolled at Vinton ECS because it was the only school in the village. RL continued in the English sector for HS at Campbell's Bay.

Piera Di Fruscia

Declaration Included

Rosemount – 1960

Father arrived from Italy in 1956. Mother and 5 kids followed 1959. Mother took the school-age children to Ste Bernedette elementary school because it was the closest, and Catholic. Mother was told the school was too crowded (because of baby boom) so there was 'no room.' PF enrolled at Saint Finnbar ECS, which was also very crowded but made room for immigrants. Later JFK HS in Villeray.

LG

LaSalle – 1984

Mother arrived from Italy mid 50s, father early 60s. Mother was turned away from French school. Father arrived later and by then immigrants didn't try to enroll in FCS. LG went to Laurendeau-Dunton ECS. (attached to French school) Separate start times Eng- Fr students. Some taunting between Anglos and Francos. Bill 101 spray painted.

SO

Ville-Émard – 1939

Polish GF arrived before First World War. GM followed after with SO's father. Mother was also an immigrant educated in Poland.

SO did K and G 1-2 in Polish (at a French girl's school) and then started ECS grade 3 at Holy Cross. SO remembers that even in 1939, immigrants were expected to go to English school.

FC

NDG – 1968

Maternal GF arrived 1949, GM and mother followed 1955.

Father's family 1953. Father worked in construction and spoke French. The Parish priest was Québécois.

In the 1960s it was 'common knowledge' that Italians would attend ECS, but English education provided economic benefits so the ECS was a positive experience. The family was immersed in French culture and spoke Italian at home so the children became trilingual.

PD

Ste-Foy – 1980

Parents educated in English, as were his older siblings.

Father was Irish. Mother francophone. The family mostly spoke French at home. Anglos were a minority and exotic in the area.

Parents enrolled him in an ECS to acquire English, but then moved him to a private French high school, the only member of the family to receive part of his basic education in French. He stood out with an Anglo name, and because he 'code switched' with other bilinguals.

Then English CEGEP St Lawrence (which brought together previously segregated Catholics and Protestants, and was 80% francophone), followed by Concordia, Université de Montréal and PhD at Université Laval.

Rosanna Bruni

Declaration Included

Tétreaultville – 1966

Father arrived from Italy in 1955, mother 1956. Father had worked in Belgium so already knew French.

Older brother, born in Italy, arrived age 3. French school was right across the street. Brother was not admitted because he was an immigrant. ECS was farther away. RB and 2 other siblings followed brother in ECS. If Quebec had been smarter then, there'd be no problem with French today.'

Michael Gaug

Declaration Included

Longueuil – 1962

Mother's family from Hungary. Eight siblings born there. Mother born QC 1932. Father born in Romania 1929. Both parents educated at [Saint-Louis-de-France school](#) in a mixture of French, English and German. They went to English high school. Quebec-raised parents spoke French. They attended St-Jude's (French) church in Longueuil, and its associated school was very close to their home. Parents expected MG to be enrolled there.

The Curé decided he should attend the English school with other immigrants. During the baby boom years, new schools opened frequently obliging students to change schools several times. Then MacDonald-Cartier HS, which bussed students from as far away as Farnham. Too far from home to participate in social life. Then Champlain cecep, which merged formerly segregated Catholics and Protestants.

CP

Chabanel area – 1958 (age 11)

Father came from Italy in 1955. Mother and three sons followed in 1958 by boat. They lived on St-Urbain in Chabanel area. St-Simon-Apôtre school was a block away. Fall of 58, father took them to the school to enroll. CP was 11.

The father went to see the principal who said, 'Italians don't go to French school. They have to go to English school.' The nearest ECS was St-Rita's in Ahuntsic, a twenty minute bus ride. The recently emigrated family didn't question the 'rules.'

RS

Downtown eastside – 1948

Mother arrived from Czechoslovakia, age 14 in early 1930s. Father also from Czechoslovakia. They met and married in Quebec, then lived on Ste. Elizabeth Street, south of Ste. Catherine. Mother took RS to the French school. Assumed that was where she would enroll. All the neighbourhood kids were francophones so she had learned to speak some French, no English.

Mother took her to the school and they went to a classroom. The teacher gave her a weird look while mother was still standing at the door. The teacher spoke to the mother and said RS had to leave, 'because children of immigrants were not allowed in francophone schools.' Then they moved to Park Ex and she went to ECS.

Clementina Clerici

Declaration Included

NDG – 1962

Father arrived from Italy in 1953, mother 1955. They were one of the last couples married by proxy, in October.

CC born 1956, brother 1962, sister 1972. Parents spoke French in Italy and Quebec. Both parents took her to the French Notre-Dame-de-Grâce school, but 'the places that they had were only for the French community.' (She only learned this year later.) So they went to St Augustine of Canterbury ECS, which was further away. An Irish aunt helped with English spelling. Stayed in English schools: Marymount, then worked, then Concordia.

Wealthier friends sent their kids to Villa Maria private French school.

PD

St-Michel – 1969

Mother arrived 1955 with brother from Sicily, father came in 1959 to marry mother. St-Michel neighbourhood was very francophone so she spoke French, no English. All her friends went to FCS. But father wanted her to go to English school because he had cousins in USA. Father wanted her to be able to speak with cousins but also wanted her to learn a third language because she already spoke Italian and French. She fought for FCS, but father won. St Dorothy ECS was just across the street.

RM

Ville-Émard – 1965

Mother arrived from Italy in 1947 (age 13). Father arrived 1946 (age 18). They married 1955. Kids born 56, **59**, 62. Kids played on the street in a mixture of languages: French, English and others.

Parents wanted children to go to French school but were told, 'no' because they were immigrants. It was laborious for parents to learn English to help their children with homework. "Most Italian families would have preferred to send their kids to French schools. Immigrants were baffled to learn that immigrants were almost all sent to English schools. It is a mystery how some Italians got accepted in French schools."

FR

Chabanel area – 1964

Father arrived from Italy in 1954, mother 1957. Father spoke French and wanted to send son to French school. It seemed very natural and logical, although kids only spoke Italian. When it came time to register for school, FR was given a verbal test to make sure he could speak French, and failed the test. None of the immigrants in the neighbourhood – Italian, Polish, Ukrainian – passed the test and so none were accepted in the French school. All immigrants went to John Cabot ECS. FR struggled until grade 3 to learn English.

VG

Villeray – 1965

Father arrived from Italy in 52, mother 53. They were married by proxy. Sister born 58. VG 59, sister 65.

The family would have preferred French school. Many Italians learned French at school in Italy. VG's mother integrated in French in QC and never learned English. VG only spoke French until older sister went to English school.

"Everyone knew" that immigrants had to enroll in English schools in Quebec. Immigrants also wanted to learn English.

MB

Baie-Comeau – 1955

Father had deep French roots in QC but was adopted by an aunt in Rhode Island. Mother from NB.

MB went to French kindergarten (one of the first in QC) then English elementary school. They did not have their own building until grade 4. They were a subsector of the French school board.

Then McCormick Memorial HS was built. Most English-speakers in B-C became highly bilingual.

TC

Dorval – 1946

GF from Ireland. Father born 1905, Montreal. Mother was Scotch immigrant via Ontario. Both Catholic.

Lived in Strathmore area of Dorval, which was a very English town. École St Louis boys' school was 1/3 English and 2/3 French, segregated by floors

First two years of HS, travelled to Darcy McGee HS by commuter train. Then the family moved to west NDG when he was 13. Acquired very little French in school but did so later in life.

Faustina Billotta

Declaration Included

St-Michel – 1963 (age 15)

Followed her married sister from Italy at age 15. Sister thought there would be better opportunities in Quebec. FB already spoke French and expected to enroll at the French school, which was very close to their apartment. The school would not admit her because she was an immigrant. Although she knew no English, FB was forced to complete HS at an ECS. FB still speaks mostly French and wanted to be interviewed in French. More than 60 years later, she is still deeply disturbed that the FCS refused to admit her.

BG

Ahuntsic – 1954 (age 9)

Family arrived from Trinidad in 1954. Family specifically chose Montreal because it was largely French.

They were English-speaking so he attended St Rita's. Ahuntsic was a bilingual area and he had a very positive educational experience. His best friend is a francophone who attended St Rita's. They spoke French and English together. BG has stayed in touch with most of his high school friends: they were a mixture of many ethnicities and are mostly bilingual or trilingual.

Luisa Silvestro

Declaration Included

Ahuntsic – 1960

All four grandparents arrived from Italy before First World War. Parents were born in Montreal: mother 1918, father 1919. Both parents educated at trilingual schools, which were part of the French Catholic school board. Parents spoke mostly English at home, so wanted daughters educated in French to become fluently bilingual (they also transmitted Italian).

LS was enrolled in a French kindergarten. Her mother took her to La Visitation school for enrollment in grade 1. Despite the family's religion (Catholic) and the mother's proficiency in French, she was told to take her daughter to the ECS. Mother believed it was because she had an Italian name. LS's sister followed in the English Catholic system at St Rita's school in Ahuntsic.

Franca Confente

Declaration Included

Mile End – 1962

Father came from Italy in mid-50s. Mother followed soon after. Parents married and lived in Mont Laurier, where FC and elder sister were born. Parents were totally francized. In the home, they listened to French radio and TV. Father was a lumberjack but contracted pleurisy so couldn't work as a lumberjack. Family moved to Montreal.

Mile End was quite French at the time. When older sister was ready for school (1960), father took her to the local French Catholic school. The school said, 'No'. Father begged them to take his daughter who spoke French but no English. The official insisted that French schools did not take immigrant children. They had to enroll daughter at an English schools. FC also went to English Catholic school.

LR

Saint Lambert – 1952

Father had deep francophone roots. Mother's family Irish-Scots from 1880s.

In Saint Lambert there were two schools for Catholics: École Saints-Anges for girls, with some classes for English students. Mother wanted to enroll LR in French section but was refused because mother didn't speak French, which determined mother tongue. Father's language (French) didn't count.

LR's husband is German who had to attend an English school. Most Italian friends tell the same story.

Vincent Gabrielli

Declaration Included

NDG – 1962

Family came from Italy in 1962. Father had worked in Belgium so already spoke French. VG was born in 1956 so was old enough to enroll in grade 1. Newly immigrated father took him to the local French Catholic school but was told that immigrants had to attend the English Catholic school. As new immigrants, they did not question authority and followed instructions. Enrolled at Saint Raymond school. Parents spoke little English. It would have been easier for them if their sons had been educated in French.

Parents later bought a house in LaSalle and VG attended LaSalle Catholics Comprehensive school then John Abbott college.

Monika Boos

Declaration Included

Côte-des-Neiges – 60

Parents arrived in 1954 from Yugoslavia via a decade in Austria. MB was born a few weeks after parents arrival in Quebec. They were sponsored in Canada by father's uncle. The family language was mostly German.

Côte-des-Neiges was a diverse neighbourhood with a lot of children, and many spoke English. The choice of school for MB was based on proximity. Parents wanted to register their daughter at the closest school, which was a French school – Saint-Pascal-Baylon. The school did not want to accept a German-speaking student, even if the family was Catholic. MB was sent to St Kevin's school, an ECS that was further from the home. As new immigrants, they did not question authority and followed instructions. Younger siblings followed MB into English Catholic system.

English Protestant School Thumbnails

Anna Fuerstenberg

Declaration Included

Mile End –1953

Family came from Poland (via refuge camp in Germany) in 1952. AF had brother 10 years older (now deceased). Parents spoke Polish, German, Yiddish and French. They lived on Hutchison near Villeneuve.

AF's parents wanted to enrol her in French school on Laurier, because French was a language they understood and therefore could communicate with teachers and help with homework. The school asked, 'Are you Jewish?' Mother replied, 'I don't think that's any of your business!' Mother later told AF, 'They were afraid we were communists.' AF – 'And we were! So they were right!'

Mother did not immediately take 'no' for an answer and tried to enroll AF at other FCS, unsuccessfully.

Finally enrolled at Bancroft, with many other immigrant students. Later Guy Drummond (Outremont). Then family moved to Côte-des-Neiges and attended Northmount HS. High evaluation of the Protestant education system. Then AF left Canada for adventures before attending UC Berkeley.

KH

Outremont – 1953

Family were DPs from Germany – via Norway. Parents spoke Yiddish, German and English.

First enrolled at Alfred Joyce, Outremont. They knew that other Jewish families enrolled at EPS and were not welcome at FCS.

Soon moved to Monkland village NDG and attended Willingdon school grades 2-6. Later Monkland HS, quite a diverse group of students. KH remembers bomb threats during FLQ years. Wagar only opened in grade 9, quite Jewish. And then McGill.

SS

NDG – 1950

Ancestors Irish and Scottish since 1803. Protestants. Some Gaelic-speaking Romans Catholics. Ancestors in Quebec City were bilingual. Several educated at l'Université Laval or Ursuline Convent. Family had a positive attitude toward learning French and knowing Quebec history.

Family had a business in NDG. SS attended Herbert Symonds elementary school. In Grade 4 moved to Morin Heights. Political and linguistic polarization in 1960s. Private HS in the Townships – Ste Helen’s Anglican.

PN

Town of Mount Royal – 1966

First ancestors arrived in Quebec City and Eastern Townships.

Mother’s family from USA – doctors. Baptists. Father’s family Presbyterians.

Enrolled at Carlyle ECS school, TMR, right across the street. Later Champlain and Bishop’s.

PM

Rosemount – 1965

Paternal GF visited QC 1898, returned to Italy. Came to QC 1909 with one son, wife followed in 1913 with two other sons. The Catholics kids went to a bilingual (Fr/Eng) school.

Maternal GF born in England, arrived Toronto 1909.

In 1935 Italian Catholic GF became Pentecostal. Verbotten to attend FCS. Father went to William Dawson HS. Because family had become Protestant, PM enrolled at Rosemount school. PM though he was attending the ‘local school.’ Only realized years later that Protestants and Catholics were completely segregated.

Miriam Zylberstein Byers

Declaration Included

Mile End – 1951 (grade 3)

Family emigrated from Poland via France. Also spoke Russian.

MZB born 1943 and did first two years of school in France. When the family arrived in QC she was in grade 3 and had already spoke French – with a French accent. Family wanted to enroll her in local FCS but she was denied admission because she was Jewish. The family considered Marie-de-France private school but the cost was prohibitive. MZB enrolled at Bancroft.

She still has francophone colleagues who ask why she went to an English school and why she speaks French with European accent. Some do not believe she was not allowed to attend FCS.

JC

Town of Mount Royal – 1966

Mother's family came from Ontario (from England many generations ago.) Father's family came from England in 1700s (Anglicans).

Family was living in Town of Mount Royal. First school was Dunrae Gardens - EPS. There were many Greek and Armenian students, mostly bussed in from Park Ex. JC remembers FLQ bomb threats and many families leaving QC.

MR

Trois-Rivières – 1962

Parents came to QC from Ontario in 1953 for work at paper mill. The environment in Trois-Rivières was mostly French, plus a small Syrian community. Outside school, home and church, everything was French.

Enrolled at Trois-Rivières HS (K-11). The English Protestant school and English Catholic school (mostly Irish) were on the same street and kids shouted insults at one another. Family moved to St. Lambert in 1968. Saint-Lambert elementary, then Chambly County High.

CO

Pierrefonds – 1974

Father and GM arrived from Czechoslovakia after World War Two. Father grew up poverty in Park Ex. He spoke Bohemian, Polish and Russian, plus learned to speak both French and English perfectly.

Maternal GM from Moose Jaw and maternal GF an Acadian from Shediac. Parents met in Montreal.

CO was born in 1969 around the time of Bill 63. Brother born later and their mother was part of class action lawsuit to permit brother to enroll in English school. Parents worked in both English and French. Family lived in Hudson. Only two choices: English Protestant or French Catholic. Parents thought they had a better chance of learning both languages at the Protestant school.

HK

Hudson – 1970

Parents emigrated from Germany in 1953 and 1954. Met and married in Montreal. HK attended Saturday German classes at John Rennie in a heritage program.

Kindergarten and grade 1 – Dorion Gardens. Then Mount Pleasant in Hudson grades 2-3 and Hudson High 4-6 for French Immersion. French Immersion was so popular in the 70s that it exceeded supply and many kids from Hudson had to be bussed to Dorion Gardens (now part of Vaudreuil-Dorion).

KH did 'inverted immersion' in high school: mostly French in Sec 1 then increasing amounts of English. There were many theories about best practices in second language instruction.

DP

Ville St-Laurent – 1966

Mother arrived from NY to marry father in 1940. Father was born in Quebec. Both Jewish.

Started school at Garden Vale elementary in Ville St-Laurent for kindergarten. The family did not believe Jewish students could be accepted into FCS so EPS was the only public choice. DD had a bad experience with her teacher in grade 1 so switched to private Jewish school – Talmud Torah – for grades 1-4. Then Carlyle school in TMR grades 5-6.

Mary Moroska

Declaration Included

Little Burgundy – 1957

Grandparents left Russia after the Revolution to live in France. Religion Russian Orthodox.

Parents educated in France and had French passports. They relocated to Morocco after WWII. MM born there in 1950. Family left Morocco after Independence declared in 1956 and the country became unstable.

Arrived in Quebec 1957, living in Little Burgundy. The family spoke French so expected to enroll daughter at FCS. The family was not Catholic and parents were not willing to "convert" or declare that their daughter would be raised as a Catholic. MM was turned away from FCS although Russian Orthodox and Catholicism are much more similar than Protestant religions.

MM enrolled at Royal Arthur in Little Burgundy, and then from grade 2 at Bedford school in Côte-Des-Neiges.

Karyn Zuidinga

Declaration Included

Préville – 1968 kindergarten

Family emigrated from Holland in 1958. Father spoke a little French and English. Older brother (now deceased) was taken to the FCS to enroll because the family was Catholic and the school was very close. The principal explained to them that they could not enroll at the school because they were not French. 'Immigrants don't ask questions. They just want to fit in.'

So they went to the English Protestant school – Préville elementary. The secretary told them Catholics could not attend the Protestant school. The family was Catholic. There were only two elementary schools in Préville and both refused to admit KZ. The impasse was resolved by filling out a form renouncing their Catholic religion – which they did, because there was no other public option.

Politics intensified during the 70s and 80s. Half the people they knew left Quebec.

SP

Mile End – 1962

Father came to Quebec first (1958), mother and daughter followed from Greece a year later. She was born in QC

SP attended Greek school for a year, then Bancroft, close to home. Parents are deceased so cannot verify why they chose Protestant school, but it was 'common knowledge' that Greek orthodox students were not accepted into French Catholic schools. All the Greeks she knows went to Protestant schools, until Bill 101, then everything switched. Most of the teachers at Bancroft were Jewish. Then she went to Barclay and Montreal High School.

SM

Chomedey – 1967

GF arrived 1903. GM shortly after. Both from Armenia and Jewish. Chomedey had many Jewish students and they all attended Protestant school. Later on Western Laval HS and then Dawson.

HM

Rosemount – 1958

Mother's family *pure laine* francophone. Father Hungarian, orphaned age 10. Came to Canada by himself in 1950. Met mother at l'École des beaux-arts. Catholic mother was excommunicated for marrying a Protestant. Parents wanted enroll kids in FPS but none available so they chose English Protestant school in Rosemount. Then moved to Ville D'Anjou Dalkeith school. Then moved to St-Lambert/Préville. Grade 7 moved to Brossard and did 1 year in Préville/St.Lambert. Then parents put her into Villa Maria Catholic boarding school in 1965 as an antidote to teenage temptations.

CG

Town of Mount Royal – 1960

Arrived from Cairo, Egypt in 1957. Family language was French. Religion was Jewish. Three siblings enrolled at Algonquin Protestant school in TMR. CG started grade 1 and learned English quickly. It was harder for older siblings to learn English in grades 3 and 6. Family would have preferred a French school but it was 'common knowledge' that Catholic schools did not take Jewish students.

Algonquin school was about 50% Jewish, Canadian born. Later went to TMR HS. Quality of education in Protestant system was excellent. Then went to McGill.

Johan Mady

Declaration Included

Lachute – 1958

Father was in Montreal during WWII then returned to Lebanon to marry. Parents came together in 1947. Family is Muslim, but her mother was educated in Lebanon by French nuns. Expected her children to be educated in French Catholic schools in QC. But not accepted, so the three children went to EPS because they were open to other religions. The family were the only Muslims in Lachute and probably the only 'ethnics.' Their neighbourhood in Lachute was mostly English.

For grade 11 new Laurentian Regional HS (half English and half French, but totally segregated).

During first years of CEGEPs, McGill offered CEGEP courses in 1972. JM stayed at McGill for university.

Greek friend had same experience. They went into Protestant system because of religion.

GR

Park Extension – 1953

Mother's family arrived QC around 1910. Father's family came to Montreal 1920s via Alberta. Religion Jewish. It was 'common knowledge' back in the 20s and 30s only Protestant schools would take Jewish students.

In grade 2, he moved to Ville St. Laurent. St Laurent High School had elementary classes. In grade 4, bussed to Russel school in TMR. Grades 5-7 a new school built in Ville St. Laurent. Christian holidays plus Jewish kids had Jewish holidays. GR's wife arrived in QC age 10 from Paris in 1960 but could not go to a FCS because she was Jewish. Many other friends had the same experience. One friend attended a French Protestant school in late 60s.

KB

Dorion Gardens – 1970

Adopted family. Mother's family Irish Protestant, came during famine in 1840s via Townships. Father's family came around the same time.

Family living in Park Bel-Air on south side of 20. First school in Dorion Gardens on the north side of 20. Later Macdonald HS, John Abbott and Concordia.

MB

Snowdon – 1957

Paternal GPs came from Russia in 1912. Maternal GP escaped pogroms early 1900s. Parents born in QC, Plateau area. Attended Jewish People's School on Van Horne near Westbury. It was part of PSBGM or followed PSBGM curriculum. Snowdon area was predominantly Jewish. No thought of going to French Catholic school. Later went to Northmount, then Dawson and Sir George Williams.

CS

Westmount – 1958

Father's family arrived from UK in 1886. Mother arrived in Canada in 1926 and then in Montreal shortly after WWII. First school Roslyn, nearest public school. Father was a graduate. Very few francophones in Westmount.

Then Lakefield private boarding school in Ontario for 5 years then back to Westmount High. During first years of CEGEPs, Sir George Williams offered CEGEP courses in 1972. Continued his education in his 30s.

DT

Town of Mount Royal – 1952 (high school)

Before the Second World War the family had been in Winnipeg.

Family arrived from Ottawa 1952 where DT had finished elementary school.

Enrolled at Mount Royal High School in TMR, which was very English. Graduated from McGill 1961 and father said, 'Leave this province and don't come back.' Because of Quiet Revolution, father did not think there would be any jobs for anglophones. DT went to Western University then worked in Toronto until transferred back to Montreal in 1967.

PB

Préville – 1974

Paternal GGF came to Montreal from England. Paternal GM came from Delaware. Maternal GF and GM from Newfoundland. Both families lived in Verdun where parents met. Soon after PB's birth, they moved to Brossard and stayed until 1976. They were the only Anglo family in the neighbourhood and had little contact with francophone neighbours. Brossard did not yet have a lot of schools. PB had temporary expansion classrooms.

Both parents were working in Montreal. Housing prices dropped due to FLQ violence so family moved to NDG in 1976. A lot of Bill 101 graffiti. He attended Willingdon elementary then Westmount HS. Then Dawson and Concordia.

VH

Le Moyne – 1958

Family moved to Quebec from Alberta and Ontario 1958. Heritage Scottish/Irish. VH's mother approached the local school to enroll her, but the family was Protestant and in those days 'there was no mixing of Catholics and Protestants.' She was in St. Lambert elementary annex for grade 3, then Préville 4-6. Moved to NDG, Westmount HS grade 7-8. Brother went to Westhill. Then moved to Saint Bruno, grade 9, and grade 10-11 Préville. Then father transferred to Toronto. VH returned to QC 2001.

HS

Point Saint-Charles – 1951

Mother's family came from Scotland late 1800s. Father's family from Wales. Father left school at age 9 to support his family. Mother never finished grade school.

South of the railroad tracks was English, a mix of Protestant and Catholic. North of the tracks was French Catholic. Protestant kids went to Lorne school, English Catholics to Saint Gabriel's school and French Catholics to Saint-Charles school. Point Saint-Charles was a rough neighbourhood with a lot of fighting, mostly between English and French.

HS later went to the High School of Montreal, which had students from as far away as Ville St Laurent and East End Montreal. None of friends from the Point went there. He transferred to Verdun HS. Then went to Sir George Williams, which was an alienatingly different world of apparent wealth and affluence but also extraordinary diversity with kids from around the world.

LL

NDG – 1962

Father born in Lachine. Grandparents were British and moved back to England, where the father later met a woman from France. They married in 53. LL born in England, then the family came to QC in 1957. Mother fluently bilingual. They lived on the border of Westmount and then NDG. Grade 1 at Willingdon. Moved to Roxboro in 1963. Later Riverdale HS. Only really learned French as an adult.

GC

Coaticook – 1954

Father's family arrived in 1803. Free Will Baptists who later converted to Anglicanism. Mother a Catholic francophone with roots back to Jacques Cartier. Father was injured in WWII and sent back to veteran's hospital in Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue. Mother, who had been raised in an orphanage, joined the Women's Auxiliary Core, was shipped to Alberta, learned English, then back to QC. Met at the hospital then met again in Coaticook after the war and fell in love.

GC's parents needed permission to marry in a Catholic church, under the condition that the children would be raised Catholic. Father believed that Protestant schools offered more education and less religion, so GC enrolled in English Protestant school, but the children attended French Catholic church.

GC did not have to renounce Catholic religion to attend Protestant school. The

family paid taxes to the Protestant school and the father had 'droits acquis' to send children to Protestant school. Could not be refused. But also had to pay compensation of \$4.50 per month to admit a 'Catholic' child.

George Contaxakis

Declaration Included

Mile End – 1962 (grade six)

Father and son arrived from Cairo, Egypt. Family was Greek Orthodox. GC was in grade 6.

Father took him to *College Français* on Fairmount, and he was placed in grade 6. A few minutes later the principal came into the class, pointed at GC and asked, "Are you Catholic?" GC said, "No, I'm Orthodox." Then he said, "You're not allowed to be here." The father did not know the Catholic school system did not accept Greek Orthodox students.

GC subsequently discovered that many non-Catholics were denied access to FCS.

DC

Ville St-Laurent – 1951

Mother born in New Brunswick, during depression came to work with wealthy family. GF was from Britain. Father born in Granby.

Kindergarten at Elmgrove (brand new school) in Ville St-Laurent. Then boundaries redefined and she attended Parkdale school. Both close to home. Neighbourhood houses built 1948, very new. Most of the fathers had been overseas during the war. Kids all played in English. No ECS in Ville St-Laurent until much later.

Saint Laurent HS overcrowded because of baby boom. Church basements full of classes.

Malcolm Campbell High School built for grade 9. Many Armenians and kids commuting from West Island – eg Roxboro. Then Sir Winston Churchill school was built, and boundaries redefined for grades 10-11. Sir Winston Churchill class was 70% Jewish. High quality of education at all schools. Students motivated to go to university, many the first in their family. Then to McGill.

JT

St Léonard – 1970

Both sides of the family arrived from Italy in the 1920s. Mother born here but raised in an orphanage and educated in French by nuns, then went to Holy Family English

HS. Not sure why. Father's family converted to Protestantism. Father's elementary school was Peace Centennial then Montreal HS and McGill. Mother also became Protestant.

Family living in St Léonard, Jérôme-Le Royer school board. All the other kids – mostly Italian – went to local Catholic schools. Many of the families were related. JT's family was different because they had no relatives and were Protestant. JT bussed to Mountrose school in Rosemount. French immersion 7 -8. Vanier and McGill.

Nicolette de Smit

Declaration Included

Lachine – 1962 (grade 2)

Father went back and forth between Dutch Indonesia and Holland. Mother was pure Dutch but had friends from Dutch Indonesia. Parents met in Holland. NS born there. Only Dutch spoken. Mother was raised Catholic but not religious. Father nominally Protestant but not religious. Family with four children came to Montreal in 1962. Initially lived in Lachine. NS wanted to go to French school but because the family was not Catholic, she could not. Mother had been raised Catholic but could not speak French. They discovered there was a French Protestant school in Outremont area but it was too far from Lachine for an 8 year old to commute. NS has memories of liking the Frenchness of QC and resisting being sent to English school. Enrolled at Summerlea school Lachine. Learned English fairly quickly with little assistance. Moved to Pointe-Claire for grade 7. Brand new development. In HS she was a Francophile who took French-enriched courses. Then went to de Maisonneuve cegep (travelling from Pointe-Claire) but struggled with local French. Could understand professors but not students. So switched to Loyola, affiliated with Udm, then Concordia.

Carole Rentschler

Declaration Included

Ste-Therese – 1962

Father arrived from Germany in 1955. Mother arrived 1956. CR born 1957. Father spoke German and English, and quickly learned French. Mother spoke German and some English, no French. The family lived in a very francophone part of Ste-Therese so the children learned French playing on the street with neighbours. Father went to enroll CR at the local French school in 1962 but would not enroll her because the family was not Catholic. Directed them toward Protestant English school. Parents placed her in a private kindergarten to learn English and then she

enrolled at McCaig elementary in Rosémere, which was the closest ECS but much further from their home in Ste-Therese. When CR was 10 they moved to Rosémere, which had a large English-speaking community.

JE

Arvida – 1950

Mother related to Louis Hébert, 1660. Father came from Toronto in 1941. Parents met in Montreal. Father employed by Alcan so moved to Arvida. Very English-speaking neighbourhood (many employees had international roots) but the town was 90% French. Only French TV and radio, so JE became bilingual. Protestant school had grades 1- 11 then to Bishop's in Lennoxville.

Rachel Sinyor

Declaration Included

Côte-des-Neiges – 1964 (grade 4)

Family arrived in 1964. RS was 10. Father was from Morocco and mother from Bulgaria. They lived in Israel prior to Quebec. The family spoke Hebrew and French, which was why they chose Montreal. Parents went to register her at the local French school but were turned away because they were Jewish and not Catholic. Enrolled in Bedford school but learning English was a struggle.

Parents couldn't help.

Family moved to Chomedey and RS went to Souvenir school then Chomedey HS. Later Vanier and McGill.

Family had many Moroccan friends, who spoke primarily French, but were turned away from French Catholic schools and sent into the English Protestant system.

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French Protestant School Thumbnails

BD

Saint-Laurent – 1964

Mother was a holocaust survivor but not a practicing Jew. Father was Italian Catholic but atheist. When father arrived in Quebec, he asked to be excommunicated from Catholic Church. They were also trailblazers in wanting to put their daughter in a French school. They did not want a Catholic school because mother had seen textbooks, of Italian cousins, and the books were too religious. They preferred less religious Protestant schools. Father was on a Committee for Neutral Schools, along with Unitarian Church and Henry Morgentaler.

Only a few available FPS. Closest to their home was Peace Centennial. In elementary school, the other students were Jewish, Jehovah's Witnesses, French from France, North African Muslims and some were Indigenous. Teachers were Huguenots from Belgium and Moroccan Jews. Textbooks were from France.

Baron Byng was available for high school, small French sector. BD switched to EPS close to home – Malcom Campbell – because French skills were well established. Then to Vanier and McGill.

AA

Montreal North – 1977

Father came to Quebec 1969 and prepared an apartment, then returned to Italy to marry. Parents arrived 1970. Father was a college educated assistant engineer. They arrived during the *Révolution Tranquille*, immediately after the Saint-Léonard crisis. Parents did not understand the rapidly shifting and complex politics as Bill 101 was enacted and met with considerable resistance. There was a lot of confusion.

AA started school one month after Bill 101 adopted. Gerald McShane ECS was 2 minutes from the home. Parents tried to enrol her there just before Bill 101 became law and were told she could not be admitted.

AA enrolled in English Protestant school -- Maple Hill --and did first year in English. Then transferred to French *Classe d'accueil*, to comply with Bill 101. (Same school with French classes). Maple Hill was not allowed to continue French classes so AA was transferred to the French sector of Nesbitt school grades 4-5. English and French totally separate. One teacher was a passionate nationalist, 'Ici, \$%@, on parle en français!' Lot of tension French vs English. Ambiguous identity as 'French' students in an English school.

Then she transferred to official French Protestant school grade, École de Maisonneuve on the Plateau. Long way from Montreal North. No busses available. Each transfer was to the 'closest' Protestant school. Repeatedly changing friends. Then went to Ahuntsic school near Henri-Bourrassa Metro for grade 6.

The Italian community was divided into two groups: part in French Catholic schools and part in English Catholic schools. They had their shared cultural references. AA was bounced from school to school in small French Protestant system and struggled to make friends or feel part of a community. She always felt outside the Italian community. AA could not transfer to Catholic French school, despite Bill 101, because she had started in Protestant system.

Closest French Protestant High School was Roberval. Students in 1980s were Haitian Protestants, Moroccan Jews, Greek Orthodox, and some Italians. Later AA switched to English for Champlain College and Concordia.

French Catholic School Thumbnails

SP

Murdochville – 1978

British parents arrived in 1969 with contract in northern Quebec. Both parents spoke French. Enrolled in École St Paul FCS. There was also an EPS. She enrolled the year after Bill 101. Parents did not expect to stay in Quebec but they saw an opportunity for daughters to learn French. Initially the school did not want an English student for kindergarten. The obstacle to taking non-Francophone students was the difficulty of integration. Mother convinced the nun that the girls would learn French quickly. By Christmas SP could speak French. For grade 5 moved to Rouyn-Noranda. Stayed in French system 5-6 plus Sec 1-2. Older waves of immigrants, eg Poles, were in English system.

Then boarding school in Sherbrooke to learn written English (sec 3-5) plus mother tongue French and then one year at McGill, one year at Université de Laval, then Concordia.

AC

Mile End – 1959

Born in France. Italian Father spoke French. He had also been a prisoner of war in the UK and felt some animosity toward English-speakers. He came in 1952. Mother and 3 children followed from Italy in 1959. The parents got their daughter into FCS (for girl's) but she was the only immigrant. A nun pulled her braids and called her a *stupide Italienne* so she only stayed 2 and a half weeks then switched to ECS. Her three brothers also quit the FCS for boys and switched to ECS.

MM

Pierrefonds – 1964

Mother old stock francophone from Abitibi and Quebec City. Mother moved to MTL as a teenager.

Grandparents pre war from Italy. Settled in NDG and raised 6 kids there, ECS. GM never learned to speak English or French. GF spoke English better than French.

Mother wanted kids to be educated in French because they spoke English at home. Parents were both Catholic and mother was Francophone de souche so MM was accepted at Monseigneur Deschamps school was closest.

She changed schools four times during elementary years because of new schools being built for baby boomers and redistribution. At one point, the three siblings

went to different schools. During FLQ crisis some friction for being different – she was called l'Anglaise. Politics ended some friendships. After high school went to Europe for a year and then Ottawa University.

Dida Berku

Declaration Included

Côte-des-Neiges – 1957

Parents Romanian, married in 1947, then escaped communist Romania and lived in Austria, where she was born in 1951. Came to Quebec 1953.

Her parents were both Jewish but her mother was educated at Notre-Dame de Sion by nuns, and in French. Wanted to send her children to French school. A FCS was right across the street on Dupuis. The school said, 'We can't admit you because you are immigrants and you're Jewish.' Parents did not want EPS and so chose a French private school – *Collège Marie de France*. Parents initially earned low salaries but scraped together the money (a month's salary) for a French private school. DB remembers only four non-Catholics in the entire school. The rest (hundreds) were francophones-de-souche.

Went to Wagar HS in CSL, where there were many immigrants, then McGill.

RT

Côte-des-Neiges – 1949

Both parents born in Quebec. Grandparents arrived from Italy 1920s. RT's older sisters were educated in English but brother was in French system for grade school then switched to English HS.

When RT started school, family was living in CDN. He enrolled at Saint-Pascal-Baylon, the closest school to home. Neighbourhood was 100% French. RT considered himself French Canadian until ethnic nationalism emerged. Then English-speakers and Italians were the problem.

Family moved to Town of Mount Royal. The schools there were very English so father sent him to a FCS on the Plateau. For HS father looked into a private French school. RT interviewed at Collège Brébeuf but he was not 'private school' material so he finished grade 12 in FCS (public) on the Plateau. There were no other Italians or immigrants. Some students were afraid of RT because they thought his father was a gangster and they asked weird questions about Italian culture.

RT was accepted at McGill, despite weak English. He wanted to study science, which was stronger at English universities. Studied for his MBA 1966-68. Then a PhD at Ohio State. Later taught at UQAM.

Declarations– Students rejected by French Catholic Schools

Interim Report to June 30, 2025

Catholic

Faustina Bilotta	Italian
Monika Boos	Yugoslavian
Rosanna Bruni	Italian
Franca Confente	Italian
Clementina Clerici	Italian
Piera De Fruscia	Italian
Vincent Gabrielli	Italian
Michael Gaug	German
Irene Ioannoni	Italian
Ralph Mastromonaco	Italian
Claudia Ottaviano-Maheux	Italian
Luisa Silvestro	Italian
Karyn Zuidinga	Dutch

Non-Christian

Dida Berku	Jewish - Romania
Anna Fuerstenberg	Jewish - Poland
Johan Mady	Muslim - Lebanon
Rachel Sinyor	Jewish – Morocco and Bulgaria
Miriam Zylberstein Byers	Jewish - Poland

Non-Catholic

George Contaxakis	Greek Orthodox
Mary Moroska	Russian Orthodox
Carole Rentshler	German Protestant
Nicolette de Smit	Dutch Agnostic

Déclaration d'un ancien élève du système d'éducation québécois

Nom:

Faustina Bilotta

Vos parents étaient-ils des immigrants de première génération ? s/o

Si oui, en quelle année sont-ils arrivés au Québec?

Ma sœur aînée est arrivée en 1958

Êtes-vous né(e) au Québec?

Non

Sinon, en quelle année êtes-vous arrivé(e) au Québec

1963, avec statut d'étudiante

Quel était le pays d'origine de votre famille ?

Italie

Quelles langues votre famille parlait-elle à son arrivée ?

Je parlais Italien et français de base
(études de deuxième langue)

Quelle(s) était (étaient) la(les) religion(s) de la famille ?

Catholique

Année de naissance :

1948

Première année d'études au Québec :

1963

L'admission dans une école catholique française vous a-t-elle été refusée ? Oui

Signature



Date 2025-08-01

Quelles étaient les raisons pour vous inscrire dans une école catholique française ?

Je parlais un peu français car j'avais étudié le français en Italie comme 2e langue. De plus, j'étais catholique et l'école était juste près de mon logement.

Où viviez-vous à l'époque ? (Quartier et rue)

St-Michel entre la 8e avenue et Legendre.

Comment vos parents ont-ils tenté de vous inscrire dans une école catholique française ?

Ma sœur aînée s'est présentée à l'école pour m'inscrire.

Quelles raisons ont été invoquées pour refuser votre admission ?

La raison était « On n'accepte pas les immigrants. Vous devez aller à l'école anglaise. » Ce n'était que plus tard que ma sœur m'a confié que j'avais été refusée parce que j'étais immigrante. Ça été un choc vraiment énorme et ça me dérange encore aujourd'hui, plus de 60 ans plus tard !

Quelle école vous a accepté(e) ?

L'école anglaise était beaucoup plus loin. J'avais 15 ans et il fallait terminer mes études secondaires dans une langue que je ne connaissais pas.

Connaissez-vous d'autres étudiants italiens qui souhaitaient suivre un enseignement en français, mais qui ont été refusés ? Oui

Si oui, considérez-vous que votre expérience était (soulignez une option) : rare / fréquente / très courante

Très, très courante. C'était le seul choix que l'on avait.

Connaissez-vous d'autres élèves italiens admis dans des écoles catholiques françaises ? Non
Si oui, considérez-vous que cette expérience était (soulignez une option) : rare / fréquente / très courante

La question de l'éducation au Québec avant la loi 101 était très controversée. Votre expérience a-t-elle déjà surpris quelqu'un ou suscité le scepticisme ? Si oui, veuillez la décrire.

Au fils des ans, j'ai souvent partagé l'expérience que j'ai vécue en me faisant refuser à l'école francophone avant la loi 101. Presque tous ceux à qui j'ai raconté mon expérience refusent d'admettre catégoriquement cette réalité, niant obstinément que nous avons vécu cette discrimination. Encore à ce jour, la majorité persistent en affirmant que les immigrants avaient le choix entre l'école française et l'école anglaise, et qu'ils ont choisi d'aller à l'école anglaise librement.

Ils refusent toujours de dialoguer et même de prendre le temps de vérifier les faits réels et historiques. Pourquoi ? Possiblement par faute de connaissance des problèmes auxquels les immigrants ont été confrontés lors des années avant la loi 101. Malheureusement, cette mésinformation persiste encore aujourd'hui par une grande majorité de Québécois qui se catégorisent de « souche ».

Encore à ce jour, à chaque fois que ce discours fait surface, je me sens insultée, en tant qu'être humain, en tant que personne qui a contribué économiquement et culturellement à enrichir la culture québécoise. Je peux vous confirmer avec assurance que plusieurs immigrants italiens et autres immigrants issus de cette époque partagent le même sentiment.

En fait, la communauté italienne, malgré les refus et les traitements discriminatoires reçus au fils des ans, a été l'une des communautés qui s'est le mieux intégrée avec une participation active à l'enrichissement du Québec, nombreux ceux qui sont devenus d'influents médecins, scientifiques, bâtisseurs, professeurs, artistes et bien plus.

Nous croyons que le temps est mûr pour que le gouvernement du Québec reconnaisse cette discrimination que nous avons subi et qu'il présente des excuses officielles. Beaucoup se posent cette question dans la communauté italienne : comment se fait-il que le gouvernement du Québec n'ait pris aucune action pour aider les immigrants à s'intégrer dans le réseau francophone, malgré le fait que plusieurs auraient aimé suivre ce chemin ?

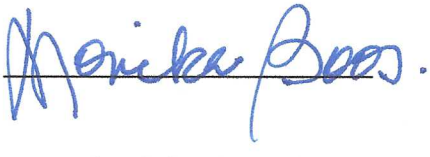
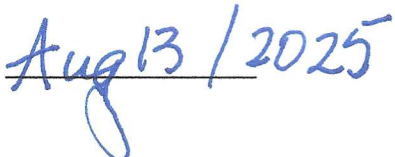
C'est une réalité qui n'est pas facile à reconnaître mais qui est tout de même un fait historique incontournable et important, qui a eu des répercussions importantes sur la prolifération de l'anglais parmi les communautés immigrantes de cette époque. Dommage qu'il n'y pas eu autant d'acharnement que nous vivons aujourd'hui pour l'application de la loi 101, car les conséquences de cette discrimination se font sentir clairement.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name: Monika Boos

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? 1954
Were you born in Quebec? yes
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? n/a
What was your family's country of origin? Yugoslavia via Austria
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Yugoslavian and German
What was the family religion(s)? Catholic

Year of Birth: 1954
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1960
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ? Yes

Signature  Date 

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?
St Pascal's was the nearest school to our home.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)
Côte-des-Neiges near Barclay and Plamondon

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?
My mother took me to the school to enroll me in grade 1.

What reason was given to deny you admission?
My mother was told that immigrants should go the English Catholic school. She did not question the decision. My life would have been very different if I had been allowed to attend the French school. My younger siblings also attended English schools.

Which school accepted you?
St-Kevin's (English Catholic)

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? No
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common
I do not know any other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied.
Unfortunately never had a conversation with anyone on this topic.)

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common
I do not know any immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic School.

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

I did have a conversation with someone who could not believe that I and my siblings were not accepted into French School when my parents wanted to sign us up for school.

Declaration by Former Student Rosanna Bruni

Name: Rosanna Bruni

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? Father arrived 1954, mother followed in 1955 with son.

Were you born in Quebec? Yes
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? N/A
What was your family's country of origin? Italy
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Italian. Father had lived in Belgium so also spoke French.

What was the family religion(s)? Catholic

Year of Birth: 1960
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1966
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ? Yes

Signature 

Date Aug 13, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

We were living in Tétreaultville, which was quite French. Father spoke French.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

Tétreaultville

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My older brother was born in Italy and arrived in Quebec age 3. My parents took him to be enrolled at the local French school, which was across the street, but he was not allowed to register. The English school was further away. My parents were concerned for his safety but a neighbour's daughter walked my brother to school. Our parents enrolled all three children in English schools.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

Which school accepted you?

St Lawrence O'Toole. Tétreaultville. It was much further from our home.

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Italian students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? Yes / No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

When I shared my family's story, French-speaking friends reacted with disbelief, unable to fathom that such things could happen. However, other immigrants met my words with quiet recognition. They had walked through similar trials themselves, and so my account did not shock them, it merely echoed experiences they already knew too well.

Declaration by Former Student Franca Confente

Name: Franca Confente

Were your parents first generation immigrants?
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? Yes
Father, early 50s. Mother followed soon after.

Were you born in Quebec?
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? Yes in Mont Laurier
N/A

What was your family's country of origin? Italy

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Italian

What was the family religion(s)? Catholic

Year of Birth: 1956

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1962

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school? Yes

Signature Franca Confente Date August 20, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school?
When my parents were married, they lived in Mont Laurier, where my older sister and I were born. My father worked in French and we listened to French radio and TV in the home.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)
The Mile End near Bernard and Saint-Urbain.

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school?
When my sister was old enough for school (1960), our father took her to the local French Catholic school.

What reason was given to deny you admission?
The school said, No. My father begged them to take his daughter who spoke French but no English. The official insisted that French schools did not take immigrant children. They had to enroll her at an English schools. I also enrolled at a English Catholic school two years later.

Which school accepted you?
Luke Callaghan girl's school

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Italian students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? Yes / No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

Very much so, I have been criticized for not going to a French school. I have been told that the immigrants preferred English education. When I explained my situation some are shocked and some don't believe me. One person told me that he knew a lot of people in the education field and was going to research what I said. He came back with an apology. I feel I was treated as a second class citizen as a child by the Church and the government. I am being punished again now for speaking a language that was forced upon me.

Declaration by Former Student Clementina Clerici

Name: Clementina
Clerici

Were your parents first generation immigrants?

Yes

If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?

Father 1953, Mother
1955.

Were you born in Quebec?

Yes

If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec

N/A

What was your family's country of origin?

Italy

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?

Italian and SOME
French

What was the family religion(s)?

Catholic

Year of Birth:

1956

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1)

1962

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?

Yes

Signature



Date __2025

08 31 _____

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

We were Catholic and my parents spoke SOME French. They ALSO wanted me to learn French.

Where was your family living at the time? Walnut Street St Henri (street and neighbourhood)

What reason was given to deny you admission?

Years later my parents told me that the places in the school were only for the French community, not for immigrants.

Which school accepted you?

St Augustine de Canterbury, which was further from our home. My parents didn't speak English. An Irish aunt helped me with English spelling. My younger siblings also entered the English Catholic system.

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one):
rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Italian students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? Yes / No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one):
rare / frequent / very common

UNLESS IN PRIVATE SCHOOL

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

Friends of parents who were well off sent their daughters to French private school IN NDG
Thank you for allowing me to voice my opinion.

Firstly, I understand why it is of great importance to be strong in defending one's language; however, we all feel the same about the pending possibilities of losing our own language or in long term trading one language for another.

Quebec is a versatile province, we have the possibility of being multi linguistic, like many European countries, I hope this can change.

Sincerely,
Clementina Clerici

Declaration by Former Student Piera Di Fruscia

Name:

Piera Di Fruscia

Were your parents first generation immigrants?

Yes

If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?

Father arrived 1956. Mother and 5 children followed in 1959.

Were you born in Quebec?

No

If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec?

1959

What was your family's country of origin?

Italy

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?

Italian

What was the family religion(s)?

Catholic

Year of Birth:

1954

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1)

1960

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?

Yes

Signature 

Date August 15, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

My parents did not understand that Quebec had different schools for Catholics, Protestants, francophones and anglophones. They wanted to enroll us in the closest school, which was Sainte Bernadette, a French Catholic school. It was walking distance.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

St Michel

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My mother joined my father in Montreal, and brought five children. She went to Sainte Bernadette to enroll her four school-age children.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

She was told there was no room for us.

Which school accepted you?

St Finnbarr (13th and Bélanger) English Catholic. St Finnbarr was also packed – up to 45 students per class - but they made room for us.

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Italian students who were accepted in French Catholic schools?

Yes / No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

___ Yes, they are very surprised.

_ Some comments were, why not build more schools like the English were doing. _____

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name:

Vincent Gabrielli

Were your parents first generation immigrants?

Yes

If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?

1962

Were you born in Quebec?

No, I was born in Italy

If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec?

1962

What was your family's country of origin?

Italy

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?

Italian. My father also spoke French because he had worked in Belgium

What was the family religion(s)?

Catholic

Year of Birth:

1956

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1)

1962

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?

Yes

Signature:

Vincent Gabrielli

Date:

Aug 13, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

My father had worked in Belgium and spoke French. He thought it would be easier for his children to learn French than English.

Where was your family living at the time?

We lived in NDG on Belgrave near Upper Lachine Road.

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My father wanted to enroll me in a French school when we arrived in Quebec in 1962.

What reasons was given to deny your admission?

My father was told that immigrants had to attend the English Catholic school.

Which school accepted you?

Saint Raymond school NDG. I failed grade one and had to repeat it because I did not know English.

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French and were accepted? No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

Yes, mostly French-speaking family members. They have said they are happy that the government has fixed this problem.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name: Michael Gaug

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Mother born here; elder siblings born in Hungary. Father born in Rumania.

If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? 1929 & 1932

Were you born in Quebec? Yes

If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? N/A

What was your family's country of origin? Mother Hungary, Father Rumania

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? German, Hungarian, Rumanian

My parents were educated at Saint-Louis-de-France school in a mixture of German, English and French. They went to English Catholic high school.

What was the family religion(s)? Catholic

Year of Birth: 1957

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1962

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ? Yes

Signature 

Date 21 July 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

We often attended St-Jude's (French) church on Tiffin Road in neighbouring Ville Jacques Cartier, as it (and its associated school) was closer to our home than our parish of St-Georges. There were no English Catholic Schools or Churches. My mother thought St. Jude's would be appropriate because it was close by, and that enrolment there would ensure the integration into Québec society that she and my father had not achieved. My younger brother was allowed to enrol in the French kindergarten of St-Georges Parish because the English system did not yet have room for one.

Where was your family living at the time?

We lived in Montreal South (which merged with Longueuil in 1961) in the parish of St-Georges Church, located near Ste-Hélène and Desaulniers. We were near Taschereau Blvd, which was the border between Montreal South and Ville Jacques Cartier, and Tiffin Road, which was the boundary between Ville Jacques Cartier and St-Lambert.

How did your parents attempt to enrol you in a French Catholic school ?

In early spring 1962, when I was 4, the Curé of St-Georges Parish visited us on his annual fund-raising mission. After chatting with me, he told my mum that I should be in school, in spite of being a year underage, and that he would take care of my enrolment in the fall. St Jude's parish had a Catholic school, and my mother hoped he would enrol me there.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

St-Jude's was out of the question because it was not our parish, but in any case, the Curé explained that allophone and anglophone Catholics were not enrolled in French Schools but were rather hosted in

unused classrooms in existing French Catholic Schools. They were taught in English and remained administratively distinct from the rest of the school. We were segregated from the other students. I attended different schools in grades 1 and 2, and then the new English Catholic school, St-Clare's, from grade 3 on. My younger brother, after a year in French kindergarten, was transferred to St-Clare's for grade 1. He was shattered that he was the only child in his class not allowed to continue. He felt he had been singled out because 'something is wrong with me' which instilled a negative attitude toward school. In both cases, our mother was disappointed that we could not attend the French school that was more established and closer to home.

Which school accepted you?

Notre Dame des Écoles 1962
École Catherine Primot 1963

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied?
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

☒ Yes / ☐ No

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools?
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Yes / ☒ No

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

I have yet to meet a Francophone who believes my account on first hearing. The most common reaction is that I was too young to understand what actually happened, and that my parents, being immigrants, misunderstood their options.

Ironically, Francophones who went to English Catholic Schools were even more adamant that my experience was not credible. After all, if they were allowed to go to English School, then clearly the reciprocal option was permitted for Allophone/Anglophones. So my enrolment must have been by choice.

During the mid to late 1970s, after the first Parti-Québécois electoral win and the run up to the 1980 referendum, I was deeply immersed in Francophone culture. The topic of Québec nationalism was ever-present and grievances against anglophones/allophones were frequently aired. Whenever I attempted to explain that allophones were not as a whole against the french culture, nor were we trying to destroy it, I was held up as an example of the injustices they faced. My family of immigrants, I was told, came to Québec, and in spite of it being a French province, started a business in English, sent their children to English Schools, and assimilated into the English Culture. I tried to explain that in my case this was completely false; my parents small fabrication shop had Allophone and Francophone employees, I was forced to go to Anglophone Schools, and that it was their own leaders that had contributed to this division - and used it to advance their own interests. This was never taken seriously.

Myths and Legends are soothing. They create a cultural narrative that justifies our behaviour - and they die hard.

Declaration by Former Student Irene Ioannoni

Name: Irene Ioannoni

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? Mother 1957, father 1958
Were you born in Quebec? Yes
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? N/A
What was your family's country of origin? Italy
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Italian
What was the family religion(s)? Catholic

Year of Birth: 1961
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1967
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school? Yes ..See below. French Catholic school was not considered an option since there would be automatic refusal.

Signature I. Ioannoni

Date 19-08-2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school?

My parents did not seek out French Catholic schooling for me or my two younger siblings. It was well established that I would be refused. English had already become the language of education chosen by older siblings, older relatives and older immigrant friends in the neighbourhood I grew up in. English had already become the social and dinner table language of communication within this younger generation of immigrant children. These choices began taking shape as far back as 10 years (circa 1955) before I was eligible for primary school.

The refusal of immigrant students by the French Catholic school system began in the early to mid fifties in my neighbourhood. Two reasons were given; French primary schools were already over capacity; secondly French schools did not accept immigrant children that did not speak the French language because they would slow down French speaking classes. These families were openly invited to go see the nearest English Catholic or Protestant schools. The English Catholic schools accepted everyone, with few exceptions. Even the many Francophones who chose at that time English education.

The English Catholic schools attended in the mid fifties included Lawrence O'Toole Elementary, Saint Gerald's Elementary on rue Hochelaga, Saint Dominics and Cardinal Newman Highschool. In 1967 I attended Lawrence O'Toole Elementary on Taillon grades 1,2 &3, Lawrence O'Toole Elementary on Bilodeau grades 4,5 &6, Saint Gerald's Elementary grade 7 and subsequently Monsignor Harold Doran Highschool. In general, high school required travel by city bus. I think most of or perhaps all the above-mentioned schools no longer exist.

This did not mean we ignored the French language. We (young generation along with our immigrant parents) mastered the French language thanks to Quebecois friends and neighbours which abounded in the neighbourhood I grew up in.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

Rue Paul Pau, Tetreaultville, Montreal

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school?

They did not try enrolling me in French Catholic school since by the time I was eligible to enter primary school, it was well established I would be refused. English had become the adopted language of education and communication between the younger immigrant generation.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

N/A

Which school accepted you?

Lawrence O'Toole Elementary School on Taillon Street (no longer exists)

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare (they did not seek it since automatic refusal was guaranteed)

Do you know other Italian students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

Yes, surprised and not aware. Especially people living outside the neighborhoods where most immigrant families settled. The general thought being that immigrant children chose English over French with both options being equally available to us. French education was in fact not available for us nor were the French schools actively seeking to enroll immigrant children. In conversation with individuals, they are generally surprised but are equally impressed with the level of integration I achieved. The diversity in language is seen as a contributor to my success. They wish they would have had been exposed to better English language education.

As the controversial debate continues today in the political domain to justify ramping up additional restrictions, pre-Bill 101 children are made to feel they contributed to a cultural problem of today. No one is countering this politically motivated narrative.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name:

Ralph Mastromonaco

Were your parents first generation immigrants?

Yes

If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?

1953, father, 1955 mother.

Were you born in Quebec?

Yes

If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec

N/A

What was your family's country of origin?

Italy

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?

Italian

What was the family religion(s)?

Catholic

Year of Birth:

1956

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1)

1962

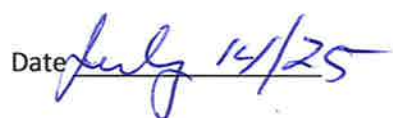
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?

Yes

Signature



Date



What were your family's reasons for enrolling you in French Catholic school ?

It was the closest school. It was Catholic.

Where was your family living at the time?

NDG – Saint Monica

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My mother took my elder brother and me to the school to enroll us.

What reasons was given to deny you admission?

My mother was told that Italian immigrants should attend English (Catholic) school.

Which school accepted you?

Saint-Monica NDG (English Catholic)

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied?

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French and were accepted?

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have you experienced scepticism or denial of your experience? If so, please describe.

Comments at cegep / university: I attended English language post secondary institutions. This topic came up with other students who had the same experience with French Catholic schools.

Comments during professional career – In speaking with francophone colleagues about this experience most react with surprise that this would have occurred.

Comments since raising exclusion as a public issue (3 types of response) The reactions I have received have been:

- 1- appreciation for writing articles and social media posts from people of my generation who also experienced being excluded from French catholic schools who received the reaction from Francophones who refused to believe that this happened ;
- 2- 2- Appreciation for writing articles and social media posts from people of younger generations who had no idea that this occurred and gained a better insight into the origins of the language debate in Québec;
- 3- 3- from politicians, pundits and the media in general- silence and a reluctance to react either for or against this issue that I take to as an intentional decision to avoid responding to advocacy that challenges a politically convenient narrative that is considered by status quo defenders to be irrefutable conventional wisdom on the origins of the language issue in Québec.

Reactions to Petition – From those who lived this experience support.

Reactions to op eds in La Presse and Le Devoir – Overwhelmingly supportive from those who identify with the English-speaking communities of Québec. From the Francophone readership there has been expressions of support mixed with strong expressions of denial that this happened and labelling the author to be engaging in “Québec bashing” as well as expressions that dismiss the advocacy as being much ado about nothing other than what may have been a few unintentional anecdotal experiences.

Other thoughts

The point of this advocacy is to foster a more robust consideration of the true historical origins of the French language issue in Québec. Specifically, to challenge the reductive narratives that frame the French language issues as an adversarial conflict that targets identifiable social groupings (English speaking Québécois and immigrants) as the threat that needs to be addressed in order to promote French language equity in Québec.

The state of the French language in the late 1960’s and 1970’s was a far more textured public policy issue than what politicians and language activists framed it to be. As stated in my May 2025 Gazette article, social choices made by Québec society explains much of what was happening to the French language. It was and remains reductive to look for someone to “blame” for the challenges to the French language.

The ultimate goal of this advocacy is to attempt a more objective view of what happened in the post world war 2 era and after some 50 years since the passing of the Charter of the French Language to shift the crafting of language legislation and policies from away from an adversarial approach to finally embrace a collaborative approach that assumes that all Québécois share the goal of promoting the vitality of the French language.

In 2025 it is not about the “why” of our language laws and policies that is questioned.

We need to shift the focus to the “how” of securing French language endurance that when not done properly can challenge, unnecessarily, our social cohesion.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Claudia Ottaviano-Maheux

Name:

Were your parents first generation immigrants?
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?
Were you born in Quebec?
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec?
What was your family's country of origin?
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?
What was the family religion(s)?

Yes
1951
Yes
N/A
Italy
Italian and French
Catholic

Year of Birth:

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1)

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?

1959
1964
Yes

Signature

Claudia Ottaviano
CLAUDIA OTTAVIANO

Date

July 20, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

My father had lived 5 years in Paris France & so, our family spoke French and Italian at home. We were French speaking & Catholic so it seemed natural to enroll me in French school.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

Ahuntsic

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My parents tried to enroll my elder brother in 1958, but he was sent to the English school. They tried again for me in 1964. My mother took me to the administration office and asked to enroll me.

What reasons was given to deny you admission?

They said, « Vous êtes des immigrants. Il faut aller à l'école anglaise. »

Which school accepted you?

John Cabot Elementary School – Ahuntsic. I'll never forget the first day at school. I didn't know a word of English and I didn't know anybody. I cried like a crazy kid.

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / **very common**

Do you know other Italian students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

Felix Rose's film enraged me. When I tried to speak about how wrong it was on social media I was attacked, called a LIAR etc. It hurt me because I had a hard time learning English for the first 4 years of elementary school. I still speak French fluently but I have great difficulty writing French.

Declaration by Former Student

Name: LUISA SILVESTRO

Were your parents first generation immigrants?	No. My maternal and paternal grandparents immigrated from Italy in 1914.
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?	Both my parents were born in Montreal.
Were you born in Quebec?	Yes
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec?	N/A
What was your family's country of origin?	My parents were born in Canada but of Italian descent
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?	My parents who were born in Montreal spoke English French and Italian. Their parents, who were immigrants spoke Italian
What was the family religion(s)?	Catholic
Year of Birth:	1960
First year of Education in Quebec: (kindergarten)	1965-66
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?	Yes for Grade 1 in 1966

Signature Luisa Silvestro Date August 7, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

My mother spoke excellent fluent French and wanted her children to be educated in a French grade school. Since I had completed a year in French kindergarten (1965-66), my parents wanted to enroll me at the neighbourhood French Catholic school - La Visitation. They believed we should be bilingual.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

Pothier Street, Ahuntsic

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school?

My mother and father were born in Montreal (mother 1919 and Father 1918) and were educated in trilingual schools (English, French and Italian) at the time that were imposed on them for children of Italian immigrants. They both were fluent in French and English. We were Catholic and spoke English at home but we all spoke French. They strongly believed their children should be bilingual, able to read and write in both English and French.

My mother brought me to enroll at a French school named La Visitation, a school nearest to our home.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

As soon as my mother explained in her excellent French to the person responsible for enrollment at La Visitation school, this person immediately refused to enroll me and told my mother to register me in an English-language school for immigrants. I believe this person assumed she was an immigrant because my mother had an Italian last name. The fact that my mother was born in Canada and spoke French

fluently was of no consequence to this person. My mother was incensed and refused to pursue the matter further, not wanting to enroll her daughter in a school that was already showing major signs of prejudice.

Which school accepted you?

The English language St Rita's School in Ahuntsic.

Do you know other Italian students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Italian students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? Yes / No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

I still feel I was short-changed by not being allowed to enroll at the French school La Visitation, despite being born in Quebec and having attended a French kindergarten. My mother, who spoke excellent French, was upset that I was denied a French education and deeply unsettled by the discriminatory way she was treated by the person she spoke to at the school.

My parents wanted both of their children to be fully bilingual. The lack of a strong education in French created a lifelong disadvantage and limited my employment opportunities. I took night courses at the Université de Montréal to improve my French, but my writing skills were never as strong as they would have been had I attended a French school, as my parents had intended.

I eventually worked in the French education sector, teaching English as a second language. Some of my colleagues, especially those who were not of Italian or those of ethnic backgrounds who had immigrated more recently and who had easily attended French school themselves, did not believe that I had been told I couldn't enroll in French school. Even one of my closest friends of many years still refuses to believe that I was denied the right to a French education simply because of my last name and assumptions made about my mother's background. Their disbelief has often made the experience feel even more isolating and painful.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name: Karen Zuidinga
Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? 1958 or 59
Were you born in Quebec? Yes
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? n/a
What was your family's country of origin? Holland
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Dutch. My father spoke a little English & French
What was the family religion(s)? Catholic

Year of Birth: 1964 (?)
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1969
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ? My older brother was denied directly, so the same decision applied to me.

Signature 

Date _____

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you a in French Catholic school ?

The French Catholic school was three blocks from our house. My brother was first to attend school.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

Brossard, Perrier Street

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My mother, who spoke very little French, took my older brother to the neighbourhood Catholic school.

What reasons was given to deny you admission?

They were told the school could not accept my brother because he did not speak French. They were told to go to the English school in St. Lambert (Preville Elementary), but it was Protestant and my family was Catholic, so my brother could not be admitted there unless they renounced their religion. There was no English Catholic school in Brossard. My brother was admitted to the English Protestant school when our parents signed a form renouncing the Catholic religion.

Which school accepted you?

Preville Elementary School (St Lambert)

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? No

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Until I spoke to you I didn't realize that the other families in my neighbourhood had likely experienced similar dynamics.

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have you ever experienced scepticism about your experience, or denial ? If so, please describe.

I stopped talking about it because of the consistent denial/skepticism I experienced. I felt like the Quebecois people I was talking to felt like I was “the enemy” or “making excuses” for my poor French. On the immigrant family side, we simply didn’t talk about it (to my recollection). We lived outside of French Society and Culture but we didn’t have our own as we also weren’t part of the established English-speaking culture in Quebec. As immigrant families we each were socialized within our own cultural communities (e.g. Jewish community, Italian community, etc).

Declaration by Former Student Dida Berku

Name:	Dida Berku
Were your parents first generation immigrants?	Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?	1953
Were you born in Quebec?	No, Austria
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec	1953
What was your family's country of origin?	Romania via Austria
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?	Romanian, German and French
What was the family religion(s)?	Jewish
Year of Birth:	1951
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1)	1957
Were you denied admission into a public French Catholic school ?	Yes

Signature *Dida Berku*

Date *August 25 2025*

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

My mother, although she was Jewish, was educated in Romania at Notre-Dame de Sion, so she had a classical French education. She wanted to send me to a French public school in Montreal.

Where was your family living at the time?

On Dupuis in Côte-des-Neiges, right in front of the French public school.

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My mother took me to the local public French public school.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

My mother was told they did not accept Jewish students.

Which school accepted you?

My parents sent me too a private French School – Collège Marie de France. It was a huge sacrifice for them to afford the fees, it was \$400 a year and they were making combined salary of \$400 a month. But they really wanted me to be educated in French.

Do you know other Jewish students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes
If so, do you consider your experience to be not too common.

Do you know other Jewish students who were accepted to French private school? yes
If so, do you consider that experience to be quite rare.

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

After graduating from elementary school at College Marie de France I went to Wagar High, an EMSB English public high school. The majority of students in my class were children of first generation immigrants and Holocaust survivors. Not one of my classmates knew French. In fact, very, very few of the hundreds of kids in the school knew any French at all. Very often, I was correcting the teacher. I got 100% in my matric exams in French. I went on to work at Expo 67 and many other jobs and went to McGill law school where French was of course very useful.

In 1978, for my first legal job, I joined a law firm in social law, Services Juridiques St Louis on rue St Hubert. I was the only Jewish female lawyer in Montreal east of Parc Avenue. But I was very comfortable because my French was fluent and I could service my clients and plead before the courts in both languages. I practiced law and in 1990 I was first elected to city council in Côte-Saint-Luc.

In 2001, during the merger of all cities on the island of Montreal I became the Leader of the Majority during the Tremblay administration, something I could never have done without my fluency in French. So overall, I'm very grateful to my parents for making the sacrifices they made in order to allow me to live and work in French. Most of my peers did not have that opportunity. The government should recognize that it is their own failure in education that lead to the absence of French in the lives of many immigrants and allophones.

My own children were educated in three languages. English, French and Hebrew and my grandchildren also benefit from the same opportunity. Knowing more than one language is always a benefit.

I once met an MP of the Bloc Québécois who refused to recognize what I experienced. He insisted that the Quebec education system never discriminated against allophones and non-Catholics. Its time that the government actually recognize and I would say apologize to the thousands of immigrants who were denied access to French public school in the 50s and well into the 60's.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name: Anna Fuerstenberg

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? 1952
Were you born in Quebec? No
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? 1952
What was your family's country of origin? Poland (via Germany)
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Polish, French, (which others ?)
What was the family religion(s)? Jewish

Year of Birth: 1947
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1953
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ? Yes

Signature A Fuerstenberg Date July 21 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

Both my parents had a good Polish education spoke French and loved French literature. My mother's French was impeccable.

Where was your family living at the time? Hutchison and Villeneuve.

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

They took my older brother to be enrolled at the local French Catholic school.

What reasons was given to deny you admission?

My parents were told that French Catholic schools did not accept refugees.

Which school accepted you?

Bancroft (English Protestant) in the Mile End.

Do you know other Jewish students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / No

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Jewish students were accepted in French Catholic schools? Yes / No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have you ever experienced scepticism or denial of your experience? If so, please describe.

When I was teaching at Marguerite de la Jammerais, my high school students refused to believe that immigrants and refugees were denied enrollment in French Catholic schools. This was ironic because When I discovered that the school library had no English dictionaries and NO English books, I offered a hundred of my own books to the school.

They refused them saying it would just take the school priest too long to read them all and pass judgement as to their subject matter being appropriate for teen aged girls.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name: Johan Mady

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? Father early 40s, both 1947
Were you born in Quebec? yes
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? n/a
What was your family's country of origin? Lebanon
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Arabic and French, some English
What was the family religion(s)? Muslim

Year of Birth: 1952
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1958
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ? Yes

Signature Johan Mady

Date July 18, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

My mother was educated in Lebanon in French by nuns. We were in Quebec.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

Lachute.

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My parents wanted their children (my elder brother, me and younger sibling) to be educated in French. [I]they probably went to the closest Catholic school in the Town of Mount Royal to register my older brother.

What reasons was given to deny you admission?

We were not Catholic.

Which school accepted you?

Lachute High School (grades 1-11) (Protestant)

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied?

Yes / No

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools?

Yes / No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

②

Mady, Johan

Most people were unaware of the situation and most were surprised that we were not allowed to attend French schools. Particularly with the opposite happening at the moment.

Declaration by Former Student Rachel Sinyor

Name:

Rachel Sinyor

Were your parents first generation immigrants?

Yes.

If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?

1964

Were you born in Quebec?

No

If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec

1964

What was your family's country of origin?

My father was from Morocco and my mother from Bulgaria. They lived in Israel prior to Quebec
Bulgarian, French and Hebrew.
Jewish.

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?

What was the family religion(s)?

Year of Birth:

1954

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 5)

1964

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?

Yes

Signature

Rachel Sinyor

Date

Aug 26/25

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

My parents were both French-speaking, which is why they chose Montreal. I had been studying in Hebrew in Israel and they wanted me to learn French in Quebec.

Where was your family living at the time?

Côte-des-Neiges. Then we moved to Chomedey, Laval.

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

They went to the school and were told they could not enroll me.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

We were not Catholic. We are Jewish.

Which school accepted you?

Bedford school in Côte-des-Neiges. My parents watched TV in French so it was a slow process for me to learn English for school. It would have been easier in French.

Do you know other Jewish students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes / ~~No~~
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other Jewish students who were accepted? Yes / No- NO
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common
rare

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

We had many Moroccan friends who spoke French and wanted to enroll in French schools, but were not admitted.

When the subject of eligibility to enroll my children in English school became an issue, my husband and I were ready to leave Quebec.

Many French Canadians were surprised to hear that we were turned away from a French education due to religion.

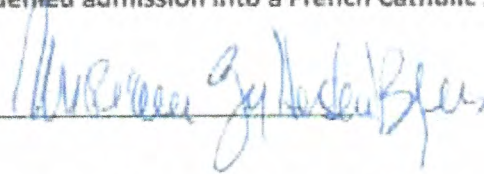
Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name: Miriam Zylberstein Byers

Were your parents first generation immigrants? yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? - 1951
Were you born in Quebec? -no
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? -1951
What was your family's country of origin? -Poland
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? Yiddish, Polish, Russian and French
What was the family religion(s)? Jewish

Year of Birth: -1943
First year of Education in Quebec. (grade 3) - 1951
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school? Yes

Signature



Date

Aug 14, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school?

We arrived from Paris, France where I had gone to school. My parents took me to the local school which was French which is what they would have done in France. They were not aware that there were different school systems.

Where was your family living at the time?

They were living on St. Dominique and St. Viateur

How did your parents attempt to enrol you in a French Catholic school?

My father went to the school office and asked to unroll his daughter.

What reasons was given to deny you admission?

My father was told that since we were Jewish and not Catholic I could not go to that school. I had been at school in Paris and so the priest told my father to take me to Marie de France which was much too expensive for recent immigrants or else to go to the Protestant School.

Which school accepted you?

Bancroft a Protestant school in the Mile End

Do you know other Jewish students who wanted to be educated in French but were denied?

No, I don't know other people's personal experience but there were many Jewish immigrants in my classes and they all found themselves in the Protestant/English system.

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): very common

Do you know other Jewish students who were accepted? No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe

The only people who are surprised and skeptical are French Canadians. Because my French is very good and I speak with a European accent I am often asked why I am an English speaker. I respond that I was rejected by the French education system at the time which forced me to become an anglophone. The whole situation seems incomprehensible to most Quebecois. No one seems to want to think about it since it clashes with their belief that the immigrants rejected the French community and not vice versa.

MAB

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

school

Name:

George Contaxakis

Were your parents first generation immigrants?

Yes. I emigrated with my father

If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?

October 1962

Were you born in Quebec?

No

If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec?

October 1962

What was your family's country of origin?

Egypt

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?

Greek, Arabic, English, French.

What was the family religion(s)?

Greek Orthodox

Year of Birth:

1951

First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 6)

1962

Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school?

Yes

Signature

Date

Aug. 14/2026

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school?

My family was well-educated and by the time they graduated 12th grade they all spoke Greek, Arabic, English and French in that order (and some members spoke Italian).

Where was your family living at the time?

On Park Avenue near Bernard .

How did your parents attempt to enrol you in a French Catholic school ?

My father took me to the reception at College Français on Fairmount corner Esplanade, and I was placed in grade 6.

What reasons was given to deny you admission?

A few minutes after I was placed in the grade 6 class – something that I will never forget – the principal came into the class, pointed at me and asked, "Are you Catholic?" I said, "No, I'm Orthodox." Then he said, "You're not allowed to be here." I asked why. "He said, "You're not Catholic." I told him, "I'm Orthodox. We're the same thing." He said, "You're not allowed to be here," and escorted me out. The Pope and the Greek Orthodox Archbishop are very close, but I couldn't argue with him. We did not know the Catholic school system did not accept Greek Orthodox students.

Which school accepted you?

Protestant schools: Bancroft and then Baron Byng.

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied?

Yes

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools?

No

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

Yes, mostly French Canadians.

My experience is that the French Canadian Catholic hierarchy kept their people away from other religions: Orthodox, Protestants, Judaism. French Canadians have NOT been exposed to THE truth that other religions were excluded. I believe this exclusion was done so that the Catholic Church could dominate and control their people.

Declaration by Former Student in Quebec's Education System

Name: Mary Moroska

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? 1957
Were you born in Quebec? No
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? 1957
What was your family's country of origin? Russia but we arrived in Quebec with French passports****
Parents born in France. I was born in Morocco. Grandparents born in Russia

Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? French and Russian
What was the family religion(s)? Russian Orthodox

Year of Birth: 1950
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1957
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school? Yes

Signature *M. Moroska* Date 2025-07-22

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school?

My grandparents fled the Russian Revolution for France where they lived until after WW2. My parents were born and raised in France and went to the local French school. They moved to Morocco after the war and worked for the American Army because they learned English in school. My initial year of education in Morocco was in French.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

Rue Coursol in Little Burgundy

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school?

There were 2 schools almost facing each other not far from where we lived. So, they went to the French school to register me so that I could continue my education. My parents thought it would be the same system they had grown up in.

What reason was given to deny you admission? We were not Catholic and my parents were not willing to "convert" or declare that I would be raised as a Catholic.

Which school accepted you?

Royal Arthur in Little Burgundy briefly, and then from grade 2 at Bedford school in Côte-Des-Neiges.

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? Yes.
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / **very common**

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

As a working adult, even today, I am constantly meeting people who assumed that we chose to go to English schools and would not believe my story.

Often, they are amazed at my facility in speaking French. To quote: "Wow, your French is amazing for an immigrant / Anglophone".

Declaration by Former Student Carole Rentschler

Name: Carole Rentschler

Were your parents first generation immigrants? Yes
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec? 1956
Were you born in Quebec? Yes
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec? N/A
What was your family's country of origin? Germany
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival? German, father spoke English
What was the family religion(s)? Protestant

Year of Birth: 1957
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 1) 1962
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ? Yes

Signature C. Rentschler

Date Aug 14, 2025

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

We were living in very French part of Ste-Thérèse. I spoke German and had already learned some French playing with two girls on my street. My father wanted to enroll me in the same French school as the other kids.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)
Ste-Thérèse-de-Blainville

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?
My father tried to enroll me at the local French Catholic school.

What reason was given to deny you admission?
He was told I could not be admitted because we were not Catholic.

Which school accepted you?
After enrolling me in private kindergarten to learn English, I was accepted into McCaig elementary, Rosemère, the closest English school to where we lived.

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? yes
If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? No
If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

From 1987 to 2011 I lived in French regions of Quebec (Alma, Rimouski). French speaking Quebecers were always amazed to hear that I was unable to attend French school, sometimes not even really believing me when I told them the reason and point out that there are many children that were in the same position for various reason (immigrants, religion).

Declaration by Former Student Nicolette de Smit

Name:	Nicolette de Smit
Were your parents first generation immigrants?	Not exactly; my father had a two-year contract at ICAO, a United Nations organization in Montreal. It later became a permanent position.
If yes, what year did they arrive in Quebec?	1962
Were you born in Quebec?	No
If not, what year did you arrive in Quebec	1962
What was your family's country of origin?	Holland
Which languages did your family speak upon arrival?	Dutch. Father spoke several languages.
What was the family religion(s)?	Mother raised Catholic, father born Protestant. Neither was religious.
Year of Birth:	1954
First year of Education in Quebec: (grade 3)	1962
Were you denied admission into a French Catholic school ?	Yes

Signature



Date: 2025-08-20

What were your family's reasons for wanting to enrol you in French Catholic school ?

When my father accepted the position at ICAO, and I learned that we were moving to Canada, I was not happy. Although I was only eight years old, I had strong opinions. When I understood that Montreal was a francophone city, I felt happy that it would still be "like living in Europe".

When we arrived in Montreal, I made friends with the children in the neighbourhood, who were francophone. I started to learn French, as well as some English, and wanted to go to the local French school to be with my friends. My parents were fine with my decision. However, this turned out to be impossible (see below).

Although I was forced to go to an English Protestant school, I remained a "Francophile". I excelled at French in school, and took as many of my high school subjects as possible in "French Immersion". I was appalled at all the English signs throughout Montreal, and as a teenager supported friends who were part of the Separatist movement, including some who were detained during the FLQ crisis.

After high school, although my family was living in Pointe-Claire by that time, I enrolled in CEGEP de Maisonneuve. My first choice had been CEGEP de Vieux Montreal, but I was refused since I didn't come from the francophone school system. It was a long commute, and it was even more difficult to bridge the considerable gap between the French I learned in English schools and the French I needed to study and socialize in a French CEGEP. I realized that I was not as bilingual as I thought I was, despite speaking better French than anyone I knew in the English school system. I returned to the English stream for the rest of my college and university education.

Where was your family living at the time? (street and neighbourhood)

37th Street in Lachine when we first came to Montreal, Pointe Claire after my father's ICAO position became permanent.

How did your parents attempt to enroll you in a French Catholic school ?

My father made inquiries at his place of work. He learned that only Catholic children could be admitted to French schools. He located a small French Protestant school in the Outremont area that was used by some of the children of his colleagues. However, there was no way for me to get there, since I was only eight years old, and there was no public transportation available. So, we settled on the closest English Protestant school.

What reason was given to deny you admission?

The school would not enroll me because I not Catholic. My mother was nominally Catholic, but she spoke no French nor English, and was not involved in making any arrangements. I was also taken aback when I learned from my friends how much time they spent learning catechism. They showed me their schoolbooks, full of religious questions and answers they had to learn by memory. I'd been traumatized by some religious beliefs a friend in Holland (who went to Catholic school there) had explained to me, so I was not a fan of Catholicism.

Which school accepted you?

Summerlea School in Lachine.

Do you know other immigrants who wanted to be educated in French but were denied? No

If so, do you consider your experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common (not sure)

Do you know other immigrant students who were accepted in French Catholic schools? Yes.

Later, I learned that some of my Italian colleagues at work had attended French Catholic Schools in the East End of Montreal.

If so, do you consider that experience to be (underline one): rare / frequent / very common

I learned that some Italian immigrants opted to send their children to French schools. Religion was not a factor in their case. However, I also learned that fights between French and Italian students were common in some schools. Some colleagues switched to English Catholic school due to these conflicts.

The subject of education in Quebec prior to Bill 101 is highly controversial. Have people subsequently been surprised to hear about your experience, or skeptical? If so, please describe.

I worked as a social worker in the public system for many years, and dealt mostly with youth. All the "101 kids" who were (unhappily in many cases) forced to attend French schools, were surprised to hear that I had fought to go to French school, but was refused.

Freedom of Choice and Exclusion in Quebec's Education System During the Years 1945-1977

This interim report was produced by Guy Rex Rodgers in collaboration with ELAN. A second interim report will be released early 2026, and the final report in November 2026.

My interest in this research was stimulated in 2020 during a documentary film project about waves of immigration into Quebec. Several participants interviewed in the wave that arrived between 1945 and 1970 mentioned being turned away from French Catholic schools. The waves of immigration project produced a 6-episode TV series for MATV, a one-hour TV special for CBC, and a feature-length documentary film with assistance from the National Film Board of Canada.

What We Choose To Remember can be seen on YouTube.

<https://whatwechoosetoremember.ca/>



When I toured *What We Choose To Remember* from 2022 to 2024 to 55 communities around Quebec, many people who attended screenings mentioned that they were also denied admission to French Catholic schools. Most of them reported that their experience was widely unknown and often disbelieved. This is an important piece of contemporary history that needed to be investigated. *Le Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise* agreed, and they provided funding for this two-year project.

This project is funded by

**Secrétariat aux relations
avec les Québécois
d'expression anglaise**

Québec



This project is supported by



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