

A FEDERATION CONCERNED WITH THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REGIONS

On many occasions in recent years, FNEEQ and the CSN have intervened publicly and politically on the issue of cegeps in difficulty in the regions.

For many years, the effects of demographic declines on the cegep system, particularly in some regions of Québec, have been a concern for FNEEQ. Many interventions have been made, reports and depositions have been submitted, especially since 2000 when the Ministry changed the financing formula for teaching, making the situation even more difficult than it had been before.

In 2002, FNEEQ presented a deposition to the Education Committee of the National Assembly. Although, following the Germain-Boucher Ministerial Committee report, a budget annex was introduced making supplementary funding available to cegeps with programs in difficulty, the conditions were (and still are) such that the situation remains difficult.

In 2002, a campaign in concert with the central councils of each region of Québec and the *Fédération des employées et employés du secteur public* (FEESP-CSN), which represents many of the support staff in the college system, raised the awareness of the population and main socioeconomic actors in the different regions of the situation and of the negative effects of the financing formula on programs with low student numbers. During the last round of negotiations, the employer's side showed little interest in this issue.

In 2004, FNEEQ published a pamphlet entitled *Supporting cegeps in difficulty in the regions: a necessity*. This document puts forward two demands: promoting a province-wide management of the programs offered that would guarantee regional vitality in this regard, and also to maintain and improve the financing of programs with low student numbers.

In 2007, the situation having deteriorated due to the unwillingness of the government and local administrations, the *regroupement cégep* set up a committee to bring up to date its analysis and to suggest means of action.

In 2008, each local union executive of FNEEQ unions met with their local administration in order to ask for their support for the creation of a tripartite committee (FNEEQ, the Federation of Cegeps and the Ministry of Education) in order to find solutions for the short and long term. Some local administrations, mostly from colleges most affected by declining enrolment, were supportive of this initiative. On the other hand, the Federation of Cegeps showed no openness in trying to find solutions to the problem.

In 2009, during a meeting of the three union federations with the Minister of Education, we brought up this issue and possible solutions. The Minister found the idea very interesting and promised to follow up. Since then, we have reminded the Ministry of Education of this commitment, and, according to deputy-minister Hélène Martin, it remains interested in dealing with this issue. The FNEEQ got an agreement on a meeting in August on this issue.

At the start of 2009 semester, the *regroupement cégep* will be brought up to date on the situation and will decide what actions to take on this issue.