

A B R I D G E D V E R S I O N

**THE STUDENT'S ENGAGEMENT IN HIS
EDUCATIONAL PLAN AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL:
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AMONG
ALL COLLEGE STAKEHOLDERS**

BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The present Brief on student engagement falls within the general scope of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation's ongoing study of educational success. The theme of educational success is multifaceted, and one that the Conseil has examined in many of its published works. The Conseil now wishes to address this theme from a different perspective, that is, the engagement on the part of the student in his educational plan.

The Conseil will herein study both the responsibility of the student regarding his engagement in his educational plan and the ability on the part of colleges to support this engagement. The theme of engagement has two underlying premises. First, engagement on the part of the student in fulfilling his educational plan is closely linked to the success of his plan, and thus becomes a guarantee of achievement. Second, supporting and encouraging student engagement thus constitutes a method of supporting success.

The objective of the present study is to better understand the dynamics in play when student and college meet. The student arrives at college with his own personal plan, while the college has one for its entire student population. The student engages in his studies and the institution seeks to support him, with each playing a role and having a responsibility in achieving student success.

An understanding of students, of what they experience, and their values and attitudes toward their education thus becomes essential to fully appreciate and encourage their engagement. Two questions ultimately arise, questions that guided the Conseil's study for the present Brief: *What is engagement and how is it expressed?*

To support its study, the Conseil first adopted an approach of giving a voice to college stakeholders, to canvass their views on engagement and to define its expressions. This approach was supported by research on the concept of engagement, which enabled the Conseil to understand the various meanings attached to the concept and to propose a definition from which it was possible to begin to identify the various manifestations of engagement. In addition, the Conseil studied the measures included by colleges in their success plans to support students and promote their educational success. The Conseil also summarized assessments conducted by various organizations on the efficiency of support measures to discern any correlations between actions on the part of the colleges, student engagement and student success.

It is not the Conseil's objective to herein expound on all the external variables that may influence student engagement, but rather to focus on stakeholder perception regarding both the type of commitment that students bring to their educational plan in college and the supporting role that the college plays. The Conseil has identified challenges and formulated recommendations based on four key areas for innovation: understanding youth, diversifying measures, pedagogical relationships and student services.

The Conseil would like to thank the students, teachers, education professionals and all those who participated in the telephone survey and group discussions. The Conseil would also like to extend its thanks to the experts, members of the Commission on College Education, as well as all those who participated in the preparation of this Brief.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL PLANS: A MULTIFACETED REALITY

Engagement on the part of the student in his educational plan is often viewed as the most likely explanation for his success. But what exactly is meant by *engagement* and how is it expressed? Are some engagement behaviours more closely related to student success than others? If so, how can colleges motivate and support the student in his educational path?

These three facets of engagement merit further examination. Indeed, the lack of a clear definition surrounding this concept, the difficulty in establishing a link between some behaviours and student achievement, as well as acknowledging the dynamics between college and student are all complex elements in understanding and supporting engagement.

Engagement: Defining a Concept

The concept of engagement in its broadest sense refers to the responsibility of the student in his academic achievement, his personal commitment and the effort in his work as a student. It also refers to the relationships that the student establishes with his surroundings. Thus expressions of engagement comprise not only the effort the student puts into school-related activities, but also relationships with his peers, teachers and institution.

The concept of engagement is a complex one to define as it takes many shapes and forms and can evolve over time. Indeed, engagement can adopt different forms depending on the student's characteristics and the type of education or stages of his educational path.

Another problem inherent in the concept of engagement is that evaluating it rests on perceptions that involve the values of the observer, which may not necessarily be those of the observed. If a student is employed, does this make him any less engaged? If a student does not participate in extracurricular activities, does this mean he is disengaged? Can these behaviours be compensated for with other behaviours or attitudes that do reflect engagement? These questions underscore the need for a better understanding of the values, motivation and behaviours of youth, in order to dispel any impressions of disengagement because they do not behave in an expected way.

The various expressions of engagement can be seen in behaviours and actions that occur in many contexts: in the classroom and at school, with peers, at home and in the community. These behaviours may be linked to the student's individual characteristics and may have an impact on their success. If their needs are to be appropriately met, a better understanding of young people and their behaviours and values toward student success is one facet of engagement that should be fully explored.

Engagement: A Dynamic Relationship and a Shared Responsibility

Engagement presupposes a shared responsibility between the college and its students. The relationship established between the student's responsibility and that of the institution is a crucial one. The commitment—the institution's toward student success and the student's to use the available means to succeed—is reciprocal.

Colleges can motivate or promote student engagement, or achieve precisely the contrary and hinder it. However, engagement on the student's part can also have an effect on school. For the institution, student responsibility is an important consideration when setting educational policy. The latter must be conceived to allow the expression of this sense of responsibility, and must somehow enable the student to truly participate in defining his own education experience. Consequently, colleges cannot ignore the notion of student responsibility, either in aligning their initiatives or in acknowledging the limits of their powers. A student's engagement in his educational plan thus becomes a result of this equation, as it stems from the dynamic relationship between the student and the environment in which he advances.

ENGAGEMENT AND STUDENT SUCCESS: A DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP

To define the concept of engagement, the Conseil conducted a review of literature, both to outline the current consensus of its meaning and to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of its expressions and to identify its indicators.

Expressions Of Engagement and Their Impact On Learning

Early research on engagement focused on the theme of dropping out of school, and its goal was to redefine the variables that influence school retention. In these studies, engagement mainly referred to the quantity of time and effort a student invested in his school life and the relationship with his surroundings. These studies primarily focused on the element of success, as well as support measures. The variables examined were largely linked to the student's individual characteristics (socio-economic, cognitive, self-perception, values, motivation, vocational maturity), his environment (social networks, school integration, employment) and the school organization (measures to support transition between levels of education, the concept of course schedules). As for support measures, they referred mainly to various teaching strategies and learning aids.

Considered as a factor that encourages school retention, engagement was also noted to be a variable that could explain the gaps in performance between students. According to the findings of the above research, the quality of the efforts dedicated to studying played a greater role in academic performance and durability of learning than the quantity of these efforts. In light of these findings, researchers are now proposing new definitions of engagement, which are related primarily to cognitive dimensions, namely, strategies used in learning.

From the analysis of this research, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, engagement is the act of an individual, that is, the student. Second, engagement consists of two elements: the will to engage and the act of engaging. The will to engage is linked to motivation for learning and its determining factors, such as self-perception or the ability to carry out a task. This constitutes the affective dimension of engagement. The act of engaging comprises actions on the student's part, such as time spent studying, the use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies or relationships established with his peers. This would be expressed on two levels: the cognitive dimension (i.e. relationship with knowledge), and the sociorelational dimension

(i.e. relationship with the environment). Expressing engagement can thus take many forms, depending on the context of and the issues in a given situation.

The following table illustrates the dimensions of engagement as identified by the Conseil.

Summary Table on the Concept of Engagement

ENGAGEMENT		
Will	Act	
Affective Dimension	Cognitive Dimension	Sociorelational Dimension
Motivation for learning Conceptual systems Learning goals Perceptual systems Perception and attribution Self-perception Perception of tasks Sense of control over tasks	Behaviour toward learning Use of management, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies Participation and perseverance in tasks	Behaviour toward the environment Relationships with peers Relationships with teachers Participation in college life

Engagement thus constitutes a dynamic activity. Its components in perpetual interaction, they can overlap and occur alternately or simultaneously depending how on a given situation evolves. There is no set pattern.

A definition of engagement that would include all these components could be as follows.

Engagement is the interrelation between the value an individual places on his education and college life and the effort that he invests in acquiring knowledge and the relationships he establishes and maintains with his environment.

Student Success: A Four-step Process

The Conseil has previously examined the issue of student success many times. In 1995, in a brief on favourable conditions for academic success at the college level, the Conseil chose a vision of success that transcended the

classroom. Rather than address academic achievement, the Conseil opted for student success. Also, in its 2000 brief entitled *Réussir un projet d'études universitaires : des conditions à réunir*, the Conseil drew attention to the problem of defining the concept of success, since it is closely linked to fulfilling the objective of education. Indeed, the concept of an educational plan does not have the same meaning for all. Therefore, the Conseil viewed success to be a process comprising four steps: access to higher learning, the educational path, diploma attainment, and social and work integration. Lastly, in the brief *Au collégial, l'orientation au cœur de la réussite*, the Conseil deemed that finding one's professional path also constituted an element of student success. In the brief, the Conseil reasserted the need for a definition of success that would take into account the student's educational plan, and proposed a vision of success that was not tied to obtaining a diploma at a specific time, reasoning that changes of path and pursuing part-time studies should not ultimately influence the value of success.

From this perspective, student success at the college level would then be one that allows the student to grow (access to college studies), to find his career path (the educational path), to obtain a college diploma (diploma attainment) and to pursue university studies or integrate in the work force (social and work integration).

By adopting a definition of engagement that includes three dimensions (affective, cognitive, sociorelational) and a definition of student success comprising four steps (access to college studies, the educational path, diploma attainment, and social and work integration) as a conceptual foundation, the Conseil proposes a framework for analysis which would enable the identification of the various expressions of engagement and correlate them with the characteristics of the student and his college studies. It would then be possible to present a clearer picture of the student's engagement in his educational plan and to clarify the ability of colleges in supporting and encouraging this engagement to promote success for a greater number of students.

EXPRESSIONS OF ENGAGEMENT: A SURVEY OF COLLEGE STAKEHOLDERS

To draw a picture of student engagement, the Conseil conducted a telephone survey of college students to gather data on their perceptions and expressions of engagement. It also held group discussions with students, teachers and education professionals to obtain further insight on the perception of engagement.

Some Findings

The results of the survey revealed that with regard to the affective dimension of engagement, students do place great value on their studies. They stated that they strongly believed in their ability to succeed and were very interested in their studies; they declared they were satisfied with their choice of program, their studies, their college and their grades. With regard to the cognitive dimension, a large majority of the students also said they were doing the required work: attending courses, actively participating in them, doing the required assignments outside the classroom, and they were very aware of learning resources provided by their colleges. It appeared, however, that students were not very inclined to do more than was required of them for their studies. Lastly, with regard to the sociorelational dimension, students stated that while they participated very little in extracurricular activities, when they did—or when they forged relationships with peer groups—they were satisfied.

Findings related to each of the three dimensions of engagement revealed that gaps exist between students, depending on individual characteristics. Students in pre-university programs showed greater interest in studies and placed importance on extracurricular activities than those in technical programs. The latter attended and participated more actively in their courses than those in pre-university programs or in orientation and integration sessions. They seem to adopt a more “school-oriented” behaviour than other students. Female students generally showed greater interest for their studies and adopted behaviours that conform to school requirements than their male counterparts: a greater number of female students attended their courses, respected the set requirements and did extra reading. Also, second-year students seemed to have greater confidence in their ability to succeed in their studies than they did in their first year, which shows how challenging the passage between secondary education and college can be, as well as how the emotional engagement related to self-confidence can change during the college years.

With the findings of the telephone survey, it is possible to conclude that students are indeed engaged because they believe they value their studies and college life, dedicate all the efforts required for learning, and establish and maintain quality relationships with their environment.

The group discussions allowed the Conseil to define that engagement, according to students, consists in dedicating time and effort both for their studies and extra-curricular activities. For students, the ideal engagement is one that allows for personal growth through participation in extracurricular

and co-curricular activities. The notion of engagement held by college teachers and educators, however, differs from that of the students. For the former, engagement is first and foremost academically related: the action of spending the necessary time and effort for study, doing the required work, attending courses and doing the required reading. For their part, educators believe that participation in college social activities provides a balance to a student's life and contributes to overall education. Teachers and educators both think that not enough students give the importance they should to their studies. They also complained that students spend too much time in non-academic activities.

Students, teachers and educators all agree that the cognitive dimension (effort dedicated to studying) and the sociorelational dimension (peer and teacher relationships as well as participation in college activities) are two important components of engagement. However, teachers and educators rank the cognitive dimension first, while students believe that these two dimensions are equally important.

Correlation Between Engagement Behaviours and Student Success

Research on the correlation between engagement behaviours and indicators of student success has shown that certain individual characteristics can be more predictable variables than others, namely gender and the general average in secondary school. Female students do in fact stand a greater chance of succeeding than their male counterparts, and students with a higher general average in secondary school will have a greater chance of success. These studies have also shown that the variables of engagement can have an influence in predicting student success, such as well-being or a sense of belonging to the college. This is part of the affective dimension of engagement and a probable indicator of success, which influences both academic achievement, attaining a diploma and pursuing an uninterrupted education. This disposition seems to be at the heart of student engagement, more specifically, in the will of the student to value his studies. In other words, the affective dimension of engagement would be one that colleges should support more. It should be emphasized, however, that this dimension is based on perceptions, values and beliefs and that it can be fragile and change depending on experience. For example, a student who repeatedly fails will undoubtedly see his perception of well-being change. The challenge for colleges is to be aware of these changes.

Moreover, the data gathered show that the variables in the three dimensions of engagement can play a role or have a considerable influence on success; the degree of influence can fluctuate depending on the variables and the dimensions. These findings corroborate the results of the survey with college stakeholders. According to this survey, while the sociorelational dimension of engagement is not ranked as highly as the affective and cognitive dimensions, it is, nonetheless recognized as part of the dynamics of engagement.

In brief, the various findings and perspectives of the surveys have led the Conseil to consider engagement as the personal disposition a student has for his studies that comprises three dimensions, and it is by leveraging these three dimensions that colleges could better support the student. Herein lays the great challenge.

ACTIONS BY COLLEGES TO SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

For several years now, colleges have undertaken actions to promote the quality of education and student success, without expressly relying on the concept of engagement. Yet the measures implemented, were, in fact, a form of support of the student's engagement in his educational plan as they encouraged him to participate in college life.

Student Success Plans

For the preparation of the present Brief, the Conseil has conducted an in-depth examination of student success plans, which have been part of the strategic plans of colleges since 2004. This was done to identify the measures colleges directly link to engagement, to determine the meaning that colleges give to engagement, and to specify which of the three dimensions they embrace.

In its analysis, the Conseil firstly noted that almost two-thirds of colleges refer explicitly to the concept of engagement in their success plans, and attach to it the meaning of perseverance, participation and effort dedicated to studies. While they include the various dimensions of engagement, they give priority to the cognitive dimension, particularly regarding the adoption of efficient learning strategies. They also value the affective dimension by including measures that foster a sense of belonging and a motivational environment and that encourage students to invest in their studies. Lastly, they emphasize the sociorelational dimension, namely relationships with teachers but also between peers, to establish a stimulating environment

where mutual aid becomes a valuable resource in fulfilling an educational plan. As for the concept of success, the definition which colleges include in their plans is one of student success, which encompasses academic achievement, the fulfillment of a personal development plan and social integration.

From this analysis the Conseil concludes that the college network acknowledges the role of the three dimensions of engagement, and that colleges do pursue the overall objective to create a motivational environment by offering a quality education in which every stakeholder plays a part.

Improving Measures That Support Student Success

Since the implementation of success plans in colleges and the establishment of measures supporting engagement, colleges have taken the necessary steps to ensure their actions are as effective as possible and to share their results. The most important of these is that success depends heavily on the collaboration and full participation of all college personnel: the objective here needs to be shared and anchored in common beliefs and values, otherwise cohesion may be difficult to achieve.

From the analysis conducted by various organizations such as the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial, the Carrefour de la réussite au collégial and the Fédération des cégeps, the Conseil retains two points. First, measures implemented to support success or engagement are increasingly more focused and detailed and are developed in a way that their impact can be better assessed. This is a positive outcome. Second, it is a challenge for organizations to agree on a classification of measures that target the objectives behind them and the time of their implementation.

SUPPORTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: A CONCERTED EFFORT

The analysis and the work carried out by the Conseil in preparing the present Brief have shown that the student's engagement in his educational plan can be expressed in different ways. Engagement evolves and changes depending on the student's college experience, and it appears to become more stable and defined as the student advances in his education. Individual characteristics linked to specific engagement behaviours (such as gender and time spent at work) and being enrolled to certain groups of programs seem to produce differences in attitude and expressions of engagement. In addition, some expressions—such as time dedicated to study, a sense of well-being, belonging and integration into college—can have a greater

influence than others on student success. These various findings reveal some of the challenges colleges may face in efficiently supporting student engagement—multifaceted, multidimensional, and evolving—and encouraging student success. These are real challenges that colleges must meet. The Conseil has selected four of these as a starting point for the development of support measures to encourage student engagement and ultimately promote student success.

Taking Up the Challenges

Identifying expressions of engagement while respecting the values of all. All college stakeholders must agree on a common definition of engagement and adopt the most objective perspective possible on engagement behaviours. Indeed, it may be difficult to support student engagement when the perceptions various stakeholders have are not rooted in a common definition, particularly if the voice of those primarily concerned—the students—is not taken into consideration. When teachers perceive students as not being very engaged, while the latter place great value on their studies, there is a disconnect between these two groups which may influence the quality and efficiency of the measures used to support student engagement. The best solution to avoid misperceptions and ineffective measures undoubtedly rests in the most objective understanding possible of students, their values and behaviours. Yet knowledge is not everything; it must also include the sharing of information and, where necessary, an explanation of specific student characteristics to better inform all stakeholders so that any actions taken are objectively based and may become channels of success.

Embracing student diversity in their characteristics and their paths. In fact, the Conseil's study revealed that male and female students do not adopt the same engagement behaviours, nor do they have the same attitudes or values. Students in technical programs differ from students in pre-university programs or those attending an orientation and integration session. Students who have failed academically have affective dispositions that do not foster engagement in their work. Students who are engaged and succeed are also different than those who, while succeeding, do not feel very motivated in their studies and consequently feel disengaged. All these variables must be considered both to establish measures that meet the range of needs and to ensure that they are as efficient as possible. The challenge that colleges must face is considering student diversity in measures designed for the entire school population.

What further complicates the challenge of diversity is that identifying differences among students when establishing efficient measures to reach the greatest number of them is simply not enough, since students change during their stay in college and so do their needs, depending on the stage they are at. All measures should consequently take this into consideration. For example, a first-year student would perhaps need greater cognitive guidance than a second-year student, who has learned his role and who has acquired efficient work methods that help him study well. A second-year student who changes programs would also need a different type of support or guidance to help him continue his educational plan. Students near the end of their path when their motivation is at an ebb will need other types of support to persevere. It appears then, that diversifying measures are also necessary for taking into account the development of students.

Developing a repertoire of teaching strategies and establishing pedagogical relationships that are channels of engagement. This challenge primarily concerns teachers, who are the engine of a pedagogical relationship. But they are not alone; students also have their responsibilities, and the institution as well for the support it gives to the teacher and students. As the classroom is the locus where it is possible to reach all students, it should be the preferred place, then, for implementing any support measures involving the three dimensions of engagement. Partnerships between all stakeholders are essential so that a common educational goal is accomplished.

Providing a meaningful environment for the student. Some students in particular need a stimulating environment that enables them to reach their goals, whether to explore different fields because they have yet to find their chosen career, or simply because they are curious to make new discoveries, exercise their creativity, or get involved in college life or their community. Colleges must consider these needs because they may for some people be a source for motivation in pursuing education. This is how they find relevance. The challenge for colleges in this area is two-fold: first, to be able to attract students and encourage them to participate in activities, given the amount of time spent on activities outside of college. Second, to accept that participation in school activities may vary precisely because of these outside activities, which may represent for some students another means of achieving and perfecting their general education.

Four Key Areas For Innovation

To meet the above challenges, the Conseil has defined four key areas for innovation that would assist in developing and establishing actions and

measures that support student engagement and encourage student success. The first is in the area of acquiring a better understanding of youth, their values and attitudes toward their education. The second lies in implementing diversified measures that take into account a diverse student population and how it evolves during college. The third is in the area of developing pedagogical relationships established in the classroom, the preferred locus for implementing measures and supporting engagement. Lastly, the fourth key area for innovation is in improving student services as an element of integration and participation in college life.

Before introducing these four key areas, however, the Conseil would like to note that differences and disagreement exists in how college educators and students perceive engagement—even among the students themselves. In fact, college educators do not feel that students are very engaged, particularly at the cognitive level, while students, for their part, believe that they are very engaged at this level. Group discussions also revealed that students pit the cognitive dimension (engaging in studies) against the sociorelational dimension (participating in the extra-curricular life at their college). If they do not participate very much in college life, it is because, they claim, they need to dedicate time to their studies. The Conseil believes that there is work needed to bridge this gap.

First Key Area For Innovation: Acquiring A Better Understanding of Youth

To acquire a better understanding of youth and taking into consideration the abovementioned divergent perceptions are closely related. In fact, reaching an objective understanding of youth to better know who they are, what they want and what their main interests are, represents a step in the right direction for any action that could better support student engagement.

For several years, particularly since the introduction of success plans, colleges have developed a range of tools designed to better understand students at their different stages in college. These tools allow for both the collection of quantitative data on academic achievement and qualitative data on some of the behaviours young people engage in during their college years.

Within the framework of supporting the student's engagement in his educational plan, the Conseil believes that two actions should be undertaken in the area of understanding youth. The first would be to carry out a systematic collection of data on student behaviour and attitudes throughout college to define who they are, their engagement behaviours,

and how to best support them. The second would be to disseminate the data collected among college educators, for it appears that some of the latter's perceptions would be better informed with a broader knowledge of students. This information should be disseminated among students as well so that they may be informed of and identify behaviours or attitudes likely to help them in their studies.

Second Key Area For Innovation: Implementing Diversified Measures

The second key area has its foundation in the first—understanding youth—but enhances it with a repertoire of measures that consider the diverse student population and its development.

The Conseil believes that in order to establish diversified measures that include individual characteristics of the student population, colleges should first encourage pedagogical innovation among their personnel. In the Conseil's opinion, colleges should promote new initiatives by supporting innovative projects that target specific needs, such as those that foster success among male students or integration of Allophones and First Nations students into college. Colleges must also ensure that the outcomes of these innovations be more widely disseminated, both within their college and throughout the network, so that stakeholders in the college community may adopt them and share in their success.

With the support of the Carrefour de la réussite au collégial and other organizations, colleges have a range of tools and resources for contributing their expertise and disseminating measures deemed useful to support their students. The Conseil believes that it is important these forums continue to exist for sharing successful experiments and developments in the area of student engagement. Colleges should be encouraged to participate in these and should receive sufficient financial support for dissemination of the outcome.

In addition, the Conseil also deems that the organization of the college be sufficiently flexible to consider the individual needs of the student during the various stages of his education path and thus better support him. Awareness of the systemic barriers should facilitate an easier transition for a student changing programs or experiencing difficulties that may hinder the regular or expected educational path. By the same logic, the Conseil invites colleges to continue providing diversified paths, such as co-op programs or transfers between a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) and a Diploma of College Studies (DCS), or between a DCS and a bachelor's

degree, in so doing meeting the needs of some students for whom the link between programs of studies and the workplace is an efficient support strategy in their engagement.

Given the delicate nature of the first semester at college and the fragility of student engagement at this point in the college path, the Conseil deems that colleges and school boards should strengthen their collaboration by using a range of means, notably through regional consultation groups from the different levels of the education system. This would better inform stakeholders about college requirements regarding time dedicated to study as well as to create forums for teachers and educators from the two levels of education to better appreciate how everyone contributes to continuity and how to best equip young people to pursue their college education.

Third Key Area For Innovation: Developing Pedagogical Relationships

The pedagogical relationship refers to the interrelation between the various components of engagement, as well as the role that college educators and services play in supporting its various dimensions. The Conseil believes that this key area should be approached by identifying the manner in which it is possible to support the three dimensions of engagement in the classroom, by using teaching strategies that incorporate the dynamics of engagement and the basic elements at work in any pedagogical relationship: the links between student, teacher, learning and the environment.

The Conseil believes that some pedagogical approaches—tutoring, mentoring, problem-based learning, project-based learning or co-op programs—may foster engagement for they involve the interrelation of its three dimensions. Tutoring, for example, places the student in a relationship with one or more of his peers (sociorelational dimension) for specific problem solving or learning (cognitive dimension) in an environment which places the student in a trusting relationship, deepens his sense of understanding and of improvement and ultimately, his motivation (the affective dimension).

The teacher's role in a pedagogical relationship is a important one, for the teacher acts as conduit between learning and the student. The teacher shapes and organizes knowledge to make learning easier for the student. In this dynamic, it is important to bear in mind that learning does not exist in a vacuum: the classroom is a social environment where the teacher interacts with one student as well as all the other students simultaneously, who are also interacting among themselves. A teacher instructing a group can use

the latter to promote and motivate learning. The teacher, however, must consider the heterogeneity of the group and, as with the second key area for innovation—diversifying measures—must have a repertoire of approaches and methods to place students in a relationship with each other and/or with learning.

Pedagogical formulas that promote actions among students and learning are among the preferred tools as they encourage deep learning. The classroom is an ideal environment to support engagement, but a classroom does not exist by itself, but within a program, which is the logical and complimentary organization of competencies to be acquired in a given field. The cohesiveness and the logical progression of a learning activity are also, in the opinion of the Conseil, factors supporting student engagement and perseverance in college studies. Colleges have, for several years now, invested much effort in a program-based approach and should continue to do so, to ensure the cohesion of their programs and to modify them where needed to take into account the educational paths of their students. Colleges must foster a sense of belonging to a program or to the institution and also invest in the peer group's contribution to the vitality of the program, by encouraging formulas (such as peer tutoring or resolution by teamwork) that leverage all the three dimensions of engagement.

In keeping with the theme of dialogue between research and practice as a key to success in its 2004–2005 annual report, *Le dialogue entre la recherche et la pratique en éducation : une clé pour la réussite* (CSE, 2006), the Conseil believes that education research on the mechanics of acquiring, developing or broadening knowledge and on the evaluation of active teaching methods should be more widely known, debated and adapted by teachers when establishing programs and preparing and delivering courses. Teachers should be familiar with and use some of these approaches, which could prove useful for certain students in some contexts. In the opinion of the Conseil, colleges should use the findings of pedagogical research more often, and in order to be better leverage this research, professional development and on-going training of teachers is a step in the right direction.

Fourth Key Area For Innovation: Improving Student Services

Improving student services involves the most efficient strategies to engage students, as well as measures which contribute to and play a part in the overall education of students, while taking into consideration their values, taste, aspirations and time management.

Student services in a college meet both the needs of the individual (orientation and psychological counselling) and of the group (team sports, theatre troupes, etc.). Having services for these two areas of need is essential, and, according to students, the main challenge colleges face are to make these services and activities better known, and to encourage students to use or participate in them. Students believe they would use the services more and increase their participation in activities if they knew about them.

Although student participation in extra-curricular activities is declining as they conflict with activities outside the boundaries of the college, the Conseil believes that colleges should nonetheless continue to offer the broadest range of activities possible to students, because for some, these activities are a motivating factor in the sense of belonging and self-fulfilment.

In the Conseil's findings, according to students relationships with peer groups and the environment are indeed very important. Relationships forged with peers and teachers contribute to the student's intellectual and social integration to college life. However, because students do not participate very much in extracurricular activities due to their time management, activities related to their program or their studies would better provide support for their engagement. These activities, which could be qualified as co-curricular as they are positioned slightly outside the confines of program content without being directly linked to the course, would have the advantage of reconciling the curricular with the extracurricular. Activities such as field trips to a workplace or museum for Arts students would, just as efficient teaching strategies do in a classroom, combine the three dimensions of engagement and promote social integration in college.

Relying on an offer of services built primarily on these types of activities related to a given program could prove to be an interesting strategy which would reach the greatest number of students and could also support all the dimensions of engagement.

Moreover, another challenge for colleges is offering a wide range of activities while ensuring they best meet student demand. Not every student needs every service but the offer should nonetheless be sufficiently varied so as to meet the greatest number of needs.

Lastly, the Conseil's study has shown the importance of family support in the student's choice of programs and perseverance in school. Consequently, colleges must try to build ties with students' families to help youth in their choice of programs. Colleges would also benefit from using students' families

and social networks as intermediaries of information on the programs, activities and services offered. To wit, the family network remains the primary place of belonging and support for a large number of college students. Like the peer network, it is an important environment that influences behaviours and attitudes of the student engaging in his educational plan.

Recommendations

Based on the four abovementioned key areas for innovation, the Conseil here presents to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport and to college stakeholders 12 recommendations to better support the engagement of the student in his educational plan and ultimately his success.

Acquiring An Understanding Of Youth

RECOMMENDATION 1

In this key area for innovation, **the Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport:**

- to support, in collaboration with partners in the college network, the development of tools to assess engagement behaviours that will provide a continuous picture of student engagement based on their behaviour and characteristics, such as programs of study, gender, or stages in the educational path at college;
- to ensure that this data on engagement behaviours be disseminated among all college network stakeholders, the community and the family network to allow for a common understanding of engagement and the development of appropriate and efficient support measures;
- to invite colleges to communicate their findings to students so that the latter are aware of their engagement profile and of support services provided at college.

College network stakeholders would thus have at their disposal a tool allowing them to reach an objective understanding of youth, and be able to disseminate the resulting information among all college stakeholders, who would then have access to the necessary information to either guide their actions and modify their services (the institution) or behaviour (the student).

Implementing Diversified Measures

In this key area for innovation, the Conseil presents four recommendations (the first two are addressed to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport and colleges; the last two to colleges and schools boards):

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Conseil recommends to the Minister and to colleges:

- to promote pedagogical innovation among college personnel to quickly and adequately meet the emerging needs of their diverse populations;
- to support the establishment of forums between and within colleges to promote the exchange of new knowledge.

The college community would thus be able to adapt tools to quickly meet the range of needs of its population and share the various measures available to the college network.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Conseil also recommends to the Minister and to colleges:

- to ensure that systemic and institutional barriers that hinder support measures tailored to diverse college populations be identified and, where needed, carry out the appropriate modifications and introduce the necessary flexibility in the system to meet the range of student needs.

It would thus be possible to quickly act on the necessary modifications to take into account the range of possible and unforeseen educational paths.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Considering the need for better support for the transitional phase between secondary school and college, **the Conseil recommends to colleges and to school boards:**

- to promote dialogue between professionals and teachers from the two levels of education so that at the college level they are aware of characteristics of students who are a product of the education reform, and at the secondary level they are aware of the expected behaviours for students at college, particularly regarding work organization and methods.

This measure would foster partnership among the primary stakeholders at the two levels of education, and would enable a better understanding

of how everyone's contribution is important in the process of preparing and receiving secondary school graduates.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Conseil also recommends to colleges and to school boards:

- To partner in disseminating to students enrolling in college all relevant information about favourable engagement behaviours for succeeding in their college studies, so that they may adopt the required behaviours and attitudes at this level of education from the outset.

This initiative falls within the framework of relevant actions to be taken as of the first semester in college, since a successful start contributes to perseverance and academic success.

Establishing Pedagogical Relationships

For this key area of innovation, the Conseil also formulates four recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Conseil first recommends to teachers and colleges:

- to employ a repertoire of pedagogical formulas and strategies that support the dynamics of the three dimensions of engagement to foster the active participation of students in their learning and to encourage deep learning;
- to ensure that students are provided with clear information on teacher availability outside the classroom schedule and to encourage access to teachers.

An environment could thus be established where teachers fully carry out their primary role in the acquisition of knowledge and in the development and support of engagement.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Moreover, **the Conseil recommends to colleges:**

- to promote a sense of belonging and participation in college life among students by developing activities that promote engagement specific to the program of study or group of programs with common characteristics;

- to foster mutual help and relationships among peers by providing space or facilities specifically allocated for programs or groups of programs.

These measures, which fall within the framework of actions promoting a program-based approach, would also reassert the importance of social and intellectual integration in college as a factor supporting student engagement.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Conseil recommends to colleges and to teachers:

- to jointly establish in their respective environments innovative professional development formulas (forums, exchanges, lunch debates, pedagogical days) to promote the use of a repertoire of pedagogical strategies.

In keeping with the notion of the need for ongoing professional development, **the Conseil also recommends to the Minister:**

- to assist with ongoing professional development of teachers through appropriate financial support and access to a range of pedagogical resources in order to meet new and emerging needs.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Lastly, considering the turnover of teachers in the near future and the need for quality training to support new teachers entering their profession, **the Conseil recommends that the Minister and colleges:**

- establish a resource framework for new teachers so that they may be aware of issues related to diversified pedagogical approaches as a means to support student engagement.

These last two recommendations should enable the college community to adopt policies and methods that promote the ongoing professional development of teachers, making it a key action for taking into consideration the new and emerging needs of students or new realities.

Improving Student Services

For this key area of innovation, the Conseil presents three recommendations addressed to colleges.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Conseil recommends firstly to colleges:

- to develop co-curricular activities outside the scope of programs of study to promote student participation in college life and thus support their integration.

Colleges would thus ensure reaching the greatest number of students possible, as it is difficult for some students to participate in activities outside of their program of study.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Conseil also recommends to colleges:

- to uphold the offer of diversified services and activities tailored to the characteristics of students and of the environment;
- to ensure that measures established to adequately meet the needs of the greatest number of students are more readily accessible;
- to widely disseminate information on the services available.

Students have shown how important it is for them to participate in relevant activities, and to integrate in college life.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Lastly, the Conseil recommends to colleges:

- to use the family network to convey information on available programs, services and activities at college to increase the possibility of the information reaching the student;
- to reach out to the family network and solicit its support for students in fulfilling their educational plan.

As extensive research has shown, colleges would thus embrace the crucial role of the family network in supporting engagement and education.

CONCLUSION

The issue of student engagement has been explored many times over the past few years in an attempt to understand the attitude students have toward their education. The work of the Conseil as well as consultations among stakeholders in the sector have made it possible to determine a number of key aspects about engagement and draw some conclusions.

The first aspect is the challenge of thoroughly defining the concept of engagement, for it has many meanings and its expressions are varied. The second aspect is that this polysemy and its varied expressions are in fact complementary. Engagement, then, is the interrelation of the importance an individual gives to education and to college life with the effort he dedicates to acquiring knowledge and the links he establishes and maintains with his surroundings. Engagement is thus a multifaceted activity.

A survey of college stakeholders has revealed a number of findings. It appears that students attach great value to their studies and college life, contrary to the perception of some. A majority of students also adopted school behaviours and dedicated consistent efforts to their studies. Moreover, it was noted that while students felt it was important to establish relationships with their peers and teachers, as well as to participate in college activities, their management of their busy schedule would not always allow them to take part in extracurricular activities as much as they wished.

In addition, there are links between some expressions of engagement and student success. A sense of well-being and integration into college life, efforts invested in studies, the right choice of program, the influence of family support and the value of peer relations are all factors on which it appears relevant to act upon. Moreover, the work of the Conseil has revealed that colleges would benefit from also taking into consideration some of the individual characteristics to better identify students who might need more guidance than others, for example those with a low average in secondary school, or those with financial problems, or those who spend too much time working. Lastly, other variables such as the education sector or the stage in the college path should be considered when establishing support measures.

As they are complementary, the three dimensions of engagement (affective, cognitive and sociorelational) all contribute to student success. Consequently, it is important that colleges act upon each of them. To do so, colleges must meet four challenges: adopt an objective perspective on the expression of student engagement; consider, in their support measures, the diversity of students depending on their characteristics and their educational paths;

develop a range of pedagogical strategies for the classroom that takes into account this diversity; and finally to provide a surrounding environment that is meaningful to students.

In conclusion, the Conseil invites all involved stakeholders to view supporting engagement as a key element in promoting student success. It should be reiterated that engagement is multifaceted and that it can change throughout the college years depending on different events. To support engagement it is also essential to have an objective understanding of young people and their values and attitudes, to establish a range of diversified measures, and create partnerships in the college network. The Conseil wishes that this Brief will stimulate thinking among all communities to better support student engagement and thus promote student success.

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The full text (in French) of the Brief

Au collégial – L'engagement de l'étudiant dans son projet de formation : une responsabilité partagée avec les acteurs de son collège

as well as its abridged versions in French and English (*The Student's Engagement in His Educational Plan At the College Level: A Shared Responsibility Among All College Stakeholders*)

are available on the website of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation at **www.cse.gouv.qc.ca**

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