



# Quebec's CLC Network: A Community School Initiative Fueled by Passion and Relationships

*Community schools - a place-based strategy that connects students and families with the resources they need to be successful in school and life.*

For many, relationship-building is considered a fundamental life skill, one that will bring great success to those who possess the ability to nurture it. For Quebec's Community Learning Centres (CLCs), also known as community schools, relationship-building is the foundation of their many achievements and is the thread that ties the CLC Network together.

Launched in 2006 by Quebec's English education ministry, the CLC Network is managed by LEARN's Provincial Resource Team (PRT), five passionate individuals, each equipped with their own unique skill set. "The PRT is the thread that draws the string throughout the whole CLC Network," said PRT Project Coordinator, Dannielle Dyson.

The CLC network is now comprised of more than 90 English-language community schools across Quebec. The concept of community schools was brought to life by Paule Langevin, former Education and Development Specialist at the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ) and Noel Burke, former Assistant Deputy Minister for the English-Speaking Community, with one goal in mind, to connect official language minority (OLM) schools to their communities.

While community schools exist around the world, the Quebec model is unique as "we focus on supporting Quebec's minority language community," said Debbie Horrocks, current PRT Director. "The number one thing community schools do is provide services, resources, and access for students and the English-speaking community through partnerships in the CLC schools."

Quebec's Community Schools are funded by the provincial education ministry and the network relies heavily on grant-writing to support their community school projects and activities. Each CLC is managed by a Community Development Agent (CDA) who works closely with the school team, their communities, and a variety of partner organizations to bring resources, programming, and services to students, families, and the English-speaking community. "Having CDAs, who are members of the school staff, allows them to be immersed in the culture of the school AND the community," said PRT Assistant Director, Katherine Dimas.

Supporting the CDAs is at the heart of what the PRT does. With 10 years of experience as a CDA, the PRT's newest team member, Bobbie Variantzas, brings a unique perspective when it comes to assisting CDAs. "I still consider myself boots on the ground," said Variantzas, who joined the PRT in August 2022. "The PRT is here to listen to and help CDAs. I'm here for the CDAs to talk, boast, and walk through processes. I've been there. I know that world very well."

For Katherine Dimas, who was also a CDA before joining the PRT in 2017, building relationships with current CDAs is what inspires her. “My favourite part of the job is supporting the CDAs and the school leadership teams,” she said. “There’s something really magical that happens when you get two people in a room, help them identify the reason why they’re doing something, and then watch ideas spark, turning into programming. That’s what the PRT is all about – building relationships and helping people bring their amazing ideas to the next level.” Quebec’s community schools are located in urban, rural, and remote areas, making a CDAs’ job different in each CLC, which has the PRT customizing their support to match each CDA’s unique circumstances.

In addition to the professional development, coaching, and support they provide to the Network, the highly-adaptable PRT is data-driven, using results from in-depth surveys, consultations, and research to advocate for CDAs, community partners, and the initiative. “Both the PRT and the CDAs sit on inter-sectoral tables because if you’re not at those meetings, then people won’t know that they want to work with you,” said Horrocks of the importance of communicating the role the CLCs play in Quebec’s educational landscape in order to secure long-lasting partnerships and funding.

When the Covid-19 pandemic descended on the world in 2020, the PRT was able to pivot its programming and support mechanisms thanks to their malleability and long-established partnerships with local organizations, such as the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), the Centre of Excellence for Mental Health (CEMH) and Bird Protection Quebec. “When everything moved online, partners were able to expand their reach into a much broader territory, especially in rural and remote areas,” said Dimas of one of the positive outcomes during a not-so-positive time.

PRT Project Coordinator, Ben Loomer agrees with his colleague, Dimas. “Partnerships became stronger,” he said, noting that the CDAs were able to heavily lean on their long-time partners to provide much-needed services to their communities during a difficult period. “The entire network and its partners found a bit of an ecosystem amongst each other. Before the pandemic, it could sometimes feel a little territorial between partners but when we faced such uncertainty, there was a realization that collaboration was key in getting important programs into the hands of the communities and students.”

“We’re an impact network”, says Dimas. We very consciously and intentionally bring people together, that’s the part that isn’t always visible.”

Like many initiatives, the sustainable funding question is always a concern, for both the CLCs and the PRT. There may be a lack of funding but there is certainly no lack of passion within the CLC network. The PRT and its school teams forge on to create vital community schools that are leaving an indelible mark on Quebec’s English education system by connecting students and families with the resources they need to be successful in school and life.

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