



# ADR-Federation Edition

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## **FNEEQ: An Organization You Can Rely On With a Future-Oriented Union Agenda**

**First, we want to thank the DTU for inviting us to participate in this issue of the OWL HOOTS and to share with you why we think FNEEQ is your best choice as a union federation.**

FNEEQ is the most important union organization not only in the cegep system, but in all post secondary education in Quebec. It represents 37 of the 59 cegep teacher unions, almost two thirds of the total. Its Cegep grouping has grown in recent years with the addition to its ranks of the teachers' unions from Valleyfield and Lionel-Groulx.

### **The Regroupement Cégep**

FNEEQ is organized into three autonomous groups: one that brings together unions from private schools, one for sessional lecturers at university and one for cegep teachers. Within the federation, the Cegep group is composed exclusively of representatives from cegep teachers and is completely autonomous with regard to all matters dealing with the negotiation process, including the list of demands, pressure tactics and agreements in principle.

The number of delegates per union varies from one to three according to the number of union members. Dawson would have the right to three (3) delegates. The high level of participation by all the cegep unions in FNEEQ's meetings and other activities indicates its dynamism and vitality.

### **The Federation**

Twice each year, representatives of unions from all three *groups* meet in the Federal Council. Positions are taken on issues of common concern, usually arising from the deliberations of the federation's committees. Release time is provided to members of these committees in order to allow them to produce high quality studies. The Federal Council addresses, for example, issues such as the status of women in society and in union life, governance of cegeps and universities, how to integrate new members into unions, and environmentally-friendly practices.

### **English Unions**

The Cegep grouping includes three unions from English colleges: John Abbott, Champlain St. Lambert and Champlain St. Lawrence. Sept-Iles also includes an English section. Responding to the needs of their members and ensuring their ability to participate in union life is one of our priorities. Therefore, almost all documents addressed to members are translated: the *Carnet Collégial* magazine, Info-Nego

newsletters, and various guides and resources produced about the collective agreement as well as the webpage.

FNEEQ and the CSN have always supported the existence of English-language public cegeps and open access to them. This is shown by the CSN brief presented to the Estates-General on the Situation and Future of the French Language in Quebec in March 2001, where the CSN clearly stated its position:

*Since 1995, 60% of allophones have enrolled in English cegeps and 40% in French cegeps, while at the same time francophones have also attended English cegeps. **The CSN does not believe that it is necessary or desirable to require that college studies be in French (as it is for primary and secondary education) in order to better integrate children from immigrant communities into Québec society.***

### **Services**

FNEEQ services are focussed on the responsibilities and needs of unions and their members. Services are provided quickly and efficiently. A union counsellor, bilingual if required as would be the case at Dawson, is assigned to each union. The majority of the union counsellors of the *Cegep grouping* are lawyers. They answer all questions from union executives about the application of the collective agreement and labour relations, plead grievances and represent the local unions before any administrative tribunal (the provincial Labour Relations Commission, the Workers Compensation Board, etc.). Elected full-time representatives responsible for issues such as staffing, recognition of years of schooling, etc. are also available. Finally, a coordinator is elected for the *Cegep grouping*. All are available to meet with local unions as are the teachers elected to the FNEEQ executive.

### **Insurance**

Our group insurance combines the solidarity of large numbers with democratic management. Each union participates in the management of the insurance policy, in particular in the annual policy renewal. FNEEQ also offers a very competitive policy for retired teachers.

### **Pedagogy**

The pedagogical positions of the federation are developed by the School and Society committee. It prepares social and political analyses of the major issues that affect the education system. Each month, the committee prepares an article that unions can publish in their local newsletter. Competency-based education in cegeps, the financing of teaching, the commercialization of education, tuition fees, the challenges of the reforms in primary and secondary education, school drop-out rates, selection in public secondary schools are some of the issues that have been addressed.

### **Negotiations**

To join FNEEQ is to become a full member of the common front, and therefore to be able to take part in the central table negotiations. The current political and economic climate calls for the greatest possible degree of union solidarity in order to improve the salaries and working conditions of cegep teachers, especially when our employer can pass laws and believes it has a mandate to dismantle public services.

To join FNEEQ is also to belong to a federation that has the resources available to carry out the required analyses on negotiation issues, with the negotiation experience and the means to support all of its unions in their mobilization activities.

The negotiation committee is made up of five elected members, all cegep teachers. The team for this negotiation includes two who have participated in past province-wide negotiations. A FNEEQ union counsellor also brings his experience to the committee, but is of course a non-voting member.

The CSN pays for the expenses of the public sector negotiations coordination committee out of its Professional Defence Fund. Support personnel for information and mobilization are assigned to each of the four public sector federations. In addition, economists, supported by the CSN actuary, contribute to the committee by producing the studies needed for the negotiation of salaries and the pension plan.

**Invitation to members of the Dawson Teachers' Union**

Our message is clear: we invite you to join FNEEQ, and take an important step in reinforcing the unity and cohesion of cegep teachers. By doing so, in addition to bringing your experience to our deliberations, you will also be able to participate in the development of the largest teachers' union forum in the cegeps and in higher education and ensure Dawson teachers high level professional services.

We have experience in integrating newly affiliated unions. When the unions at Valleyfield and Lionel-Groulx voted recently to leave FAC and join FNEEQ, the transfer of all files (including insurance, grievances, recognition of years of schooling and labour relations) was done without delay.

**In this context where unions and education are under attack, we invite you to join FNEEQ, and by doing so, to contribute to unify cegep teachers within an organizational structure that allows diversity of points of view and can best defend teachers against arbitrary government action.**

## **CHOOSING A FUTURE WITH FAC**

As we have already emphasized elsewhere, nobody could possibly doubt the legitimacy of your review of your union affiliation. FAC's belief in the fundamental right of union members to choose their affiliation is evidenced by its flexible disaffiliation rules that fully respect the will of general assemblies. Nevertheless, the importance of the decision that you will soon have to make calls for fair and accurate information, preferably from several sources. In the past few weeks, you probably have become aware of different points of view on several aspects of union life. Do these perspectives have equal weight in the decision you will have to make? It is up to each one of you to decide about this. And at FAC we believe that the debate, given its significance and consequences, deserves to be correctly based.

FAC provides the DTU teachers with services that clearly stand out for their quality and relevance. The consultation service in labour relations that FAC has developed is one that no other federation is able to offer. The regular presence of consultants at Dawson College and the personalized treatment of each file testify to FAC's unionism of outreach and proximity. In its approach to labour relations, FAC prefers to work in the field rather than to judicialize the files. In addition to the labour lawyers at its disposal, FAC can also draw on the input of specialists, in insurance law or in workplace harassment for example, in order to better represent you. Results obtained at Dawson thus speak volumes. Together with the DTU executive, FAC counsellors have settled an impressive number of cases in a more than satisfactory manner.

As for insurance, FAC offers significant advantages adapted to the reality of college teachers. In this regard, we invite you to participate in the workshops on insurance that will take place March 30–31 at Dawson College. The FAC team will be there to answer any questions you may have.

At FAC, teaching is a daily concern. As well, FAC's leadership in curriculum and subject matter is shown in the quality of its analyses as well as by the advisories and reports it publishes. FAC is sensitive to the various emerging issues that have a direct impact on college teaching. For instance, it sits on the programs sub-committee of the Comité national des programmes d'études professionnelles et techniques (CNPEPT). As such, it is the only college teachers' federation represented there. Over the years, FAC has distinguished itself, among other accomplishments, with the publications

“Pedagogical Platform” (revised 2006) and “In Support of Freedom and Responsibility: A FAC Teachers Declaration.” These documents remain absolutely current today and enable the federation to present an overall vision of the college network by allying concerns in the matter of labour relations with pedagogical principles that we promote and defend.

The veritable foundation of FAC is an active and intense democratic life that calls for quality information, and this is one of FAC’s priorities. The federation has developed first-class communication tools to provide members with the information essential for decision making. FAC is the only union federation that offers all of its information in French and in English. In addition to its Web site, the federation produces a variety of publications, among them *Factuel*, a review for discussion and deliberation on pedagogical, social, and union issues; and *Contact*, a monthly bulletin reporting on the orientations of the federation and on current issues involving the colleges.

Thus, the facts testify that the services FAC provides Dawson College teachers are of a very high quality. On that issue, it is rather difficult to find grounds for a debate on union affiliation. Rather, the fundamental questions to be asked must be connected to FAC’s capacity to negotiate agreements that respond to the aspirations of its members and to the place of the DTU within our federation.

Through the ins and outs of negotiations, FAC has proven itself a major player in the life of the college network. On several occasions FAC has innovated by introducing a number of new provisions into the work contract. With a direct link to the Quebec treasury secretariat (Conseil du Trésor), FAC is also able to discuss intersectoral issues such as salary and retirement. One should not lose sight of the following facts. The “central table,” at which some organizations discuss intersectoral issues, is above all a union creation. As a matter of fact, the Conseil du Trésor has a legal obligation to present its offers and to negotiate them with all of the union organizations, FAC included.

Those who support disaffiliation believe it would be to the DTU’s advantage to join an organization with a larger membership. The strength of numbers is thus thought to be a cure-all for the difficulties encountered by the entire group of union organizations in their negotiations with the Quebec government. On this basis, should not union organizations with larger numbers then benefit from better working conditions? Should they not then enjoy higher salaries? And even supposing that numbers were all that significant, would DTU teachers really find it advantageous to become a member of the CSN when, right now, it is the Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics (the SISP)<sup>1</sup> that represents more than 260,000 unionized public and parapublic employees?<sup>2</sup> One has to admit that the quasi-magical effect attributed to numbers does not stand up to analysis. In reality, under the current system of negotiation, the ability of a union federation to negotiate a satisfactory collective agreement has considerable precedence over its numerical weight. As such, in the course of the past negotiations, FAC has always been the first federation to arrive at an agreement in principle.

While the limitations of numbers are clearly established, this in no way suggests that FAC chooses to work alone. Quite to the contrary, FAC has always preferred to work in alliance with others. FEC (CSQ) and FNEEQ (CSN) have also recognized this necessity in that they have been working in close collaboration with FAC for almost two years now on the issue of recognizing the teaching profession. Not only does this interfederative cooperation duly refute the mythical effect of numbers but it also shows clearly that the union unity that all of us are looking for can very well be something other than a simple question of structure.

What remains to be considered is which union federation most shares the values of DTU teachers. As a founding union, the DTU has participated closely in the definition and the development of FAC; and its values are very much made up of the values that DTU delegates wanted to see incorporated in their union federation. An intense democratic life, the primacy of general assemblies, promotion of the college teaching profession, ensuring progress in women’s rights, pluralistic and regular information, openness in regard to social solidarity—all these remain the principal values that FAC union life is still built upon today.

It is also equally important to assess the place that the DTU occupies within FAC. Over the years, FAC has adopted a number of measures in order to better take into account the size of Dawson College in the decision-making process. As it is, the DTU commands significant weight in all FAC decisions, a weight that simply has no equivalent in any other organization. There are some who suggest that the voice of the DTU would be better heard in an organization with a greater number of urban Cégeps. Once again, the simplistic nature of this argument does little justice to a reality that is far more complex. On numerous occasions, at FAC as at other organizations, unions with the same geographical origins have opposed each other on questions as basic as accepting an agreement in principle. Prejudices aside, at FAC several unions from the regions have voted along with DTU representatives on numerous contested issues. One cannot reduce the dynamics of a union organization like FAC to a so-called opposition between city and regions.

After 20 years of existence, FAC continues to move forward. Is the organization without fault or above reproach? Never would we have the arrogance to make such a claim. Yet FAC, true to the principles with which it was created, has as its first priority the defense of teachers and the promotion of their interests. As your deliberations come to an end, we invite you to make a choice for the future and to continue to fully occupy the central place that belongs to you with FAC.

Jean-Claude Drapeau, President, Guy Desmarais, Vice-President for Communications and Development, Bruno Voisard, Vice-President for Resources and Labour Relations, and Catherine Johnson, Vice-President for Pedagogy, Union Practices and New Rights

<sup>1</sup> The SISF is composed of the Centrale des syndicats Québec (CSQ), the Syndicat de la fonction publique du Québec (SFPQ), the Syndicat des professionnelles et professionnels du gouvernement du Québec (SPGQ), the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ), and the Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS).

<sup>2</sup> The CSN represents approximately 135,000 unionized public and parapublic employees, of which more than 100,000 are in the health and social services sector.