

You had an unfortunate situation where there was no communication among teachers, parents or students. Essentially, a Greek student, unless he happened to come from an unusual family, or attract the interest of an unusual teacher, was left to drift through the system.

A further problem was the liberalization of school curricula in the 1960's. Until that time, even though they were neglected, the Greek students at least came into contact with the basics of education—language, grammar, mathematics, history, geography. But with the new approach, students were told that they could choose their own path through school. What happened was that the immigrant children usually chose the easiest path, with the result that when they reached high school graduation, they were unfit for post-secondary education.



“In 1971, only 4% of our high school graduates went to the university. Today, our special schools send 84% of graduates into post-secondary education.”

In 1971, when I became president of the Greek community, only 4% of our high school graduates were going on to university. This had nothing to do with innate ability or intelligence.

The turnaround of this situation is an interesting one. Since 1925, we had in the Greek community a little institution known as the Socrates School. Its original purpose had been to encourage a better kind of integration of Greek people into the English culture. But at the end of the 1960's it was little more than a ghetto school, which reinforced the disabilities that our young people were experiencing.

We decided to use this Socrates School as the foundation for a new experiment in ethnic education. From the Quebec government we received the permission to establish a trilingual curricula, with all class instruction in French. In addition to granting permission, the government also agreed to pay 80% of our costs to run the school. What followed over the past thirteen years has been the development of a school system which now has four schools and accommodates more than 20% of all Greek-speaking students in greater Montreal. From 171 students in 1971, we reached 265 in 1972, and now have over two thousand. Last year 84% of the high school graduates in our system went on to university or college.

The consensus is that our system teaches French as well as either of the Catholic or Protestant systems. After we had been in operation for four years, I had the pleasure of guiding the Quebec deputy minister of education on a tour of our schools. It was a moving experience for me, when in class after class the children answered her questions in superb French. I had to look away to hide the delight I felt. And the children also achieve a high competency in English, and their native language which they learn at home is continually reinforced.