At present, there is little conclusive research data about the effects of the pandemic on the educational success and overall well-being of students and adult learners in Québec. However, a number of preliminary observations can be made in light of the available information and knowledge emerging from scientific research.

Educational Success

An overall comparison of results that Québec students obtained on the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 report cards illustrates, to some extent, the effects of the pandemic on their educational success, especially in Secondary III and IV mathematics. At the elementary level, the results on the first report card of 2020-2021 were relatively comparable to those obtained last year, in both the language of instruction (French/English) and mathematics. Nevertheless, it would seem that elementary school students have experienced worrisome difficulties in reading and writing since the beginning of the pandemic (Turcotte, Giguère and Prévost, 2021). Care should therefore be taken in evaluating the short-, medium- and long-term effects of the current pandemic on educational success. However, there is no doubt about the immediate need for concerted action, which is why this plan is so relevant.

Some researchers anticipate that the effects of the pandemic (especially the closing of schools and centres) will result not so much in the declining achievement of students as a whole, but rather in a growing achievement gap that will affect students who already had difficulties or who are from more disadvantaged backgrounds (Haeck and Lefebvre, 2020).
The scientific community in Québec was quick to address the issues related to mental health and well-being in the context of the pandemic. In the spring of 2020, research projects were undertaken to document the effects of the pandemic, including confinement, on the mental health and well-being of the general public and of children, adolescents and young adults in particular. The Ministère was able to help support and carry out some of this work, which is still ongoing.4

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the available results. For instance, children and young adults who already had social or behavioural problems before the pandemic have become increasingly vulnerable in terms of their mental health. Some of the difficulties described by Camden et al. (2020)5 include screen addiction, distress, anger, demotivation, a lost sense of belonging to the class, anxiety, sleep disruption, and a loss of routine and of social connections.

According to Tardif-Grenier et al.6, the pandemic, and especially the first lockdown, had a major impact on the 1251 adolescents aged 12 to 17 that they surveyed throughout Canada. For example, they reported that symptoms of anxiety and depression were significantly greater among girls than among boys, that girls used their cellphones more often and that boys used their computers more often. An interesting fact was that these adolescents used adaptive strategies (e.g. using social media to maintain social connections, playing sports and exercising to avoid boredom and reduce stress, finding new hobbies). Lastly, these adolescents wanted the adults in their school to help them on an academic level in terms of the subjects taught and school life (return to normal, variety of topics discussed, leniency and reduction in school-related pressure) and on a personal level (availability to talk, encouragement, congratulations and reassuring messages).

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4. A number of research projects are currently under way, and their results are expected over the next three years.
International organizations have emphasized the opportunities related to making the most of the positive aspects of the health crisis to review and improve education systems. This would make it possible to reinforce the importance of education in societies to make them more inclusive and resilient. These opportunities to enhance education would have an impact on students, teachers and all the other education network partners.

Students

The emergence of new ways of learning during the health crisis should prompt an overall review of practices in order to better foster student engagement. Listed below are ways of creating the conditions for success and ensuring students’ overall development:

- Regard the right to connectivity as a fundamental component of the right to an education and ensure universal access to digital technology.  
- Take a different approach to students’ overall development by ensuring that 21st-century skills complement the core skills.
- Safeguard the mental health and well-being of students while focusing on the development of their social and emotional skills.
- Rethink evaluation to reinforce its role as a tool to support learning.

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Teachers and All School Staff

The challenges related to the pandemic have shown that it is more important than ever to make every possible effort to value the work that teachers do. Some of the measures to be taken could also apply to all school staff members. With regard to education, these new possibilities stand out:

- Ensure that teachers have a high degree of autonomy so there is greater emphasis on a culture that promotes innovation and the sharing of pedagogical practices based on research and conclusive data.
- Think about developing a flexible curriculum and ways of providing teachers with greater latitude so they can meet students’ real needs.
- Focus on personalized professional development that makes it possible to meet the challenges associated with the different modes of education (e.g. using digital tools and helping students with their social and emotional development).¹¹

Education Network Partners

In addition, the pandemic has reaffirmed the need to establish conditions that ensure inclusive governance of the education network, which encourages the contribution of all stakeholders. Some of these conditions are as follows:

- Promote the engagement of parents and devise new ways of helping them develop their skills.¹²
- Maximize collaboration and communication between schools and families (e.g. update the skills of education staff and make optimal use of digital tools¹³).
- Form partnerships to involve the community and local stakeholders.¹⁴
- Empower local stakeholders.
- Think about policy responses to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis on education.¹⁵

The possibilities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic point to the establishment of a set of conditions designed to encourage all stakeholders to be actively involved in achieving educational goals. Lastly, the implementation of these conditions would require an innovative, flexible approach.

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