

Québec's Strategy to Incentivize Associate Teacher Mentorship for Practicums Amid a Teacher Shortage

Joanne Pattison-Meek, *Bishop's University*

Abstract

A dominant methodology of teacher education programs around the globe is the teaching practicum. Many governments and teacher education programs offer incentives to attract practicing teachers to mentor student teachers during their practicum. Such incentivization strategies are critical during teacher shortages, as mentorship is one means to attract and retain new teachers in the profession. This article analyzes the outcomes of one such initiative: Québec's Intern Supervision Allowance and subsequent *Strategy to Promote the Recognition of School Staff*. Drawing on publicly available documents, the analysis highlights regional disparities in how financial incentives are accessed in English-language schools. Urban and suburban boards tend to benefit most, while rural and remote communities gain comparatively little. Recommendations propose more inclusive strategies to incentivize mentorship that are equity-focused and context-aware.

Résumé

Partout dans le monde, le stage d'enseignement est une méthodologie dominante dans les programmes de formation des enseignants. De nombreux gouvernements et programmes de formation des enseignants offrent des incitations pour attirer des enseignants expérimentés afin qu'ils encadrent les enseignants stagiaires pendant leurs stages. Ces stratégies d'incitation sont essentielles en période de pénurie d'enseignants, le mentorat étant un moyen d'attirer et de retenir de nouveaux enseignants

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dans la profession. Cet article analyse les résultats d'une telle initiative : l'allocation pour l'encadrement des stagiaires au Québec et la Stratégie visant à valoriser le personnel scolaire qui s'est ensuivie. S'appuyant sur des documents publics, l'analyse met en évidence des disparités régionales dans l'accès aux incitations financières dans les écoles anglophones. En effet, les conseils scolaires urbains et suburbains ont tendance à en bénéficier le plus aux dépens des communautés rurales et éloignées. Cet article recommande en conclusion des stratégies pour encourager le mentorat qui sont inclusives, axées sur l'équité et sensibles au contexte.

Keywords / Mots clés : teaching practicum, associate teachers, student teachers, mentorship, teacher shortage, Québec, rural-urban / stage d'enseignement, enseignants associés, enseignants stagiaires, mentorat, pénurie d'enseignants, Québec, milieu rural et urbain

Introduction

Teacher attrition rates are on the rise globally and estimations indicate that 44 million new teachers are required to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030 (UNESCO, 2024). Canada is no exception, with many provinces currently re-suming stopgap measures used during the pandemic to address ongoing teacher shortages. Such actions include increasing reliance on retired teachers and hiring staff who have no formal teacher education training (Wong, 2024). Also referred to as non-legally qualified teachers, some unqualified teachers lack a university degree or any experience in teaching. In December 2024, Québec reported having over 9,000 unqualified teachers on long-term contracts working in public schools, a number that does not include substitute teachers, the group that comprises the largest share of unqualified teachers (Bongiorno, 2025).

To become a certified teacher in Canada requires a degree (e.g., Bachelor of Education) from a teacher education program. These programs provide grounding in content and processes that develop *knowledge* (about learners and learning, subject matter and curriculum goals, and teaching); *skills* to enhance teaching and learning (adaptive expertise, inquiry skills, instructional skills, etc.), and *dispositions* for teaching (social-emotional capacities, habits, mindsets, etc.) (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Schachner, Wojcikiewicz & Flook, 2023). A dominant methodology of teacher education programs worldwide is the teaching practicum, also referred to as field or professional experience. Practicum typically involves a prolonged in-school placement where student teachers apply the knowledge and theories learned in their program while developing and shaping their professional identities (Cobb, Harlow & Clark, 2018). This time in schools plays a vital role in the professional learning of student teachers, who tend to regard practicum as a central aspect of their teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Martin, 2017; Russell 2017).

The teaching practicum is supported by the guidance and mentorship of multiple stakeholders, including in-school teachers, university advisors, and classroom students (Pattison-Meek, 2024, 2025a). Associate teachers—also referred to as host or

mentor teachers—play a significant role in shaping student teachers’ professional learning (Ambrosetti, Dekkers & Knight, 2017; Glenn, 2006; Leshem, 2012). Student teachers are typically matched with an associate teacher active in the field for each practicum placement. The associate teacher is expected to create opportunities for mentees to become acquainted with the school environment, develop professionally and personally, and identify ways to make a positive contribution to their school and community (Aydın & Ok, 2022; Cohen, Hoz & Kaplan, 2013). These practicing teachers provide daily, direct support to student teachers throughout the practicum.

Given the importance of mentorship in teacher education, many governments and teacher education programs offer incentives to encourage experienced, practicing teachers to act as mentors (associate teachers) and host student teachers in their classrooms. These enticements vary and may include financial remuneration, tuition waivers and rebates for university courses. Such strategies can be especially important in times of teacher shortages, as mentorship is often seen as a means of attracting and retaining new teachers to the profession (Larsen, Jensen-Clayton, Curtis, Loughland & Nguyen, 2023). However, in a global teacher shortage, teacher education programs may struggle to locate qualified in-school teachers to support student teachers in the field. In Québec, for example, an associate teacher must be legally qualified (hold a provincial teaching license) and identified by their school principal as having both sufficient teaching experience and the capacity to mentor. Such knowledgeable and skilled teachers are essential to maintaining a steady stream of classroom-ready teacher graduates who can enter—and replenish—the profession.

This article offers an analysis of one provincial incentivization strategy in Canada that aims, in part, to encourage greater numbers of teachers to act as associate teachers and mentor student teachers in their practicums. Since 1994, the Intern Supervision Allowance program (or Measure 30020) in Québec has provided ministerial guidelines and financial support for the mentorship of student teachers by associate teachers during practicum periods (MEQ, 2021a). The program’s current objectives are twofold and include: 1) supporting the training of associate teachers, and 2) recognizing the contribution of associate teachers to training the next generation of teaching professionals. To support these objectives, the Ministry of Education offers a financial contribution that is paid to public English-language school boards and French-language service centres¹ based on their annual intake of student teachers from Québec universities.

In the face of Québec’s teacher shortage and increasing student population (Mackenzie, 2024), the provincial Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government adopted the *Strategy to Promote the Recognition of School Staff* in 2022 (MEQ, 2022). The goal of the strategy is to “reaffirm and publicly recognize the key role of school staff in carrying out the mission of Québec schools, while providing lasting solutions to the labor shortage in the school system” (MEQ, 2022, p. 7). The strategy acknowledges that the current labor shortage has created challenges in public education, including problems with attracting and retaining qualified teachers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategy offers various actions to enhance the professional development of school staff and recognize their work. One such action is specific to the teaching practicum and associate teachers:

Action 8. Improve the Supervision of New Teachers.

In order to support the education of future teachers, the Ministère financially supports public schools in welcoming and supervising student teachers in educational institutions. This support aims to further recognize the expertise of associate teachers, and to better acknowledge their contribution to the training of the next generation of teachers. With this action, the Ministère wishes to improve this support to encourage the participation of a large number of associate teachers in the supervision of student teachers. This improvement will have a positive impact on the initial education of future teachers and thus foster the educational success of students. (p. 18)

The strategy effectively bolsters the Intern Supervision Allowance by increasing its funding envelope between the 2022–2023 and 2025–2026 school years. During this period, each associate teacher who supports a student teacher through a full practicum (the extent of which is determined by the individual universities) will typically generate an allowance amount of \$1,000. Prior to the 2022 strategy, this amount was capped at \$660 per full practicum. Allowances are paid as an annual lump sum by the government directly to school boards and service centres for all the student teachers they host from Québec universities.² The purpose of increasing the Intern Supervision Allowance is twofold. First, to recognize the expertise of associate teachers as mentors; and second, to incentivize and thereby increase the numbers of associate teachers in public schools during the teacher shortage.

How the annual allowance amounts are allocated is determined at the school board level, in accordance with the provisions of teacher collective agreements. Examples of expenses associated with the training of mentor teachers include the development of mentorship preparation courses by school board personnel, associate teachers' participation in meetings or training activities related to their role of supporting student teachers (e.g., including fees to cover the costs of substitute teachers), and the purchase of materials relevant to supporting a student teacher (e.g., books on practical training and/or mentorship). Ways the allowance can be used to recognize mentors for their contributions include the following: financial compensation paid directly as taxable income to associate teachers; additional paid leave for associate teachers (e.g., to attend self-selected professional development sessions); the purchase of classroom materials (e.g., teaching resources, equipment); and support for school improvement projects.

While such incentives may encourage associate teachers to engage with supporting the teaching practicum, monetizing the mentorship of student teachers can have unintended consequences. The case study presented in this article will address the following research questions in relation to Québec's Intern Supervision Allowance: What are the regional implications of monetizing mentorship in Québec's English-language school boards? What are some potential consequences of such an approach amid a teacher shortage?

What follows begins with a brief overview of teacher certification in Québec's three English-language universities to provide provincial context. A literature review then outlines the different motivations that prompt in-service teachers to become associate teachers over the course of their careers. Next, the theory of practice archi-

lectures offers a holistic framework to think about practicum and mentorship as a web of interconnected practices. The method framing the current study is then described, followed by key findings. Lastly, a discussion of the study's implications offers insights and recommendations for more inclusive recognition strategies to incentivize mentorship.

Teacher certification in English-language universities in Québec

In Québec, a teaching certificate (*brevet d'enseignement*) is required to become a licensed teacher in general education, covering preschool, elementary and secondary schools, as well as adult education and vocational training centres (Québec, 2025). The standard route to obtaining this certificate involves completing a four-year, accredited Bachelor of Education program, which culminates in a teaching degree. Teacher education programs are required under provincial policy to include a minimum of 700 hours of practicum, to be successfully completed by graduation (MELS, 2008). While student teachers typically enter the field in each year of study, the way in which practicum hours are distributed and structured across a program's four years is determined by each individual postsecondary institution.

Three universities offer English-language degree programs in Québec and provide certification to teach in the province: McGill University (Montréal), Concordia University (Montréal), and Bishop's University (Sherbrooke). McGill is the largest of these institutions, graduating students in Bachelor of Education and Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning programs. Concordia specializes in early childhood and elementary education, as well as teaching English as a second language (TESL). Bishop's is the smallest of the three, offering provincial certification in elementary education, secondary education, TESL, and creative arts programs. Student teachers enrolled in education programs at these institutions typically complete their practicums in one of the province's nine English school boards (Pattison-Meek, 2025b).

As a provincial requirement, student teachers must be assigned to an associate teacher during their practicum (MELS, 2008). Associate teachers are expected to assume specific responsibilities in their role as in-school teacher educators (Chu, 2019; Smith & Nadelson, 2016). The complexities inherent in mentorship require a distinct skill set, one that demands specific knowledge, dispositions and competencies beyond those of classroom teaching (Byth, 2024). Butler and Cuenca (2012) identify three typical associate teacher roles: 1) instructional coach (developing and refining content and pedagogical knowledge), 2) socializing agent (facilitating reflective and professional dialogue, shaping perspectives and practices), and 3) emotional supporter (e.g., building student teachers' confidence). Unsurprisingly, the quality of a practicum experience is closely linked to the effectiveness of the mentorship provided (Paul, Loudon, Elliott & Scott, 2023; Scott, Loudon, Simons, Donovan, Peach & West, 2023). The following literature review explores various motivations that lead in-service teachers to become associate teachers over the course of their careers.

Motivations to mentor student teachers

While much practicum scholarship examines student teachers as the benefactors of practicum mentorship, few researchers explore what associate teachers gain from

the experience or why they decide to act as mentors. Mentorship in teaching is commonly thought of as one way to “give back,” i.e., by accompanying and guiding new teachers into the profession. Some mentor teachers have highlighted pragmatic advantages to hosting student teachers, such as “having another set of hands” in the classroom and supporting the overall “organization and structure” of their practice (Rinne, Windsor, Hipkiss, Yildirim & Brkovic, 2023, p. 7).

The subsequent sections review three common motivations of associate teachers to support trainee teachers: mentorship as a professional responsibility; the desire to enhance one’s own professional learning and development; and monetary incentives/recognition.

1. Mentorship as a professional responsibility

In Québec, mentorship is enshrined in provincial law as a professional responsibility of teachers. The *Education Act* states that: “A teacher shall . . . collaborate in the training of future teachers and the mentoring of newly qualified teachers” (Légis, 1988, 22.6.1). This clause is echoed in the province’s *Reference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers* (MEQ, 2021b). In teacher education in Québec, “competency” refers to the specific skills, knowledge, and abilities required by teachers to effectively perform their duties. The framework, which lists 13 such competencies, acts as a guide for teacher professional development across preschool, elementary and secondary schools, vocational training and adult education settings, and university teacher training.

Within the framework, Competency 11 emphasizes the need to commit to one’s own professional development as a teacher and to the profession (MEQ, 2021b). Teachers “[c]ontinuously analyze, evaluate and develop all facets of [their] professional practice and promote the status and recognition of the teaching profession by fostering a shared professional culture based on mutual support and co-operation” (p. 74). The support and mentorship provided by experienced teachers to student teachers, as well as to newly hired novice teachers, is viewed as evidence of this commitment (Martineau & Bergevin, 2007). However, in general, while mentoring student teachers is highly regarded in the profession, it is generally considered a professional opportunity and a valuable contribution to the education community, rather than a strict obligation.

2. Mentorship as professional learning and development

Recognizing and promoting professional learning *in situ* is an essential feature of teacher professional development (Smith & Nadelson, 2016). A contemporary view of mentoring is one that supports reciprocal mentorship, positioning mentor and mentee as future focused co-investigators of professional practice, where mutual learning takes place (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Larsen et al., 2023; Talbot, 2018). Collaborative relationships between associate teachers and student teachers that are positive and productive are also essential for the mentors’ own professional development (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Hudson, 2013; Rinne et al., 2023). Generally, mentors seek to collaborate with mentees, as this creates opportunities to reflect on their own practice (Rinne et al., 2023). Therefore, a broader aim of mentorship is not simply to assimilate

new teachers “into ‘the way we do things here’ but rather to transform teaching work through the ongoing education of all involved” (Talbot, 2018, p. 18).

Professional learning conversations between associate teachers and student teachers involve a constructive exchange of ideas that can foster professional growth for both. For instance, early in a practicum period, student teachers typically observe their mentors in action in the classroom. To encourage active participation, associate teachers may invite feedback from mentees about their teaching as a way of gaining a “fresh look” at their own practice (Rinne et al., 2023, p. 8). Mentoring also requires associate teachers to become more aware of their actions so they can help mentees to make sense of the whats, hows, and whys of teaching—knowledge that, for many experienced teachers, is often more tacit or instinctual (Rinne, et al., 2023). In this way, associate teachers are held accountable for their pedagogical decisions and actions (Smith & Nadelson, 2016).

Hosting student teachers can also expose mentor teachers to new insights on teaching and recent research findings from their teacher education programs. Many mentors simply lack the time during the school day to engage with scholarship or discuss research with colleagues. Mentoring, therefore, can be seen as a “kind of short-cut to current education-focused literature,” with student teachers serving as a resource for mentors’ professional learning (Rinne et al., 2023, pg. 10). From this perspective, mentorship can foster and influence mentors’ professional identity development, thereby revitalizing their self-understanding as teachers (Chu, 2019).

3. Monetary stipends and tuition credits/rebates

While the mentoring of student teachers is recognized as a valuable and essential professional responsibility in the profession, it is sometimes perceived as a “burden” (Rinne et al., 2023, p. 1). One reason is that the responsibilities associated with supporting mentees’ professional learning tend to be viewed by teachers as over and above their regular duties (Rinne, et al., 2023). Effective mentoring requires a substantial investment of time during the school day (e.g., to collaboratively plan lessons, debrief teaching experiences, or discuss educational issues and research), which may be in short supply alongside the demands of regular teaching tasks. The time needed to prepare student teachers for classroom-readiness is often overlooked (Hamel & Jaasko-Fisher, 2011). Insufficient time for mentorship can ultimately hinder the professional learning of both student teachers’ and associate teachers’ professional learning (Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009; Maynard, 2000).

In addition to time, the emotional and skilled labour that teachers invest in nurturing mentor relationships are arguably deserving of distinct and formal recognition (Hamel & Jaasko-Fisher, 2011). Byth (2024) describes these dynamics as part of the hidden labour of practicum mentorship. To address the imbalance between the importance of associate teachers’ contributions and the recognition they receive, some institutions offer financial remuneration or other incentives. These may include honorariums (cash stipends) from teacher education programs or a state or provincial government, typically considered taxable income and set either as a dollar amount per practicum day or a lump sum per practicum period. Universities may also provide tuition rebates or credits toward continuing education courses.

A recent survey of 1,816 associate teachers in Ontario found that financial stipends are increasingly a preferred means of recognition for the mentorship role (Dickson, Kotsopoulos, Amato, Barwell & Melville, 2025). Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated “Payment of a stipend/honorarium provided directly to me” as their preferred means. The survey also found insufficient remuneration to be a key factor in the decision to discontinue in the role of associate teacher.

In Québec, the Intern Supervision Allowance, together with the recent *Strategy to Promote the Recognition of School Staff*, reflects this broader financial motivation to mentor student teachers. The allowance is unique in Canada in that the Québec government sets the amount (maximum \$1,000) for each associate teacher who mentors a student teacher during their practicum and pays school boards directly as a means of recognition.

Theory of practice architectures and mentorship in the teaching practicum

The teaching practicum can be thought of as a web of interconnected practices that help guide new teachers into the profession. The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017) offers a holistic framework for understanding the complexities of these various practices. Kemmis et al. (2014) provide the following definition of practice:

A practice is a form of socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings), and when this complex of sayings, doings and relatings “hangs together” in a distinctive project. (p. 31)

Such arrangements are embedded across three interrelated dimensions that align with the complexities of sayings, doings, and relatings (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer & Bristol, 2014; Mahon, Kemmis, Francisco & Lloyd, 2017). These dimensions include cultural-discursive arrangements, which involve the language and discourses that define and justify practices (sayings); material-economic arrangements, referring to the physical and tangible resources that facilitate or hinder the actions within a practice (doings); and social-political arrangements, which encompass the social contexts that influence how individuals interact (relatings).

The theory of practice architectures calls for the overlapping arrangements that enable or constrain a practice to be identified and explained (Mahon et al., 2017). In this sense, it highlights the interconnected cultural, material, and relational conditions that shape the practice of mentoring student teachers. Rather than treating associate teacher participation as a simple matter of individual choice or financial motivation, the theory shows how incentivization strategies must engage with a broader web of practices, structures, and meanings that define practicum work. The framework has the capacity to expose hidden systemic constraints within the practicum (e.g., rigid policy structures, unequal power dynamics, lack of professional

discourse around mentoring) that are apt to disincentivize mentorship. In this way, it encourages multi-dimensional thinking about recognition, encompassing not just the financial (material-economic), but also the professional (cultural-discursive) and relational (social-political) dimensions.

By applying the theory of practice architectures, decision-makers can move beyond framing questions such as “How can we encourage greater numbers of associate teachers?” to “What conditions must be transformed so that mentoring becomes a valued and supported feature of the teaching practicum?” In brief, the theory enables stakeholders to ground the conversation in a systemic understanding of teacher education during a teacher shortage, thus prompting leaders and policy-makers to design changes that reshape the architecture of the practice itself, rather than relying on surface-level fixes.

Case study method and research design

Drawing on case study method supports the analysis of education policy in two ways. First, it allows researchers to delineate problems within their full context (Pal, 2005). In this study, the case approach provides a detailed portrait of teaching practicums in Québec’s English-language school boards and the outcomes of provincial incentivization strategies designed to encourage mentorship. Second, case studies support the examination of policy-relevant questions—functioning primarily as research rather than analysis—and can inform future recommendations and decision-making (Pal, 2005). This quantitative case study focuses on the current outcomes and implications of the Québec government’s Intern Supervision Allowance across the province’s nine English school boards during the two-year period (2022–2023 and 2023–2024) since the introduction of the *Strategy to Promote the Recognition of School Staff*.

Merriam (1998), in reference to case study research in education, explained that many types of documents can help ascertain meaning, develop understanding, and reveal insights in response to research objectives. The compilation and examination of three types of government documents supported the development of this case. These included: 1) school board Measure 30020 statements ($n = 17$) filed annually with the provincial government (2022–2024), reporting the full-time equivalent (FTE) values³ of student teachers in their schools according to each partner university; 2) internship reports ($n = 17$) listing the names of each student teacher, their associate teacher, school, FTE, and practicum course code, filed annually by each university and shared with participating school boards; and 3) a single report showing allowance amounts as lump sums paid annually to each English school board between 2022 and 2024. These documents were made available for this study through access-to-information requests submitted to the Québec government.

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or assessing documents (Bowen, 2009). Using established guidelines to analyze the content and context of documents (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2012), the author first compiled data from the above sources into tables (see Tables 1 and 2). School board student populations, available through the Ministry’s online school data portal, enabled simple statistical calculations to help make sense of the data (e.g., allowance amount per student, average total provincial allowance per school board). The document-derived quantitative

data was then examined and interpreted to identify trends, elicit meaning, and gain understanding in relation to the research objectives (Bowen, 2009).

This case study is intentionally bound by the nine English-language school boards in Québec and does not extend to the 60 French-language service centers.⁴ As a former Director of Practice Teaching at one of the province's three English-language universities, the author brings both professional experience and familiarity with the unique structures and challenges of the English minority education system to this research. Her ongoing role as a teacher educator and researcher within this community further shapes the study's focus and scope. This positionality, rooted in both insider knowledge and sustained professional engagement, grounds the analysis in the lived realities of the English education sector, while also acknowledging the limits of its broader generalizability.

Findings

As noted earlier, the Québec government provides the Intern Supervision Allowance amounts as an annual lump sum to each individual school board. By tracking the allowance reports submitted to the Ministry of Education at the end of each academic year, we were able to analyze the annual distribution of teaching practicums across the nine school boards. Tables 1 and 2 present the total stipend amounts received by each board for two consecutive academic years (2022–2023 and 2023–2024). The tables also display student populations for each English school board, the corresponding funding per student per board, and the provincial average per board.

Table 1. Relation of annual student intern allowance to student population sizes, 2022–2023

| | Allowance amount | Student population | Average per student | Provincial average |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Central Québec School Board (CQSB) (20) | \$28,700 | 5,332 | \$5.38 | 2.05% |
| Eastern Shores School Board (ESSB) (21) | \$0 | 1,246 | \$0.00 | 0 |
| Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) (26) | \$251,140 | 7,260 | \$34.59 | 17.97% |
| English Montreal School Board (EMSB) (77) | \$557,860 | 30,189 | \$18.48 | 39.91% |
| Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) (55) | \$299,460 | 25,465 | \$11.76 | 21.42% |
| New Frontiers School Board (NFSB) (15) | \$20,510 | 4,978 | \$4.12 | 1.47% |
| Riverside School Board (RSB) (29) | \$117,490 | 13,572 | \$8.66 | 8.41% |
| Sir Wilfred Laurier School Board (SWLSB) (39) | \$117,580 | 14,378 | \$8.18 | 8.41% |
| Western Québec School Board (WQSB) (31) | \$5,000 | 8,830 | \$0.57 | 0.36% |
| Total | \$1,397,740 | 111,250 | | 100 |

*The number in parentheses following the name of each school board indicates the total number of its schools/centres.

Table 2. Relation of annual student intern allowance to student population sizes, 2023–2024

| | Allowance amount | Student population | Average per student | Provincial average |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Central Québec School Board (CQSB) (20) | \$32,130 | 5,405 | \$5.94 | 2.20% |
| Eastern Shores School Board (ESSB) (21) | \$9,000 | 1,261 | \$7.14 | 0.62% |
| Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) (26) | \$244,320 | 8,024 | \$30.45 | 16.79% |
| English Montreal School Board (EMSB) (77) | \$519,400 | 31,905 | \$16.28 | 35.70% |
| Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) (55) | \$290,980 | 26,207 | \$11.10 | 20.0% |
| New Frontiers School Board (NFSB) (15) | \$26,040 | 5,241 | \$4.97 | 1.79% |
| Riverside School Board (RSB) (29) | \$157,660 | 13,630 | \$11.57 | 10.84% |
| Sir Wilfred Laurier School Board (SWLSB) (39) | \$154,010 | 14,636 | \$10.52 | 10.59% |
| Western Québec School Board (WQSB) (31) | \$21,360 | 8,924 | \$2.39 | 1.47% |
| Total | \$1,454,900 | 115,233 | | 100 |

1. Proximity to English universities distinguishes school board *haves* from the *have-nots*

Analysis of school board allowance reports shows that the allowance is concentrated in school boards and schools located near one of the three English universities and their teacher education programs. The four school boards in and around Greater Montréal (EMSB, LBPSB, RSB, SWLSB) receive the largest share of student teachers and financial allowance annually, accounting for more than 75 percent. This is expected, given the boards’ proximity to Québec’s most populous metropolitan area, which is also home to the majority of the province’s English-speaking population as well as Concordia and McGill Universities. The allowance amounts generally align with the number of students attending the schools governed by these four boards. For example, in 2022–2023, 72 percent of students attending English-language schools in Québec were enrolled in schools managed by one of the four boards.

Similarly, the ETSB receives a sizable annual allowance due to its near-exclusive relationship with Bishop’s University, on its doorstep in the Eastern Townships. In contrast to the four school boards encompassing Concordia and McGill, however, the ETSB receives a disproportionately high allowance relative to its student population. For example, in 2022–2023, while 6.5 percent of students were enrolled in ETSB schools, the board received 18 percent of the total allowance paid to English school boards. As a result, the ETSB has the highest allowance per student on average in 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 (\$32.52), almost double that of the EMSB (\$17.38).

Tracking annual allowance reports reveals a gap between school boards, based on their proximity to Québec’s English universities. Boards that host high numbers of student teachers from the three English universities, thereby benefitting financially from the allowance, can be considered the *haves*: EMSB, ETSB, LBPSB, RSB, SWLSB.

In contrast, boards that receive far fewer student teachers do not benefit to the same extent financially; these can be considered the *have-nots*: CQSB, ESSB, NFSB, WQSB.

2. Monetizing mentorship gives rise to an urban-rural divide among English schools

The analysis also shows that student teachers from Québec universities are much less likely to complete their practicums in English schools located in rural and remote⁵ regions outside of Montréal. The ETSB is the exception, with many of its rural schools being accessed by student teachers from nearby Bishop's University. In other words, English school boards and schools located farther from the three English universities, particularly those serving rural and/or remote student populations, are less likely to attract student teachers for their practicums.

The NFSB, for example, which serves suburban and rural communities south of Montréal, borders the United States to the south, Ontario to the west, the St. Lawrence River to the north, and the Kahnawà:ke territory to the east. Its online mission statement highlights “a rich history and a diverse territory covering rural farmland and bustling suburbia” (NFSB, 2025). Though this board is within reach of Montréal, it fails to attract significant numbers of student teachers from McGill or Concordia. This may be due to the relative lack of regional public transit options, unlike in the RSB, located in Montréal's more populous South Shore.

The ESSB, located in the province's easternmost regions, is among its largest English school boards geographically. Covering the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the Côte-Nord, the Gaspé peninsula and the town of Fermont, it serves a diverse student population from Anglophone, Francophone, and First Nations communities. Despite having the smallest student population of any board (1,261 students in 2023–2024), the ESSB operates 21 schools and centres, putting it on par with more populous boards like the CQSB and ETSB. Nonetheless, the ESSB hosts the fewest number of student teachers from Québec universities, in some years receiving none at all.

As another example, the WQSB stretches over 90,000 kilometers in western Québec, across the Outaouais, Pontiac and Abitibi-Témiscamingue regions. While it has a student population similar in size to the ETSB's and operates five more schools, the WQSB receives a disproportionately low number of student teachers by comparison. Owing to the rural and remote locations of their schools in addition to their distance from English universities, both the ESSB and WQSB face geographic disadvantages in terms of attracting student teachers and securing the related benefits.

Many school boards also show an uneven distribution of student teachers, with significantly more of them being placed in urban or suburban schools than in rural ones. For example, the SWLSB comprises three regions: Laval, Laurentides, and Lanaudière. Laval, with fewer English schools than Laurentides and Lanaudière combined, tends to receive disproportionately higher numbers of student teachers, likely due to its proximity to Montréal and its strong public transit connections.

The CQSB presents an interesting case, as it is spread over 515,000 square kilometers, spanning almost one third of the province. An analysis of the university student internship reports (2022–2023 through 2023–2024) reveals that a high percentage—an average of 28% over two years—of total student teachers practicing

in CQSB schools are from Université Laval, a French language university. These student teachers are mentored by French as a Second Language (FSL) associate teachers; FSL is a mandatory component of the English school curriculum. Université Laval is in Québec City, the province's second most populous city after Montréal. It is therefore not surprising that Université Laval's FSL student teachers in the CQSB conduct their practicums in schools in Québec City or in the surrounding suburbs. Few student teachers from either the English or French universities practice in English schools outside the provincial capital (e.g., in Chibougamau, La Tuque, Kawawachikamach, the Mauricie region or Thetford Mines).

The potential consequences of monetizing mentorship in English school boards, particularly amid a teacher shortage, are explored in the next section.

Discussion

The one-size-fits-all approach of the Intern Supervision Allowance and related *Strategy to Promote the Recognition of School Staff*, while well intentioned, assumes uniform access to schools and experienced teachers. The findings, however, paint a different picture: incentive policies, when detached from contextual realities, may inadvertently perpetuate the disparities they were designed to address. The unequal distribution of student teachers across Québec's English school boards disproportionately affects rural and remote communities. Those communities, whose Anglophone populations have always been small compared to those of Montréal and other urban centres, are further disadvantaged by Québec's language policies (ABEE, 2018). English schools in these regions already face systemic challenges compared to their urban and suburban counterparts, including limited access to English-language support services (e.g., psychoeducators, speech therapists), fewer academic and extracurricular opportunities, and chronic staff shortages that significantly hinder educational equity and long-term academic achievement (e.g., Pattison-Meek & Langevin, 2023).

Given the dearth of English-language teacher education programs based in rural and remote communities outside the ETSB, there are four distinct implications for the "have-not" school boards and the schools they serve. First, since the teaching practicum functions as a mutually beneficial professional exchange between mentors and mentees (as outlined in the literature review), prospective associate teachers in these schools are unlikely to gain from such collaborative relationships (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Larsen et al., 2023). Second, these associate teachers and their schools miss out on the funds provided through the allowance, which could otherwise be put toward school and community projects, classroom resources, or professional development opportunities for teachers. Third, only a handful of student teachers will experience the benefits of practice teaching in Québec's diverse English rural and remote schools—for example, small class sizes allowing for more personalized learning (Nelson, 2010), strong ties to the local and school community (Gallo, 2020), and opportunities for leadership and collaboration (Seelig & McCabe, 2021).

And fourth, the uneven distribution of teaching practicums reported by English school boards highlights the distinct disadvantage that rural and remote schools face in attracting new teaching staff, making them particularly vulnerable amid the ongoing provincial teacher shortage. The associate teacher role during practicum is es-

pecially important in a workforce crisis, given that mentorship is widely recognized as crucial for retaining new teachers (e.g., Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As student teachers are more likely to conduct their practicums—and eventually secure employment—close to where they complete their training (Krieg, Theobald & Goldhaber, 2016), urgent measures are needed to increase the frequency of practicums in rural and remote settings.

Implications for policy and leadership

Although this study is situated in Québec's English-language education sector, its findings hold broader relevance for rural and remote schooling contexts elsewhere. The inequities exposed by monetizing mentorship—uneven access to student teachers, resulting in *have* and *have-not* schools and boards—mirror the challenges faced by many rural and remote jurisdictions across Canada and internationally. The Québec case underscores that addressing teacher shortages in these regions requires not only financial incentives, but also policy architectures that integrate mentorship and rural school sustainability as mutually reinforcing goals. While the following considerations and recommendations are specific to Québec, they may also apply elsewhere.

First, more equity-focused and context-aware approaches are needed to incentivize practicums in rural settings, starting with strategies that make these experiences feasible. One recommendation is for the Ministry of Education to introduce a targeted financial incentive, such as a bursary program (e.g., \$3,000 to \$5,000) to support student teachers completing practicums in designated school boards with rural and remote schools that do not currently benefit from the allowance (e.g., ESSB, CQSB, NFSB, WQSB). Such a program would help offset the travel, accommodation, and living expenses often incurred during rural and remote placements and that reportedly deter some student teachers from embarking on these experiences (Harris, Rhodes, Gray & Vernon, 2025). The goal of such an incentive would be to increase the number of student teachers undertaking practicums in rural and remote English schools in Québec, thereby ensuring the sustainability and quality of English education across *all* regions.

Second, English universities have a responsibility as educational leaders to develop innovative programming that enables and supports teacher practicums in school boards beyond their local areas in order to help sustain small English rural and remote schools. These universities are encouraged to strengthen their partnerships with the ESSB, CQSB, NFSB, and WQSB by developing rural teacher education programs that prioritize place-conscious learning. Such cohort-based program models would aim to help student teachers from rural and remote regions to complete part of their coursework virtually and their practicums close to home, where their presence is most needed, rather than requiring them to relocate to a distant university campus. Notable examples of such initiatives include the University of British Columbia's West Kootenay Rural Teacher Education Program and the University of Calgary's Community-Based Bachelor of Education. Bishop's University is especially well positioned to assume such a responsibility, given its experience in equipping student teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to practice in rural ETSB schools.

These recommendations value collaborative governance between education departments, universities, and school boards, enabling them to co-design practicum frameworks that balance equity with practicality. Rural representation in policymaking bodies is essential to ensuring that incentive structures are informed by lived local conditions. Such measures would reframe practicum policy as part of a broader teacher-workforce strategy—one that sees mentorship as both a professional learning practice and a structural investment in educational equity.

Conclusion

As the practicum is a global methodology in teacher education, the current study underscores the need for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches to mentorship policy and practice. Rather than relying solely on monetized incentives, more equitable mentorship models are needed to reinforce mentors' professional value, cultivate networks of mutual trust, and ensure enduring systemic supports for those working in rural and remote communities. By critically examining the case of English schools in Québec, this research contributes to broader international discussions in policy and leadership on how to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the practicum in times of systemic strain, ensuring that mentorship remains a meaningful, professionally enriching component of teacher preparation and professional development.

Notes

1. In Québec, the public education system differentiates between French- and English-language school governance. The province's 60 French school boards were replaced in 2020 by school service centres; the majority of its English-language schools continue to be governed by the nine English school boards.
2. School boards in Québec can accept student teachers from other provinces; however, mentorship of out-of-province students is ineligible for the Intern Supervision Allowance. Independent or private schools that host student teachers are also ineligible.
3. A full-time equivalent (FTE) value is reported for every student teacher after a practicum. The maximum value per student in a practicum period is 1 (qualifying for the full \$1,000 allowance amount). In cases of incomplete or partial practicums, the FTE value is adjusted in proportion to the time spent in practicum.
4. Remote areas are generally less accessible than rural areas, and "remote from" more developed villages or towns, making transportation time-consuming and/or limited (for example, see Canada, 2020).
5. This study also does not include the Kativik and Cree public school boards as they do not benefit financially from Measure 30020 (MEQ, 2025).

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