



What changes for Rochambeau?

Interview with François Legros, President of the Board of Trustees about the new relationship with the AEFÉ and the appointment of a new Proviseur

ROCHAMBEAU : Hello Mr. Legros, could you tell us what led the Board of Trustees to directly recruit the next Proviseur for Rochambeau?

François Legros : Since the announcement of the departure of our current Proviseur, the Board of Trustees has been in discussion with the AEFÉ to ensure that we will have a Proviseur for the next school year. Since the beginning of these discussions, and at the suggestion of the AEFÉ Director, two options have been on the table: *either* the AEFÉ would appoint a Proviseur as provided for in the convention contract, *or* Rochambeau recruits the Proviseur directly. During the AEFÉ Director's visit in February 2020, he told the community and the Board of Trustees that the AEFÉ would only agree to appoint a Proviseur on the condition that Rochambeau modifies our governance structure. Specifically, he said Rochambeau must put all of the school's programs, including any programs outside the traditional French curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate ("IB"), under the responsibility of this Proviseur. The Director also indicated that in the absence of an agreement on governance, the AEFÉ would terminate the convention contract. It was therefore clear that Rochambeau, while seeking an agreement with the AEFÉ, had to prepare for this eventuality. Concurrently, we received either directly or indirectly through recommendations, several expressions of interest in the position of Proviseur in case Rochambeau would recruit directly. On April 4th the Director of the AEFÉ informed the Rochambeau Board of Trustees, in writing, that he did not agree with the governance proposals made by Rochambeau. The Board of Trustees therefore decided to recruit Mr. Xavier Jacquenet, the most qualified candidate we had received and probably the most experienced Proviseur ever to be appointed to Rochambeau.



R : You indicate that Rochambeau made proposals to the AEFÉ, what did they consist of?

FL : Maintaining the convention has always been the preferred option of the Board of Trustees. Rochambeau therefore proposed to the AEFÉ a modification of the school's organizational structure based on the expressed wishes of the AEFÉ. This included placing the responsibilities for all pedagogical programs under the responsibility of a Proviseur. This even included programs that were not originally part of the convention contract (i.e., the International Baccalaureate program). This proposal was intended to address the main points expressed by the Director of the AEFÉ and shared with the Rochambeau community in the February 2020 meetings.

Rochambeau also proposed to accept that the current convention contract be extended for one additional year (2022-2023), even without having any visibility on the working conditions (e.g., hours of work, specific teaching subjects/positions, etc.) of the expatriate staff or the cost of the convention contract beyond this third year (2022-2023 school year).

Finally, Rochambeau had also proposed to accept the AEFÉ's position that the recruitment method of the Proviseur be conducted only by AEFÉ as in the past, without the school's involvement in the candidate selection.

Unfortunately, these proposals were not accepted by the AEFÉ. Therefore, the Board of Trustees decided to proceed with the hiring of Mr. Jacquenet who, I have no doubt, will be an excellent Proviseur for Rochambeau.

R : What consequences could be expected from a lack of agreement on governance?

FL : The Director of the AEFÉ was very clear on this point during his visit to Washington in February: without an agreement on governance the AEFÉ would terminate the convention in July 2020 and limit the term to one year (2020-2021). This meant that even though the AEFÉ proposed at the last minute to present a Proviseur candidate to fill the post, given the disagreement that the AEFÉ had on Rochambeau's proposals on governance, there was a



significant likelihood that the new Proviseur would only stay for one year. This instability at the leadership level is not good for our students, families, teachers or our staff. Therefore the Board of Trustees moved to find a more permanent solution for our school.

R : Why did you choose Mr. Jacquenet?

FL : Of all the candidates we considered, we found Mr. Jacquenet to be a remarkable educator and school leader. He possesses a great many qualities and depth of experience that we feel confident will enable his professional success at Rochambeau and lead to success for our school.

First of all, he is passionate about teaching and he values teamwork. He is very experienced as a school administrator as he has been part of the body of Proviseurs since 2006. Not only is he a Proviseur, but he also trains other candidates for the Proviseur's exam. He has directed schools in France and has also been posted internationally as Deputy Proviseur of the Lycée Français in Singapore and Proviseur of the Lycée St Exupery in Santiago de Chile. In addition to French, he is fluent in English and Spanish and will therefore be able to communicate very easily with our diverse community. It is noteworthy that during his time in Santiago, Chile, Mr. Jacquenet was responsible for overseeing the traditional accredited French program as well as a Chilean program which operated in parallel to the French program. This is something similar to the way we anticipate offering the IB Program at Rochambeau (starting Fall 2021) in parallel to the traditional French Bac. In his current position Mr. Jacquenet supervises six International Sections and his students come from 90 different countries. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Jacquenet is a team player and is excited to join Rochambeau within the framework of our current governance structure.



R : Specifically, what will Mr. Jacquenet's responsibilities be?

FL : Since the Board of Trustees had decided to propose to the AEFÉ a regrouping of academic programs all under the supervision of the Proviseur, it was logical to maintain this structure if we were to directly recruit our own candidate.

Mr. Jacquenet will therefore supervise all the programs at Rochambeau, including both the accredited French program and the future IB program. He and his team will be responsible for maintaining the accreditation ("homologation") of our French program, implementing the strategy of academic excellence desired by the Board of Trustees, and also proposing to the Executive Director and the Board of Trustees future academic developments and projects that meet the needs of our diverse community of students and families. To do this, he will work with a team composed of Philippe Vanhille, Frédérique Le Ber, Yvan Tabellion, as well as the Deputy Director of the Elementary School who will be recruited this spring.

R : What is the relationship now with the AEFÉ?

FL : During his last visit, the Director of the AEFÉ was very clear that if Rochambeau recruited a Proviseur directly, he would terminate the convention contract.

Rochambeau will therefore remain under the convention contract through one more school year (2020-2021) and will then become a partner ("partenaire") of the AEFÉ. This would mean our school's relationship with the AEFÉ would become similar to that of 45 out of the 47 French accredited schools in the United States.



R : What is the financial implication of this change in relationship (from convention contract to partner contract)?

FL : The financial impact of this decision will be small in the short term and very favorable for Rochambeau in the long term.

The AEFÉ's financial support for the real estate project currently underway (purchase of new Elementary campus) amounts to \$200,000 per year for the duration of our convention contract. The AEFÉ had indicated that it would not extend this contribution beyond the current convention contract (ending 2021-2022), even if a one-year extension were to have been approved as we had proposed. Out of the total budget for the new campus this is quite a small amount.

Traditionally, the AEFÉ has also directly paid the salary and benefits for the expatriate teachers placed at our school. Based on the convention contract in place, that currently includes 7 out of our 125 teachers. We had been previously informed that at the end of the current convention contract (2021-2022), the number of hours taught at Rochambeau by AEFÉ-paid expatriate teachers was to be reduced by 50%. (This is independent of any current negotiations.) Therefore, we would have expected to hire new teachers to compensate for the reduced teachers/teaching hours to be provided by the AEFÉ. And of course, we would have planned to maintain the existing teaching levels.

Additionally, our membership within the AEFÉ network includes annual expenses for the school. Under our current convention agreement, Rochambeau pays to the AEFÉ directly an annual sum equal to 3% of our tuition. For the most recent year, that amount is \$650,000. Our previous convention contract specified a membership payment equal to 6% of our tuition. At the conclusion of our current convention contract, and despite the repeated requests from the Board of Trustees, the AEFÉ did not wish to commit itself to maintain the advantageous conditions of our convention contract. This would likely have resulted in at least a doubling of Rochambeau's annual contribution to the AEFÉ.



R : How will this change impact our students?

FL : Absolutely nothing will change for our students! Our students will continue to follow the French program under the same academic expectations and framework. They will continue to prepare for and undertake the examinations associated with the Brevet des Collèges and the Baccalauréat in Rochambeau. They will also continue to be able to obtain their US (Maryland) High School Diploma. And they will continue to be able to gain admission to the best universities in France, the United States or elsewhere around the world based on their merits and their work.

R : What will change for our teachers?

FL : For most of them absolutely nothing either. Out of our 125 teachers at all academic levels, 118 are recruited and employed directly by Rochambeau. Their working conditions are governed by a Collective Bargaining Agreement that is negotiated every three years and is not affected by any change to the convention contract. Their "détachement" or overseas posting will not be affected, nor will their salaries, retirement benefits, or working conditions. As you are likely already aware, we have undertaken many efforts to provide positive working conditions, including increased salaries and expanded opportunities for professional training; these efforts are superior to those offered within the French National Education system.

I should note that the AEFÉ does not help Rochambeau to recruit teachers directly.

Out of our 125 teaching faculty, only 7 teachers and 1 school director have been recruited by the AEFÉ. To all of them I extend my hand and say: "If you wish to stay with us and join your other colleagues, we would welcome you."

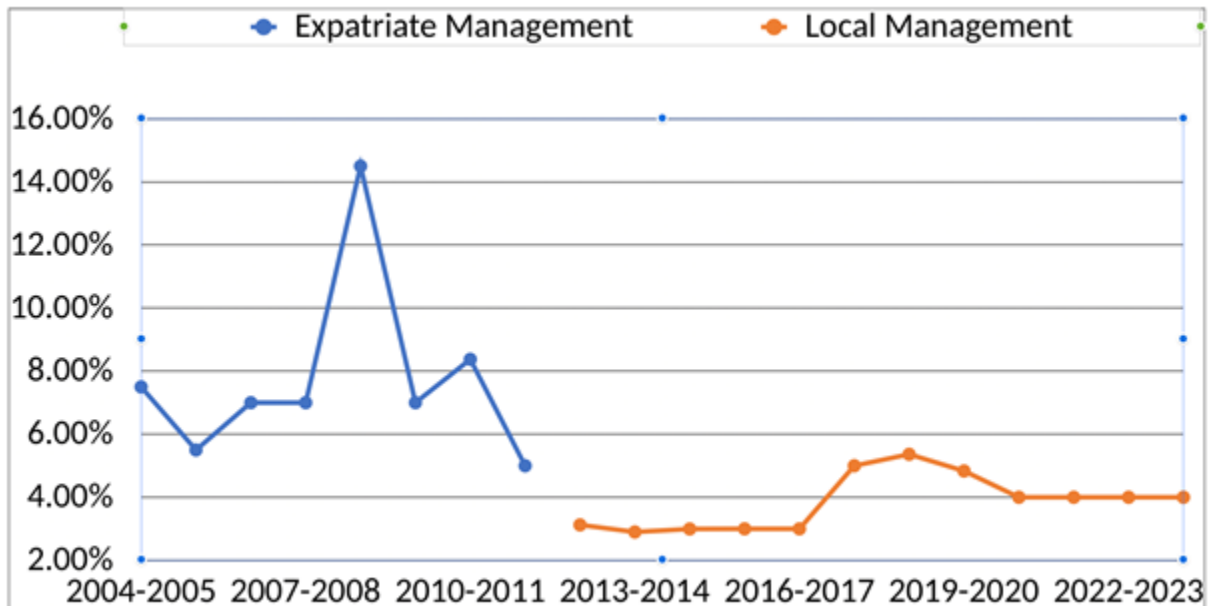


R : Will the accreditation (“homologation”) of the French program be in question?

FL : Absolutely not. Not only does Rochambeau meet all the criteria for accreditation, but the commission's report from Spring 2019 recognizes the prestige of our school, the exceptional qualifications of our teachers, the excellent results obtained by our students in their academic classes and testing, and the overall quality of the school.

The arrival of Mr. Jacquenet will further strengthen our capacity to continue to improve the quality of our teaching while adhering to the criteria necessary for continued accreditation.

R : Some parents are concerned about a sharp increase in school fees when we become a partner school instead of the current convention contract. What assurances can you give to them?



Rochambeau tuition fee increases



FL : I understand the concern: Some French schools, like those in NY or Los Angeles for example, have much higher tuition fees than Rochambeau. But rising tuition fees are a matter of management and politics. Rochambeau for years and until 2012 was run and managed by an expatriate Proviseur and an expatriate accountant. During this period the average increase in tuition fees was 8.1% per year with a peak of 14% in 2008. Since 2013, and with the arrival of H el ene Fabre at Rochambeau, a local management team has been gradually put in place. The Board of Trustees has placed great emphasis on the recruitment of local expertise and skills, Since 2013, the average increase in school fees has been 3.7% per year. This has been achieved even while having created a financial aid fund endowed with nearly \$1 million, having invested nearly \$1 million per year in our infrastructure which were previously in a lamentable state, having raised teacher and staff salaries, with special attention to our lower earning colleagues, and having greatly increased the educational offerings and supports for children with learning difficulties.

This policy of moderate increases in school fees will be continued by the Board of Trustees and we maintain our commitment to investing in our students, supporting our families, providing pedagogical rigor, and making improvements to our infrastructure where needed. This policy made Rochambeau the second least expensive French high school in the United States. And in this current period of global health and economic crisis, we are affirmed to know that Rochambeau is managed by H el ene Fabre whose managerial skills are exceptional and who has been able to surround herself with a remarkable team, with the hiring of Mr. Jacquenet being just the latest example.

R : You mentioned the Mission La ique Fran aise ("MLF") in your last message on April 7. What is the MLF and what could be the relationship for Rochambeau with this organization?

FL : The Mission La ique Fran aise is a French agency managing a network of 112 French schools around the world. It was founded in 1902. Currently, 32 of the French schools in North America that are partners of the AEF  are *also* part of the MLF network. This network is run by staff directly from the Ministry of Education and is universally recognized for its



professional teacher training programs. It offers various services to the French schools that are part of its network. The Board of Trustees is open to any partnership that will strengthen Rochambeau's French accredited program and the quality of our teaching. This is why we would like to start discussions with the MLF to see if a partnership would be beneficial for our school. Any relationship we explore with the MLF would exist as a complement to the one we already have with the AEFÉ; an MLF relationship would not replace our AEFÉ partnership. Following discussions with the MLF, we will share with our community what we learn about the benefits the MLF could offer for Rochambeau.

R : Your April 7 message also mentioned initiatives being explored to provide additional support to the employees and families in our school community. Can you tell us more about this?

FL : While governance issues are important, they are not as important as the challenges we're all facing right now. The thoughts of our Board of Trustees members go first and foremost to those in our community who have been, are now, or will be affected by the COVID-19 virus. Our thoughts, as well as those of the management team, are focused on three main areas: the safety and health of our students and staff; the preservation of the school and the jobs attached to it so that everyone can return to school as soon as the crisis ends; and providing financial assistance to families who are or will be economically affected by the crisis. Thanks to the sound management of the past 8 years, Rochambeau has the financial strength to face this crisis and the capacity to take initiatives in these three priority areas. As I indicated, H el ene Fabre will soon present several important initiatives to the Board of Trustees and then to the full community.