

# Home-schooling rises sharply among Montreal's Hasidic families



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Hasidic Jews on Hutchison St. in Montreal in April 2012. *JOHN MAHONEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

In the months after police and social workers raided an ultra-Orthodox Jewish school to investigate allegations of educational neglect, more than 400 Hasidic families have signed home-schooling contracts with the English Montreal School Board.

The board now has 654 Hasidic students being followed by teaching consultants who will track their progress to ensure they're being taught the curriculum at home. Last year, the EMSB had home-schooling agreements with 236 Hasidic students.

The sudden increase means the EMSB will hire several employees and educational consultants who will meet with the students and their parents three times a year to evaluate their progress.

After the [raid on the Vizhnitz community school on Parc Ave.](http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/police-raid-ultra-orthodox-jewish-school-on-parc-ave)

(<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/police-raid-ultra-orthodox-jewish-school-on-parc-ave>) last June, the Quebec government announced that it would increase the government subsidy

(<http://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/quebec-to-invest-additional-1-million-into-homeschooling-this-year>) for each home-schooled child to \$1,000 from \$616 for the 2016-17 school year.

The increased funding will allow the EMSB to set up a home-schooling team that will track the students' progress and verify their school work. The students will also write government exams, but only after a two-year grace period.

Board spokesperson Michael Cohen couldn't say whether it was the raid that led to the increase in families signing home-schooling contracts. However, he told the Montreal Gazette this week that the government had worked with the community and more of them are on board for home-schooling.

Most of the students covered by the agreements attend Yeshiva Toras Moshe Academy, an elementary school in Montreal, Vizhnitz school, a primary school in Montreal, and Beth Esther Academy, a primary and secondary school for girls in Outremont.

Youth protection officials closed their investigation over the summer after determining that there was no evidence of educational neglect.

"The observations and assessments demonstrate that your (children) are meeting developmental milestones," Assunta Gallo, the director of youth protection for CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal, wrote in a letter to the community.

In an interview with the Montreal Gazette this week, Gallo said that while

she can't discuss details of the investigation, when youth protection officials close a file in cases like this one it's because they have determined that the children are not compromised educationally. She said it's not up to youth protection to ensure that students are following the education curriculum to the letter, but to make sure "they're receiving the necessary schooling to become autonomous and to be able to function in their community."

Quebec Education Minister Sébastien Proulx said in the wake of the June raid that the Hasidic community must balance the religious knowledge it wants to pass on with the secular instruction that all Quebec students are required to receive.

In November 2014, the government reached an out-of-court settlement with Yeshiva Toras Moshe Academy that allowed students to receive secular instruction at home while attending the school for religious lessons. The government previously tried to shut it down in 2010 because the teachers were not properly accredited (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/quebec-reaches-agreement-with-montreal-hasidic-school>) and devoted only six hours of instruction a week to secular subjects.

Under the agreement, the Education Department will provide homework assistance and other services if parents of students attending Yeshiva Toras Moshe turn to home-schooling for their children's secular education. Many students from that school are among those whose families signed home-schooling contracts with the EMSB last year.

Abraham Ekstein, a spokesperson for the Hasidic community, said signing the students up for home-schooling took time, but said the community had always intended to comply with the 2014 agreement.

He said that under the agreement, parents are responsible for educating their children at home, but added that tutors at the religious schools the children are attending teach them aspects of the curriculum during the school day.

During the 2014-15 school year, there were 1,300 home-schooled students in Quebec, according to the Education Department. The department says it does not know how many of those children are from ultra-Orthodox Jewish families.

Angela Mancini, the chairperson of the EMSB, said she thinks that more Hasidic families signed home-schooling contracts this year because the families that did so last year were happy with the set-up.

“People were comfortable with it and there was a certain trust,” she said. “The goal was to put the children in a situation where they are succeeding.”

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