

After 3 months, EMSB's Mancini returns to board to find salary slashed

Board chair says she has been on sick leave, refused calls for her resignation, and said cutting her salary is "harassment and intimidation."

KATHERINE WILTON, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/KWILTONMONTREALGAZETTE](https://montrealgazette.com/author/kwiltonmontrealgazette))

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Angela Mancini says she told an EMSB board employee she was on medical leave and asked the employee to notify the vice-chair. *ALLEN MCINNIS / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

Angela Mancini attended her first school board meeting in three months Monday night, but many of her fellow commissioners weren't happy to see her back.

Commissioners at the English Montreal School Board voted to cut the board chairperson's salary from \$38,000 to \$10,000, citing her absences from meetings and other EMSB duties since November.

Mancini, who said she has been on sick leave, fended off calls for her resignation and called the decision to slash her salary "harassment and intimidation."

She said that she told a board employee that she was on leave and asked the employee to notify vice-chair Joe Ortona.

Ortona told her that he never received the message. "In what world does someone disappear for three months and when they come back, announce that they're on a medical leave?" he asked, as Mancini sat beside him.

Ortona told The Montreal Gazette on Tuesday that he felt commissioners were justified in reducing Mancini's salary because she missed meetings and board events and failed to notify commissioners that she was on medical leave.

"She hid this from us because she didn't want to relinquish her power as chair," he claimed.

Mancini said the decision to reduce her salary was "politics," adding that she was "flabbergasted that I would have to speak about my private life at a public board meeting."

She said she didn't notify commissioners before Christmas about her sick leave because she thought her absence would be temporary. "I have done my job for the school board," she said on Tuesday.

During the time she was on sick leave, Mancini was sanctioned by the board's ethics commissioner. (<https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/allison-hanes-dysfunction-catches-up-with-emsb-at-sensitive-time>).

The ethics commissioner ordered her to make a public apology. (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-chair-ordered-to-apologize-amid-ethics-code-violations>) to director general Ann Marie Matheson for interrupting her during an in-camera meeting last March and for making derogatory comments when Matheson became upset during the same meeting.

She also has to apologize publicly to deputy director general Benôit Duhême, for not allowing him to speak at a meeting. Those apologies are expected at the next board meeting, Feb. 20.

Agostino Cannavino, an opposition commissioner at the EMSB, said Mancini and former vice-chair Sylvia Lo Bianco began to lose support from some commissioners two years ago after they had lobbied for Lo Bianco's brother-in-law to be appointed to a job that administrators felt he wasn't qualified for.

He said he would like to see an end to the squabbling on council and the petty politics that he has witnessed over the years.

Two years ago, the board held a press conference at General Vanier school in St-Léonard to launch its new STEAM program (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/new-way-of-teaching-picks-up-steam-in-emsb-schools>) (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics).

The plan was for the press conference to be held at Pierre Elliott Trudeau School in Rosemont, in Cannavino's ward. Cannavino said he told the principal and teachers about the event and they were thrilled.

But shortly after the administration announced the Rosemont location, a decision was made to move the press conference to a school outside Cannavino's territory, he said.

When Cannavino asked administrators why the change was made, he said they just shrugged their shoulders. "I screamed and hollered but there was nothing I could do," he recalled. "I had

to go back and tell the principal and teachers that it was off. It wasn't very professional."

The infighting comes at a time when the Quebec government is launching [two investigations](https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/quebec-opens-investigation-into-english-montreal-school-board) (https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/quebec-opens-investigation-into-english-montreal-school-board) into allegations of mismanagement and ethical transgressions at the board.

Quebec's Treasury Board is conducting an audit of contracts given by the board and has already asked for copies of board documents. The audit will "verify whether the tendering and awarding of contracts by a school board complies with the established rules."

This month, Education Minister Jean-François Roberge launched [an administrative investigation](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-contract-probe-announced-by-quebec-treasury-board) (https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-contract-probe-announced-by-quebec-treasury-board) into the EMSB, calling the situation "serious and troubling."

Roberge said some contracts have been issued without respecting the existing rules and there have been repeated cost overruns.

kwilton@postmedia.com (mailto:kwilton@postmedia.com)

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