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Quebec / Local News

# Anglo school boards hit back at Jennings for siding with Legault

*Russell Copeman, of the Quebec English School Boards Association, calls Marlene Jennings's stance "odd."*

Philip Authier • Montreal Gazette

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"I am with Premier Legault," tweeted Marlene Jennings, head of the Quebec Community Groups Network. PHOTO BY DAVE SIDAWAY /Montreal Gazette

QUEBEC — A war of words has erupted after Marlene Jennings, head of the Quebec Community Groups Network, sided with Premier François Legault over whether the English Montreal School Board is qualified to make decisions about re-opening schools.

"I love it!!!," Jennings tweeted Wednesday after Legault questioned the EMSB's decision to resist his government's order to send older high school students back to class full time — an order the government soon rescinded.



"I am with Premier Legault," Jennings wrote. "I too would like to know who those EMSB 'experts,' are and their credentials."

Jennings, a former Liberal MP, is now president of the QCGN, an umbrella group for English language community organizations. In 2019, she was appointed as the Legault government's trustee to manage the EMSB, which was then mired in turmoil.

Reaction to the tweet was swift.

Russell Copeman, executive director of the Quebec English School Boards Association, said he was puzzled by Jennings's stance.

"I find it odd that the only dissonant voice in our community about the EMSB's legitimate and correct response to the yo-yo decisions of the government of Quebec on the successful hybrid model in high school is the president of the QCGN."

**Russell Copeman**  
@racopeman

I find it odd that the only dissonant voice in our community about the EMSB's legitimate and correct response to the yo-yo decisions of the Govt of Québec on the successful hybrid model in high school is the President of [@QCGN](#) [#polqc](#) [#COVID19](#) [#ÉducationQc](#)

**MarleneJennings2.0** @marleneqcg

Replying to @eliasmakos and @toinz

I love it!!! I am with Premier Legault; I too would like to know who those EMSB 'experts' are & their credentials.

10:54 PM · Apr 6 2021

10:04 PM · Apr 6, 2021

2 1 Copy link to Tweet

In a tweet, the current chairperson of the EMSB, Giuseppe Ortona, directed a remark to Jennings: “You are definitely with François Legault. No news there.”

 **Me Giuseppe Ortona**  
@MeOrtona 

I agree, you are definitely with [@francoislegault](#). No news there.

 **MarleneJennings2.0** @marleneqcggn  
Replying to @eliasmakos and @toinz  
I love it!!! I am with Premier Legault; I too would like to know who those EMSB 'experts' are & their credentials.

9:46 PM · Apr 6, 2021 from Montréal, Québec 

There was no immediate response from Jennings.

The incident was sparked Tuesday at Legault's pandemic news conference where he backtracked on the loosening of COVID-19 restrictions in Montreal.

After announcing a week earlier that all high school students in Montreal and other red zones would go back to school full time starting March 29, Legault flip-flopped and returned to the hybrid model, where students in the higher grades attend in-person classes every other day.

Legault denied his swift reversal was evidence the government was wrong to send all students back to school full time.

He then took a swipe at the EMSB, which had balked at the government's initial decision.

"We have to rely on science; we have to rely on the real experts," Legault said. "I have not seen the EMSB experts."

(The Lester B. Pearson and Sir Wilfrid Laurier boards followed the EMSB in resisting the government's plan. Education Minister Jean-François Roberge initially insisted they would have to comply, then later softened his position.)

In a statement following Legault's news conference Tuesday, the EMSB said it welcomed the decision to return to the hybrid model.

"Last week our system was placed under tremendous duress when we were told that we had to send all high school students back on a daily basis," Ortona said, and urged Quebec to keep the hybrid model for the rest of the year.

*This story will be updated.*

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