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CAQ minister promotes bilingualism event at Montreal school



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The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) is nearly halfway through "Le mois du français," a month-long event that celebrates bilingualism in schools, with the motto "Être bilingue, c'est gagnant !"

"You know we offer excellent French education. Our grades show that. Our success rates show that and we just want to showcase the good things that are going on in our schools," said EMSB chair Joe Ortona.

Throughout January, the school board invited a series of Quebec politicians for discussions with elementary and high school students, entirely in French. CAQ Minister Eric Girard visited Royal Vale in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Friday morning.

According to the EMSB, this is the first time any CAQ minister has even stepped foot inside one of its schools. Girard, Quebec's finance minister, also became the minister responsible for relations with English-speaking Quebecers after the October election.

Despite not taking questions from reporters, Girard spent an hour fielding questions from two dozen Royal Vale Elementary and High School students. The pre-written questions ranged from his favourite hobbies, to what it's like managing the province's finances.

"He was very inclusive and tried to make sure that everyone got a chance to answer all the questions that they had. And no matter what kind of question they asked, he always had a really good answer for it," said Grade 8 student Lily Phaneuf.

Girard spoke about the importance of preserving the French language, adding that being bilingual or even trilingual can be a huge asset.

Principal Mauro Zampini said Royal Vale's French immersion program's goal is to set students up for success.

"Our goal is at the end of Secondary 5, our kids are perfectly bilingual and they're able to function and work in the Quebec society. And as well to work throughout Canada and the rest of the world," he told CTV News.

The talk happened at a time when the school board and government are in a language debate playing out in court. Despite this, Ortona says it's important to still come together for the betterment of children's education.

"We have court challenges with the government currently, but that's for the courts and that's for another day," he said.

The EMSB chair hopes Girard's new role signifies the start of a new chapter together.

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Finance Minister Eric Girard (third from left, back row) visited the Royal Vale School in NDG on Friday, Jan. 13, 2023, for 'Le mois du français,' a month-long event that celebrates bilingualism in EMSB schools. (Olivia O'Malley/CTV News)

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