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When families are welcomed by schools and encouraged to contribute their talent and time, teachers, students and communities benefit.

Arron Neal • Special to Montreal Gazette

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students."

student experience.

the educational experience.

Headline News

collaboration with teachers.

I suspected we were on that list.

We all had butterflies.

second two-year mandate as board chair.

clunky began to feel familiar and easier.

a new school in a fully French-language school system.

I wasn't surprised.



communications within and between English boards would have to be translated into French, placing "an unnecessary burden on our staff (and) diverting their focus from educational priorities and students." PHOTO BY JOHN MAHONEY / Montreal Gazette

legally challenge provisions of Bill 96 and the Charter of the French Language that affect its internal communications. Part of the concern is that written communications within and between English

A recent news story revealed the English Montreal School Board's plan to

boards would have to be translated into French, placing "an unnecessary

As a parent, this prompted me to reflect on my role in school governance and

the symbiotic relationship between parents and teachers.

burden on our staff (and) diverting their focus from educational priorities and

more than a supportive nod. When families are welcomed by schools and encouraged to contribute their

Striking teachers want resources to better serve students; parents want to offer

talent and time, teachers, students and communities benefit.

Three years ago, I was elected chair of the governing board for a bilingual

paving a path for his younger sister to follow. My objective was to help parents collaborate with staff and add value to the

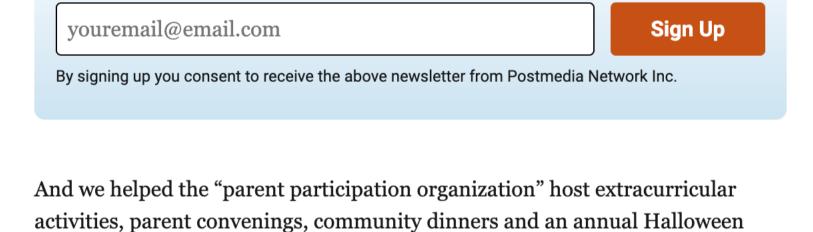
English public school near downtown Montreal. My son was a new first grader

During my time as chair, and in spite of a global pandemic, those objectives were met.

We refreshed a dated dress code, relieving parents of the white shirt laundry battle, and freeing teachers of having to enforce a code that had little impact on

We facilitated the purchase of new library books featuring culturally and inclusively diverse characters in both English and French, better representing the students in our school.

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Two months into an exhaustive home search, another challenge emerged notification that our family could no longer attend English schools.

party, underscoring the invaluable contributions of parents and their

Language debates on the news hinted that our English eligibility was in jeopardy, and our school principal shared that several families would soon be informed they could not return in the fall.

Bill 96 modified rules governing English eligibility. Our daughter, a Canadian citizen born to American parents with work visas, originally qualified. However, at the end of her Grade 1 experience, we were informed she would no longer have access to English education and, consequently, I could not fulfill my

Would our kids feel alone and out of place? Would their confidence and their

After settling into our new place on the South Shore in the fall, our kids started

grades drop? We endured a rainy, bumpy start and the usual challenges of the first two weeks

of school. When our routine was established, what was at first awkward and

High marks on their report cards say our kids are doing just fine — a testament to the benefits of the bilingual education they received in the English system until now.

changed. My limited French proficiency leaves me feeling sidelined, particularly when it comes to governing board participation. Nevertheless, I'm committed to finding ways to contribute and support the school staff.

We were compelled to switch education systems when our English eligibility

Our new school's warm welcome heartens me.

Despite linguistic differences, I've been invited to organize fundraisers and support other initiatives.

This reaffirms that the warmth of a school's welcome, along with opportunities

for parent involvement, contribute to the overall strength and joy in schools.

During parent teacher conferences, a francization educator joined, facilitating

Any bureaucracy or government policy that threatens to get in the way of this kind of co-operation and collaboration must be vigorously challenged.

Arron Neal is an American expat and a former governing board chair at an EMSB school. She is navigating the Quebec education system with two children in primary school.

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translation as needed.



