



Local News



Montreal school boards, service centres promise a teacher in every classroom

Montreal school boards and service centres say they will find teachers to fill more than 1,000 posts before school starts or use substitutes.

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The chairs of the English Montreal and Lester B. Pearson school boards say they're in good shape to have a teacher in every classroom when school kicks in next week. PHOTO BY DAVE SIDAWAY /Montreal Gazette

The heads of Montreal's school boards and school service centres sought to reassure parents Thursday that even with more than 1,000 teaching positions still unfilled, there will be teachers in every classroom when school resumes next week.

English Montreal School Board chair Joe Ortona said the situation in the province's largest English board is better than it was at the same time last year and that the board was able to find enough qualified teachers before the start of the 2023 school year.

"There's no reason to believe this year will be any different; in fact, if anything, we'll have them all ready and filled before the first day of school," he told reporters at a joint news conference held by all of the island's school boards and service centres.

The EMSB had 201 unfilled teaching positions as of Aug. 21, according to the provincial government's education dashboard, reflecting 7.6 per cent of its teaching positions.

Ortona said that as of Aug. 16, when there were 239 unfilled posts, 76 of those were full-time regular positions, 112 were replacement posts and 51 were part-time posts. The board is also in need of psychologists, guidance counsellors, speech therapists and secretaries, as well as daycare and special education teachers and cafeteria workers, he said.

At the Lester B. Pearson School Board, there are 70 empty teaching posts, most of which are part time, said Judy Kelley, chair of its board of commissioners.

"The positions will most likely be filled by next week, but don't forget that we also have a substitute teacher list," she said. "On any given school day, of any given year, there are substitute teachers who need to be called in to fill certain positions."

French school service centres said they too may have to rely on substitutes when school resumes on Monday, three days before the first day of school at English-language boards.

Isabelle Gélinas, the head of the Centre de services scolaire de Montréal, said there may not be a permanent teacher in every class when school begins, but there will be a qualified teacher — though those substitutes could be filling in for weeks or even months.

"We can reassure people that just because the posts aren't all filled doesn't mean there isn't a teacher in front of every class," she said.

Gélinas said that with teachers going on maternity leave, getting sick or having to take time off work for other reasons, as well as the need to incorporate new students arriving during the school year, there are always posts to fill.

Across Montreal Island, there were 1,061 unfilled teaching positions as of Aug. 21, according to provincial government data, about five per cent of the nearly 21,000 teaching posts.

Paul St-Onge, the acting director-general of the Centre de services scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, which serves western Montreal Island and some areas in central Montreal, said universities aren't training enough teachers and that recruitment is difficult with Quebec's labour shortage. But he defended the planning and organization of the school boards and service centres and said that with around 95 per cent of teaching posts currently filled, schools are doing better than some other sectors, such as health care.

While student populations have been growing at French-language schools, including thousands of immigrants who often require special integration classes, numbers have been stable or dropping at English schools.

But Kelley of the Pearson board said the increasing popularity of French immersion programs in the rest of Canada has made it more difficult for her board to recruit French teachers for immersion and bilingual programs.

In some cases, schools plan to fill gaps by using people not legally qualified to teach, though the school board and service centre leaders said those people have at least a bachelor's degree and in some cases may have a master's or PhD, though not in education.

"More than 93 per cent of our teachers are legally qualified, so six per cent to seven per cent don't currently have a teaching licence," she said, adding that all substitute teachers are required to have an education degree, or to be education students.