



Opinion



Opinion: At the EMSB, a new school year brings renewed commitment

As classes resume Thursday, the English Montreal School Board vows to keep defending community rights and values with legal challenges to Bills 21, 40 and 96.

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30 Comments



renew our commitment to fostering an environment that promotes student success. We are incredibly proud that last year, the EMSB achieved a 95.9 per cent graduation rate — the highest in our history and the top result among all school boards and service centres in Quebec, even surpassing the private sector.

But that was last year.

As we look forward, our goal is to build on this solid foundation. Globally, this means defending our constitutional right to manage and control our school system against government initiatives that threaten it.

At the EMSB, we firmly believe that a religious symbol worn by a teacher does not compromise their ability to provide quality education in a secular state. In fact, we are convinced that diversity strengthens our education system. Our student body reflects a rich tapestry of over 50 cultural communities, with over 70 languages spoken at home. Our teachers are crucial role models, helping to build bridges among Quebecers.

We will also continue to oppose the Office québécois de la langue française's restrictive stance on when the EMSB is permitted to use English only in internal communications. It is unreasonable that a principal of an English school must write in French when communicating with English-language arts teachers about a training workshop or when informing parents about a school event.

We believe that democratically elected school boards, where the views of all constituencies are represented, lead to better outcomes than decisions made centrally in Quebec City.

The EMSB will not back down. We will stand up for our rights and values with legal challenges to Bills 21, 40 and 96.

At the same time, we remain committed to investing in our French programming to ensure our graduates have the linguistic skills to thrive in Quebec. The anglophone community pioneered French immersion in the 1960s, well before Bill 101, and we remain dedicated to ensuring our students can live and work in French. The EMSB offers three models of French instruction in elementary schools — core, bilingual and immersion — and our secondary schools offer French programs that exceed the Education Ministry's requirements.

While we must keep an eye on what is happening in the courtroom, our primary focus remains the classroom. We recognize that our students learn differently and have diverse interests and talents. One size does not fit all. That is why we have expanded services and support for special needs students, launched a pilot project with Giant Steps at Wagar for a new work-training program, and are consulting on the creation of a centre of excellence dedicated to these students. We will also maintain our support of the Quebec Virtual Academy, which serves students with medical conditions that prevent them from attending class in person, as well as elite athletes enrolled in Sport-études programs across the nine English school boards.

As commissioners, we will continue to monitor how services and resources are being utilized and their impact on educational success. But our true source of optimism lies in our students, who are full of potential, and in our teachers, who are committed to meeting their evolving needs.

Joe Ortona is the chair of the English Montreal School Board.