



## Why you should care about English school board elections

### Description

# Your vote counts in ensuring the survival of our school boards

By Irwin Rapoport

With the vaccination campaign for COVID-19 ramping up, there is a distinct possibility that the provincial government will resume the twice-suspended **English school board elections** in May or June or mid-September.

Within the territory of the English Montreal School Board, only one election is taking place and that is for **Ward 3**, comprised of Westmount, a large section of downtown Montreal as far as University Street, and Southwest Montreal. There are approximately 10,000 registered voters and nine schools, including those in Westmount (Roslyn Elementary, Westmount Park Elementary, and Westmount High) and the Southwest (St. Gabriel Elementary and James Lyng High School).

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Many leaders in the English community condemned Premier Francois Legault and his CAQ government for holding school board elections last fall as the second wave of COVID-19 was beginning to hit full stride in terms of new daily infections that could put people at risk, especially seniors who take their voting responsibilities seriously.

Fortunately, the elections were suspended but the plan, according to the above-mentioned community leaders, was to conduct them to ensure a minimal turnout and thus demonstrate that the English-speaking community did not care about its school boards.

In their view, ministry of education lawyers were going to cite these low numbers during the Superior Court case on Bill 40 – the provincial legislation that seeks to eliminate all school boards in the province and replace them with Service Centres, which are essentially controlled by the government. A clear example of this control was recently seen at the French Service Centres, which were not permitted to purchase and install air filters in the



classrooms.

Thankfully, the EMSB and other English school boards, which are challenging Bill 40, were able to purchase and install such filters and protect our students.

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Our English school boards are constitutionally protected via Section 93 of the BNA Act and Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and various Supreme Court rulings regarding French and English minority-controlled school boards. The elimination of the French boards was a tragedy and an assault on local democracy by Legault et al. I, and many, hope that the French boards are restored for the sake and benefit of the community.

With this background in mind, it is extremely important that the English-speaking community express its support for the nine English school boards and vociferously stress its insistence upon controlling and managing its educational institutions.

Thus I ask people to do the following:

- **Vote in the upcoming school board elections** – let’s have a minimum 60 percent turnout at the polls and by mail-in ballots. This means urging your family and friends to vote.
- **Ensure that your name is on the school board’s electoral list.** If you received a voter election notice last fall, you are on the list. If you did not, then you were automatically placed on the French voters’ list and now have to request to be placed back on the English one. Contact your school board to secure the forms to make the application.
- **Request a mail-in ballot so that you can safely cast your vote without fear of contracting COVID and spreading it.** By the time the elections resume, we may have a good percentage of the population vaccinated but we cannot afford to take any chances. During the last election cycle, the government expanded the scope of those who could apply for such ballots and it essentially allowed them for people who may have come into contact with COVID-19. Many successfully applied for such ballots, which could be done by phone.
- **Get acquainted with the issues affecting our school boards, local schools, and overall public education system and the way it operates.** We all pay taxes to support our schools and we all benefit from the success of each student, be they in the youth or adult sectors.

Our English school boards pre-date Confederation and our community leaders during the Confederation Debates fought hard to have constitutional guarantees for them via Section 93 of the BNA Act. This not only guaranteed their protection but also control of curriculum and the selection of textbooks. Unfortunately, our school boards lost control of the curriculum in the 1980s and alas, two Supreme Court rulings confirmed the transfer of this authority from the boards to the ministry of education.

Our students have long paid the price for this usurpation and it is felt by our students writing matriculation exams written in French and poorly translated into English. Despite changes suggested by our teachers and educational consultants, the flawed exams are rarely altered. This has created many problems for our students, with many failing them, especially math and history. This is reported annually. Most of the textbooks are translated from French versions and we are all aware of the problems associated with the math and history



textbooks. This is shameful and an unnecessary travesty.

Fortunately, our teachers and educational consultants do their utmost to prepare students for the exams and make up for the faults in the textbooks. We are in their debt.

'Should we lose our school boards, our community will be all the poorer and weaker. Our school boards are the last large community institutions that we control. Let's ensure that remains the case.'

Overall enrolment at our school boards has dropped from a high-water mark of over 250,000 students in 1973-74 to less than 100,000 and the decline continues. Far too many schools have closed and were transferred to the French boards. We recently saw forced transfers of East End elementary schools and the loss of a high school in the West Island. We can expect more such transfers in the future and as a community, we have to be ready to resist.

The EMSB has a 90 percent-plus graduation rate at the Grade 11 level. We should celebrate this and be proud of it, but there is always room to improve the educational experience.

School board elections are crucial and I hope this article has provided the reader with some of the key background points to stimulate interest and to participate in the elections. Should we lose our school boards, our community will be all the poorer and weaker. Our school boards are the last large community institutions that we control. Let's ensure that remains the case.

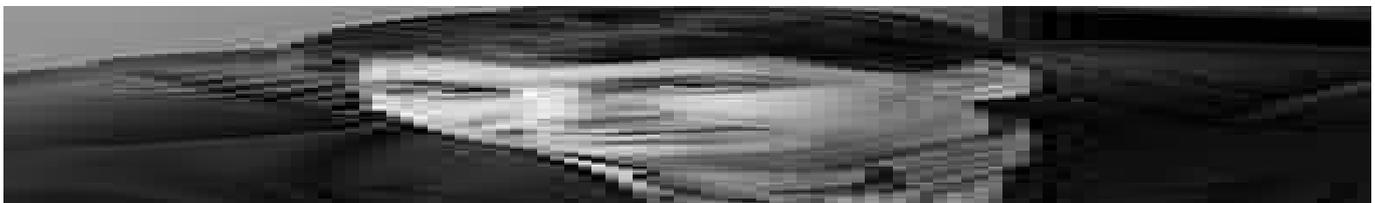
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