



Meet the English Montreal
School Board elections candidates

Description

Irwin Rapoport, independent candidate for Ward 3 – Westmount/Southwest Montreal/downtown Montreal east to University Street

On September 9, candidates for **Ward 3** in the **English Montreal School Board elections** were invited by WestmountMag.ca to submit a text describing their platform for free publication, on a first-come, first-served basis. The articles are unedited and presented in their original format.

Here is the first article of the series, submitted by **Irwin Rapoport, independent candidate**.

The September 26th election to select a new school commissioner to represent Ward 3 (Westmount/Southwest Montreal/downtown Montreal east to University Street) of the English Montreal School Board is an important one and I urge you to cast your ballots for our students, parents, and community.

This could literally be the last English school board election in Quebec if Bill 40, Premier Legault's legislation to eliminate school boards in Quebec, is deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court or if a future federal government strikes a deal with Quebec to exempt the English school boards from their protection under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Ward 3 has 9,000 voters and it is essential to have a large turnout to tell Legault that we care about our school boards and want to manage and control our schools and educational infrastructure. In last spring's proceedings at the Superior Court, government lawyers stated that it was reasonable to eliminate elected school boards due to previous low voter turnouts. Ironically, the same government has no problem with low turnouts in by-elections for the National Assembly.



Bill 40 has already eliminated the French boards and replaced them with government-controlled service centres. We cannot allow this to happen to our boards. Your vote makes a difference – please vote and urge your family and friends to do the same.

From 1990-94, I served as a commissioner with the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, representing Cote Saint Luc. I am seeking election for Ward 3 as an independent candidate, a critical distinction.

If I have the honor of being elected:

- I will be **your voice** at the EMSB. I will meet with parents at governing boards, community centres and on-line forums. I will listen to your concerns and be the change agent that parents are looking for.
- I will be **independent**, working for all Ward 3 families to address issues that matter to our community, representing your priorities. My allegiance is to the community – I will not be answerable to a party leader and caucus, having to toe the party line. Aside from one independent commissioner, the party with the majority has eight commissioners and the chair's seat. Having another party member is not essential and it would only silence the voice of Ward 3 residents.
- I will **work with other commissioners** and associations from across the province to protect our community's right to elect our own school boards and manage our schools as we see fit. We don't need our schools turned into another fiasco like the healthcare system, run by Quebec City bureaucrats with no idea of what is needed in our communities. Perfect example: the EMSB passed a motion and allocated funds to install air purifiers in every classroom. Provincial bureaucrats refused to let the French school service centres do the same. We need the power to decide what's best for our students.
- I will be **someone you can be proud of**, someone who represents the standards and values of the families of Ward 3: visible and approachable, working together, sharing opinions, caring about our children, proud of our teachers, staff and schools.

To learn more about my positions, I invite you to visit [my campaign page](#).

Over the past year, I have written several articles for WestmountMa.ca about our school boards and their importance to the community, especially as they predate Confederation. They can be accessed [here](#).

A commissioner's role is to unite the educational community (students, teachers, parents, and board personnel) and the public to maximize the learning experience of every student and their future success by providing the needed resources and support. We all have a vested interest in the success of every student and in an efficient and well-run school board.

I also have an obligation to:

- Have the public education system, through improvements and upgrades, be a first choice for parents.
- Dispel the myth that sending one's child to a French school is the better option to ensure that the child is fluently bilingual upon graduation. The EMSB has excellent French programs.
- Increase enrolment at the EMSB so that we have a stable population to maintain our schools and to set targets to increase net enrolment over a five-year period. It is estimated that up to 20,000 children eligible to



attend English public schools are enrolled in French schools. If 10,000 of these students attended English public schools, it would help to save many schools impacted by declining enrolments and bring in a much-needed infusion of annual funding to support programs.

- Bring the Ward 3 educational community together to help solve problems at individual schools by sharing best practices and create a greater sense of community.

Ward 3 is a microcosm of the EMSB, sharing many of the same issues and challenges. This includes providing resources for all levels of learners, not just special needs and gifted students; dealing with poverty; having state-of-the-art facilities and resources; enhancing the partnership between the parents and teachers, principals, and the school board; and increasing community involvement in the education system and fostering a greater concern for our English school boards and their continued existence.

The EMSB is the community's school board, not the dukedom of the commissioners and the chair.

I attended Merton and Hampstead elementary schools in the 1970s and West Hill High School from 1977-1981.

From 1990-94, I served as a school commissioner in the PBSGM. It was an eye-opening experience that enlightened me about diverse community needs, the types of parents who volunteer to improve the quality of life and education at our schools, how large organizations function – the positives and negatives; how to best support the educational community, and to see the big picture and the small strands simultaneously.

Some issues are just that simple, while others are more complex and have competing interests within schools and the ward itself. This could be a daunting challenge, but I see it as a welcome challenge.

I was an elementary school student at Merton when it closed due to low enrolment and I was transferred to a new school. As a school commissioner, I voted to close West Hill when its enrolment fell below 200 students. When I had graduated in 1981, the big problem was that there were more students than lockers. I know what it means to lose a school and the pain it causes.

My late mother, Shirley, taught at the PSBGM as a full-time teacher before I was born and resumed her career at the PSBGM and EMSB as a substitute teacher following the birth of my siblings.

As a reporter with *The Suburban*, I covered education at the PSBGM and the EMSB and at the Lakeshore and Lester B. Pearson school boards. My experience as a school commissioner proved helpful in providing solid coverage. I covered the first public meeting of the EMSB, when the community learned that Francois Legault, the Parti Quebecois's education minister, confiscated many EMSB schools and properties and transferred them to the French boards. That shocked many and as a reporter, I secured an interview with Legault on the matter. I also tenaciously secured an interview with Jean Charest, asking him why he supported Bill 101's restrictions on access to English public schools.

Many of my friends sent their children to EMSB schools and I was often asked to help them out with essays, projects, assignments, and preparation for exams. It was my pleasure and it made a difference. This definitely increased my appreciation of the role of teachers and the many challenges they face.

Preparing our graduates for the transition to CEGEP is a matter of concern for me. I want to see the EMSB and the CEGEPs take an active role in ensuring as smooth a transition as possible.

I have always supported free choice in education – the provincial government should not be forcing parents to send



~~their children to French public schools against their will.~~

Ward 3 needs a monthly newsletter with updates from school governing boards, local Home and School associations, parents, and teachers and principals.

In conclusion, this school board election is crucial for the community and I urge all to cast their ballots. Just a few minutes of your time can have a significant impact now and in the future.

If someone tells you that “I have no children or grandchildren in the public school system, why should I vote and why should I care?”, just reply with the wise words of Westmount resident and registered EMSB voter Lynn Pecknold, who attended West Hill High School in NDG: “While we have no children or grandchildren in the school system here, my husband and I both feel that it is essential for us to vote.”

We must protect our school boards from elimination by Bill 40 and I ask that you vote for our students, parents, and the community.

Sincerely,

Irwin Rapoport
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Feature image: courtesy of Irwin Rapoport

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