

Anglo group, Quebec education minister meet to discuss school boards

Following a meeting with Jean-François Roberge, representatives of Quebec's anglophone community are cautiously optimistic they have the government's ear ahead of its planned school board reform.

JESSE FEITH, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/JFEITH2014](https://montrealgazette.com/author/jfeith2014)) Updated: August 16, 2019



Students, parents and teachers formed a chain around General Vanier Elementary School in June to protest the transfer of the building from the EMSB. Despite the transfers of General Vanier and John Paul I Junior High's buildings, the two schools are keeping their own identities, EMSB spokesperson Mike Cohen says. *JOHN KENNEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

Following a meeting with the provincial education minister this week, representatives of Quebec's anglophone community are cautiously optimistic they have the government's ear ahead of its planned school board reform.

APPELE-Québec, a coalition of organizations that's fighting the [Coalition Avenir Québec's plan to abolish school boards](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/anglo-groups-unite-to-defend-english-language-school-boards-in-quebec) (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/anglo-groups-unite-to-defend-english-language-school-boards-in-quebec>), met with Education Minister Jean-François Roberge to discuss its concerns about the impending legislation.

"The minister gave us a good solid hour and listened carefully to the positions of the community, which were very well expressed," said Quebec Community Groups Network president Geoffrey Chambers, who took part in the meeting.

"I don't know where that will go," Chambers added, "but at least in regards to talking to us, right now he is, and we're happy to respond."

Premier François Legault's government has [pledged to replace Québec's school boards](https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/the-pqs-october-electoral-defeat-still-haunts-the-party-caucus) (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/the-pqs-october-electoral-defeat-still-haunts-the-party-caucus>), including the nine English boards, with regional service centres run by government civil servants.

Anglophone-rights groups have argued abolishing the boards would hurt minority communities and threaten the survival of English communities in rural Quebec towns, among other concerns. APPELE-Québec formed in April to challenge the plan.

Chambers said he left this week's meeting with two positive takeaways: Roberge said those drafting the bill for the government will be in touch with the group's experts over the next two weeks, and the minister pledged to meet with the group once more before tabling the legislation.

Roberge is showing a good-faith commitment to the process, Chambers said. What remains to be seen is how far that goes, given the government's commitment to the change.

"They have a lot of momentum behind this process and we will see what the legislation says," Chambers said. "We're not expecting this to work, but we're definitely not going to spare any effort to try to make it work."

In an email response, a spokesperson for Roberge said the meeting was held as part of the government's planning process for the eventual bill.

The minister, the spokesperson said, is "meeting with various partners in the school system to gather their comments and suggestions."

The meeting took place the same week the English Montreal School Board officially decided how it will handle losing two buildings to a French school board. Roberge ordered the transfer to solve overcrowding issues in French public schools in the east end.

The EMSB approved the moves in a vote held Wednesday night after a 30-day consultation.

General Vanier elementary students will go to Pierre de Coubertin come September and John Paul I Junior High students will move into Laurier Macdonald High School. [General Vanier has 190 students and John Paul I has 303](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsbs-general-vanier-school-to-remain-intact-despite-move) (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsbs-general-vanier-school-to-remain-intact-despite-move>).

The cohabitation was made necessary by Roberge's decision. The EMSB tried to obtain a court injunction to temporarily block the transfers, but a [Quebec Superior Court judge denied the request](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-seeks-injunction-to-block-school-transfers) (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-seeks-injunction-to-block-school-transfers>).

Despite the transfers, the two schools are keeping their own identities, EMSB spokesperson Mike Cohen said on Friday.

"We had to do things under duress," Cohen said, "but I think the transition has been done smoothly."

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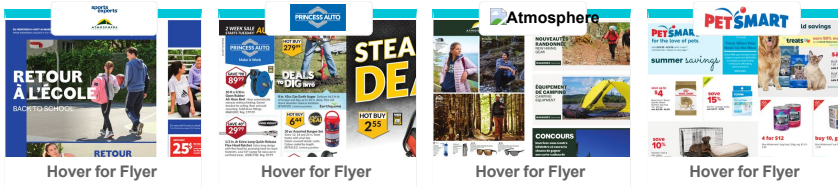
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