

Local News

After five 'incredibly tumultuous' years, EMSB director general abruptly resigns

The search for Ann Marie Matheson's replacement will start soon.

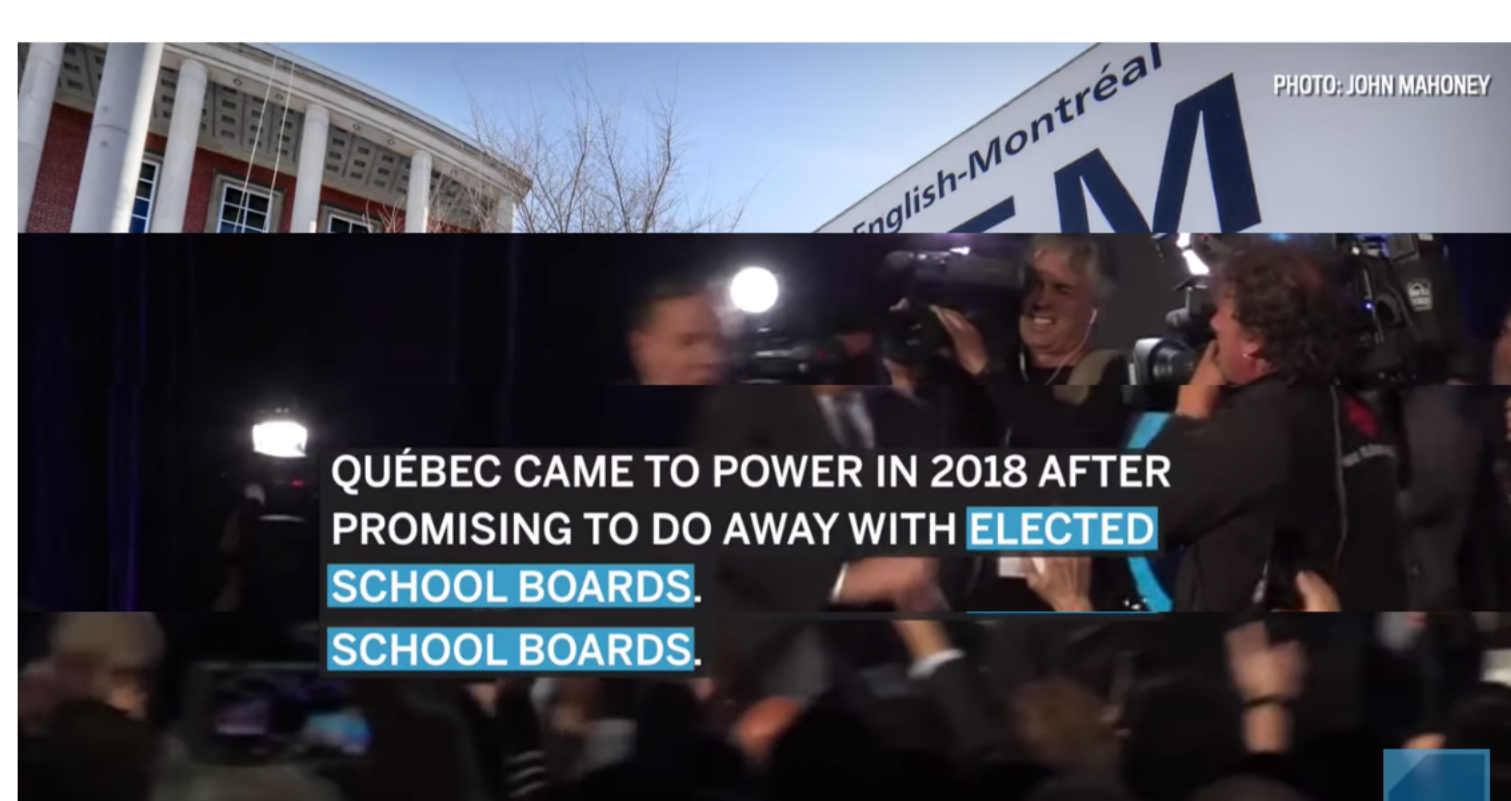
Katherine Wilton • Montreal Gazette
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English Montreal School Board director general Ann Marie Matheson will be resigning as of Aug. 13. JOHN KENNEY / Montreal Gazette

Five years after being appointed to a top post in English education [amid controversial circumstances](#), Ann Marie Matheson has resigned suddenly as director general of the English Montreal School Board.

In a letter to board employees, Matheson wrote that she was leaving “with a heavy heart.”



She thanked several past and current senior administrators for supporting her during an “incredibly tumultuous” five years, during which she clashed frequently with former board chair Angela Mancini.

Prior to their falling out, Matheson had been a strategist and close associate of Mancini’s during the 2014 school board elections.

After Mancini was elected, she and her sidekick, commissioner Sylvia Lo Bianco, managed to oust highly regarded director general Robert Stocker. Stocker retired suddenly after being berated and humiliated by Mancini during a caucus meeting, sources say.

They then [stunned board administrators by replacing Stocker with Matheson](#), who was a principal with the Lester B. Pearson School Board. With the promotion, Matheson jumped from a Level 9 to a Level 17 on the pay scale and her salary increased by at least \$60,000.

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In her resignation letter, Matheson acknowledged that her “learning curve was very steep.”

Initially, senior administrators were worried about Matheson’s appointment because they feared that she was there to do Mancini and Lo Bianco’s bidding.

“They thought they were installing a puppet whom they could control, but it didn’t turn out that way,” another source said.

The [relationship between the women deteriorated](#) after Matheson put the brakes on a plan by Mancini to appoint Lo Bianco’s brother-in-law to a senior board position that he was not qualified for.

She also drew Mancini’s ire by signing a letter to the Council of Commissioners in 2016, complaining that Mancini and Lo Bianco were too meddling in the day-to-day running of the board’s operations.

Matheson’s decision to stand up to Mancini won praise from staff at the board.

“She rose to the occasion and learned the ropes very quickly,” the source said. “She was an effective director general.”

Matheson hasn’t given a reason for her resignation and declined to be interviewed by the Montreal Gazette.

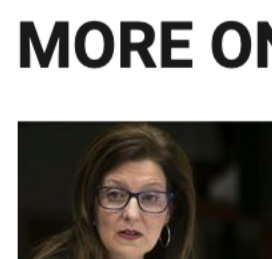
In a [scathing report by education ministry officials](#) last September, investigators wrote that the dysfunction and infighting at the EMSB is unlikely to change “as long as the same persons occupy the posts of commissioners and director general.”

Rumours of nepotism, backroom deals and disputes among elected officials have dogged the board since its inception in 1998 with the creation of linguistic school boards.

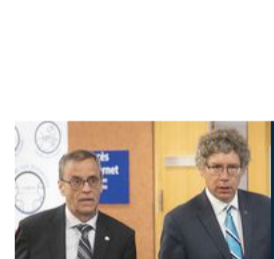
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The ministry report noted that past attempts to intervene in the situation have run up against “the commissioners’ stubbornness and resistance to change.”

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Mancini resigned last month after publication of a [withering report](#) on her performance as chair of the EMSB.

[The report](#), compiled by Steven Droz, a specialist in human resources and labour relations, was filed after the school board launched an investigation into Mancini’s claims she had been the victim of harassment by other board members.

However, Droz not only found that Mancini’s claims were unfounded, but [recommended](#) that the “(provincial) government should take the step of declaring that Mancini (and a person whose name was redacted from the report) and their supporters and/or proxies not be eligible to run for office during the Nov. 6, 2020 school board elections, or any successive elections.”

Droz’s report also outlined cases of bickering and nastiness between Mancini and Matheson.

Marlene Jennings, who was appointed trustee of the board last November amid allegations of misuse of public funds, said a committee would do a short search to find Matheson’s successor.

In her resignation letter, Matheson thanked Jennings for “restoring civility to the board meetings, for ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of governance and management are respected.”

Jennings praised Matheson’s work on Monday.

“During her five years as director general, Ann Marie Matheson displayed exceptional leadership abilities during a period of turbulence for the board,” Jennings said in a statement.

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