

Montreal

Citing pandemic expenses, EMSB forecasts \$15M deficit

Board chair says without a bailout 'very difficult decisions' will be necessary

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The English Montreal School board says it is projecting a deficit of nearly \$15 million for this year, with at least \$10 million of that tied to COVID-related expenses.

When schools closed last year and then reopened with a range of measures in place, the expenses added up quickly, the EMSB said in a statement Wednesday.

For example, it cost the board about \$5 million to set up online teaching. Another \$3 million in daycare fees were refunded to parents during pandemic-related closures and absences. Personal protective equipment cost the board an additional \$1.6 million.

Board chair Joe Ortona says other boards and service centres in Quebec will likely be in the same situation and he is calling on the Quebec government to help cover the cost by tapping into federal funding and its own reserves.

"Failing that, we will have no choice but to make very difficult decisions at budget time in June," Ortona said in a statement.

"In the interim, we will continue to closely monitor our financial situation and to take all measures to ensure that services to students are maintained and enhanced during this challenging period. That is our pledge to the community."

- [Quebec primary students will be required to wear masks after March break](#)

Earlier this week, the Centre de services scolaire de la Région-de-Sherbrooke reported a deficit of \$5.4 million. It too blamed costs related to COVID-19.

The centre's director, Christian Provencher, said without COVID-19 the budget for the fiscal year would have been roughly balanced, as was the case in 2018-2019.

The deficit would have more likely hovered around \$200,000 were it a typical year, he said.

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