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Local News

EMSB, Pearson board confirm some Ukrainian children are studying in English

"Above and beyond the language issue or whether they come to our schools or not, the most important thing is that they're welcomed," said EMSB chair Joe Ortona.

Frédéric Tomesco

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Nine-year-old Sofia Ladnitska plays on a homemade swing in the yard of Tatiana Romano's home, where she and her family are staying after fleeing Ukraine. Romano says Sofia received a warm welcome at the school she recently started to attend. PHOTO BY ALLEN MCINNIS /Montreal Gazette

Close to 20 Ukrainian children have enrolled at English Montreal School Board and Lester B. Pearson School Board institutions after being granted exemptions to study in English in Quebec.

The EMSB said it has accepted more than a dozen Ukrainian children as students, while the Pearson board has accepted five. Both boards confirmed the news on Friday, noting that the exemptions to Bill

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Children of Ukrainians arriving in Quebec as refugees generally must receive their schooling in French.

“There are some people who fall under one of the exception provisions in the Charter of the French Language, namely people who have temporary work permits,” EMSB chair Joe Ortona said Friday in a phone interview with the Montreal Gazette. “To the degree that they qualify, we’ve been able to accept their children into our system, and we’re happy to do that. We know that we have space for them and the resources for them.

“Above and beyond the language issue or whether they come to our schools or not, the most important thing is that they’re welcomed, that the resources they need are provided to them and that they’re able to integrate and adapt to Quebec society.”

On March 23, the EMSB Council of Commissioners adopted a resolution indicating to the Quebec government that the board was willing to accept Ukrainian students immediately on a humanitarian basis. The Charter of the French Language has a humanitarian clause allowing for admission to the English school system under exceptional circumstances, but Ortona emphasized in a communiqué that is not the route these newly enrolled students took, although he added that “it should be.”

“People who just arrived here are unfamiliar with the system and the laws, and we’re hoping that word spreads,” Ortona said Friday. “If there are others that qualify, we hope that they’ll choose to enrol their kids in our schools as well.”

The Lester B. Pearson School Board noted in a communiqué that while it passed a resolution in March indicating it was prepared to accept Ukrainian refugees in its schools on humanitarian grounds, “there has been no change in the Quebec government’s position regarding eligibility for English-language education.”

“Like any refugee,” the board stated, “Ukrainian refugees must therefore apply for eligibility under the applicable provisions of the Charter of the French Language.”

The Pearson board noted that the five Ukrainian students who have been enrolled in its schools “have temporary resident status, not refugee status.”

Dollard-des-Ormeaux resident Tatiana Romano, who is [hosting several Ukrainians at her residence](#), said one of the children — nine-year-old Sofiia Ladnitska — received a warm welcome at the Lester B. Pearson school she recently started to attend.

“On the second day, everyone in the classroom made her welcome cards,” Romano said Friday. “Everybody in the school was thrilled to meet her. It was lovely. It’s so nice to see children realizing how important it is to welcome somebody.”

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