

## Opinion: After a year, my job as EMSB trustee is almost complete

*There have been many positive changes, but one big task remains: to fill the director general position.*

Marlene Jennings • Special to Montreal Gazette  
Oct 19, 2020 • Last Updated 1 hour ago • 3 minute read



Nov. 6 will mark the end of Marlene Jennings's one-year mandate as a government-appointed trustee of the English Montreal School Board. PHOTO BY JOHN MAHONEY /Montreal Gazette

Nov. 6 will mark the end of my one-year mandate as a government-appointed trustee of the English Montreal School Board. On that same day, a new Council of Commissioners will be sworn in. As this transition takes place, I must admit the question Allison Hanes poses in her Friday column ("[After a year of trusteeship, with the EMSB slide back into its old bad habits?](#)") is quite valid. However, allow me to bring another perspective on Quebec's largest anglophone school board.

This past year, many significant positive changes have taken place at the EMSB, with much hard work, dedication, tears, laughter, plain belief in the extraordinarily dedicated and talented EMSB team, as well as jaw-dropping inspiration from the dedication, commitment and creativity of so many students, including those with special needs. In such circumstances, it is simply impossible to forget just how important is the work accomplished at every level of the board, and perhaps just as critical is our responsibility to place the needs of our student population over and above any other consideration.



Halloween gets green light: Legault outlines why Quebec is allowing trick-or-treating

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Among other key achievements over the last 12 months, we strengthened the board's governance on many levels, adopted new policies and processes to make better decisions and display more transparency, we developed a new rapport of collaboration with other school service centres and government authorities — while always jealously defending our critical role in the education of Montreal's anglophone minority.

We also initiated the transformation of the organizational culture and structure of the board to make it more productive and better equipped to face the challenges of education for a digital world.

I have met and worked closely with extremely dedicated and talented individuals at the EMSB. Many confided they had experienced for the first time in their career with the board the freedom to display their leadership and make decisions, to the direct benefit of each student, teacher and board employee.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Virtually all of them deserve my thanks and recognition.

My job is almost complete. However, one enormous piece of this work remains, which is to fill the director general position. I committed back in late July — [after our former DG resigned](#) and well before court decisions concerning Bill 40 — to lead a rigorous yet rapid process, and intend to do everything in my power to uphold that commitment.

An extremely rigorous selection process was put into place under the guidance of legal experts as well as the executive headhunter firm Mandrake.

The selection committee is composed of Peter Dunn, a highly respected member of Quebec's English-speaking minority communities with much experience in education; Caroline Phaneuf, outgoing president of EMSB's Parents' Committee; Ann Watson, EMSB's director of Human Resources with more than 20 years of professional experience in this field; and finally, myself. Mandrake's VP Isabelle Girard will also be part of the committee to continue to ensure our selection process abides by the most stringent HR practices.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Join the mailing list to receive daily email updates [Subscribe Now>](#)

Search

MONTREAL GAZETTE

Subscribe

Sign In

I have extended on numerous occasions these past weeks an invitation to chair-elect Joe Ortona to join this committee. He has refused, but I reiterate my invitation to him. In my view, his input and expertise would only make our committee stronger.

The importance of proceeding without delay is also heightened by the fact that the success of the ongoing EMSB transformation project will be highly dependent on the director general, who must be a recognized change agent with the strength of character, highly developed and proven integrity, and ethical values to lead EMSB's administration and to gently but firmly guide and advise the chair and Council of Commissioners on proper governance.

The longer this position remains vacant, the higher the risk to the success of EMSB's transformation project and action plan. This is the reason I will if possible, fill the position of EMSB's director general before the end of my mandate, three weeks from now.

*Marlene Jennings, a former Liberal MP, is trustee of the English Montreal School Board.*

**MORE ON THIS TOPIC**