

ETSB says welcome back

By Matthew McCully

The Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) Council of Commissioners held its first meeting since the summer break, welcoming students, teachers and staff back to school for another year.

The first day of classes for elementary and secondary students will be Wednesday, Aug.30.

Over the summer Gregg Thompson, commissioner for Ward 2 sent a letter of resignation, which the board received at the end of July.

Council passed a motion to accept the resignation, initiating the procedure for a by-election to fill the vacant position.

Following the appropriate steps including notifying the director general of elections, posting a public notice, and a period to receive candidacies, Secretary

General Éric Campbell explained that the earliest possible date for the by-election was Sunday, Oct.29.

Campbell added that candidacies will be accepted between Sept.19-24.

The board adopted a motion to form the James Strickland Fund, named after the Lennoxville community member who passed away in 2016.

Strickland left an endowment of over \$160,000 to the ETSB, to be used for meal programs for underprivileged students in elementary schools.

A number of administrative appointments were approved during Tuesday's meeting; David Scott was appointed Principal (50 per cent) at Mansonville Elementary and Vice-Principal (50 per cent) at Massey-Vanier High School (MVHS).

Diane Sherrer-Voky was appointed Vice-Principal (100 per cent) at MVHS.

Gail Kelso was named Director of Complementary Services.

During his report, Director General Christian Provencher welcomed back the more than 5,100 students returning to ETSB schools, pointing out that over 450 will be starting in kindergarten.

"It is a very busy and exciting time of year," Provencher said.

During the summer, Provencher participated in the Grand Défi Pierre Lavoie. He cycled 135 km, raising \$950 that will go towards physical education at Sherbrooke Elementary, the school he paired up with for the biking challenge.

During the meeting, Chairman Mike Murray, the board's representative for the Quebec English School Board Association (QESBA), reminded the commissioners that the QESBA executive director had left the organization in the spring and had not been replaced.

Murray said QESBA was considering paying \$66,000 for a consultant program to come up with a strategic plan, an idea for which he voiced his disapproval.

"To me it sounds like an association that has lost its way and is looking for a purpose," Murray said, suggesting QESBA members should be able to deal with internal issues without having to hire a consultant.

Recruiting a new executive director has been suspended for the time being, Murray said.

Parent commissioner Paul Laberge asked how much the board pays in fees to be a member of QESBA.

Murray couldn't remember the figure exactly, estimating it is between \$30-35,000. The fees are levied on a per-student basis, he explained.

The Record, Aug. 24, 2017

Letter

Anglo parents and commissioners: Scrap QESBA!

DEAR EDITOR:

Quebec's anglo community (parents and school commissioners) should pay heed to comments made by Eastern Townships School Board Chairman Mike Murray and Parent Commissioner Paul Laberge regarding the future of the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) in the article: "ETSB says welcome back" (Aug. 24).

According to the chairman, the QESBA has not replaced its executive director and longtime former president, businessman Marcus Tabachnick, who suddenly left in the spring.

Now, QESBA is considering "paying \$66,000 for a consultant program to come up with a strategic plan."

What drivell! No wonder Chairman Murray disapproves and said:

"To me it sounds like an association that has lost its way and looking for a purpose."

Meanwhile, Parent Commissioner Laberge wonders how much the fees are to be a member of the QESBA. Let's reel back up a bit.

Consider this excerpt from a commentary, in the Oct. 31, 2011, edition of the Sherbrooke Record, titled: "QESBA no friend of Quebec anglos."

"Presently, our school tax-dollars are being used against us. I believe the

QESBA should be dismantled because it is no friend of Quebec anglos. If the English school boards of Quebec were to withdraw their membership from the QESBA, over one million dollars (\$1,000,000) could be reinvested into our English-speaking classrooms."

Then there was this regarding the lack of English textbooks for our kids:

"What benefit was the QESBA's 2006 paper: 'Advisory Council on the Future of English Public Education,' the brief to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in 2007, and the report to the forum on the Future of School Boards in 2008?

"Not one word was mentioned regarding the English textbook matter."

The QESBA is a master at self-preservation. Here is its latest tactic:

The French equivalent of the QESBA is the Fédération des commission scolaire du Québec (FCSQ). The QESBA convinced the FCSQ to become a member of the Canadian School Boards Association. For the first time it was represented at the convention in early July, in Whistler, B.C.

But only 57 of the 60 French boards were involved. Here's why:

Three years ago, three French boards decided to drop their membership to the FCSQ and reinvest the money into their classroom: Mar-

guerite-Bourgeois (\$200,000); Marie Victorin (\$165,000); and Grandes-Seigneuries (\$115,000). Basically, the boards cited "ethical differences."

In today's high-tech communications world, organizations such as the QESBA are not needed. Furthermore, there is nothing really tangible that the QESBA has ever done for any English student, classroom or school.

Today, there is a variety of parent representatives, who exist in our education system, such as governing boards, parent committees, parent participation organizations and parent commissioners, as mandated by the Education Act.

It is time for the English school boards to be honest with themselves and consider withdrawing their memberships from the QESBA for the aforementioned reasons. This could be done democratically by polling all school and governing boards.

One more thing: the QESBA has repeatedly refused, in writing, to divulge its budget. Why?

CHRIS EUSTACE
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Pour des tarifs uniformisés

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Coûte-t-il vraiment 900 \$ pour surveiller un enfant pendant l'heure du dîner pour toute l'année scolaire ? La Commission scolaire des Draveurs semble croire que oui.

Depuis deux ans, plus de 20 000 contribuables en Outaouais ont tourné le dos aux commissions scolaires francophones, et c'est la CSD qui a remporté la palme de ces pertes. Son président, Claude Beaulieu, aurait sans doute souhaité que cette histoire passe dans l'ombre. Il n'avait besoin de cette mauvaise publicité supplémentaire...

Mais voilà, la décision de facturer 900 \$ par enfant pour les frais de surveillance du dîner revient à M. Beaulieu et les commissaires de la CSD, et ils doivent en porter la responsabilité.

Déjà, l'écart entre la facture moyenne entre la CSD et la Western Quebec School Board atteint 500 \$ par an. Beaucoup des contribuables qui ont transféré leurs taxes scolaires à la WQSB l'ont fait avec l'impression que les administrateurs de la CSD sont des

incapables. Apprendre qu'ils ont approuvé une telle tarification pour les « enfants marcheurs » qui dînent à l'école, alors que la commission scolaire voisine n'exige que 250 \$ par an, renforcera ce sentiment négatif.

Cette tarification ne tient pas la route. Comment la Commission scolaire des Portages de l'Outaouais peut-elle fournir ce service de surveillance pour environ 1 \$ par jour, et pas la CSD ? Comment la CSD peut-elle justifier une facturation majorée de 360 % ?

Nous ne parlons pas de services de pointe, d'activités spécialisées. Ce n'est pas un repas chaud livré par un traiteur haut de gamme -- les enfants doivent fournir leur nourriture ! Nous parlons ici de quelques surveillants du dîner, des gens qui travaillent au salaire minimum ou presque, et qui jettent un coup d'œil sur quelques dizaines d'enfants qui prennent leur repas.

Il n'est pas surprenant que la CSD ait été à peu près incapable de justifier cette tarification auprès d'un père de famille, Eric Di Tomasso, dont les propos ont été rapportés

par notre collègue Justine Mercier, hier.

M. Beaulieu et la CSD est en train de creuser sa propre tombe. Il faut dire qu'elle était déjà bien creuse avec la question de la taxation scolaire. Les efforts de M. Beaulieu de convaincre le ministre de l'Éducation, Sébastien Proux, d'imposer une tarification unique pour tout l'Outaouais -- de conférer un « statut particulier » pour de l'ouest du Québec en fait, sont demeurés lettre morte.

Cela dit, cette histoire invraisemblable de frais prohibitifs pour la surveillance du dîner rappelle, comme cela se fait au moment de toutes les rentrées scolaires, que l'école publique n'est pas gratuite du tout pour les familles du Québec.

Confrontées régulièrement à des restrictions budgétaires, les écoles et les commissions scolaires rivalisent d'imagination pour soutirer de l'argent aux parents.

Le magazine de consommation *Protégez-vous*, qui consacre justement un dossier à ces coûts, parle d'ailleurs du « Far West des frais scolaires ». Ses conclusions sont que ces frais « varient grandement d'une école à l'autre » et qu'il est « impossible d'avoir un portrait global de ces frais pourtant encadrés par le ministère ».

Le gouvernement du Québec, qui aime bien avoir la main haute sur ce qui se fait dans ses ministères, ferait bien d'uniformiser tout ça. Une photocopie, un cadenas et la surveillance du dîner, par exemple, devraient coûter la même chose aux quatre coins du Québec.

Cela procurerait un répit aux familles d'enfants marcheurs de la Commission scolaire des Draveurs qui sont la cible de l'arbitraire des commissaires.

