

Highlights

Council of Commissioners' meeting of
Tuesday, October 24th 2023



Recognition of Excellence

This month the Council of Commissioners and Head Office Administrators highlighted the numerous celebrations and recognitions that took place since the last Council meeting, namely the National Support Staff Day, The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, World Teachers' Day as well as the ETSB Administrators' Week!

The many students, staff and school communities that took part in the Terry Fox runs were applauded for their commitment, participation, and fundraising efforts.

Massey-Vanier High School was also recognized for holding a week of awareness activities in the promotion of wellness and healthy life choices in line with the World Mental Health Day.

Parent Commissioner at Large, Daniel Zigby resigned from his position with the Council of Commissioners. The Council thanked him warmly for his many years of service and for his commitment to the Eastern Townships School Board. Elections for this position will take place in the month of November.

Dates to Remember...

Oct. 26 th	Open House at Richmond Regional
Nov. 16, 17, 20 & 21 st	Pedagogical Days / Planning Days
Nov. 20 th	Open House at Massey-Vanier
Nov. 20 - 24 th	Professionals in Education Week

Resolutions

- Financial Statements for the Year Ending June 30, 2023;
- Resignation of Parent at Large Commissioner, Daniel Zigby;
- *Division du territoire de la Commission scolaire Eastern Townships en circonscriptions électorales;*
- Statement of School Taxes Remaining Due and Owing 2023-2024;
- Asbestos-Danville-Shipton (ADS) Elementary School – Brick Pointing;
- Parkview Elementary School – Administrative Office, Windows and Window Sills;
- Richmond Regional High School – Boiler Room Upgrade;
- Marguerite Knapp Building – Bus Electrification;
- Purchase of Chromebooks (Renewals);
- Purchase of MacBooks (Renewals);
- Parkview Elementary School – Request for a Lottery permit.

See attached report from Chairman
Mr. Murray and
the Director General,
Ms. Mackey.

O C T O B E R 2 4 , 2 0 2 3

Reflections

From Michael Murray, Chairman

The relentless assault on the English institutions and the Anglophone community in Quebec continues unabated. Since its initial election the present government has adopted a hostile attitude to everything English in Quebec. For them it is not enough that a very high percentage of our community made the effort to become bilingual. It is not enough that we endorse and promote the importance of protecting the French language. It appears that our very existence is an affront in their eyes. Bills 29 and 96 abolished civil rights to choose what garments or symbols one can wear. They gave unprecedented rights of search and seizure without legal process to officious civil servants in efforts to stamp out any traces of Englishness. They complained that their rules did not apply to federally chartered businesses until a supine and submissive government in Ottawa changed the rules, and even went further to enshrine bill 101 as modified by Bill 96 in a federal statute. When it was pointed out that Anglophones have become largely bilingual, the discourse became one about the language spoken in homes. Now the sound of English spoken in the street has become a focus of their ire. This government no longer pretends to govern for all Quebecers while the ruling party in Ottawa has abandoned Quebec anglophones to their fate.

The CAQ government declares that Education is a priority, and I have no doubt that they are sincere. After all, it is well established that education broadens minds, stimulates thought and builds physical and metaphysical wealth. Education is how societies progress. I cannot help thinking that their approach to education is intended to prevent just those benefits from spreading through the entire population. Instead, they appear to want to confine learning to the channels they prefer and to stifle independent voices. Among other moves, they wish to rewrite history to eliminate any uncomfortable reminders of the huge contributions made by anglophones and immigrants in creating modern Quebec.

Their first move was to eliminate school boards, a level of local democracy that meant an independent public voice about educational content and delivery. Bill 40 was adopted by closure, stifling discussion and debate that had become too effective in exposing its dangers and disruptions to quality education. All opposition was stifled while interest groups representing stakeholders were appeased with promises of local control and flexibility. As we know now, the opposite was the case. Uniformity and indifference to local issues have been imposed from the top. Erasing all evidence of individuality to the point that signage has been made uniform. Henceforth process and standards will be imposed centrally.

We are fortunate. Bill 40 does not apply to English school boards because we challenged the government in the courts. We spent our own funds to cover legal fees and put our faith in an independent judiciary and the rule of law. We won a sweeping victory in Quebec Superior court and for now the law does not apply to the English education network. The government has appealed its devastating loss and when it loses again at that level, will probably appeal again to the supreme court of Canada. Using our own tax money, they force us to continue spending hoping to exhaust our limited resources. They have no real hope of winning, but appealing saves face and allows them to pretend otherwise. We embarrass the government and its focus on creating a totally uniform Quebec education system, at least in part because our results, in the form of student success are consistently superior on average than for the French system. Instead of celebrating and learning from our success they seem to prefer to stifle and standardize us until we no longer embarrass them.

English CEGEPS were the next target. Adults are free to choose their post-secondary education path and an embarrassing number of Francophone high school graduates were opting to attend English institutions. Dawson college was expanding, and others were flourishing. The St. Lawrence campus of Champlain College located in Quebec City attracted so many applications that it required marks in the 90 percent range to be accepted. However nearly 90% of successful applicants graduated from French high schools because the best students wanted to study at English universities. Other English CEGEPS were expanding and attracting high

performing French students as well, so another law was enacted to limit access, limit growth and cancel expansion plans. Despite the howls of protest from the public those measures are now in place. Sadly, the CEGEPs were unable to organize to contest these laws in the way English school boards did.

The second phase of the Bill 40 initiative dropped last year with the presentation of Bill 23. It is currently under study by the national assembly, but the government is in a hurry. They want it adopted by December 8th the end of the current session and may invoke closure if debate goes on too long. It gives the minister of education total power over education, the right to choose directors general, to replace any who perform in a way unsatisfactorily to the minister, and the right to retroactively reverse decisions. In turn that director general appoints all other administrators of each school service centre. It is difficult to imagine that a director general would dare to take independent action or in fact any action contrary to the minister's wishes, but should such a horrifying incident occur, the minister would have the power to replace the individual and reverse the decision. Total control from the top, by an elected official who, like the current minister, may have no professional qualification in education. No autonomy or even influence at the local level.

A fresh assault this month is the outrageous attack on English universities. Is it embarrassing to this government that the best universities in Quebec are English? Is it humiliating that students from across Canada and around the world prefer McGill to any other Quebec university? When a minister mandated to protect the French language in Quebec announces with undisguised pride that this outrageous racist-inspired move is only the first of fifty measures being planned, not to promote French but to eliminate any vestige of English in public life in Quebec it underlines the pettiness, narrowness, and destructiveness of the whole approach.

The government does not need to adopt laws or issue decrees to pursue its efforts to wipe out English. Working administratively can be effective as well. A recent measure is for the ministry of education to refuse Eligibility Certificates to individuals over the age of 18, regardless of their

right to have attended English public schooling. Those students who attended French elementary schools, a decision parents probably made from a desire for their children to stay in and become integrated into Quebec society, now face unexpected penalties in CEGEP by being obliged to successfully take French language exit exams. They also face limitations in attending English CEGEPs. While school boards are willing to be helpful in providing proof of the qualification for eligibility to those students, such as having a parent or sibling who attended English elementary school, the administrative ruling is that it is too late for them. Just too bad!

Meanwhile our struggle continues. The government tolerates English boards but systematically attempts to impose its rules administratively despite the legal framework. A recent announcement by the minister of education banning cell phones on all school properties is a case in point. The hasty and uninformed announcement was quietly amended after the fact to apply only to student cell phones, and only in class but it demonstrates the risks associated with placing absolute power in the hands of an uninformed and easily influenced individual. This decree does not legally apply to English schools, but functionaries at the education ministry attempted to impose it anyway. Under our legal structure, cell phone possession and use falls under the school code of conduct which is adopted and periodically revised by the governing board. That is genuine local authority. In addition, any teacher may prohibit cell phones in their classes should they so desire. The entire question is rendered moot since we give every student a computer anyway. Any distraction that might exist with a cell phone is readily accessible through a chrome book. Teachers deal with that issue as part of their skill set, knowing that prohibition is ineffective, while teaching preferable habits is part of their mission.

As a Council of Commissioners we strive to protect our employees from the worst of the stresses created by these political maneuvers. We do our best to ensure that teachers, support staff and professionals are free to perform their mandates with a minimum of interference. We encourage parents and staff on Governing Boards to fulfil their functions without regard to the noise and public controversy. I sincerely hope that the distractions do not reach into the

classroom to the detriment of our students or of the quality of teaching and learning occurring there.

In recent years the role of school commissioners has become progressively more political, but I am under the impression that many in education are unaware of all these battles being waged on their behalf. Commissioners have become accustomed to discussing legal matters, court cases and structural changes. Many among us struggle with the idea that by default, we have become a bulwark resisting assaults on our civil rights and on the freedom of educators to do their jobs. Constant interference in matters as significant as testing and assessment or as trivial as cell phones in class does not permit professionals to function effectively and must be resisted.

As part of our responsibilities, school boards have already taken the initial steps to prepare for school board elections scheduled for November 2024. We need to find the means to engage encourage our communities in the process, to support local democracy by encouraging friends and neighbors to ensure they are on the English electoral list. This is particularly important because even graduates of our schools are not placed on our lists automatically. Many more qualify than are on our rolls. Then encourage interested people to stand for election and to vote. We need to have a strong turnout for our elections to justify our continuing efforts to protect minority language rights. The government has made school board elections burdensome, then uses low voter turnout to question the legitimacy of elected commissioners.

I make no apology for the length of this report on matters distinct from education as a daily exercise. It is important that the entire community including those would prefer to be left alone to know what is happening behind the occasional headline or post they may see.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Michael Murray', is positioned above the printed name.

Michael Murray, Chairman



October 24,
2023

At ETSB,
we value...

Inclusion
Wellbeing
Growth

Director General's Report...

As we approach the end of our first term and will soon step into November, I seize this moment to underscore our commitment to wellbeing. This month often unfolds with heightened fatigue among students and staff due to the time change, elevated stress from end-of-term assessments, and the demands on teachers preparing report cards and engaging in vital conversations with parents. Simultaneously, the labor relations arena adds another layer of pressure as we collectively strive for enhanced outcomes for our staff and students.

In the midst of these challenges, I urge everyone to embrace kindness, mutual support, and care. Our wellbeing is a precious asset that should never be taken for granted. Let's keep our focus on our collective purpose—making a positive difference in the lives of our students. November will pass, ushering in the serene winter sunshine on our drives home and, before we know it, the festive season will be upon us. So, let's maintain our smiles and revel in celebrating the small victories.

Amidst this, our ETSB Commitment-to-Success Plan and educational projects in schools and centres are finding resonance. Our student enrollment is on a steady rise, a testament to our community's trust. Our students continue to immerse themselves in a wealth of activities, from the arts to sports to cultural pursuits. Equally noteworthy is the commitment of our staff, not only in engaging students but also in their personal and professional growth, attending and actively participating in various professional development sessions.

We can take pride in our community's achievements, and I extend an invitation to all to nurture kindness and care for one another—simple gestures that can yield a profound impact on one's wellbeing.

Your Director General,

Kandy Mackey

Recognition of Excellence

October 24th, 2023

This month the Council of Commissioners and Senior Administrators of the Eastern Townships School Board would like to signal the following:

The fall has been a very busy time with many activities and events to highlight, including numerous employee recognitions. Since the last Council, we celebrated & recognized the National Support Staff Day, The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, World Teachers' Day as well as the ETSB Administrators' Week! We tip our hats to all who lead and teach, to those who create positive experiences for our students and to the ETSB community who all support us to grow as scholars and individuals. Thank you for investing and believing in us!



The ETSB community rallied together for Terry Fox!

Throughout the Eastern Townships, our students, staff and families joined forces in support of the Terry Fox Foundation. With high spirits and commitment, many took part walking, running and fundraising to great results. Thank you everyone who participated and helped to make this year another fundraising success in support of the Terry Fox Foundation. We can make great things happen when we move ahead together!



TERRY FOX RUN 2023



WE RAN HARD...

Massey-Vanier steps up and out for a week of Wellness!



On Tuesday, October 10th the entire student population and staff of Massey-Vanier High School went for a walk to highlight World Mental Health Day. The staff wore green ribbons to note the day. External services from the community were also invited to host kiosks during the lunch hour to familiarize students with the services available to them.

The following morning healthy snacks were served up and at lunch students got a work out on a "smoothie bike" which transformed fruit into smoothies through their own output of energy. The smoothies were worth the effort! On Thursday of the same week, art activities were held in the plaza and a motivational speaker gave a presentation to the entire student body.

The goal was to give Massey- Vanier students as many strategies and different doors to knock on whenever they need to work through stressful issues or situations. The school also wanted students to understand that wellness needs to be a priority and that there are many ways to stay well. What a healthy example and attitude Massey-Vanier!