



[Home](#) / [Opinion](#) / [Op Eds](#)

Opinion: Education is never the place to cut corners

The effects of the CAQ government's measures are already being felt, adding pressure on overburdened teachers and school leaders.

By [Chelsea Craig and Susan Perera](#) • Special to the Montreal Gazette
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English-language schools have long played an essential role in Quebec's social fabric, note EMSB commissioners Chelsea Craig and Susan Perera. Above: The EMSB building on Fielding Ave. in Montreal. PHOTO BY DAVE SIDAWAY /Montreal Gazette

Since our election as commissioners of the English Montreal School board a little more than one year ago, we have learned that advocating for English-language education in Quebec demands persistence, unity, collaboration and profound responsibility to the communities we serve.

The Quebec government has imposed a series of bills and budgetary measures that threaten the vitality of our schools. The most severe came in June, when it announced directives requiring the EMSB to cut \$10.6 million from its 2025–26 budget, with a potential \$10.4-million penalty for failing to meet a staffing-reduction target we’ve deemed unrealistic.

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In October, the government announced it would reinvest \$540 million into education across the province. While this may sound promising, the move came after the Coalition Avenir Québec had imposed \$570 million in cuts to the education budget, unleashing a public backlash.

Furthermore, this “reinvestment” comes with conditions, so it does not fully repair the damage. Nor does it restore confidence in the CAQ’s ability or willingness to manage the education system responsibly and equitably.

The effects are already being felt at the EMSB. Behaviour technicians and support staff positions have been cut, and critical administrative roles remain unfilled. These losses add pressure on overburdened teachers and school leaders who must meet the needs of diverse student populations.

The cuts have led to fewer services for students with special needs, reduced classroom supports, scaled-back extracurricular programs and strained administrative functions essential for our schools to run smoothly.

To make matters worse, the government has barred school boards and service centres from accessing their accumulated surpluses (\$7.8 million in the EMSB’s case), which were built through sound financial management and is normally used to sustain essential programs and services.

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Denying access to these surpluses not only undermines local autonomy, but also deprives vulnerable students of the resources they need.

There is irony in a government that claims to value education while undermining it. Teachers and principals are discouraged and constantly asked to do more with less. Parents of students with special needs are left pleading for the support their children were promised, wondering why the most vulnerable seem to be always the first to pay the price.

As commissioners, hearing these stories from families and educators who simply want what’s best for their students is distressing.

The Quebec English School Boards Association took an important stand by unanimously adopting a resolution to pursue legal action against these measures. All nine English-language school boards joined this effort, highlighting the stakes for the financial health of our boards and the future of English-language education in Quebec.

The EMSB has a long history of resilience, innovation and unwavering commitment to our students. Year after year, the EMSB achieves the highest success rate in Quebec, a testament to our dedicated educators, engaged parents and united English-school community.

Together, we will continue to rise to this challenge. We will continue to fight for the resources our schools deserve, protect the rights of our English-speaking community and ensure that every child in our care receives the excellent education they are entitled to.

As new commissioners, we are proud to represent our constituents and to stand alongside EMSB chair Joe Ortona and colleagues who believe in a future where every student — regardless of language, background, socio-economic status or challenges faced — has access to high-quality education, strong support systems, fully funded resources and a school environment where everyone thrives.

Our message to the government is unequivocal: Education is never the place to cut corners. Every dollar taken from our classrooms is a stolen opportunity from the next generation. Investing in our students is not an expense. It builds a stronger, more prosperous Quebec.

Chelsea Craig and Susan Perera are school commissioners with the EMSB. Craig represents Côte-des-Neiges—Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. Perera represents Ahuntsic-Cartierville—Montréal-Nord.