

OP EDs

## Opinion: FACE is a Montreal success. Quebec must not mess with it

By **Joe Ortona** *Special to the Montreal Gazette*

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Students protest outside FACE school after the CAQ government announced it was scrapping a planned renovation and moving students to two new locations. EMSB chair Joe Ortona calls the unilateral decision “a betrayal.” Allen McInnis *Montreal Gazette*

This month, Quebecers learned that [the cost of renovating](#) the Gérard-D.-Lévesque building — home to the Finance Department in Quebec City — has ballooned from \$188 million to \$340 million. The project has been hit by delays and is now expected to be completed in April 2027, some 18 months later than the last revised target date.

Apparently, the Quebec government can find hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade offices for bureaucrats, some on hybrid work schedules that don’t require them to show up every day. But when it comes to investing in FACE, a unique school that unites English and French students under one roof in a first-rate arts-based program, suddenly, [the money isn’t there](#).

FACE is more than just a school. It’s a rare and remarkable collaboration between the Centre de services scolaire de Montréal (CSSDM) and the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), housed in a downtown Montreal building with deep historical and cultural roots. For nearly 50 years, it has offered bilingual, bicultural and coeducational learning in music, drama and the arts.

Without consultation and with little more than a Friday afternoon press release, Education Minister [Bernard Drainville](#) [cancelled long-promised renovations](#) to the FACE building, citing rising costs — from \$150 million to \$375 million. What began as a temporary relocation of elementary students to a building in Plateau-Mont-Royal and high school students to the old Baron Byng/Sun Youth Organization facility has morphed into a permanent dismantling of the unified FACE model.

The decision was made unilaterally and the EMSB was informed just an hour before

the public. It's safe to assume the CSSDM — created by the government to replace elected school boards in the French sector — was likewise sidelined. No consultation. No transparency. No respect for the communities affected.

This is not just a betrayal of the FACE community — it's a broader betrayal of Quebecers who value education, co-operation and the arts.

Drainville's lack of engagement in real dialogue reflects a troubling pattern of top-down governance and disregard for the rights of the English-speaking community. These rights — [affirmed by the courts](#) — include the ability to manage and control our schools. Yet here we are, learning of this decree the same way the public did: through the media.

Had the minister bothered to consult, he would have heard what parents, educators and students know: FACE works. Its integrated approach builds bridges between languages and cultures, between older and younger students, and between disciplines.

Its graduates thrive — not only in the arts, but in medicine, science and beyond. FACE isn't just an academic success — it's a social and cultural one.

So what now?

We are calling on the Quebec government to reverse course and reopen a dialogue. The CSSDM, EMSB and FACE parent communities must be part of the solution. Perhaps phased renovations can make the project more affordable. Perhaps a new site could house both programs under one roof. But the starting point must be this: the FACE model must be preserved.

In tough economic times, governments have to make choices. But investing in young people, in education and in a model that fosters unity and excellence — this is not an expense; it's an investment in our collective future.

Instead of building lavish offices for bureaucrats, let's prioritize the future of our students. Let's keep FACE whole.

*Joe Ortona is the chair of the English Montreal School Board.*