

**MANAGING THE SCHOOLS:
A HISTORY OF MONTREAL'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD**
Robert Gagnon

(Excerpts from an online review of the publication. The review site is given below.)

Education remained in private hands until 1846 when a school law was passed in Lower Canada calling for the election of school boards in every municipality except in the cities of Montreal and Quebec, where trustees would be appointed. A system of public funding through taxation would assure some level of stability. The goal was to furnish all citizens with enough of an education to manage in the new industrial world. La Commission des ecoles catholiques de Montreal, The Catholic School Board (CECM) was formed in 1846.

...For the first fifty years of its existence, the author noted, the board managed classes where English and French speaking students learned the two languages without creating any great debates (p. 123). French and English language instruction were given equal importance in these early decades of the CECM's history. Some schools with a number of Anglophone students, offered blended classes where a few subjects were taught in English and others in French. In 1894 this concept was dropped. Students were separated into French and English classes in the thirty-nine schools with sizable English/French populations.

...Parents were free to choose where to enroll their children and, since English was the dominant language in the economic and business sector, it was the language most parents wanted their children to learn. Nearly all immigrant families and many Francophone families chose to register their children in the English classes. Some English classes had as many Francophone as Anglophone students (p. 51). Anglophone Catholics, making up only 15% of the CECM school population in the west end of Montreal in 1909, but less than 5% elsewhere in the city, lobbied unsuccessfully for a separate school district within the perimeters of the CECM as early as 1910. Although they failed to have a separate district, the parents did succeed in having complete autonomy over instruction in English Catholic schools, and English classes within Francophone schools in 1928. This was particularly beneficial for the English students, Gagnon pointed out, since they were then in a position to implement an Academic High school curriculum, thus preparing their students for university. Gagnon said this only increased the tendency of Francophone parents to send their children to the English system.

Robert Gagnon. Histoire de la commission des ecoles catholiques de Montreal. Montreal: Boreal, 1996. vii + 400 pp. Tables and maps, illustrations, endnotes, and index. \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-2-89052-751-5.

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