

Montreal, October 1st, 2021

To the attention of the Council of Commissioners

Lester-B.-Pearson School Board

1925, Avenue Brookdale

Dorval (Québec) H9P 2Y7

OBJECT: Student Ombudsperson Annual Report – School year 2020-2021

It is my pleasure to submit the Student Ombudsperson annual report, as required by section 220.2 of the *Education Act* and section 4.3 of the By-Law 9-A (*complaint examination procedure*). This report covers the period from October 1st, 2020 to September 30th, 2021.

I have been nominated by the Council of commissioners in October 2019. Due to a parental leave, my colleague and substitute Ombudsperson Me Isabelle Turgeon acted on my behalf in the beginning of the last school year, until my return on January 1st, 2021.

The Student Ombudsperson is an independent and impartial individual, nominated by the Council of commissioners. I am mandated to provide information to students or parents about the *Complaint examination procedure* and direct their inquiries to the appropriate person in accordance with the By-Law 9-A and By-Law 9-B.

The Student Ombudsperson does not provide legal opinions. I usually intervene when a complainant has exhausted all remedies within the School Board administration itself. Exceptionally, I can intervene earlier in the process to prevent a serious prejudice to a student. When an investigation is open about a complaint, I can give my opinion on the merits of a complaint to the Council of commissioners and, if needed, recommend corrective measures.

During all school year, I benefit from the valuable collaboration of the School Board's Secretary General, Me Geneviève Dugré, to assist promptly and provide information on the status of any complaint.

Methodology used to compile data

You can find two tables below that indicate the profile of complainants and categories of complaints received for the school year of 2020 – 2021, ending September 30th, 2021.

The second chart breaks down the contacts into different categories. These categories are an adaptation of the categories listed in the *Uniform Reporting Categories* published by the International Ombudsman Association¹.

Please note that when a complaint concerned more than one aspect, the main issue was chosen to compile the categories of complaints.

You can also note that the total number of complainants in the first chart (100) does not correspond to the number of complaints as per the second chart (101). This can happen if a complainant makes two separate complaints in the same school year.

Review of the school year 2020 - 2021

Firstly, I want to emphasize the context of the past school year, affected by the rebounds of the global pandemic of COVID-19. Even if my position brings me to be more aware of conflictual situations, I was still able to appreciate the incredible adaptability of the students / parents and all professionals working within the School Board.

There was an increase of complaints for the past year, going from 72 for the school year 2019-2020 to 101 this year. The numbers for the previous years are 100 in 2016 – 2017, 69 in 2017 – 2018 and 64 in 2018 – 2019.

In my opinion the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is related to this increase in complaints. A significant number of complaints was received about administrative decisions or the application of rules by the school administrations (application of sanitary measures, admissions to virtual schooling, etc.). There were also complaints made about the grading process in the adapted context of the pandemic.

None of the complaints received in 2020-2021 resulted in an investigation by the Student Ombudsperson. The complainants were listened to (or read in the case of complaints received by email or in writing). I provided explanations to the complainants about their options according to the *Complaint examination procedure* (By-Law 9-A) and referred them accordingly to Me Geneviève Dugré, Secretary General, or to the appropriate level of direction. In most situations, I also invited the complainants to fill out the official complaint form and forward a copy by email if necessary. Some complainants were also directed to other instances if needed (as the Ministry of Education or the *Protecteur du citoyen*).

Secondly, I want to mention that I was contacted at two occasions by professionals working with children with disabilities outside of the school board (acting as “whistleblowers”) whose intent was to communicate a lack of resources and a reduction of services offered to the children in two specific schools within the school board. Although very empathetic to this situation, I did not open an investigation based upon the claims, as neither the

¹ INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION, *Uniform reporting categories*, second version, October 2007, online: <https://facultyombuds.ncsu.edu/files/2015/11/IOA-Uniform-Reporting-Categories.pdf>

Education Act or *By-Law 9-A* give power to the ombudsperson to open an investigation on her own initiative. In both situations, I invited the professionals to contact Me Geneviève Dugré and offered to discuss with concerned parents to provide information about the complaint procedure. To my knowledge, no complaints were filed after this initial contact either within the school board or at my office.

Thirdly, I want to address the question of complaints about acts of bullying and violence, as requested by the section 220.2 of the *Education Act*. Nine complaints were received this past year directly concerning acts of bullying and violence. This is a significant increase from the previous year (where two complaints were received about acts of bullying). More specifically, there was a time of last year, around the winter / spring of 2021 that these complaints got more frequent. The situation was specifically discussed with Me Geneviève Dugré. The information communicated to me by complainants was disclosed to Me Dugré, with as much respect to confidentiality as possible. I was also informed by Me Dugré, as a follow-up, of actions taken by the schools to address the situation (for example, a revision of the anti-bullying plan). There was no intervention request made to the Student Ombudsperson by the complainants after the situation was initially referred to the school board.

Finally, I also approached Me Geneviève Dugré during the winter / spring of last year to verify if the information about the ombudsperson's role and the contact details were easily accessible to higher grades students, as I was preoccupied with the students' well-being and their input on quality of services, grading, etc. in the context of the pandemic of Covid-19. As shown in the first chart below, few contacts are made directly with students. This request was discussed with Me Dugré and we concluded that a reminder about the ombudsperson's role and contact would be included in the documentation for the beginning of the new school year (2021-2022).

On a personal note, I would like to express my gratitude to the people within the School Board who responded to my requests for assistance in a promptly manner. I wish to express a special thank you to Me Geneviève Dugré for her assistance and availability. Also, I would like to thank my colleague Me Isabelle Turgeon for her assistance during my maternity leave last fall.

I want to express my gratitude to the parents and students who put their trust in me by sharing their concerns and difficulties.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Laurence', with a stylized, cursive script.

Me Laurence Sarrazin

Profile of the complainants

Level of Education	Students	International Students	Parents	Other	Total
<i>Elementary</i>	0	0	53	2	55
<i>High School</i>	1	0	26	1	28
<i>Adult / Voc.</i>	6	0	1	1	8
<i>Other / Unknown</i>	1	1	6	1	9
<u>Total</u>	8	1	86	5	

Complaints by category

	Number of complaints
1. Evaluative Relationship/Teacher-student relationship	
1a) Priorities, Values, Beliefs	1
1b) Respect	6
1c) Trust / Integrity	1
1d) Reputation	1
1f) Bullying, Mobbing, Coercive behaviour	9
1g) Diversity related	2
1j) Assignments, Schedules	1
1m) Performance appraisal /Grading	6
Other: management of sexual harassment between students	1
2. Services /administrative issues	
2a) Quality of services	1
2b) Responsiveness / Timeliness	1
2c) Administrative decisions and interpretation /application of rules	33
2d) Behavior of service providers	2
3. Legal, regulatory, financial and compliance	
3d) Discrimination	3
3e) Disability, temporary or permanent, reasonable accommodation	6
3h) Privacy and Security of Information	1
3j) Other (finances)	2
4. Organizational, strategic, and mission related issues	
4a) Strategic and mission related strategic and technical management	1
4d) Communication	4

Other (transportation)	9
5. Values, ethics, and standards	
5b) Values and culture	2
Other interventions (Follow-ups, General Information, References, etc.)	8
Total	101