

Back to Royal West Academy for Alois Orozco after Bill 101 exemption

Minister of Education Kathleen Weil called Alois Orozco's mother Thursday with the news.

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"I'm very happy about it," said Alois Orozco, with his mother, Rebeca Estrada. "It makes me feel a lot less stressed. And all my friends are really happy too — everyone was hugging me." *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

Alois Orozco will be back in school at Royal West Academy on Friday, after being granted an exemption from Bill 101 by the minister of education.

Kathleen Weil, the MNA for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and now the minister responsible for Relations with English-Speaking Quebecers, had intervened on his behalf, and shared the news with Alois and his mother Thursday afternoon.

“This has been one of these days when it’s all worth it,” Weil said. “I spoke to his mother and she was so, so relieved and happy.”

Alois, who was born in Ecuador and moved to Canada in 2010, had been going to the English high school in Montreal West since Grade 7. His mother was doing her PhD, then her post-doctoral research at the École de technologie supérieure. The family was in Canada on a work and student visa, and as such they could opt for the schools of their choice.

But when they became permanent residents in June, Alois and his younger brother and sister were told they would have to switch to French schools.

According to Bill 101, also known as the Charter of the French Language, any immigrants to Quebec, along with Canadians whose parents were educated in French, must go to school in French.

In Alois’s case, that would have meant doing his last year of high school in French, and leaving his friends — and his good marks — behind.

Following a request for an exemption made to the ministry of education in June — and [a story in the Montreal Gazette on Thursday](https://montrealgazette.com/news/teen-in-grade-11-at-royal-west-academy-ensnared-by-bill-101) (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/teen-in-grade-11-at-royal-west-academy-ensnared-by-bill-101>) — the exemption was granted, on humanitarian grounds.

“I’m very happy about it,” Alois said Thursday. “It makes me feel a lot less stressed. And all my friends are really happy too — everyone was hugging me.”

Mike Cohen, a spokesperson for the English Montreal School Board, said Alois will be back at Royal West starting tomorrow.

“This is a human rights issue in the middle of a critical election campaign where education is discussed on a daily basis, and access to English education has been an issue for decades,” Cohen said, adding that there are other students at the EMSB facing similar issues. “Here was an opportunity to resolve a simple issue. ... We hope whatever government gets elected will ensure cases like this don’t go so far. There’s no reason for students to go for weeks out of school.”

Alois has spent the three weeks since the start of the school year at home, not knowing where he would study, or how.

The student, whose marks for math and science at Royal West average 95, also works as a baseball umpire, and has plans to go first to Dawson College then to McGill University to become a surgeon. But his French is not as good.

“In all the cases I’ve had like this, the (students) want to be at school, because they’re not with their friends, and this situation creates a lot of uncertainty and anxiety,” said Weil, adding that her first case as an MNA in 2009 involved a Canadian seeking an exemption to Bill 101. “This wasn’t a holiday. ... This is a young student with incredible dreams, and this allows him to follow his dreams.”

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