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'Not an empty lot': English parents lobby to keep T.M.R. school's field

The uproar began when MNA Pierre Arcand suggested the land next to Dunrae Gardens Elementary School could be the location of a much-needed French school.

Katherine Wilton • Montreal Gazette
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But when Weclas zoomed in on the picture, she was stunned.

It was of a soccer field that students at Dunrae Gardens Elementary School have been using for decades.

“My head exploded,” said Weclas, who has three children at the French immersion school. “It was the first week of school, parents are stressed out and we are in the middle of a pandemic.”

Weclas immediately went on the Facebook page to correct the post. “It’s not an empty lot; it’s my children’s schoolyard and it’s not up for grabs,” she wrote.

The uproar began this month when Pierre Arcand, the local Liberal member of the National Assembly, posted two pictures on Facebook. One was of the schoolyard at Académie Saint-Clément, which has several mobile classrooms, and the second was of the large soccer field adjacent to Dunrae Gardens, which is used as a schoolyard.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Arcand wrote that the land next to Dunrae is available and wondered what the education minister was waiting for.

Académie Saint-Clément was built for 350 pupils, but has 600 students this school year.

After being contacted by frustrated English-speaking parents, Arcand posted a mea culpa on his Facebook page, saying he was not “promoting the use of some of your land to build a French primary school in T.M.R.”

“There were discussions about that project at the ministry of education, but if there is no social acceptability another solution should be found,” he wrote.

Although parents were relieved that Arcand walked back his post, they fired off emails to the English Montreal School Board and T.M.R. Mayor Philippe Roy, demanding answers.

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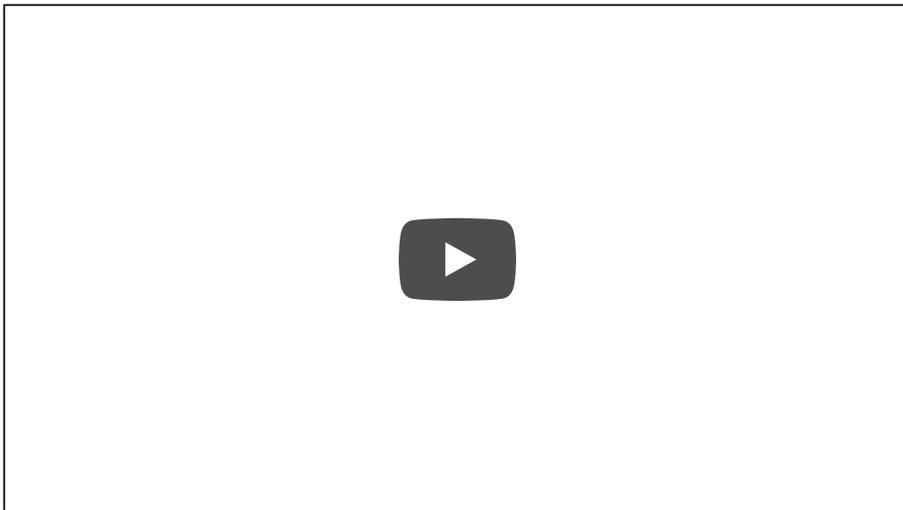
Karolina Weclas and other parents were upset at the prospect of the field next to Dunrae Gardens Elementary School – which is used as a schoolyard by the T.M.R. institution – being the site of a new French school. “We wanted to make sure that a decision wasn’t being made and we were the last ones to find out,” says Weclas, with sons Marcus, left, and Samuel. PHOTO BY JOHN MAHONEY /Montreal Gazette

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Karolina Weclas was looking for a recipe on her mobile phone when a post on a Facebook Group page startled her.

A parent from Académie Saint-Clément in Town of Mount Royal was sharing some good news: a location may have finally been found to build a [much-needed French school in T.M.R.](#)



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“Why would an MNA make a statement like that (out of the blue)?” Weclas wondered.

English parents have bad memories of Education Minister Jean-François Roberge’s controversial decision to transfer two English schools to an overcrowded French board in June 2019, Weclas said.

“We wanted to make sure that a decision wasn’t being made and we were the last ones to find out,” she said.

The Quebec government has put aside \$25 million for a new French primary school in T.M.R.

When talks were held about two years ago, the former Marguerite-Bourgeoys school board (which is now called a service centre) said its preferred choice was to build a school on part of Dunrae’s soccer field, T.M.R.’s mayor confirmed on Tuesday.

If Quebec gives the proposal the green light, the town is prepared to compensate Dunrae Gardens by giving the school a parcel of land in one of two nearby parks, Roy said. The English school has about 333 students this year.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The town’s two English primary schools are doing well and are important parts of the community, Roy said.

However, francophone parents have been waiting patiently for a new school to be built in order to ease overcrowding in the town’s three French primary schools, he added.

EMSB spokesperson Michael Cohen acknowledged that the Dunrae Gardens soccer field has come up in discussions with the Marguerite-Bourgeoys service centre.

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that has occurred.”

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In an interview with the Montreal Gazette, Arcand said a solution needs to be found to address the overcrowding in French schools.

At Académie Saint-Clément, the mobile classrooms are in the middle of the schoolyard, he said. “Around Dunrae, there are two parks and some space available,” he added.

“There should be a consultation on this, and I think (T.M.R.) is willing to make some compromises to accommodate everybody.”

The Marguerite-Bourgeoys service centre is looking for land to build a new school and discussions are underway to find the best option, an education ministry spokesperson said.

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