

Tuesday, January 29th, 2019

Dear Willingdon Parents,

RE: Information Update and Consultation Schedule regarding the potential for an expansion of Willingdon School

This letter is intended to provide information about a new and exciting initiative at Willingdon School. The Willingdon Administration and Governing Board are engaging the Willingdon community with regards to an evaluation process that has just begun to expand and grow our school by adopting a new facility in the NDG region. The facility is the former St Ignatius of Loyola School building located at the corner of Coronation and Somerled streets. We believe this facility has the potential to broaden the educational and social offerings of our school, grow our student body, meet new and increased demand in NDG, and ultimately widen the Willingdon community and the educational impacts that have been cultivated up until now.

Some introductory background information is provided below and there will be a parent information session on February 5, 2019 at 7:00 pm at Willingdon, where a presentation will be made with more details on this exciting initiative.

Background

Presently, all EMSB schools in the NDG region are suffering from overcrowding. Enrollment has been increasing over the past few years and that trend does not appear to be slowing down. This year Willingdon is almost at its maximum capacity and as a result the resources in the building are stretched. This presents a future risk to the current services at Willingdon but also an opportunity for growth.

In this context, the EMSB Commissioners recently put forward a motion to use an under-utilized building as a new school in the region or to convert it into an annex to one of the three existing schools in the area (Willingdon, Edinburgh and Merton Schools). Commissioners have requested that each school prepare a brief on how they would use the facility, consult with parents, and report back to the Council by mid-February.

It is important to emphasize that at present there is no guarantee that Willingdon will be awarded the facility. That said, the Administration, Teachers and Governing Board of the school believe it could potentially be a valuable asset to our school and community, and therefore we have launched an exploratory process to evaluate the value of this school to our students and community, and to engage with the student parents to provide information and get feedback.

We are now in a phase to consider this opportunity in detail, evaluating all pros and cons of this potential expansion. A Willingdon Annex Steering Committee has recently been created to explore the different options and draft an initial proposal of how this facility might best

benefit the student body and community already at Willingdon. The committee is made up of the Principal, Ms Carmen Nicolas, the Governing Board Chairperson and student parent, Eric Lamoureux and the co-chairs of staff council, Lara Belinsky and Kathleen Usher. Below we present a basic description of the vision for this facility and how we might integrate it into the Willingdon family.

Initial Considerations

Community spirit is a key concern in this potential expansion. At the outset any new campus must be actively involved with the main building in all activities and events to ensure the community continuity and feel of the current Willingdon school. The current culture at Willingdon is inclusive, inquisitive and forward looking, which is something we all pride ourselves on. We need to ensure this remains as strong as ever. Crossover and inclusion between the two campuses would be priority number one. It is interesting to point out that with additional facilities, more diverse community events could potentially be fostered. Sporting events and outdoor activities are a few examples of new activities that could broaden and enrich the school spirit.

A preliminary visit to the expansion building was made by the committee, and it has been concluded that the facility would only be considered as a senior campus for Grades 5 and 6. The indoor and outdoor spaces are well suited to senior students, and this site would help respond to some issues already raised by the older students, such as a desire for more green space, more autonomy, greater choice in learning, more creative spaces and access to better and more upgraded facilities (e.g. gym, kitchens, bathrooms). As an initial consideration, a new facility would address these concerns.

A senior campus would ease space constraints at the current building and improve facilities for the younger students as well. By expanding, Willingdon could protect all of its specialist spaces and programs (Music, Science, Tech Lab, Library, Resource Room, Behaviour Tech room, Sensory Room) and have more room to keep growing without sacrificing quality. Attention must be given on how to properly divide resources; for example, ensuring Specialists are able to cover both locations. To further augment the educational experiences at both locations, extra resources (and staff) would be requested of the EMSB.. At a minimum we expect from the EMSB a commitment for a second Vice Principal and more teachers to staff the extra classes at the two locations.

For both the younger and older students, there would be access to additional green space. We view this as a huge benefit to the students over the current Willingdon grounds. At the new location there is access to 3 soccer fields, a park with play structures and a treed area with a field. Phys ed classes could be expanded and take on new activities. The facility also has several fully equipped kitchens which could support diverse Science and Santé classes.

Assessing transportation needs has also been an important consideration to the committee. We will insist that, if this expansion is to proceed, the EMSB must supply bussing for the new building.. The two campuses could have staggered start times so siblings could board the bus together in the morning and return home together in the afternoon. The

transportation details will have to be figured out in more detail through consultation with the parents, the community and the Board.

Finally, consideration for our treasured EDP program is top of mind. We believe it could be run as a satellite program before and after school for the senior campus. Some details will need to be worked out, but consultation is already ongoing with the EDP team and we believe we can work together to support the school's growth and parent needs.

Next Steps

For this vision of expansion to take real form and advance, we believe the entire Willingdon community must understand and agree that there is value and opportunity to grow the school. This will involve more information sharing, questions and answers, and feedback from you, the parents. Simply put, this opportunity could allow our school to receive more resources and host a variety of new programs to further enhance our mission of servicing the community we love and developing the leaders of tomorrow in both French and English.

We remind you that this proposal is not a done deal and is still only a concept. The EMSB Board may not allocate the facility to Willingdon. Of the three schools, however, Willingdon is best positioned to explore the option of an expansion. As the largest school we already have in place the structures, services and population to support such an initiative and have strong leadership in all relevant domains. Willingdon has a proven track record for innovation (development of a rock-climbing program, the entrepreneurship initiative with the honeybees, and a focus on social and emotional learning, to name a few successes) and is leading the way toward truly inclusive, community based, 21st century learning helping our students to leave feeling like they can change the world.

Whichever school ends up using the facility, we support the EMSB's decision to increase resources and reduce the space constraints that impede our local schools from growing and restrict educational and social activities. We believe in a long-term vision of growth at Willingdon and more broadly at the EMSB for the anglophone community in Montreal.

Finally, updates and next steps will be posted regularly on our school website at:
<http://willingdon.emsb.qc.ca>

Come join us and be part of the solution! We look forward to seeing you there!

The representatives for the Willingdon Senior Campus Steering Committee:

Carmen Nicolas, Principal Willingdon School

Eric Lamoureux, Parent and Governing Board Chair