

N.D.G. elementary school preps for expansion in response to overcrowding

In the wake of growing concerns regarding overcrowding, Willingdon Elementary School has opted to house its senior students in a new campus located at the former St. Ignatius of Loyola School building.

DANIEL SUCAR Updated: June 22, 2019



Things are a little cramped at Willingdon Elementary School in N.D.G.

As a result of overcrowding and a subsequent lack of space, the gym is restricted to some students during lunch, recess periods do not occur at the

same time for all kids and course specialists may lose their permanent classrooms.

But that's all about to change.

Beginning in the upcoming academic year, the French immersion school will be housing its Grade 5 and 6 students in the former St. Ignatius of Loyola School building on Coronation and Somerled Aves. The original building on Terrebonne St. will house five incoming kindergarten classes, as well as returning students who will be in the Grades 1 to 4 classes.

"We saw this as an opportunity for growth, we saw this as an opportunity to improve what we had, and we saw this as an opportunity to multiply our impact and our vision," said science specialist Kathleen Usher, who is known affectionately to her students as Dr. Kat and who has been teaching at Willingdon for seven years.

On Wednesday morning, the school's 150 senior students walked with teachers and parents to witness the new campus for the first time. After arriving, students explored the campus' eight homerooms, science laboratory, music room and library. They spoke with broadcaster Suzanne Desautels, who is documenting the expansion and its effects on students and faculty in a podcast series (<https://soundcloud.com/englishmtl/podcasts>). After a Q&A session with the administrative staff in the gym, the kids then participated in team-building activities on the three soccer fields adjacent to the new school.



Grade 5 and 6 students from Willingdon Elementary School walk from their school with teachers and parents, to a senior campus about 2 kilometres away that is being prepared for them on Wednesday, June 19, 2019 as a solution to increased enrolment. *JOHN KENNEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

“This is an important day for the kids, because it teaches them that change is necessary,” said Christina Prentas, a fifth-grade teacher. “If you’re never willing to take that step and get out of your comfort zone, then you don’t evolve as an individual.”

For the staff and students at Willingdon, this expansion could not have come at a better time. This past academic year, the school operated at 90 per cent capacity with 550 students in total. With more students registered for the 2019-2020 year, there was a genuine concern that the school’s speciality rooms would be reduced to classrooms to accommodate the influx of students.

When the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) organized consultations to discuss the [overcrowding issues \(https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/french-immersion-robotics-and-flexible-seating-boosting-enrolment-at-emsb-schools\)](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/french-immersion-robotics-and-flexible-seating-boosting-enrolment-at-emsb-schools) affecting its French immersion schools this year, Willingdon principal Carmen Nicolas [stepped forward with a plan \(https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/n-d-g-s-willingdon-school-keen-on-](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/n-d-g-s-willingdon-school-keen-on-)

[annex-to-move-grade-5-6-classes](#)) to establish the first-ever senior elementary school campus in the history of the board.

“Our vision was to develop a program that is more fulfilling for the kids and the teachers,” Nicolas said. “At the new campus, students will have a bit more choice and flexibility. It will serve as a preparation for high school.”

Classes at Willingdon will end on June 21 and resume in September. Before the academic year begins, the school will organize a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new campus for students, staff, parents and volunteers.

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