



Local News



What to know about the Montreal ties of Kamala Harris, Biden's choice for successor

She attended Westmount High School from 1978 to 1981, with classmates describing her as extremely bright with a promising future.



The Canadian Press
Morgan Lowrie

Published Jul 21, 2024 • 3 minute read

[Join the conversation](#)



A copy of Kamala Harris, right, from the Westmount High School class of '81 yearbook taken in Montreal on Feb. 5, 2019. PHOTO BY ALLEN MCINNIS /Montreal Gazette

U.S. President Joe Biden is stepping aside as the Democratic candidate in that country's November election and throwing his support behind Vice-President Kamala Harris — a Montreal-area high school graduate who spent several years in the city.

Here's what to know about her Canadian connections.

Before she became America's first female, first Black, and first South Asian vice-president-elect, Harris spent several years in Montreal, where she attended Westmount High School from 1978 to 1981.

She moved to the city as a teen so her mother Shyamala Gopalan, a breast-cancer researcher, could work at the Lady Davis Institute of Montreal's Jewish General Hospital. Harris enrolled at Westmount after an initial stint at a French-language school.

Dr. Michael Pollak, who worked with Gopalan in Montreal, described her in a note published on McGill University's website as a "pioneer" who left a mark on the institution, helping to develop a method of assessing cancerous breast tissue that became standard procedure at the Jewish General and other hospitals.

While Harris's biography on the White House website doesn't mention her time in Montreal, she later "recalled fondly" her years there in a 2021 call with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, according to a summary of the conversation known as a readout.

Former classmates described Harris and her sister Maya as good students with promising futures ahead of them.

"They were so extremely bright and intelligent people, they were just so smart," former classmate Trevor Harris told The Canadian Press in 2020.

In a 1981 yearbook, Harris described her favourite pastime as "dancing with Midnight Magic," a dance troupe she founded with her friend Wanda Kagan, who remembers the two of them performing at community centres and at fundraisers.

The English Montreal School Board issued a statement congratulating Harris on becoming vice president-elect in 2020 that included a photo of students holding up hand-drawn posters reading "Congratulations Kamala! Class of '81!"

More recently, as vice-president, Harris has had several meetings and conversations with Trudeau.

In the same 2021 call in which she reminisced about her time in Montreal, Harris offered assurances the Biden administration would "do everything it can" to secure the release of then-imprisoned Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, according to a readout. The two Canadians were released later that year.

In subsequent calls and meetings, Trudeau and Harris have reportedly discussed a range of issues, including women's entrepreneurship, the COVID-19 pandemic, gender equality, trade, and workers rights. The two met in May in Philadelphia, where they discussed U.S.-Canada cooperation on "a range of bilateral, regional, and global issues," including the situation in Haiti and Ukraine, the readouts state.

They also "highlighted the deep-rooted partnership between Canada and the United States" and "reaffirmed their commitment to advancing shared labour priorities, including creating good-paying jobs, building opportunities for workers, and growing our economies," the prime minister's office said at the time.

Biden on Sunday threw his support behind Harris, and described his choice to pick her as vice president as "the best decision I've made."

Former president Bill Clinton and former secretary and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton were also among a growing list of prominent democrats endorsing Harris for the Democratic Party nomination on Sunday, urging people to "fight with everything we've got to elect her."