

# Centennial Academy may share space with EMSB until it finds a new home



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Angela Burgos, head of Centennial Academy, stands outside the school on Thursday May 4, 2017. *PIERRE OBENDRAUF / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

Over the past six years, Angela Burgos has been concerned with a lot more than just providing quality education to her students at Centennial Academy - she has also been on the hunt for a new school building.

Since 1976, the private high school has been renting space from the Commission scolaire de Montréal on Prud'homme Ave. in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

But their 40-year lease is now up and the French school board needs its buildings to deal with a severe overcrowding problem in its N.D.G. schools.

Until Centennial finds a permanent home, the English Montreal School Board has offered to rent space in two of its high schools starting next fall — at Marymount Academy International in N.D.G. and James Lyng High School in St-Henri.

“Centennial needs space to educate their students for one year until a long-term solution to their situation can be found and we certainly want to do our part to help a fellow educational institution that, like ourselves, serves the English community of Montreal,” the board’s chairperson, Angela Mancini, said in a statement.

The EMSB is holding a consultation with its two school communities on June 8 and the board's commissioners are expected to vote on the proposal on June 14.

If the plan is approved, about 120 Centennial students in Grades 9-11 would move to Marymount and Centennial's CEGEP students would relocate to James Lyng. In both cases, the Centennial students will be given a separate wing in the buildings.

The CSDM will allow Centennial's Grade 7 and 8 students to remain in one of the buildings on Prud'homme for one more year.

Burgos, Centennial's head of school, is pragmatic about the move. "If you don't have a building, you can't continue," she said.

A building committee has looked at many options over the years, including buying the existing buildings or buying empty schools, but nothing has panned out. "They were either too small, too expensive or we were unlucky," Burgos said.

But the building committee may have finally found a building that will suit Centennial's needs — and it's literally right around the corner.

The school has started preliminary discussions to buy a large building on Décarie Blvd. that houses the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton schools. The Mackay Centre caters to children who have hearing and physical disabilities and the Philip E. Layton School specializes in education for the blind.

Both schools are slated to move to the new Mackay Centre that is being built on Terrebonne St. next door to St. Monica's church in N.D.G.

The Quebec government has given the English Montreal School Board \$22 million to build the school on a parcel of land owned by the school board. Construction has started on the site and the building is scheduled to be finished sometime during the 2018-2019 school year.

The current Mackay Centre building on Décarie Blvd. is centrally located and can accommodate all of Centennial's students, Burgos said. Many students live across Montreal Island and the South Shore and use public transportation to get to school.

Burgos said she is keeping parents in the loop about the moves. She said students and parents “value very much the experience they have at Centennial and they want to preserve that.”

Centennial is a private high school that caters to students with a variety of learning challenges. Despite the learning difficulties, which affect about 95 per cent of the students, about 90 per cent of students finish high school in five years.

About 50 per cent of Centennial’s students transfer there from other high schools because they are “not thriving and something is not working,” Burgos said. “Homework is untenable, they can’t get up, they’re stressed and it just isn’t the right fit,” she said.

Some students, especially in Grades 8 and 9, have difficulty planning their schoolwork, moving from class to class and remembering their material, she said. At Centennial, it’s the teachers who change classes and students are given colour-coded binders to help them become better organized. The teachers also use diverse teaching strategies to help students master the curriculum by giving them structure, routine and predictability in their school day.

Marie-José Mastromonaco, the CSDM’s school commissioner for N.D.G., said her board could not renew the lease with Centennial because their schools are bursting at the seams.

At École Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, there are 886 students, including 10 kindergarten classes. In many French schools, the libraries have been converted into classrooms and at École Marc Favreau, the library books are in a hallway. Hundreds of students are bused outside the district because of a shortage of space in N.D.G.

The CSDM hasn’t made a final decision on which students will be housed at Centennial next year. “We will let the students at Centennial finish their year and then we will go in and see what we need,” Mastromonaco said.

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