

Lester B. Pearson School Board overall numbers continue to decline

The projected enrolment numbers for the Lester B. Pearson School Board are in and the decline in numbers continues, albeit at a slow pace.



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It is predicted enrolment at Lester B. Pearson School Board schools will bottom out at 19,000 in five years. *DAVE SIDAWAY / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

The preliminary numbers are in and enrolment at Lester B. Pearson School Board schools continues its decline.

Overall enrolment at elementary and secondary schools, as of Aug. 30, is 19,727, down 1.61 per cent — or 323 students — from 20,050 in the last academic year.

Not an enormous drop but a dip nonetheless and one that the Quebec Education Ministry estimates will continue moving forward.

“The ministry estimates enrolment will bottom out at 19,000 in five years,” LBP assistant director general Carol Heffernan said. “But the Lester B. Pearson School Board still has the highest youth population of all the English school boards in the province.”

And the graduation rate for the Lester B. Pearson School Board — Grade 7 through Grade 11 — remains the highest in the province.

Adapting to the decline has led to elementary schools merging which, in turn, affects the enrolment at nearby high schools.

Thorndale Elementary school in Pierrefonds closed at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year, after which Thorndale merged with Greendale Elementary to form Kingsdale Academy. Even with the merger, Kingsdale enrolment dropped to 387 this year from 397 last year and enrolment at Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School dropped to 676 from 721.

Overall numbers could adjust slightly by Oct. 1 because the official count submitted to the Education Ministry is done at the end of September.

Not all the numbers are glum.

St. Thomas High School in Pointe-Claire held steady at 1,231 students and John Rennie High School, also in Pointe-Claire, showed a modest dip from 1,365 to 1,350.

Macdonald High School in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue showed one of the biggest increases among the high schools with enrolment growing to 830 from 800.

Heffernan said the increase is due, in part, to the growth of the student population in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region.

“Because of the proximity of Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue to students off-island, they get to choose whether they want to go to Macdonald or to Westwood Jr. and Sr. (off-island),” Heffernan said.

Enrolment at Westwood High School junior campus in St-Lazare dropped to 420 this year from 456 last year, but the reverse occurred at Westwood High School senior campus in Hudson, with enrolment increasing to 584 from 556.

St. Patrick Elementary in Pincourt underwent an expansion in 2014 and continues to welcome new students. Numbers grew from 487 last year to 513 for the 2017-2018 academic year. That growth will most likely have a positive affect on enrolment at Macdonald High, down the road.

“Traditionally, students from St. Patrick choose Macdonald High School,” Heffernan said.

Heffernan said the decision for off-island students to attend Macdonald is made easier because the high school offers transportation.

The news is mixed for two schools that have battled for the last two years to stay open.

In Dec. 2015, the board announced it would be closing Lakeside Academy in Lachine and Riverview Elementary in Verdun. Parents, students and staff at both schools made impassioned pleas and promised to come up with financially viable survival plans.

Riverview Elementary’s enrolment increased from 188 to 206 this year.

Lakeside Academy’s dropped slightly, from 449 to 446. The school’s capacity is 1,300.

There will be no further announcements of closings during the school board’s mandate, which ends in fall 2018.

Other schools that showed increases in enrolment ranging from 1 at the low-end to 36 at the high-end are, in alphabetical order: Beechwood Elementary in Pierrefonds; Allion Elementary in Lasalle; Beacon Hill Elementary in Beaconsfield; Birchwood Elementary in St-Lazare; Dorset Elementary in

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Baie-d'Urfé; Dorval Elementary; Forest Hill Sr. Elementary in St-Lazare; Lasalle Jr. and Lasalle Sr. Elementary; Mount Pleasant Elementary in Hudson; Soulanges Elementary in St-Télesphore; Springdale Elementary in Dollard-des-Ormeaux; St. John Fisher Sr. Elementary in Pointe-Claire and Westpark Elementary and Wilder Penfield Elementary in Dollard.

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