

Parents brave cold for limited spots at Royal Vale School

Annual tradition to secure a spot in kindergarten program has its critics

By Brennan Neill, [CBC News](#) Posted: Feb 06, 2017 6:03 AM ET Last Updated: Feb 06, 2017 8:01 AM ET

Despite temperatures that dipped below -10 C, dozens of parents camped out over the weekend outside Royal Vale School in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce in hopes of securing their child a kindergarten spot.

Kindergarten enrolment at Royal Vale, a school that belongs to the English Montreal School Board, is done on a first-come, first-served basis.

Registration officially began this morning at 8 a.m. at Royal Vale and other EMSB schools.

A few parents, eager to get a head start on the competition, set up their sleeping bags and tents as early as Saturday morning.

But some consider the annual tradition disrespectful and believe there are better ways of handling registration.

According to the EMSB, there are 32 spots open this year after parents with children already in the school were offered spaces for siblings.

Line up began earlier than expected

Karen Magallanes said she and her husband were planning on lining up at the school on Sunday.

But after driving by Saturday evening and seeing the number of people already waiting, they rushed down to the school to get in line.

"I drove by and panicked when I saw 20 people already lined up," said Karen Magallanes, who was waiting in line with her husband, Alan Michael Wong, to get their daughter a spot.

Wong said they bought outdoor equipment, hand and foot warmers and insulated gloves ahead of time.

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"When we came here we saw all the tents. These are heavy duty tents. It was a shock to our system," said Wong.

Both Wong and Magallanes said they were impressed by Royal Vale, which students can attend from kindergarten to grade 11.

"The standards are high, it's almost semi-private," said Wong.

"My wife's fear about public school is that [our daughter] is going to get bored and she won't be challenged."

Magallanes said their daughter is also on several waiting lists for private French schools.

'This is not appropriate'

NDG resident Patrice Blain said he's been speaking about the annual kindergarten line up at Royal Vale with other parents.

He too has a son who will be entering kindergarten this year.

"Some parents say, 'You know what, I'm willing to go to that extent because I really care for my kids.' But I care for my kids too, and I just think that this is not appropriate," said Blain, who won't be sending his son to Royal Vale.

"Knowing that this practice is an ongoing thing, I think that I'd be ashamed to be part of that board and let that happen every year. It's just not respectful."

Blain believes the EMSB should consider giving out bracelets at a set time that establish who has a spot on the registration list.

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Testament to school quality?

EMSB school commissioner Joseph Lalla, who represents the ward where Royal Vale is located, said the fact parents are lining up days ahead of registration shows they recognize the quality of the school's programs.

"It's like that year after year and there's only limited places. The school is in demand," said Lalla, adding Royal Vale offers things such as hockey and music programs.

Royal Vale is also a French immersion school, which is attractive to many parents, he said.

Lalla said the school has tried to come up with other registration systems, but they've determined the line is the fairest option.

"No doubt, people have other suggestions, but this seems to be the best one the school can come up with," he said.

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