

Montreal North adult-ed centre may be next English school to go French

EMSB vice-chairperson Joe Ortona confirmed that the board has been discussing a deal to hand over all or part of its Galileo Adult Education Centre to the Commission scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'Île.

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A number of the EMSB's east-end schools are vulnerable to the kinds of transfers that saw Riverdale High School given over to the Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, because they are not at capacity. *PETER MCCABE / MONTREAL GAZETTE FILES*

Instead of waiting for the provincial government to decide which of its underused schools will be handed over to the overcrowded francophone boards next, the English Montreal School Board is in talks about offering space at an adult education school in Montreal North to the Commission scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'Île.

The two school boards have not finished hammering out the details, nor is the offer official, but EMSB vice-chairperson Joe Ortona confirmed that the EMSB has been discussing a deal to hand over all or part of its Galileo Adult Education Centre.

"I'm not going to hide that there have been discussions with Pointe-de-l'Île (school board) concerning space," Ortona told the Montreal Gazette. "It is not a secret that our schools are not all at 100 per cent capacity and they have schools that are over 100 per cent capacity. So they are in desperate need of space.

"We have had discussions. When there is a proposal on the table, there will be a proper consultation process."

The Galileo centre, located on Gariépy Ave. near the intersection of Pie-IX and Henri-Bourassa Blvds., is perhaps best known for employing special-ed teacher Vanessa Grimaldi (<https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/our-love-is-real-montreal-special-ed-teacher-who-won-the-bachelor-says>), the first Canadian to win on the reality TV show The Bachelor.

The school offers a Social Integration Services Program (SIS) for adults who experience difficulties of a psychological, intellectual, social or physical nature, as well as basic French and English language courses and high school completion courses to adults. In the basement of the two-storey complex is a satellite campus of the Rosemount Technology Centre, which offers vocational training to adults.

The building has the capacity to accommodate 1,075 full-time students. In the 2017-2018 academic year, it had the equivalent of 500 full-time students.

News of the discussions leaked out at last week's EMSB meeting, when a resolution demanding the community be consulted about the issue was

voted off the meeting's agenda.

Sylvia Lo Bianco, the school board commissioner who represents the ward where Galileo is located, and EMSB chairperson Angela Mancini both voted to keep the resolution on the agenda.

"There are negotiations going on with the president of the other school board ... and we are not going to consult our stakeholders, our parents in the communities that may be affected? It's wrong," Lo Bianco said at last Wednesday's meeting.

But Ortona said the resolution, introduced by Lo Bianco and Mancini, was premature because there is no sense consulting until it is clear what is being proposed. He added that the board is required by law to consult with the community about a school closing or its mandate changing.

The minister of education has the power to transfer schools from one board to another due to space considerations, so Ortona says the EMSB is better off actively proposing solutions to the francophone boards, rather than waiting to be dictated to by the minister.

In January, Education Minister Jean-François Roberge announced that Riverdale High School in Pierrefonds will be transferred from the Lester B. Pearson board to the Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys. A number of the EMSB's east-end schools are vulnerable to these kinds of transfers because they are not at capacity.

"We don't want to be in a position where a school is taken without our consent," Ortona said.

He said it makes more sense to give up space at adult education facilities, or even transfer those buildings, rather than see more elementary or high schools taken away.

"We certainly don't want to be giving up any of our youth sector schools," he said. "Those are community schools; most people go to the school in their area. Every community should have a local school, and with Bill 101, if we lose a school we are not getting it back. So we definitely don't want to lose those schools.

"An adult education centre is not a community school in the same way. If the school happened to move, the special-needs kids who get adapted

transportation will get it to the new building.”

He added those who attend Galileo “absolutely should not panic,” because everyone will be accommodated. He could not say when the issue will be back on the council agenda.

“It will come back whenever we have a proposal to inform the community. ... The fact that it was made public like this might bring it onto the agenda sooner, because we don’t want the community to feel like they are in limbo, not knowing what’s happening.”

Lo Bianco could not be reached for further comment Monday.

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