

Nicholas settles into principal position at Willingdon Elementary School

BY ISAAC OLSON

Carmen Nicholas has taken over as principal of NDG's Willingdon Elementary School on Terrebonne St. and she says she is enjoying her first career experience outside of high school.

"I am very happy here," said Nicholas. "It is my first experience in elementary school, which I was nervous about after 15 years in high school. My only connection to elementary school is my son who is in grade two, which gave me a little bit of a heads-up as to what to expect. But since I'm here, I'm really, really loving it."

Nicholas began her career in education back in 2001, teaching at the high school level in the public and private sectors for more than a decade. Most recently, she taught dance at LaurenHill Academy for seven years and coordinated the after-school program.

She began her master's degree studies in educational leadership at McGill University a few years ago and, while completing her degree, she became vice principal of Lester B. Pearson High School. She was interim principal of that school



Carmen Nicholas sings karaoke in front of the entire student body at Willingdon Elementary School on October 14. She sang because she told students she would if the school reached or surpassed Terry Fox fundraising goals.

for about six months before her appointment to Willingdon in June. At the same time, she was awarded her master's degree.

Nicholas said she is still observing. She is learning how the school is run and about the community. Every community is different, she said, and NDG is "very different" than Montreal North, where she is from originally. Now she lives in St. Laurent.

She said she is passionate about "mindfulness" in education as students are "suffering more and more from anxiety, depression and mental illness."

She is also focused on integrating technology more into the classroom while teaching students about the responsibilities of digital citizenship. Coming from high school, she said issues arise from teens using technology in inappropriate ways and she said it is important to teach kids early how to use technology appropriately.

She says she feels "very welcome by everybody" at Willingdon, be it staff, parents or students. The transition has gone smoothly, she said.