

School closings, mergers will be focus of EMSB meeting Wednesday night

The Long Range Planning Committee will present several scenarios to close, merge or transfer schools in the CSPI's territory.

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Gerald McShane School is one of three the education department wants to transfer to the local French school board.

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Parents and students will learn on Wednesday which schools the English Montreal School Board is considering closing or merging to help solve an overcrowding problem in French public schools in the east end.

The board is launching a Major School Change consultation to evaluate how to consolidate its school population (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/education-minister-scrambles-to-resolve-emsb-deadlock>) and buildings in territory covered by the Commission scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'île.

During a special meeting Wednesday night, the board's Long Range Planning Committee will present several scenarios to close, merge or transfer schools in neighbourhoods where the CSPI lacks space, such as St-Léonard and Montreal North.

The commissioners will vote on each proposal and only proposals that are approved will be sent out to consultation by parents and governing boards.

Governing boards will have until December to submit briefs on the proposals and a final decision will be made at the end of January.

"Parents will have a role in determining which schools are closed, or merged or transferred," board spokesperson Michael Cohen said.

The decision to consolidate the EMSB's school network was made last week after talks between board administrators and senior officials (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/its-not-too-late-to-avoid-school-transfers-roberge-tells-boards>) in the education department.

The EMSB was told that it could probably hang on to three schools in the east end for another year if it launched the consultation process immediately and offered the CSPI classrooms at two east end high schools for the next school year.

The EMSB has offered to share space with the CSPI at General Vanier Elementary and Laurier Macdonald High School in St-Léonard and at Gerald McShane Elementary, Lester B. Pearson High School and the Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North.

If Education Minister Jean-François Roberge decides to transfer three English schools before Wednesday night's meeting, the board will probably

cancel the consultation process, Cohen said.

“We are hopeful that the minister and the CSPI will accept our proposal,” he said.

Last week, the head of the CSPI said his board is not interested in cohabitating with English schools and maintained that transferring General Vanier, Gerald McShane and John Paul I High School is the simplest solution to the overcrowding problem.

Sharing space in multiple English schools is logistically complicated and will make it more difficult for new immigrants to quickly master French, board chairperson Miville Boudreault said.

The EMSB meeting starts at 7 p.m. at the board’s head office on Fielding Ave. in Notre Dame de Grâce.

Roberge’s spokesperson, Francis Bouchard, said on Tuesday that the transfer process is continuing because the minister hasn’t received a joint agreement from both school boards on cohabitation.

Bouchard said the school boards are running out of time to come to an agreement, adding that the transfer may be on the agenda at Wednesday’s cabinet meeting.

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