

# PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

## **Minister of Education, Roberge requires Lester B. Pearson School Board to cede Riverdale High School to Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys**

**Dorval, Qc., January 28, 2019** – The Minister of Education, Jean-Francois Roberge, in recent interviews with media outlets, detailed his intention to transfer ownership of Riverdale High School from the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) to the Commission Scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys (CSMB), effective July 1, 2019, to address the exceptional influx of newly registered students and immigrant families to Quebec. The Minister’s plan is to bring this forward to the Cabinet for approval, invoking Article 477.1 of the Education Act.

Since February 2018 the LBPSB has been in discussions with the CSMB in order to provide additional student places that deliver secure, appropriate, and sustainable education for their burgeoning student population.

Throughout those discussions the LBPSB’s position has remained; that we are willing, ready, and above all else, capable of educating these students in our system.

Having stated that, we also recognize the exceptional challenges being faced by our colleagues at the CSMB in trying to respond to the extraordinary influx of thousands of new students and our obligation to assist in this crisis.

By the Fall of 2018 the situation had reached a critical level and an urgent request from CSMB to provide accommodation for 2500 students in several municipalities was received. At the same time the Minister of Education intervened, requiring a “concerted” proposal on the part of both boards to develop short and long-term solutions to alleviate this crisis situation.

The LBPSB explored five options with the CSMB as potential solutions:

1. Derogation – new immigrants allowed to register in English schools on humanitarian grounds
2. Rental – leasing of classroom space to CSMB while long-term solutions are developed
3. Collaboration – joint projects in which French and English students participate together

4. Cohabitation – school buildings are subdivided into French and English schools
5. Building Transfer – under-occupied school permanently transferred to CSMB

In mid-December an official response was submitted to the Minister of Education proposing a combination of Derogation, Rental, and Collaboration options and allowing for the possibility of a Building Transfer; although this option would be subject to our existing “Major School Change Policy”, which is an 18-month process, with public consultation.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> our board received notice from the Minister of Education that the rental option should be implemented for early January in two schools, that the derogation of students to register in an English board would not be retained, and of his intention to invoke article 477.1 of the Education Act that permits the Government to transfer a school to another board.

*“As Chair of a Board that prides itself on transparency, that respects its obligations to the communities we serve, and honours its responsibility to work in tandem with its French school-board partner, I can only say that I am worried by the Minister’s decision to accelerate this process while alternative options may still be possible,”* Burke stated.

Burke continued, *“Moreover, the minister must recognize that he is circumventing our school board’s policies on school transfers; and limiting our ability to ensure a smooth transition without negatively affecting the delivery of educational services, our own students, staff, and communities, or the board’s operating budget.”*

*“I am urging the Minister to provide some additional time to allow the two school boards to continue discussions supporting a proposal that will properly protect the interests of the students and their communities. That proposal, of course, would be subject to M. Roberge’s legitimate consideration and ratification.”* Burke concluded by making a formal request for the Minister to meet with the two school boards to discuss the final solution to this approach.

*“In the meantime, we will move quickly to assess the needs required to ensure a respectful and equitable relocation of the staff; and start discussions with our unions and associations.”* Stated Michael Chechile, Director General of the Lester B. Pearson School Board. *“Concurrently, it goes without saying that we will be in direct communications with the school’s communities, and stakeholders, with relevant information on the steps to be taken. This includes student registration, and a strategy to provide ongoing communications to everyone. Our immediate priority will be ensuring that students and staff are cared for with the utmost respect.”*

Riverdale High School also houses the LBPSB’s Sources Adult & Vocational Centre & our CFER program. All indications are they will remain in the building under a rental agreement with CSMB.

**Spokespersons for the LBPSB:**

**Noel Burke, Chair & Michael Chechile, Director General**

**All Media are invited to attend two opportunities to meet with Mr. Noel Burke and Mr. Michael Chechile for interviews and a question period on this announcement.**

**10:00am in the boardroom of the the LBPSB's Head Office**

**Approximately 8:30pm at the board meeting of Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, held at the Head Office. This opportunity will take place after Council's agenda item, "Questions from the Public".**

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All media inquiries will be forwarded for consideration to:

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