



Parents at Gunningsville School are seeking a new facility as the area continues to develop.

## Gunningsville School hits the limit

■ No room for more portables and major development on the way

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Gunningsville School isn't rapidly running out of space. It has rapidly run out of space.

There are now 10 portable classrooms attached to the six-classroom school and there is no room for more.

Add in the fact that East Riverview has become a hot new housing market with hundreds of homes set to be built there over the next four years and you have on your hands a space crunch of epic proportions.

"It is not that the schools are going to be full someday; the schools are full now," says Todd MacLeod, chairman of Gunningsville's Parent School Support Committee. "It doesn't take an engineer to figure out there will be kids sitting outside. There won't be room indoors."

A new school for the area is third on District 2's priority list, behind a new school for the north end and extensive renovations to Moncton High School.

Few people likely understand how vital a new school is better than Brenda Orchard, Riverview's director of corporate services and economic development.

In December, the town approved the construction of 80 more units in the Carriage Hill subdivision and they are expecting 45 more in the spring.

"We're anticipating incredible growth in the east end, partly because of the bridge, partly because of the quality of the developers," she says. "In 2008 alone we are looking at 125 new homes and the prices are attractive to young families, so we are going to have a lot of school age or pre-school age children."

There is room for 730 homes in Carriage Hill, 210 in Harmony Estates, which means the possibility of close to 1,000 new homes over the next four to five years.

"Say even half of those have kids, what is the impact going to be on that school? It is maxed out now with portables and the school is so old," she says. "It has served the community well, but it is time to be put to rest. They really need a new facility."

Although a new school for Riverview is only third on the priority list and the government has already committed to the first two projects, MacLeod realizes that

doesn't necessarily mean the project will go ahead within the next year or two.

"To think three or four years at best, six, seven, eight years at worst — I shudder to think what will be happening over here school-wise," he says.

In the north end of Moncton the district has been able to manage overcrowding at Evergreen Park School by busing students to other schools in the city, an imperfect, but workable solution.

Riverview doesn't have even that luxury as all of the other elementary schools in the town also have little room to spare.

Roméo Goguen, the developer behind Carriage Hill, says they built 130 homes in the last three years, but plan to step it up this year with at least 80 units.

Goguen makes a slightly more conservative estimate of about 400 homes in the next five years just in Carriage Hill.

He says they plan to continue building about 80 units a year as long as the demand is there, but with homes seven minutes from downtown Moncton and the first really big development in Riverview in a number of years, they are getting lots of calls.

That momentum could slow if parents don't have a school nearby to send their children to.

"The ones with families, it is a big issue," Goguen says.

Parents of students and future students of Gunningsville and Lower Coverdale schools were invited to a public meeting two weeks ago to learn more about the situation and what it might mean for their children.

Jaime Benner has a four-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son.

While she knew there was a space issue at the school, she didn't realize how bad conditions were until she attended the information meeting.

"I knew there was a problem, but I had no idea of the extent of the problem," she says, adding she was horrified to learn one of the bathroom ceilings had caved in.

"I can't believe that people aren't screaming their heads off about that," she says.

Gunningsville School was built in 1950 with six classrooms. Ten portable classrooms have been added, but no further washrooms were installed.

A natural spring runs under the building, which creates flooding and thus mold problems in the school, and the building is not wheelchair accessible.

The building also does not meet current standards for things like gym space.

"We were sitting in a larger classroom in the basement and someone made reference to how terrible the gym was," Benner says. "I said, 'How terrible can it be?' and my husband said, 'Jaime, we're in the gym.'"

Benner says the flooding is also a concern to her.

"You do everything you can to protect your children from sickness

and then you're going to send them to an environment where there is mold," she says.

MacLeod says a new school would most likely replace both Gunningsville School, which currently has about 250 students, and Lower Coverdale School, which has about 70.

The district requested the new school accommodate students in kindergarten through Grade 8 to relieve some of the pressure on Riverview Middle School, which now has 820 students.

MacLeod sympathizes with the fact that the government only has so much money to go around.

"But at the same time, at the local level, we just can't wait. It is not a matter of make do with what you have, we can't make do with what we have," he says. "No doubt the government could point around the province and say there are 50 or 100 schools in the same condition, so get in line. But when it comes to the severe overcrowding, I don't think they can say, 'Get in line,' they need to say, 'Get to the front of the line.'"

MacLeod says they've encouraged parents to write letters to the district and the province.

"The more letters that go to the district, the more letters that go to Fredericton, the more it will keep us on the radar of the people who make the decisions of what gets built when," he says. "We want to let them know this is a serious situation, not just that we'd like this, there is no other choice."

The town is so eager to see things move forward that Orchard says they've been pitching options to the district.

The town has future plans for a wellness centre and arena with amenities like cross-country running trails and has suggested a partnership might be of benefit to a school.

"We are not married to any one location," she says. "We just need a new school here and if the possibility of a joint project helps it along, great."