

# Minister visits Riverview school

■ New school a possibility for future, with town willing to donate land

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A new elementary school in East Riverview could be part of the provincial government's next capital budget in December, Education Minister Roland Haché said yesterday.

"There is quite clearly a need for new schools in New Brunswick because the average age of our schools is 40 years," Haché said in an interview in the principal's office after touring the 96-year-old Gunningsville Elementary School in Riverview yesterday.

There has been increasing pressure from the town and council to build a new school for East Riverview. Election-style signs can be found along local streets and roads urging that a new school is needed immediately. Several of these signs mysteriously appeared in prominent places along the route to the old school in advance of the education minister's visit to make sure the message wasn't missed.

"The pressure is there and the aging infrastructure is there. The amount of money that would be needed to bring the schools up to par in New Brunswick is about half a billion dollars. That's a whole lot of money and because we don't have the money to do all of that at once, we will do one while the others continue to age."

Earlier this year, the province entered into a public-private partnership with a Nova Scotia-based developer to build new schools in north-end Moncton and Rexton.

Haché was in Metro Moncton yesterday as part of a round-the-province tour of school districts to familiarize himself with the system and meet with district administrators. He said he has toured one school in each district and the choice in District 2 — which administers 37 English-language schools in southeastern New Brunswick — was Gunningsville Elementary.

First constructed in the old brick schoolhouse style in 1953, Gunningsville Elementary has had several additions over the years. It is located just off the Hillsborough Road just a few streets east of the new Gunningsville Bridge and is home to about 270 students in Kindergarten through Grade 5. The old brick building has a large segment of portables built on.

Principal Adam Rogerson led Haché around the school, pointing out such shortcomings as a small gymnasium with hardly any equipment, and the fact there is no wheelchair access for students. The minister stopped into a few classrooms to visit with students, one of whom asked if he was Dr. Phil of TV fame.

Rogerson said the school is filled to capacity with students and the Town of



Gunningsville Elementary School Principal Adam Rogerson, right, and Education Minister Roland Haché, left, take a walk through the school so the minister could see firsthand why residents and local politicians are calling for the construction of a new school.

Riverview has joined in the campaign to have it replaced. Riverview Mayor Clarence Sweetland recently led a delegation to Fredericton to meet with Haché and make the case for a new school. The town is prepared to donate a piece of land for the school and has a dream of combining it somehow with a new arena and wellness centre which would provide more services for town residents and encourage more economic development. The town is thinking about using land near the air traffic control centre on Old Coach Road. That location would be right in the middle of a development zone that would be created by construction of another road between Gunningsville Boulevard and Hillsborough Road near John's Garden Centre. It is believed a new school would help draw in more residential and commercial development in a part of East Riverview which is now forest.

"They (Riverview council) explained to me why a new school would be important as far as the development of their community is concerned. It was a very productive meeting and I'm sure we will be talking about that in the future," Haché said.

Karen Branscombe, superintendent of School District 2, said a new school is the No. 1 priority on the district's list of capital projects. She likes the idea of a combined school, arena and wellness centre complex. She noted that the district already has a partnership with the town to operate the aquatic centre and Riverview Arts Centre, which are located inside Riverview High School.

Aubrey Kirkpatrick, director of finance and administration for School District 2, said the new school would likely cost in the area of \$24 million, depending on the design. He said a new school would be designed to accommodate about 600 students, which would take the pressure off the Coverdale School, which has about 80 students, and the Riverview Middle School which has more than 800. Riverview Middle School is also an aging structure and filled to capacity. The Town of Riverview has a population of just under 18,000 and is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years with new subdivisions and increased commercial development.

The current Byron Dobson Memorial Arena has two ice surfaces but people involved with the hockey association often complain there is not enough ice time available to accommodate the demand from hockey, ringette, figure skating, various clinics and public skating. Sweetland has said the town would love to build a new arena and wellness centre, but Riverview needs more tax revenue and is trying to lure more commercial development.

Haché also praised the dedication and professionalism of local schools and administrators he has seen while visiting district offices and schools across the province.

"There is a lot of enthusiasm about education. I've heard a lot of positive things and seen the atmosphere and the enthusiasm. When the kids are happy something good is going on."