

Another new school close to capacity

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Riverview East opened in January, and teachers are already using speciality classrooms as homerooms

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Another new school in Metro Moncton is facing space issues.

Riverview East School, a kindergarten-to-Grade 8 school located at 49 Chambers St., opened in January 2014 and is already approaching capacity.

The school was designed to accommodate 650 students and currently has

621 students. Before the new school opened, 519 students were set to attend the school, coming from Gunningsville, Lower Coverdale and Riverview Middle schools.

"They've already had to use some non-designated homeroom spaces," Supt. Gregg Ingersoll said on Wednesday of how staff are dealing with the issue.

As a new school, there are lots of these rooms, he said, but it was never the intention for art and science classrooms and the like to be used as general classrooms.

"The good news is that they have those spaces, and they still have a couple more, but if the trend continues the way it's going, they're going to run out of those spaces pretty soon," he said.

The district isn't unfamiliar with the problem of overcrowding in up-and-coming, young neighbourhoods.

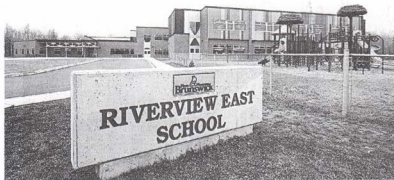
"Whenever you build a new school, the community tends to grow up around it," Ingersoll said, noting the issue is reminiscent of what's happening in the north end of Moncton, with overcrowding at Northrop Frye School.

In minutes from the school's Parent School Support Committee (PSSC) meeting in April, concerns were voiced regarding space issues.

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Riverview East School is already nearing capacity after opening in January. PHOTO: GREG AGNEW/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

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At that time, the school was still taking registrations for kindergarten for this school year and already had enough students to fill 29 homerooms. The school has only 27 homerooms.

The minutes say the next steps in addressing the space issue were to get the support of the district education council and vote on the issue when there were enough members to make quorum.

Ingersoll said the council received a letter from the PSSC in May, to which he replied in June.

"Increasing enrolment is certainly a health and welcome sign in any community considering that the overall student enrolment in NB is on the decline," he wrote. "It does however create concerns as you have expressed regarding the capacity of the school for the future."

"In situations where the school is nearing its capacity we look at all possible options to solving the issue," he wrote later in the letter. "Some of those options include moving programs, changing boundaries, school reconfigurations, and once all of the above applying for an addition to the school or for the construction of a new school in the area to alleviate the pressure."

Ingersoll said on Wednesday the district hasn't started looking at any of these options just yet, but as kindergarten registrations roll in, they'll get a better indication of whether or not they'll be in trouble next year.

A temporary solution would be to ask the province to add a portable classroom for a couple years.

Another short-term solution would be to change the boundaries in Riverview because there is a bit of room in other Riverview elementary schools (Claude D. Taylor, West Riverview and Frank L. Bowser), as well as at Hillsborough Elementary.

But this isn't a short-term problem, Ingersoll said, having seen some population projections for that area, which means the district education council may seek a long-term solution as part of its major capital funding requests next year.

"I definitely think the problem is going to continue," he said. "This isn't going to go away."

Ingersoll noted there would be consultation with parents before any decision was made.

Overcrowding isn't the only issue at the new school.

Students and staff weren't able to use

their two sports fields last spring and this fall because they weren't in good enough condition.

The quality of the fields, especially the quality and quantity of the grass, is the main problem.

Ingersoll said the matter should have been dealt with last spring, but it wasn't. Now they'll have to wait until winter passes and check the state of the fields in the spring.

The district is working closely with Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and the contractor to fix the problem, he said.

The \$21.6-million school, which covers 10,230 square metres (110,074 square feet), was set to open in September 2014, but that opening was moved to January 2015 because of construction delays, primarily a faulty foundation. The school features 27 kindergarten and general teaching classrooms; multi-function classrooms; a performing arts classroom; dedicated music, art and science classrooms; a middle school technology education classroom; project work areas; resource and special care spaces; two gyms; a library/seminar room; a shared stage that allows viewing of performances from either the gym or cafeteria; and administration and personnel spaces.