

## All-girls plus all-boys equals nervous parents



TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR

Vanessa Tillner, a Grade 12 student at St. Joseph Morrow Park, poses outside her school, which the Catholic board has to relocate. (May 26, 2009)

**Plan to put two Catholic schools side by side draws fire: 'Does this make sense to anybody?'**

May 28, 2009 04:30 AM

**KRISTIN RUSHOWY**  
EDUCATION REPORTER

Would there be enough room for the Holy Ghost?

Maybe not, if the Toronto Catholic board relocates an all-girls high school right beside an all-boys school.

Some parents at St. Joseph Morrow Park say they don't mind their daughters on the same campus as the boys of Brebeuf.

But others, as if in deference to the nuns' age-old rule that boys and girls "make room for the Holy Ghost" while dancing, believe the idea of side-by-side schools is too close for comfort.

"As long as there's a 20-foot fence in between, I don't see any problem with that," laughs Walter Tillner, who is head of the parent council at St. Joseph Morrow and has a daughter in Grade 12.

All joking aside, he said what parents really want is for the board to build a new school at the current St. Joseph Morrow site on Bayview Ave. south of Steeles – even if that means expropriating a few of the 22 hectares of land sold for \$40 million by the Sisters of St. Joseph to Tyndale University College and Seminary, a Christian post-secondary institution.

The high school has a long history with the sisters and has been at the site for 50 years, he added.

"To be perfectly honest, why would you have an all-girls school and an all-boys school if you are putting them right beside each other? Does this make sense to anybody?" said local Trustee Maria Rizzo, adding the "overwhelming best choice" is for the school to remain at its current location.

But Tyndale needs the land to expand its campus, although it is negotiating to extend the lease so that the girls can stay put until 2013, said Randy Henderson, chief operating officer.

Besides, the Toronto Catholic District School Board says there is no money to buy land.

It has instead put forward two choices for community consultation: A new school on a shared campus with Brebeuf or a move southeast to St. Leonard's school, near Leslie St. and Finch Ave. E., which was closed years ago.

Provincial supervisor Norbert Hartmann said the next step is to ask for public input to "see what in fact is feasible."

Further complicating matters is that a move to Brebeuf would affect St. Agnes Catholic School, which already shares the 7-hectare site with the boys' school.

The small elementary school has such a good reputation for academics and programs that it draws many of its students from neighbouring York Region, said parent Michael Lio. They would be lost if the school is demolished to make way for an all-girls high school, he adds.

"St. Agnes is quite unique," said Lio, who criticized the board for a lack of communication on the issue. "We've worked hard as a community to build this extraordinary little school we've got."

Darlene Canton, whose son is in Grade 9 at Brebeuf, says too many students would be affected.

"Why would you upset the students, possibly move students and create upheaval to build a new school in our backyard when you have a site (St. Leonard) already available that could be ready in a month, ready to go?" she asked.

However, some of the girls' parents have said St. Leonard is too far and the school might lose its 905-area students. They also complain it is in a less desirable neighbourhood and too close to a hydro corridor.

St. Joseph Morrow and Brebeuf already run activities together, such as fundraisers and dances. Canton is worried that if the all-girls school moves in, the schools could start offering co-ed classes in under-enrolled subjects, which happened at one other location where the board has side-by-side, single-sex schools. "We want it to remain a boys' school ... there are huge learning style differences between boys and girls, and that's one of the main reasons that parents do send their sons to boys' school."

Residents near Brebeuf say there is no room to accommodate the traffic should 800 students be added to the mix.

They're also worried the board could expropriate some of their homes for school parking. But that's not the only issue.

"Two weeks ago, (some students) took my tulips and tried to sell them to my neighbours. I mean, these things happen and we are tolerant of the situation," said Sabina Almeida, adding she always sees Brebeuf teens smoking outside.

"But with parents picking up their kids, everyone delivering and picking up their kids all the time," any such changes would put too much of a strain on the neighbourhood.

"Can you imagine if there's over 2,000 students, and on top of that an all-boys school beside an all-girls school?" she said. "What hormone levels will be going on?"