

Centennial Academy's UDL framework is a 'success story'

BY ISAAC OLSON

According to a recent paper produced by Frederic Fovet, Centennial Academy is at the "forefront of inclusive education in Quebec" for its application of "universal design for learning" principles.

Universal design for learning, or UDL, is an educational framework that caters to each individual student's needs and provides an inclusive learning environment that helps students succeed while, at the same time, teaching them to learn – a skill they can carry with them into the higher tiers of education.

Produced in June of this year, Forvet's *The Centennial Success Story* outlines the school's ongoing implementation of educational principles that provide a flexible learning environment for students. UDL accommodates each person's unique learning differences at both the high school and college levels. Fovet is a former teacher and principal who currently works as an inclusion and UDL consultant. He was the director of the students with disabilities office at McGill University for a number of years and, while there, he implemented a campus-wide integration of UDL principles.

"Centennial believes in putting into place systems and structures that shape the learning environment in the optimum way for the learner," he writes in a report



Centennial: Centennial Academy, as seen here on September 28, is providing students with a UDL framework that continues to be a success.

that examines that ability to cater to the individual needs of such a diverse population of learning profiles.

Centennial Academy is located at 3641 Prud'homme Ave., just south of Côte St. Antoine Rd. Across the street is Centennial College CEGEP. At the academy, 94 percent of the students graduate after five years. The five-year graduation rate province-wide is 74 percent. Nearly all of the school's students move on to CEGEP

and university despite the fact that 90 percent of the school's population has diagnosed learning challenges.

Head of school Angela Burgos attributes this success to following this individualized, UDL format.

"It's providing students with choices," began Burgos in a September 28 interview with the *Free Press*. "At the college level, all the teachers design courses so that they have a variety of evaluation strategies. In-

stead of students just writing papers, there are presentations, essays and group work so that students have a variety of ways to show they are learning."

Every student, she says, gets extra time for tests and study periods are integrated into the high school students' daily schedules so they can do homework and study with the help of a teacher. It's a matter of changing the environment so that all students will benefit from the accommodations. Centennial's high school students are trained to become learners to the point, she said, that they won't need to attend Centennial College as the college is designed to assist learners with challenges as well.

At the high school, she noted, it's a three-block model that builds a caring community. It includes all students rather than dividing them and it allows them all to feel accepted. Teachers go to students rather than having the students lug their books around all day, she said, and, while they provide curriculum as set by Quebec standards, it is delivered with "instructional practices that really break things down," said Burgos.

"We help students become autonomous, resilient learners through innovation and collaboration," Brugos said. "Our vision is to be the preeminent school that helps students conquer the challenges of learning."