

## AMISKWACIY ACADEMY 101

# New native school ready to fly

**Old airport to serve as new home base for 800 after \$5.3M in renovations**

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Edmonton Public Schools will spend up to \$5.3 million to upgrade and renovate the old City Centre Airport terminal to accommodate the Amiskwaciy Academy native studies school.

"With those dollars we're going to build computer labs, science labs, home economics," said Gary Reynolds, department supervisor for Edmonton Public Schools. "What you could call unique features of the school will be arts and ceramics labs, industrial and traditional arts labs."

The two-storey, 85,762 sq-ft one-time terminal building will be sectioned into classroom and other functional space.

There's no gymnasium planned for Amiskwaciy, but renovations will include a new facade for the school, perimeter fencing for the side facing the airfield and other site improvements.

The school board put out a call for expressions of interest for the fast-track modernization project last week, with bids closing a couple of weeks ago.

Manasc Isaac Architects earlier won the design bid for the academy and the winning tender for a general contractor will be named next month.

Richard Isaac said the building presents some challenges in its current configuration. The interior will be gutted and some washrooms moved. But aside from a zig-zagging central hallway to ensure exits are all connected, there aren't any real oddities, Isaac said. The former terminal's solid masonry, rectangular shape and size make it fully functional for a school.

"It will be a great school. We took advantage of the givens in the existing design," said Isaac. "It will be a good use of available space."

The ground level, or former arrivals area, will contain classroom space and administration.

The one-time departures area



Architect Richard Isaac holds a computer-generated image of what the front entrance of the terminal building will eventually look like when transformed for Amiskwaciy native school.

GREG SOUTHAM, THE JOURNAL

on the second floor lends itself to creative use of a passenger lounge and high-ceiling open space that will serve as a gathering place and cafeteria. A portable stage will help in doubling it as a drama area and a former restaurant becomes home for home economics.

The exterior will see dramatic change. An overhanging concrete canopy over the former taxi and drop-off area will be redesigned for aesthetics and will become a second-floor balcony.

The airfield side of the building will be landscaped with a combination of earth berms and walls to provide a usable outside area that will provide shelter from air-plane noise and be a showcase for art displays.

Still up in the air is whether the third floor, one-time security and observation area, can be used. There are no elevators to the level and the area has to be fully accessible before it can be converted to school use.

On the realty side, Mark Kolke

of Colliers International handled lease arrangements with Edmonton Public Schools and Gibraltar Capital Corp. of Vancouver, which took out a long-term lease on the terminal property from Edmonton Airports last spring.

The school board is sub-leasing the building from Gibraltar over a 25-year term. That agreement is expected to be completed by year's end, Reynolds said.

Edmonton Public Schools had an initial list of 45 potential school sites, but the airport terminal was always at the top. Its location, configuration, size and proximity to public transit were among determining factors.

"We feel that the financial terms of this site were as good and as fair as any of the other submissions. So not only is it a good site, but we felt the economics are reasonable," Reynolds said. Other potential sites would have been much more costly to make suitable, he said.

Amiskwaciy began as a native studies school this fall with 290 students in an old Ed Tel building at 105th Street and 103rd Avenue. With a projected enrolment of 800 for next September, the school was forced to seek new accommodation.

Edmonton City Council approved the new use for the terminal this month, clearing the last hurdle for Amiskwaciy's relocation.

The building was mothballed when scheduled passenger service was consolidated at Edmonton International Airport five years ago, following a plebiscite.

The Kingsway Business Association petitioned city council not to approve converting the terminal building into a school.

Locating Amiskwaciy at the airport is the latest in a string of developments since 1995 that has decreased the viability of the facility for aerospace and aviation use, said Paul Gervais, chairperson of the business group.