

Parents protest unlocked front doors on elementary schools

By Tim Whitnell
Metroland Media Group

A handful of parents from Kilbride Public school in north Burlington headed south yesterday to voice their concern over the Halton public school board's recent decision to unlock the front doors to its 85 elementary schools.

Sanctions remain until high school deal ratified

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No dates have been announced for the ratification votes by teachers and trustees. Details of the deal would be released upon ratification.

The OSSTF represents 1,300 permanent full- and part-time high school teachers at the Halton District School Board. Local administrative sanctions remain until the tentative agreement has been ratified by both sides.

The provincial body of the OSSTF ratified a central bargaining contract in September.

The front doors to those schools across the region have been left unlocked since yesterday (Monday).

It is the board's response to the recently ramped up job sanctions by the union local representing, among others, office clerical school support staff. Secretaries will not utilize a buzzer system that unlocks the front door to allow people into the school through the front door. All other doors to the school are to remain locked during the day, a common practice for about the last two years.

In Halton, the 400 members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation District 20 (OSSTF)/Office, Clerical and Technical Unit (OCTU) have been working with out a new contract since Aug. 31, 2014. OCTU consists mainly of full-time workers like secretaries, library technicians, facilities maintenance and accounts payroll staff, and about 100 casual workers.

School office staff has become the focal point of the doors debate.

"We feel that leaving the doors unlocked ... is compromising our children's safety, which should never, ever



Kilbride elementary school parents protested unlocked front doors at their school and other Halton public schools as part of the school support staff union's work-to-rule campaign. Kilbride P.S. from left to right Carol Pembey-Ollerenshaw, Carolyn Slizys, Sarah Jensen and Nikki Ferreira.

Riziero Vertolli photo

be used as a bargaining tactic in these labour disputes and sanctions...." Kilbride parent Jennifer Millar Giudice said.

"We really appreciate that our (school's) support staff are in an awkward position," said Sarah Jensen, president of Kilbride P.S.'s Parent Council for the past six years. "We are disappointed with the (Halton public) board leaving them (unlocked) and saying we have to work around it. We don't want to over-react but is it about the kids or isn't it, about their safety and health," Jensen asked.

She said the unlocking of the front doors "is the most disruptive issue we've had in our school."

"We have a nice community in Halton. It (door locks) won't stop someone

if they really want to come in, but it slows them down," she noted.

New Halton public board Education Director Stuart Miller met the parent protesters outside and then invited the small group to talk inside the board office with him and Superintendent Rob Eatough.

Jensen said the senior board officials tried to reassure them that the children's safety was not in jeopardy. She said she's still determined though to take the issue up with Burlington's MPP and the school office staffers' union.

Before he met with the group of parents, Miller said there have been no safety issues brought to his attention during the first two days of unlocked school front doors.

"We've had people express their

concerns and anxiety and we're getting back to as many as possible.... I've also had emails from parents saying it's no problem."

Miller, who just took over the top job at the board on Oct. 1 from outgoing education director David Euale, said they were only informed of the union's intention not to unlock doors from the main office last Friday.

Miller, after consulting with his senior management team, decided later that day to leave the front doors unlocked starting Monday.

He wouldn't comment when asked if there was a timetable for leaving the front doors unlocked, but did say his staff is having ongoing discussions with certain groups about the matter.

In Toronto, Peel, York and Durham regions, school secretaries have not been prohibited by their CUPE union locals from buzzing people in through the locked front door. Instead, the union has instructed secretaries not to multi-task when the buzzer rings and file for overtime if the interruptions mean they can't get their work finished.

— with Toronto Star files

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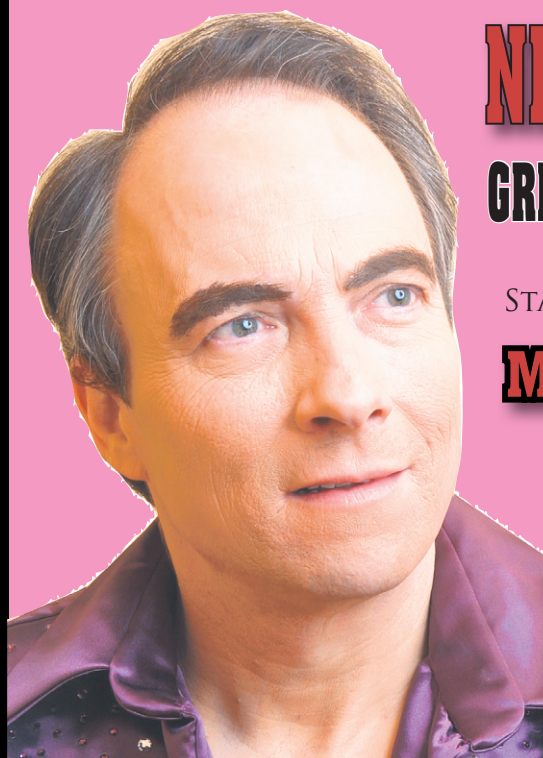
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