

Community

Condom dispensers seen as health issue

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

Though some members of the Halton Hills community are bound to object to the idea of installing condom dispensers in Halton high schools, local trustees and high school principals are cautiously supporting the idea for health reasons.

A study into the feasibility of installing condom dispensers in secondary school washrooms is currently being done by Bob Williams, Director of Education for Halton, and Robert Nosal, Medical Officer of Health. Over the next few months, opinions from parents, students and community members on the issue will be gathered by the board to be compiled in a report.

"They won't be put in schools if people don't want them," said Mr. Williams.

However, judging from the opinions of principals and trustees, the machines may be accepted as a viable way to help prevent the spread of sexual diseases, mainly AIDS.

"I think we're shutting our eyes to the problem and I know we have to take steps to deal with this social problem of sexual activity in the schools," said Halton Hills trustee, Arlene Bruce. "Condoms may be a possibility to deal with the threat of AIDS."

She said that education about the problem isn't enough.

Bryn Davies, principal of Georgetown District High School, said as a professional, he's sensitive to the community's point of

view and hasn't made a decision on the issue. But personally, he's not opposed to condom dispensers in schools.

"I have a 13-year-old daughter and if she was ever in a position where she was tempted to engage in sexual intercourse, I'd rather she had a condom than not," he said. "Statistics suggest that sexual activity has been on the increase over the decades and I can certainly understand the intensity of adolescent emotions and how teenagers can be overcome by these emotions."

Statistics presented by Medical Officer of Health, Mr. Nosal, indicate how common sexual activity among high school students is. These statistics, taken from a study conducted by Queen's University, found 31 per cent of male grade nine students and 21 per cent of female grade nine students report having intercourse at least once, while 49 per cent of male grade 11 students and 46 per cent of female grade 11 students reported having intercourse at least once.

But Mr. Davies, and his colleague, Acton High School principal Ozzie Caldarelli, say there are two sides to the issue.

Both agree that everyone, including the school, should do all they can to prevent AIDS infection among students, but wonder if the placement of condoms in the school might promote sexual activity.

"We have to ask ourselves, are we encouraging or condoning early sexual activity," said Mr. Caldarelli, "or are we just helping prevent dangers in something that is happening anyway."

He senses public opinion will support the idea and that condom dispensers will eventually be installed in schools.

This follows statistics collected in a Canada-wide survey commissioned by the Gallup National Omnibus and the Canadian Public Health Association which questioned 1,044 adults 18 years and older and 104 16-to-17 year olds regarding AIDS transmission and prevention.

Sixty-one per cent of Ontario adults felt condom dispensers should be installed in high

schools, while 73 per cent of the 16-to-17 year olds surveyed approved of the idea.

Mr. Nosal concluded that "use of condoms is an important preventative measure for both unwanted pregnancies and contracting sexually transmitted diseases."

However, he said, the placement of dispensers is just one part in a whole larger puzzle of the health campaign. The other pieces include; a post to support sexual abstinence, a healthy relationship newsletter for parents and a student survey. These aspects of the campaign were approved by Halton Region Health Department.

He views the machines as a part "of an overall community strategy to deal with the serious health problems of AIDS. I hope condom dispensers will be made more available in general places like washrooms in bars or other entertainment establishments," he said.

School boards stretching limit

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

In light of a recent work-to-rule action 100 English Catholic secondary school teachers commenced against the Dufferin-Peel Catholic schools, President of Halton's association is predicting the same thing could happen in many regions, including Halton.

"I think the Catholic school boards will take the full process in more cases than in the past because of the hard economic times," said Jerry Keyes, President of the Halton Secondary Ontario English Catholic Teacher's Association.

He said it's not advantageous for boards to settle early when contract settlements are being reached because there are many working conditions "which cannot be made retroactive."

For instance, if teachers ask for a lower 'People Teacher Ratio' (PTR), and negotiations go past September when classes have already begun, the board won't lower the ratio because kids would have to be pulled out of classes.

"The teachers get stuck with the same working conditions from their last contract. They have to continue with the same salaries, same conditions and whatever else is in the contract if the board won't settle because often boards won't make these changes retroactive," he said.

These actions save the board money. By not agreeing to teacher's requests in a time when changes could be made, the board doesn't have to hire new staff to improve working conditions simply because the change can't be made retroactive. "The boards end up getting half a year for virtually nothing," said Mr. Keyes.

This is what's happened in Dufferin-Peel where teachers and the board failed to reach a contract settlement for the 1990-91 school year. Their agreement expired last August and they have been in negotiations since last April. (The contract was recently settled).

Halton's agreement doesn't expire until Aug. 31 of this year, but teachers are already working on a new contract which they will present to the board for negotiation in February, said Mr. Keyes.

"It's too early to say if Halton will end up taking the action Dufferin-Peel teachers did," said Mr. Keyes.

But Mr. Keyes thinks overall, "boards will be going the limit" of negotiations to the point where teachers may be forced to strike to reach a settlement they're satisfied with.

The teachers association has begun developing a contract. The process begins by circulating a survey to all teachers in order to determine what changes teachers want in their collective agreement. These suggestions are drawn up in an initial proposal and the proposal is voted on

by all association teachers who can then accept, disagree or change aspects of the proposal.

This will take until February when the Halton Catholic school board will get their chance to review the proposal.

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