

Trustees should determine fate of school uniforms— HCDSB

By **TIM WHITNELL**
Metroland Media Group

A special committee of the Halton Catholic District School Board has recommended that the power to make decisions about students wearing uniforms in its elementary schools be in the hands of elected trustees, not parents.

However, the committee is also suggesting school communities require a lower threshold of votes, a simple majority (50 per cent plus one), if they want to opt out of the program.

Since 2009, 29 of the Halton Catholic board's 41 elementary school communities have participated in the current school voting process, which requires a two-thirds majority for acceptance of uniforms.

Twelve of the board's elementary school communities so far have opted not to conduct a vote.

Uniforms are mandatory at the board's eight high schools.

Four Halton Catholic elementary schools have implemented a uniform dress code to date: St. Elizabeth Seton and St. Gabriel of Burlington, Guardian Angels of Milton and St. James of Oakville.

Of the four schools that voted for a uniform dress code, St. Gabriel and Guardian Angels did so overwhelmingly, with 92 per cent and 89 per cent of voters respectively saying yes, while voters at St. Elizabeth Seton and St. James barely achieved the needed two-thirds majority with 68 and 67 per cent respectively saying yes.

The school uniform ad hoc committee, consisting of the board's nine trustees, met five times between March and June in 2012 to consider the hot-button issue of elementary school student uniforms.

It received feedback from some parents and school administrators.

"School communities are pretty evenly

split on whether to have uniforms," Oakville trustee and ad hoc committee chairman Anthony Danko told the board at a recent meeting.

"Where there are schools that have uniforms, they are happy to have them. At other schools (without them) there is less support."

The opinion of school councils is split on whether the decision-making power to implement uniforms should remain with individual school communities or be delegated to the school board.

One thing the ad hoc committee said was clear is that the current school uniform process is "contentious and divisive within the school communities."

Board staff received 36 responses from elementary school administrators with the vast majority preferring that decision-making authority for uniforms be shifted to the board. Increased pressure and workload at the school level under the current policy were cited as reasons for wanting the change.

There are two other recommendations of the ad hoc committee.

One is to allow parents of Kindergarten pupils registered to attend the following school year to be eligible to cast a vote on uniforms.

Also, the committee suggests possibly expanding the list of school uniform providers from the perspective of convenience and cost.

The recommendations of the school uniform ad hoc committee— it has disbanded since filing its report with the board on June 19— have to be referred back to the board's policy committee for consideration.

The issue can come back to the board, possibly this fall, with a policy rescindment required and then a trustee motion incorporating suggested changes for a new school uniform policy.

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JENNI VENERUZ

Q: What can I expect from couple counseling?

A: In my experience, when people talk about their relationship problems, they tend to attribute the responsibility to their partner and how they are just not living up to their expectations. These biased conversations are rarely effective as they fail to acknowledge the relationship as an independent entity and how each spouse contributes to the "dance" they create together.

When couples come to counseling, their first session often resembles a court proceeding where the therapist is expected to act as judge and jury. This experience is rather painful and discouraging, and explains why many don't follow through with counseling.

Counseling should be viewed as a process where spouses assist each other to grow and appreciate each other rather than one that is meant to criticize. Counseling should assist you in learning the following: how your relationship is a special space where you will keep each other safe, avoid war by having collaborative conversations, understand that your approach to intimacy is hard wired in your brain rather than intentional, how to soothe each other emotionally instead of jumping into the melée and escalating the exchange, build in rituals for connection in your busy schedule, become each others go-to person, and how to rekindle love and erotic desire.

Follow the next few issues of Manon's short articles to learn more.
Manon Dulude Ph.D. is a certified member of OACCPP and a professional certified coach.

Q: What is the #1 thing you can suggest to improve and maintain my health?

A: There are many treatments, strategies and lifestyle changes that can benefit your well-being but there is one thing that you can do anywhere, anytime and any place that can truly improve your overall health. This treatment is drug-free, injection-free and surgery-free. It has been shown to improve health problems such as hypertension, diabetes, dementia, Alzheimer's and reduce hip fractures. It has been proven to decrease anxiety, depression and fatigue. What is this miracle cure?

Exercise. 30 minute of exercise per day, even something as simple as walking, has shown incredible health benefits such as decreasing, pain, disability and improve overall quality of life. Low fitness and obesity combined with inactivity have been one of the strongest predictors of untimely death.

Dedicate at least half an hour to some form of fitness and you will reap the greatest return on investment for your health. Walk to work, take the stairs, play tennis with a friend or join a gym. Keep it up and your health will improve. Physiotherapists are specialists in promoting activity and mobility and can help you start on a safe routine.

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