

School board studies protocols to run extracurriculars

Bringing extracurricular activities back to Halton schools involves developing a protocol for volunteer involvement and assessing what, if any, individual teachers plan to do this term.

Jeff Blackwell, Assistant-Director of the Halton District School Board (HDSB), said staff would speak with principals this week. On Friday he said they would "continue to ask our principals to ask our teachers, and to invite teachers to consider... what you are planning to do this semester or term."

The ban on after-school activities – everything from bands to sports teams to chess clubs – are the fall-out of labour unrest by public elementary and secondary school teachers in response to Bill 115, which removed teachers' bargaining rights, froze wages and cut benefits. HDSB trustees voted unanimously in early February to ask the director to develop and implement strategies

to ensure extracurricular activities are properly supervised.

Blackwell said while some parents have come forward and offered to help run programs and events that can't happen until the Board has a protocol in place to ensure student safety. "Up to this point, we haven't taken them up on it – we were hoping to see some pick up by our staff. The Board wants to know that we are engaged in conversations and looking ahead..."

He said they would ask principals if there are low-risk, low-safety issue activities – like a chess club, environmental club – that could run with a parent volunteer as long as the principal is on-site. "Whenever we bring someone in who's not a staff member, you've got to have a really good protocol for managing that so they're comfortable, the kids are comfortable (and) the kids are safe...and it is a positive experience."

He said the "real crux" of the current situation is that current Board policy requires staff supervision or a staff liaison, and "that's what we don't have right now."

Blackwell said in some schools some teachers are running some "very, very low keyed" extracurricular activities – including lunch hour IT clubs. At McKenzie-Smith Bennett there are no after-school activities taking place. At Robert Little School, students will take place in a dance-a-thon, but it would happen during the school day with teacher supervision, not after or during nutritional breaks.

Blackwell said that's how they hope to engage students. "If they are presenting a musical – a spring show – all of the preparations will happen during class time in music, and drama and dance in curriculum time," Blackwell said. While they can't turn the instructional day into the music or sports program, they can provide



READY TO ROCK: DJ Sarah Smith (centre) provided the tunes and Town staffers Myra Kohler (left) and Rachel Inniss the supervision at the Town's sparsely-attended monthly youth dance at the Acton arena/community centre on Friday – Ted Tyler photo

some extracurricular activities – like a track and field meet – if the practices take place during gym classes.

At the high school level, Blackwell said student leaders, because of their age and abilities, have been able to keep some activities going. At Acton High student leaders organized a semi-

formal, and that same group may run a student-led prom, if the teachers don't do it. Blackwell said while students are disappointed that extracurricular activities have been suspended, they are also very respectful, even though they are unhappy.

Blackwell acknowledges banning extracurricular activities was not an easy

decision for teachers to make because those involved with them, do it on a volunteer basis because they "love to do them." "It's tough. It's really, really tough," he said, adding they hope that with a new Premier and new Minister of Education at Queen's Park, the impasse will be resolved.



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By Julie Conroy

Valentine's Day was celebrated in a very special way by 126 members and guests at the Acton Senior's Social evening on February 14. Roses and chocolates on the tables helped to create the mood, whether you were with a partner or just friends the evening was very special. As usual, everyone was up dancing

or enjoying listening to Ron and Betty, better known as *Juke Box*.

Door prizes were won by Nives Bozic, Eileen Dix, Siena Ancker, Carol Hawke, Anna Arnold, Mary Humenyk, Louise Marjerrison, Joanne Feenstra, Joan Leonard, Judy Knuff, Sonia Malysa and Kim Odette. Pat Chapman certainly enjoyed Valentine's Day as she won the

50/50 and went home with \$131. I am sure she shared it with Orville.

Betty Brewer had the only mooner at Bid Euchre last Thursday afternoon. There have been some requests for regular Euchre if there is enough interest the Centre will find a suitable day and time.

March 5 is not very far away, so please remember to write the annual general meeting down on your calendar. It is very important that all members attend. There are several board positions vacant. If you, or a person you know would like to commit to two years as a board member please talk to Wendy or Michelle in the office or Mary Walsma.

Starting on February 28, we will be following the Acton Senior Centre's travel policy rules for our trips to Rama. You will have to come to the Centre, sign up and pay. You will receive a receipt from the cash register and your name will be marked paid on the sign up sheet. If you have any questions please talk to Wilda Tressel.

The person whose name was drawn last Friday had not put her loonie in the box. Next week the prize money should be around \$200.

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