



CtK student honoured

At a recent ceremony at Christ the King Catholic High School, Grade 9 student Harnoor Gill was honoured with a Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, presented by Robert Thibeau (right) and veteran and Metis Elder Joe Paquette. Thibeau, President, Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones (AVA), told the group how the environment is an important issue for all Canadians, and the AVA recognized Gill and his work. AVA advocates on behalf of veterans and their families to ensure benefits due to military service are available. *Photo by Ted Brown*

Chair says board 'not taking sides' despite letter

By **DOMINIK KUREK**
Metroland Media Group

Despite strong wording against the provincial government in a letter to parents, Halton District School Board Chair Amy Collard says trustees are not taking sides in the labour dispute between teachers and the Province.

Instead, she said, the letter is meant to show another side of the labour situation—the board's perspective.

The letter was sent out near the end of the workday last Wednesday on behalf of the board of trustees.

It begins: "The Trustees of the Halton District School Board wish to publicly express their disappointment and dissatisfaction with the way in which this latest round of labour negotiations has been managed by the Ontario government."

Collard agreed the wording is strong.

"We realize it might come out strong and I may get some calls over this, but we really are trying to catch the attention of people that there's more to this than perhaps they've seen in the paper or heard on the news or even heard from the mouths of the union leaders and the mouths of the ministry. We want them to understand there's another perspective. We are the employer and we were not party to this," she said.

The letter refers to the handling of contract negotiations between the Ministry of Education and teacher and education support worker unions and the use of the Province's Bill 115.

The bill was used to impose contracts on teacher unions that had not signed agreements with their boards already. It also set out contract parameters for boards and unions to work towards and made changes to the Education Act.

Early in the school year, teachers cancelled extra-curricular activities and did not do certain administrative tasks. The elementary teachers' unions held rotating strikes, forcing school boards to close schools for one day.

Most recently, teachers threatened to protest, forcing many boards to close elementary schools. The protest was cancelled in the wake of an Ontario Labour Board ruling.

"We want parents to understand why we wrote letters to ask for Bill 115 to be repealed and why we wrote letters to ask for regulation 274/12 to be repealed. It's because we actually believe they're not in the best interest of students," Collard said.

Regulation 274/12 changes the way boards hire teachers. To hire full-time permanent teachers, boards have to select applicants from a roster of their occasional teachers, based on seniority.

The letter adds the bill takes away the board's ability to negotiate local terms with teacher unions and that the majority of the school boards in Ontario have not been involved in the most recent contract negotiations.

"Most recently the ministry negotiated with CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) and our board was not even aware that the negotiations were taking place," the letter says.

The letter also mentions the trustees' hope that teachers will refrain from further action that negatively impacts students.

"We really don't take sides. We just want what's best for students and we felt the students were being left out of the conversation," Collard said.

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