

Board to allow volunteers to supervise extracurriculars

By **DOMINIK KUREK**
Metroland Media Group

Except for a few pockets of extracurricular activities run under-the-radar by renegade teachers, students in public schools have been mostly devoid of programming beyond the classroom this year.

However, now members of the community will have a chance to fix that.

The Halton District School Board will soon be allowing volunteers to be the supervisors of extracurricular activities.

This means there will be a return to sports, clubs and groups, where there is enough support from the community.

There are a number of restrictions on which

activities will be allowed under this supervision model and potential volunteers will be screened by a school board committee.

"We would much prefer to have these activities supervised by teachers. They are in line authority to the principal. The principal is ultimately responsible for every activity that happens in the school," director of education David Euale told the board of trustees at last Wednesday's board meeting. "This is a measure that we're only taking in these unusual circumstances."

Extracurricular activities had been cancelled in public elementary and secondary schools across the province as a teacher response to the provincial government's passing and enacting of Bill 115, which froze teacher wages, cut into benefits and took away the unions' bargaining rights.

Secondary school teachers upset with union, Province

The provincial high school union's change in stance on supervising extracurricular activities won't mean the return of sports and clubs at all schools.

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) president Ken Coran has said about 20 per cent of teachers will remain too upset with the government to resume extracurricular activities.

And on the weekend, many angry teachers took to Twitter to say they had no such plans, and were upset with their union over the lack of information about what the government had offered in exchange for extracurricular activities.

The move by the high school teachers' union puts pressure on the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario. However, elementary teachers' union president Sam Hammond said he doesn't feel any pressure, given that the two situations are different.

Hammond said his union's meetings with the province continue this week, and that its executive will "review the situation, the progress at the table and take a lot of things into account" on Wednesday and Thursday, before making any decision on extracurricular activities by March 1, as promised.

—Torstar News Service

The local school board, however, will use a provincial policy to allow volunteers to supervise activities instead.

"We already have policies that encourage volunteers in schools. The difference in this case is this is a policy that will highlight how a volunteer can solely be responsible, rather than assisting a teacher, in an activity," Euale said.

There are a number of activities the school board will not allow to run without a teacher or principal supervisor. They are over-night excursions, offsite field trips with 50 or more students, invitational tournaments in sports beyond Halton and beyond schedule, and activities that are curriculum-related such as a class trips.

"These activities, we're suggesting can only go forward if the principal will supervise or can secure a teacher to ultimately supervise the activities," Euale said.

The board has also rated activities as low, medium and high risk. An example of a low-risk activity, Euale said, is a chess club operating in a public area such as a school foyer.

Activities in a gymnasium, a distance from the school office, on the other hand, would be considered medium to high-risk activities.

Screening of volunteers for low-risk activities will be at the principal's discretion, while the screening of volunteers for medium and high-risk activities will be done centrally through the board's committee. The committee is expected to first meet next week and it should begin its screening process soon after that.

When asked by Oakville Trustee Kelly Amos how the board will deal with inequities in the extracurricular system, Euale said it won't and that inequities will exist.

Euale said he hopes people come forward to supervise activities and then the board can form leagues. Making sure there is equity will be easier in the elementary system as there are 83 public elementary schools in Halton so creating leagues will be easier. There are only 17 high schools so leagues might be harder to form.

"If you only have four or five schools come forward for a team event, then it's going to be limited. We'll take what we get and see what we can do with what we get. There definitely will not be equity," he said.

Euale said liabilities would not be a

problem as the board will be able to provide insurance coverage for the volunteers.

The school principals will have final say of which activities take place.

Trustees also heard an update on extracurricular activities in schools, which, to date, have been limited.

"In elementary schools, there are very small pockets where extracurricular activities are occurring... But, the majority of schools are reporting no extracurricular activities," said associate director Jeff Blackwell.

When it becomes available, the school board will have information for those wishing to volunteer available on its website at www.hdsb.ca.



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