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No lockouts planned for Catholic schools

Halton's 375 Catholic secondary school teachers will not be locked out. At least for the time being.

Admitting that the situation was less than ideal, James Sherlock, chair of the Halton Catholic District School Board, announced at Tuesday's board meeting that supervision at the high schools would continue to be provided by non-union faculty members during the teachers' one-period-per-day strike.

Under Bill 160 the secondary school teachers' workload has been increased to 1,250 minutes in the classroom a week. The Halton Catholic board has met this requirement by scheduling teachers into seven out of eight classes, instead of the previous six of eight. Those scheduled for an additional class this semester have refused to teach it, and are being docked 25 per cent of their pay by the board.

"The principals and vice-principals are providing the best supervision that they can for students who have been abandoned during classes while the teachers are refusing to teach those periods to which they are assigned," he said.

Sherlock said board members will "teleconference" every night to discuss any new developments.

"We will be getting status reports every night to review the situation. If circumstances change so that there are very significant safety concerns, the board would have to look at considering closing the schools."

Sherlock said he considered it the province's responsibility to restore some semblance of stability to Ontario schools.

"It's my opinion that the province has tried to do too much too fast and that's part of the problem," he said in an interview before the public portion of the board meeting. "We deeply regret that our students are not receiving the full program to which they are entitled."

The Halton Catholic District School Board has joined six other large Catholic school boards in asking the Minister of Education intervene immediately to resolve the province-wide labour dispute with teachers.

In a letter sent to the Education Minister Wednesday (Sept. 16), the chairs of the seven Catholic School boards say they have complied with Bill 160 and its requirement to reduce the average class size in secondary schools to 22 pupils.

The letter to the minister states, "The teachers' provincial union leaders are unwilling to allow local teacher units to negotiate collective agreements in ways which meet the spirit of the Education Act."

—By Carol Baldwin, special

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