

Longer lunches for teachers?

longer lunch hour may be in the works for Halton's elementary students, in order to allow Latheir teachers a chance to find time to eat.

Most public school students currently get an hour for lunch, but that could be increased to 80 minutes under a proposal being suggested by senior staff with the Halton District School Board.

Since September 1996, when the board cut lunchroom supervisors out of the budget, classroom teachers have been required to spend at least 20 minutes of their lunch hour supervising students.

In many cases, says Oakville teacher Linda Jones, that means teachers hardly have time to hit the washroom and gobble down a sandwich.

While the board's contract with the teachers guarantees them a 40-minute uninterrupted lunch break, superintendent Paul Anthony admits the scheduling of supervision duties makes it difficult to meet that guarantee.

"For the most part, we can't give teachers the 40 minutes," he says.

And in the school where Jones works, that has teachers rushing on their lunch hour and feeling stressed out.

Jones and fellow teacher Maria Kalvaitis appeared in front of trustees recently to ask that the board go back to hiring lunchroom supervisors, to allow teachers a chance to relax, plan and meet and eat on their lunch hours.

The teachers have filed a grievance, due to go to arbitration later this spring, demanding the board find a way to allow them to eat their lunches in peace.

Ideally, they would like to see a return to the previous policy of hiring people to act as lunchroom supervisors.

But Anthony says the board doesn't have the \$500,000 needed to reinstate paid lunchroom supervision across the region, so he has come up with the idea of extending the lunch hour, and the school day, by 20 minutes.

"That's the only answer we can see, aside from the \$500,000 which we don't have," he says.

-By Kim Arnott, special

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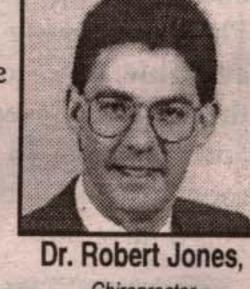
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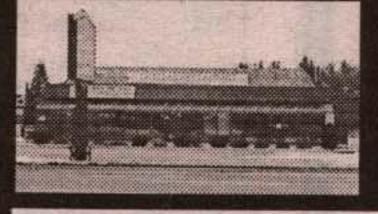
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