

Paid-for programming concerns raised before school trustees

Parent Carol Dougherty isn't comfortable that paid educational programming is offered during school hours. She fears some students won't be able to pay the costs to register in these kinds of activities, risking creating a culture of haves and have-nots.

Dougherty presented her concerns to the Halton District School Board's committee of the whole meeting recently, urging it to investigate the issue of allowing pay-for-service programming during school time, and the board will.

Dougherty cited Mad Science—a popular children's franchise, which creates learning through entertaining and educational activities—because her daughter had brought home a registration form from Martin Street Public School in Milton. After looking at it more closely,

she saw the program was being offered during school time on school property at a cost.

She was worried about the feelings of some kids who wouldn't be able to register because of the expense.

"What was the school doing offering pay for service programming during school hours? Obviously some kids would be excluded because their parents couldn't afford to pay. Wasn't this creating a two-tiered education system?"

School, she stressed, is about equity, about providing a level playing field of learning.

In an interview afterward, Dougherty stressed she's not picking on Mad Science. In fact, she said it's a fun and exciting initiative.

She said she's simply using the pro-

gram as an example only to illustrate her problem with schools allowing pay-for-service programming to be offered during typical instruction hours.

Other parents have expressed similar concerns over paid programming within school hours, she said.

The bottom line, Dougherty said, is these kinds of programming should be conducted outside of typical school hours.

It's up to principals to decide if the program is to be allowed in the school.

Dusty Papke, the public board's director of education, told trustees he will bring to them at a later meeting a list of the various programs offered during school hours as part of discussing the issue, and any potential board action.

Papke noted in an interview after the

board meeting that paid programming being offered during school hours has been on-going for a number of years. He said officials must pay the school for the space rented to administer the program.

"I just want to take a careful look at it without knowing what the impacts are."

Dougherty later said she's thrilled the board is looking into the issue rather than dismissing it. Ultimately she said what may be needed is a policy for all schools to follow when it comes to deciding when paid programming should be allowed inside the school.

At the board meeting some trustees expressed similar views about the concern over equity when it comes to being able to enroll in paid programming and the fact they are offered during school hours.

—By Jason Misner, special



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