

Only three trustees on hand to discuss school uniform issue

# Catholic board fails to meet quorum for first time in 25 years

**TIM WHITNELL**  
Special to The IFP

For the first time in 25 years, the Halton Catholic District School Board last week failed to meet quorum for a scheduled meeting.

A special meeting of the board scheduled for Tuesday, March 27 saw only three of nine elected school trustees in attendance. One of the absent elected officials—Burlington's Bob Van de Vrande—admitted he didn't see the point in attending the meeting.

Director of Education Lou Piovesan said that in his quarter century as a senior administrator he couldn't recall a similar situation of the board failing to meet quorum.

"I haven't missed one board meeting since I became a superintendent in August 1982," he noted.

The nine-member school board must have at least five elected trustees present in order for quorum to be met at meetings. Only board chair Al Bailey of Burlington and Oakville trustees Alice Anne LeMay and Ed Viana attended the meeting.

"We knew about a week or two ago that two (trustees) wouldn't be there," said Piovesan.

At the meeting a discussion was held in public by board legal counsel Bob Keel on generic issues around a trustee's role and responsibilities. However, a planned private session of trustees dealing with the board's process on the two-year uniform pilot project—planned for St. Gabriel elementary in Burlington and Guardian Angels in Milton for 2007-08— and an expected discussion item to be presented by Bailey in public related to the matter could not proceed due

to the lack of trustee representation.

The pilot project introduces mandatory school uniforms at the elementary level—previously only Catholic high schools had uniform policies in place.

The pilot would run for two years beginning this fall at the Guardian Angels and St. Gabriel schools, and then be brought back to the board for review and possible consideration as a board-wide initiative.

Van de Vrande said he did not see the point in attending Tuesday's special meeting. A proponent of the pilot project, Van de Vrande said he believes the issue is moot.

"We want to carry on with valid board decisions. We can't continually be asked to revisit decisions that have been made. I don't see any point for the meeting. I don't see any point in (resuming) it."

Halton Hills' Rosanna Palmieri, Oakville's Anthony Danko and Pauline Houlahan and Burlington's Joanne Matters subsequently said they had prior commitments and advised the board of that in advance of Tuesday's meeting.

Phone calls to Milton trustee Rev. David Wilhelm for comment on why he missed the meeting went unreturned.

Palmieri said she supports the pilot project.

"Many studies I've read indicate uniforms

are positive in schools," she said. "There will always be a policing aspect but overall, it has a very positive effect in a school."

*'Many studies I've read indicate uniforms are positive in schools.'*



**ROSANNA PALMIERI**

Piovesan wouldn't cast aspersions on the timing of the lack of quorum.

"It's not up to me to question; it's not up to me to pass judgment."

Bailey, who says he's not against school uniforms, just that he wants confirmation that proper board

process has been followed, would like to have the suspended special meeting continue as soon as the next regularly scheduled board meeting on April 10.

However, Van de Vrande doesn't want to have anything to do with Bailey's item, if it is related to the pilot project.

"I will have no more interest in addressing the item then than I did (March 27). The majority of trustees are sending a very clear message and it's up to him (Bailey) to receive that message."

While Bailey says he can't discuss specifics about what item he wants to bring forward in public at the special meeting when it resumes, he said he is not, as has been reported, launching a legal challenge on the school uniforms issue.

"My concern has always been process with the board. As the chair of the board, one of my responsibilities is to make sure we are operating properly and above board and

that we are following our policies, bylaws and procedures," Bailey said.

Van de Vrande believes the board should get on with holding parent information sessions at both pilot project schools. Those meetings were supposed to happen last week but were cancelled when board administration sent a letter home to parents of children at the schools last Friday informing them of a "legal challenge" around the process.

Piovesan said the letter to parents contained misleading wording.

"It's an unfortunate choice of words. There are some legal issues but I would not categorize that as a legal challenge. It has to do with the decision-making process that took place over school uniforms. Obviously there are two different opinions on it."

The education director said that while the uniform pilot project is technically a go at this point parents, school council members and the principals at the two schools will have the final say as to whether it proceeds.


"The board motion says there has to be a parent information session at which time parents of the community... can express their support or non-support and then the school council, in consultation with the principal, then determines whether they will proceed with the pilot project or not."

No formal final vote is to be held at the school council level as the board has already approved the pilot project in principle, said Piovesan.

Piovesan indicated that further delays in dealing with the school uniform pilot project could jeopardize its implementation for this September.

—With files from Eamonn Maher, staff writer

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