

Education minister defends policy allowing students' late assignments

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Special to The IFP

Ontario Education Minister Kathleen Wynne says the leader of the Opposition and his education critic need to do their homework before criticizing existing guidelines about how teachers should mark late assignments.

In a telephone interview, Wynne defended ministry criteria around the assessment and evaluation of students and said the Conservative duo of Party Leader John Tory and education critic Joyce Savoline have overreacted to recent media reports about existing ministry guidelines, specifically regarding when teachers should consider deducting marks for late homework.

In a news release issued recently, Tory and Savoline— Burlington's MPP— called on Ontario's ruling party to stop encouraging school boards to ban penalties for late homework assignments or projects.

"The McGuinty Liberals are giving our kids a one-way ticket to easy street," said Tory. "This policy does nothing to teach Ontario students about what it takes to succeed in the real world."

The education minister said the use of the word 'ban' is wrong.

"There has been a misinterpretation by the opposition.... The actual (ministry) language is 'mark deductions, as a consequence of late and missed assignments, is suggested as a last resort'," said Wynne, emphasizing her final four words.

The issue was added to a special school board meeting last Wednesday night, where associate director Ruth Peden presented an overview of the ministry's guidelines and board's policies on late assignments.

"This is not a new policy. It was spearheaded through the Conservative government of the time," she told trustees.

Peden used the symbol of an iceberg to illustrate the debate about late homework and mark deductions.

She said the recent controversy is the tip of the iceberg but that the most important aspect, an overall view of student assessment and evaluation techniques, is represented by the bulk of the ice-

berg that is not seen on the surface of the discussion.

"We need more (assessment), coaching and less of the final-evaluation-it's-over-event," she said, referring to the tension caused for some students by things like assignment deadlines and final exams.

"It's not (about) what's wrong with the child it's what's wrong with the (learning) environment.... As teachers we have to believe that all students can learn and that's why we're fanatics about thoughtful assessment."

Several trustees say they agree with the board's policy of dealing differently with some students.

Halton Hills Trustee and board chair Gillian Tuck Kutarna said her impression is that the board is in transition regarding the application of ministry guidelines and board policy on the issue.

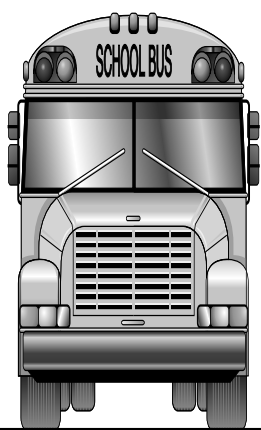
Meanwhile, Wynne reiterated that the province's student assessment and evaluation guidelines are detailed and clear.

"It's basically a progressive process where a teacher has a number of tools to get kids to hand in their homework, and if not they can take marks off. So, there is nothing in the ministry guidelines that would not allow a teacher to do that. Every board has to have (student evaluation) policies that are consistent with the ministry guidelines," she said.

"If a student is looking to take advantage of a policy, just about any policy can be taken advantage of. I really think it comes down to individual teachers working with their kids, helping them to understand how the kids in the class are being treated (differently)."

Savoline said there could be extraordinary circumstances where marks shouldn't be deducted for homework lateness, but she believes the kid-glove approach by the Liberals on the issue is ultimately about graduating as many students as possible.

"There are certain exceptional situations where leniency should be available but it should be up to the discretion of our teachers to make that decision," said Savoline. "It shouldn't be exploited by the McGuinty Liberals as an attempt to prop up slipping student achievement."



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Proposed Acton Quarry Applications Public Information Centre

Sponsored by the Joint Agency Review Team (JART)

A Joint Agency Review Team (JART) including representatives from the **Niagara Escarpment Commission**, the **Regional Municipality of Halton**, the **Town of Halton Hills**, **Conservation Halton**, **Credit Valley Conservation**, and the **Ministry of Natural Resources** has been formed to consider the proposed applications by Dufferin Aggregates for the Acton Quarry. JART will be hosting the public information centre to explain the JART review process and to hear your comments. Representatives of Dufferin will be in attendance.

Date

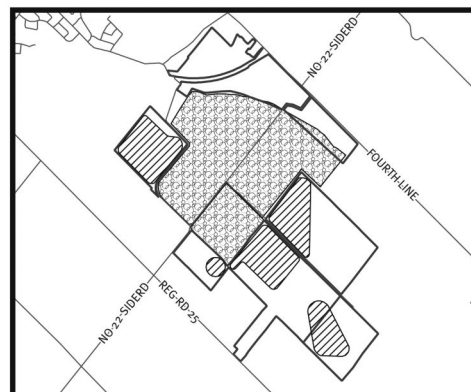
Tues., March 4, 2008 - Drop-in 7:00 p.m. Presentations followed by questions at 7:30 p.m.

Location

Community Hall Room, Acton Arena - 415 Queen Street - Acton

For more information please call: 905-877-8363

Proposed Acton Quarry Applications



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