

THE INDEPENDENT



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FRIDAY...

A story about two local schools involved in a pilot project designed to encourage more children to walk to school that was originally to appear today will now run Friday.

For breaking news go to: www.independentfreepress.com



Snake eyes?

Bekky Gibson, 17, of Acton, who was one of the youths who helped organize Saturday's Chance for Change event held at Prospect Park in Acton, gets up close and personal with an albino snake. Local youths organized the event to highlight their talents. The day featured a wide variety of entertainment, games and, of course, a hands-on reptile display. See page 7 for more photos. *Photo by Calvin Dyke*

Union and parents fear cuts to EA staff

TIM WHITNELL
Special to The IFP

The head of the association representing Halton educational assistants is worried there could be layoffs next year, despite assurance from the Halton public school that there will be no cuts.

Lynne Gurzi, president of the Halton District Educational Assistants Association, said she doesn't believe Halton District School Board superintendent Kathy Schaffer, who oversees special education on behalf of the board, that there won't be a reduction to the current complement of EAs when the new school year starts.

Currently, there are almost 600 educational assistants— full and part-timers— who work for the board.

EAs often work one-on-one, in regular or self-contained classroom settings, with children identified with physical or developmental disabilities

or behaviour issues. Gurzi said she has heard from some schools that their EA allotment for 2008-09 is down drastically.

"Principals were given their (EA) allocation a couple of weeks ago and the message from (Schaffer) was that they were going to experience a 20 per cent reduction in their allocation requests.

"Currently, it's more like 40 per cent. As an example, one particular school had eight full-time EAs and they're down to three for next year," said Gurzi, noting she's heard similar stories from several schools.

She said the current 'holdback' of EAs, which is what the board calls the contingent of EAs for



GERRY OCKENDEN

whom there is no work at present for the following school year, "is far greater than 20 per cent."

Even if the holdback is 20 per cent that represents 120 EAs, noted Gurzi. "That's an incredible number."

Schaffer disputed Gurzi's interpretation of the situation saying that no cuts to EAs are planned or expected for '08-09.

"Unfortunately, some people seem to be sharing very erroneous information with some of our parents. All of our EAs will be deployed now and into the fall.

"... There are 590 full-time equivalent EAs that I have right now, and to my mind all of that will be needed (next year)."

At last Wednesday's school board meeting, Halton Hills Trustee Gerry Ockenden asked Schaffer to publicly address the status of EAs, which she did.

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