



COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Explore compromise

It looks like some of the teacher unions and the provincial government are in an old familiar position — brinkmanship. Meanwhile, parents and students are once again caught in the middle.

Both the Catholic and public high school teachers are poised for legal strikes. The crux of the dispute is increased workloads for teachers, who will now have to instruct seven out of eight classes per day instead of six.

According to Al Tanner, president of the Halton public secondary school teaching union local, the change would mean dropping 100 teachers — something he considers highly negative in terms of providing quality education. As well, teachers have strongly hinted that extra-curricular school activities are at risk since, given their higher in-class work commitments, they won't be able to help out with for example football or the drama club.

There are no easy answers here, and even compromises will satisfy neither of the belligerents, if that term may be used to describe the two sides.

Yet in the interests of continuity, creative compromises should be examined.

Teachers say that they need the two periods a day they had until now for marking and planning lessons. What if lessons were not planned by individual teachers but set out more centrally, so that they didn't have to invest as much planning time?

In terms of marking, while the union clearly wouldn't like it, what if papers were marked by lower-paid teaching assistants, or even senior university students as a part-time job? In university, teaching assistants mark papers all the time.

Maybe these ideas are in no way revolutionary or even novel, but perhaps too, this is a line of thinking that should be explored.

As well, the need for volunteers to run extra-curricular activities becomes clear if teachers won't be involved, with whatever legislative changes are necessary to allow non-teachers the authority to oversee practices and games without being personally liable should a child be injured.

Clearly, these suggestions will not be palatable to the teaching unions. But just as clearly implementing ideas such as the ones outlined above may make the situation overall more acceptable to teachers vis a vis their workload.

And, if 100 teachers get laid off, that too is highly unfortunate. But that is what happens in unionized environments when costs are cut. Invariably the choice is between slashing benefits and compensation for the majority of the union members, or letting some union members go. Usually, the less senior union members are let go because the union stands firm in protecting the hard-earned compensation package negotiated by the majority, who will not lose their jobs.

This is in no way a criticism of unions, which are integral to many workplaces and the springboard of most enlightened occupational legislation through the 20th century.

And it is not really much of a criticism for teachers, who by and large, we would suggest, work hard in an environment that is far more stressful than most people believe.

Still, change will be made by the provincial government, and teachers must cope. How they choose to do so is up to them. It appears right now that it will be through confrontation, a strike. If that happens, the government may feel it has a freer hand to do as it pleases.

Perhaps the better play on the part of teachers would be to hammer out a deal.



OUR READERS WRITE

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

Don't be stupid — always wear a helmet while skateboarding

Dear Editor:

The Town of Milton and parents -- beware!

Last week, while cycling with my eight-year-old son, we stopped by the new skateboard park, built by The Town of Milton, adjacent to Milton Memorial Arena. We were both fascinated by the acrobatics of the more skilled youths on their bicycles, skateboards and rollerblades.

The Town has posted a sign that states that the park is unsupervised, that users must wear protective gear and helmets and the Town is not responsible for any injuries.

My eight-year-old son asked me, "Why aren't these kids wearing helmets?" Of the 70 or so participants, three had helmets on. I had already read the sign and I looked around the compound expecting to see a myriad of discarded helmets laying about, but to my chagrin, there were only a few. So my conclusion was that most of these youths had come from their homes without helmets.

These ramps and rails etc. are used for various tricks and stunts that one can easily see is a high-risk activity. It is easy to expect injuries in the order of scrapes, bruises and broken bones, as acceptable.

On the other hand, unsuccessful stunts that drive the participant up a vertical wall 8 to 10 feet in the air, landing head first on asphalt will leave one of our children with a very serious head injury.

Parents should ensure that their children wear a helmet, at least, all of the time that they participate in these activities, on their own street or at this park.

Should a tragedy occur, the family involved will be devastated, our community will be aghast, and the Town of Milton, I suspect, will be in the courts defending its good intentions.

By the way, the answer to my son's question was, "You have a good habit wearing your helmet all of the time." He said back to me, "You wear one and I'm not stupid, you know."

Paul Tate
Milton

Sentences way out of whack, according to upset reader

Dear Editor:

This letter is regarding what I feel are unfair sentences.

Gary Tattersal was fined \$4,000. His crime was interference with a fire official during an inspection — no violence, no threats and no damage.

Bank robber Linda Michaud is free with supervised conditions. She committed 10 bank robberies, some with threats of violence with pepper spray. Someone could have died from fear, heart attack or other conditions.

Ten instances of bank robbery certainly deserves some jail term. Is depression conducive to planning 10 successful bank robberies. I think not.

Is this gender bias? Poor court decisions? Is it acceptable?

Walter J Talford
Hornby

Pud

by Steve Nease

