

# Technical problem puts wrench in school uniform pilot

By Melanie Cummings  
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

A uniform pilot project has been "blindsided," says Halton Catholic District School Board Trustee Bob Van de Vrande.

Approval to start up the two-year experiment at two elementary schools was expected at last Tuesday night's board meeting until Chair Al Bailey threw a wrench into the plans.

At issue is recommendation 10 in the elementary school uniform committee's report. It calls for a suspension of a five-year-old board dress code policy, only for the two participating schools.

Instead, during that time students at St. Gabriel's School

in Burlington and Guardian Angels in Milton would be required to wear a navy or white top and navy shorts, pants, skirts or dress with the respective school crests embroidered. Uniforms must also be purchased through clothing manufacturer R.J. McCarthy Ltd, the committee determined.

Bailey insisted that a separate vote would have to be held on this recommendation and that, as with any policy change, 75 per cent of trustees must approve it.

"This is a thorn in my side," said Bailey. "I'm concerned about board regulations and not following policy."

According to Bailey the committee didn't acknowledge a legal opinion that said 75 per cent of trustees would have to vote in favour of the policy exemption.

Superintendent of Education Larry Clifford waded into the debate and said that this was a "technical issue" and not in the spirit of trying to get this pilot off the starting blocks.

## Trustee challenges chair

Trustee Van de Vrande requested a short recess at the board meeting to confer with the committee. He said members expressed shock and dismay from having the rug pulled out from under them. He then challenged the chair on this ruling.

"The chair is trying to derail the policy. We're not changing the policy; we're simply running a pilot. This pilot is not in jeopardy rather, the integrity of the board is in jeopardy — especially if it is seen as playing with politics with its own process. (Bailey) shouldn't be playing technical games with the board's own rules."

At the April 18 board meeting trustees gave unanimous approval to establish a committee of trustees, staff and parents to recommend guidelines to initiate a pilot program for mandatory school uniforms.

Van de Vrande said that the board had an opportunity then to hold a vote on amending its dress code policy.

"April 18 trustees voted unanimously to authorize a pilot project. The pilot simply wants to study a set of circumstances over the next two years to see if the board should, could and would amend the policy," said Van de Vrande.

St. Gabriel's school council co-chair Jane Michaels, who spearheaded the uniform issue back in November 2005, agreed.

"(Bailey) set up the pilot committee to fail by withholding this technicality," she said. "We abided by all the requests and surveys trustees demanded of us all along the way and now we've been blindsided in the 11th hour."

Although "tired" as a result of all the personal time she has put into this years long effort, Michaels said it is not a question of 'if' uniforms will be imposed, but a question of 'when'.

This uniform committee of 10 members, which includes board officials, trustees and parents, has held five meetings since May.

Since then, members examined the board's student dress code policy and conducted two surveys of all elementary schools, in November 2005 and March 2006.

The uniform issue was initiated in November 2005 when a delegation of parents from St. Gabriel pushed for a change in the current wording of the board's uniform policy.

They wanted the word 'voluntary' dropped and replaced with the word 'mandatory', which would require that all students must wear a uniform, even if only the requisite 75 per cent of families opted in favour of them.

A school council survey done at St. Gabriel in 2005 revealed at least 75 per cent of families registered at the school wanted uniforms.

The uniform pilot committee will reconvene in the next few weeks to consider its options, said Van de Vrande. The issue will come back to the board February 6.

## Slot cash comes in

The Town of Milton hit the jackpot with Slots at Mohawk Friday, receiving its quarterly installment of more than \$1.4 million in slots revenue.

The money comes from the local gambling facility as payment to the Town for hosting slots in the municipality.

To date, Milton has received more than \$44.2 million in non-tax gaming revenue from Mohawk.

Payments are made on a quarterly basis according to the government fiscal year, which runs from April to March, and are distributed by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG).

The slots at Mohawk opened August 10, 1999 and have since attracted more than 10.2 million visitors.

Across the province, 23 communities play host to slots at racetracks and charity casinos.

So far, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation has distributed more than \$450-million in gaming revenue to these communities.

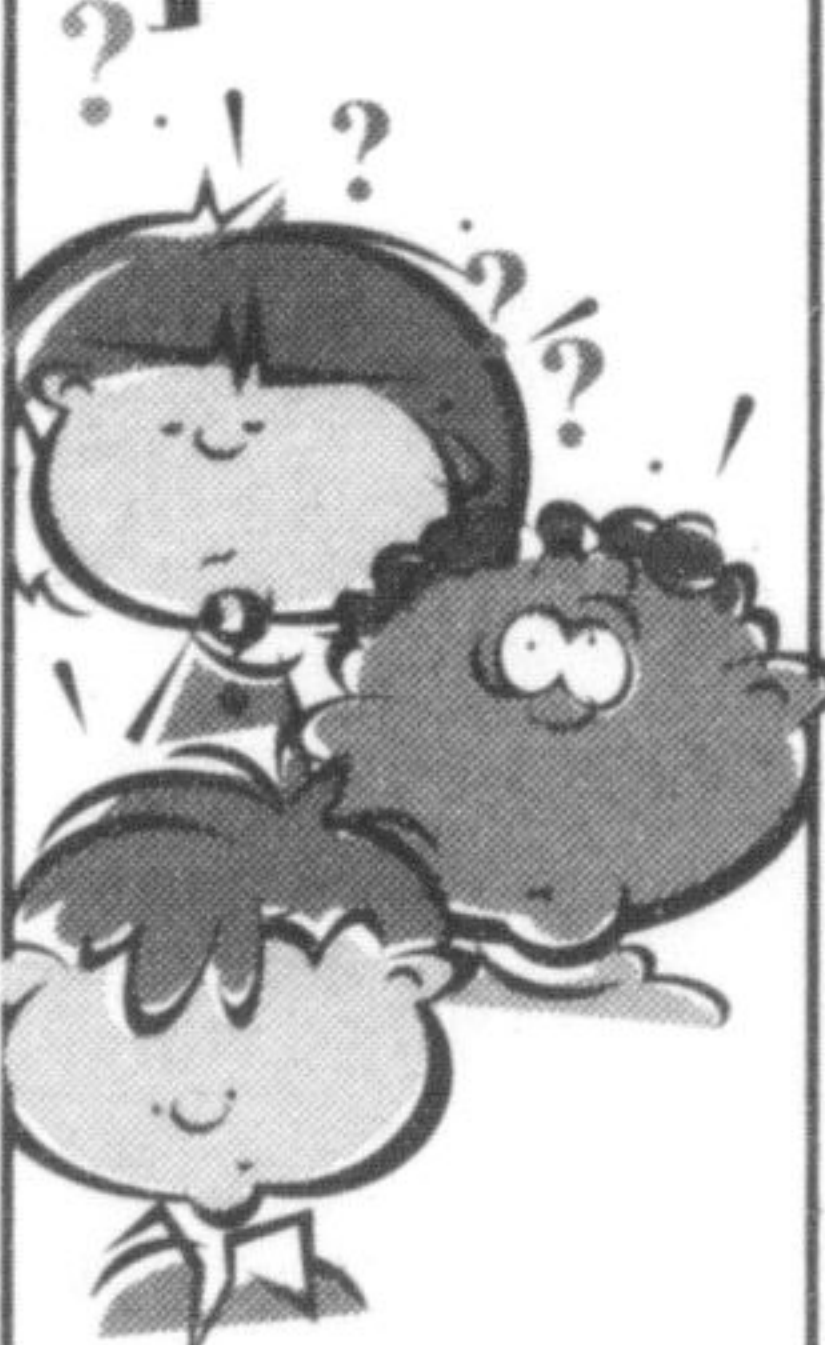
The payments make up five per cent of the gambling establishment's gross slot machine revenues for the first 450 machines and two per cent for machines over that number.

Every year, the Province allocates two per cent of gross revenue from slot machines at OLG casinos and slots-at-racetrack facilities to Ontario's problem gambling program for research, treatment and prevention programs.

The amount for the 2006-07 fiscal year is estimated at \$36 million.

Also, \$100 million annually goes to charities throughout Ontario, distributed through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

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