

OPINION

Uniform policy not so uniform

Like it or not, parents of students who attend two Halton Catholic elementary schools — Guardian Angels in Milton and St. Gabriel School in Burlington — will soon have to purchase school uniforms for their children or face the prospect of having them sent home.

In an uncharacteristically erratic move, the Halton Catholic District School Board recently voted to push ahead with a mandatory school uniform pilot project that, according to its own veteran chair, contradicts board policy.

At a meeting earlier this month, Burlington Trustee Bob Van de Vrande engaged in a verbal joust with board Chair Al Bailey over whether establishing the pilot project was a fundamental change of the board's five-year-old dress code policy and therefore required 75 per cent trustee support.

Roughly a month after being selected to lead the Catholic board's trustees for the seventh consecutive year, Bailey found himself at odds with the school uniform committee assigned the task of developing the pilot project. While he insisted the test program represented a change in board policy and therefore required 75 per cent approval from trustees, others around the board table disagreed.

Van de Vrande challenged Bailey's authority on the issue and won out by a slim 5-4 vote — essentially paving the way for the two-year pilot project to be sent steamrolling along.

It wasn't one of the board's more unifying moments.

Bailey and Van de Vrande's board table dispute aside, this pilot project to test out a mandatory dress code appeared to be a fait accompli long ago.

In March of last year, the board issued a board-wide survey of schools that sought a minimum 75 per cent parental approval for mandatory uniforms. Of 11 elementary schools that returned the survey, none attained the 75 per cent approval rating.

When asked why a proposed pilot program for elementary school uniforms was continuing when no schools met the minimum 75 per cent parental approval rating, the chair of the pilot project committee responded: "The trustees asked us to create a pilot program."

While it's not certain what overall impact the pilot program will have on Halton families, what is clear is that a very vocal minority group has managed to get the ear of enough school trustees to keep the issue alive despite less than favourable results from a parent survey and the board chair's opposition to the process.



ReadersWrite

Send your letters to miltomed@haltonsearch.com or drop them off at 875 Main St. E.

Editorial's concern certainly valid

DEAR EDITOR:

The Champion's February 9 editorial voiced disappointment at Garth Turner joining the Liberals after being kicked out of the Tory caucus and becoming an independent.

I share the concern that an elected federal member wouldn't realize his constant refusal to toe the party line would result in his being asked to leave the caucus. The caucus is the place a party moulds policy, and it's expected

once a course of action is decided that all caucus members will support that policy.

In watching the press conference at which Turner announced he was joining the Liberal party, it was clear he felt there was little input — if any — allowed in Prime Minister Stephen Harper's caucus. While I don't agree with Turner's overt actions that forced his colleagues to kick him out of their

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Editor'sdesk

I hope one day to be covering Habitat's Milton build

For many working people the thought of owning their own home is just a fantasy.

The costs are simply too high so they resort to renting as their only alternative.

Renting isn't a bad thing if that's your preference — there's definitely a big market for rental units as housing. But if you would really rather have a house to call your own but your situation in life won't allow it, you're stuck right? Wrong.

I've seen firsthand over the last few years that that isn't necessarily the case.

Since 2004, I have served on the board of directors for Habitat for Humanity Halton.

It's an amazing organization that operates to fulfill one goal — to build affordable housing. It's not a give-away organization. It builds, renovates and sells homes to low-income families on a no-profit, no-interest basis. It provides interest-free mortgages to

families that would otherwise not be able to afford their own homes.

Eligible families must have a steady income, positive work history and contribute 500 hours to help build their home.

I will be leaving Habitat as my three-year term on the board is over this month, but I will always have a special admiration for the organization and the people who make it happen.

I have never seen a more dedicated bunch of people, especially past board chair Susan Goetz and current chairman Terry Quinn.

But all my board colleagues are so talented. They sit through long meetings going over often complicated reports and must make well thought out decisions for Habitat.

I have been particularly impressed with our executive director, Kathrin Delutis. I don't know how she keeps up — as efficiently as she does — with all the tasks required of her. And then there's the other staff and volunteers. Wow!

This Tuesday, Habitat for Humanity Halton will hold its annual general meeting at Burlington Central Library on New Street at 7 p.m.

Interested citizens are invited to attend to learn more about Habitat and its upcoming projects. While a Milton build isn't imminent, I'm sure we'll see Habitat in town eventually.

I hope when Habitat does arrive, it's welcomed with open arms. Judging by what I know about Milton, I suspect it will be.



Karen Miceli

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875 Main St. E.,
Milton, Ont. L9T 3Z3

905-878-2341

Editorial Fax: 905-878-4943
Advertising Fax: 905-876-2364
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Publisher
Neil Oliver

Advertising Director
Wendy McNab

Managing Editor
Karen Miceli

Production Manager
Tim Coles

Circulation Manager
Charlene Hall

Office Manager
Teri Casas

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