



Five-year-old Lena Peterson, a Kindergarten student at 16th Avenue School helps Mickey Mouse celebrate his 50th birthday as they both visit Santa at Hillcrest Mall. (Liberal Photo by Bruce Hogg)

McCONAGHY Must it be only school to close?

The theme of a public meeting held last Thursday was 'Why just look at McConaghy if schools must be closed in Richmond Hill', a question which the Richmond Hill Study Committee will have to answer sometime after tomorrow.

Bruce Langstaff addressed an audience of about 35 at the old public school, outlining and restating the major points of a brief he co-authored and presented to the study committee in October.

One of his opening comments was a rebuke to The Liberal, which had published a story saying the McConaghy Association admitted some of the figures it had used were not fully up to date.

The Beverley Acres parents group made a similar reference in its own brief.

"Had we not asked for those figures and not asked the board for all the relevant information, those buggers wouldn't have had anything — wrong or right," said Mr. Langstaff.

Mr. Langstaff explained to parents and trustees present, the situation for Richmond Hill public schools has changed since the problem was first defined.

As an example, Ross Doan is scheduled to utilize 210 per cent of its capacity this year, according to the McConaghy brief.

"Right now, they haven't reached that stage, but there are good reasons," said Mr. Langstaff. "There are large numbers of housing units in Phase II of Baif that haven't been completed as quickly as anticipated. Lower pupil yields have been coming out of the homes already finished, than the board originally projected. I'm sure it's not because of the high quality education offered by the York Region Separate School Board, either."

Mr. Langstaff disputes the number of excess spaces in Beverley Acres. The board at first claimed

there were 889 empty pupil places but readjusted the number to 470 to take into account special education students and the room being used by its two Area Offices.

The key, claimed Mr. Langstaff, is not to ask why McConaghy but why considering closing schools. He feels closing the school on its own won't do anything to alleviate the enrollment problem in Richmond Hill.

The brief states there will be 1,420 empty pupil places by 1981 in Richmond Hill, based on 90 per cent of theoretical capacity. Figures released by the board at the end of September show there are now nearly 2,000 empty places.

"Given the problem is not as vague as it once was, most of the portables are gone from the southern part of the Region, the savings resulting from operation and maintenance costs through closing one or more schools is minimal and the proceeds from the sale of school sites cannot be kept for use in Richmond Hill, I don't think any school in Richmond Hill will be closed," said Mr. Langstaff.

Following a resounding round of applause, he asked the audience for a show of hands on three basic questions: 1) if part of the school were rented, how many would favor McConaghy being made into a K-5 school (unanimously in favor); 2) would you prefer grades for your children as opposed to closing the school (about 50 per cent in favor); 3) if the school is closed, would you abide by boundaries set by the board for alternate schools, or pick your own (only four or five said they'd go along with the board's decision on boundaries).

York education board okays sex guidelines

Floundering through its final meeting of the term, the York Board of Trustees approved a set of guidelines for a new sex education — family life program after more than an hour-and-a-half of fruitless debate.

The majority of trustees (four are retiring, three were defeated in the election) had no qualms with the content of the recommendations made by the sub-committee, which conceived of the guidelines after nine months of study.

The major thrust (that word was used at least a dozen times in the discussion) by outgoing Richmond Hill Trustee Eric Baker and Markham Trustee Don Couzens, was to have the recommendations circulated to the board as a proposed public policy and allow input from any interested group to shape the final content of the program.

The board has a standard policy (No. 59) which follows a rigorous set of steps to ensure parents and community groups have a fair say on issues of significant interest.

But the board balked at this idea for two major reasons: as a policy, the committee would not be able to select curriculum aids and resource people to start designing the program until all quarters have been given their right to speak on the subject and, throwing the question open to parents would probably produce so many ideas and suggestions it would be impossible to draw up a practical program and implement them all.

So a suggestion from the sub-committee was followed — that the recommendations be made into a position paper — and then distributed to the public after the actual program is in place. John Stephens, who left the chair to take part in the discussion, confused the matter with a motion asking for a position paper which could be circulated for public input.

"CAN'T DISAGREE"

The problem (with the recommendations) is they are a bunch of statements with which nobody can disagree. The real problem arises when we have to implement them and how it should be done," said Mr. Stephens.

"All parents have different ideas on how sex should be taught. The objection I have is the public seems to be excluded from what we intend to tell them except after the subject has been taught — and then we expect reaction from the public," he said.

Earlier in the evening, Reverend Robert Quick, of the Free Methodist Church in Richmond Hill, made a short presentation on the views of a group he is chairman of — Right to Life.

He also advocated a public forum be made available but was unable to answer how so many opinions could be incorporated into the program.

"The first recommendation (the gist of what is to be taught) was written in a way it could include our own suggestions. However, we feel the schools have been given a blank cheque and that the proposals are so


broad for the teaching of the proposed course," he said.

There were several motions to table the study and let the new board handle the design of the program. They were all defeated. The only other time the report was in peril of not being approved was when Aurora Trustee Norm Weller tried to defer part of it

until the next budget in February.

"The purpose of my motion is so the board can get a good idea of what the final budget will look like before approving an expenditure of \$10,000. Let's face it, last year we really ripped the public off..." said Mr. Weller.

Weller's motion was soundly defeated.



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