

Special education suggestions seen, not heard by board

After submitting his own recommendations on special education to staff of the York County School Board, the president of the local chapter of the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities feels they have been seen but not heard.

It was mid-February when Yunus Desai, legislative representative for OACLD, gave his original brief to the board outlining some procedural suggestions based on his experience as a remedial teacher at the Toronto Learning Centre.

Staff prepared responses to his ideas but for various reasons he appeared before the program committee only last Wednesday for further comment.

Some of Mr. Desai's ideas were prompted by a report prepared for the board by special education staff last January.

The report was a guideline for special education program placement and review committees and he felt staff either ignored basic criteria of their operation or weren't specific enough on some of the details.

For example, the board guideline, in accordance with ministry regulations, states a quorum of the committee to consider any one pupil for special education placement should consist of (three people: a) one of whom shall be the Area Superintendent or the special education consultant for that area; b) the principal of the school where the special

program is offered or his or her designate; c) the principal or his designate of the York County school the pupil is currently enrolled in.

Mr. Desai suggest the quorum be composed of the present principal (not his designate), the pupil's teacher (s), his parent(s) and a special education

consultant. In its response, staff assured him the purpose of the quorum is not to limit discussion but ensure that those making decisions are the ones ultimately responsible.

Such decisions always require the written consent of parents.

In a half-dozen other queries, staff was able to reply with reasons for the way it believes the committees should operate, usually based on ministry regulations.

However, Superintendent of Special Education Frank Wilkinson became defensive when questioned by both Mr. Desai and Thornhill Trustee Margaret MacDonald about further involvement and communication with parents about placements.

"I'd like to know if parents are given adequate notice when these meetings come up because it's very important they be given every opportunity to attend," said Mrs. MacDonald.

Program Chairman Craig Cribar said the board has a policy where it tries to accommodate all parents — and if that's not possible then there is usually a very good reason for it.

"York County is one of the few boards accommodating parents at night, if possible. However, you can't expect a teacher who works all day to give up all of his or her nights. When you

have a doctor's appointment or if you draw a traffic summons, you're expected to be there, aren't you?" asked Mr. Wilkinson.

Mr. Desai was invited to make final comments when the full report by staff is ready. Afterwards, he said he was happy to contribute his thoughts, though not all his points were followed up.

"There is still the question of the grid I drew up and submitted to the director," he said. "It is designed to show how much money is being spent on each child in special programs, exactly what the money is being spent on, waiting lists for assessments, the numbers of students who

can't be accommodated either in special ed. classes or on waiting lists and several other items."

He claimed most school boards only spend \$250 per 15 students per year on special education, a gross inequity in his opinion.

"This is an important year, especially with declining enrollments and budget restraints by the province. We do not want the children of York County to suffer as a result of what is happening at the North York and Toronto School Boards," he said.

He was referring to several recent teacher layoffs because of shrinking student populations in both those boards.

Correction

In a news story last week, The Liberal reported that a 22-year-old Etobicoke man, Larry Easterbrook, was involved in a serious single-car accident on May 17.

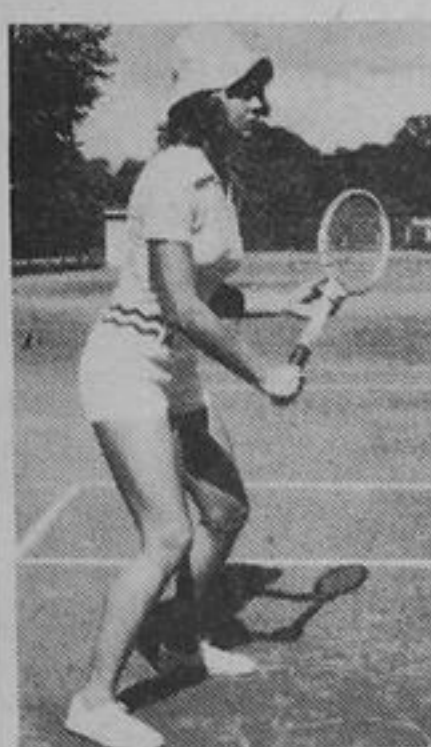
The item went on to say Mr. Easterbrook died two days later as a result of his injuries.

In fact, he is in the intensive care unit of Toronto General Hospital in serious but stable condition with multiple head and neck injuries. The Liberal sincerely regrets the error and apologizes for any inconvenience it might have caused.

On May 26, George Randy Leetham, 19, of Keswick was killed when the car he was driving was sideswiped. At first, The Liberal believed he was riding a motorcycle at the time of the accident. We regret the error.

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