

# Physical education quality varies in schools

A lengthy presentation to the Program Committee shows the quality of physical education programs offered to York's elementary and secondary students varies greatly.

Several reasons for the disparity were discussed but it was concluded a lack of adequate facilities, such as gyms, proper sports equipment and even useable playing fields, is keeping elementary pupils from getting the well-rounded phys. ed. instruction they need.

The review committee, which worked with Superintendent of School Operations Walter Willms, was composed of: Master Teacher Dave Kennett, Miss Sandra Strachan, Ed Griffith (principal of Baythorn P.S.), Cliff Nuttall (phys. ed. teacher at Bayview Secondary), Charles Seath (principal of Don Head S.S.) and John Laughlin (principal of Ballantrae P.S.).

While each member had a chance to speak to the committee about his or her own section of the review, Mr. Nuttall's comments left little doubt high schools get preferential treatment when it comes to equipment, teachers and facilities for phys. ed.

"Any lack of facilities is something we look at in our five-year capital expenditure forecast," said Mr. Willms in an interview afterwards.

"It's true that one of the board's priorities this year was to review all our phys. ed. programs with an emphasis on upgrading them where necessary. However, in the last couple of years there has been a lack of money for new facilities and we have been concentrating on obtaining new schools where they are needed."

As for disparities, he said you could take any program you want, at either the elementary or secondary level and once you start comparing them within different schools, you're bound to get differing opinions.

In committee, Mr. Nuttall explained there are a minimum of four specialist teachers who are trained to teach such programs at all the high schools in York Region. Because of staffing restrictions, elementary schools get no specialists so a regular classroom teacher has to handle his or her own class in the gym or outdoors, in most cases.

"Ideally, it would be nice to have one specialist for phys. ed., one for science, one for music, until you have one in each program area of the school and there are more specialists than there are regular classroom teachers," said Mr. Willms. "That's one of the arguments I use in favor of larger schools — in a small school it's just not possible to have those kinds of resources because it has to live within a set of priorities. A bigger school can allow for more variance in program and hence more room for specialists."

The committee will hear a final staff report on phys. ed. programs the first week in July. It will likely go the full board at the August meeting.

The committee heard some elementary schools have gyms with the same quality as high school gyms and others have either no facilities or very poor ones. Mr. Nuttall claimed there is an abundance of excellent phys. ed. programs (sets of course of study) as outlined in Ministry of Education documents like the Formative Years and the Intermediate Guidelines.

The York Board currently has several task forces at work, including a response to Ministry guidelines in general and a review of safety standards in phys. ed. across the Region.

"Though many of the elementary schools have the courses, there are too few with the space or the equipment to make them effective. The disparity lies in what they have available to do and where they can do it," said Mr. Nuttall.

All the secondary

school gyms are in good shape with the exception of Newmarket High School, according to the committee's findings. It also reported equipment and budgets for these schools are excellent. Last January, the

Ministry did a review of senior division phys. ed. programs in 11 randomly selected schools across the province. It found that the health education parts of phys. ed. programs are generally under-emphasized. It also found, after

examining seven broad categories of phys. ed. activity, team and individual activities get too much course time and outdoor education for all students and dance for males, receive too little instruction time.

However, it concluded that 77 per cent of the sampled programs follow most or all of the Ministry guideline's recommendations and 17 per cent follow some of them.

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