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Class size key issue in strike

In the fight between teachers and the public school board, principals are caught in the middle. They are members of the teachers' union. But they and the vice-principals are management, so these may be the only teachers in area high schools next week if weekend talks between the union and the York Region Board of Education don't go well. Principals also assign staff in their schools, which forces them to

deal with what most agree is the central issue in the 10-day-old teachers' strike — class sizes. Several were interviewed for this article on condition of anonymity.

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

Fall classes are getting bigger inside York Region public high schools, but the results are not spread evenly from room to

room, area principals say. The board says its contract offer to the striking District 11 of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation will increase the size of an average regular high school class from 26 to 27 students. There are 27,500 in the regular stream — that doesn't include students in the basic level, English as a second language, or special education programs, explained Bob Harper, a superintendent of schools.

The students are expected to be taking about 200,000 credits this fall. Divide that by the 7,527 classes the schools are offering and you'll get 26.53, although that doesn't include unregistered "walk-in" students, he said. Last year, the average was 26.16.

"It's a fair representation of what a typical teacher faces in

a regular class," Harper said. But principals say that in practice, mentioning the "average" is meaningless or even misleading.

One said he has some OAC classes this year "well into the 40s," but Grade 9 classes often have 26 or 27. "There's classes all over the map."

"Kids will notice a sizeable difference if nothing changes," said another principal, who just finished putting several extra chairs into each classroom.

The key question, he added, is how many are put in classes "everybody takes," like English or advanced math, or geography. Many of these academ-

ic classes had hit the 30 mark last year, and many will now go to 33. "They're likely to be in classes of more than 30 kids, more so than they've ever been before."

(Students) are likely to be in classes of more than 30 kids, more so than they've ever been before' — York Region principal

Another said he had to cut courses this spring, mostly at OAC level where there had been only enough students for one class — 15, or 17, or 18. "We're not running them. They became throwaways," he said.

Community colleges are asking for these courses, he added, "but you're saying, 'How can I run this with 15 kids,'" because keeping them would mean dividing another course with

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MARATHON OF HOPE. Whitchurch-Stouffville raised the official Terry Fox flag at the Rec Centre Wednesday in preparation for the annual run to raise funds for cancer research. Jeremy Schell, 8 stands in front of the flag. He was diagnosed with a cancerous growth on his kidney when he was just 18 months old. After the removal of the kidney and chemotherapy, Jeremy has been cancer-free for the past six years. Holding the flag, from left, are Dixie Sellers, a cancer survivor and member of the local Terry's Team, Mayor Wayne Emmerson, and Dr. Bill Murphy, another cancer survivor. Last year, 480 Stouffville participants raised \$25,072 in the annual marathon. Residents can make a pledge on run day, or pick up pledge sheets at any public library, Scotiabank, Toronto Dominion Bank or at the town's offices on Civic Avenue.

Photo by LORI EMMERSON

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News you can use

SAFE AND SOUND: The Ontario Provincial Police remind motorists that during the last long holiday weekend of the summer and as students head back to school, it's time to be doubly attentive while on our highways.

Tragically, and all too often, the last long weekend of summer turns into the last long weekend in the lives of some motorists. During Labour Day weekend in 1996, 18 people

were killed in collisions investigated by the OPP.

The OPP urges drivers to take extra time when behind the wheel and on the water. Take frequent breaks and don't take chances.

Aggressive driving and alcohol consumption account for the majority of highway and waterway fatalities.

The OPP wishes everybody a safe, sober and enjoyable weekend. Remember: Drive Friendly, Drive Safe.

MEET THE CANDIDATES: Although the municipal election isn't until November, an all-candidates meeting has already been announced.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library is hosting the

event, which will be held in the gymnasium of Stouffville District Secondary School on Friday, Oct. 17 at 7:30 p.m.

FUNDRAISER BBQ: Next Saturday is the charity barbecue, with proceeds going to Teen Challenge Farm. The event is being held at Stouffville Missionary Church.

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