

Start of school hinges on weekend talks

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

For York Region's 29,000 public high school students, it's either a full day of school Wednesday or just a chair in the cafeteria.

What they'll see at school that day — timetables for a new year or their teachers walking a picket line — is being decided this weekend, as striking teachers and the school board meet.

If the talks with provincial mediator Kevin Burkett have gone badly, they are already over, and the 13-day-old strike has reached a destructive phase. But if the Friday negotiations have continued into Sat-



LYNN JOHNSTON

urday, there's reason for hope, both sides say.

The board is promising to start the school year Wednesday if a settlement is reached. If that happens, Tuesday will be a PA Day, and new students will be registered.

But if there's no deal, students can count on only principals and vice-principals to be in the schools.

If students choose to stay home while a strike is on, "we'd encourage them to re-

view their work from last year or engage in reading or independent study," said Brian Jamieson, a board spokesperson.

If they go to school, Jamieson said, they'll be "directed to an area for supervision," likely an auditorium or cafeteria.

"There's obviously going to be no learning going on," in schools while a strike is on, the principal of a Markham high school added this week.

Parents should plan now where their sons or daughters

EDUCATION

will be if the strike continues, suggested Lynn Johnston, local president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

The board says a slight increase in the ratio of pupils to teachers is necessary because of provincial cutbacks.

The teachers say the board's latest offer will remove 190 teachers from the board's 22

high schools between this year and last year.

"They know it's educationally unsound," Johnston charged. "This is about disrespect for education."

If the strike is on, teachers will meet Tuesday morning in Centennial Arena in Markham and ride buses to a noonhour rally in front of the York Board of Education main offices in Aurora.

Pickets would appear around schools the next day, Johnston said.

Students cancel rally

Student leaders seem to be staying out of the way while the public school board and its striking teachers are negotiating.

A rally that a student group proposed for next week was called off by its executive "because we saw no reason for it," said a spokesperson for the Ontario Secondary School Students Association (Central Metro-West).

"We're just waiting to see what happens," explained Tuuli Hannula, minister of regional affairs for the association and a student at Aurora High School.

"We are optimistic that we'll be back at school Wednesday," she added this week.

-Mike Adler

Students will suffer if class size is increased, say principals

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70 teens into two classes instead of three.

Harper said the board considers 20 to 35 students an acceptable range in most classes by Oct. 31 (when official enrolment is taken). "There are not a lot of classes under 20 and there are not a lot of classes over 35, but there are some," he said.

The union says the board's contract proposal will mean 190 fewer teachers over two years, including last year, and means eight or nine fewer teachers in each school.

"The fear is: Is this the beginning of a snowball

effect that is really going to hurt kids?" asked yet another principal. Several also said smaller schools are more deeply affected by staffing cuts, because larger ones have more flexibility.

Harper, however, said the board compensates smaller schools by giving them "a slight top-up" from a small reserve of teachers.

The board might also use a teacher from this reserve to keep a small OAC class from being cancelled, he said.

Class size is up slightly, Harper conceded: "It's slightly more difficult to run a class of 15 than it has been in the past, but it's certainly not more difficult to run a class of 20."

Ninth Line safety concerns addressed

JORDAN H. GREEN
Staff Reporter

Stouffville parents won a major victory last week — lane and speed reductions have been put in place for St. Mark Catholic School and Glad Park Public School children crossing the Ninth Line to go to school.

The lane markings have been changed from what appeared to be two lanes on either side of Ninth Line from Main Street north to just past Millard Street, to one lane in each direction with a centre turn lane.

School crossing signs with flashing lights have also been put up, creating a speed reduction from 50 kilometres per hour to 40 kph when the lights are flashing.

The flashing lights — which will be flashing every school day from 7:45 a.m. to 5 p.m. — indicate a school speed zone which is enforceable by police.

Last June, concerned parents worked to get 500 people to sign a petition requesting the speed reductions and traf-

fic lights for the Ninth Line and Millard Street intersection.

"We did some traffic assessments the last day of school (June 26)," said Dave Aspinwall, York Region's director of transportation operations.

The region found that traffic on the busy stretch of Ninth Line had increased from 6,600 vehicles on an average day in 1992 to 7,400 vehicles on an average day in 1997.

Despite the changes — costing the region between \$12,000 and \$15,000 — parents still don't feel safe sending their kids off to school.

"I'm still very concerned about the kids crossing the Ninth, but we realize they aren't going to put the traffic lights in just because we ask them," said Lesley O'Connor, one of the parents organizing the battle.

In June, both the public and separate boards cut the number of buses to save a combined \$245,000.

With October's planned opening of the new Glad Park school on the dead-end

stretch of road of the same name, an estimated 100 students will be walking to school.

"We've got so many changes this year and I don't think people realize that," said O'Connor.

"We're not used to so many kids crossing there."

There isn't enough pedestrian traffic in the area to justify traffic lights at Millard and Ninth, according to a regional report.

However, the region is still investigating the situation and may change its position, according to Aspinwall.

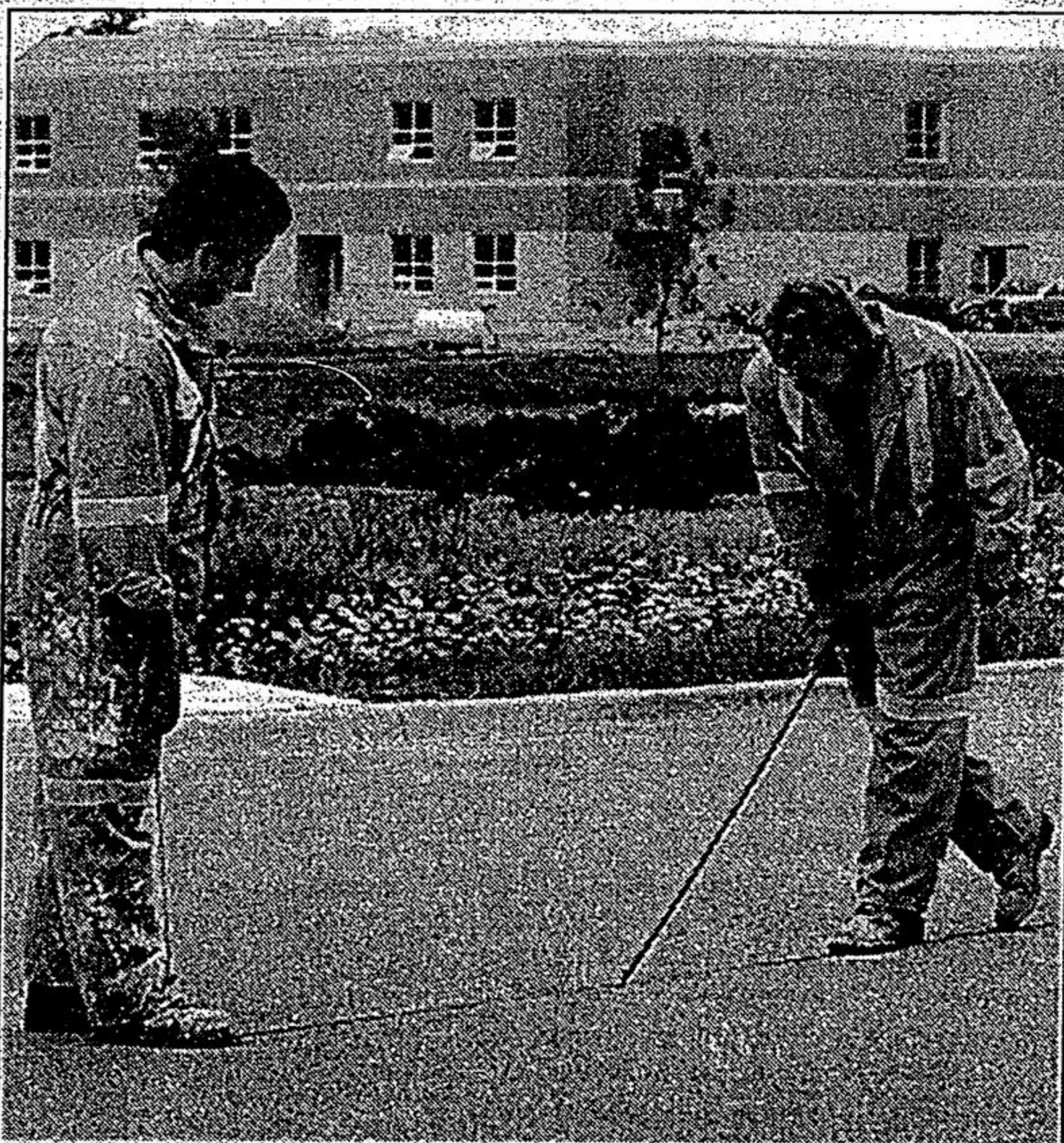
Still, some feel the region has already made the final decision.

"(Regional chair) Eldred King doesn't see a need for a light there," said O'Connor. "He thinks the kids will be safe with just a crossing guard — people will be rushing to work and won't slow down for them."

The parents also believe the intersection of Glad Park and Elm Road is a disaster waiting to happen, according to some parents.

"Increased cars and increased pedestrians, it's unfortunate if a child is hurt,

but they'll have trouble getting emergency vehicles in there," said O'Connor.



WALKING THE LINE: Ronald Benard and Glen Burden measure markings for the new crosswalk on Ninth Line this week.

Photo by STEVE SOMERVILLE

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