



**Attention
York Region Board of Education
Parents, Guardians and Students**

A province-wide strike by Ontario's teachers has been announced for Monday, October 27, 1997. Unless this is resolved through provincial negotiations with teachers over the next few days, the Ontario Teachers' Federation has indicated they will not be in the classroom on Monday. Although this action would be directed against the Government of Ontario to protest proposed legislation, York Region public schools will be affected. Our utmost concern is for the safety of students, staff and visitors.

If a strike occurs, The York Region Board of Education will:

- ✓ keep schools operational as long as sufficient staff are available and the safety of students and staff can be assured;
- ✓ suspend the offering of programs, including special education, until an assessment can be made of staff availability;
- ✓ encourage alternate arrangements be made for the care of your children;
- ✓ cancel transportation (Please listen to your local radio station for last-minute details regarding busing.)
- ✓ cancel field trips, if and when necessary.

Child care operations in some schools may also be affected and some before-and after-school programs will be cancelled. Please check directly with the operators of these programs.

Please note that the Board is obligated under the Education Act to maintain school operations and that we will make every effort within our means to keep schools and facilities open. If we are unable to do so, information updates will be provided through the media and via a special Board information hotline (1-800-546-0709).

We appreciate that any disruption to school operations places a greater burden for care on parents and guardians. We thank you in advance for your patience and understanding.

Bill Crothers
Chair of the Board

Bill Hogarth
Director of Education

Massive Bill 160 increases ministry regulation power

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

It's not quick reading, but it's the reason teachers are preparing for an illegal strike Monday morning.

Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, would greatly diminish the power of school boards in favour of province-wide rules and standards.

It will allow Ontario's Ministry of Education to write regulations about almost everything in the system, York Board of Education chair Bill Crothers observed recently.

"It's massive," he said. "Whatever Bill 104 (the Fewer School Boards Act) didn't do, this does."

Teachers' unions call it an attack on democracy. Why should unions keep negotiating with local boards for their jobs, they ask, when those boards won't have flexibility to make deals?

"I think the government's afraid of province-wide bargaining (by teachers)," added Lynn Johnston, York Region federation president for public high school teachers.

Johnston's union fought its recent strike over class size and preparation time, because these have been local issues in teachers' contracts.

But Bill 160, as it is today, would let the ministry set "the minimum amount of time" teachers must be in class during a school day.

The government says high school teachers in other provinces spend more time with students. Teachers say thousands of teachers will lose jobs if prep time is cut (fewer will be needed), and those remaining will get more students and less time to help them or handle extra-curricular events.

The bill would let the government set the size of class and "the method of determining" class size.

Former Education Minister John Snobelen promised this means "boards would no longer be able to increase class size." Local boards have kept some classes smaller (for certain languages, arts or technical courses, for example) by allowing other classes to grow larger.

Another aspect of Bill 160 which angers teachers is that it would allow instructors to teach some subjects without requiring them to be certified teachers.

This means professional musicians, for example, won't need to earn a teaching certificate before they can lead a music class. The government says this could also give students "greater access to specialists" in art, guidance, and computers.

The bill, still being examined at public hearings, would also let the ministry, through the provincial cabinet:

- take control of taxation powers, so that school boards cannot set a mill rate on their own, and stop the building of schools and the selling of school sites without permission.

- require "fair funding" for school boards, although the province hasn't revealed a plan. Getting a smaller share of education funds has been a sore point for Catholic boards, including York Region's.

- replace Bill 100, a special negotiation process used for teachers' contracts, with the Labour Relations Act.

- require teachers to work during "some or all" of the five working days before the school year, and set the school year and all holidays, exam days and professional activity days.

- allow school boards to hold their meetings "through electronic means," including committee meetings. That could mean a conference call on the phone, Crothers said.

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