

EDUCATION: Performance Plus program meeting tonight

Community should help teach kids

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Schools are more than just buildings where students learn — they should be places where the community comes together to improve learning opportunities for children.

About 200 educators and school council representatives are gathering today at a Richmond Hill hotel to consider that concept and look at ways to involve the community in a new public school board program called Performance Plus.

The program was created last year after results of Grade 3 standardized tests showed some York Region schools performed well below the provincial and board average. Those schools include Ashton Meadows, Parkland, Armadale, Wilclay, Morning Glory, Black River, Sutton, Deer Park, Stuart Scott, Crosby Heights, Sixteenth Avenue and Woodbridge.

Five of the 12 were identified early and the program was implemented last June, with the other seven named by the end of September.

"It's really just a title, but the important piece is we're a school like other schools and we need other support systems. Our circumstances are not the same as other school communities," Sixteenth Avenue principal Sheryl Hoshizaki said.

So far, Hoshizaki said her school has implemented a breakfast program created to address the whole school population and initiated relationships with other community agencies.

Performance Plus schools are identified using a variety of criteria, including the Grade 3 test results, where children live, household income level, family structure, ability to speak English and the education background of their parents.

The forum at the Sheraton Parkway Hotel today will feature child-care specialists and leaders in education, such as Joan Green, the head of the Educational Quality and Accountability Office — the same office where the province-wide Grade 3 tests are generated — as well as Ontario's Deputy Minister of Education, Veronica Lacey.

At the seminar, each of the 12 schools identified will bring seven representatives, including school council members.

An annual report will be produced to see how the Performance Plus schools are doing and whether other schools should be included in the program.

"We know there are others and they will be monitored," said superintendent Jaimini Randev, adding schools will receive a long-term commitment from the program.

"Reading scores may go up and down, but the other factors will always be there. Our intention is to build communities and have real community schools."

Randev says the \$1.8-million budget for Performance Plus is just a small part of the overall project, with additional funding coming from organizations such as the Canadian Living magazine fund for nutritional programs.



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