

SECURITY AT SCHOOLS LAX, WE FIND

BY TERESA LATCHFORD
Staff Writer

When you enter your child's school you are expected to sign in at the main office. But how long could you wander around before being noticed?

On the heels of a parent's concerns about security after an episode she calls disturbing and the explanation of safety measures from both school boards, we decided to put it to the test.

I visited seven schools at random across the region with the intention of entering each without checking into the office to see if I could walk one lap of the main floor without being approached by a staff member.

Each school had a sign clearly posted instructing visitors to sign in at the office upon entering the school.

Some of the schools also posted warnings, including a reference to the Safe Schools Act being taken seriously, that trespassing is prohibited and security cameras may be in use.

At Whitchurch Highlands Public School in Whitchurch-Stouffville, I wandered halfway down a hall and

returned to the main entrance.

I paused for at least three minutes to gawk at a display about disposing of batteries safely, located directly across from the office.

I was not approached and there were numerous teachers entering and leaving of what I assumed to be the staff room right beside me.

Upon entering Thornhill's Holy Family Catholic Elementary School, Roselawn Public School in Richmond Hill and Aurora Grove Public School in Aurora, I was approached almost immediately by a staff member.

At Holy Family, a teacher passing by the main entrance politely asked if she could be of assistance and escorted me to the main office.

At Roselawn, I was only five paces down the hallway and was called to by a staff member monitoring the front entrance.

At Aurora Grove, I hadn't even made it into the school before speaking with a staff member monitoring the yard at recess.

With all the security measures, I was sure I would be spotted at Unionville High School or Brother Andre Catholic High School in Markham.



Teresa Latchford

In the schools

I entered Unionville and was able to roam around, say a few words to students and leave after 10 minutes without being approached by staff.

At Brother Andre, where all students wear uniforms, I was able to walk in, cross in front of the main entrance and travel down the first hallway.

I left through a door at the end of the hallway. After passing a group of three teachers chatting with students, who barely noticed me.

What's more disturbing is I was not wearing a uniform or visitor's badge.

The most disturbing visit, however, was to Newmarket's Stonehaven Elementary School.

I was able to walk through the main entrance, past the main office and through four hallways.

Through the third hallway, a group of young students were taking drinks from a water fountain.

I saw a teacher monitoring them briefly, but was able to smile and ask the students how they were.

Then, without any questions, I continued through the final hallway and made my way out the same way I came in.

My experiences were similar to what happened on an afternoon earlier this month when Fernanda Carra-Salsberg and a neighbour took their children for a walk in a wooded area behind Thornhill Woods Public, in the Yonge and Centre streets area.

Her neighbour's son needed to use the washroom and headed to the school.

A short time later, Mrs. Carra-Salsberg wandered into the school, looking for her friend.

"I was astonished at how easy it is to enter and walk around without being noticed," she said.

"Why is it up to visitors to voluntarily report to the main office?" she said. "I can't believe if someone is going into a school with poor intentions, they will sign in at the office."

She decided to try to get some answers by writing a letter to Thornhill Woods' principal, superintendent, Education Minister Kathleen Wynne and Mayor Linda Jackson.

A buzzer system or more supervision was what she suggested.

"In each letter, I explained the aforementioned occurrence and demanded a prompt, constructive response," she said. "For this, I've either been ignored or informed that enforcing greater security measures is beyond their reach."

All schools have signs at the front door stating visitors must sign into the office and many schools choose to lock every entrance, except the main doors while school is in session, superintendent of high schools Helen Fox said.

With all the security features in place, I expected to be stopped at every school. But to my surprise, questions were only asked at three out of seven schools I visited.

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TOWN OF WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE
"Country Lifestyle CLOSE TO THE CITY"

Community Information Meeting
Proposed GO Transit North Stouffville Station

Thursday June 7th, 2007 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Whitchurch-Stouffville Municipal Offices
Council Chambers, 37 Sandiford Drive, 4th Floor

The Development Services Dept. of the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville will be hosting a Community Information Meeting on the proposed GO Transit North Station (located adjacent the Tenth Line, Bethesda Rd. and Regional Rd. #30)

The Community Information Meeting will be convened on Thursday June 7th, 2007 in the Council Chambers, Town Municipal Offices. The Information Meeting will be informal in nature operating as a drop-in session between the hours of 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. GO Transit representatives will provide a brief presentation on their development proposal starting at 7:00 p.m.

The Information Session will provide the opportunity for interested members of the community to meet with GO Transit representatives and to ask questions on their development proposal. Please plan to attend.

GO Transit proposes as part of its 1st phase of development, scheduled to commence in the Fall of 2007, the following:

- Creation of a 'kiss n ride' passenger pick up and drop off area;
- Provision of 183 off-street parking stalls;
- Creation of two driveway access locations onto Bethesda Rd.; and;
- Creation of a dedicated bus pick up and drop off area for up to five (5) vehicles. The bus area is designed to support GO Transit, York Transit and Durham Transit.

GO Transit proposes as part of its 2nd phase of development, scheduled to commence in the Spring of 2008, the following:

- Provision of an additional 216 off-street parking stalls;
- Creation of two driveway access locations onto Regional Rd. #30;
- Construction of a bus layover facility for GO Transit vehicles.

Other phases of development, in terms of constructing a formal station building and additional parking, will occur in the future when demand warrants the expansion. There is no timeline for the later phases of development.

For further information on the Community Information Session, please contact Andrew McNeely, Deputy-Director & Manager of Planning, at (905) 640-1910 x270 or via email at andrew.mcneely@townofws.com