

OPINION

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Editorial

Community volunteers could help youth get more exercise

ISSUE

Some schools in York Region don't give students the suggested 20-minutes of daily exercise.

Does your child spend recess involved in a hearty game of football or is he more apt to be texting his buddy across the school yard?

And beyond this brief break between classes, just how much daily activity does he really get?

If you listen to the advocacy group People for Education, the answer is not much.

Despite a provincial mandate, not all elementary schools ensure students take part in 20 minutes of daily activity, the group notes in its recent report, Ready, Set, Go Building Healthy Schools in Ontario — some here in York.

York Region District School Board health and physical education curriculum consultant Ken Leang cites several factors, such as a lack of resources and, get this: difficulty in coming up with engaging activities.

This latter statement defies logic. Since when is coming up with engaging activities a credible reason to not teach our kids? Do teachers abstain from teaching a math unit because they can't come up with an engaging way to present the lesson? Of course not.

In 2005, then-education minister Gerard Kennedy announced every Ontario elementary student would take part in a minimum of 20 minutes of daily physical activity as part of the government's Healthy Schools program.

The province released age-specific guidelines that include dozens of suggested activities for each group. We're not talking a simple list here, rather a well-researched program outlining locations, equipment, rules, warm-up methods and safety tips.

There are plenty of ideas to get our kids moving. And even if all our schools achieved the 20-minutes-per-day standard, after a sedentary winter, when extracurricular activities weren't offered at public elementary schools, 20 minutes just isn't good enough.

Children five to 17 years old should perform at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily, according to the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. Most of our kids simply aren't doing that and childhood obesity is growing.

Simply put, the province should be doing more to ensure daily physical activity is being offered in all elementary schools. It made a big splash when the program was announced, but the lack of accountability has led, in large part, to its failure.

However, there are some positive signs it's not too late.

Last month, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Healthy Kids Panel submitted to Health Minister Deb Matthews its report, No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy, the first step in a campaign to reduce childhood obesity in Ontario by 20 per cent in the next five years.

As with the People for Education report, the document highlights the designated physical activity initiative and reasons why it's not working. As part of its broader solutions, it talks about the importance of role models and champions. And this may be the program's saviour.

If teachers and board consultants are unable to ensure an engaging daily program is being offered, it's time for each school to turn to the community and find a fitness champion or two who can take up the reins.

There's no shortage of personal trainers, zumba instructors and fitness coaches out there who may be more than happy to volunteer their time to ensure our kids lead healthier lives.

This concept has proven successive with the Girls on the Run program, through which community and teacher volunteers help girls improve their fitness levels.

Our boards should embrace this concept — with strong endorsement from the province — so all elementary students benefit from a healthier school day.

BOTTOM LINE: Volunteer fitness champions can help give our children more exercise in school.

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

Don't wait for deaths on roads

Re: How to make our roads safer, editorial, Feb. 21.

I have some common sense suggestions. Late 2011, an elderly man lost his life at McCowan and Elgin Mills roads. This was not the first accident at this intersection. The traffic during rush hour often was backed up 20 cars deep with drivers taking suicide type crossing attempts.

After the accident, traffic lights were installed. Prior to that, I often was frightened for my own life when driving through the intersection.

I have no doubt pro-active monitoring with the proper implementation of the safety measures could have saved this man's life. The problems were obvious.

I live on McCowan between Bloomington and Aurora roads. A couple years ago, it was reconstructed. During reconstruction, it was identified the road did not meet safety guidelines related to driver sight lines.

Several proposals were made to remedi-

ate the situation, but nothing was implemented.

In the past few years, two dogs and a horse have died in a particularly dangerous section of McCowan. There have been close calls involving children and school buses as vehicles crest the blind hills.

How do we make our roads safer? First, we pro-actively monitor the roads for traffic pattern changes and implement safety measures as required.

Changes need to be made pro-actively and not reactively after people are hurt or dead. Strict adherence to Ministry of Transportation infrastructure guidelines should be followed for all construction and road modifications.

In the McCowan situation, reducing the speed 10 or 20 km/h at critical places with periodic enforcement is an example of a cheap and easy solution to the problem that will bring the road closer to the guidelines and potentially save lives.

DAVID G. CAMP
STOUFFVILLE

Main Street building proposal affects all

Re: Developer, residents still can't agree on condo building, April 6.

Size is the big issue. Most popular comment when showed the design of the proposed building: ridiculous.

Not that it's not a nice-looking building; it is its size and location that is outermost ridiculous — the corner of Main and narrow Lloyd streets is a heritage sensitive area.

This building as proposed doesn't meet secondary plan guidelines on a number of fronts and will irreversibly change the character of Main Street and open the door for other similar and what's not to say even larger projects.

Residents spent two decades and maybe millions of dollars participating in the long-term planning to ensure when time came for this town to grow, our urban design guidelines would be in place for all to follow.

As a result, we have a solid plan approved by council and the region.

This proposed building was designed either without knowledge of, or with total disregard for the guidelines put in place to protect heritage-sensitive location such as this one.

The builders are asking the community to also ignore the guidelines, to accept a reduced quality of life and urban chaos.

Anyone living in this community can imagine the traffic issues facing residents on a long-term basis — and for what?

The question was asked why not scale back? It wouldn't be financially viable, the developer, Cheryl Shindruk (Geranium Corp.) admitted.

The builders are asking the community to ... to accept a reduced quality of life and urban chaos.

Your article quotes a March 13 e-mail from Andrew McNeely, director of planning and building

services, to Mrs. Shindruk: "...staff continue to wrestle with the overall height and massing of the proposed building".

The height, mass, setbacks, overall size of this proposed building are not compatible to adjacent heritage buildings and residences on all sides. This seven-storey project is simply too big.

As I stated in my July e-mail to planning services, it is fair to say residents/taxpayers expect the mayor, council and planning staff to ensure the spirit and letter of the urban intensification plan are respected when projects are submitted, and clearly this one does not.

Whether you live in an old or a newer neighbourhood, a building of this size on Main Street will have a tremendous negative impact on your quality of life and will destroy the unique character and heritage we all love and enjoy in this town.

There will be a council meeting Tuesday at 7 p.m. This is a very important meeting to attend.

JEANNE MAJOR
STOUFFVILLE