

Parents raise concerns about student safety

By Mark Pavilons

Parents in Schomberg are worried about their kids walking to St. Patrick's School.

Changes to busing policies at the York District Separate School Board have meant students have to walk to the school, along Western and Main Streets.

A committee of parents was formed and a petition distributed throughout the community. But their concerns are falling on deaf ears, according to Nada Venuti.

She said they've been fighting the issue for three years, without results.

She said they've spoken with board officials and Township staff and politicians about their safety concerns.

Everyone, Venuti said, seems to be passing the buck.

The school did a survey recently and safety, as well as the speed limit on Western, were named as top concerns.

Venuti said all they're asking for is signage (a stop sign), crossing guard, or ideally, sidewalks on Western.

There are no safety precautions. We just want to get something in place, Venuti said, adding the problem will worsen this September when the kids head back to school.

She mentioned the board does have the authority, under certain circumstances, to grant considering for busing. She said buses are coming to various subdivisions and they're not full, so their is capacity available.

The parent committee also includes Amanda Brodie and Stella Barbieri.

According to Elizabeth Crowe, chair of the York Catholic District School Board, said he's aware that parents have spoken to board staff but she hasn't received any calls. Notification of changes were sent out several months ago, she pointed out.

The non-transportation zone for both the separate and public boards is 1.2 kilometres from JK to Grades 3 and 1.6 kilometres from Grades 4 to 8. This has been the policy for at least 15 years.

Staff at Student Transportation Services, which determines bus stop locations and bus routes for both boards, regularly audits routes throughout the region. This year routes serving Schomberg were audited and it was discovered that students from Grades 4 to 8 living between 1.2 and 1.6 kilometres away were riding the buses. Walking routes were investigated and it was determined that there were no exceptional safety concerns as compared to other parts of the region. Sidewalks are in place on all main routes, except for part of Western Ave. Students can avoid this stretch by walking along Main to Church and then up to Western. Using the sidewalk may not be the shortest route, but the route is still under the 1.6 km +/- 0.1 km criteria. Crowe added there are crossing guards at Cooper and Main as well as Church and Western.

There was a concern raised that there may be a need for a crossing guard at Main and Western and it is my understanding that the Township put someone in on a trial basis in late spring. It should also be noted that any students who live on Western Ave. between Main St. and the school (the stretch of road without sidewalks) have never been eligible for busing no matter what grade they are in because they are within the 1.2-kilometre criteria.

St. Patrick principal Fran Hill has initiated a safe routes to school program in cooperation with board and Township staff. It is a York Region sponsored program that is working well in other parts of the region, Crowe observed.

The Township of King has been great and it is my understanding that they will add the extra crossing guard on a permanent basis if there are sufficient students using the intersection.

I understand that some parents may be nervous but the non-transportation zone and safety criteria used to assess the situation is the same one used for the public board and the same one applied across York Region from Markham to Georgina to Woodbridge to Nobleton.