

Schomberg mothers stage march on YCDSB transportation

By Jake Courtepatte

A mother's wrath can be quite intimidating, especially if it involves the safety of her children.

A number of Schomberg mothers marched to St. Patrick's School in Schomberg last Wednesday morning, in protest of the York Catholic District School Board's decision to limit bus transportation for students.

Due to the changes, a number of Schomberg students must now walk to the school located on Western Avenue, a busy road without sidewalks for much of its distance.

Donna Barrowclough is a grandmother of several children who attend St. Patrick's School, who have been taken off the bus route and now must make a half-hour trek to school each morning.

The winding curves of Western Road makes for an unsafe walking path, as cars face a number of blind corners.

Winter conditions can be pretty bad for children who have to walk for half an hour, said Barrowclough. You can see the street here, it's busy. They said not to walk it because of the lack of sidewalks, but Main Street is just as bad as it's getting busier and busier.

The small town of Schomberg has grown to almost 2,500 in population, and continues to grow.

We've gotten three or four new subdivisions in the last few years, the population growth is high, the tax base is high. And yet we're cutting back on our kids.

Barrowclough has spoken with Dan McCowell, the superintendent of transportation for the YCDSB, about the situation.

He has told me that the transportation program has changed. They're reusing the buses, and have rescheduled the opening and closing of schools to accommodate. So there is no issue with a lack of buses, it's the fact that they don't want to pay for them. It's very expensive now to pay per head.

While in the past the school board has paid the bussing company per bus, it has now changed its policy to pay per student.

Therefore, it is more cost-effective to have less students on the bus.

I'm old enough to realize that the bottom line of anything is money, said Barrowclough. So if you keep looking at it, you'll finally get the right answer it's money.

I've seen multiple buses go by today, all fairly empty. One had two kids on it. I guess it's cheaper to pay for two kids than thirty.

Barrowclough said the school board is hoping to promote physical exercise through the students walking to school, as well as reducing gas emissions.

I'm not quite sure how it works. Now you've got 25 or 30 kids that are getting dropped off by their parents.

Barrowclough added she has counted up to twenty cars dropping off students at the school some mornings.

Those cars wouldn't be there if the kids were on the bus. It's basic logic.

The school does have a walking program for students, which is a walking school bus campaign.

(Township and school board officials could not be reached at press time.)