



## HOW "7 OUT OF 8" WOULD HURT OUR CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

By Sal Amenta, Past President, Toronto Secondary Unit

Planning for the 1998-99 school year has been paralyzed by late announcement of the funding formula, as well as new requirements like increasing teaching loads and lowering average class size. Ways of accommodating the new requirements have been found, but the Ministry has not permitted them.

Instead, it has demanded an immediate reduction of average class size to 22 from the current 26.40 students. This would prove disastrous to our system, since it would mean that the equivalent of four and one half students from each class would need to be re-assigned to *new* classes in *additional* classrooms. Because many of our schools do not have the additional spaces, what could we do?

### **OPTION 1: *redirect students to schools with more space.***

Since many students choose local public schools instead of other Catholic schools when redirected, we could expect the same if they were told to leave the school they already attend. The community probably would object to redirection as much as we would, and we would be faced with the unprecedented task of choosing which students would have to leave. Redirection is not an acceptable solution.

### **OPTION 2: *add an additional period of instruction to the school day.***

This is the "7 out of 8" solution. Since semestered schools have a 4 period day, the full schedule has 8 periods over 2 semesters. Adding a period would produce a 5 period day or 10 periods over 2 semesters. However, there is no new money for new teachers to teach these new classes. Teachers would have to teach "7 out of 8" courses each year instead of the current "6 out of 8."

Option 2 is unacceptable for the following reasons:

- ***Schools would become less safe***

Since funding is based on students taking an average of 7.5 courses a year, insufficient teachers are provided for students to take 8 – let alone 9 or 10 courses in a 10 period annual schedule. Therefore, a 10-period schedule would give every student 2 unscheduled periods a year – either in the same semester, or 1 in each semester. ***Thus, students would have free periods every day.*** In our smallest schools, 150 or so students would have a spare each period every day, or 60 periods a year. In our largest schools, about 350 students would have a spare each period, or 140 periods a year.

Parents say that they do not want students to have unsupervised spares because they consider them a waste of time. However, they could also be an *unconstructive* use of time, since teachers could not supervise students on spares. Our families and community prize our "safe schools" policy, which is a direct response to concerns about young offenders, youth violence and the related problems we face at school every day. Constant vigilance is the cost and the obligation of a caring and secure school. Hundreds of unsupervised students threaten the security of our schools and parents' peace of mind.

Toronto Secondary Unit

951 Wilson Avenue, Unit #20

Downsview, Ontario M3K 2A7

(416) 633-5502 / FAX (416) 633-9495

Of course, teachers could be assigned to supervise the students on spare, but then these teachers would be unavailable to teach the additional courses, to supervise classes where the teacher is absent, to mediate and help resolve student conflicts wherever they occur. Our teachers routinely undertake levels of supervision only now being introduced in public boards that once *paid* for lunchtime supervisors. Option 2 is unacceptable because it makes schools less safe.

- ***Schools would be less enriching***

Assigned to an additional class, teachers would also no longer be available other important duties (e.g., supervising school excursions; meeting with Grade 8's looking for a Catholic high school; helping with independent studies, making up tests or tutorials; calling parents; monitoring the halls and cafeterias; identifying school visitors, and so on). Worse still, adding a 5th period of instruction would extend the school day by about 90 minutes, so that schools now dismissing at 3:00 p.m. would dismiss at about 4:30 p.m. This would have the following negative consequences:

1. ***It would put the extracurricular program at risk*** because teachers would have far less unscheduled time to volunteer. Teachers want to continue contributing to these worthy services, however, with less preparation time during the day, a longer work-day, and more work to take home, there may not be much or any time left for after-school activities.
2. ***It would make the extracurricular program inconvenient for many students*** who have other expectations at home and at work after school, like attending to other siblings, part time jobs, and homework.

Given unpalatable options 1 and 2, the Ministry was asked for an exemption from meeting the average class size requirement immediately, so there is another, viable option:

**OPTION 3: keep "6 out of 8" and achieve the class size requirement in 3 years.**

Worked out by Board and Teacher representatives, this resolution not only meets the Ministry's classroom instruction requirement, but also goes a long way toward attaining the average class size target within the first of three years. Most importantly, it does so without jeopardizing the safety of our community and the richness of our co-curricular programs.

This creative resolution was proposed to the Ministry in a letter of understanding between the Secondary Teachers and the Board, but the Ministry threw in a Catch-22 to nullify the agreement, which had been freely negotiated. The trustees have been denied the required exemption.

Whatever happens now, public awareness of the situation is critical to getting the support needed to make the Ministry re-consider its counter-productive position. If you agree that the Ministry must allow the Board and Teachers to proceed on the basis of 6 out of 8, please call, fax or write to Dave Johnson at Queen's Park and let him know where you stand.

Queen's Park Address: 12<sup>th</sup> floor, Ferguson Block, 77 Wellesley St. W., Toronto Ont., M7A 1N3

Tel: (416) 326-9190, FAX: (416) 327-3790.

Constituency Office: 1102 O'Connor Dr., Toronto Ont M4B 3L4

Tel: (416) 752-2005, FAX: (416) 752-2646.