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School activities cancelled due to heat alert

By OTTAWA SUN

Last Updated: May 25, 2010 4:10pm

The Ottawa Catholic School Board has cancelled all outdoor activities May 25 and 26 due to the hot weather.

The board announced the cancellations on their website after receiving a heat alert from the city earlier Tuesday.

The Ottawa public health department issued the heat alert for Tuesday and Wednesday, warning those vulnerable to extreme heat to take precautions.

Catholic board spokeswoman Mardi De Kemp said that the school board does not have a set temperature that forces them to cancel outdoor activities, but the board uses common sense.

"When we get a heat notification from the city we pay attention," De Kemp said.

A heat alert is declared when Environment Canada forecasts a humidex of 36 or more for at least two consecutive days.

The forecast for Tuesday is for a temperature of 33 C and 34 C on Wednesday. Factor in humidity and temperatures will feel like the high 30s on both days. The extreme heat is expected to tail off with showers forecast on Thursday and rain on Friday.

Temperatures by the end of the week are expected to be in the 27 C range.

The health department warns extreme heat can cause dehydration, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and even death.

"Heat is hardest on the elderly and chronically ill. If they have no protection from the heat, such as access to air conditioning and plenty of fluids, they can develop serious health effects and even die," said Dr. Isra Levy, Medical Officer of Health.

Protection from the heat includes:

- drinking plenty of fluids,
- having access to air-conditioning at least 2 hours a day,
- wearing light coloured clothing, including a hat and,
- cooling down in the shade or in a pool.

Risk factors for heat-related illness include living on the third floor or higher, not having air conditioning, not drinking enough or drinking fluids that promote dehydration, such as coffee, caffeinated soft drinks, and alcohol. Medications like anti-Parkinsons and antidepressants can also make people more vulnerable to heat.

Ottawa Public Health is encouraging people to check on those who may need help accessing air conditioning, such as the elderly and chronically ill, especially those who live in high-rise buildings.

Everyone is encouraged to drink plenty of water, stay out of the sun and find a cool place to spend the day. Information is available by calling the City Call Centre at 3-1-1 or 613-580-2400 or www.ottawa.ca/health.

— With files from Andrew Snook

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Revenge of faith-based schools?

By CHRISTINA BLIZZARD, QMI AGENCY

Last Updated: May 25, 2010 10:58pm

You don't know whether to laugh, cry — or get religion.

Last election, voters overwhelmingly rejected then-PC leader John Tory's plan to have the province fund faith-based schools.

Premier Dalton McGuinty argued funding faith schools would splinter the public system and harm our children.

(OK, forget for a moment that we have a publicly-funded Catholic system. We all understand Catholic schools have a constitutional right to funding. And they neither harm nor splinter.)

So who's right? McGuinty? Or Tory. Well, judging by what's happening in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL), it seems they both are.

In a controversial move that has split the community, Niagara District Secondary School (NDSS), the only public high school in NOTL, will close its doors for good this June due to falling enrolment.

The chief reason for the plunging numbers? Well, 170 students in NOTL are bused to a fully-funded faith-based school. (The school board no longer pays for the busing.)

Eden Christian School in St. Catharines is Mennonite. And no, Mennonites don't have a constitutional right to full-funding of their schools.

The closure of NDSS doesn't sit well with NOTL resident Jamie King. He has two sons, aged 9 and 5. They'll have to be bused out of town when they're in high school.

"I think that culture and community play a really important role in the education of our children.

"I am upset that opportunity is being taken away from my kids," King said Tuesday.

He realizes declining enrolment is forcing school closures in many rural areas, but he believes NOTL has the population to sustain a high school. It's Eden that's eroded their base.

"To have an additional layer of religious education provided within my own school board really troubles me, especially when it impacts my kids' opportunity to have local secondary education," King said.

For a government that ran an entire campaign on not funding faith schools, this is pure hypocrisy.

Clearly, Eden is very successful. Why not allow Jewish, Muslim and Hindu parents to follow the same model?

A spokesman for Education Minister Leona Dombrowsky said Eden became part of the public system under the following conditions: "The provincial curriculum would be taught."

School staff delivering this curriculum would become employees of the public board and certified by the Ontario College of Teachers; and any religious activities would occur outside of the regular school day. Chapel at Eden occurs before school hours, but there is a "spiritual life program" that offers mentoring and retreats to students.

I asked a spokesman for the District of Niagara School Board if chapel was mandatory.

"Define mandatory," said John Stainsby, the superintendent of secondary schools.

"In order to go to Eden you sign up for two things. Students go there because of the context or flavour of the school.

Chapel is a component that's held there. It's an expectation for kids. It's before school," Stainsby told me.

So, is Eden the cause of declining enrolment at NDSS, I asked?

"Families take advantage of the choices that are available to them," Stainsby said.

Hold on, I'm confused. Voters reject funding for faith schools. Parents embrace it. Magically, one school board manages to achieve it.

Don't anyone tell Dalton McGuinty.

Or John Tory.

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About the Cappies

The Citizen and 35 high schools are participating in the Cappies, a Washington, D.C.-based program that uses high school critics to review high school theatre. The program is a unique partnership between the Citizen, the OttawaCarleton District School Board and the Ottawa Catholic School Board. The four winners of the lead acting categories will be eligible to receive a bursary provided by the national law firm Gowling Lafleur Henderson to attend the Stratford Shakespeare School this summer. Winners in all categories will be announced at the annual Cappies Gala at the National Arts Centre on June 13.

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Baseball beats school sports heat ban

Administrators order timeout because of sweltering weather

'T'd rather have this than the cold.'

SAM BROWN, catcher, Sir Robert Borden Bengals baseball team

Home-plate umpire Ed Metcalfe of Ottawa had perhaps the dirtiest job in sport Tuesday.

Wearing a cumbersome chest protector, a snug mask, which marked his face and ruffled his sweaty hair, and heat-absorbing dark pants, the veteran baseball official handled the heat and humidity with the calm of someone making a play at the plate.

The teenage players he was overseeing, members of two of only four high school teams to escape a midday edict by administrators for a two-day ban on sports because of the hot and humid weather, did exactly the same thing.

On Tuesday, the city was under a heat alert, which happens when Environment Canada predicts a humidex reading of 36C or higher for two consecutive days. In such cases, people can experience dehydration, heat exhaustion, heat stroke or death.

Following a directive from the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and the Ottawa Catholic School Board, the National Capital Secondary School Athletic Association postponed the boys' A/AA lacrosse and the girls' A soccer finals because of the health risks involved in those cardio-strenuous sports.

The Mother Teresa-St. Francis Xavier lacrosse final has been rescheduled for Thursday. The Deslauriers-Ashbury soccer title game is now set to take place on Monday.

The four NCSSAA rugby championships — girls and boys' A/AA and AAA/AAAA — also have been rescheduled to Thursday. They had been slated for today.

"It's the right thing to do. It's a safety issue," NCSSAA athletic co-ordinator Laura Gillespie said.

There were no medical incidents at either of the two NCSSAA tier 1 semifinal baseball games, which were won by the Sir Robert Borden Bengals, 8-5 against the defending-champion St. Joseph Jaguars, and The Hillcrest Hawks, 12-9 against the Holy Trinity Tornados.

The final is also scheduled for Thursday.

"It was tough enough, but I drank lots of juice and water before the game and in between innings," said umpire Metcalfe, a 55-year-old Ottawa resident. "I survived it, and that's a plus.

"I put ice packs on my wrists and neck. I've been at this for 37 years. I know all the tricks."

The Bengals and Jaguars players also were on the ball when it came to dealing with the heat that was thrown their way.

Borden centre-fielder Hanna Martensen, whose RBI singled contributed to a five-run seventh inning rally that broke a 3-3 tie, said he embraced the warm weather.

"It started out really, really hot, but we fought through it. We stayed hydrated and came through with the result we wanted," she said.

"I love playing in the heat. It's the best kind of baseball weather. It changes the atmosphere. Everyone tries hard and it's a good feeling. But to lose would be bad."

Borden catcher Sam Brown, who could appreciate what Metcalfe was feeling behind all of his equipment, said he wasn't affected by the stifling weather.

"I'd rather have this than the cold," said Brown, a Grade 10 student who drank plenty of water and energy drinks. "I stayed hydrated."

Borden coach Jean Lefebvre said his players were well prepared before and during the game, but scolded himself for wearing a black shirt

"There was no effect at all," he said about the heat. "They had plenty of water. I told them to do a whole lot of drinking. They're tough kids."

Winning pitcher Nick Gazo was as hot as the weather, striking out 11 batters and allowing only two hits in his maximum four innings. Ben Milinkovich had two hits for Borden.

In the Hillcrest-Holy Trinity game at McCarthy Park, the catchers were allowed to position water bottles near the backstop behind home plate during play, and all players were encouraged to sit in the shade.

One of the coaches bought four large water jugs for the players before the game.

"Baseball is made to be played in the heat," Holy Trinity coach Daniel Kelemen wrote in an e-mail.

Three weeks ago, St. Joseph coach René Coutu had to wear a hockey jacket to fight off the cold.

"The weather had nothing to do with (Tuesday's) game," Coutu said. "When it's warm, I like it better. The only reason we felt bad was because we lost."

Soccer coaches Francis Bourgon of Deslauriers and Caroline LeGresley of Ashbury agreed with the two-day postponement.

"As much as we'd like to play the game, it's better off for the players to wait until the weather is right," Bourgon wrote in an e-mail. "It is a championship game after all. As much as we'd like to get ready for this kind of weather, you can't."

In another e-mail, LeGresley it wasn't very important to her squad when the game was played.

"I think it is more important for the athletes to be safe," LeGresley wrote. "Such extreme conditions can be risky."

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Boyfriend charged with killing pregnant teen

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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FONTANA, Calif. — Police aided by dogs and a county sheriff's search-and-rescue team returned to a Rialto landfill Tuesday to continue searching for the body of a pregnant 17-year-old whose boyfriend allegedly confessed to killing her.

Diggers searched for Anyssia Escamilla's body for more than 12 hours on Monday and planned to do the same Tuesday in a 50-by-25-yard area filled with tons of trash. If nothing is found, they will move to another landfill in Corona, Fontana police Sgt. Billy Green said.

"We're cautiously hopeful," he said. "We realize the enormity of the task before us, but we're going to do everything we can to bring some closure to the family."

Escamilla, the mother of a 3-year-old son from another relationship, never returned home from Bloomington High School on May 11. Investigators interviewed her 18-year-old boyfriend, Jesus Avitia Jr.

Avitia told police that he killed the Bloomington girl and placed her body in a trash can near his Fontana home, Green said.

Her body apparently was never seen by trash-truck drivers who use a robotic arm to empty cans. The trash was taken to one of the two dumps.

Avitia was charged Monday with murdering Escamilla and her fetus. She was three months pregnant.

Avitia remained jailed Tuesday. Susan Mickey, a spokeswoman for the San Bernardino County district attorney, did not immediately know whether he had a lawyer.

Detectives did not know how Escamilla was killed because Avitia gave conflicting statements, Green said.

Investigators also were trying to determine a motive, though Avitia indicated he was unhappy that his girlfriend was carrying his child, Green said.

Escamilla's family said Avitia's family didn't approve of him seeing a girl who already had a child. Her parents said the two had been dating for about a year.

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Teacher in trouble after students don Ku Klux Klan robes

By DIONNE WALKER, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Last Updated: May 25, 2010 1:42pm

ATLANTA — A North Georgia teacher is on administrative leave and could lose her job after she allowed four students to don mock Ku Klux Klan outfits for a final project in a high school class Thursday, administrators said.

The sight of people in Klan-like outfits upset some black students at the school and led at least one parent to complain.

Catherine Ariemma, who teaches the advanced placement course combining U.S. history with film education, could face punishment ranging from suspension to termination, Lumpkin County School Superintendent Dewey Moye said Monday. Ariemma has spent nearly six years teaching in the rural county about 75 miles north of Atlanta.

She told The Associated Press Monday that students were covering an important and sensitive topic — but one that she might handle differently in the future.

"It was poor judgment on my part in allowing them to film at school," Ariemma said. "... That was a hard lesson learned."

The incident happened at Lumpkin County High School. Ariemma said her students spend the year viewing films and later create their own films to watch in class. She said the students brainstorm and pick topics to cover. This particular class decided to trace the history of racism in America.

She said the class has 15 students of multiple races, but no blacks.

A group of five students took on the subject, which included covering the history of the notorious white supremacist group which had large chapters in Stone Mountain, Ga. and Tuscaloosa, Ala. One student filmed and did not wear sheets, she said.

"The kids brought the sheets in, they had SpongeBob party hats underneath to make it shaped like a cone," Ariemma said. "They cut out the eyes so they could see."

Ariemma said she led the students through a cafeteria to another location where they shot the scene. Later, she said another teacher approached her.

"That's when I heard there were a couple of students who were upset," she said.

Ariemma said she wasn't able to find those students to explain the project to them.

Monday, student Cody Rider told Atlanta's WSB-TV that his cousin was among those who saw the group in white sheets and was frightened.

"I got mad and stood up and I tried to go handle it," he told the TV station.

Moye said a black parent went to the school to complain that evening.

Ariemma has no history of missteps at the school, Moye said, but administrators of the roughly 90 percent white school system are taking the incident seriously.

"This stuff happened in history. Do you ignore it? No," he said. "But you certainly don't walk the hallway in the garb."

Ariemma says administrators will review the film and decide if it will be shown in the classroom. She said the students who wore the sheets were shaken when they realized that other students were upset.

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