

# Mirror-Guardian

## School permit fees slashed for groups

Catholic board cuts fees, but no schools in North York among seven to offer free space

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Seven Catholic schools in high needs areas across Toronto are being opened free of charge to community groups under an agreement between the province and the city's separate school board. However none of the schools is in North York.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board is also giving not-for-profit groups a substantial price break in permit fees at its remaining schools, thanks to more than \$800,000 in government funding.

The seven separate schools that will be available at no cost to not-for-profit groups include Father Henry Carr South Campus in Etobicoke, Santa Maria and St. James Catholic schools in the former city of York and St. Gabriel Lalemant, St. Florence, St. Jean de Brebeuf and St. Thomas More in Scarborough.

North York Trustee Maria Rizzo reports the schools were chosen based on the areas targeted by the mayor's community safety plan, which was adopted last year and resulted in several schools being opened free of charge in five neighbourhoods across the city, including the Jane and Finch community.

Rizzo said a new agreement will be in place this September "with a mandate to look at other areas."

Last July, the McGuinty government announced \$20 million to help school boards open their facilities for community use.

Since then the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation has been hammering out formal agreements with boards across the province.

"It's very encouraging," board chair and Scarborough Trustee Oliver Carroll (Ward 8) said of the agreement with the province. "The fact that schools are open at night makes a big difference (in the community)." Carroll said the board wanted to make schools across the city as accessible as possible in an effort to enable community organizations to provide more opportunities for young people.

"We started from the premise of trying to get the fees as close to zero as possible," he said in an interview.

Rental fees have been substantially reduced for use of gyms, playing fields and pools.

The cost for using a single gym will drop from \$25 per use to \$10 on weekdays and \$5 on weekends.

Permit fees for playing fields will drop by 65 per cent, decreasing from \$35 per use to \$12.

Swimming pools, which had cost \$100 per use, will now be available to not-for-profit groups at a rate of \$50 on weekdays and \$25 on weekends.

"We really appreciate that there's going to be access to the schools," said David Rew, executive director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario.

He reported the move means organizations such as the two clubs in Scarborough can start thinking about expanding programs for youth.

St. Gabriel principal Mary Lou Mills said organizations, including the Scouts, have already approached the school about running programs during the week.

"I think as a community school it's wonderful that we can again welcome community groups to the school," she said.

Wayne Lewis, executive director of the Etobicoke-based organization Hopes are High, said the agreement will lead to greater opportunities for young people.

"From where I stand it's really simple. When you have a young person that doesn't have something constructive to do...things happen."

Rew added, "There's no doubt if you have a structured program, the realities are that these kids are going to be engaged."