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Public meeting addressing concerns at local schools held

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A public meeting at the Centre Dufferin Recreation Complex on Sunday (Sept. 25), was the second event organized to address several issues of concern at local schools, with a focus on Centre Dufferin District High School.

Local resident, Gary Whitworth, organized the meetings in response to an ongoing issue at Glenbrook Elementary School last year, as well as an incident at the local high school and ongoing situations that are causing concerns among students at the school. Mr. Whitworth said he was concerned because of the serious nature of the Glenbrook incident and those same students will be going on to high school.

Mr. Whitworth had invited local OPP officers to attend the meeting and said he was disappointed that they did not have a presence at the meeting.

Superintendent of Education ? Equity and Inclusion Services Upper Grand District School Board, Belal Taha did attend and spoke to local residents.

Mr. Taha addressed protocols which are in place when it comes to violence in schools and what is done when an incident takes place.

The issue of police in the school was a major talking point during the meeting.

In ?April of 2021, a motion was passed limiting the amount of police and involvement of police in our schools. And that wasn't just in Upper Grand,? Mr.Taha said.

Mr. Taha said that a school board task force comprised of administrators, board officials, trustees, and community members, was created to ask students about police in schools, and that a ?certain demographics of students that felt unsafe with a police presence? in the schools.

In response, Mr. Taha said, the school board ?voted to have a limited police presence.?

Several parents in the audience said that catering to small group of people, means the majority are left out of the process.

?You have a small group who don't like police, and don't feel safe, while the majority, who want the police there, now feel unsafe,? one parent said. That was followed up by a comment, ?the Board made a decision to do what the smaller demographic wanted, while ignoringthe majority.?

The high school did have an incident late in the school year, that was blamed on a racial divide.

Some parents expressed concerns that blame in the incident was placed only on one race while ignoring the involvement of others, and felt it was an unfair assessment of the situation.

One parent said, ?You can't talk about racism as if it were a one-way issue.?

The fact that there was an ?anti-black racism' meeting held, should have never happened, one parent said, following up with, if there was going to be a meeting, it should have been ?anti-racism' without identifying once particular group.

Washroom facilities at the high school were also brought up as a major concern.

One parent said his son had never visited the washroom at the school out of fear.

Some students congregate in the washrooms to be out of sight as well as take part in some activities that are against school rules.

?Walking into a washroom where there are already 15 older kids just hanging out, can very intimidating for a grade nine student,? one person said.

The School Board does not have a policy in place that effectively supervises washroom facilities.

One parent said she had contacted teachers and the principal at the school several times, and had a good experience speaking to them, but issues have still not been resolved.

Mr. Whitworth said he was not sure if a further meeting would be necessary to address issues in the schools.