



Acton District High School held their 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Bearcat Awards on Monday. The ceremony included a musical duet, a students vs. teachers game of “Family Fued”, various awards from “Best Dressed” to “Most Likely to Laugh at the Wrong Moment”, and a farewell to six departing teachers (above). - Alex Hilson photo

# Peaceful protest at ADHS



By: Vivien Fleisher

Just down the street, away from school property, a group of parents and concerned townspeople gathered Friday morning near Acton District High School to peacefully protest what was ostensibly a freedom-of-speech issue involving two students at the school. With upwards of 35 protestors at any given time throughout the day-long event, support was solid and positive. At issue: an incident in March involving two students that resulted in a suspension for one, followed by another suspension for the same student, who is currently appealing to have it expunged from their permanent record. Several supporters were also suspended at that time.

Tina Marshall organized the event with the support of many other parents and said neither parent of the students in question was present on Friday. However, when

Director of Halton Board of Education Stuart Miller came out at 10:30 a.m. to speak with parents, he referenced “Student A” (the one suspended) and “Student B” (the complainant) since the appeal was in process, saying, “I

of frustration. Don’t you think it would be a bit more productive if the principal would come out and speak to us?” Miller stuck to generalities, and by the day’s end, protestors did not get the opportunity to speak to the principal.

A conversation is why the protest centred on freedom of speech: an opinion was expressed on a sensitive topic and was further compounded when the student shared the experience with friends through a poem. It’s the school’s punitive response that has aggravated so many.

As Tina Marshall said to Miller, the issue may be freedom of speech, but it’s more the cumulative effect of the school’s response to student conflict that made this incident “the straw that broke the camel’s back. This was the turning point where we just said, ‘we’ve had enough already’.”

## “The straw that broke the camel’s back”

tell you why we wanted to meet over there. Today’s the last day of classes. I was concerned it would be disruptive,” adding he did not object to the protest but didn’t have any answers for them either.

Miller’s words did little to appease parents, whose objective was to speak to ADHS Principal Lucy Marion. Marshall told Miller “This protest isn’t about one incident, though. It’s about years

# Lowest funded English Public-School Board in Ontario

Trustees of the Halton District School Board (HDSB) have released an infographic depicting the funding gap for the Board on a per student basis compared to the Ontario provincial average.

The infographic clearly shows that neighbouring boards, some of which are similar in size and demographics, receive higher funding from the province. The Halton District School Board received \$1,290 less per student—almost 11 per cent less—than the provincial average of \$12,000. With 64,000 students in the Board, it works out to more than an \$82 million funding shortfall for the 2017-2018 school year.

“With program cuts and the creation of tight, balanced budgets we make it work, but I know we could be doing so much more for our students if we had the \$82 million that would bring our Board in line with the average per pupil funding in Ontario. The Halton District School Board Trustees have long been advocating for clarity and transparency regarding the funding formula and

have received neither. This infographic has been created to make the community more aware of the Board’s concerns so they can reach out to their MPP to help advocate on behalf of the students of Halton,” said Andréa Grebenc, Chair of the Board of Trustees for the Halton District School Board.

“Trustees at the Halton District School Board understand that northern and rural boards require additional funding for their unique circumstances and are not suggesting that the funding for those boards be adjusted,” adds Chair Grebenc. “We just do not understand our Board’s consistent and growing funding lag from the average provincial per pupil funding over the past 10 years that has essentially kept hundreds of millions of dollars from our classrooms and student supports without explanation from the Provincial Government.”

Currently the Halton District School Board is the lowest funded Ontario English public school board on a per pupil basis.

The infographic also outlines that the Halton District School Board spends more on Special Education than is allocated through the Ministry of Education’s Special Education Funding Model. The Halton District School Board has had a loss in excess of \$20 million dollars in Special Education Funding since the model changed in the 2014-2015 school year despite the growth of the number of students requiring support for special needs in the Board.

Additionally, the infographic speaks to the Ministry of Education’s use of an out-of-date transportation formula that uses population data from 1998 even though enrolments in Halton District Schools have risen by at least 35 per cent in that time. This funding gap has contributed to school bus driver shortages in the region.

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