

# GDHS students to benefit from decision to lower walking distances

By **TIM WHITNELL**  
*Metroland Media Group*

More high school students with the Halton public and Catholic boards will be eligible to take a bus to and from school starting this fall.

Trustees with both boards voted this week at their respective public meetings to reduce the walk-to distance policy from four kilometres to 3.2 km beginning with the 2014-15 school year.

The lowering of the high school walking distance threshold for busing puts Halton in line with the majority of school boards in Ontario that utilize a 3.2 km figure. The two Halton boards also harmonized policies for the transportation of French Immersion and English program students.

The distance change will result in more secondary students on school buses and a corresponding increase in costs to provide the added transportation.

The additional cost to the Halton public board to reduce the walk-to distance for secondary students will be \$155,482 and result in an increase of 826 students receiving transportation (from 2,543 to 3,369), an increase of nearly 33 per cent.

Cost estimates are based on 2013-14 Halton Student Transportation Services contract rates.

The number of new students who will be eligible for busing will increase the most at Georgetown District H.S. with 189 added at an estimated cost of \$29,672 more.

"This will make a significant difference in Halton Hills," Halton Hills trustee Alice Strachan, whose area of representation includes Georgetown DHS, said at Wednesday's board meeting.

The impact of the busing distance change would vary wildly at five of Bur-

lington's public high schools. At one end of the spectrum, Robert Bateman would have just one new student eligible at no cost impact while the new Dr. Frank Hayden S.S. would have 85 more students eligible at an estimated additional cost of \$18,240.

"This will bring down the number of cars" on roads, Strachan said generally about the busing distance change.

Several trustees have said it might seem counterintuitive that more kids bused means more exercise for them but they say many kids living beyond the 4-km distance are driven to school by parents so

now they will likely walk from home to their bus stop in the morning and from the stop to home after school.

Other trustees noted the new distance for busing will free up more courtesy (optional) seats on buses for students not normally eligible

for board-provided transportation and also remove some potential safety hazards for students who have to walk long distances and in areas where there are no sidewalks.

For the Halton Catholic board, the busing distance changes mean an additional 841 students would be eligible for transportation. It will require another 12 bus runs at an added cost of \$133,982.

The change would see the Catholic board go from providing transportation services to 3,167 students from the 2,326 students who are eligible based on the current 3.2-km distance.



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