

WiFi to stay in public schools

By **DOMINIK KUREK**
Metroland Media Group

Students in Halton public schools will continue to get access to wireless connectivity (WiFi).

With a full table, all but one trustee at the Halton District School Board, voted recently against a motion brought forward by Milton Trustee Nancy MacNeill to cease the board's operation of WiFi in its facilities.

"I would never say WiFi is harmful because I don't know that that's true," MacNeill, who voted in favour of the recommendation, said at the meeting. However, she added there are studies that suggest WiFi can be harmful, and that it has become so mainstream because it is convenient to use.

"The possibility of harm is too great a risk for convenience," she said.

MacNeill also pointed to a report released a day before the meeting, on May 31, the World Health Organization (WHO) placed cell phones in its "2b classification", meaning there is some level of risk for causing cancer. Because WiFi works on a similar electromagnetic transmission, MacNeill said there could be risks with WiFi.

However, the board's chief information officer, Bruce Smith, noted WHO said there are ways to mitigate the harmful effects of cell

phones, such as by using a Bluetooth headset allowing the user to move the phone from his or her head. Furthermore, WiFi stations are placed much farther away from people and carry about 1-1,000th to 1-100,000th the strength.

"As part of his job, Bruce continues to monitor any developments and keep us informed on all matters in this area," said Gillian Tuck Kutarna, HDSB Trustee for Halton Hills.

"(Removing WiFi from schools) would be extremely limiting and contrary to the way that the board wants to provide access to technology."

Board chair and Oakville Trustee Don Vrooman also disputed the claims WiFi might be harmful. Vrooman said he is educated in science and understands the technology.

"WiFi is not going to cause harm to our children. It's not going to harm our staff. It is a safe technology," he said.

Furthermore, he added that even if the school board stopped providing WiFi, the signals would still exist in the buildings from outside sources. He said his mobile phone picked up 26 WiFi signals during the meeting at the J.W. Singleton Education Centre in Burlington.

After the motion was defeated, Smith said the school board already has procedures in place for action, in case new information becomes available that could indicate something is unsafe, not just WiFi, in the schools.



GILLIAN TUCK KUTARNA

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