

Public blasts school board for high tax increases

The 20 or so people who attended the Halton Board of Education's first-ever public presentation of the board's budget, Monday night, let it be known that they're fed up with board budget hikes.

While many of the presenters were armed with sometimes well researched, sometimes imprecise facts and figures gleaned about the board's actions, their general perception and complaint was clear -- they're fed up with high tax increases which often exceed the cost

of living.

Last year, the Halton Board of Education jumped by 12.8 per cent to a total \$254 million. That meant an average tax bill hike of \$143 -- just for education alone.

This year's preliminary budget shows an 8.5 per cent increase to bring the budget to \$275.8 million -- an increase that will maintain only the status quo at the board -- but still up the tax bill.

"May I suggest your record is atrocious," Oakville resident and FORG (Federation of Oakville

Residents' Groups), Francis Charrey told trustees in his 10 allotted minutes.

"I am concerned that at the rate of tax increase we have been subjected to during the last five years, many of us, myself included, may have to sell our houses and move away from this region ... taxes would have become so heavy that no alternatives would exist," said Charrey, admitting he works in the financial industry on Bay Street and "makes a good buck."

Trustees heard from people who

are on fixed incomes, want programs held to what local taxpayers can afford, and who said quality education is not linked to spending money.

Burlington resident William Langhorne, who is in his 70s, told trustees a \$600 subsidy to seniors implemented four years ago for off-setting tax increases hasn't kept pace with rising taxes.

Langhorne said by the turn of the century, 400,000 of Ontario's 1.5 million people will be 65 or older and by 2020, 20 per cent of the

province will be senior.

"Should not some of these programs be put on hold or cancelled outright?" said Langhorne, asking if taxpayers should pay for a Grade 4 swimming program (or if it should be offered through the YMCA or parks and recreation); a Grade 6-8 music program ("when there are excellent private music programs.")

Langhorne also suggested pooling transportation costs among the public and separate boards and costly French Immersion programs.

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