

HDSB to keep public aware in special education funding cuts

By Tim Whitnell
Metroland Media Group

The wish of the chair of the Halton District School Board to make the public aware of ongoing, multi-million dollar funding reductions for their special education students has been expanded to a general call to make it known the board is experiencing financial pressures in many areas.

At the May 18 meeting of trustees, board chair and Oakville trustee Kelly Amos announced an intention to ask her colleagues to support a motion for a plan to develop an awareness campaign to get word to parents and the rest of the public about reductions in special education funding.

The board says the projected cumulative impact of those reductions is \$18.5 million over four years.

It began in 2014-15 with \$1.34 million less in High Needs funding, \$3.58 million less for the current school year, \$5.6 million less for 2016-17 and a projected reduction of \$8 million for 2017-18.

This system is setting up winners and losers. School boards should not be pitted against each other for something this important, Amos said in her initial report to the board.

More and more students with special needs are being identified and entering our schools and we need to provide supports and services so they can all succeed.

The Halton public board provides special education services to more than 10,500 students. Those receiving specialized instruction and care can include children with a physical disability, mental disorder or a developmental or language challenge.

The number of Halton students with special needs continues to increase, and those students are presenting with even greater needs, while at the same time our funding is

decreasing, Amos said previously.

At the June 1 board meeting, Amos changed her suggested motion after hearing from other trustees and the public.

I've had a couple of dozen emails from the public since the last meeting and media coverage. They (public) didn't know we were having funding troubles, said Amos.

Burlington trustee Leah Reynolds said she has heard similar concerns from parents.

So Amos was now asking for the creation of an ad hoc committee to create a public campaign, which she has dubbed Fix The Finances.

It is intended to raise awareness about how the board is financed overall and the implications of what it considers underfunding from the province.

We'd like (government) transparency, said Burlington trustee Andrea Grebenc. How do some boards increase their funding?

Milton trustee Donna Danielli suggested that members of the board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) be included on any awareness campaign committee.

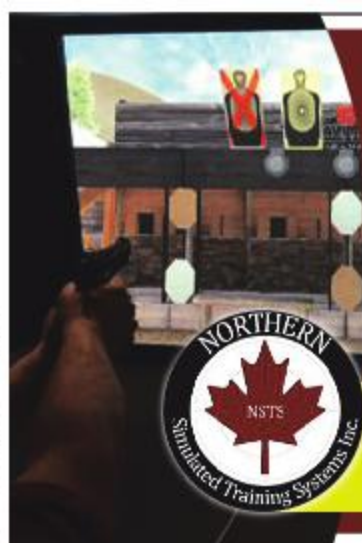
Amos was hesitant to make committee membership too broad wondering where the limit would be. She also said she doesn't know how we could embrace all of our (Ontario's 72 school) boards to come on board with the campaign.

If we could find some common ground (on funding concerns) with other boards, maybe in the GTA, it will strengthen Halton's position, said Burlington trustee Amy Collard.

Amos said a GTA action plan might work.

The chair's suggestion for an ad hoc committee on developing a plan to let the public know about board funding pressures was passed 11-0 by trustees.

A recommendation on a plan is expected to come to the board in October.



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