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HDSB approves internet filtering for the younger grade levels

By **TIM WHITNELL**
Metroland Media Group

Halton District School Board trustees have accepted a compromise position on installing in its schools and other buildings a filter related to Internet access to pornographic websites.

At the June 4 school board meeting trustees decided on a filter that will be put in place — likely sometime this fall — for the computer and handheld digital device-related information searches done by kindergarten to Grade 6 pupils.

An earlier motion that was expected to be considered by trustees but was never tabled called for an Internet filter that would have been applied to the board's WiFi signal for students in all grades.

Board staff has said previously that all Toronto and GTA public and Catholic school boards already have some form of Internet filter; most for many years.

After a lengthy, reasoned and at times passionate discussion of the potential merits and drawbacks of having an Internet filter attached to the board's Wi-Fi, trustees voted 6-5 in favour of an amended motion put forth by Milton trustee Donna Danielli.

Voting in favour of a filter impacting students only up to Grade 6 were Danielli, Burlington trustees Amy Collard and Kristen Lochhead, Oakville trustees Kelly Amos and Kathryn Bateman-Olmstead, and Halton Hills trustee Alice Strachan.

Voting against the filter were Burlington's Jennifer Hlusko and Dianna Bower, Oakville's Ann Harvey Hope and Don Vrooman, and Milton's Nancy MacNeill.

In barely passing the acquisition of a filter, the board of trustees also agreed that the cost to buy and install a filter to block pornographic websites and their proxies, and any annual subscription fee, not exceed \$100,000.

The board's chief information officer, Bruce Smith, told trustees he expects the initial cost and installation of such a filter will be no more than \$80,000 while the annual subscription fee should be in the \$15,000 range.

There are some key considerations around using a filter, he said.

Board staff has also noted repeatedly that anyone with 3G or 4G electronic devices with their own service provider will not be impacted by a filter. Board staff also will not be subject to the filter.

For full story, go to www.theifp.ca



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