

# SECONDARY CLASS SIZES TO INCREASE FROM 22 TO 28 STUDENTS

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items - there are a whole lot of 'unknowns' and 'maybes' as staff develop a budget for next year.

"If these reductions come to fruition with the announcement of the GSNs (Grants for Student Needs), there will no doubt be a significant impact on the day-to-day operations within the Halton District School Board and the student experiences we are able to offer," stated HDSB director of education Stuart Miller in a report to the board at the April 17 board meeting.

As collective bargaining begins, the province's actions may also signal a difficult round of negotiations with teachers and other education workers, said Miller.

"History has shown that in a difficult climate, teaching and learning can be negatively impacted."

What is known is the secondary school programming allocation of \$1.6M has been eliminated, funding for registered ECEs is reduced, and the board is not expecting the multi-million-dollar local priority funding, which covers additional special education staff to support children in need.

Secondary class sizes will increase from 22 to 28 students and Grades 4-8 classes by one student per

## THE ISSUE: HOW WILL THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT'S CUTS TO EDUCATION FUNDING AFFECT THE HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD, ITS STAFF AND STUDENTS? LOCAL IMPACT: CUTS MAY MEAN FEWER TEACHERS AND LOSS OF CERTAIN PROGRAMS

class. There will be four mandatory e-learning credits beginning in Grade 9, as well as changes to math and health/phys-ed curriculums.

What is not known is how many staff cuts there will be, how many electives may be cancelled, what experiential programs will be eliminated, how funding cuts may impact wait times for special education services.

Will bell times change to accommodate further efficiencies in transportation? Will graduation rates, currently at 90 per cent, fall?

Other possibilities are that schools may receive less funding for technological upgrades, buildings may not be cleaned as frequently, supporting ESL students in a growing and diverse region may become more difficult.

Delay in ministry direction means that staffing numbers have yet to be delivered to schools when normally at this time, principals would be starting to produce timetables for September.

It is not yet known if capital funding will be affected.

All departments are under scrutiny as the board searches for ways to support their students with fewer dollars, commented Superintendent of Business Roxana Negroi.

"School boards have been put in a position of having to react to those announcements; it's been very difficult to be proactive," said Miller.

"We have not received GSNs yet. We are expecting those around the end of April, hopefully early May, perhaps as late as the middle of May," which will give the board the information needed to develop a budget, expected to be presented to at the June 5 board meeting.

"Because of the nature of some of the announcements it will require some alterations, in some cases radical alterations, in our operations and in our operational strategies," said Miller. "We have tried our best to project some of those implications and

what some of the challenges will be for the board."

Beyond budgetary challenges, the board faces curriculum challenges: not knowing what to plan for and how to prepare staff, said Miller.

"We've been in a position of being one of the lowest, or the lowest funded school board in the province and having to do more with less; and now we're going to be asked to do even more with less, potentially \$18M less. There is going to be a direct impact on the classrooms," commented Oakville trustee Kelly Amos.

Shifting pedagogy to 21st century learning has been a source of pride for the staff, but "authentic learning experiences" come with supervision and safety requirements, components a reduced secondary staff may not be able to provide, said Superintendent of Education Julie Hunt Gibbons, citing an example of a chemistry lab.

"We don't know what the future holds; we just know that it's going to be different," said Hunt Gibbons.

All the work the board has done in producing engaging course offerings stands in limbo, said Halton Hills trustee Jeanne Gray.

"Every one of the

things listed in the (director's) report clearly impacts the classroom experience of our students," said Gray.

The director wouldn't go so far as to say board-wide events such as the annual Musical Showcase and Halton Skills would be cancelled, but the continuation of such popular events induces anxiety and will be difficult to navigate, he said.

Does the board have any concerns in its ability to deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its students when it is charged with balancing a budget with significant pressures on it, queried Gray.

"We have some anxiety around for all students," said Miller. "The class average sizes may have an impact on particular areas of the high school program, around small

arts classes, possibly some of those classes that are applied level or essential level, because they're all smaller class sizes. We believe we've had many challenges over many years, and we've been able to rise to the occasion and support our students, but I would be fibbing if I didn't say we have an anxiety around what we will be able to deliver to pockets of students and certain cohorts in our board."

"This is a board that is stretched to the limit and continues to perform, outperform many other boards in that stretched position. I feel it's almost like an elastic band - one little more tug on that stretch just may not produce the results that we hope for all our students here, and I hope the government understands that," added Gray.

### THREE EDUCATION ACTION MEETINGS

The trustees of the Halton District School Board are holding three Education Action meetings to gather community feedback on the Ford government's new vision for education.

The information will be included with trustees' submissions to the ministry's Consultations on class size and hiring practices.

Meetings are scheduled for:

**Thursday, May 2** at Dr. Frank J. Hayden Secondary School, 3040 Tim Dobbie; **Wednesday, May 8** at Abbey Park SS, 1455 Glen Abbey Gate.

**Monday, May 13** at Milton District SS, 396 Williams Ave.

All meetings will begin at 7 p.m. and be held in the school cafeterias.

For more information, visit [www.haltoneducationaction.ca](http://www.haltoneducationaction.ca)

### STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

We wanted readers to be aware of the potential effects of the province's budget cuts on the day-to-day operations of the HDSB.



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