

HALTON CATHOLIC BOARD GRAPPLES WITH FRENCH IMMERSION

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There's a lot to consider when putting together an education program.

Despite a number of clear obstacles, the Halton Catholic District School Board has kicked off an ambitious process to fix French immersion. Currently, those wanting to enter the popular program will face a long waitlist and a likely requirement to transport their child to a school further away.

Patrick Murphy, the Milton trustee, said the board wants to deliver the program, but that eliminating the waitlist would mean resolving a number of large structural challenges.

"It sounds simple, but it's not simple. We're the lowest funded per capita board in Ontario. We're a

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- Patrick Murphy

growing board. The demand for French programming is in those high growth areas. I'm in Milton -- portable city - it's not easy to just say we can add a classroom. Do we have the will and desire? Absolutely, we want to satisfy that need," said Murphy.

"We understand there is an issue with the supply of teachers. Can we make the space? I'm sure there's a way we can find the physical space, but finding

qualified teachers who are Catholic who want to come to our system?"

According to a study from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, inadequate teacher supply for French immersion programming has been an issue across the province.

The lack of qualified teachers has become a significant issue as demand for the program has increased. From 2011 to 2016



Roland Cilliers / Torstar

Halton Catholic District School Board trustee Patrick Murphy says eliminating the board's French immersion wait list would mean addressing significant challenges like a lack of availability of qualified Catholic teachers.

enrolment in French immersion increased from 164,635 to 212,714 students.

In November, Halton's Catholic board passed a

motion requesting a comprehensive plan to eliminate the waitlist and meet future demand for French programming in the next

school year. It further directed an expansion of the French teacher recruitment plan.

Patrick Daly, director of education, cautioned the trustees on making any rash decisions, especially as more reporting was expected on the subject in the coming month.

"This is bigger than saying we are going to add two classes here and two classes there.

This is going to be a much bigger process and have a greater impact I think than we realize. So I think in order for trustees to be able to really make those decisions you need as much information as possible," said Daly.

As a result of extensive discussion and the three delegates who came forward to speak on the issue, the Nov. 19 meeting had to be extended.



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