

'AVALANCHE OF RESPONSE OF STUDENTS IN NEED'

PUBLIC BOARD DISCUSSES MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

KATHY YANCHUS
kyanchus@metroland.com

The Halton District School Board's (HDSB) Director of Education has called the need for student mental health support "overwhelming."

"It's been an avalanche of response of students in need," HDSB Director of Education Curtis Ennis has said.

Provincial funding to support the mental health and well-being of students, however, is "not enough."

Half of the most recently allocated COVID-19 funding targeted to mental health and well-being has been received (approximately \$250,000); the board

is awaiting confirmation and timing of the second half.

At its Nov. 3 board meeting, trustees were given an overview of current board mental health strategies for students and staff, as well as the results of an eight-week summer "pop-up" mental health initiative. The latter program drew 1,000 referrals, supported over 500 students in therapy groups and 100 students for individual mental health support, said Superintendent of Education Dean Barnes.

The summer mental health support resulted in the temporary hiring of 13 Child Youth Counsellors (CYCs) and 16 social workers.

Coming into the new school year, common mental health concerns for HDSB students included feelings of sadness, anxiety,

loneliness and stress, said Barnes.

Funding has allowed for the hiring of seven new CYCs and two additional social workers for this school year.

Staff have similarly been impacted and challenged by the pandemic, said Superintendent of Human Resources Sari Taha.

Mental health sick leave and disability claims are on the rise, he said.

Staff have similarly been impacted and challenged by the pandemic, said Superintendent of Human Resources Sari Taha. Mental health research indicates that there has been a drastic increase in anxiety, burnout and substance use and "clearly we're not immune to that as a school board," added Taha.

HDSB has also undertaken a long-term strategy through a partnership with School Board Co-operative Incorporated (SBCI) to undergo an organizational mental health

and well-being audit to assess the needs of staff, raise awareness of mental health issues, reduce stigma, and implement strategies.

The board is also looking at creating mental health first aiders in schools to act as contacts for those experiencing mental health concerns.

Oakville trustee Joanna Oliver expressed her thanks to the board's mental health staff for being able to use COVID-19 mental health funding quickly to put together "an amazing summer program, something that's quite outside of the box I think in being able to deliver mental health supports to our students."

"The numbers are staggering and that's probably just the tip of the iceberg in the referrals that were made. We know that there's

probably many, many more students who are in need."

NON-COMPLIANT EMPLOYEES

Currently there are four permanent HDSB employees on unpaid leave for noncompliance of testing protocols for unvaccinated personnel.

There are 391 staff confirmed as unvaccinated and 669 with an undisclosed status, all of whom are required to undergo rapid antigen testing three times a week, a recent increase from the initial twice weekly provincial mandate.

Testing kits are paid for through federal funds; however, the board has chosen to pickup the cost of couriers to deliver the kits to employee homes in an effort to maintain privacy.

Burlington trustee Amy Collard suggested unvaccinated staff start paying for their own tests (unless they have a legitimate medical

reason), as there is a cost to taxpayers.

Board chair Andrea Grebenc recommended the board consider having non-vaccinated staff pay for all, or part, of the courier costs.

"We should not be incurring the cost of enabling people to continue to choose to be unvaccinated as that is not what's in the best interest of society going forward because we will be stuck in this pandemic forever," said Grebenc.

RENAMING SCHOOLS

A member of the public's request to the Director of Education to rename Craig Kielburger Secondary School in Milton did not meet the criteria under the board's Naming and Renaming Schools policy, said Grebenc.

The incident, however, did lead Grebenc to propose the revival of a past board discussion to review all HDSB school names in the near future.

Our 22nd Annual

HASSELL AUTOMOTIVE

NOW ON!

Super FALL Special

only

\$7995*

Prices are +HST

- Oil & Filter (Includes up to 6 litres regular oil.)
- Complete top to bottom check over.
- Installation of winter tires (already on rims) included.

EXTRAS

- \$5.00 Tim's Card
- Windshield Washer Fluid
- 12 Pack of Pop

Call for an Appointment

*Most Vehicles.

\$9995*

Synthetic oil (up to 6 litres)



AUTOPRO

HASSELL AUTOMOTIVE
SALES & SERVICE

45 Mountainview Road North, Georgetown, Ontario

905.877.7958

e-mail: hassellsauto@bellnet.ca • www.hassellautomotive.com