

HOW SPECIALIZED ARTS SCHOOLS COULD HELP ENROLMENT ISSUES

IDEA RECEIVES INITIAL SUPPORT FROM TRUSTEES

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Halton has a school enrolment disparity issue that's not going away.

In some places, notably in Milton, the student population is so large that boards have hit the maximum number of allowable portables. However, in other parts of the region, including Halton Hills, schools have less than 65 per cent occupancy and those numbers are not projected to increase much — or at all — any time soon.

The difficulties for a school with an above capacity population are obvious. But an under-capacity school poses a chal-

lenge for school boards as funding from the province is directly tied to enrolment numbers. If the student population stays well below capacity, shuttering a building and transferring students to a different school could be an option.

One Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) parent has come forward with an innovative idea that could go a long way to addressing the issues in both the over and under populated schools.

Laurie McDougald is a parent with two children at a chronically under-capacity school. She believes one potential solution is the creation of specific programming at low population schools.

"It's an attempt to boost enrolment at some of the schools that are seeing lower enrolment and to offer students a different way to learn something

that's more aligned with the kind of careers that they're going to be having outside of school and just to meet more of their interests," said McDougald.

Called regional programs, the concept is to designate specific schools within a board as specializing in particular areas of interest. For example, there could be an arts school, an athletics school or a STEAM school where additional focus and expertise is provided for students on that particular subject.

This concept isn't new. The Peel District School Board offers a wide variety of these programs including SciTech and Transportation, Engineering and Technology.

"Arts programs, high tech programs, they're more aligned with what kids are seeing out there right now. And I think it



Roland Cilliers/Metroland

Parent Laurie McDougald (left) and trustee Nancy Guzzo are promoting a concept that aims to bring specialized programs to the Halton Catholic District School Board.

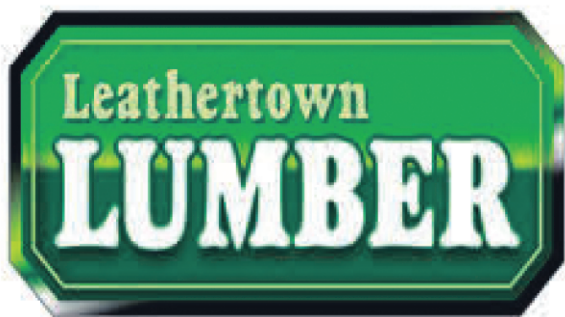
would bring, more kids and get them more excited about going to school. I think it would surround them with like-minded

peers who share their interests and allow them to express themselves in ways that kind of the traditional programming

might not be doing," said McDougald.

Generally, students

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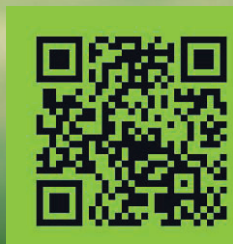
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