

Funding formula does not reflect cost of education – Gardiner

"The funding formula is having a profound effect on the quality of education being delivered in Halton," Ethel Gardiner, Chair of the Halton District School Board, told the Education Equity Task Force in Toronto, Wednesday, September 18.

Director of Education, Dusty Papke, for the Halton Board told the task force panel, "We certainly appreciate the magnitude of the task you have undertaken and are confident and hopeful that the results of your efforts will prove fruitful for our public education system."

The Chair and Director were accompanied by trustees and staff in making the presentation to the

Task Force.

Chaired by Dr. Mordechai Rozanski, the task force is reviewing the provincial funding formula for education and has heard a number of presentations from school boards, parents and employee organizations as well as provincial agencies in its hearings across the province.

"The Halton District School Board has been dealing with critical funding shortfalls for the past five years, and we welcomed this opportunity to illustrate the shortcomings of the funding formula to the Task Force," said Gardiner. "The current funding formula does not recognize the real costs of delivering quality educa-

tion programs and services. We need to rebuild the current formula with student needs front and centre."

The Halton District School Board's submission to the task force highlighted what is considered the most critical funding issues impacting the delivery of education in Halton.

The Halton District School Board highlighted issues specific to Halton such as its governance model as well as themes common to other boards.

The common themes identified in the presentation by the Halton District School Board included:

- Out-of-date benchmarks for employee compensation.
- Funding which does not

keep pace with the growth in the number of students requiring special education services, causing a diversion of funds from other areas.

• A transportation funding model which penalizes boards for eliminating inefficiencies prior to the implementation of the funding model.

• Diversion of funds from the general day-to-day maintenance budget (50% reduction since 1997) in order to support financial needs in other budget areas.

• Recognition of cuts and efficiencies made throughout the Halton District School Board organization prior to the implementation of the funding formula, and the effects of outstanding issues such as pay equity

legislation and retirement gratuities.

The Halton Board also highlighted the relationship between school boards and the Ministry of Education, suggesting a collaborative approach recognizing the pace of change in education would help boards to refocus resources to the benefit of students.

The recent implementation of the Halton Board's new governance model was also highlighted.

The task force was presented with a copy of the Board's policy manual as well as an outline of how the Board moved to a policy leadership model that clearly delineates roles, as suggested by the Education Improvement

Commission (Road Ahead II).

The Halton submission addressed issues identified in the mandate of the task force, which are to examine:

• The effectiveness of the model for distributing funding between different types of boards; (for example, urban and rural, small and large)

• The structure of cost benchmarks;

• The degree of local expenditure flexibility boards should have;

• Approaches to addressing school renewal – to finance the cost of repairs and renovations, etc.

• Whether the current approach to funding special education is the most responsive way to meet these

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Drought-like conditions mean lower crop yields, prices for local farmers

By FRANCES NIBLOCK
The New Tanner

You know you're a farmer when... "Your family instantly becomes silent when the weather comes on the news."

That offering on the PrairieLink.com humour page brings only wry smiles from some local farmers who are dealing with decreased yields and lower prices for some crops

because of drought-like weather across southern Ontario this summer.

Speaking from his combine while harvesting soybeans from a field in northwest Mississauga, Norval farmer Harry Brander, a regional director of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture who represents 450 Halton farmers, joked that rain or shine, farmers always have something to complain

about.

"We're always at the mercy of Mother Nature. That's why some people say we're always complaining that it is too wet or cold or too hot. Seems like we can never win, but this August was certainly the driest in history, so they say," Brander said, adding Environment Canada reported less than half the usual precipitation last month.

Brander said winter wheat might save the day for local farmers because of high demand and exceptionally high prices. He was planting wheat in the just combined soybean fields and said wet weather at the end of May and early June is expected to result in good crops.

"Everyone will be putting in wheat wall-to-wall and you can contract next year's, the 2003 crop,

at a really good profit so a lot of people will be doing that," Brander said.

Brander, who farms 400 acres of soybeans in and around Halton and Peel, said the yield has improved slightly over last year's record low of 15 to 20 bushels, or less than half-a-ton, of soybeans per acre.

"The average (yield) is 40 bushels per acre and we're coming up on 30, so at \$8.60 a bushel you can

do the math. Yields have improved, considering we didn't get the rain we needed in August," Brander said, adding conditions just miles away can be very different.

Brander said the corn he planted in the Norval area for his animals "isn't all that great," and although the cobs look good, the yield will probably be off from last year which was his poorest corn yield ever.

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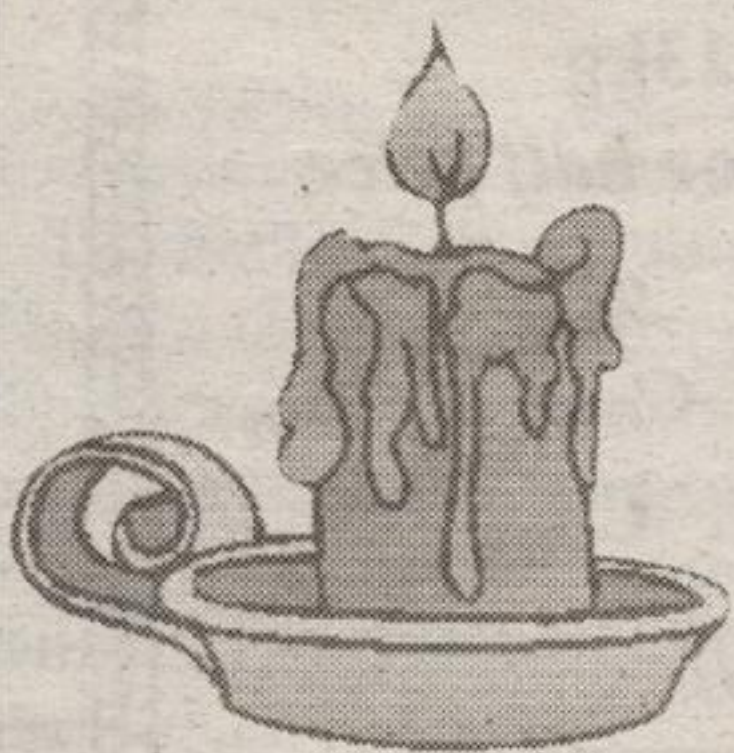
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