

No tax hike for Catholic school supporters

Supporters of Halton's Roman Catholic school board won't see any increase in the education portion of their tax bill this year.

During a relatively quick, quiet and painless meeting Monday night, trustees approved a 1997 operating budget of \$126.9 million, requiring no increase in the local mill rate.

Board chair Don Schrenk said he was quite pleased with the approved budget, noting it was timely and responsible.

"We can provide quality education at a reasonable price without having to hit (ratepayers with a tax hike)," he said. "We feel we have enough. We have been very, very fiscally responsible in the management of this board."

Despite the reduction in provincial government grants, the board was able to create a balanced budget thanks largely to a \$3 million surplus left over from last year.

Without that extra money, noted treasurer Joe Birett, the board would have been looking at a funding shortfall of about \$2.7 million.

And although the 1997 budget shows a spending increase of 2.5 per cent over last year's budget, Birett told trustees that staff are predicting a 5 per cent increase in enrolment over the next year.

"(Staff) feel it's a realistic budget, though a trifle on the conservative side," he said.

While programs, classrooms and staff remain relatively untouched under the board's 1997 budget, trustees opted to cut into a proposed maintenance program in order to pay off \$1.6 million in debt from previous capital projects.

That means washroom upgrades, playground surfacing and gym floor replacements at various schools throughout the region will be put on hold for another year.

The lone dissenting voice came from Burlington Trustee Miriam Van de Vrande, who voted against the 1997 budget because of the maintenance cuts.

Last year, she noted, the board looked across the system for potential budget cuts, rather than taking all the money from one area.

"I have great concern that this year that discussion didn't even take place," she said.

This year's budget also marks a historic break from tradition for the separate board, which usually waits to finalize a budget until the public board has completed its annual process, then matches the mill rate set by public board trustees.

Separate board trustees decided to strike out on their own, however, because of deadlines imposed by both the provincial and local municipal governments.

—By Kim Arnott, special

Man spotted in school change room

A Grade 3 student at St. Joseph's School in Acton saw a man in a black leather jacket looking in the shower stalls in a change room at the school between 10:20 and 10:35 a.m. Wednesday.

Police say the girl was in the washroom when she heard a noise in the change room, looked in and saw the man. She ran out and reported the incident.

Police were called and searched

the area extensively. The man wasn't found.

Police are not certain if the man is the same man, seen driving a black car, who has recently approached area kids and had conversations of a sexual nature with them.


The man in the St. Joseph's incident is described as white with short black hair. He was wearing a black leather jacket and a dark-blue collared shirt.

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