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## Halton Hills schools likely to avoid chop

All schools in Halton will be under consideration when the Halton District School Board reviews schools for closure or consolidation but Halton Hills Trustee and board chair Ethel Gardiner says local schools should avoid the chopping block.

"Halton Hills is fairly stable," Gardiner said. "I can't say at this point that no schools will close for sure because anything can happen, but the numbers are very promising."

Gardiner did caution that Halton Hills could be affected by the board's decision to re-examine school boundaries.

"We can't continue to overload certain schools," she said. "Our goal is to eliminate portables but we will have to readjust boundaries to do that."

The Halton board went through a school accommodation study two years ago but it is being led into the process again because of the provincial education funding formula. The board presently has 6,000 excess student spaces—mostly in Burlington and Oakville—and the province will not fund new schools as long as those spaces exist.

In the last study, Halton Hills schools were at a 92 per cent functional rating capacity if Speyside and Wrigglesworth schools were sold. The board delayed selling the schools because under sale guidelines they would have received nothing in return. Disposing of the schools now appears to be the better option.

"We need to get them off our inventory," Gardiner said. "What we really need is new schools and as long as we have the excess spaces we will never trigger the dollars to build the new schools."

Another factor helping local schools is that the province has changed the way school capacities are rated since the last study. The capacity rating used to allow for 35 students per classroom but the province has lowered that to 22.

"If it had stayed at 35-1 we may have had as many as 17,000 excess spaces (in Halton)," Gardiner said. "This gives us some room to manoeuvre."

Gardiner and Milton trustee Erica Andrew have already met with principals and school council chairs in north Halton. A series of public meetings and forums on the closure/consolidation review are slated for this week.

The board must make its decisions on closing or consolidating schools by Dec. 31 in order to qualify for funding.

—By Herb Garbutt, staff writer



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