

Halton school board's new Web site expected to 'get a lot of use'

The Halton District School Board is buzzing these days about upgrading its electronic communications.

The board recently unveiled a new, improved Web site and trustees discussed equipping themselves better electronically.

The board's new Web location— www.haltonsb.on.ca — was described by education director Dusty Papke as "a fabulous site."

"We're very excited," Papke said at the unveiling. "Most homes in Halton have Internet capacity, so this is becoming a more important tool all the time. We'll be able to communicate instantly and constantly."

He said the board is inviting people to make electronic visits as often as possible and provide feedback.

The site provides information under eight general categories — Home, What's New, Schools, In the Classroom, School Council, Administration, Transportation and Jobs.

Board staff have worked for a year to develop the site, which

contains information previously spread over two web locations.

Site development was done initially by board curriculum staff, said communications officer Marnie Denton.

"We did a category for the schools," she said. "It will get a lot of use for course work."

The Web site will provide teachers/librarians and students with access to information from all of Halton's municipal libraries. Several hundred journals and periodicals will be available on-line. Video materials can also be looked up.

It was noted the on-line library will also provide better access to materials for more remote areas of the region.

The Web site will also include links to other groups, such as school councils, corporations, the Ontario Ministry of Education, plus other libraries and school boards.

"The new Web site will help us achieve information sharing. This is quite an exciting day for the board."

—Board chair Ethel Gardiner



"It provides the ability for areas that are richer in resources to share them," said Keith Johnson, the board's information technology superintendent.

School events and bus schedules are among Web site information parents may find useful.

"At the same time, we recognize some families may not have Internet access," said Johnson. "This is not a replacement, but an augmentation of how we've been communicating."

School board meeting agendas, minutes and a variety of other board information will also be available on the new Web site.

Johnson said there are measures to ensure Web site security and privacy for students. Guidelines will be established about what informa-

tion can be posted on board pages.

Johnson said board mail servers have been taking 10,000 hits a day and its Web pages were receiving 1,000 hits a week.

"It's the primary point of contact for new residents shopping for a school," noted the superintendent.

The new site has basic information about schools and the board's web master said nearly all have their own web pages, with many worked on by students.

Web sites will be updated regularly, said Wendy Webb.

Board chair Ethel Gardiner noted during strategic planning work, staff and community partners identified communication as the top issue.

"This project meshes well with the board's strategic plan," she said. "The new Web site will help us achieve information sharing. This is quite an exciting day for the board."

A related topic of improving

communications for trustees was discussed at last week's board meeting.

A draft policy on expenses suggested trustees could spend up to \$5,000 per year on electronic communications equipment.

Dusty Papke said a package with a laptop computer, fax capability and a dedicated phone line could be assembled for trustees. A printer and paper shredder may also be included.

It was noted equipment would reduce paperwork, saving on space and storage, plus reduce staff time and courier costs. Cell phones and paper scanning equipment were also discussed.

It was suggested unused portions of trustee expenses be carried over from year-to-year or donated to school projects.

It is proposed trustees either return the equipment or buy it out when their three-year term ends.

The draft policy on expenses will be returned to the agenda for action at the board's Nov. 1 meeting.

—By Dennis Smith, special

SATURDAY NOV. 4TH



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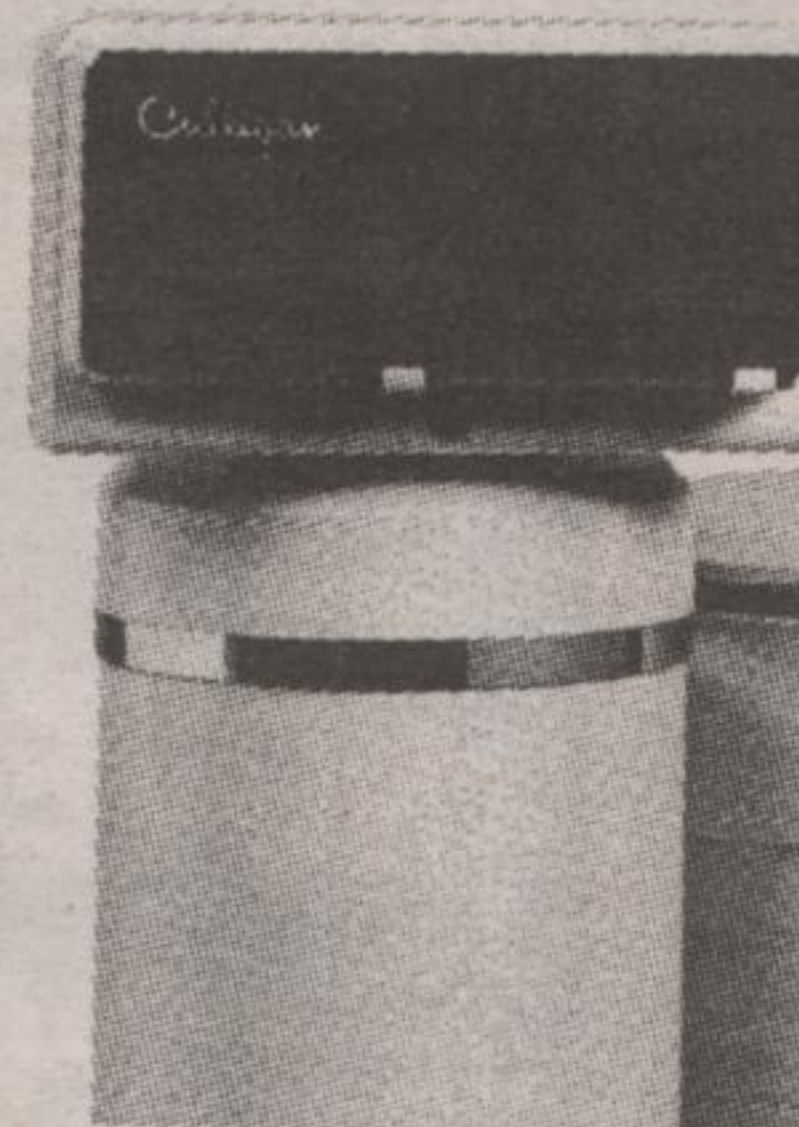
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