

Censured trustee wants province to fine, remove eight colleagues

Eight trustees with the Halton District School Board should be fined and removed from office for alleged procedural improprieties, if Burlington Trustee Michael Ellis gets his way.

The vocal Ellis, currently censured by his colleagues, has written a letter to the Ministry of Education asking Minister Janet Ecker to step in and authorize the removal of the eight from public office.

He contends the trustees in question voted to proceed beyond normal board meeting times in an improper manner

last May, and that they then voted on an extension to the education director's personal services contract in a deal that is ultimately costing taxpayers more than it should.

The eight trustees Ellis singled out are board chair Ethel Gardiner of Halton Hills, vice-chair Mary Chapin of Oakville, Burlington trustees David Abbott, Lynne Blanchard and Debbie Downs, Oakville trustees Kelly Amos and Annette Kirk, and Milton trustee Erica Andrew.

The letter adds to the hornet's nest of controversy swarming

around Ellis and the entire Halton public board. By mid-October a report should be in the hands of administration and trustees concerning an external audit of financial figures and models used by the board in dealing with school closure issues. Ellis contends the board misrepresented financial matters relating to last November's school closure decisions.

He is currently seeking a short-term leave of absence from the board due to chronic numbness in an arm that he says has kept him from work since May.

The board voted last week to

try to accommodate Ellis with hands-free technology in his home so he can continue attending public board meetings.

He has been banned from private meetings and from receiving documentation relating to them. Ellis is considering the offer of teleconferencing.

Downs, not wanting to stoke the fire, said, "I don't think I can comment on that. All I can say is the eight trustees he's looking at are really working hard."

"We've had a legal opinion here that, in terms of the accusation by Trustee Ellis, the min-

istry is not concerned with it."

Dave Ross, media relations officer with the ministry, would not acknowledge receipt of the letter but did say it is rare for the ministry to get involved in school board matters.

"There are very few circumstances where the ministry can get involved."

"About the only thing would be relating to deliberately overspending a budget. This is certainly an issue only for the board and its administration," Ross said of the allegations being made.

—By Tim Whitnell, special

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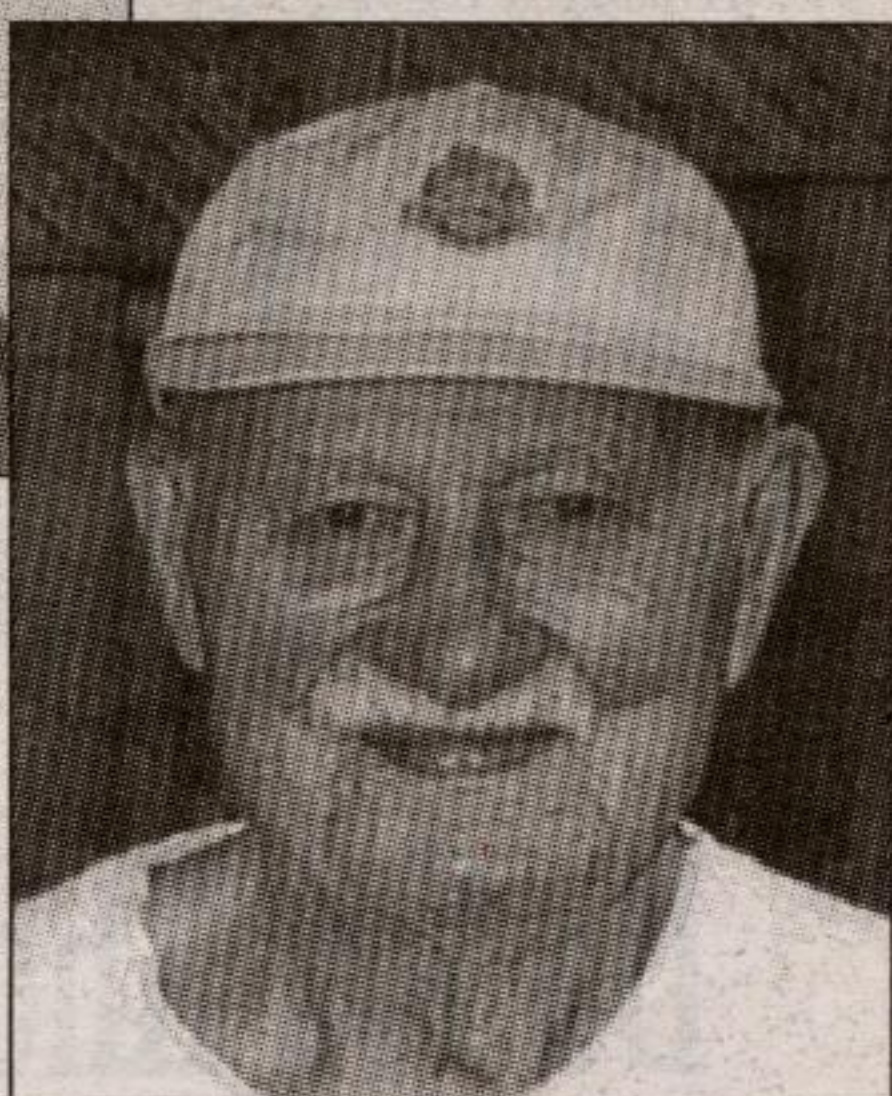
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