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Leaked documents show School board billed \$54,000 by law firm

The Halton District School Board has been billed more than \$54,000 by an outside law firm hired by the chair and vice-chair for legal services rendered over a four-month period this year.

A figure of \$54,299.26 in legal fees was made public in a document in the school board's committee of the whole agenda, which was tabled at the Nov. 2 board meeting. The number—which wasn't detailed—was categorized under the heading of "trustee" for the year 2004-2005. It was part of a two-page report that showed how much money the board has paid out for legal services since 2001.

The document didn't specify who invoiced the \$54,299.26.

In a Friday (Nov. 4) morning interview, board chair Paul Tate confirmed the amount was paid to Toronto-based law firm Miller Thomson, but he wouldn't discuss specific payments.

However, the *Burlington Post* (*The Independent & Free Press*' sister paper) has obtained confidential documents that show that Miller Thomson billed that amount for a number of services, ranging from examining the board's operating procedures to addressing a contract for a new education director, between April and August.

In May, Peter Lauwers, from Miller Thomson, was hired by chair Paul Tate and vice-chair and Burlington Trustee Peggy Russell to provide his legal opinion about the validity of policy governance at a special board meeting May 16.

At the time some trustees

expressed concern a lawyer was hired without discussion at the board table.

Documents show that Miller Thomson billed the board, between late April and late June, for work around the issues of procedural bylaws and polices.

Also, documents show that Miller Thomson billed the board, between mid and late August for work around the issues of a contract for a new education director.

The billings included a series of phone calls and meetings, as well as for reviewing draft letters, e-mail and newspaper articles.

When the *Post* approached Miller Thomson in late September for a separate story, Lauwers said he couldn't comment on invoices to the board or to clients, citing privacy issues.

Last Friday, the public board's new Education Director Wayne Joudrie said he couldn't comment on the documents the *Post* obtained.

"I can't talk about any of this, this is all in-camera stuff."

Later the same day, Joudrie spoke to two *Post* editors and cautioned against publishing anything contained within the confidential documents, noting that it could be an infringement of the privacy rights of third party individuals and therefore a breach of confidentiality.

Policy governance—which underwent major changes during a raucous special board meeting May 18—was introduced to the board in 2001.

See TATE, pg. 3

*Director
tries to
plug leak
—Page 3*



Lest we forget

Members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 120 colour guard parade towards Remembrance Park Sunday during the annual Remembrance Day parade and service. (Left) Veteran Chuck Tutty issues a salute.

Photos by Yves Desjardins

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