

Board 'comfortable' with trustees' spending

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higher than they actually are because of the way some of the board's budget line items were reported.

The board has 11 elected trustees and two non-voting student trustees.

Elected trustees earn roughly between \$13,000 and \$20,000 per year—the amount varies based on student enrolment and whether a trustee also serves as the board's vice-chair or chair. During their four-year terms, the public board's trustees also have an annual expense budget of up to \$5,000, which can be carried over to the next year if the maximum is not spent.

"Some (trustees) have given it back to the board," Parfeniuk said of unspent expense money.

"The trustees generally designate where it goes and the last time they gave it to the board's (student) food programs."

Meanwhile, the board's two student trustees each receive \$2,500 per year and an expense budget of up to \$5,000 during their one-year term.

Parfeniuk said the ministry's belief that Halton's public board spends an average of \$33,000 per year per trustee is about \$10,000 higher than the actual figure of \$23,246. This is because three main budget items belong elsewhere in the annual expense numbers the board sends to the government.

"For instance, we always show our Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA membership) fee that we pay to OPSBA on the governance (budget) line," he said.

Parfeniuk said that is a hefty \$77,000 cost to the board that traditionally has been itemized under trustee expenses.

"We actually shouldn't do that. We should charge that to central administration, but for ease of (board-level) analysis we've charged it to the trustee line."

If you factor in a \$20,000 budget for team leadership activities and the \$15,000 that can be spent annually on student trustees, it adds up to \$112,000, or about \$10,000 per elected trustee, that should not be counted toward their annual spending, Parfeniuk insisted.

"Other boards show those items on different (budget) lines and we will do that in the future," he said. "When we (consider all) that, we're right in the centre of trustees across the province, in terms of costs."

"We're comfortable with our trustees' expenditures and we'd be more than happy to have somebody come in and look at it for reasonableness and fairness."

When he was asked for trustee-by-trustee expense amounts, Parfeniuk said he will not be providing those at tonight's board meeting.

An education ministry spokesperson said the letter sent to the school boards asking for an explanation about administrative costs must be received by the province by June 30; the ministry will then forward its response.

"The numbers seemed a little high," Patricia MacNeil said of Halton. "It could very well be (because of) auxiliary fees and association fees. There was no assumption that it was inappropriate (spending)."

MacNeil said board expenses are part of the government's regular monitoring.

She said the Halton public board submitted a revised estimate for 2007-08 school board administration and governance costs that totaled \$11.39 million, \$137,795 above what the ministry had expected. The board has informed the ministry those costs are projected to rise to \$11.88 million for 2008-09, a 4.3 per cent increase.

The government's calculation about Halton's per-trustee costs put them \$12,527 above the average, which MacNeil said might be explained by the manner in which expenses are entered on the board's books.



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