

No money available

Board toils over how it will fund instructional assistants

Instructional assistants will be placed where they're really needed, but it will cost, says the Halton District School Board's education director.

Dusty Papke told trustees Wednesday the assistants are being placed with students with severe needs to ensure they can attend school.

The neighbouring Hamilton-Wentworth board has made a controversial decision to keep 23 special needs students from classes because of an instructional assistant (IA) shortage.

Funding falls short

Staffing levels required in this area are greater than the provincial funding provided, Mr. Papke said at last week's board meeting.

"The IAs are being placed primarily for health and safety reasons," he said.

"That's not what we'd like to do, but that's what we have to do."

He noted there's no funding available for kindergarten pupils or students joining the board in mid-year who would require instructional assistants.

Millions more needed

"The ministry expectations for special education require another \$300 to \$500 million for school boards," said Mr. Papke.

"The government has allocated \$30 million more, but we're going to work with them to have them do some tinkering."

The board will have to determine soon how to pay for the instructional assistants who are needed.

"It will really strain our budget," the education director said.

In April, 1998, the board issued layoff notices to



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DUSTY PAPKE

273 instructional assistants, but many were later recalled after provincial funding was acquired.

A media release outlining how the province's special education funding model is seriously flawed was relayed by the board last week.

"The current funding model does not recognize or address the current and growing needs of special education students," said Frances McKenna, president of the Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA).

"Our members face this mismatch daily, as needs and expectations of parents and students exceed the resources school districts can commit."

Numerous concerns cited

Several concerns about funding for special education were outlined by the OPSOA, a group that represents superintendents and directors at public school boards.

These include a lack of defined expectations of services by the province and a funding model that falls short, does not account for diversity and needs a major overhaul.

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