

# Funding doesn't cut it, say public school officials

By DENNIS SMITH  
Special to The Champion

The budget clock is ticking and some Halton District School Board officials are alarmed at the provincial grant numbers they're seeing.

"They're robbing Peter to pay Paul," said Burlington trustee Debbie Downs. "A number of things that have been given are being taken back."

The Province has increased the Halton board's funding by an estimated \$4.8 million for the upcoming school year.

But public school officials, who must finalize their budget by the end of June, say increases amount to \$100 per pupil spread over several areas.

"We will not be able to fulfill our obligations to students," said Ms Downs. "We will not even have enough to pay for all our needs."

The trustee said it's unclear how much new provincial funding is coming in. Ms Downs noted a recent provincial subsidy to help with rising fuel costs hasn't been included in 2001-02 grants.

Another concern is high school curriculum funding. There will be \$325,000 for the new grade 11 timetable, half of what was provided earlier when new grade 9 and 10 courses were introduced.

"There'll be no funding for textbooks when the new year is introduced," said Ms Downs. "It's a difficult pill to swallow. There's no clear funding for them."

The trustee said some grants weren't announced until mid-May, making it difficult to obtain public input before the budget is approved. "That's a pretty fast turnaround."

The board's business services superintendent Carla Kisko also expressed concern about provincial funding levels.

"It's going to be awfully hard to set a budget with so much riding on the \$100 per pupil," Ms Kisko said. "It is difficult to balance a budget of that kind."

She said additional pupil funding represents a 1.6 per cent hike, half the increase of the Consumer Price Index.

Of the \$360 million extra the Province is providing to school boards, \$120 million will address enrolment growth, she noted.

The superintendent was still awaiting regulations for spending of increased funding on local programs like remedial help.

Burlington MPP Cam Jackson noted the combined funding increase for Halton's public and Catholic boards is \$12.3 million.

"The government is keeping its promise to invest in quality education," he said. "Education continues to be a priority and we've increased funding yet again to help Halton schools ensure our children receive the education they need to succeed."

He noted the Province has increased spending each year since introducing student-focused funding in 1998. Last year, Halton's public school board received an extra \$10.9 million, while the Catholic school board received an additional \$11.8 million.

This year's province-wide increase represents a 2.8 per cent hike over last year's education spending, said Mr. Jackson.

The MPP also cited \$50 million announced recently for boards to address local priorities. He said this will provide greater flexibility and resources, providing students with better access to support programs, such as remedial help.

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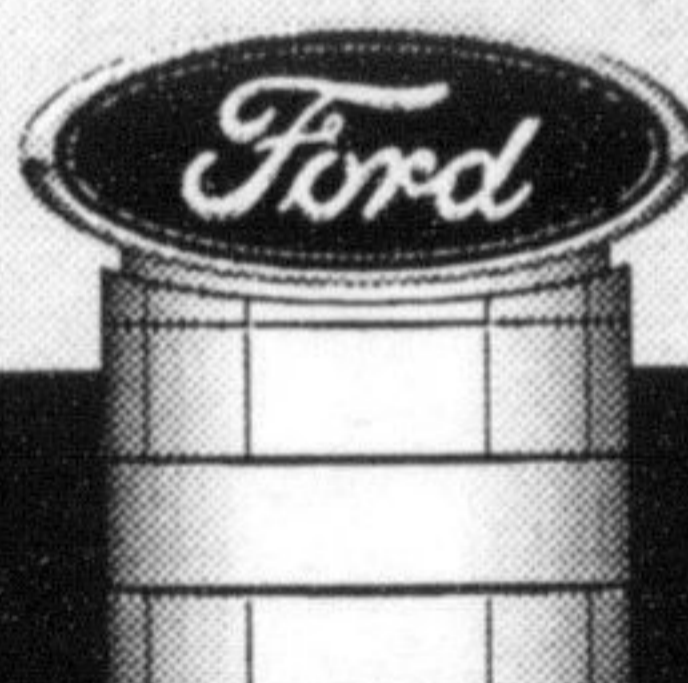
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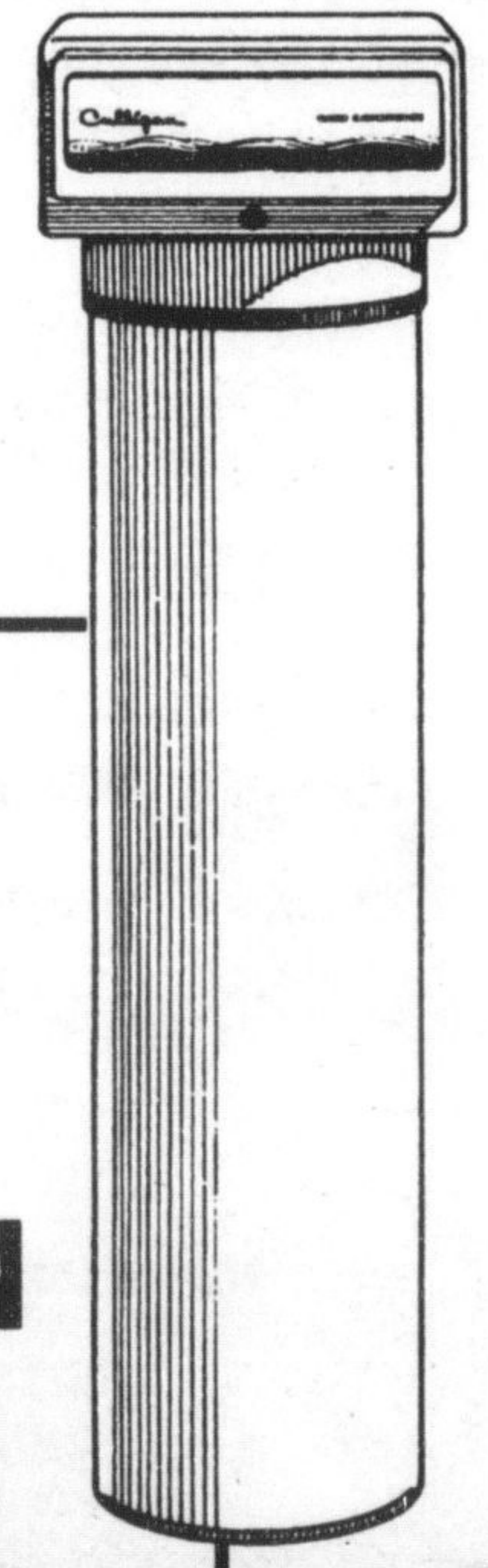
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