

School trustee says he's not resigning — for now

By **TIM WHITNELL**

Special to The Champion

A public school board trustee says he's staying on in his position — for now.

Burlington Trustee Mike Ellis said just prior to the holidays that he has received nothing but support and encouragement from constituents in his post, and he plans to remain in place for the time being.

"I've been getting a lot of calls to stay on, overwhelming actually, so at this point I've made no (final) decision. I'm staying on at the moment. Nobody from my community has said that it would be best if I stepped down."

Mr. Ellis has been embroiled in controversy since the summer when he called for an external investigation into certain practices of the board.

Specifically, he questioned the validity of information provided to parents of students at W.E. Breckon, an elementary school in

Burlington slated for future closure, and the process used to give Education Director Dusty Papke a new contract. The board was later exonerated by the external audit.

Mr. Ellis was censured by the board in September by an 8-2 vote of trustees for making public statements about confidential board documents. The censure, which lasts until February, prevents him from attending private board sessions or receiving documents related to private board meetings.

Chair asked Ellis for resignation

The auditor's findings were presented at the October 17 board meeting, at which board Chair Ethel Gardiner publicly asked for Mr. Ellis' resignation.

The following day, Mr. Ellis said he was "99 per cent" sure he would resign his post by mid-November.

The trustee then later said he wasn't prepared to resign until he received assurances from the board that it will hold a byelection

for his seat, as there's still two years left in his second term.

Ms Gardiner recently said such guarantees can't be made and indicated she wouldn't be inclined to support the call for a byelection, which would likely cost in excess of \$60,000.

Mr. Ellis said his concerns about the board remain.

"I'm not the bad guy here. I seem to be portrayed as the bad guy. I (just) brought up issues that (I felt) needed to be addressed," he said.

Most recently, Mr. Ellis attended — via teleconference from his home — the November 21 board meeting. He avoided missing a third straight regular meeting which, according to Ontario's Education Act, results in automatic expulsion for a trustee.

Mr. Ellis has said for the past few months that he's not physically able to attend board meetings due to health problems which make it difficult for him to sit in one position for prolonged periods.

In light of ongoing complications, Mr. Ellis had requested a short-term medical leave of absence from the board in September. The board didn't authorize such a leave; instead, it offered to hook him up at his home with hands-free technology so he could attend regular board meetings.

The offer remained in effect until the end of the year.

The next Halton public board committee meeting will be held Wednesday.

The next regular meeting of the board has been rescheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 22. Public session for both begins at 8 p.m.

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