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Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

A real treat

Firefighter Greg Ollerenshaw gives a treat to Smudge, a four-month-old Dalmatian puppy that will be one of many children's attractions at tomorrow's fire station open house. As part of Fire Prevention Week, Central Station on Steeles Avenue will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Demonstrations, face painting, a barbecue and a visit from Sparky the Fire Dog will also be part of the event.

Parents' group set to fight proposed closure of school

By RICHARD VIVIAN

The Champion

The possible closure of Martin Street School had parents eagerly seeking answers during a public meeting Tuesday.

More than 35 parents turned out for the first meeting of the School Closure/Consolidation Study Committee to hear from Halton District School Board (HDSB) staff why their children's school may close at the end of the school year.

"This is an open process. There have been rumblings that this is a forgone conclusion. I want to assure you that as a committee, we take the task we've been charged with very seriously," committee Chairman Al Greyson told the crowd. "Our job is to go through the information and make our best recommendation back to the (school) board."

Although the school is operating near capacity with 250 students, 106 of those students are bussed in from outside the school's catchment area — mostly for the French Immersion program.

Those catchment area enrollment figures are projected to drop in the years leading up to 2010, said Elaine Westerhof, the board's manager of planning.

"It's (school) in a mature area. Its population has matured and is starting to decline," she said.

Under provincial regulations, school boards only get funds to build new facilities in growth areas through the elimination of surplus pupil placements. That surplus is looked at on a board-wide basis, explained Jerry Cullins, the board's superintendent of facility services.

"When the board needs to build schools in response to new growth and development, one of the issues that it has to look at is schools that may be drawing from outside the immediate area," he said.

"If we have an empty desk in Georgetown and a student in Burlington, they (Province) don't care how we work that out. We'll have to shift boundaries to accommodate that pupil before we will get a dollar to build one new pupil placement anywhere in the region."

While parents weren't allowed to address the committee during the first meeting, they were able to submit written questions based on information provided by school board staff. "I'm actually in the south end of town, but we've chosen this school — first off because it's French Immersion and secondly because of the history of the school. You can't get the quality of a small school education out of a big school," Mark Wallis, president of the Martin Street School parent council, told *The Champion*.

"We're going to have to show the board that it's about more than just the numbers."

A review of school catchment boundaries is currently underway and it's unknown what school Martin Street students would attend should the school close.

A parents' group has also formed to combat the closure. In its efforts, the group has gathered signatures from more than 350 people opposing the closure.

The public will have the opportunity to address the committee during meetings this Tuesday and October 15. Another open house will be held October 22 at Milton District High School.

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