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36 PAGES "Using Communication to Build Better Communities"



Grin and bear it

Surrounded by hundreds of donated stuffed toys, Katie Boyle of Milton adds her donation to the growing mound yesterday morning at Milton Mall. It was part of the shopping centre's annual collection for Good Bears of the World Canada, which distributes teddy bears to comfort children around the world. The drive ends Sunday.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

School closure decision postponed

By JASON MISNER

Special to The Champion

Ontario's education minister has postponed any decision the public school board was to make on school closures in Milton and south Halton.

As a result parents, Halton District School Board trustees and bureaucrats are crossing their fingers such drastic action will never have to be taken.

Education Director Dusty Papke announced at a special school board meeting last week that a deadline of December 31, by which the board was to have submitted recommended schools for closure and/or consolidation, has been delayed — likely until next spring.

Mr. Papke sent a letter to Education Minister Gerard Kennedy June 7 for an extension. No set timeline was given by Mr. Kennedy to submit

schools for closure.

The board would have had to start the process to review closures and consolidation areas in early January.

At the special meeting, trustees were to have voted on a process to begin studying school closures and consolidation review areas. Mr. Papke said it wasn't until around 6 p.m. that day word finally came from the ministry that the December deadline would be extended.

"This is a good move at this point," Mr. Papke told trustees.

On the list of potential closure/consolidation discussion is Martin Street School.

The board decided last fall to delay the issues of closures and consolidation after the Liberal government took power. At that time the board cited election promises made by Ontario's new government to revise the education funding formula as

the rationale to halt closure/consolidation studies involving 13 elementary schools.

The dilemma for some of Ontario's public and Catholic school boards since the funding formula was introduced in 1996 is that all surplus pupil capacity has to be eliminated in older communities in order to qualify for provincial funds to build new schools in growing areas.

Also, the delay allows boards the opportunity to implement the Liberal's promise to cap classes at 20 students in the primary grades, meaning more space and teachers will be needed for the extra classes created. This means schools that are currently underutilized may need their open space in the near future.

Mr. Papke said the Province's commitment to review education funding will likely be the key in ultimately determining future school closures/con-

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