

# Funding news on the way

By **JASON MISNER**  
Special to The Champion

The Halton District School Board could know as early as this week if it will get \$3 million in already-allocated special education funding or if it needs to find it somewhere else to ensure it has a balanced budget for 2004-05.

Education Minister Gerard Kennedy told The Champion his ministry will soon be announcing special education funding following a comprehensive review of the vast number of requests this year.

"They (the requests) are 200 per cent more than what boards asked for at the beginning of the year," he said. "This is something that is extraordinary and we're going to make very sure that the dollars that leave this ministry are to help kids very specifically the way they are intended for."

But he wouldn't confirm if the Halton board would get the \$3 million in anticipated funding.

"That's part of the decision we're

going to make so I'm not going to put that out to one board ahead of time. I think all boards are going to learn about it at the same time," Mr. Kennedy said, noting boards have been cooperative.

"We've been trying to keep them as closely informed as we can about our thinking right up until we make our conclusion so they're in a fairly good position to estimate where their board is going to be. They understand we have to do due diligence on these kinds of claims."

Mr. Kennedy angered school boards when he decided earlier this year to hold back \$102 million of special education funds already approved by ministry officials.

Rising costs and concerns about the process prompted the move.

Last month the Halton District School Board passed a \$329-million balanced budget, which included spending \$44 million on special education, to serve about 8,200 students.

But \$3 million of that money has

yet to be released to the board from the ministry, from an earlier commitment. If that money doesn't come down the pike, it will leave the board in a deficit situation and the shortfall will have to come from somewhere else in the budget.

Board Chair Mary Chapin told The Champion in an interview after the budget was passed that the yet-to-be released \$3 million was included because the board is holding the ministry to its word.

"I believe we're right to budget to use that money and if it doesn't come through then it will be the ministry that's put us into deficit," she said at the time.

Mr. Kennedy said no board will be in a deficit situation because they don't have to submit their final budgets to the ministry until the end of August. If funding allocations happen to come in lower than expected for any board, there will be time to make adjustments, he said.

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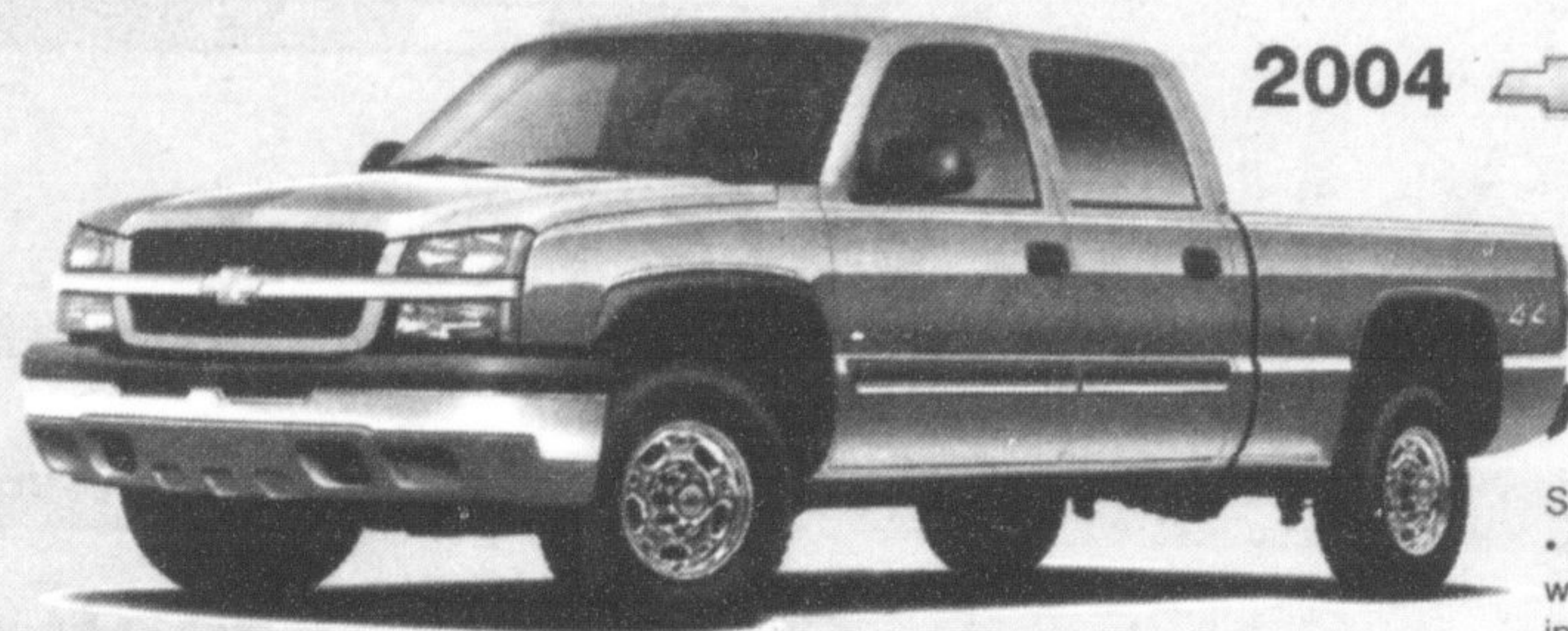
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