

Catholic school board adopts a video surveillance policy

By **KIM ARNOTT**
Special to The Champion

The Halton Catholic school board has approved a video surveillance policy, but board staff say that doesn't mean cameras are imminent in local schools.

Assistant Superintendent Gary Mahoney described the board policy as basically: "Video surveillance where necessary, but not necessarily video surveillance."

The policy outlines how security cameras, along with the information they gather, may be used on school board sites.

It comes on the heels of an announcement by the provincial government that it will spend \$4 to \$6 million installing cameras in schools where public access is difficult to monitor.

But Lou Piovesan, director of education for the Halton Catholic District School Board, said most of the board's schools have either been renovated or designed to

ensure that front entrances can be monitored by office staff.

The board will consider requests from individual schools that believe they would benefit from the installation of cameras to improve staff and student safety, deter unauthorized access or discourage vandalism and theft.

But Mr. Mahoney warned trustees that cameras won't likely prevent criminal activity, as they won't be consistently monitored.

"Video surveillance is primarily seen as a way of augmenting the information available to anyone investigating a situation," he said, adding that it isn't the right tool for all circumstances.

"In fact, there may be situations where a locked door may be more effective than video surveillance."

Mr. Piovesan also reassured trustees that the cameras would not be used as a substitute for staff supervision of students.

"The best surveillance is human

surveillance," he said.

"The cameras are there to support, but not to take over human surveillance."

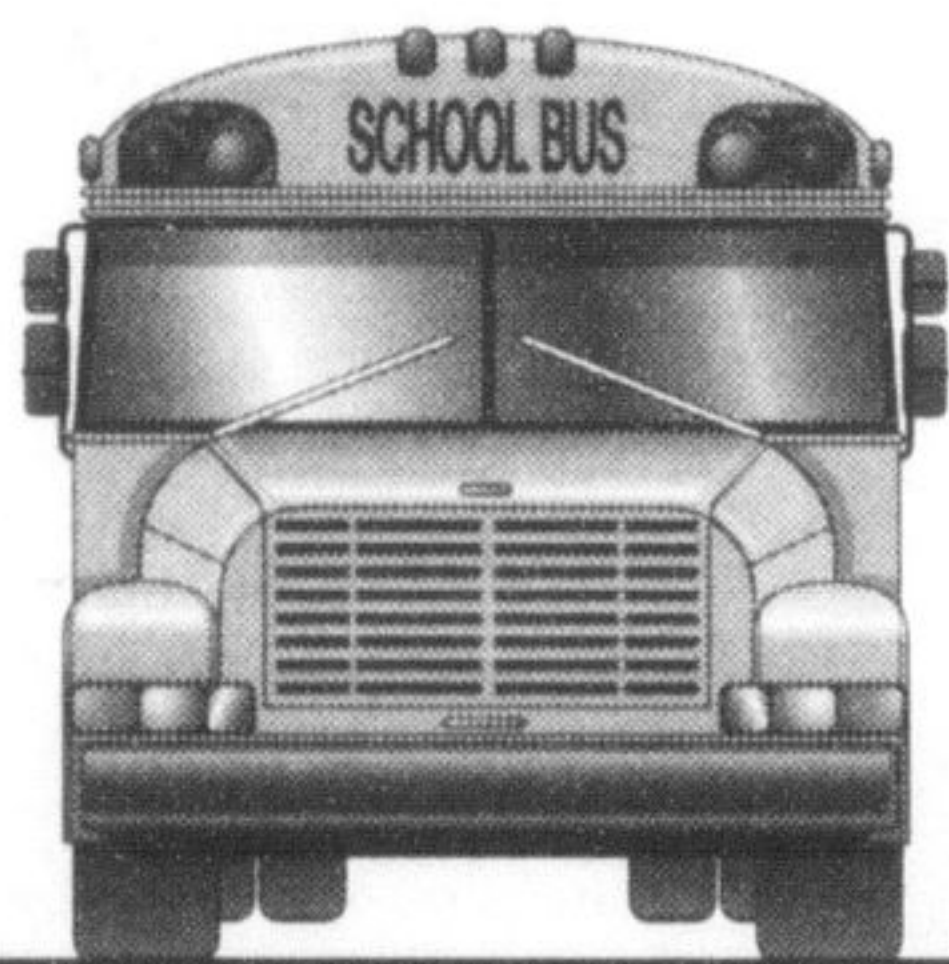
The only Catholic school in Halton that currently uses video surveillance is Notre Dame high school in Burlington.

About 16 cameras were mounted both inside and outside of that school nearly a decade ago, in response to concerns about the growth of the school, the number of portables and the use of the facility by Sheridan College students.

Mr. Piovesan said staff at Notre Dame believe the cameras have been effective in dealing with problems at the school.

"They tell us it has had a positive impact on reducing vandalism and thefts," he said.

He added that the board has also addressed security concerns by hiring one full-time security guard for each of its high schools.



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