

School board passes \$434.5-million budget

By Tim Whittnell
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Halton District School Board trustees have approved the operating and capital budgets for the 2008-09 school year with the overall spending increase lower than the previous year.

Budget issues were debated for five hours at a workshop for trustees and board administrators on June 16 with a final discussion and vote held at the June 18 public school board meeting.

The budget received unanimous trustee approval.

The 2008-09 overall budget is \$434.5 million. It's broken down into \$407.9 million for day-to-day operations and \$26.6 million for capital building needs.

"With this budget, we are building on the investments and the board's operational objectives of 2007-08," Steven Parfeniuk, the board's treasurer and superintendent of business, said in a press release.

"The 2008-09 budget reflects an ongoing commitment to student achievement and continual improvement of board programs and services for every student. In addition, the budget reflects the needs of a growing school board through investment in school teaching staff, school support staff and administrative staff."

Overall, the budget has increased \$21.6 million, or 5.3 per cent, over the previous year due, the board says, to

student enrolment growth of 2.7 per cent.

Halton is one of only a handful of growth boards among the 72 in the province. The previous year the Halton public board's combined budget went up 8.1 per cent.

The latest Halton board budget is up almost \$123 million since 2003-04. The board says that province-wide, education funding for 2008-09 has increased \$315 million to \$18.8 billion.

"We are one of the few growing boards in the province but we have different growth," Parfeniuk told trustees at the June 18 board meeting.

"Burlington's (overall enrolment) is stable while Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills will continue to grow. By 2014 it is projected that Milton will have more elementary students than in Burlington."

Parfeniuk said the down side to next year's budget is that money for special education is only keeping pace with the growth in overall student enrolment with funding for special needs pupils lagging at 2005-06 levels.

He also noted that rising utility costs for electricity, diesel fuel and natural gas are outstripping the existing funding and that the board may have to go back to the Ministry of Education early in the next school year for additional money.

Milton Trustee Donna Danielli asked Parfeniuk if the 604 fulltime-

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