

Trustees approve \$560-M budget at public board

Budget includes funding for 136 new staff positions

By Dominik Kurek
METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

Halton District School Board trustees approved an operating budget of \$560 million for the 2011-12 school year Wednesday.

The budget also included another \$66 million for capital expenses for the upcoming school year.

According to staff, about 80 per cent of the board's operating budget is used for salaries and benefits. The Province's Ministry of Education pays for about 99 per cent of the budget, while the remainder comes from other revenue sources.

The budget includes 136 new staff positions, as a result of an increase in pupils to more than 54,000 next year, compared to just funder 53,000 this year.

The approved budget includes a \$5.6 million accumulated surplus (reserves) and \$370,000 as a contingency, to be used in the upcoming school year on unforeseen costs.

Some of the budget highlights include 10 additional full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the areas of itinerant learning disabled teacher, instructional program leader, gifted teacher, three special education elementary teachers for self-contained classes, two food school educational assistants and two child and youth counsellors.

Other additions include occupational therapist support, an Aboriginal Liaison Officer and other hirings, along with pro-

gram and software purchases.

There has also been a removal in FTE positions in other areas, such as secondary teachers from holdback, one itinerant gifted teacher and an FSL system principal moving down to a half-time position, among other items.

Trustees also approved a last-minute amendment to the budget at the meeting, opting to make the Gay Straight Alliance equity facilitator a full-time position compared to its current half-time post. Prior to the upcoming year, the position was subsidized by an outside organization. Since then that funding has stopped.

Milton trustee Donna Danielli asked fellow trustees to approve the addition, saying this was a role for more than a half-time position. She said since the budget has gone public, she has received calls from concerned staff and parents over the issue.

"This is not a part-time position," she said. "The GSA co-ordinator supports some of our most vulnerable students and their families. I have received a number of emails from families about how much of a difference this has made."

She said homophobic name-calling is the number one form of harassment and bullying in schools.

"We currently have a full-time GSA co-ordinator. This role involves so much more than GSAs at the secondary level. It involves working in classes from JK to 12."

She said the person leads discussions, provides resources, anti-bullying sessions with students and much more.

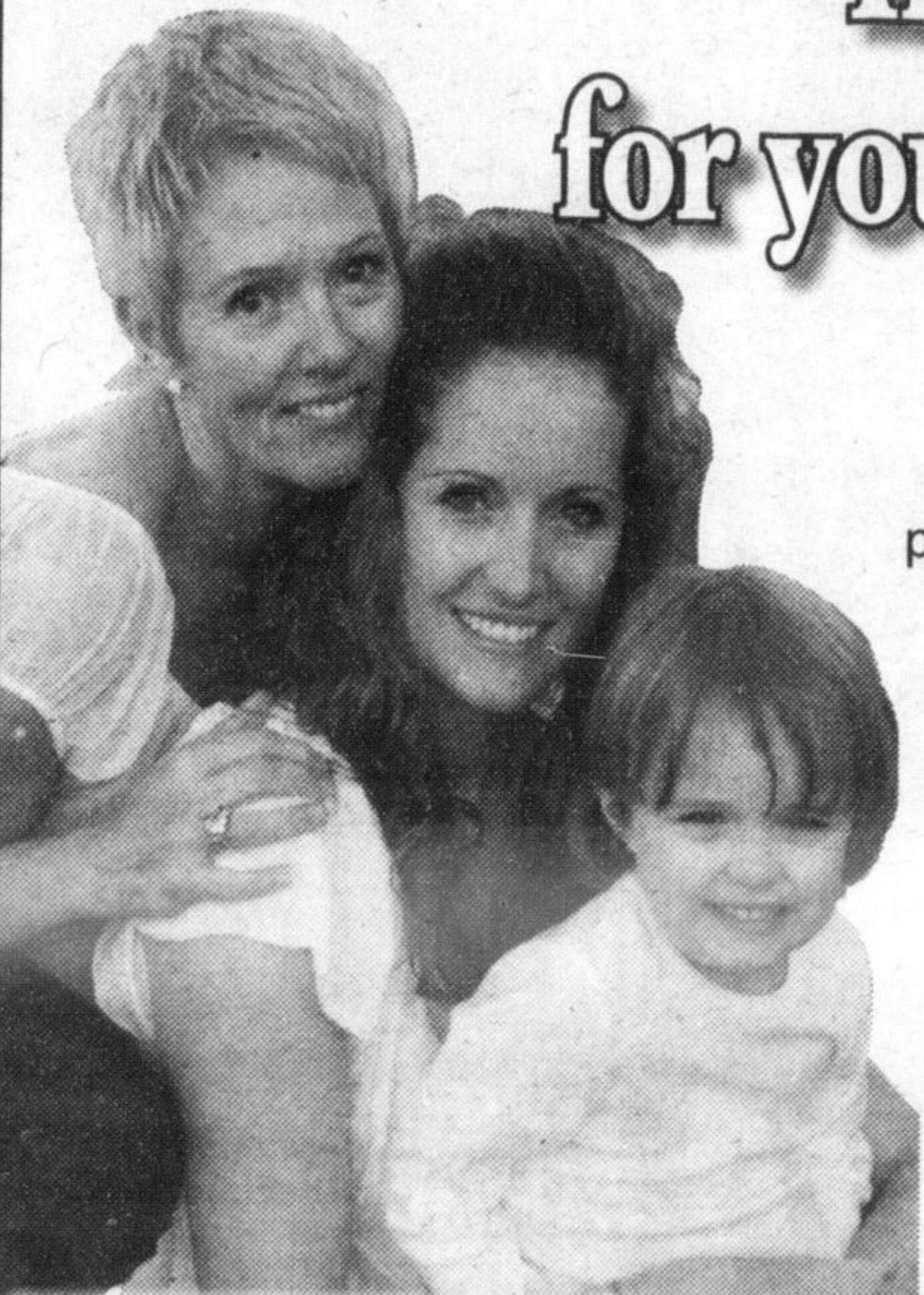
"The GSA co-ordinator also limits the board's exposure to lawsuits by identifying and responding to human rights code violations," she added.

As a result of the request, the board

amended the budget by approving to fund the position for another year as a full-time position, with an added cost of \$30,000, which was taken from the \$400,000 contingency budget.

The contingency budget was brought down to \$370,000 as a result of the decision.

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