

Board nixes monetary reward for saving suggestions

By ALEX MATHESON
Special to The Champion

Opponents of an employee suggestions program in the Halton Board of Education system think it is too crass to pay professionals for ideas on saving money.

Bob Williams, director of education with the Halton board, said recently, "for our kind of organization we want suggestions as a natural part of the job rather than

hoopla and extra recognition."

He said it is difficult when asking for a team approach from employees to use individual recognition.

Dave Barty, director of the consulting firm Employee Management Involvement Concepts, recommended a system to the Halton board whereby employees would receive cash awards for making suggestions that save the board money. He said the cost would be \$20,000 for a program, which would yield

\$100,000 in savings annually.

Trustee Penny Siebert opposed the suggestions program approach advocated by trustee Linda Lane.

From Ms Siebert's own work experience there was "a great deal of time spent for the value of the suggestions."

"Our staff are mostly professionals, own the system and shouldn't have to be paid to improve it," said Ms Siebert.

"Employee suggestion systems in-

volve monetary rewards and can be insulting."

Since the board educates children and doesn't make widgets, she said, it is hard to identify tangible savings.

However Ms Lane, whose motion on a suggestions system was voted down, believes in the idea.

"People in the front line," she said, "are in the best position to see what improvements can be made." She added that many major com-

panies use it.

"I would like to see a formal process that keeps employees motivated and coming forth with suggestions."

Frank Gue, spokesperson for the Taxpayers Coalition Halton, said a suggestion system was among an array of proposals his organizations made to the board two years ago.

He thinks such a system is great, if there is not an expensive bureaucracy.

He conceded — that savings are more difficult to measure in education, but that doesn't mean they aren't possible.

The suggestions should be on something the proponent has control over, he said.

Peter Earle, director of corporate affairs with Dofasco Inc., said his company no longer sees its suggestions system as an instrument of the 1990s.

Started in 1936, the program was discontinued at the end of 1992.

"It was effective in its day," he said, "but it got cumbersome and it didn't fit philosophically with where we are going." At Dofasco, employees could earn as much as \$50,000 for a suggestion.

Mr. Earle didn't rule out the adoption of a new suggestion system tailored to different needs at Dofasco.

Trustee doesn't like document wording

All Burlington trustee Lynda Schreiber said she wanted to do was give priority to students. Instead, she was accused of trying to cost the Halton board of Education thousands of unnecessary dollars at a recent meeting.

In the board's strategic directions document, currently framed and hanging in every school, there are a series of points under the section, Our Beliefs and Values, one of which is "high expectations for student learning."

That particular "belief" is not first on the list and Ms Schreiber felt it should be placed "before all others."

The reasons behind the order of beliefs and values have nothing to do with importance, simply how the wording best fit on the page when being typeset, according to superintendent of school services Bob Parry.

"We couldn't come up with a consensus . . . they were all so important," he noted.

It cost the board \$8,000 to print and frame the documents, so to change them now would be "ridiculous", said Burlington trustee Linda Glover.

Mr. Parry said it would cost thousands more dollars to make those changes to the document.

It wasn't her intention to revamp existing plaques, said Ms Schreiber, although she couldn't comprehend the high price tag attached to such a move "since it's already been typeset and you don't have to buy new frames."

Trustees did approve a small adjustment to her motion, stating that "in all future printings" of the strategic directions document "high expectations of student learning" be given first priority.



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