

Schools to close early but vote close

By CAROL BALDWIN
Special to The Champion

The kids are either restless or daydreaming, the teachers are running out of ideas for keeping them focused and the weather is beckoning them all to the nearest pool or ice cream parlor.

It's after lunch on the last day of school, and for over half a century kids and teachers have only had to tolerate this mixed atmosphere of anticipation and boredom for an hour or so.

But last week, at the Halton Board of Education meeting, tradition was almost broken for the economically-based, practicality of the '90s. Why pay teachers to teach and cause child-care panic among working parents, when you can keep the kids and teachers in school for the full day?

Fueling the debate was a new policy adopted earlier this year, requiring board approval for any early school closings other than emergency situations.

But as trustees learned at the meeting, school principals have already sent out letters to parents advising them school would be closed 90 minutes

early on the last day of school.

Oakville Trustee Penny Siebert said many of the principals were probably so used to letting the kids out early that they didn't even think of it as a violation of board policy.

"It's something we've been doing for 60 years. Everyone was expecting it," she said. "And, it's too late in the year, as far as I'm concerned, to change things."

Tradition is no reason to ignore a board policy or to continue a practice, said Oakville Trustee Linda Lane.

"I'm really disappointed that the schools were not clear on the original motion. It was the job of staff to make it clear. If a motion had been passed to let schools out at noon, there would have been clarification out to the schools real quick," Lane said in a telephone interview.

"This flies in the face of what the renewal policy is all about. We have got to get out of our box, get away from the traditional way of doing things and take a look at new ways."

Her concern was for working parents, who would have to juggle their schedules to accommo-

date an early school closing. "They're paying twice. They are paying for the salaries of the teachers and they are paying for additional child-care or babysitting. Or, they are taking time off work on an unpaid basis," she said. "The (teachers') salaries are already paid, the people are in place. Those who want to remove their children early can do so, but this motion removes the option for people who want their kids to be in school all day."

Ms Siebert said the fact trustees were voting on it was proof that it had come to the board for approval.

And, she said, there would be transportation costs to pay if public schools closed at a different time than Roman Catholic schools.

Bob Perry, superintendent of education services, suggested that the cost would be minimal — probably around \$200, and that the Roman Catholic board would probably alter its closing time to coincide with the public board.

With only 10 trustees in attendance at the time of the vote, the motion to close the schools early on the last day of school passed, six to four.

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