

board briefs

Retirement plan passed

The Halton Board of Education, after substantial debate recently, rejected one employee-related benefit while passing another, both by one vote.

There will be no further increase in the employee assistance program, which seeks to help people with mental and emotional problems. A motion to expand it lost by a 9-8 vote.

However, the board did vote to adopt an early retirement incentive plan for teachers. This won by an 8-7 vote.

The board hopes that this retirement plan will encourage some of the older teachers to call it quits earlier, making room for new young teachers. Rejuvenating the teacher force with young people was the motivating factor, from the board's point of view.

Trustee Pat Hillhouse said that the board will save money, through hiring a teacher at a lower salary, but the idea is to have new blood coming in. We have to find ways to have positions for younger teachers and revitalize our staff. It is a win-win situation.

Problem-solving for the board is one benefit trustee Cam Jackson alluded to. He said that although the overwhelming majority of Halton's principals and vice-principals are excellent, there are a few for whom retirement doesn't come soon enough.

Superintendent of employee services Rae Stoness outlined the potential savings. The average elementary school teacher, on retiring, has a salary of \$37,000, while the retiring secondary teacher is earning \$43,000. New teachers coming into the board generally get \$25,000.

Resentful of some of the implications of the policy, trustee Marg Bullock said "it goes against the grain to pay them to retire early, but I will be supporting it. It is being tried for three years to see how many take advantage of it and if the right people do."

To encourage teachers to take advantage of it, the board is offering lump sum payments of an increasing amount, depending on how much before legal retirement a teacher is willing to leave. The maximum is \$14,000. This inducement is necessary because early retirement entails a reduced pension for the teacher.

Trustee Jim Clelland saw primarily further aggrandizement for the teachers. "I see very little benefit except to the employee and they are already being enriched." Robert Filman, outgoing president of the Halton Elementary Teachers Association, said that he will be recommending to all members that they consult the association before opting for the plan. There are serious pension implications that an employee should be aware of in making such a choice.

The obvious loss is two per cent per year off the 70 per cent pension available after 35 years of service with the board, he said. However, the most serious loss will be to those with less than a 90 component (addition of age and teaching experience). The loss in pension in this case will be five per cent for each point less than 90. So, for a teacher with a cumulative score of 82, the pension loss would be at least 40 per cent.

Mr. Filman said all else being equal, the plan would likely favor older teachers near the 65 retirement limit. The number of people eligible for the program is limited by the board to two per cent of staff per year.

On the other issue of the night, what employees failed to get was an increase in employee assistance facilitators from one half-time person to one-and-a-half facilitators. These people would help make staff aware of mental and emotional problems, give some counselling and direct people to other support services.

Mr. Stoness told the board that it is in the forefront of providing this kind of service in the public sector, but is only meeting the needs of three per cent of employees, where five to six per cent are estimated to need the help. "It can be a saving to the board, because if an employee can be helped, it will reduce absenteeism and the attendant need for supply teaching," he said.

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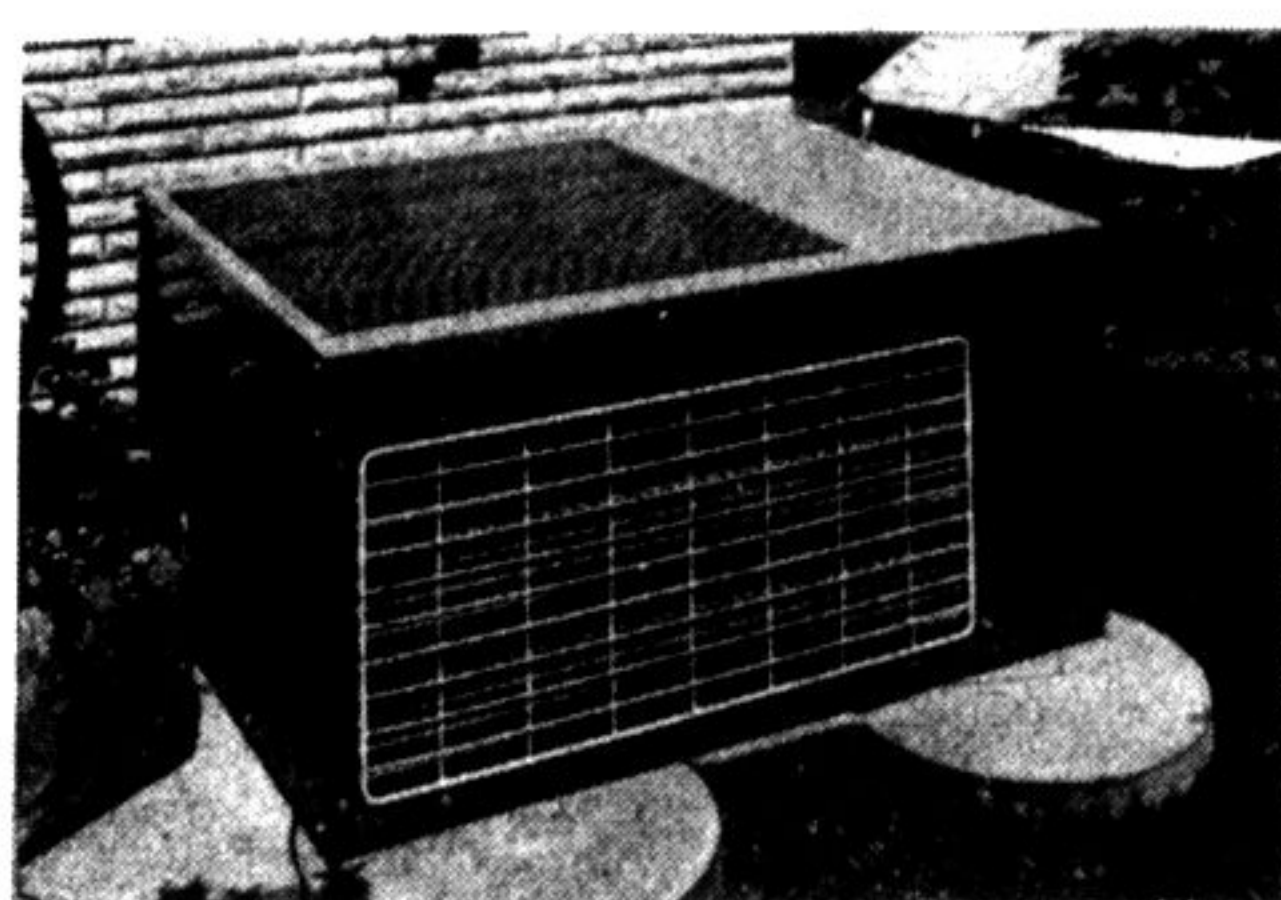
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