School board moves to hire additional Educational Assistants

The Halton District School Board will hire 35 more Educational Assistants (EAs) to support students with special needs.

The board has OK'd the expenditure of approximately $775,000 to cover the cost of the new EAs for the period Feb. 2-June 30, 2016. The money will be funded by contingency funds and anticipated 2015-16 budget surplus funds.

EAs are allocated to schools to support students with special education needs, those with English as Second Language (ESL) needs and Food School programs in four high schools.

For the past several years the ESL and Food School allocations have remained constant while there have been additional EAs allocated to support students with special needs, said the board.

During budget deliberations last spring, the board decided to maintain the EA allocation for 2015-16 at the same level as the previous year.

That decision was made, said the board, "in recognition of the growing knowledge and skills of staff in supporting students with special needs."

Now board officials say there are several reasons for needing to increase the EA complement.

There has been a general increase across Ontario in the number of students who are "medically fragile and have complex needs entering school systems each year," according to the board.

Local enrolment growth is occurring mostly in kindergarten and the primary grades (Grades 1 to 3), the ages where a larger proportion of EAs needs exist, says the board.

There are more kindergarten students with special education needs who previously stayed in childcare until Grade 1 but are now entering the school system as a result of Full Day Kindergarten implementation.

There is also an influx of new students with complex needs arriving from other school boards.

"This fall a significant number of unanticipated new students with special needs have arrived in our schools. While staff has been successful in supporting most of these students within existing resources, some additional resources are required so that all students can attend school with support for their health and safety needs," says the board.

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