

Board leaves trustee group to spend money on program

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tions" over the coming year and new initiatives, such as an anti-bullying program slated for September, will be postponed.

Board chairperson Elizabeth Crowe said money is so tight the board has voted to redirect its Ontario Catholic Schools Trustees Association membership dues directly into special education programs.

The dues, which amount to about \$120,000, will go toward hiring more teaching assistants for special-needs students.

"The association is a good lobby group," she said. "But we couldn't, in good conscience, support it this year."

As well, the board will borrow \$1.4 million from its reserves to balance the books, leaving \$500,000 to deal with teacher retirements and unforeseen expenses.

"I think people were hesitant to bring forward a budget that identified the potential to bring deep cuts," Ms Crowe said.

"But overall we felt that we had to be compliant at this time."

Ontario school boards are required by law to submit balanced budgets, but some have refused to do so this year to focus public attention on the state of education funding.

Trustees who defy the law face fines of \$5,000 — their annual salary — and removal from office.

School boards in Toronto, Hamilton-Wentworth and Thames Valley have said they will follow the lead of Ottawa-Carleton, the first board in the province to submit a deficit budget.

Education director Susan LaRosa said last night the board is simply not prepared to go down that road, regardless of how many other boards are tempted to do the same.

"We needed stability for the school system in September," she said.

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