

Trustees want Catholic funding scrapped

Even supporters question fallout on Hamilton board's cooperation with petition

By RICHARD LEITNER
NEWS STAFF

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is calling for renewed efforts to scrap public funding for the Catholic education system. Trustees voted to urge the Ontario Public School Boards' Association to petition the province for one publicly funded system.

Stoney Creek trustee Robert Barlow, who spearheaded the move, said the timing is right because there will be a provincial election this fall and none of the three major parties is talking about the issue.

He said Ontario currently funds four education systems — two English, two French — resulting in unnecessary duplication in schools, transportation and administration.

"There is nothing different between us and the Catholic system," Mr. Barlow said.

"They'll tell you this, that the Catholic school board is no longer the Catholic school board. Every kid in that system is not a Catholic. They are open to anybody, like we are obviously. So why should we have two publicly funded English-lan-

guage school systems in the province and two publicly funded French-language (systems)?"

While supporting the motion, Ward 5 trustee Ronald English said he fears it will be divisive and has no hope of succeeding because the Catholic system is guaranteed in the British North America Act.

He questioned how it will affect efforts to work more closely with Hamilton's Catholic board on issues like shared bus-

ing. "I agree that we should have one school board. I don't think it's a battle we should be fighting, I don't think it's a battle we can win," Mr. English said.

"I'm just afraid we haven't weighed out the consequences when we're trying to work with another board that is going to see this as hostile."

But Dundas trustee Jessica Brennan said the issue deserves more public debate because education is the second biggest provincial expenditure, next to healthcare.

A provincial election is also an ideal time "to talk about education, period, whether its the structure of education or delivery of education," she said.

"None of the three traditional parties in this province want to touch this at all," said Ms. Brennan, who has run provincially for the NDP.

"I have to look around and see who would be the warriors, therefore, in this conversation and I think it has to be public school board trustees because no one else is going to talk about it. And yes it may be uncomfortable and yes we may have some challenges."

Mountain trustee Lillian Orban said she doesn't see going to one publicly funded system as hostile to Catholic education. She called funding "a bottomless pit" that can see three different boards build underused schools in one area.

"No Catholic board will lose their rights, as far as what they have currently. There might be some changes but the religious part will always be there," she said. "If that can be resolved in a manner that will help for the (Catholic) board to realize that we're not going to take them over, but we want to be a cooperative, one system for all our children and maintain their religions, etcetera, etcetera, then I think they will be a party to this."