

## Changes in science, history on the agenda this year

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By Cal Millar

Just slow down  
on new initiatives,  
Queen's Park urged  
PEEL/HALTON BUREAU

Change is coming too fast for the education system to handle, the director of education for the Halton Catholic District School Board says.

``It's too much, too soon,'' Fred Sweeney said.

``I think the number of changes that have occurred in the past year and those to be implemented this year are significant,'' he said.

``They will make quite a difference to both teachers and students.''  
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Ethel Gardiner, who chairs the public Halton District School Board, said the speed of change has caused a great deal of difficulty for staff.

``Change is sometimes good, but we can't have it so fast,'' she said.

Government asking  
for too much,  
director says

``People have difficulty coping with small amounts of change, but when the changes are numerous and have to take place in short time lines. . . it makes it all the more difficult.''

Gardiner suggests the government slow down in a lot of its initiatives.

``I think they have decided to do many things without looking at implications for specific areas,'' she said.

``The only thing that really matters is what happens for kids on a daily basis in their classrooms.''

Sweeney said the Ministry of Education is asking quite a bit from teachers by demanding several new curriculums be implemented in one school year, including those for science, physical education and history and geography.

``Those are three they (teachers) are going to have to do this year,''  
'' Sweeney said. ``That's going to cause some concern.''

The board has just received the social studies document that the ministry expects to be used this year.

``We spent five weeks here in the summer with teachers developing units for the new science program,'' he said.

``We have no units at all for the new social studies program. We just have a list of topics that should be taught.''

He said they didn't even get a recommendation for textbooks.

The board will ask teachers to use the new document as a guideline until staff can sit down and develop units for the course.

But the biggest issue might be just making sure there are teachers in the classroom, and not on the picket line, Sweeney said.

The Catholic board also faces problems of overcrowding through rapid growth, but some of that could be helped with the construction of a new elementary school in Milton and additions at two schools in Burlington and Georgetown.

Students moved from the schools undergoing renovations will be housed for six to eight months in schools leased from the public board and the new French District School Board.

Sweeney said the board also expects the ministry will soon approve requests for new elementary schools in the northern parts of Oakville and Burlington.

``We don't have any surplus space . . . We're absolutely desperate for schools,' ' he said.

``Under the new funding formula we think we qualify for two and possibly three new schools.''

Gardiner said the public board has not been able to build more schools in growth areas of the region.

``This necessitates transporting kids out of their communities and increasing portable use throughout the system,' ' she said.

But using portables raises another problem the board has had to face - mould that has forced students out of some portables and into temporary classrooms in school gyms, libraries or any vacant space.

``We're working as quickly as we can to remove the mould and remediate the portables for start-up in September,' ' Gardiner said, admitting that some students will start the school year in temporary accommodations.

Several experts have linked prolonged exposure to stachybotrys atra mould, one type of fungus found in portables, to migraines, nose bleeds, flu-like symptoms, lung problems and diarrhea.

Health officials in the United States have also tied mould exposure to a number of infant deaths in Ohio.

Gardiner said the management of mould will continue to consume the time and energy of Halton's board.

``It will be a tremendous drain on financial and human resources,' ' she said.

Dusty Papke, Halton's director of education, sent a letter to the Education Ministry asking for \$2 million to help with the clean-up.

He said at the time that the board would concentrate on schools with more than three portables to make sure space is available when students return.

He hopes to have them all done by November.

Sweeney described Halton's separate system as a low assessment board and said it hasn't been hurt by provincial government budget slashing.

``We're finding that we got more money for our classrooms as the government had stated,'' Sweeney said.

Sweeney said the province also approved the board's requests for grants for special needs kids.

``We were able to get the full amount of those grants based on the proposals we sent into the government,'' he said.

CAPTIONS:

CAL MILLAR/TORONTO STAR

MOULD MANAGEMENT:

Dusty Papke, Halton's director of education, hopes that all of the public board's portables will be mould-free by November. He has requested \$2 million to help with the clean-up from the education ministry.

FRED SWEENEY:

``We're desperate for schools,'' says education director.

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