

Junior kindergarten program termed 'ludicrous' by trustee

By LISA RUTLEDGE
the Herald

Halton schools can't expect to meet the needs of more than 3,000 new junior kindergartens in 1993 when the region is struggling to serve the needs of its existing students, says a Halton Hills school trustee.

Halton Board of Education trustee, Arlene Bruce, said the province's demand to implement a junior kindergarten program by 1994 is "ludicrous." "We should do what's right and take care of the kids who are already in the schools," she said.

"The cost is abominable and the reality is that people will just have to reach down into their pockets again," Mrs. Bruce argued. "We can't afford to put services in place to serve the needs of those children," she said.

Although junior kindergarten may be beneficial to some three and four-year-olds, Halton won't receive adequate support from the province, she said.

If the addition of half-day junior kindergarten in 1993 is approved as recommended by the Superintendent of Instructional Services, Garry Crossman, the region will pay approximately \$3.1 million annually to operate. Provincial grants are estimated at \$6.1 million every year.

Adequate accommodation to implement junior kindergartens would require the modification of 81 regular classrooms and the addition of 58 portable or permanent classrooms, according to the report. Adding 58 permanent classrooms would cost the board an estimated \$8.5 million. Adding portables and converting classes could cost \$4.3 million. However, the report indicates if the province offered to pay 50 per cent of the cost of adding permanent classrooms, the board would pay \$4 million.

Mrs. Bruce said she can't understand how schools, especially in south Halton, could accommodate additional classrooms when the funds for school renovations to serve basic student needs are scarce.

According to a junior kindergarten research report presented to the Board of Education, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics announced, the government has allocated \$296 million to support the half-day kindergarten program.

The parents who want to see junior kindergarten added can't afford regular day-care centres because their incomes are too high to qualify for government subsidiz-



Arlene Bruce



Dick Howitt

ed care centres, explained Mrs. Bruce. "For them, junior kindergarten would be a great asset because they would not have to pay as much for it," she said.

Although many children will benefit from the social interaction and exposure to books, junior kindergarten is an expensive way to go about it, said Mrs. Bruce. She suggests more home day-care centres be provided because there are plenty of "great mums in homes that could be persuaded to provide care for community children."

Does the board really have to pay teachers' salaries to send three-year-old children to school, Mrs. Bruce questioned. "Moving into the school structure is an expensive way to go. We should keep day care separate from the school system," she argued. These children are too young to send off on a bus with high school students, said Mrs. Bruce. Parents in other regions have the option to make alternative arrangements, according to the report.

Mrs. Bruce said the board won't have the power to stand up against the province's decree to add junior kindergarten. "Trustees can talk and shout as loud as we like but unless people out there in the community voice their concerns, no one will ever listen," she said.

North Halton school trustee,

Dick Howitt, said the Halton Board of Education should hold back the implementation of junior kindergarten as long as possible because the region has no need for the program.

Mr. Howitt is annoyed the province is forcing all boards to add junior kindergarten, even if a board doesn't believe the program is necessary. Some areas will benefit from having junior kindergarten but most Halton residents are opposing the program, he said.

He has received more calls from people opposing junior kindergarten because people would rather have their three and four-year-olds at home. Mr. Howitt said those who would like to see the new program in Halton schools believe their children are ready to begin their education or see it as an opportunity to solve babysitting problems.

Junior kindergarten won't save parents money because they will pay higher taxes and will still have to find care half-a-day, Mr. Howitt maintains. Bouncing children back and forth between school and home for half-days is not great for the little ones, he said.

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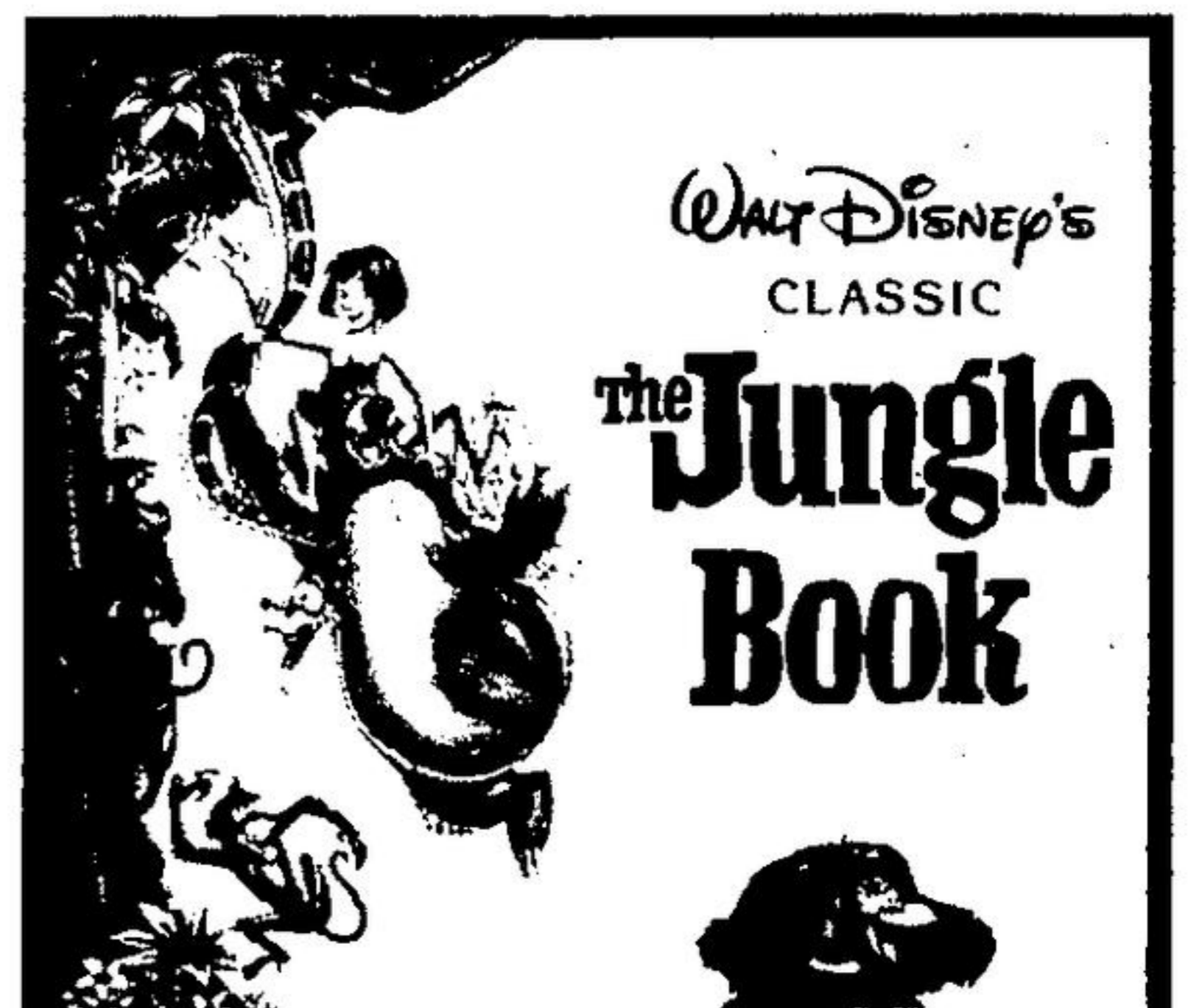
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