

Local girl, 10, to perform at Zoo's Talent Showcase

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

Vivian Hicks of Georgetown will be taking to the stage at the Toronto Zoo's New Year's Eve Talent Showcase.

Vivian, 10, will perform two songs in the show. She landed the spot in the Showcase after receiving the second highest number of votes in an online competition featuring the five finalists for the event.

Vivian's mother Alley says her daughter loves to sing and has been doing it since she was three. She's been competing since the age of 5.

She said Vivian wants to say a big thank you to the community for voting for her. She also wants to thank her family, friends, the newspaper, her school dance and a special thanks to Brian Bedal who told her about the



VIVIAN HICKS

contest and suggested she enter.

"She is extremely excited," said Alley.

Schools chosen for French pilot project

By **BOB MITCHELL**
Special to the IFP

Halton's public board has selected the 24 schools in a pilot project that will see Grade 1 students learn French as a subject starting next September.

Two of the 24 are Halton Hills schools—Silver Creek and George Kennedy.

Students will receive 40 minutes of French instruction per week in the initial phase of the program that will be reviewed annually. Additional schools are expected to also offer French as a subject in future years.

The first-year schools represent a variety of programs (K-8, K-6, dual track, single-track English, large and small enrolments) across the four geographic areas within the Halton District School Board (HDSB) — Oakville, Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills.

Schools selected for the initial rollout consist of 12 single-track and 12 dual-track schools with both large and small enrolments.

Altogether, 14 of the schools offer K-Grade 8 with 10 offering K-Grade 6.

Staff initially recommended the pilot project be run in 16 schools, but trustees decided to increase it to 24 with the goal of delivering French as a core subject to all Halton public schools over the next four years.

French as a subject has traditionally been taught beginning in Grade 4 in Halton public schools.

Starting in September, students in Grades 1-3 in the 24 schools will receive

40 minutes of French instruction each week. That increases to 120 minutes for Grade 4 students and 160 minutes in Grade 5 with students in Grades 7-8 receiving 200 minutes each week.

Under the plan, Grades 1-3 students will still receive the same amount of French by the time they graduate to high school, but classroom time will be spread over three additional years.

Currently, students in Grades 4-8 receive 200 minutes per week of French, which results in them having acquired 600 hours of French by the time they enter high school.

Meanwhile, the board is actively seeking top-qualified French-speaking teachers, who are also well-educated in teaching children with diverse learning needs with Grade 1 still the entry point for French Immersion (FI) studies, in which students receive half of their language instruction in English.

"We see this as positive for whatever schools we picked," Associate Education Director Jeff Blackwell told trustees at Wednesday's school board meeting. "We know there are schools that are interested, but weren't selected, but we feel we have gathered a cluster of schools that we can come back to in the spring and gather data on the impact and get feedback from the schools, the students and the parents."

Principals were informed before trustees, Blackwell said.

Oakville Trustee Ann Harvey-Hope asked for an interim report before the annual review.

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