

Junior Kindergarten youngsters are keen on school

By JANET BAINE
Staff writer

A group of enthusiastic 4 year-olds at Joseph Gibbons School are breaking new ground.

"Joseph Gibbons is the only school (operated by the Halton Board of Education) north of Hwy. 5 to have Junior Kindergarten (JK), and it will be the only one in Georgetown until 1996," said principal Gary Bateman.

The 42 young students (19 in the morning, 23 in the afternoon) are involved at activities in different parts of the large room: three are working on paintings, two are just outside learning about computers with the help of a volunteering mom, while others are working on puzzles on the floor and some are coloring.

There are lots of activity centres in the classroom, including play doh, blocks, dress up, dolls, trucks

and pounding away on the work bench. There's also a wide assortment of books, flannel boards and magnetic construction items.

"The children are very keen and very, very well behaved," said teacher Valerie Hamilton, who helped develop the program. She taught Kindergarten for years at the school, and has been interested in teaching younger students several years before the opportunity arose.

The children who are used to being with others seem to be further a head in knowing how to get along, but they learn from watching each other, she said.

Hamilton can use all the help she can get with the children, and principal Gary Bateman said he is hoping to get some help from co-op students from the high school as well as moms and ECE students.

While 28 are from the local area, 12 more come from other parts of Georgetown, and a couple live in Acton. The extra 14 spaces were filled up on a lottery basis, Bateman said.

A serious funding crunch forced the Halton school board to postpone implementing JK until it had no choice, since it has been mandated

by the provincial government. While it is now available at Joseph Gibbons and four other schools in Oakville and Burlington, JK must be available in all schools by September 1997.

In September 1995, M. Z. Bennett and Robert Little School will have it.

In September 1996 it will be implemented at George Kennedy and Park schools and all the remaining schools in Halton Hills (Brookville, Glen Williams, Harrison, Limehouse and Pineview) will have it in September, 1997.

Both Bateman and Hamilton are enthusiastic about having the JK program at their school and said they are pleased with how smoothly it is going so far.

Halton Catholic board is JK veteran

While the Halton Board is just venturing into the realm of Junior Kindergarten, the program has been available at all schools in the Halton Roman Catholic Board of Education since September 1989.

"There was a lot of debate of the pros and cons with a lot of passion," recalls Lou Piovesan, the superintendent who oversaw implementation of JK.

The Catholic board offered JK because surveys "suggested that was an area of need that had to be addressed," even though it was not yet required by law.

In the first year it was available, there were as many JK students as Senior Kindergarten students, so attendance was very good. The model used was not expensive, regular classrooms were used with appropriate equipment, shelving and access to a water fountain.

"The quality of the facilities have been upgraded and renovated to more appropriate classrooms," which are larger than classrooms for older students, Piovesan said.

About 20 parent information sessions were held so parents knew students didn't get started in reading and math on the second day of

JK, he said. Instead, the program involves developing social skills and readiness for later academic programs.



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