

# Memo reveals staff urging public to rally around JK

By **NORM ALEXANDER**

Special to The Independent/Free Press

The Halton Board of Education, which has publicly said it cannot afford the \$7.9-million a year cost of operating Junior Kindergarten (JK), has actually been trying to drum up support for the plan.

An internal board memo written by Pat Dickinson, an instructional leader responsible for JK with the board, asks area school principals to contact parents so they can call trustees concerning the future of JK in Halton.

When the previous provincial

government said it would be forcing school boards to implement JK programs, the Halton Board was quick to lobby Queen's Park against the program. It has, since that time, steadfastly stuck to that line, citing the program's cost at a time of fiscal restraint.

But under threat by the NDP government that they would halt grant money if the Halton Board did not comply, the board proceeded with plans to begin JK next month and those plans are still in place.

The election of the Progressive Conservative government under leader Mike Harris, changed the JK rules. The new government's position is putting more of the onus on provincial boards to determine if they want to proceed with the program.

Excerpts of the Dickinson memo, addressed to all school principals whose schools are set to start JK programs next month and dated June 21, 1995 are printed below.

*ANY of these possibilities jeopardizes our ability to provide a quality service: Option 3 has the potential of throwing the entire system into chaos and is grossly unfair to JK teachers, children and parents who have made plans based on a September start-up. ... Consequently, you may wish to alert key JK parents in your communities of these possibilities with a suggestion that they contact their trustee with concerns.*

Just four days after this memo was sent to principals, a group, calling itself Halton Parents for Junior Kindergarten, (HPJK) sent a letter

and petition of 45 names supporting JK to all trustees. They made a formal presentation to the board at its July 13, 1995 meeting.

HPJK is led by Larry Hill, who said he heard about possible problems with implementing JK in Halton, from board officials and denied that he had been called by any principal about the matter.

Former board trustee and longtime critic of the Halton Board's administration, John Scheel, said he was appalled at the memo.

"The purpose of the memo from a senior board administrator, was to maintain momentum of the JK program in the face of board attempts to rationalize its expenditures in follow-up to the election of the PCs (Progressive Conservatives)," said Scheel. "The administration shows every sign of trying to reestablish its control over the information fed to the community. JK was unanimously rejected by all trustees many times and finally was implemented only under threats from the NDP government."

Oakville trustee Linda Lane said she had brought up the memo before the board, but no action was taken.

"I think it's inappropriate that (board) staff are getting involved in the political process," Lane said.

As far as stopping the JK program for September, Lane said that the program will have to proceed because too much planning has gone on to stop it now.

But she also said that some final decision will have to be made about JK before the 1996-97 school year.

## Police Blotter

### Two arrested

Two boys were charged under the Young Offenders Act Wednesday with break, enter and theft in relation to an incident at a Shelley St. residence Aug. 14. While one 16 year old faces these charges, another is also charged with breach of probation and mischief in relation to another incident. Both boys are Georgetown residents of no fixed address. Items taken in the break-in include some jewellery, alcohol and a 1987 GMC Blazer which was later found in a field near John St. with minor damage, police said.



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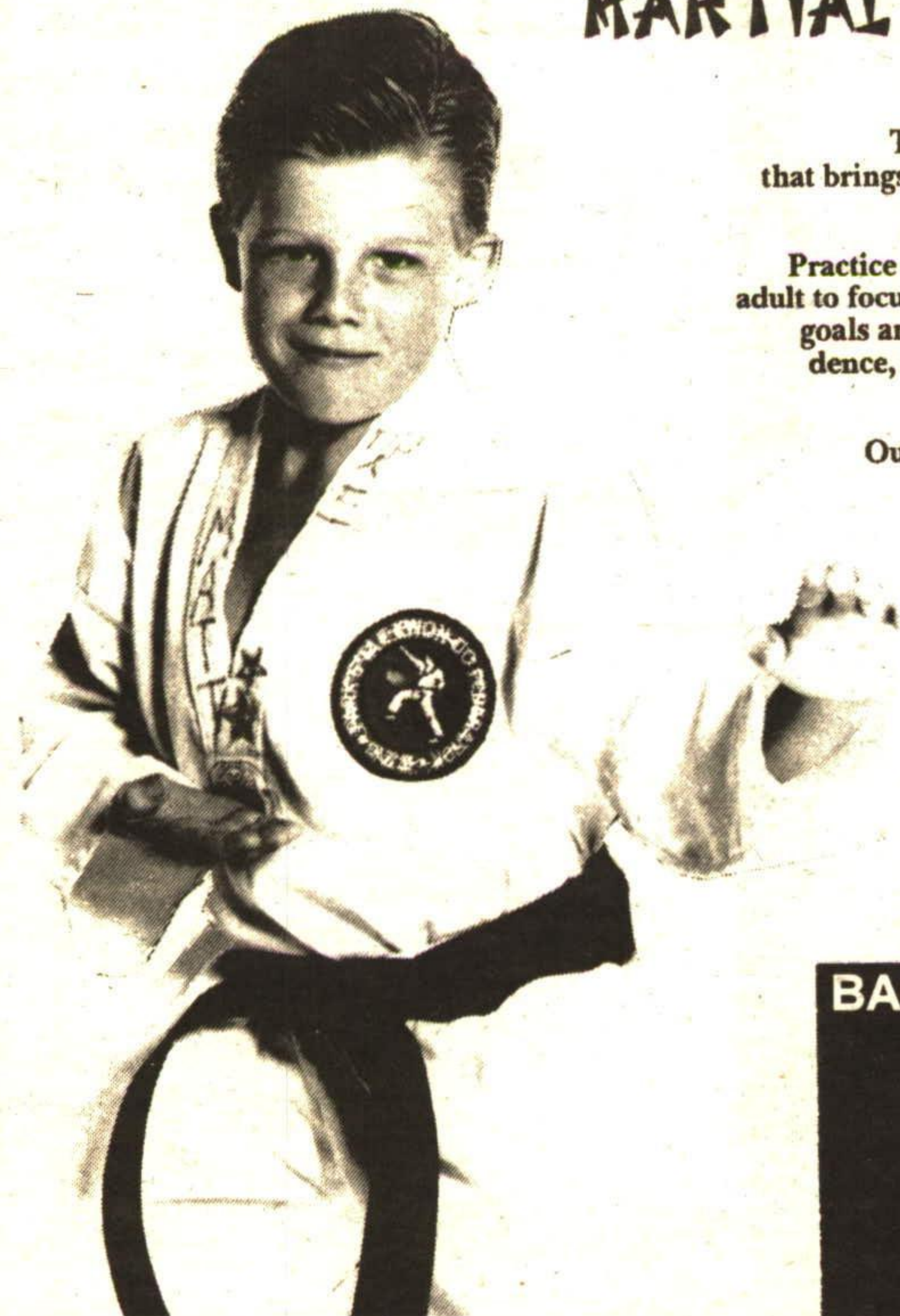
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