## Public school board considers junior kindergarten for next year

stablishing 30 junior kindergarten classes at a cost of \$324,000, plus Iteacher salaries, has been suggested for the Halton District School Board.

A plan outlined last week recommended setting up JK incrementally, starting in September 2000. The first phase would accommodate about 600 students.

The proposal is still in the discussion stage, but trustees heard an information update which suggested starting with 13 classes in Burlington, 10 in Oakville and seven in north Halton (Milton and Halton Hills). Proposed locations are: two classes each at Joseph Gibbons (Georgetown), McKenzie-Smith Bennett (Acton) and J.M. Denyes (Milton) and one class at Percy Merry (Milton).

Families outside these school boundaries can apply for their children to attend JK based on current optional attendance policy

and practices.

"We did our best to spread it out and have an equitable number of classes, with minimum disruption to other early learning classes," said superintendent Paul Anthony. "We need both kinds of learning."

He said, where possible, the first schools targeted for JK will be those with excess capacity. When questioned later, Anthony said portables would be needed as the junior kindergarten program expanded.

Trustees opted last spring to reconsider JK after an Early Years Study emphasized the importance of learning during the first six years. Junior kindergarten provides half-day education for children aged four.

The cost of JK and its impact on other early

grades were two major concerns expressed by trustees. Early learning grants for primary grades could be lost if JK is established.

Anthony said any losses would be offset by the head start JK provides.

"You get kids into school a year earlier and get them assessed a year earlier," he said. "We hope to find a balance to retain early learning teachers."

JK classes would require 15 full-time equivalent teachers and it was suggested some early learning staff could be reshuffled to fill the positions.

Superintendent Wayne McNally said JK startup funding is not in the 2000 budget but could be obtained there or through reserves, a school renewal budget or the anticipated budget surplus.

"I'm not uncomfortable saying we can find the funding in one of those places," he said.

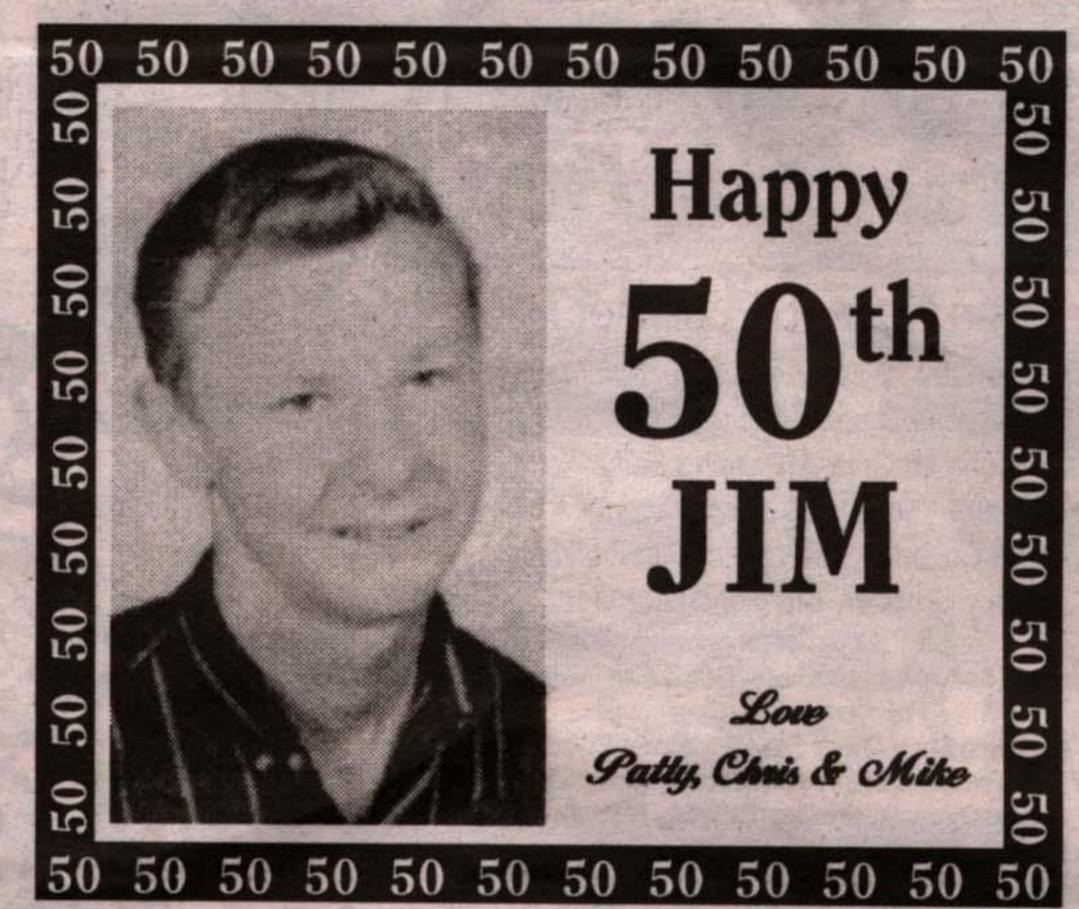
Anthony said most of the \$324,000 cost is a one-time expense, except for a \$37,500 ongoing budget for supplies like paper.

Jolante Grzeslo of the board's early learning team said special training is needed to teach children ages 3-6.

Grzeslo said language development is particularly important for JK with class time also required for other situations such as activity, small groups and outdoor play.

The board operated 13 JK classes for a year in the mid-90s, after it was mandated by the former NDP provincial government. But it was dropped following a government change and cuts in provincial funding.

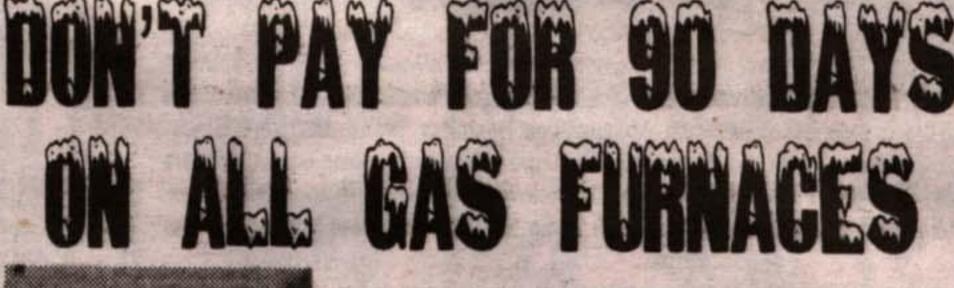
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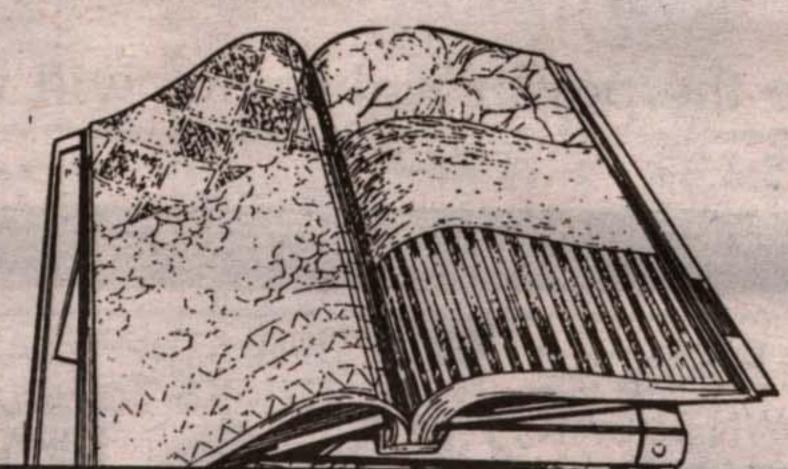


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