

# Catholic board calls on public to fight provincial funding plan

Gravely concerned about the "drastic impact" that recent provincial Special Education and transportation funding announcements will have on its students, the Halton Catholic District School Board is encouraging the public to join its voice lobbying the government to reconsider.

"We believe that the public needs to be aware of these funding issues," explained Board Chair Al Bailey. "We strongly encourage the public to write and speak to their local members of provincial parliament and the Minister of Education."

On the heels of a Sept. 7 board meeting during which trustees urged Administration to let Queen's Park know their feelings in no uncertain terms, the board fired off two strongly-worded letters to Education Minister Gerard Kennedy.

The first, dated Sept. 13, dealt with the recent "claw back" to Special Education funding and said in part: "Acting responsibly and planning for the future has resulted in the (Board) losing in excess of \$650,000."

The second letter, dated Sept. 24, outlined the board's response to the Ministry's Transportation Funding Model proposed for the 2005/2006 school year which the board says "does not appear to adequately capture the realities" 905 school boards are facing.

Specific to Halton, this would mean an allocation of \$3,889,823 which, based on the 2003/2004 allocation, would result in a \$769,104— or 16.51 per cent— reduction in transportation grant revenues.



LOU PIOVESAN

Both letters make it clear that the two funding changes will have a detrimental impact on the board's budget not only for the 2004/2005 school year, but also for future years.

The claw back is a result of new rules for Special Education funding, money that had been allocated in the board's Special Education reserve fund for the support and development of effective programs and services for special needs students. Losing the \$650,000 for 2004/2005 will impact the most vulnerable students, namely those identified with special needs, say board officials.

The announcement couldn't come at a worse time, when the board is poised to expand its services— not cut them back by as much as a third.

"Our board has consistently acted in a very fiscally responsible manner and has continually met all of the criteria established by the Ministry of Education," said Director of Education Lou Piovesan. "Planning for the future by establishing a reserve fund has resulted in a very significant funding loss specifically designated for programming and services for our special needs students. We had planned to further expand services for autistic students, but these plans will have to be drastically curtailed if these funds are not restored."

This could include the planned Transition Centre— which superintendent John Fauteux explained was to be paid for by reserves established by the board— plus the development of new and more effective services to support special needs students.

—By Howard Mozel, special

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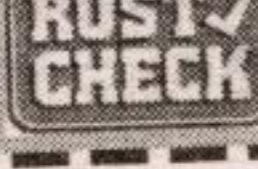
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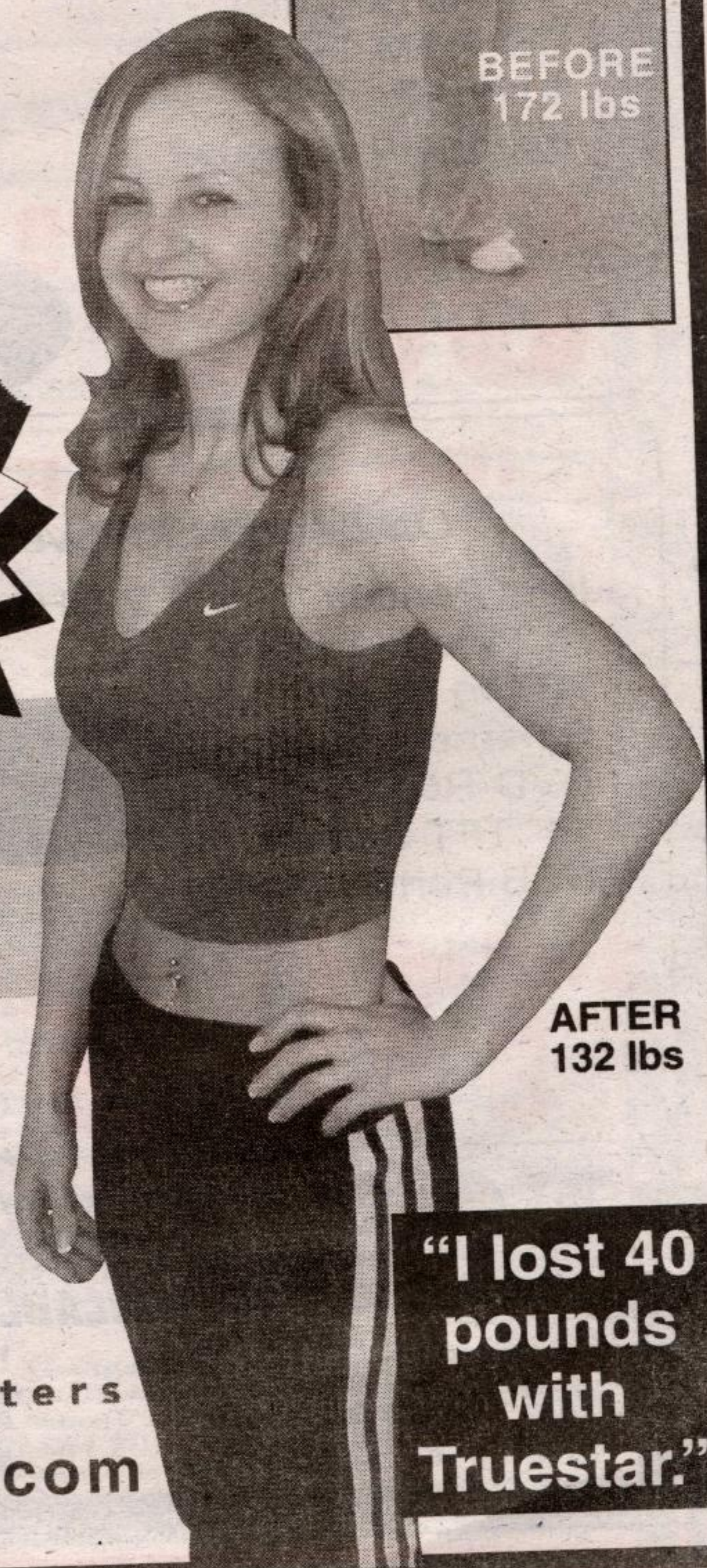
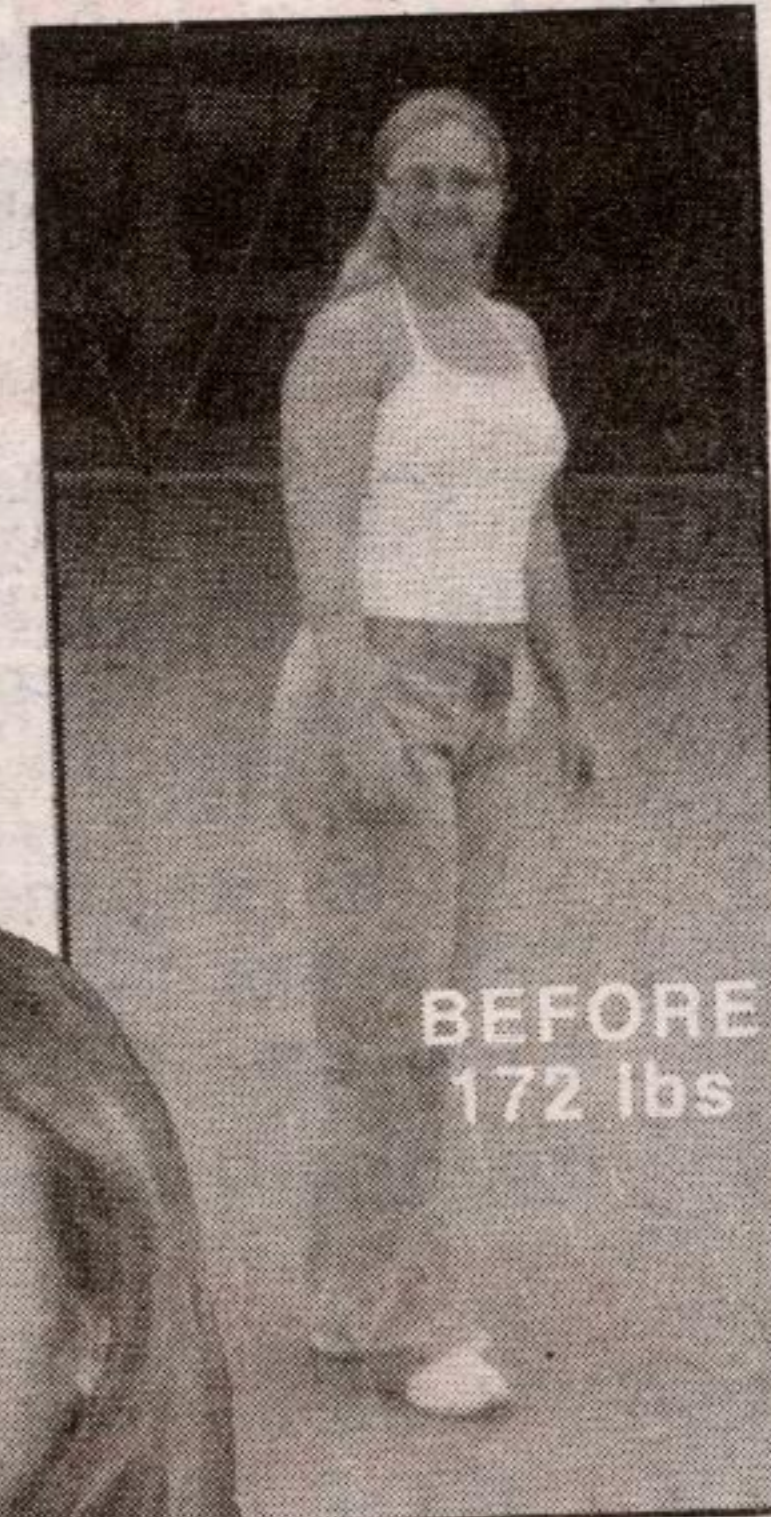
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