

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

Berry time

Three-year-old Tara Satelmayer reached between the leaves to pick up some strawberries at Springridge Farm on Bell School Line over the weekend and then it was time to sneak a taste. Strawberries are ripe and ready at local pick-your-own farms.

RC schools welcome delay

By CAROL BALDWIN
Special to The Champion

Halton Roman Catholic School board officials are pleased with the province's decision to postpone the implementation of a new high school program for one year.

Ontario Minister of Education and Training John Snobelen announced recently that the new high school program, scheduled for implementation this fall, will be postponed until September, 1999.

The education minister also announced that streaming will be introduced back into grade 9 at that time.

According to a press release from the Ministry of Education and Training, one reason for delaying implementation of the new high school program, designed to compact the five-year curriculum into four years, was the "more than 20,000 responses" received.

One of those responses came from the Halton Roman Catholic School Board in the form of a letter to the minister asking for a postponement "to ensure our students enter grade 9 with sufficient preparation to complete a secondary school diploma in four years."

At that time, the trustees said more lead time was needed to prepare both teachers and students for the curriculum change, which ideally would go all the way back to the primary school level.

"Obviously, the board is pleased with the decision," said Fred Sweeney, director of education for the Roman Catholic School Board.

"The government was wise to do that," agreed Donald Schrenk, chair of the board. "The intent was premature. The delay will give us some time to put in proper programs and lead into it."

"The educators have expressed concern and obviously, the government has listened to that," Mr. Schrenk added. "They are beginning to show some response to the boards and the educators, in general."

Mr. Sweeney, however, voiced concern there still may not be enough time to compress the curriculum and train the teachers adequately.

"A lot will have to be done to compact back in the math and science areas. French is okay, because there is no grade 12 French. It is not necessary to compact social science, and those who are good at English could take OAC English and still be good at it," he said.

Mr. Sweeney worried about the pressure on today's grade 7 students to catch up.

Students entering grade 7 in the fall will have to be



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DON SCHRENK

prepared to absorb in four years of high school what the students before them learned in five. "We're putting kids in grade 7 this year in jeopardy. The compacting is not far enough back, it should be to grade 6 or 5. We don't have any new curriculum for grade 7," explained Mr. Sweeney.

However, he said, an initial "gap analysis" has detected little difference between the new grade 7 program and the old one. But, added Mr. Sweeney, a group of teachers will conduct a more extensive analysis in the second week of July.

"We're not going to be able to have our teachers trained by the fall. We have a couple of PA days which we'll use, but I doubt it (the compacted program) will be fully implemented by next year. But we will get started on it," Mr. Sweeney said. "We'll be taking on a heck of a lot in one year."

As for de-streaming at the grade 9 level, Mr. Sweeney said he would be sorry to see it go.

"We haven't done a study on de-streaming, so we don't know the success or failure of it," he said, explaining de-streaming allowed all grade 9 students to take all the same subjects at the same level. This uniform grade 9 curriculum, he said, gives students an extra year to decide whether they will need advanced, general or basic level courses to fulfill their career goals.

"Now, kids will have to make a decision for advanced, general or basic with no understanding of what high school is all about. I think it's a bit of a backward step."

Mr. Schrenk said, "De-streaming was always controversial, so they took it off the table." However, he agreed de-streaming provides "a better opportunity for kids to change programs if they need to."

Mr. Schrenk said of the new provincial high school literacy exam that Mr. Snobelen is proposing as part of his high school reform:

"We're always hearing that kids can't spell or put together a proper sentence. If this tests their skills and allows for proper remedial work to correct the problems, then it's a good thing."

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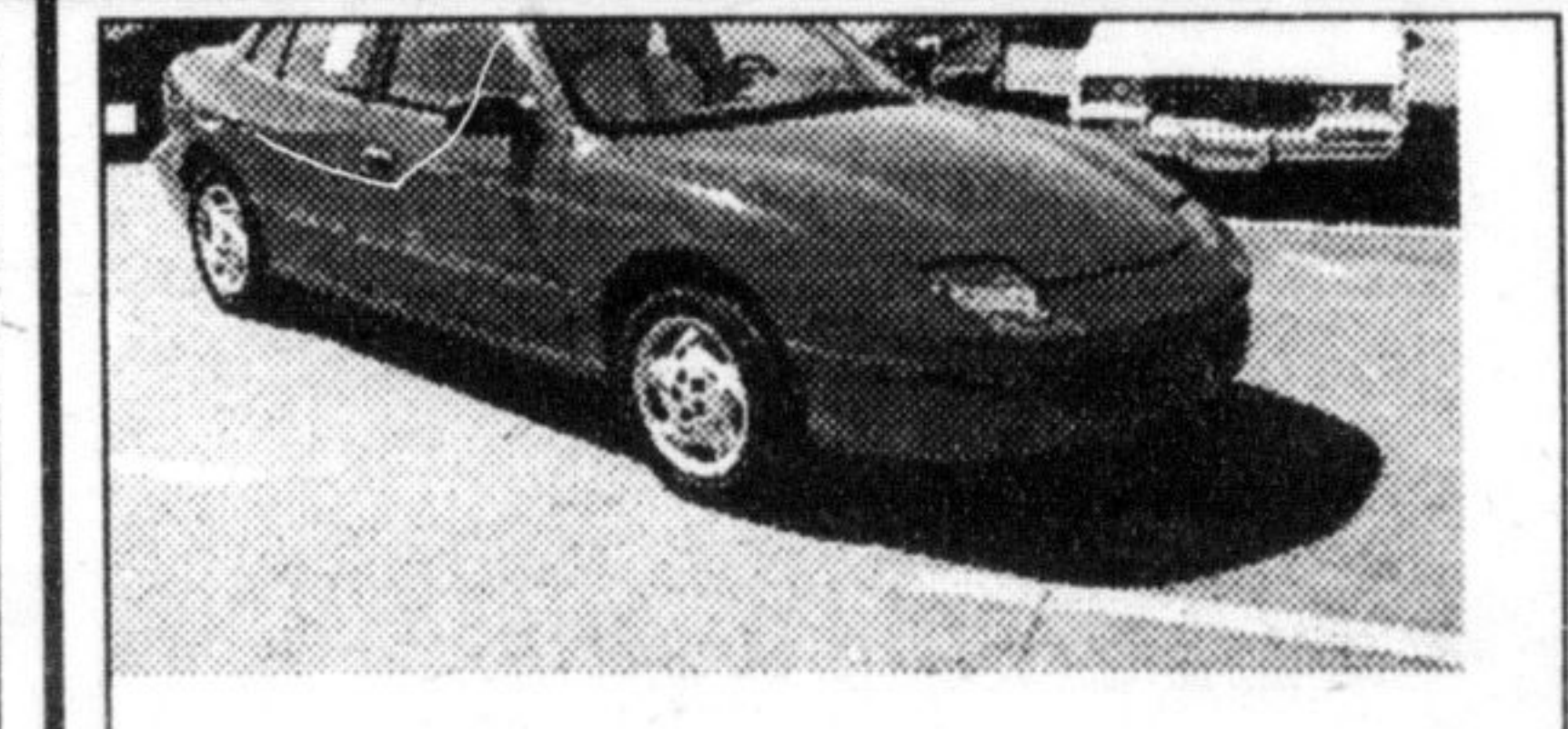
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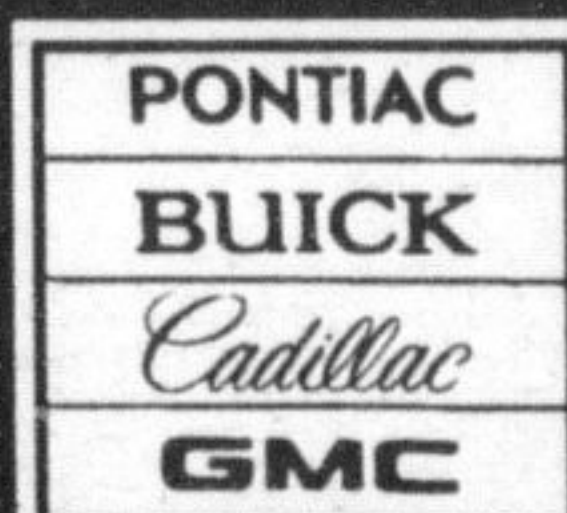


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