

Impasse reached

By KIM ARNOTT

Special to The Champion

Talks between the Halton Catholic District School Board and its 375 high school teachers have reached an impasse, but no one's sure exactly what that will mean for thousands of local students on the first day of school.

Negotiations between the board and the union representing the teachers broke down after a short meeting last Wednesday and no further talks have been scheduled.

A press release from Joe Pece, president of the Halton secondary unit of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), said the board formally rejected a teachers' offer that would have seen the school year "begin without disruption to students."

Mr. Pece said the teachers were prepared to return to work and satisfy the conditions of Bill 160 while leaving contentious issues to arbitration at a later date.

While teachers reported to the schools last Thursday for a scheduled professional development day, Mr. Pece said the union is still deciding what sanctions could be imposed on the first day of school today (Tuesday).

Strike action could range from a suspension
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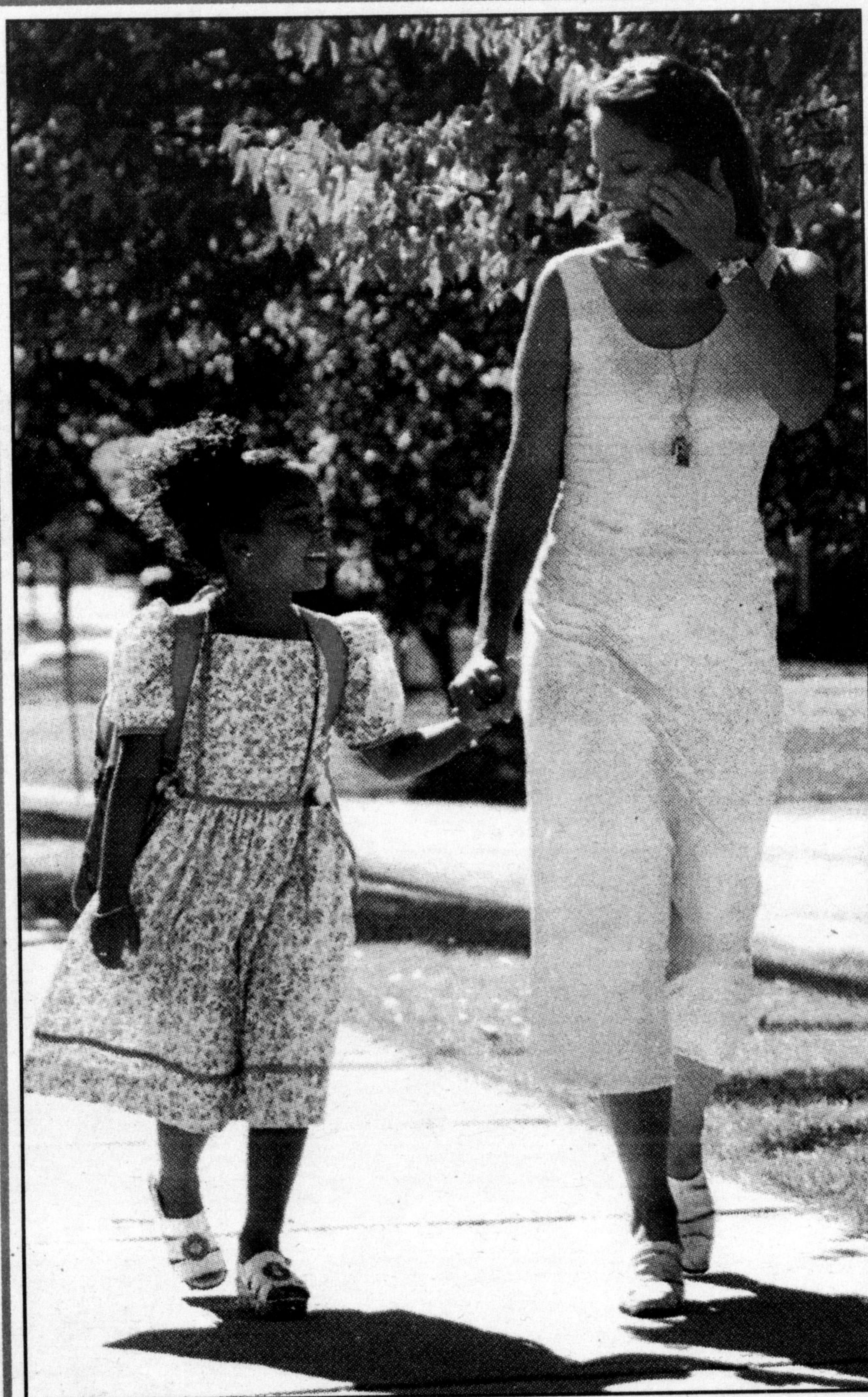


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Back to school

Six-year-old Shanese Steele, with mom Linda, makes her way up Wilson Drive toward Robert Baldwin Public School. She and thousands of other youngsters across the region return to classrooms today.

Abandoned house burns

A fire just north of Milton burned a vacant and abandoned house to the ground August 31.

Only the foundation of the house located on No. 5 Sideroad east of Hwy. 25 remains standing after the blaze broke out shortly before 6 p.m.

The Milton Fire Department first arrived

on the scene and began battling the blaze, but the Halton Hills Fire Department soon took over.

No one was hurt. The cause of the blaze is unknown.

Youths aged about 14 years old were seen in the area prior to the fire, according to Halton Regional Police.

Teachers in public board will be there

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Champion

Both elementary and secondary teachers at Halton public schools will start the year in the classroom, union officials have confirmed.

But while an elementary teacher representative talked about "breakthroughs" in negotiations, a secondary teacher representative is uncertain about how long they will stay in class

"All teachers will be in class on Tuesday," Al Tanner, president of District 9 of the Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation said Friday. "We don't want to place people in the position of not knowing what's going to happen."

But there was still the possibility secondary teachers would eventually strike or take some form of job action.

He said the union may review its position because it is opposed to the board making unilateral contract changes. "They should be negotiating a fair settlement," said Mr. Tanner.

The board confirmed it passed a resolution Thursday night implementing changes required by provincial legislation and regulation. The board statement said the changes would affect class size and teacher instructional time.

"... in order to abide by the law, we must put in place these staffing changes as part of the board's process to deal with the implementation of Bill 160 (now known as the Education Quality Improvement Act) and to stay within the restrictive funding envelope designated for staffing under the Ministry's new funding formula," said Trustee Debbie Marklew, chair of the board's secondary negotiations committee.

"It is very important to note that we respect our teachers and the negotiation process," Ms Marklew added. "We will continue to negotiate in good faith with our teachers, and it is our hope that we can reach mutually acceptable collective agreements."

Staffing requirements under the new provincial act state that secondary teachers handle seven courses per year instead of six.

Under semestering, this means providing 80 more minutes of daily classroom instruction for half the school year.

Mr. Tanner said the union will continue to oppose this requirement.

"We don't think extending teachers' classroom time will help the quality of public education," he said. "It will suffer so drastically."

The board is in a position to revise contracts with secondary and elementary teachers because their agreements expired August 31.

No-board reports, which lay the groundwork for a strike or lockout, have been filed in both cases. But elementary teachers have not taken the required strike vote, while secondary teachers

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Al Tanner

NEWSLINES

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