

# Putting grades 7 and 8 in high schools is a bad move, says leader of elementary school teachers

Moving grades 7 and 8 students to high schools could have serious consequences, the Halton District School Board has been warned.

Early adolescence is a critical development phase and nurturing, secure environments are needed, an elementary teachers' leader told trustees Wednesday.

"If problems are not prevented in these years, there are significant economic and social consequences — increased drop out rates, teen pregnancy and motherhood, substance use and abuse, and life-long violent behaviours," noted Kathy Clarke.

She said elementary teachers feel 12 to 13-year-olds don't belong in an environment with 18 to 19 year-olds.

Ms Clarke added secondary schools are designed for more independent activity and don't provide special adult support needed by

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**KATHY CLARKE**

the young adolescents.

"Left on their own or with peers, they have a significantly greater chance of engaging in risk behaviours than do their coun-

terparts involved in activities under adult guidance," said Ms Clarke, who's president of Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario for Halton Local 1.

She said the federation feels kindergarten to grade 8 or grades 6 to 8 schools are best for intermediate students and asked that federation concerns be considered in future decisions.

The board plans to add grades 7 to 8 to Aldershot High School in Burlington for the 2001-02 school year.

Two other high school buildings, Central in Burlington and Oakville's Q.E. Park, have housed grades 7 to 8 for years.

Ms Clarke said this trend may continue because of provincial funding criteria (requiring elimination of space surpluses for new school grants).

"Boards are looking to fill their empty secondary classrooms with grades 7 to 8 students in order to avoid closing high schools," she noted.

Ms Clarke said elimination of grade 13 will further reduce enrolments and could lead to grades 7 to 12 schools across the province.

"This may seem like a reasonable solution, but there are real consequences for the education, health and social well-being of our young adolescents," she said.

Ms Clarke said research shows stable teacher-student relationships, smaller schools, an intellectually-stimulating cooperative learning environment and significant parental environment are needed for young adolescents. These features are provided in elementary schools, she added.

"Grades 7 to 8 students need leadership opportunities that will build their confidence and encourage independent behaviour," said Ms Clarke. "Being the oldest students in elementary school gives them these opportunities."

Females often lose esteem and self-confidence in early adolescence, she noted.

Ms Clarke said grades 7 to 8 programs in high schools should be separate entities with their own entrance.

Elementary teachers aren't raising the issue because of staffing concerns, added the teachers' leader.

"The Education Act ensures that students from kindergarten to grade 8 are elementary students and our own collective agreement states that elementary students will be taught by elementary teachers," she said. "We will not lose elementary staff if our students are placed in secondary schools."

Nor does raising the issue involve resisting change or school closures, or undermining the saving of taxpayer dollars, said Ms Clarke.

"What it is about is the education, health and well-being of our adolescent students," she said.

## CN development causing concerns

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ble on their part.

"The bottom line is I love the area and want to stay. I hope we're not pushed out."

Allen Brownridge is also concerned about traffic.

"The roads in Milton were not developed for traffic," said the Tremaine Road resident. "From a traffic viewpoint, (the development) will only add to the already congested roads."

Traffic was also a concern for Mavis and Anton Hutter.

"When I first read the story (Friday's paper) my immediate concern was traffic," said Mrs. Hutter, who resides on Tremaine Road. "With the truck traffic, it will be impossible to live here. We'll have to wait and see what happens. We don't really want to move."

Mayor Gord Krantz said he only became aware of the CN development February 16.

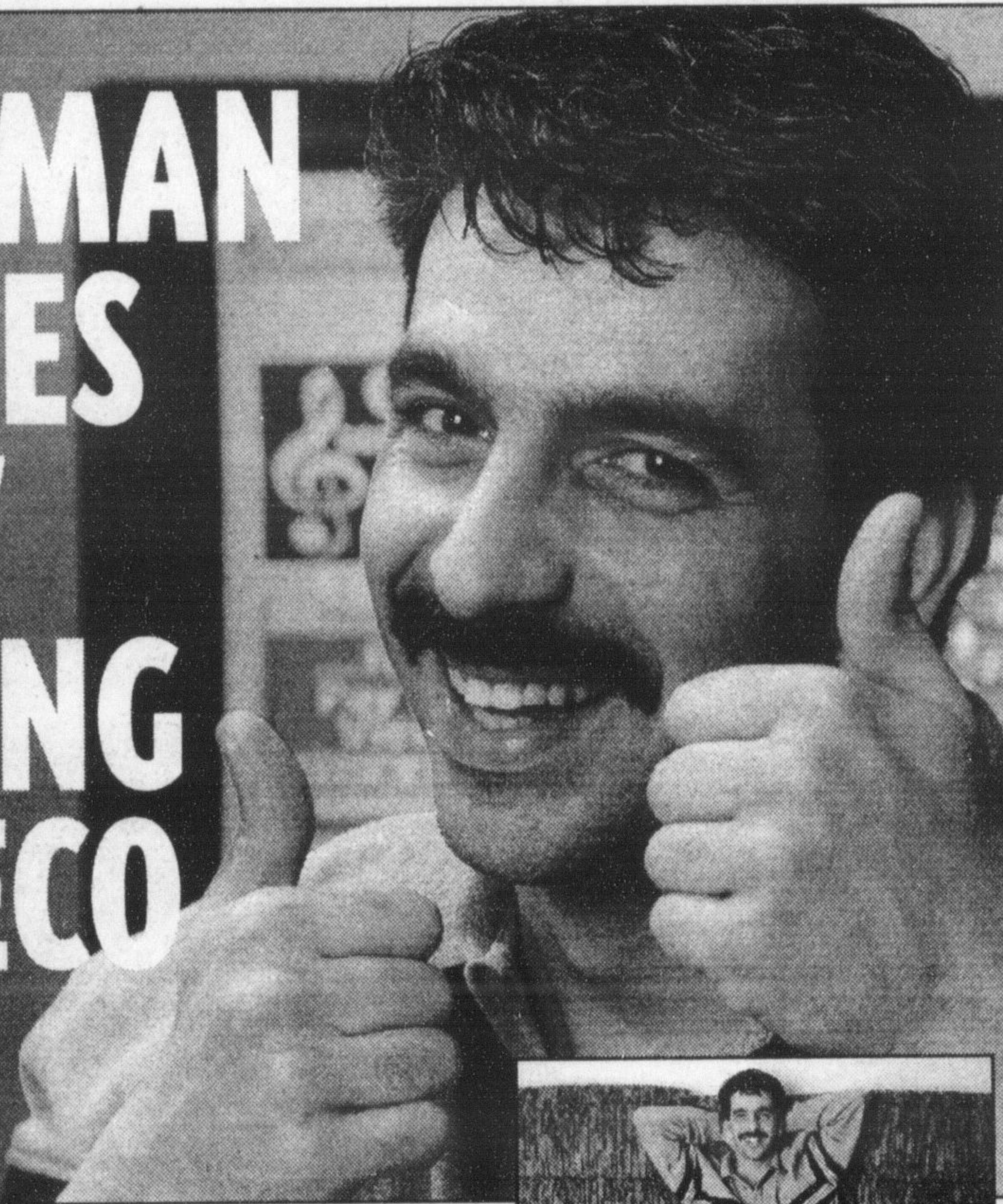
"A few representatives from CN called a special meeting with myself, (Regional Chair) Joyce Savoline and (CAO) Mario Belvedere," he said. "They informed us of the plan. There was no discussion. I was disappointed we weren't consulted for asked for input. All the planning we've done with Milton went out the door."

Mr. Krantz said there would be both negative and positive impacts the development would have on the town.

"There will be a disturbance for the rural community down there," he said. "On the positive side, jobs will be created. I haven't had a chance to measure the positive and negative impacts, but I'm hoping the positive outweigh the negative."

"The bottom line is, (CN) is going ahead with this whether we like it or not," Mr. Krantz said. "When it's all sorted out, not everyone will be happy, including myself."

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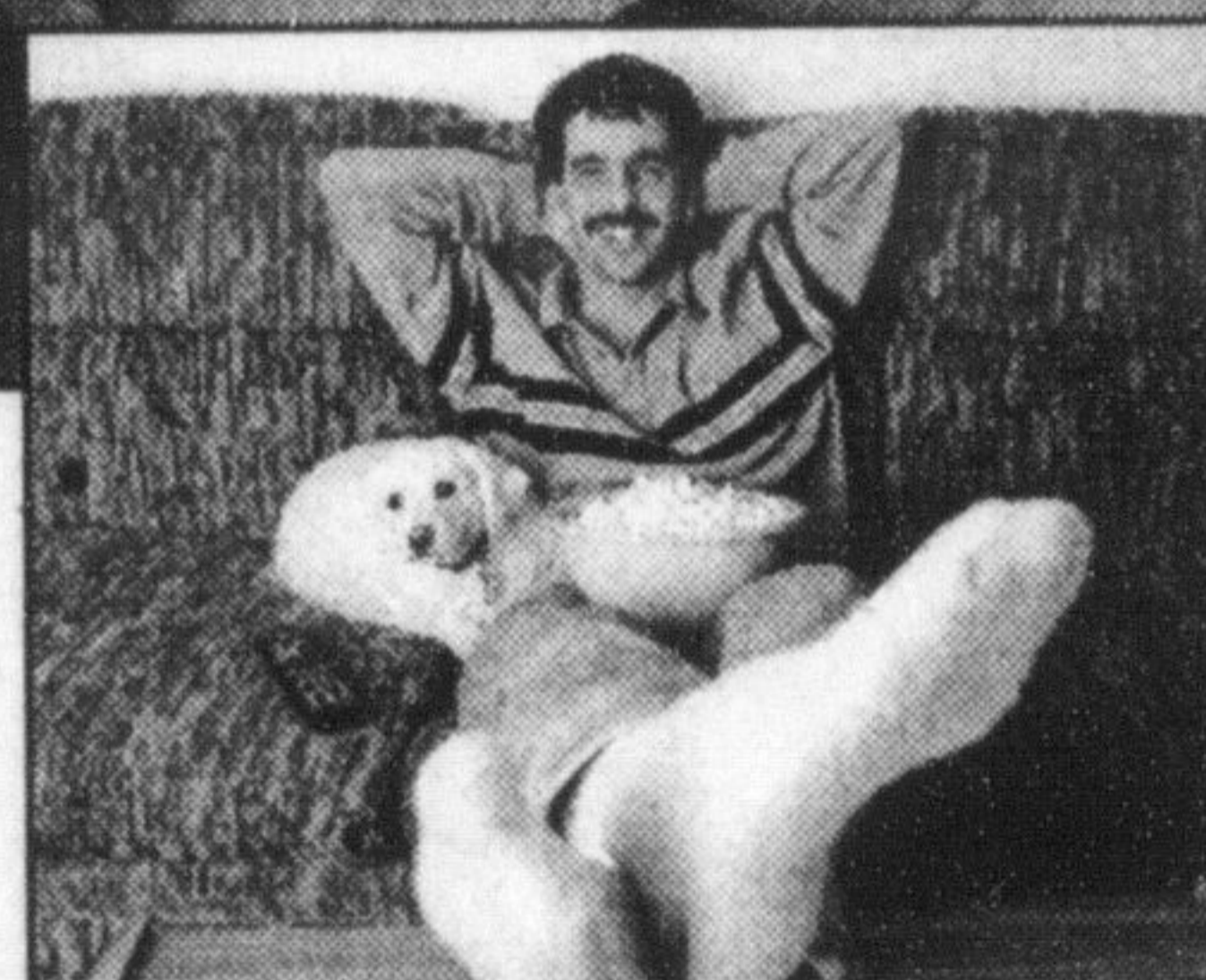
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