

Education director calls high school study a 'joke'

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Champion

A report card on Ontario's Secondary Schools has flunked out with the Halton District School Board's education director.

Dusty Papke said the Fraser Institute study seems to greatly emphasize the percentage of advanced courses schools offer.

"Personally, I find the ranking system to be a joke and unfortunately, it's a very bad one," he said at a board meeting late last month.

The report card gave top marks to the schools with highest rates of advanced courses, courses passed, core courses taken (English, math and science) and lowest gender differences for advanced grade 12 math and English (or French for French-language schools).

The scoring system automatically puts private schools and academies at the top, said Mr. Papke.

"All they offer is advanced level courses," he said. "And most private schools at the top are single-gender schools."

Ironically, only one of Halton's public or Catholic secondary schools are ranked in the 1994-99 study. (Oakville's Loyola was 81st of 568 schools ranked.)

In most cases, marks from the final year weren't available for

rankings.

About one-third of the 815 schools studied weren't ranked.

But the report card does include overall yearly averages for most. Halton public schools generally range from 5.5 to 7.5 out of 10, with a few exceptions. Several top schools, mostly private ones, scored 10s.

Mr. Papke said he's not out to criticize advanced level courses or private schools.

"But public schools are charged with a much broader mandate. It's not a legitimate comparison," he said about the report card. "Tell me how it speaks to the quality of students and equity of choice."

As for why Halton schools were unranked, Mr. Papke said the Fraser Institute never contacted the board for the study.

He said he believes it was deliberately released to coincide with a provincial government announcement proposing children be allowed to attend any school within a board's jurisdiction.

But a Fraser Institute representative said times for issuing the study are limited and March, May and the fall are already used for report card releases in other provinces.

"The timing of the release had nothing to do with the timing of the throne speech," said Peter Cowley, the report card's author.

He said the study was based on Ministry of Education data.

Mr. Cowley said the Fraser Institute hasn't been able to determine why there was insufficient data for some schools, preventing them from being ranked.

"It's not a subjective thing. We don't say let's include one school and exclude another," he added. "We handle each school the same way. The ratings were done with objective criteria."

Mr. Cowley added the data is available to anyone, if some school officials feel results are not what they should be. He said advanced courses are just one of five report card indicators.

Mr. Cowley noted B.C. Power Corporation has required advanced courses for lineman apprenticeships. "Just because a course leads to university education doesn't exclude it from being useful for other students."

Gender gap results were measured in particular courses to see whether some schools handled the issue better than others, said Mr. Cowley. "Specific criticism is inevitable and we're happy to hear it to see how we can make our report card more useful for next year."

Mr. Cowley said the study can help parents ask relevant questions when choosing schools.

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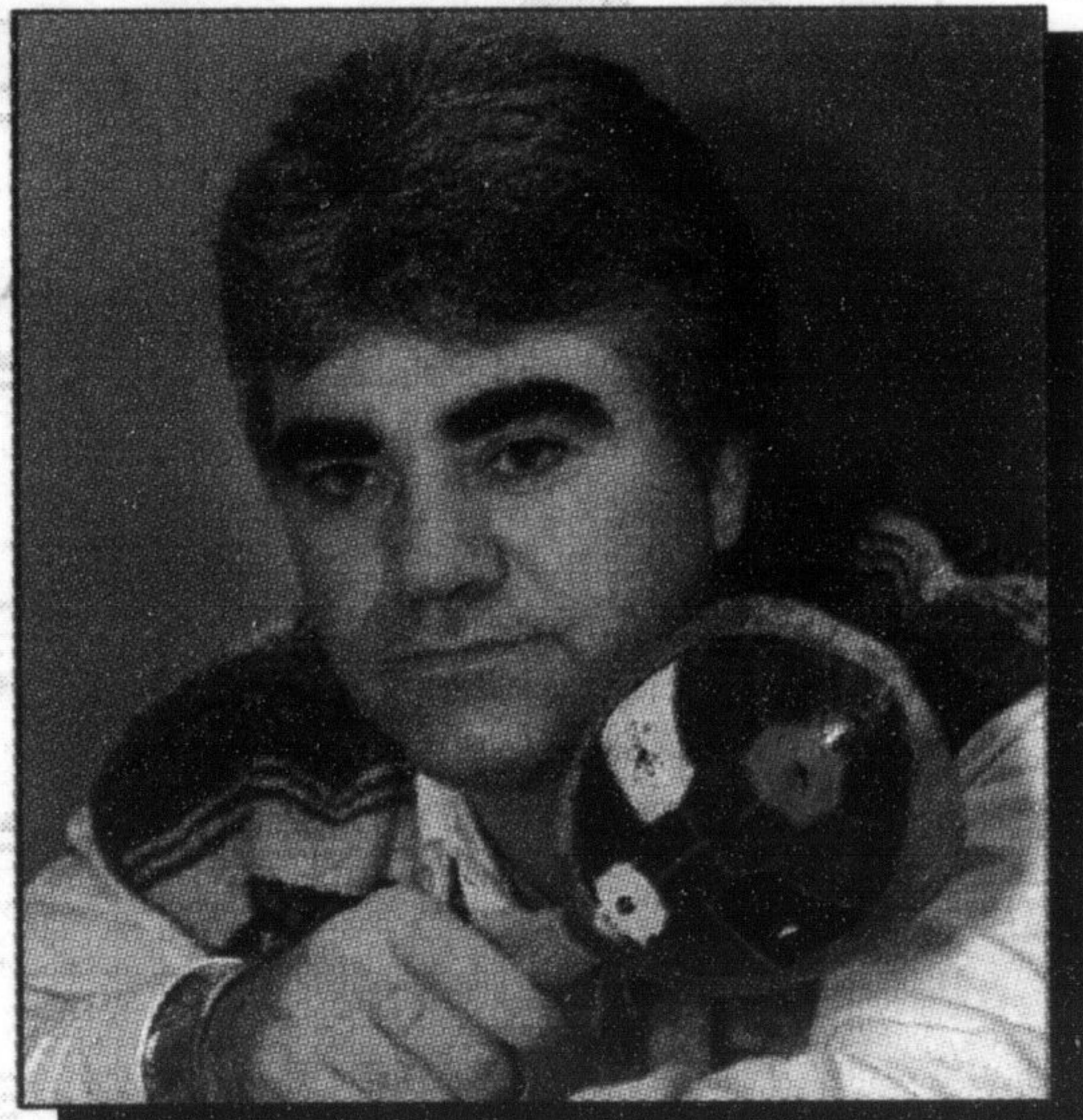
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