

Extended-day program to be provided by third parties

By Dominik Kurek

METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

Ontario's extended-day program for young learners is too expensive to run for the Halton District School Board.

In its first four months at four Halton public schools, the program has run up a \$15,000 deficit.

The extended-day program is an extension of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten program. It offers before and after school extended hours for young children, much like a daycare, however in the classroom with a Ministry of Education-based curriculum.

All Ontario school boards had to begin implementing the program within the coming years starting this past September, to be run by school staff.

Halton District School Board opened the extended-day program at four of its schools, two in Milton, this year.

However, the Province changed the policy, now saying the program only needs to run where there's sufficient parent demand and boards have the option to deliver the program through third-party providers. Furthermore, the program must break even financially, which so far it hasn't been doing.

Starting next school year, the public school board staff will no longer provide the program; it will be run by third-party providers.

The full-day kindergarten is operating at 11 schools and will continue to do so.

The decision was largely due to the costs associated with running the program.

"We do this with some reluctance on our part, to be quite honest with you. We were quite successful with the delivery of the program this year with the exception of that we were doing it at a loss," Superintendent of Education Mark Zonneveld told trustees at a recent board meeting.

"We can't do that. We must run this program as best we can and break even. At the \$25 we've been charging parents we have been losing money."

He added it was the cost of the program that forced the decision.

In the staff report, it said the program has already come \$15,000 over budget by December. In order for the program to break even, it said the board would have to charge about \$31 per day, which is significantly higher than the \$22 average at Halton child-care centres.

The costs aren't the only thing that have been challenging for the board. Human resources have been an issue as has providing special education.

"For students with special needs, meeting those needs has probably been the area of greatest challenge as the Province moves forward with the full-day program," Zonneveld said. "The Province has heard from many boards and organizations, loud and clear, that there is a lot of concern for special needs students and they have been fairly silent."

He told trustees the board has been working with numerous service providers for chil-

dren with special needs to ensure there's sufficient support service for the students.

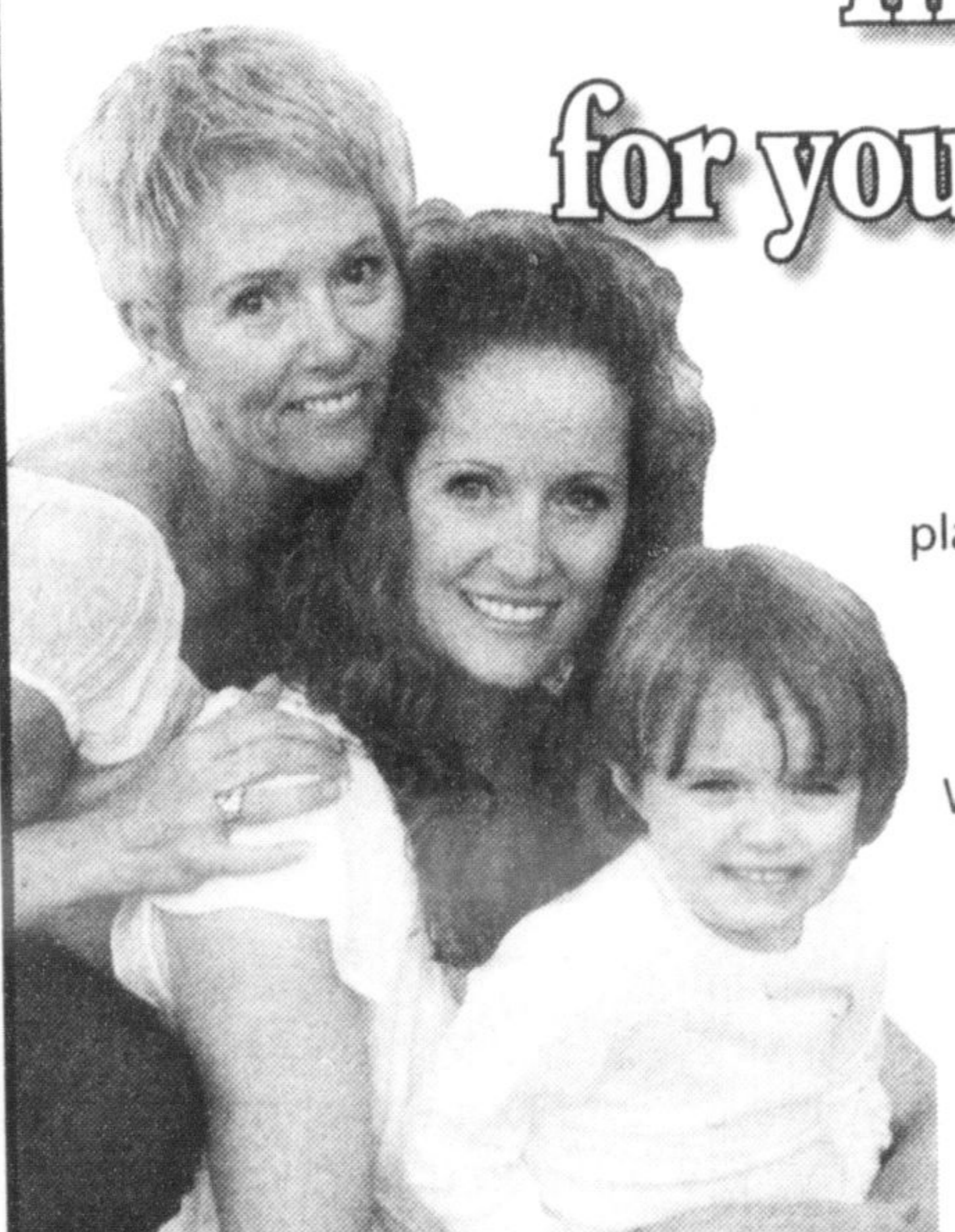
However, he said there are currently wait times for students with special needs, a lack of service and a lack of funding from the Province.

He also noted that with the implementation of the program by third parties as a partnership with the schools will be different

than in the past. Previously, the child-care providers were simply tenants at schools and used areas such as the gymnasium. The new program will require that before and after school students are in the classrooms where they will receive curriculum-based education.

"The onus is on us now to provide the appropriate space," Zonneveld said.

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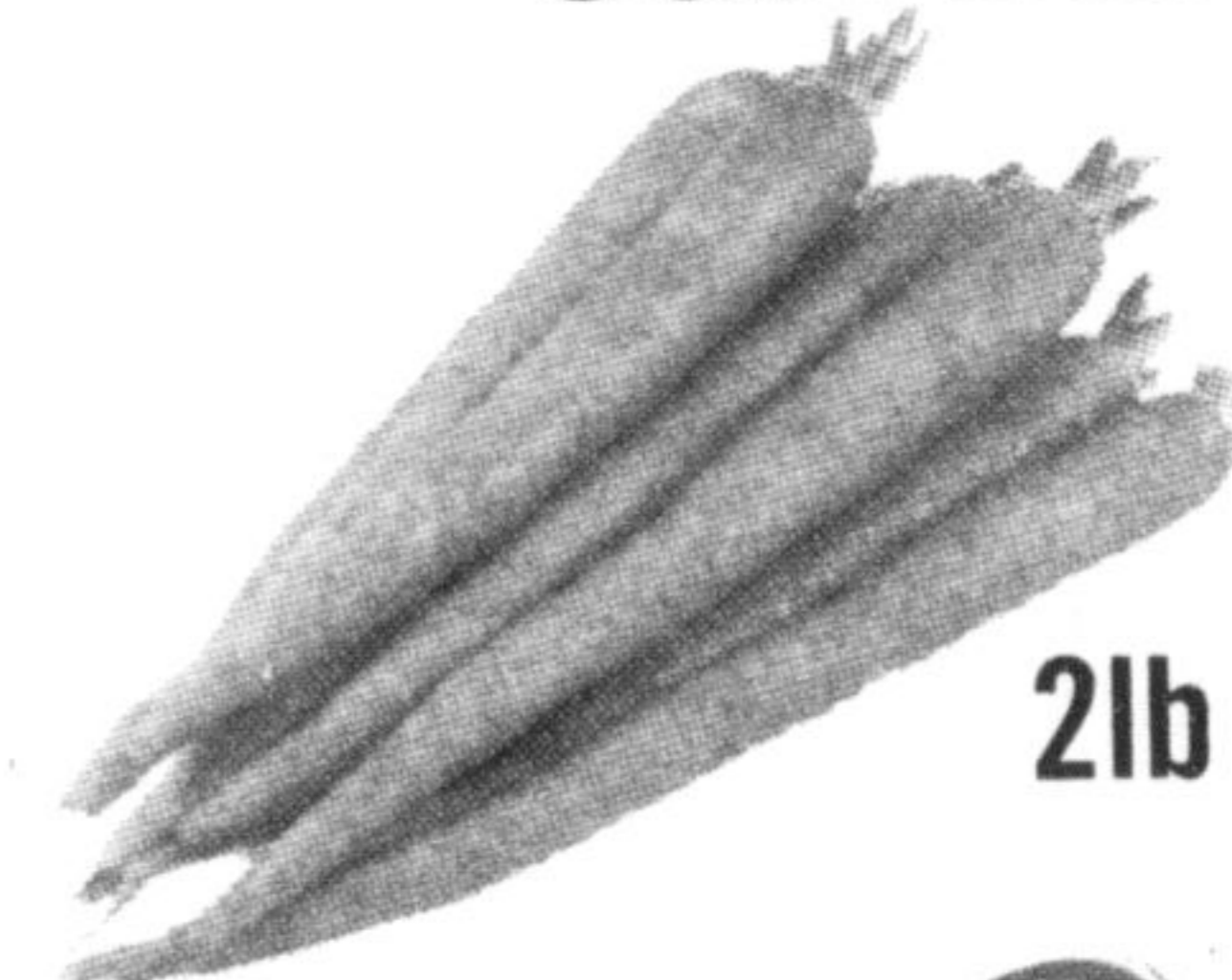
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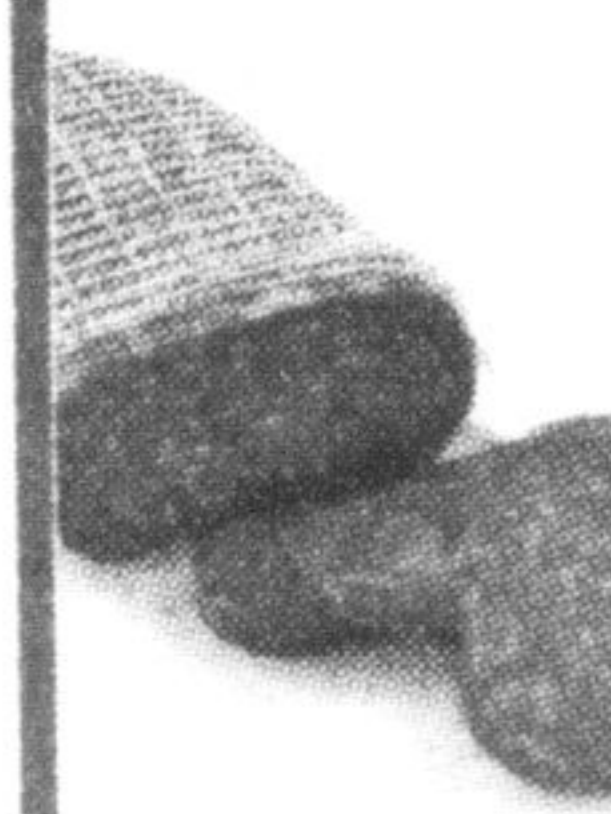
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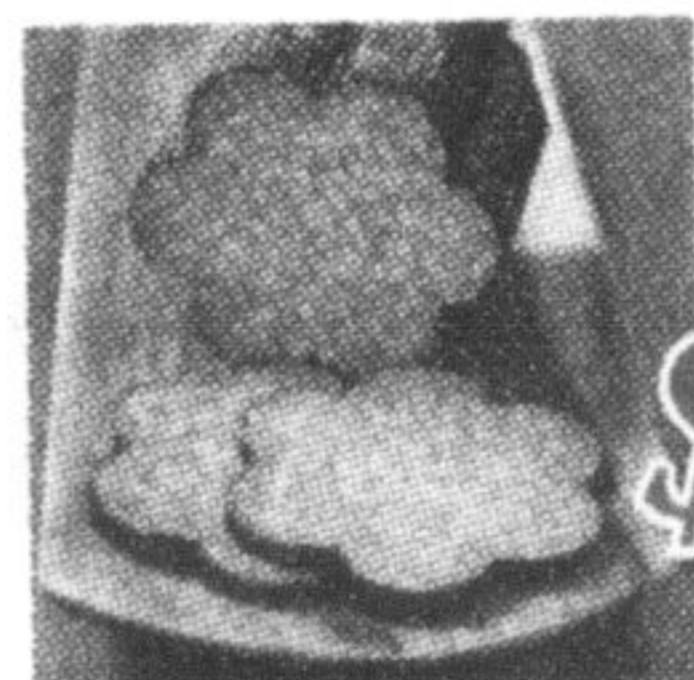
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