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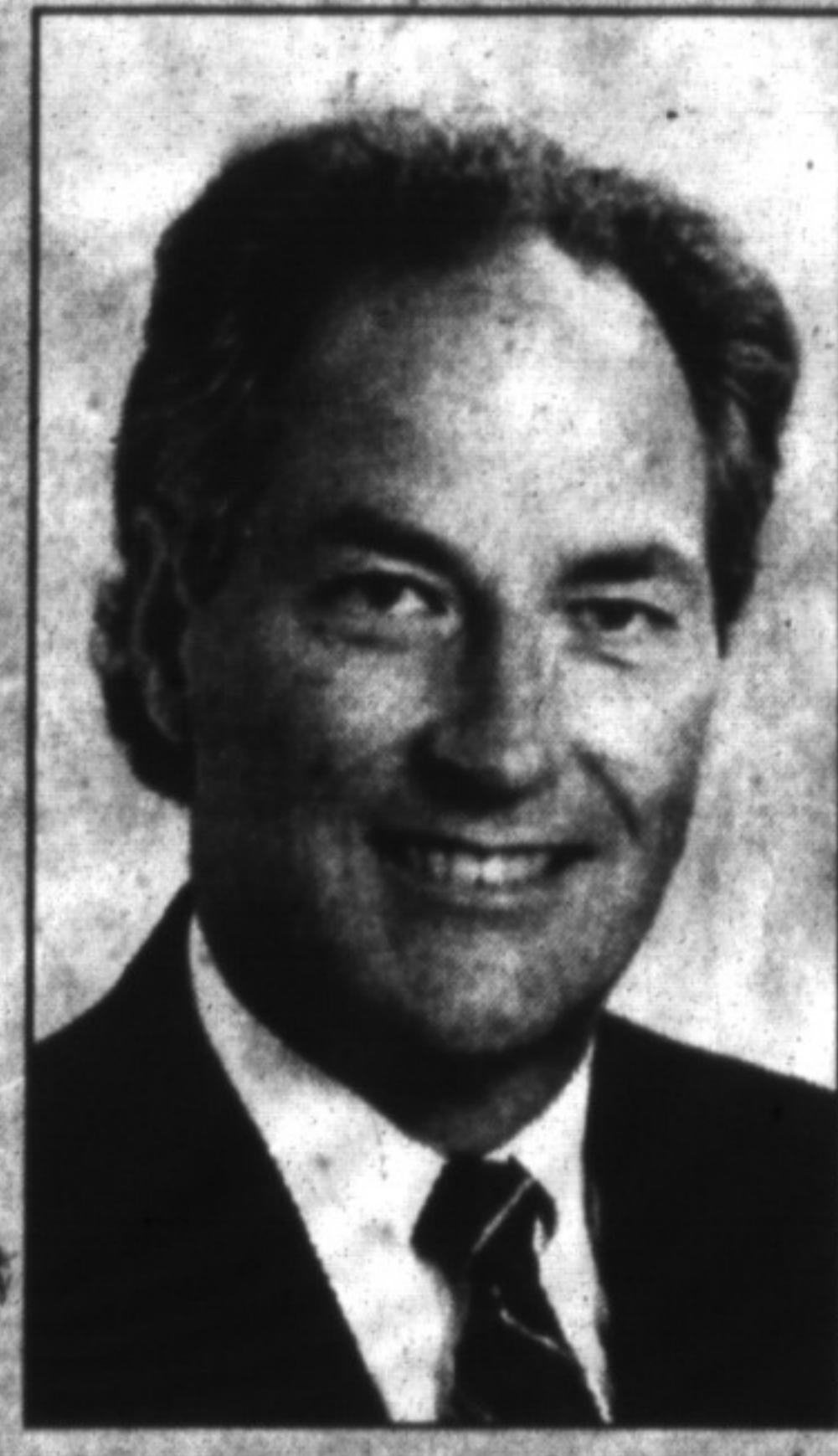
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"I don't think it requires a tinkering. I think it requires a massive restructuring."
TED CHUDLEIGH

Tory MPPs hint strongly boards done

By **HOWARD MOZEL**
Special to The Champion

School boards across the province need a complete overhaul and that may mean major changes in the way education is brought to Ontario classrooms, says a local MPP.

Halton North MPP Ted Chudleigh said the Halton Board of Education's renewal plan is a step in the right direction, but it just touches the tip of the iceberg.

"I don't think it requires a tinkering. I think it requires a massive restructuring," he said, noting that the province of New Brunswick operates under one school system.

"I don't believe the status quo is working very well. It seems to me that we could do a much better job."

Mr. Chudleigh, along with colleagues Oakville South MPP Gary Carr and Halton Centre MPP Terence Young, confirmed that Queen's Park is seriously considering abolishing the 166 existing school boards, but nothing has been decided.

"We are looking at everything from abolishing board to province-wide bargaining," Mr. Carr said. "But there hasn't been a final decision made."

If it were up to him, Mr. Carr said, the boards would be gone.

"I'm in favour of it," he said. "Right across the province the boards handled (recent 3 per cent provincial funding cuts) very badly and are incapable of handling the tough decisions when it comes to spending."

A prime example of the Halton Board's mishandling of the situation, says Mr. Carr, was last spring's knee-jerk issuing of teacher layoff notices. The board intentionally stirred up the public, he continued, but in the end only gave those opposed to school boards more ammunition to scrap them.

"My constituents have little faith or confidence in the Halton board," said Mr. Young, who adds that even some trustees are frustrated by the lack of leadership.

Another example is the public school board's current plan to close between eight to 12 schools in Halton, which Mr. Carr calls its "typical way of management." Every school could remain open if boards just reined in teachers' salaries, which are 15 to 20 per cent higher in Ontario than any other province, says Mr. Carr.

The provincial government says top pay for teachers in Ontario averages \$63,353, compared to an average of \$51,126 for teachers in the other nine provinces.

"We have to take bargaining away from trustees," said Mr. Carr. "Quite frankly, trustees haven't done a good job."

After all, adds Mr. Young, the teachers' union sets its strategy province-wide so why should 166 separate deals be struck? Savings are possible, he continued, but teachers' union leaders — not the province — are the ones stirring up anxiety among their membership.

Mr. Carr said the kinds of across-the-board changes Queen's Park is contemplating include more class time for teachers. He says, "prep time" is simply too expensive.

Mr. Young says teachers must simply spend more time in the classroom. In addition, he believes performance and merit — not only seniority — must come into play.

"We have become slaves to the financial grid," said Mr. Young. "Let's reward the teachers who are putting in the extra time."

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