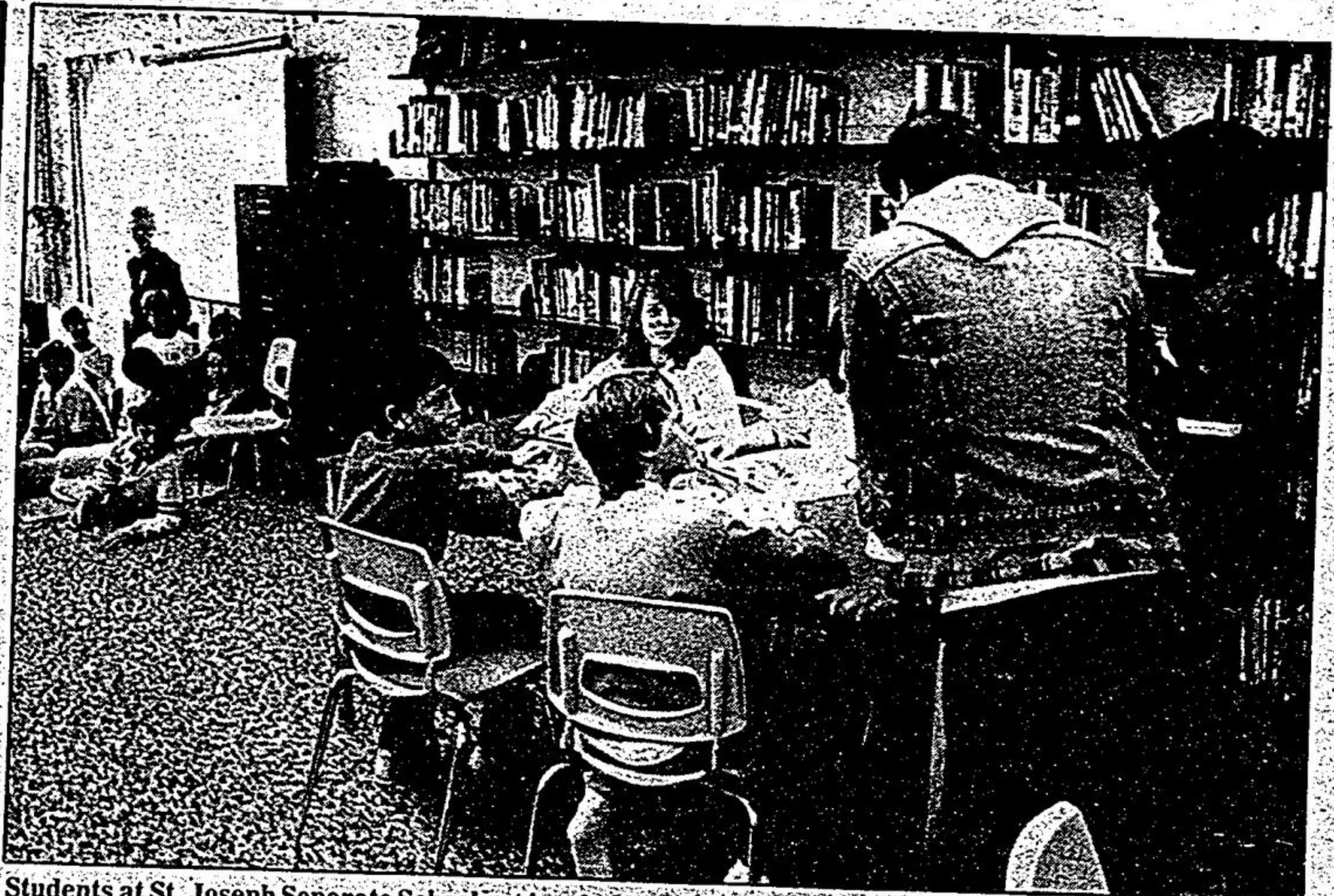


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Students at St. Joseph Separate School got involved in a dramatization involving a drug pusher (back to camera) played by a teacher. The dramatization was part of the Values, Influences and Peers (VIP) program conducted by York Regional Police at local schools. The program is designed to teach students about the kind of dangerous situations they can encounter in their adolescent years.  
— Sjoerd Witteveen

## Students learn they're VIPs through police-run program

By PAUL PIVATO Staff Reporter  
The students at St. Joseph Separate School watched calmly as a fellow student fell to the floor, hands clamped over his gut. Almost on cue, ambulance attendants burst into the room and began treating the student. His ailment: a severe drug overdose.  
It was all part of a dramatization, played out in front of the school's Grade 6 students.  
Put on by the York Regional Police department's community services bureau, the drug-overdose dramatization was part of its ongoing Values, Influences and Peers (VIP) program.  
And, in the words of one police officer, "it scares the hell out of the students."  
"Students realize what can hap-

pen with drugs," said Sgt. Rod Sine. "It's a real eye-opener."  
Noting that students find the dramatization "very realistic", Sgt. Sine said the drug abuse section of the VIP program involves teachers and students in the enactment of a drug purchase. Someone poses as a drug pusher trying to peddle LSD and other potentially-dangerous drugs to elementary school children. In some instances, the pusher attempts to recruit a student to hawk the street drugs.  
"The scenario they're creating is very close to reality," said St. Joseph principal Maurice Gareau. "Many times it's one of your peers who's selling the drugs."  
A student who buys and then takes the drug suffers an overdose.  
That sets the stage for an ambulance crew, who treat the student and take him out on a stretcher. A police officer then makes a mock arrest.  
The VIP drug abuse session also includes a discussion of the different types of drugs — everything from coffee and cough syrup

to cocaine and crack.  
Students learn about the effects of various drugs and the reasons people use them. Some classes may even include a guest speaker such as a representative from Alcoholics Anonymous or a local drug abuse center.  
Other VIP sessions include vandalism, shoplifting and peer pressure. A typical session on vandalism, for instance, includes a talk on the causes of vandalism, such as anger and frustration.  
Students may be asked to act out a skit on vandalism titled "Just for Kicks" in which some teens damage a bus.  
The VIP course at St. Joseph is the first time the police-organized program has been taught at a separate school in York region. The St. Joseph VIP program is being sponsored by the Markham Knights of Columbus.  
Said principal Gareau: "The children walked away with a good impression."  
"The whole course," said Sgt. Sine, from drug abuse to peer pressure, "is excellent."  
"It helps kids identify and handle real-life situations."

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