

EDUCATION: School trustees seek proof 1.8 million program is getting results

Performance program questioned

BY JENNIFER BROWN
Staff Writer

Trustees at the public board are questioning the success of a special program aimed at helping schools in need. The program, called Performance Plus, was implemented last year after province-wide tests showed some students were performing well below expectations.

Performance Plus is aimed at helping schools where socio-economic demographics and low test scores indicate the need for additional resources to help improve academic results.

Questions were raised Monday night after the board was presented with a report on the first year of the program.

"How is the program starting to materialize in showing improvement in reading and math?" asked Vaughan Trustee Harvey Nightingale.

"To who, how much and what progress has been made? We need some measure of progress."

The Performance Plus budget is \$1.8 million annually, allocated from a learning opportunities grant provided by the province. Those funds are beyond the normal resources provided to schools and are used to hire 12 teachers and 15 support staff.

The money is also used to focus on early literacy, extended day programs, student leadership, nutrition programs and summer schools.

An additional \$20,000 was received from the Canadian Living Foundation to aid in breakfast programs and to purchase equipment such as microwaves.

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There was also a concern that since Performance Plus was introduced a year ago, some schools have not progressed as far as others.

"Some schools have not been as aggressive as some in seeking resources," said Georgina Trustee Reid Cawston. Four schools in Cawston's community are in the Performance Plus program.

But school superintendent Jaimini Randev defended the schools involved, while acknowledging some are not as far along as others.

"Schools are at various levels of implementation," Randev said. "There is a whole process that schools and leadership teams need to go through."

But the need to see real results was emphasized Monday night when trustees were informed the Performance Plus program will expand to three additional schools this year — Walter Scott Public School in Richmond Hill, Glen Shields Public School in Concord and Jersey Public School in Keswick.

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But Randev, who heads up the Performance Plus program, cautioned trustees that it may be too soon to consider those results as a sign of whether those schools are improving.

"Our focus is on achievement," he said. "And we recognize that while the EQAO results will be forthcoming, this is really a long-term program."

Under the Performance Plus plan, primary division teachers have also

received additional training.

"It's still a little early to boast any successes," Randev said, adding the board has hired a researcher to look at the results of Performance Plus.

Questions were also raised following a presentation on a pilot project held at Sixteenth Avenue Public School this summer, part of the Performance Plus plan.

For seven weeks during the summer, the board offered a day camp called the Summer Institute at Sixteenth Avenue, one of 12 schools identified under the

Performance Plus program.

The Institute, for children aged seven to 14, cost parents \$50 a week and attracted more than 2,000 registrants, including students from the Catholic board and private schools.

Feedback from parents indicated the cost was "more than reasonable" and that they would be willing to pay as much as \$75 or \$100.

Similar camps, such as that offered by Newmarket's parks and recreation department, are \$85 per week.

The program took in \$95,000 in rev-

enue, but the expenses exceeded that amount, as the board had to cover the purchase of start-up items such as mountain bicycles.

The board hopes to expand the summer camps to three more communities next year.

But despite the success of the camp and the development of partnerships with the communities surrounding the Performance Plus schools, trustees wanted to know how the pilot camp at Sixteenth Avenue will contribute to the improvement of student learning skills.

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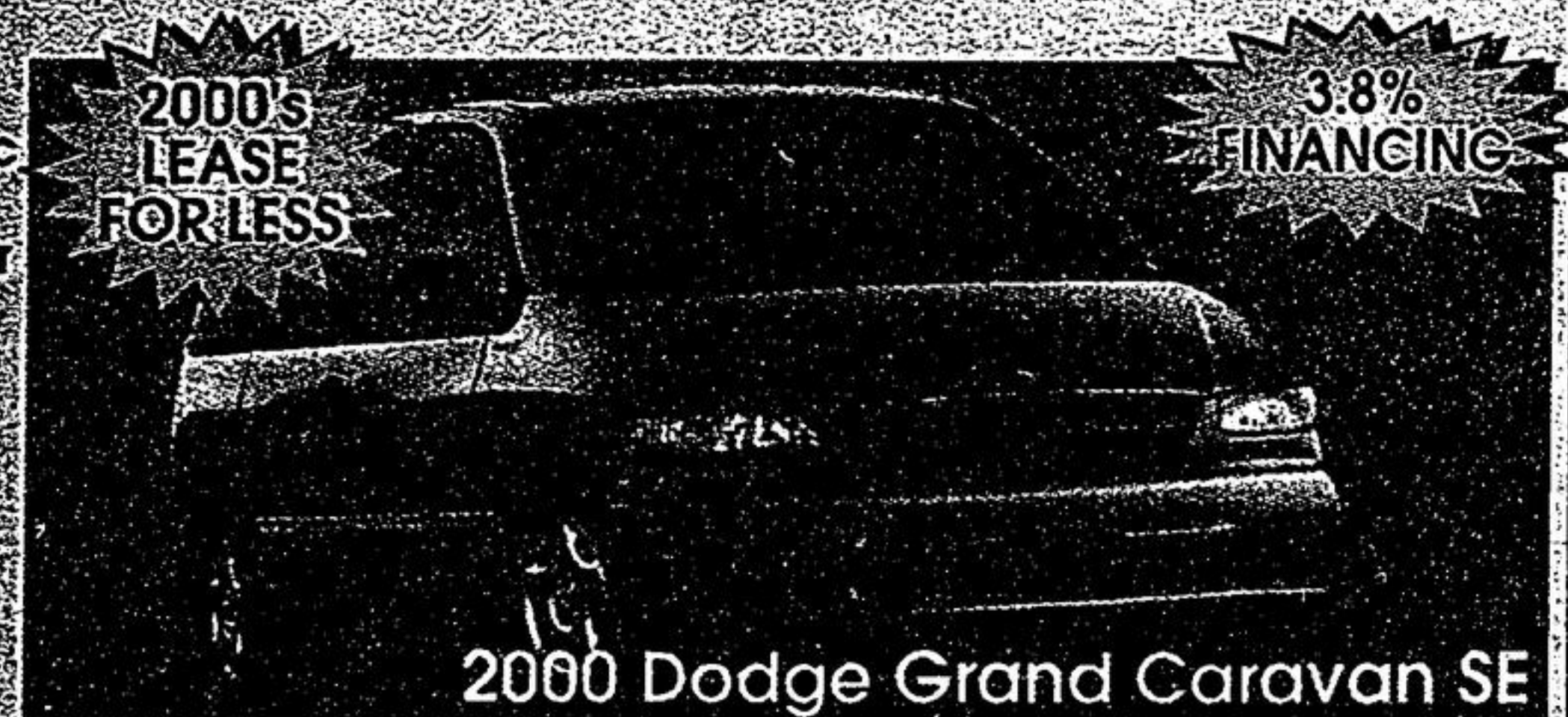
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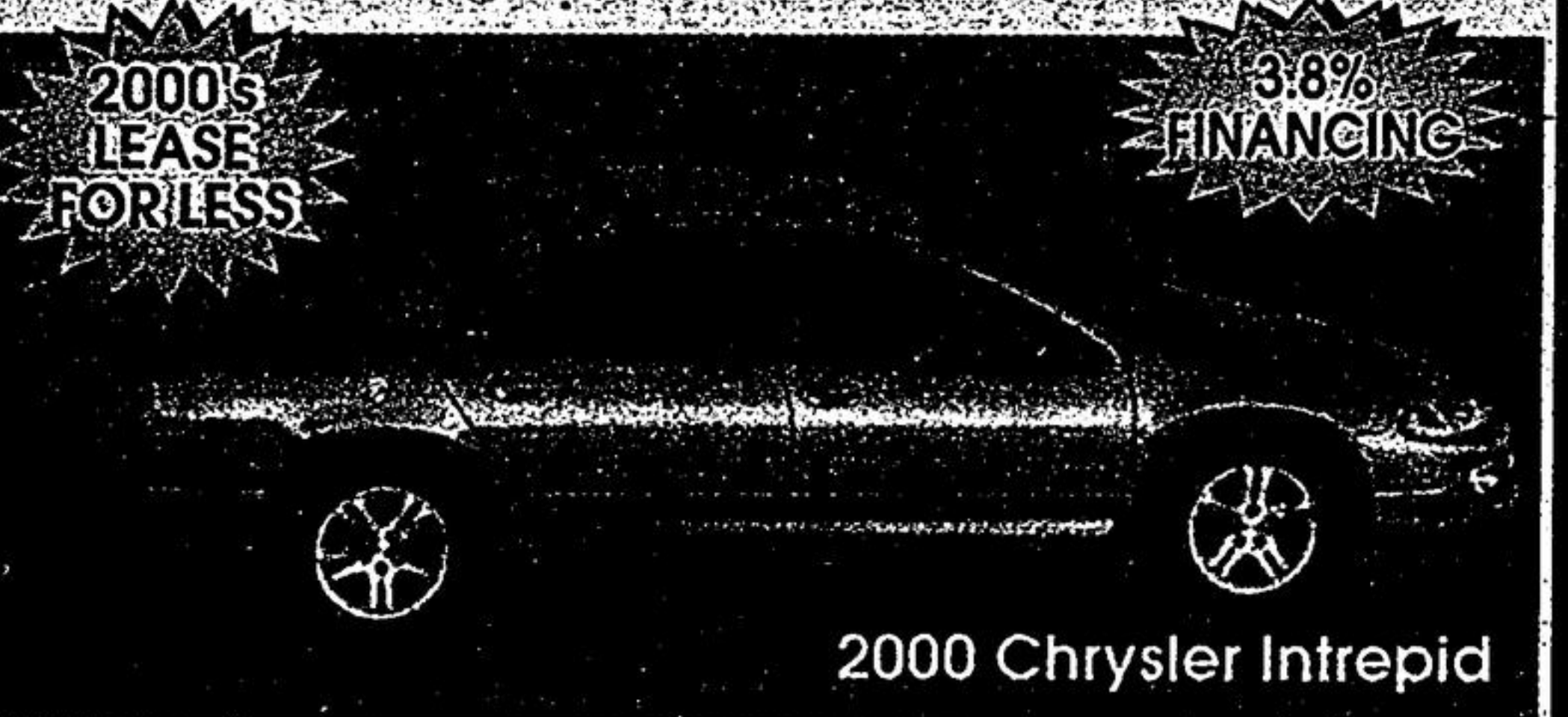
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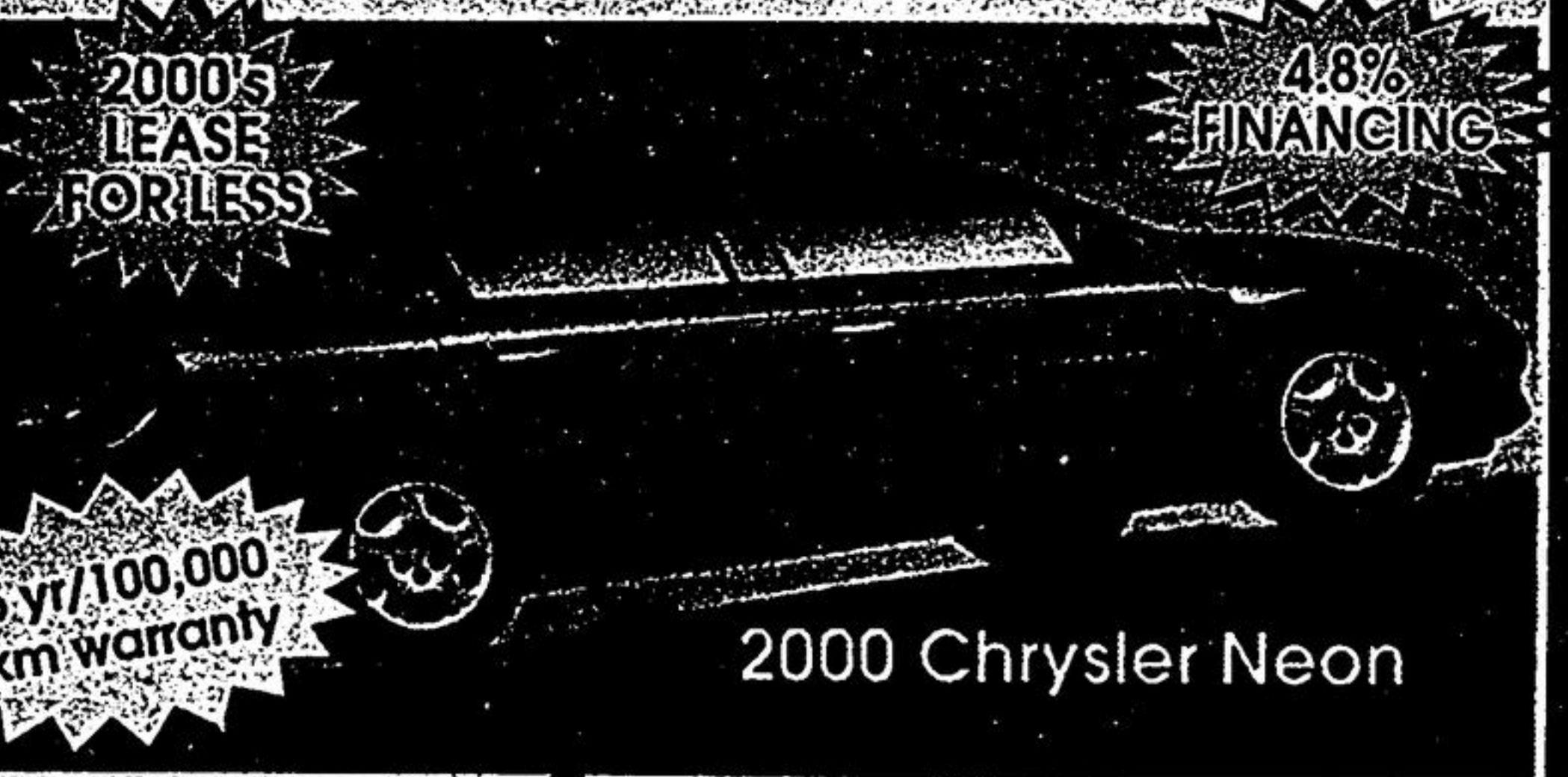
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