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This message brought to you as a community service of The Economist & Sun/Tribune

Teachers hope for 'new approach'

From page 1.

the education of about 2 million children and oversee a \$14-billion budget. York Catholic District School Board chairperson Elizabeth Crowe said Ms Witmer has the qualifications for the job.

"We're cautiously optimistic," Mrs. Crowe said. "Given her background as a former teacher and trustee, she'll be aware of the issues and up to speed on her new portfolio pretty quickly."

"Every ministry is jockeying for money," she added. "At budget time, let's hope she'll be able to address the funding inadequacy."

Ms Witmer, a former teacher and trustee for the Waterloo Board of Education, heads the Education Ministry at a time when the province is considering substantial budget cuts, when school boards are faced with funding shortfalls, students are forced to share or go without textbooks and the relationship between the Tory government and the province's 140,000 teachers is strained at best.

Although her appointment is seen by some as a strategic move by Mr. Eves to mend the rift between teachers and his government, York Region's Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association president Julie Pauletig remains skeptical.

"We'll see the proof in the pudding," Ms Pauletig said. "In the past, (the government) has taken a confrontational approach with education. I'm hopeful, she'll take a different approach."

York Region District School Board chairperson Bill Crothers agreed.

"There needs to be stability in the system. We know exactly what has happened in the past," Mr. Crothers said, referring to a lengthy provincewide teacher strike in 1997. "I'd like to see peace in the system. For far too long, there's been too much friction between different employee groups and the government."

"We don't have to all agree, just as long as there's an opportunity for input," he added.

During her leadership campaign, Ms Witmer made education one of her top priorities, offering to review the student-based funding formula, hike enrolment at faculties of education, modify the new curriculum and consider reintroducing the basic stream in high schools.

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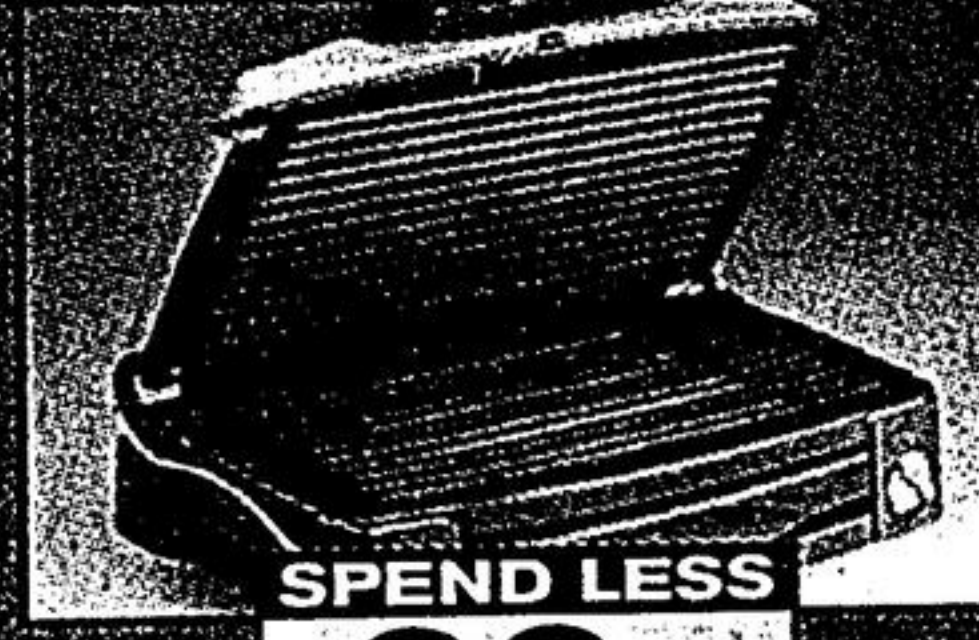
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