

Board chairs like money for special education

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mined amount to cover current contract negotiations with teaching and support staff;

- An immediate infusion of \$130 million for special education, as well as \$20 million for student transportation costs;

- \$50 million more for staffing at small schools in northern, rural, and French-language boards and single-school communities;

- That school boards be allowed to spend five per cent of their foundation grants for their own local priorities; and

- That the ministry of education "develop mechanisms" for annual reviews of the funding formula and a more comprehensive overall review every five years.

"I thought it was a very good report," said Elizabeth Crowe, chairperson of the York Catholic District School Board, one of hundreds who made presentations before the commission during its six-city tour in September.

"In particular, we're very pleased that he recommends some immediate action on the areas that we have highlighted, such as the special education funding. We really do hope the government acts on that as quickly as possible."

Bill Crothers, chairperson of the York Region District School Board, said Mr. Rozanski's report shows many boards don't have a problem with the funding formula itself, just the fact it hasn't kept pace with the cost of living.

"That was the bulk of his recommendations, that the government take the funding formula they developed and increase all the cost numbers to reflect the cost of living that has occurred since then," he said.

"That's two-thirds to three-quarters of the money he's recommending and that's what many of us have been saying all along."

He was also pleased the report recognized the need for more money for special

education and contract negotiations with the board's teachers, whose contracts expired in August.

Others, while glad the report recognizes the need for more money, are more hesitant to fully embrace it.

"It's sort of good news, bad news, as far as I'm concerned," said Wendy van Straten, president of the York Region chapter of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

'We'll wait to see how much the government actually acts on.'

"I think it's a good thing to increase the benchmarks, but that's not really an infusion. It's basically keeping up with the consumer price index, which, to me, is something that should have been done all along."

While she's pleased the report mentions the need for more ESL funding, she noted it doesn't address all of the problems her teachers face, such as the growing disparity in per-pupil funding between the elementary and secondary schools.

Sean O'Connor, a Newmarket teacher and founding member of the York Education Alliance, was also only somewhat pleased with the report.

"It's certainly encouraging that the report acknowledges the fact the funding formula is deficient in a number of areas, especially in the area of special-education services," he said. "Any money put into that area would be welcome."

Still, he figures the amount of money the report is calling for, an amount Mr. Rozanski says should be spread out over three years, is "almost the same amount of money the government will save with the elimination of the OAC year."

"We'll wait to see how much the government actually acts on," he said.

A copy of the full report of the task force is available at www.edfundingreview.on.ca

Ashley improves

Canadian race driver Ashley Taws, who was seriously injured in a car accident in Holland Landing on Sunday, is on the mend.

Airlifted to St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, the 19-year-old Whitchurch-Stouffville resident sustained multiple fractures to her back, internal injuries as well as a crushed aorta leading to her legs. She was in fair condition yesterday.

Ms Taws was in the back seat of a Plymouth Neon when it struck a Toyota on Holland Landing Road. The collision caused injuries to all five youths in the Neon, along with the 40-year-old driver of the Toyota. The 19-year-old Neon driver faces alcohol related charges.

Ms Taws tied for Rookie of the Year and finished fourth in the Canadian Formula Ford Championship at Mosport in 2002.

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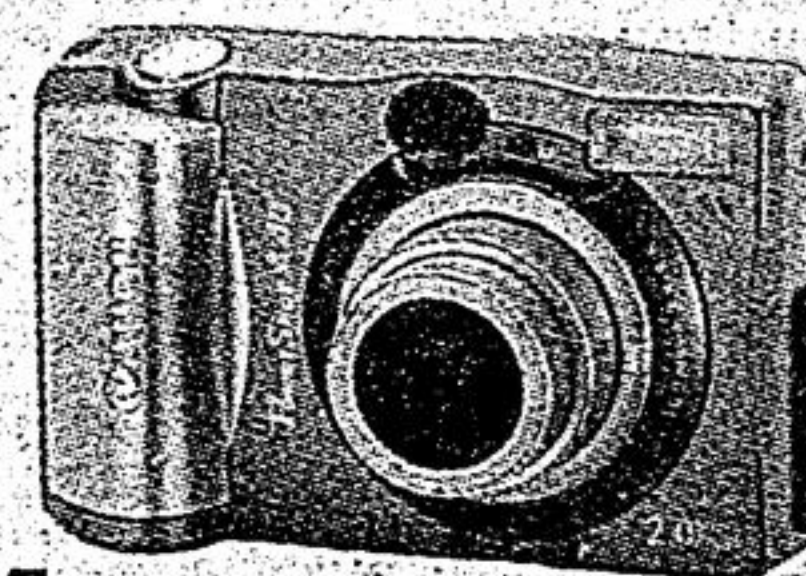
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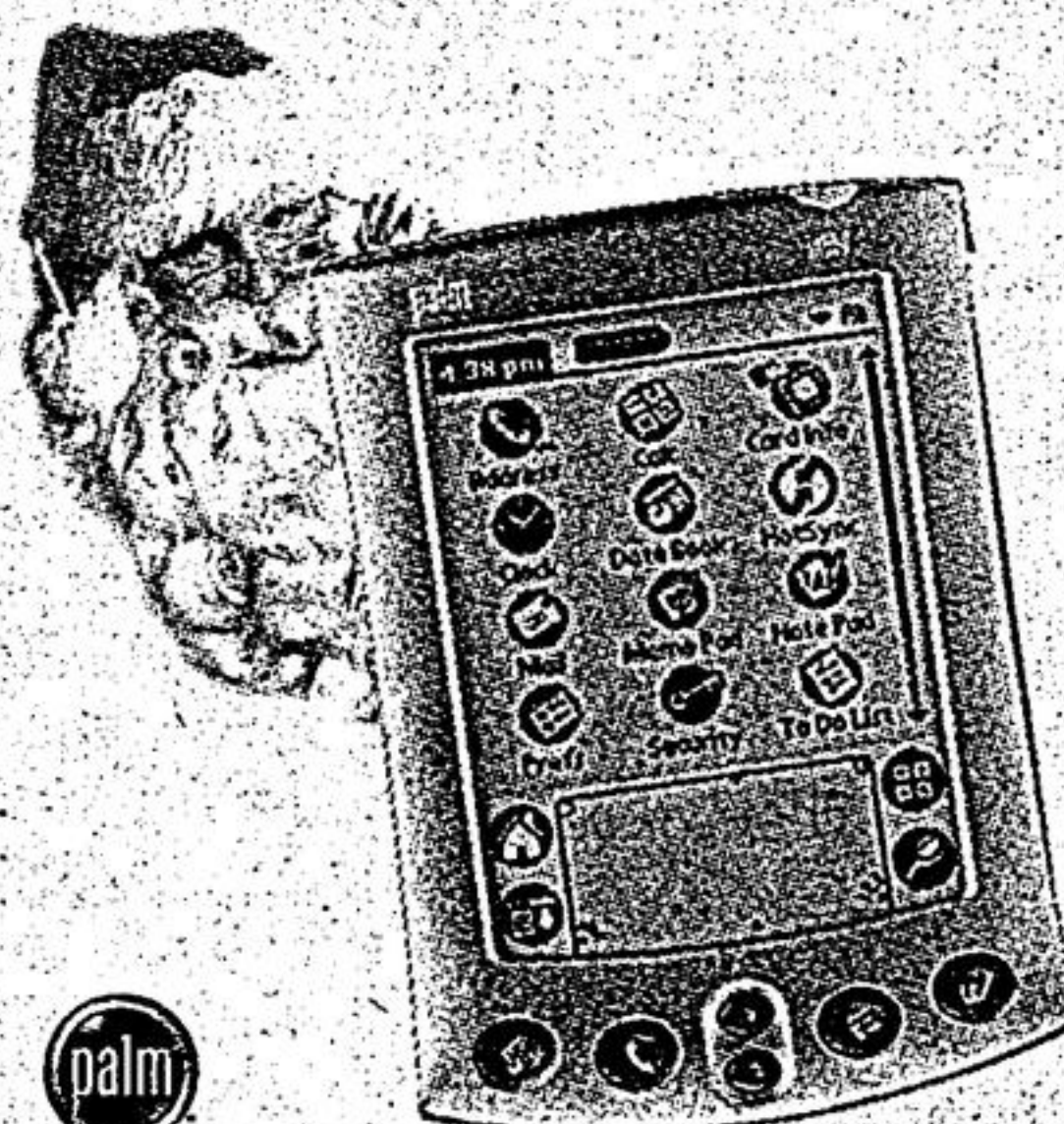
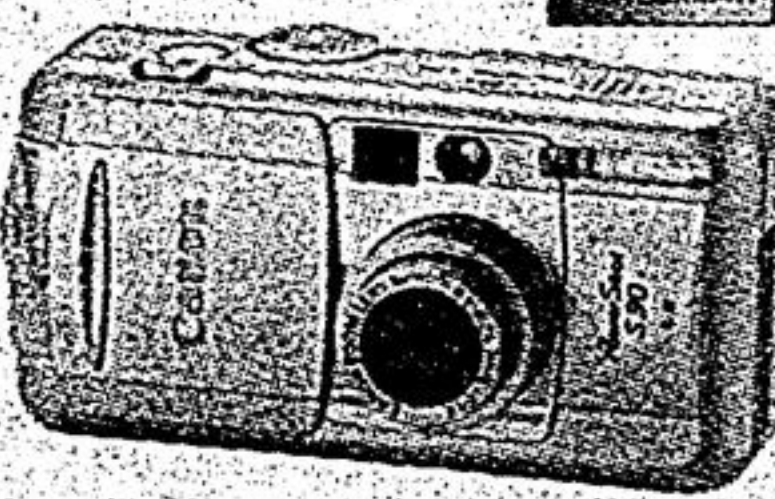
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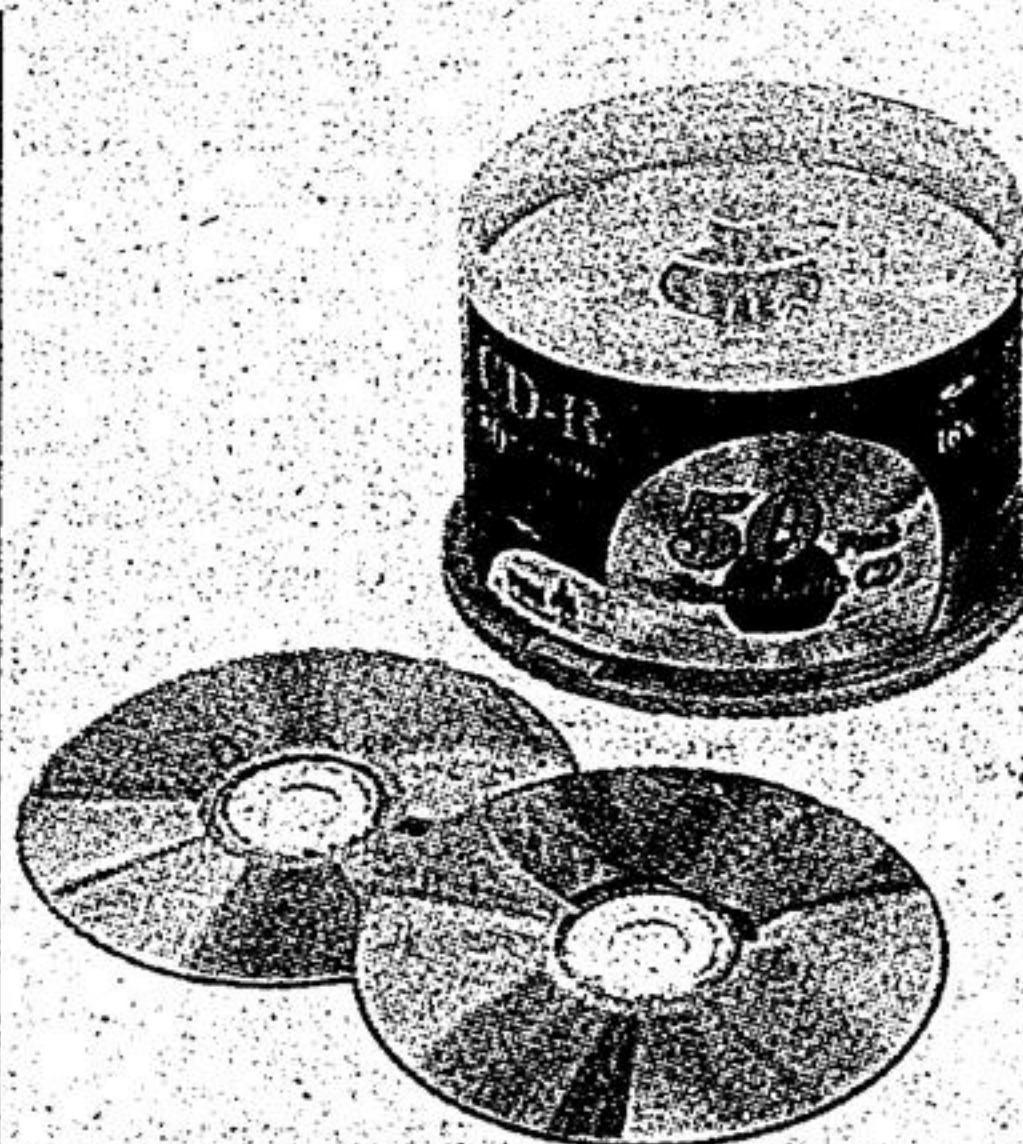


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