

# School board ahead of learning curve

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Staff Writer

York schools could be bursting at the seams, thanks to the region's booming population.

Unlike other boards that are experiencing a plateau or declining enrolment, York Region District School Board faces different challenges.

This includes implementing provincial initiatives such as the primary classroom cap and full-day kindergarten, land use planning board manager Jane Ross said.

"The implementation of the class cap went smoothly in some parts of the

region," she said, referring to the north end. "However, it was a little more challenging in the high-density areas."

The deadline set by Queen's Park to have no more than 20 pupils in a class for primary grades caused the board to do some quick-stepping this year, even though the deadline has been extended to 2008.

Since portables cut into the schoolyard play area, Mrs. Ross said additions were built such as the one added to Lester B. Pearson Public School in Aurora. Other rooms were repurposed.

"For example, some had to change a dedicated music room into a permanent classroom," she said.

But the board is ahead of the curve. Mrs. Ross said it builds "just in time schools", educational facilities built before the housing development.

"Some people think we are taking a risk because we have to guess at enrolment," she said. "But it is our job as planners to make assumptions."

Staying one step ahead is the name of the game when it comes to planning.

For example, extra rooms have been added to the additions in anticipation of full, five-days-a-week learning for kindergarten students.

Until the details of that initiative have been released, the rooms are open to daycare providers and others, she said.

One of the biggest issues is the lack of infrastructure to service new developments.

The plan for new housing or a school cannot be approved without the proper

## BY THE NUMBERS

▶ **210,900:** number of students from age 5 to 19 who will need school facilities in York Region as of 2011.

▶ **51:** Number of new schools built from 1999 to 2005, along with 27 additions.

▶ **7:** Number of new schools to open in 2008, including one secondary school and one elementary in Markham, one elementary school in Newmarket, one in Oak Ridges, two in Vaughan and one in Stouffville.

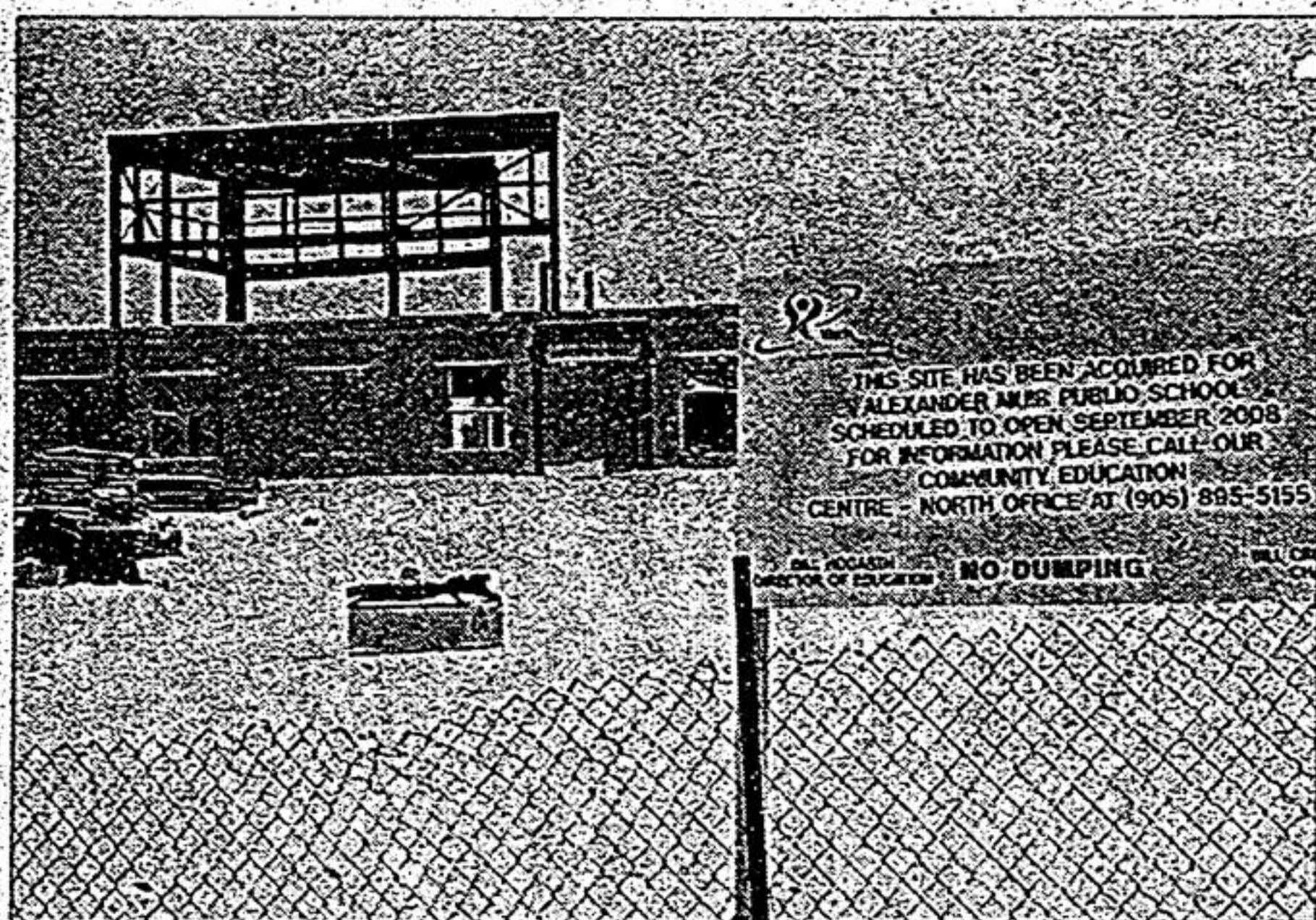
infrastructure, such as running water and sewer systems.

The board usually obtains land in a new subdivision by dealing with the town and the developer. However, with intensification of the Yonge Street corridor and other areas in the region, there isn't any land for a new school.

"We either take a portion of someone else's or be satisfied with what we currently have," said Mrs. Ross.

Other boards dealt with the predicament by putting schools on the ground level of large apartment buildings or skyscrapers. But Mrs. Ross doesn't see this happening here.

"This kind of situation allows us the opportunity to replenish the enrolment at older schools," she explained.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

The new Alexander Muir Public School during construction.

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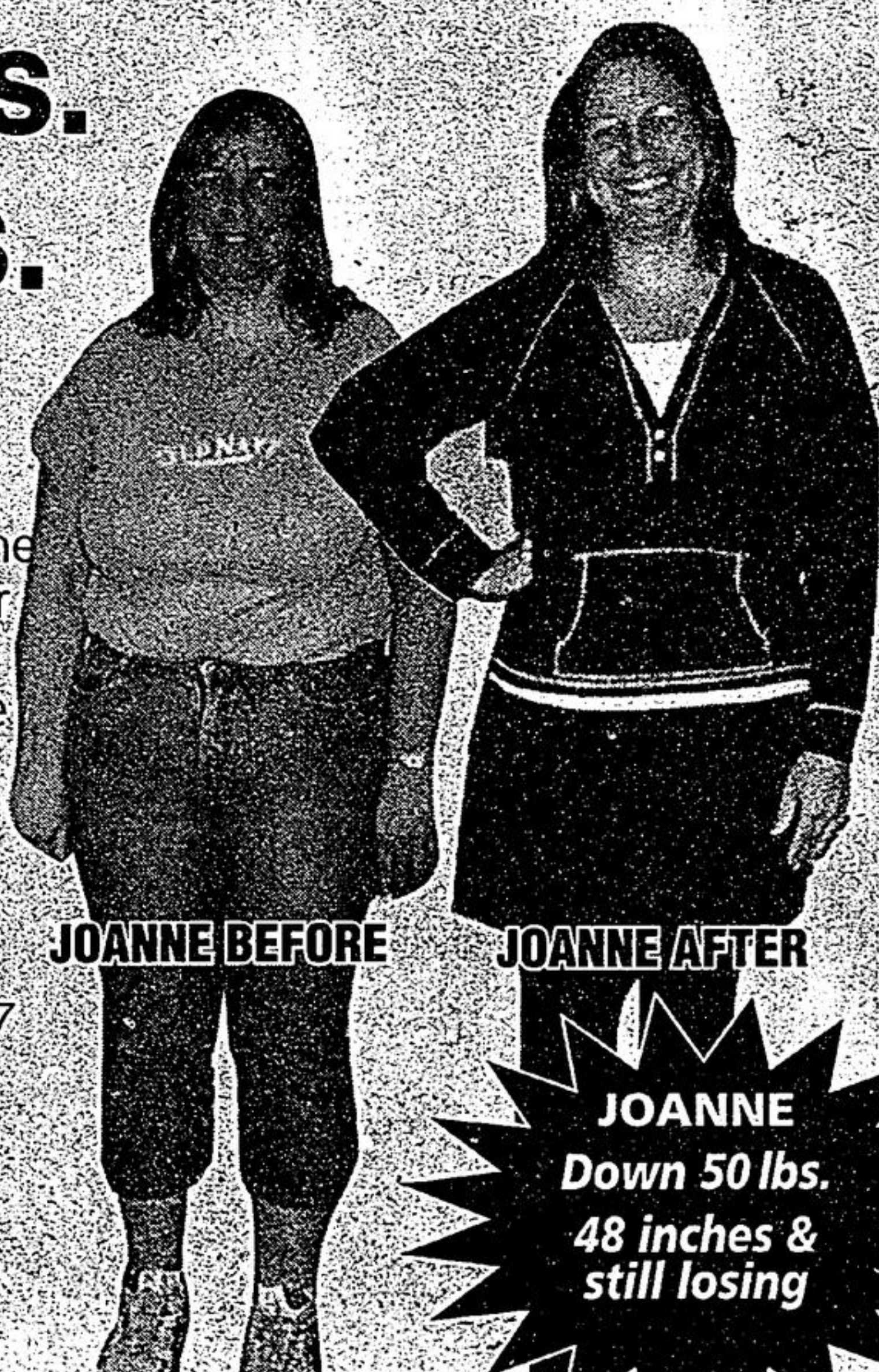
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