



While the province trumpets the fact that it has eliminated Grade 13, some think the unofficial Grade 14 should be scrapped as well.

Peter Marval

Some of the best years of people's lives are spent in high school. For most young people, it is a chance to make friends, get an education and discover themselves. But for some students, leaving the familiarity and the well-established routine of high school is harder than it is for others.

After graduating from high school with the requisite 30 credits, some Ontario students continue to come back. Some return to repeat courses in the hopes of getting better marks to improve their chances of getting into university; some return to play sports for one last chance at glory; and others return for lack of anything better to do.

Bill Brown, director of education at the Waterloo Region Roman Catholic separate school board, and Patti Haskell, director of education at the Waterloo County board of education, estimate it costs Waterloo Region \$2.8 million a year for students who take

extra credits in what has been dubbed "Grade 14."

Many school board officials, in an effort to curb spending, are asking if something should be done to limit the number of courses a student can take after they have graduated.

Ontario school boards are struggling with over \$400 million in funding cuts. The Waterloo County board, attempting to deal with \$6 million in proposed cuts, has already sacrificed junior kindergarten, while other programs wait on the endangered list.

"Kids in grade school are having programs cut back while we are paying to continue to provide education to people who have already graduated and we can't do anything about it," said Brown. "We have students in our system who have as many as 40 credits."

Currently, the existing law outlined in the Education Act, allows students to go to high

school for seven years or until the age of 21.

Brown calculated that it costs taxpayers \$800 a course for one student. "We took students who had over 33 credits, and figured that it cost the equivalent of 54 teachers' salaries in terms of the number of teachers that would be required to teach those additional courses."

Brown said money could be saved by amending the regulation so that students can acquire only three or four more credits after they have obtained the requisite 30 credits. They said students who wanted to take any courses after that would have to pay for it out of their own pockets, a fee of around \$600.

"It would mean the students would really have to dig in and work really hard the first time they took a course, as opposed to knowing they could take it a second or third time," said Haskell.

Dave Finlay, an Ontario Academic Credit

(OAC) student at Glenview Park secondary school in Cambridge, said he will have to come back to school for another year because he feels he won't be accepted into university for kinesiology. He needs an 84 per cent average, and while most of his marks are in the high eighties, he has a couple of low marks in subjects he found difficult.

Finlay said he doesn't think it costs the board as much money as they say it does. "I don't understand where these figures come from. If there are open spaces available in a class, it's not going to cost them extra to have one more student in their classroom. They're not having to open up any extra classes or bring in extra teachers," he said.

Although Finlay is returning, he will not repeat the same courses, but will take new ones. "A lot of students who repeat courses, don't often score a mark that much higher."

As far as sports is concerned, Finlay feels his involvement with sports does not hinder his studies. He said a couple of his friends have obtained scholarships from American universities while in their sixth year of high school.

"For a lot of students, sports is the only way to get an education," Finlay said. "Some wouldn't be getting an education right now if not for playing sports an extra year."

Roy Dahl, head of counselling at Bluevale collegiate institute in Waterloo, encourages students to come back, but he feels that if the law were amended, students would come in

with a different attitude.

"As counsellors, we're involved with trying to help students learn how to play the game. Under the existing rules we can take students back, and if the student needs a higher mark to get into university and appears to be sincere, I say come on back.

On the other hand, sometimes they are given so many chances it doesn't mean much anymore," said Dahl.

Overall, Dahl said he favors the change because he feels it is unfair to students trying to get into university who try hard the first time and achieve a good mark compared to those who take a course two or three times to get a good mark.

"Ultimately it is the students who lose out. If they had to come back to repeat a course to get a high mark, chances are they won't do so well in their first year of university where they only have one chance."

Though some students play sports in their sixth year, Dahl said he doesn't see too many come back just to play sports.

Earlier this year, in an effort to lower spending on education, the Tory government developed a plan to eliminate Grade 13. Grade 9 students enrolling in high school in 1997 will complete their OAC courses in Grade 12.

Courses that were available in grades 10 and 11, but were not necessary to graduate, will be reduced.

"There has been no concrete decision to

date," said Sid Hall, a general assistant in Education Minister John Snobelen's office.

Cam Conrad, principal of adult and continuing education for the Waterloo County board of education said, "Most students took advantage of courses of interest and variety that weren't really required to graduate. By compressing the curriculum, students will get their 30 credits by getting to the essential courses and having their OAC courses done in four years.

"And if they need to come back after Grade 12 to upgrade, they still can," he said.

Some time in the summer, the Ministry of Education will reveal the new secondary school course curriculum. It will outline how the ministry plans to address the issue of moving to four years from five years.

However, according to Haskell, the Ministry of Education has not addressed the limit of how many courses a student can take.

"Even though the ministry is compacting to four years, they have not put a limit on how many courses a student can take. There has been no discussion about limiting credits to this date," said Haskell.

Hall said the provincial government is researching all the different effects it could potentially have. "It's too soon for anything to be done for this year," said Hall. "We're trying to make sure we don't end up limiting access to education in an attempt to keep people from wasting taxpayers' dollars."

Brown and Haskell said they feel the regulation is a practical cost-saving device; however, they share the view that too much is being taken all at once through the current method of reducing grants to school boards.

"I think it's a myth when the government tells us the cuts are not going to affect the classroom.

"There's no way they can take that much money out of the system and not have it affect the classroom," said Brown.

Haskell agrees. "I know we need to make some cuts in education, just like everywhere else, but my biggest concern is we're making them too quickly and not allowing people to plan wisely or consult with others," she said.

"I'm afraid we might end up cutting the wrong types of programs, and in the long run, our students are the ones that suffer the most."

Whatever the future may be, it looks as if the face of education will undergo some drastic changes in the next few years.

Students will have to learn to adapt to a system which may not be so forgiving the first time around. ♦



Patti Haskell, director of education at the Waterloo County board of education, favors limiting the number of credits students can obtain after graduation.