

Drop-out rate low in Halton schools according to study

By KATHY YANCHUS

Special to The Independent/Free Press

If you're thinking of dropping out of high school, chances are you won't, at least not if you attend within the Halton Board of Education.

Results of a study conducted over the past five years which tracked the total number of Halton Grade 8 students through their high school years, showed that only 135 students or 4.71 per cent of the original 2,862 students, dropped out.

"We are encouraged by the results of the most recent retention study," said Joanne Zywine, superintendent of Instructional Services. "We have reduced the drop-out rate from just under 9 per cent (in 1988) to just below 5 per cent."

Duignan responds

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MPP Noel Duignan said that the federal government "walked on the razor's edge" and managed to carry out a very delicate balancing act between reducing the deficit and not raising taxes. He said it is a holding pattern, rather than denoting any major changes.

"One thing that surprised me is the hit on seniors. One in four seniors with an income of \$26,000 or more (will lose a tax deduction), and that's not a lot of money to live on. If that had been \$30,000 or \$35,000, then it would have been more acceptable," he said.

The provinces are taking a \$3 billion cut, which means municipalities, school boards and the health care system will all have cutbacks made later on, because the province isn't going to raise taxes, he said.

"They're tinkering around, not getting to the roots of the budget."

Never before has the board conducted such a meticulous study of this date, added Zywine. It was prompted by the frustration felt by educators about misinformation emanating from government statistics and circulated by the media, which pegged the national drop-out rate at 30 per cent.

That figure was arrived at, for one reason, because the method used to calculate it didn't involve "an accurate tracking system," said Zywine.

A drop-out in the Halton study is defined as someone who doesn't complete high school, either in Halton or elsewhere.

According to Zywine, previous studies included in their drop-out statistics, students who left school, moved and finished high school in another city.

Using Halton's definition, drop-out averages from previous studies would be considerably lower, but not necessarily as low as in Halton, said Zywine. She attributes this fact

to early intervention and quality programming.

These programs which vary from school to school, target at-risk students, kids who may not fit in socially, who aren't highly successful, who may not have a secure support structure at home or combinations of these elements, said Zywine.

Socio-economic factors influence school retention figures, concluded Zywine, but can have opposite effects. Sometimes when times are

tough and jobs aren't readily available, students are encouraged to stay in school. However, when families are struggling and students are "basically taking care of themselves," they don't have the finances to stay in school and they drop out, a factor she believes bumped up the drop-out average slightly last year.

The study, which has attracted the attention of other school boards, also showed that of the students who dropped out, 72.5 per cent found jobs.

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