



Some Grade 8 students in teacher Randy Potter's (pictured at left) mathematics class at Gardiner Public School in Georgetown had the opportunity to accelerate their studies by taking a Grade 9 math course this year. It's the second year in a row that gifted students at Gardiner have taken part in the accelerated math class. Also in the photo (from left) are students Bryn de Chastelain, Shama Pirbay and Riley Franolla.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

Successful pilot math program at GPS adds up to expansion

By **DOMINIK KUREK**

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Following a successful trial at Georgetown's Gardiner Public School, the Halton District School Board is expanding its Accelerated Math Pilot to schools across the region.

However, it will only be available to students in self-contained gifted classes, at least for the first year of the expansion.

The program allows students in Grade 8 to work beyond their grade level in mathematics. The pilot began at Gardiner last school year with four students participating in a self-contained gifted class. The students completed the Grade 8 math curriculum in semester one and then did a Grade 9 online course in semester two. This school year, those students entered a Grade 10 math class in semester one of their Grade 9 year. All were successful in completing the curriculum.

In a staff report to trustees, Associate Director Jeff Blackwell suggested to trustees that the expansion of the accelerated math pilot should remain in gifted classes.

He said this would allow the board to maintain its assessment strategies for determining the success of the program. Plus, there are several conditions for success to students in the gifted classes, such as teachers' readiness and ability to support the students to work in a compacted curriculum and a class setting that allows a teacher to pull several students out of the class so they can work on their accelerated math class.

Four more Gardiner students took the accelerated math course this year under teacher Randy Potter. During math lessons, the four would move next door to a computer lab to work on their assignments, with Potter and another teacher available to answer questions if needed.

"It worked really well because I was able to work at my own pace and maximize my ability to learn and at the same time it helped the other students in that they could work at their own pace," said Grade 8 student Bryn de Chastelain, who was in this year's accelerated math group and got a 90 per cent mark on his exam.

"Having the exam at the end of the year was a little overwhelming when you hadn't done one before, but it wasn't like I had to study for six (exams) at one time like I will in high school, so it was a great experience to prepare for that. I've also got an extra credit that I can put towards my high school."

Halton Hills Trustee Alice Strachan said she agrees with offering accelerated math to all students; however, she added there is not enough information in the small sample size of success in the current pilot. The current pilot was successful, but it only included four students and one teacher.

The board of trustees voted in favour of keeping the expanded pilot in self-contained classes. School board staff will also conduct a feasibility study at the end of the expanded pilot year to determine if accelerated math should be available to all students. The report will return to the board of trustees in June 2014.

In the meantime, the program will be available to Grade 8 students in self-contained gifted classes who are assessed by school and board staff with input from their parents as having the appropriate ability, interest, learning styles and learning skills for acceleration in math.

The online Grade 9 curriculum is offered through the Avon-Maitland Distance Education Centre, at a cost of \$720 per student, paid for by the Halton board.

With files from Eamonn Maher

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