

Most students suspended either in Grade 9 or 10

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about 100 per year since 1994-95.

Bryn Davies, now the supervising principal of the board's Adult Education Centre out of General Brock High School, was the principal at Brock last year when he levied 390 student suspensions to top the list.

Georgetown District (148), White Oaks/General Wolfe of Oakville (148), E. C. Drury and M. M. Robinson (126) were the next highest.

"Most of the suspended students were in Grade 9 or 10 when they are most impressionable and trying to impress their peers and adjust to high school," said Mr. Davies.

"I'm really proud of our kids because some come with lots of baggage and we expect them to misbehave. We know their history," he said.

In the elementary ranks, the 952 suspensions given to kindergarten-Grade 8 students in Halton's 66 schools is only eclipsed by the 994 dished out in '96-97. The total for the region was just 39 in '86-87. The numbers began to rise dramatically starting in '92-93.

Last year, 130 suspensions were handed out in Milton's eight public elementary schools.

So, what does this tell parents, educators and the general public? Are students less respectful of each other and their teachers now than in the past? Are today's teachers and principals less tolerant of perceived bad behaviour? Or is current board policy or the provincial education system less forgiving of malcontents?

The answer, as is often the case, seems to lie somewhere in between.

Mike Kasoian wasn't the principal at Brant Hills last year. But, as the current head of the Duncaster Drive K-8 school, he said there's a clear reason for the 110 suspensions last year — that number easily outdistanced the next highest total of 70 by Acton's MacKenzie-Smith Bennett. He has already handed out five suspensions this fall.

"All five suspensions since the start of the new school year have been from a class of eight students with identified behavioural problems. That's why they are in this (segregated) class," Mr. Kasoian noted.

"The identified class had eight students last year and accounted for the majority of the suspensions. This year there is a new teacher, with the usual instructional assistant and child/youth

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DUSTY PAPKE



counsellor and three different students" but the "challenges" remain, he said.

"Two kids have accounted for the five suspensions," Mr. Kasoian said, emphasizing he's not laying blame, just stating facts.

"There's only been one physical altercation between students so far; they (suspensions) are mostly for (ongoing) defiance or inappropriate language."

Of course, there is always two sides to any issue and it should be noted that 35 of the 66 elementary schools in Halton handed out fewer than 10 suspensions in '98-99.

Several Burlington schools imposed zero or one suspension all year long, including Fairfield, Champlain, Paul A. Fisher, W. E. Breckon, Clarksdale, Frontenac and Lakeshore. It should also be noted student populations and grade ranges vary from school to school.

Principals have the right under the Education Act to impose student suspensions of up to 20 days for skipping class, defying authority, destroying school property, swearing, or verbal or physical harassment.

When a student has been suspended, the principal must notify, in writing, the pupil, the pupil's parents and teachers, and school board. An appeal can be made by the student's parents with a suspension committee composed of at least three board members hearing the appeal.

When the region-wide statistics for 1998-99 were discussed at the school board meeting, education director Dusty Papke said sharp increases in suspensions might be for a variety of reasons.

"There is more latitude for school boards and zero-tolerance policies. We are also seeing more cases of severe discipline issues that come to schools (from the home)," he said.

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