

12th Chairman calls for policy review for grade promotion

By JULIE CASPERSEN
Staff Reporter

The "vast number" of students who did not complete Grade 9 last year attended three schools in Stouffville, Markham and Thornhill, notes public board chair Bill Crothers.

And Crothers wants to know if the policies of the principals at Markville Secondary, Thornhill Secondary and Stouffville District Secondary are different from the policies of other principals in the region.

"There is a common promotion policy, but there must be a variation at these three schools," Crothers said Tuesday during a committee meeting.

"How can you make a statement that there is a consistent policy when there is inconsistencies?"

Crothers raised his concern at during a discussion of Grade 9 destreaming which is now in its third year.

The levels of advanced, general and basic have been erased in Grade 9 and students are grouped together in the same way as in elementary school.

There are 161 students who are taking some Grade 9 instruction while in Grade 10, and 81 of these attend the above three schools.

Superintendent of Schools Frances McKenna, a member of the committee studying the impact of destreaming, said failing or passing students is up to the principals, and one of the factors could be a school's proximity to a summer school centre.

"It might appear there is a disproportionate number" of students repeating Grade 9 classes at particular schools, McKenna answered Crothers. But she added, the promotion policy is flexible.

Crothers also questioned data showing a substantial jump in the number of students earning all eight Grade 9 credits. Last year, 89 per cent of all Grade 9 students received eight credits compared to 80 per cent in 1993 and 74 per cent in 1991.

"The increase is very dramatic," Crothers said.

"Does it reflect higher achievement on the part of students or does it reflect lower expectations or standards?"

Committee member Robert Harper, an executive assistant in operational services, answered that the best gauge of student success in a Grade 9 destreamed model is to look at the number of credits earned at the end of Grade 10.

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Don't ignore educational aspect of home computer

There isn't a computer geek — either adult or child — sitting alone at the keyboard. Nor is there a sophisticated businessman tapping away.

Nope, the computer has become part of the family. Commercials shows parents sitting with their children as they discover and explore the computer and its programs together.

When you hear computers being described as "interactive," it is this type of interaction Dr. Ron Ragsdale likes to imagine.

A retired researcher for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Ragsdale likes to see parents sitting down with their children at the computer. That's because he is concerned too many parents feel they have fulfilled their computer obligations if they have bought a machine, some programs and games and made them available to their children.

If you do want to buy your child a computer, don't load it up with games and ignore the educational aspect, he said. Don't lead the child to the computer and leave them there alone. Parental involvement in all aspects of education is important, he said. That includes reading, writing and social skills.

It is important to have those kinds of activities, it doesn't have to be just in computer use. And if you think the computer is going to take away that responsibility that is a mistake. It can be a hazard if you buy it to take over your own responsibilities.

Parents have to be there to help their children learn, he believes. He also believes children should have a limit put on the time they spend in front of a computer. Parents don't allow their children to sit in front of the television all day, said Ragsdale, and they should not allow them to work at the computer for long periods of time.

There is a great deal to be said for experiencing the world first hand, not just through the screen on a television or a computer.

Ragsdale applies his beliefs to his seven-year-old grandson.

His grandson is not allowed to sit at his home comput-

er and play aimlessly. Ragsdale takes an active part in teaching the boy how to use the computer. This means the boy has to decide what he wants to do when he sits down in front of the computer.

"I give him freedom. He can do any of the things we have available but I want him to think it through. If he does games, and he does a lot of games, we talk about strategy. We talk about how to approach it and I emphasize that you think about it before you start doing it."

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