

Teachers having trouble coping with new curriculum

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

Less training and a shortage of resource materials will make it even harder for teachers to implement the tough new high school curriculum, the head of a local teachers union says.

Gerry Harrison, president of the York Region branch of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, said the province's requirement that teachers spend more time in class will lessen the time they can spend on professional development.

"If you are going to run a workshop from 4 to 7 p.m., it makes it difficult for teachers to get there," he said.

A cut in professional development from nine days a year to four makes it difficult to prepare for the new curriculum and teachers are scrambling to get the materials that help them deliver it, he added.

The comments came after public school board trustees approved a plan to help teachers deal with the new Grade 10 curriculum.

Teachers are implementing the second year of a four-year provincial program many observers fear will lead more students to fail courses or drop out of school.

Besides having to master more challenging concepts, students will need to know extra material this year.

Teachers say their workloads will increase as they grapple with the changes and the increase in class time.

But Barry McKillop, one of many board employees who worked on the plan, said teachers have been "absolutely consistent" in maintaining the same amount of development training as in previous years.

Superintendent of curriculum Sharon Craigen predicted students will learn more concepts earlier and achieve greater success because of the tough new standards.

"Everything that we do should result in an increased performance for students," she said.

"If we do our jobs well, our students will be learning more and different things at each grade level. And we intend to do our jobs well."

Aurora-King Trustee Susan Plamondon questioned whether students can deal as easily with the new curriculum as with subjects they took before it arrived.

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Craigen conceded the situation is creating anxiety but said there was "no significant difference" in failures among Grade 9 students before and after the new curriculum arrived.

"The facts weren't substantiating the perception," she said, noting many students predicted they would fail a new math program.

Craigen said teachers will provide students with extra help to ensure they meet the new standards. Parents could help out and a change in teaching strategies is an option for students experiencing trouble, she added.

Richmond Hill Trustee Denis Middleton wondered whether the board will have sufficient dollars and resource material to implement the curriculum.

The board has designed unit plans so teachers can deal with the increased workloads they expect the curriculum will generate, Craigen replied.

However, they will need to create their own lesson plans, she added.

"With the money that has been provided to us, we have structured a plan that has enabled us to give a high level of support to teachers," she said.

Training videos and seminars will help instructors deal with the greater demands.

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