

# SCHOOL'S IN FOR SUMMER

Students trying to get ahead keep classrooms busy

BY MITCHELL BROWN  
Staff Writer

The bell is ringing and it's time to head back to class.

At Unionville High School, students file out of the cafeteria and head up the stairwell in the main foyer, eager to get back to their textbooks for another afternoon.

The fact it's mid-July and 32 C outside doesn't mean the students are any less serious about studying.

"I like (summer courses) better, actually, because you don't forget the info you learned at the beginning of the course," said Meaghan Morris, a Richmond Hill student taking a four-week biology course at Unionville High this summer.

While most people think of summer school as a place where students who failed a course get a second chance, a significant number of York Region students are taking summer courses for fun and extra credits.

In the York public board, 3,853 students registered for what's called "acceleration" courses this summer, representing 47 per cent of all summer school registrants.

At Unionville, those students are the majority, with 723 students in the four-week acceleration program to about 120 students in either of the two-week reinforcement programs.

The students in the acceleration program are there because they're picking up an extra course before university or they want to spread their course load out over the year, George Voumvakis explained.

The Unionville summer school principal, whose winter gig is head of health and physical education at Westmount Collegiate in Thornhill, said the only difference is the condensed time frame.

"A day in summer school is like a week in regular school," he said.

And it's not just the high school students who are hitting the books.

At schools across York Region, students in primary and middle grades are attending literacy and numeracy camps, summer institutes, international language programs and "learning strategies" programs, in which students about to enter Grade 9 take high school courses and learn study tips to prepare for the transition to high school.

And that's not counting the thousands of students enrolled in private tutoring courses to keep sharp over the summer.

"It's important for kids to be afforded the opportunity to learn,



Moustafa Aslamzada (left), Peterchris Tsioros and Meaghan Morris are attending summer school at Unionville High School.

STAFF PHOTOS/JOERD WITTEVEEN

especially in special education," said Mike Dunsiger, a teacher at Thornhill's Ventura Park Public School, who is working with special needs and at-risk students.

"Not that they lose information, but you have to start over again in certain things, like working skills and how to cope. It's good for them to have a continuous program during the summer."

Having said that, he is not keen on the idea of altering the school calendar in a way that time off during the summer would be redistributed to shorter breaks throughout the year, stressing students should have a choice about attending summer courses.

The idea of year-round schooling is not a popular one at the

board level, either.

The last time the York public board brought it up for discussion was about 11 years ago and the idea was soundly voted down by parents and the community.

A spokesperson for the York Catholic District School Board made it clear her board has no intention of altering its school calendar, either.

"Most of our schools are not equipped with air conditioning, which would make for a very uncomfortable learning environment in the summer months, obviously," Joann MacDonald said.

"Also, we have transportation constraints in that we have to align our schedule with the public board, since we share transporta-

tion and that's been a great cost savings for us."

Even a straw poll of students taking summer courses does not suggest a lot of support for the idea.

"Personally, I'd rather have school during the wintertime," said Mustafa Aslamzada, whose alma mater, Markville Secondary School, is joining Keswick High School this year in opening a week earlier to give students a week off in November.

"Everyone wants to go out in the summer; no one really goes out in the winter."

His classmate, Peterchris Tsioros, agrees. "I forget everything when we have longer breaks during the school year," he said, adding "I like my summers."

## Liberals offer more cash for college students

BY MITCHELL BROWN  
Staff Writer

Changes to the way in which the province doles out student assistance will help more than 50,000 college and university students, Finance Minister Greg Sorbara said.

The Vaughan-King-Aurora MPP was referring to the province adding \$20.9 million to the Ontario Student Assistance Program, a move that would:

- reduce the required parental contribution amount;
- revise the definition of "independent student";
- introduce a debt-reduction repayment program;
- extend OSAP to accepted refugees; and
- waive the 12-month residency rule for immigrants.

Training, Colleges and Universities Minister Mary Anne Chambers announced the changes last week.

"The changes to OSAP will go a long way towards helping a large number of post-secondary students in our community and across Ontario access higher education, many of whom attend Seneca College and York University," Mr. Sorbara said.

Student reaction has generally been positive.

"Significant, positive changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program are long overdue," said Jon Olinski of the College Student Alliance, which represents 90,000 college students across Ontario.

"We look forward to more positive changes that will improve accessibility to post-secondary education in the future."

Jesse Greener, Ontario chairperson for the Canadian Federation of Students, was equally upbeat, but said more work was needed.

"Real improvements to accessibility will only come by reducing tuition fees and bringing (Ontario) post-secondary education funding up to the national average so that students can graduate without amassing student debt," he said.

"For many families, covering the rising costs of higher education simply isn't an option."

Most changes will be in place by Aug. 1, with the remainder in place by November.

For more information, visit [osap.gov.on.ca](http://osap.gov.on.ca)

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