

OCSTA Newswire, April 20, 2012

OCSTA NEWSWIRE

Bi-weekly news updates for OCSTA members and partners in Catholic Education



April 20, 2012

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Credit Cap re: Ontario's Four-Year High School Program

Among the initiatives announced as part of the government's 2012 Budget was the government's plan to put a cap on high school credits. Starting in 2013-14 full funding for high school credits will be capped at 34 credits. Credits beyond 34 will be funded at Adult Education grant rates which will reduce funding to boards for students going above the cap of 34 credits.

To help answer the many questions arising in the community around this decision, the Ministry of Education published a number of "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs) on the Ministry website. Those FAQs are listed below:

From the Ministry of Education website

at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/faqs.html>

Q: What is the new "34-credit cap"?

The ministry is putting in place a cap that would allow students to take up to 34 credits. Thirty credits are required to graduate, so this would allow for an additional four credits which is equivalent to a semester.

Over a decade ago, Ontario moved to four years of high school, but many students are still taking that additional fifth year.

Last year, there were almost 20,000 students in Ontario who returned for at least another semester despite having already graduated in four years – that's 13 per cent of last year's students.

That's why we need to shift the culture in our schools and encourage students to graduate on time.

The vast majority of students should be able to earn the 30 credits they need to graduate in four years.

Students who want to take more than 34 credits can do so, but the ministry would fund the school board at a reduced rate for those credits.

Q: Will I be charged a fee after my 34th credit? Will I be able to return to high school?

No, you will not have to pay for any additional credits.

Our intent is to encourage better planning of your educational pathway early on so that you can get all the credits you need in four years.

Yes, if needed, you can still take more than 34 credits.

Q. If I am currently in Grade 12 and plan to return next year, will this impact me?

No. You will not be impacted.

Q: When will this start?

The ministry will implement the cap and reduced funding for boards as of September 2013.

Q. If I fail a credit, does that count toward my 34 credits?

No. Only successful credits count toward your total.

Q: Can I take more than 34 credits? What if I want to upgrade my marks?

Yes, you can still take more than 34 credits. Yes, you can still upgrade your marks.

We will work with your school board and schools to support you in planning your educational pathway so that you can get all the credits you need in four years.

Each board will determine how this will be implemented for students taking their 35th credit and beyond. Options may include enrolling students in part-time studies, e-learning, night school or summer school.

Q: If I take the same course twice to upgrade my mark, does this count as one or two credits?

Both courses would count toward the 34-credit cap, but only one credit counts toward the 30 credits required for graduation.

Q: Are you doing anything to help boards work with their students?

The ministry is working on a document to help each student better plan their path through school and move forward to the next stage in their lives.

The first version will be available this fall, and it will focus on grades 11 and 12.

A second and more complete version will cover kindergarten to Grade 12. This should be available in the spring of 2013.

Q. If I have questions about specific course or program offerings, who can I talk to?

Please contact your local school board.

The Annual General Meeting & Conference is Next Week!

When: April 26-29, 2012
Where: Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, Kingston (285 King. St. E.)
Online Registration: click [here](#)

Program Highlights:

Rev. James T. Mulligan, Author - **"An Understanding: Catholic Education - Walking in the Light of Christ"**

Bishop Douglas Crosby, OMI, Diocese of Hamilton - **"Catholic Education: Past and Future"**

Module 5, Trustee Professional Development Program - **"Director of Education Performance Reviews and Board Self-Assessments"**

Module 12, Trustee Professional Development Program - **"Running Effective Meetings"**

"The Poverty Challenge: Addressing Local Poverty Issues Through Experiential Learning"

For more information contact Jane Ponte at (416) 932-9460, ext. 223.

Brant Haldimand Norfolk CDSB: Video



OCSTA has just published a new post to the Good News blog featuring a very special video from the Brant Haldimand Norfolk CDSB. To learn more click [here](#).

Student Trustees' Association Survey

On April 16, 2012, the Ontario Student Trustees' Association-l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO) released the 2012 Ontario Student, Parent, and Educator Survey at www.studentsurvey.ca.

The survey will run from April 16th to May 16th, in English and French and results will be published in the fall of 2012 along with a set of recommendations based on the response.

For further information, please contact Jenny Williams, OSTA-AECO President: (416) 550 1132, or through email at president@osta-aeco.org.

Website Updates: Labour, Videos

As part of our efforts to provide a website that offers timely news and resources to support the work of Catholic school trustees, we have added the following:

1. [Labour Relations Resource Page](#): this area of the website contains expert articles relevant to labour relations.
2. [Catholic Education in the Media - Video Clips](#): on this page are links to videos containing interviews or profiles in the media regarding Catholic education.

OCSTA in the News

The London Free Press

April 19, 2012

There's a line for religion in public arena

By BRIAN MACLEOD

As religious issues increasingly creep into the political realm, the temperature of the debate is rising.

Given the changing demographics of the Canadian population, new lines are being drawn on religious tolerance--or in some cases, intolerance--but with each line, comes a new controversy.

Christmas, in particular, finds some public officials twisting themselves into knots trying not to address the religious aspect of the season, often after some misguided soul renames the decorated Scotch pine a "holiday tree."

There is nothing wrong with displaying festive symbols signifying a certain religious group is celebrating a special occasion. Erecting a Christmas tree in city hall, setting up a menorah in the school cafeteria or placing a display of lanterns in a public building's foyer isn't spreading the word of a religious group, or subjecting others to their teachings. It's just drawing attention to the fact that it's an important time of year for a religious community.

But that's where the line should be drawn. Several public school boards have undergone

painful debates recently over whether to continue to allow the Gideons to distribute New Testaments in schools to Grade 5 students whose parents sign permission slips.

This is a 60-year tradition that should end. Schools shouldn't be used to hand out religious teachings. Bluewater District School Board trustees dealt with many nasty e-mails and phone calls before they voted to end the practice this week. It was just as bad in Waterloo in June when a resident asked to be able to hand out the Qur'an to students.

Waterloo Region District School Board chair Kathleen Woodcock said the reaction from the community to allowing non-Christian religious groups to distribute materials in schools was "disturbing."

Another line some religious organizations don't want to cross is the province's pending legislation that would force publicly funded school boards to allow students to set up gay after-school clubs. Since homosexuality is not accepted by Catholic teaching, some say this is forcing Catholics to act against their faith.

But the Catholic boards will have to live with it, and so will private religious schools that rent space in public schools.

The Dalton McGuinty government introduced the Accepting Schools Act after the suicide deaths of two gay teens highlighted the issue. Gays aren't the only ones bullied in schools, but a recent Statistics Canada report shows they are targeted by hate crimes more than any other group.

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association says gays should be respected, but Catholic teaching is that homosexuality is a sin. Since these school clubs don't have to be called gay-straight alliances, Catholic schools will call them Respecting Difference groups, in which gays or any others can join, but members should not be engaged in political activism.

Whether this clashes with the legislation, which says such groups should promote "awareness, understanding and respect for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities," remains to be seen.

The bill aims to "encourage a positive school climate and prevent inappropriate behaviour, including bullying, sexual assault, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia."

Some religious officials resent the emphasis on gender-based bullying or use of the term "homophobia." But pretending that gays aren't singled out is to defy reality. Ask the students.

The legislation doesn't target religious schools; it targets bullying, and stresses the reality of bullying against gays.

Once the bill is passed, it will be a reality religious schools must address.

The Catholic Register

April 4, 2012

Ontario trustees not pleased with provincial budget

By Evan Bourdreau

Cuts, freezes and protections for education introduced in the 2012 Ontario provincial budget are not sitting well with some of the province's partners in education.

While the province has chosen to protect small class sizes, full-day kindergarten and almost 20,000 teaching and support staff jobs in its austerity budget presented March 27, the government is also calling for the closure of under-utilized schools and potential board amalgamations to maximize resources.

Nancy Kirby, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association president, acknowledges the importance of early

childhood education, but said going “ahead with full-day kindergarten on the same timeline ... is an expensive decision.”

“It is good for kids, the parents are for it and we are too, but we are looking at the price tag,” said Kirby of the program that will add about \$1.5 billion annually to the education budget and was targetted by economist Don Drummond in his recommendation of cuts for the province.

Kirby suggested slowing the implementation process of full-day kindergarten to curb cuts in other sectors, specifically administration.

“Our big concerns are the cuts in the area of administration,” she said. “The province has put more reporting pressures onto boards but less administration to look after it.”

Kirby notes that when the Northeastern Catholic District School Board was formed in 1998, the region she represented grew from two townships to an entire county as 28 trustee positions were consolidated into seven. She said the process aimed at economic efficiency rarely yields the proposed savings.

“The last set of amalgamations actually cost the government over a billion dollars in transition funding,” she said.

Despite many boards seeing reduced enrolment, Kirby suggested a 0.5-per-cent increase in classroom size. She said this would reduce the number of teachers needed without significantly impacting the quality of education.

Kevin O’Dwyer, president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, disagreed with this notion and supports the government’s commitment to small class sizes.

“When you have a classroom of students in front of you, you are now dealing with a far more complex event. The day is gone when you go to the front of the blackboard, write some stuff on it and have all kids absorb the same way,” said O’Dwyer. “The class size needs to reflect that complexity.”

He also praised the budget for pledging to maintain full-day kindergarten, though he criticized the government for bringing components of the collective bargaining process into the public realm with the call for a wage freeze.

The Cornwall Standard-Freeholder

March 31, 2012

School board sees few surprises in provincial budget

By Tony Muma

CORNWALL -Upper Canada District School Board chair Greg Pietersma said the region's schools will be relatively insulated from the aftershocks of Tuesday's provincial budget announcement.

Unlike school boards in larger population centres that haven't addressed their size, Pietersma said the UCDSB bucked the trend years ago. Still, it wasn't all good news for the UCDSB.

"There are concerns about the 34 credit cap and how that impacts our ability to deliver programs especially in our smaller schools," Pietersma said, referring to "the victory lap" -students who return to high school for an extra year to pick up extra credits or improve on grades.

"Often students use their victory lap to pick up extra credits and gear up for post-secondary. They take French immersion or courses they couldn't get due to scheduling. It's a real problem for our smaller schools."

Other than that, the budget was much of what was expected in terms of what the Drummond Report provided as a general direction, according to Pietersma.

"We weren't blindsided," he said.

There could be trouble ahead for the school board with teacher's unions across the province set to see their collective bargaining agreements expire in time for the beginning of the next school year.

"The discussions with the collective bargaining process will continue to be an ongoing issue and we aren't getting any increases," he added.

"If the teachers do negotiate wage increases, we have no idea how we'll pay for them."

The UCDSB is only beginning to sort out what its funding will look like for the coming year, according to Pietersma, who added "we'll have a better idea where we stand in May."

Pietersma said the UCDSB is likely to avoid school closures and amalgamations.

"We already did a whole bunch, we closed 13 schools four years ago now," he said. "We were ahead of the curve on that. We did it not for financial reasons, it was the right thing to do for kids. Because we've already dealt with it, we'll be able to absorb funding changes much easier than a board who hasn't already dealt with it."

Pietersma said people will have enough trouble with all the changes going on at the provincial and federal levels - they'll have one less thing to worry about with the stability of the UCDSB.

"They won't have the grief to worry about any of our schools closing," he added. "It's good for our citizens and good for our kids."

Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association (OCSTA) president Nancy Kirby said this week's provincial budget was a mixed bag.

"We didn't expect too much money going in to health care and education," she admitted.

"We were surprised about school board amalgamations and consolidation of under-used schools."

With schools in some areas of the province suffering from declining enrollment numbers, Kirby said it was a foregone conclusion that school boards would need to react accordingly.

"Some boards will have to look at closing and amalgamating some schools," she said. "We've already spoken to the ministry and said we would like to be involved in any discussions along that avenue."

Kirby said the OCSTA was pleased to find out that there wouldn't be any kind of amalgamation of public and catholic school boards, but understood that changes are inevitable.

"We'd retain our constitutional rights in that respect," she said.

"Like most in Ontario, we understand the deficit is what it is and we all have to make our sacrifices. We have to work together."

Kirby said that while the OCSTA understands that savings must be made, some of the amounts the government talked about with respect to savings that might be found in administrative costs were questionable.

"We're not too sure what the government means by that but we'll know soon where the cuts will be and how it'll affect the province's catholic schools," she added.

Greg Pietersma, chair of the Upper Canada District School board, said the UCDSB is still assessing what the budget means for them.

" The details are really what's important and we're working through those to find out what this means."

Toronto Star

March 22, 2012

Concussion bill should go further, Catholic trustees say; Injured students should also be exempt from academics, they believe

By Kristin Rushowy

Ontario's Catholic trustees say the province's proposed concussion legislation needs to recognize that injured students may need to be removed from school while their brains heal.

Robert Murray of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association said Bill 39 refers to students being excused from athletics, but not academics.

"We feel the bill needs to go a bit further," said Murray, a former high school football coach, who otherwise lauded the province's move on the issue.

"The feeling here is that you don't just remove a student from the athletic playing field . . . A sustained major head injury goes well beyond phys ed departments and into the classroom."

Students need to rest their brains to avoid post-concussion syndrome or even another concussion, he said. "They should be excluded from the curriculum" until they are assessed as being healthy enough to return, he added.

The Ontario government introduced legislation earlier this month requiring school boards to develop policies and guidelines for students who suffer concussions, and to raise awareness among staff and parents.

Last November, the Toronto District School Board passed a motion to try to better assess and track concussions to help injured students.

The board is holding its first information session Thursday on how to prevent concussions, as well as the recovery process, with renowned neurosurgeon and ThinkFirst Canada founder Dr. Charles Tator. It runs from 5 to 7 p.m. at Northview Heights Secondary School in North York.

Trustee Howard Goodman, who has been behind the push for a concussion strategy in Toronto, doesn't think time away from school needs to be mandated.

"We have that power already," he said. "When a kid has mono, we are allowed to excuse them from class, and we give them appropriate work, a reduced amount of work - we make adjustments for them" and there's no reason schools couldn't do that for those who've suffered concussions.