

Loyalist College partners with NHHS on dual credit program

By Bill Kilpatrick

According to the Ministry of Education the dual credit program, that allows students to earn both a high school credit and a college credit simultaneously, began in 2005 as part of the student success strategy with the goal of giving students 'a head start on their post-secondary education and training.' The program is available to not only high school students in the Specialist High Skills Major program and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, but it also available to youth who 20 and under who are looking at completing their Ontario Secondary School Diploma and/or going to college. The Ministry of Education says that, 'Today, all school boards that have secondary schools and all Ontario colleges of applied arts and technology are involved in providing secondary school students with dual credit learning opportunities,' but until recently this was a program that was not available to the youth of North Hastings. 'Knowing that we have a need for the trades, and knowing that we want to see [further] engagement of students,' said Duane Wiltshire Principal of North Hastings High School, 'Matt Ronan,' the Pathways Coordinator at the Hastings Prince Edward District School Board, 'and I started talking about the idea [of a dual credit program] and we brought some other people in and it began to grow.' The course itself, explained Wiltshire, is called the 'trades sampler dual credit' course and is part of the Ministry of Education's 'School-College-Work' program. It will focus on carpentry techniques and will run Tuesdays from 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. for 14 weeks at the high school. There is no cost to enroll and transportation will be available upon request. The course requires a minimum of 15 students and can accommodate a maximum of 20. Ronan recognized the unique situation for many youth in North Hastings and he wanted them to know that the school board is trying to eliminate as many barriers to education as possible, 'For those students who require transportation to the course and home,' explained Ronan, 'we will make arrangements so they do not have to pay out of pocket.' Ronan further added that the entry age for the program was increased to 20 in the hopes of 'reengaging learners who have left school.' 'I'm just happy to finally see the program rolling out,' said Christine Yonemitsu, the Student Success Lead educator and recruiter for the dual credit program, 'we started talking about it last fall, so we've almost been a full year of figuring out what is going to work best for our students here in North Hastings.' Yonemitsu explained that this is the first pilot project that has been run in North Hastings, but as Wiltshire added, it's not the first time that a dual credit program for North Hastings has been contemplated. 'It was something that I really wanted to bring to North Hastings,' explained Wiltshire, 'but I was trying to figure out how.' Wiltshire, who was previously an administrator at Madoc High School, explained how the dual credit program worked there, and how students would take a bus to Loyalist College during the day to complete the course work, but, said Wiltshire, 'Here, it's just not doable.' Ronan added that after touring the Loyalist campus and toying with the idea of busing the students to Belleville it was decided that an after-school model was best suited to the students in the area, but they still lacked an instructor. 'The other challenge,' explained Ronan, 'is trying to find either qualified staff at the college or in the community who can do this.' But in this case, says Ronan, 'the stars all aligned.' Enter, or rather, re-enter Terry Weinert, retired secondary school educator who taught construction technology and trades at North Hastings High School for that last number of years and just retired in 2023. Despite having moved to Pembroke, Weinert decided to accept the position and is now coming back as an employee of Loyalist College. Weinert's background is mainly in manufacturing, pneumatics and hydraulics, but he also has his construction qualifications and has been teaching and doing carpentry for over 16 years. Weinert said that the students will be building a structure of some kind, but the exact structure has not been finalized as of yet, 'I think that is where we are going to get biggest buy-in,' said Weinert, 'knowing that we are not going to just be sitting in classroom doing theory. We are actually going to be building some stuff.' Weinert said that Ronan contacted him last year while he was still teaching and asked if he would teach the course, but as was mentioned above, the initial plan for busing students to Belleville was not deemed feasible, but Weinert views this plan as offering a bigger chance of success and wanted to be part of it. According to information provided by Yonemitsu the course is described as, 'A hands-on course that covers the common types of wood, wood structures, wood joints, and hardware used in typical construction practices.' The students will also be trained to use hand tools, portable power tools, and stationary power tools. Students must be between 16-20 years of age and commit to attending all classes. Ronan said that this year alone some 440 Hastings and Prince Edward District School board students are enrolled at both Loyalist College while attending secondary school. Ronan wants those who may be thinking of signing up to remember that the teacher will be on-site and is there to help students succeed and overcome challenges, which is why these courses have a 90 per cent success rate. 'That's the goal,' says Ronan, 'to provide these opportunities early on, to show students what's available and to begin that transition [to post-secondary education] ahead of time. So that, potentially, if they end up going to college they can start with having already earned one credit.' Ronan also pointed out that

students can take up to four dual credits that could potentially reduce their first-year course load at college, but if not they will have earned some valuable skills that are directly transferable in the work force. The hope is that this pilot project will be a success as there are already plans under way to potentially offer another course next year. The program is open for enrollment until the end of February. Anyone who is interested in enrolling in the dual credit program can visit the guidance office at North Hastings High School at 14 Monck Street or email Christine Yonemitsu at cyonemitsu@apps.hpedsb.on.ca.