

Mary Ward students take charge of time

JENNY YUEN
Toronto Sun

Learning and responsibility are classmates at Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School.

Students learn at their own pace at the Toronto Catholic board school with a self-directed program, which allows them to manage their own time to finish their eight-course workload.

"Our students are setting their own schedules to a point in consultation with their teachers and teaching assistants," vice-principal Derek Chen said. "The workload is even more stringent because they have these 17 units they need to complete during the year."

Located near Finch Ave. and Kennedy Rd., Mary Ward is one of six self-directed learning facilities in Canada. It's a part of the Canadian Coalition of Self-Directed Learning of which Mary Ward was a founding member.

It's a whole new learning

model from what students experienced in elementary school.

"We have less bells ringing here than other schools because students can spend more time on say, a math unit. They don't have to hear the bell and then stop," principal Patricia Coburn said.

With 1,175 students, it's also one of the top high schools in this year's Fraser Institute report with a score of 8.4 out of 10.

And while there is ample opportunity for kids to procrastinate or slack off, guidance counsellor Paul Cerre said kids actually work harder in self-directed learning.

Learning tool

"They realize that there's a black hole here somewhere," he said. "You slack off and then all of a sudden you're not getting your credits. They're all involved in planning and parents are involved."

Another learning tool called "questing" allows students



PATRICIA COBURN
Principal

creative freedom to integrate assignments, but spread them out to different subjects. For instance, a science project where you make a manual for something could also be counted towards an English assignment.

"They're large rooms with-out walls, so students can take a seat and begin working," Chen said.

But it's not just about wanting to achieve high marks and do well on the standardized tests — even though their Grade 9s scored 91% in academic math in last year and the Grade 10s scored high 90s in their literacy tests — the students learn about leadership, too.

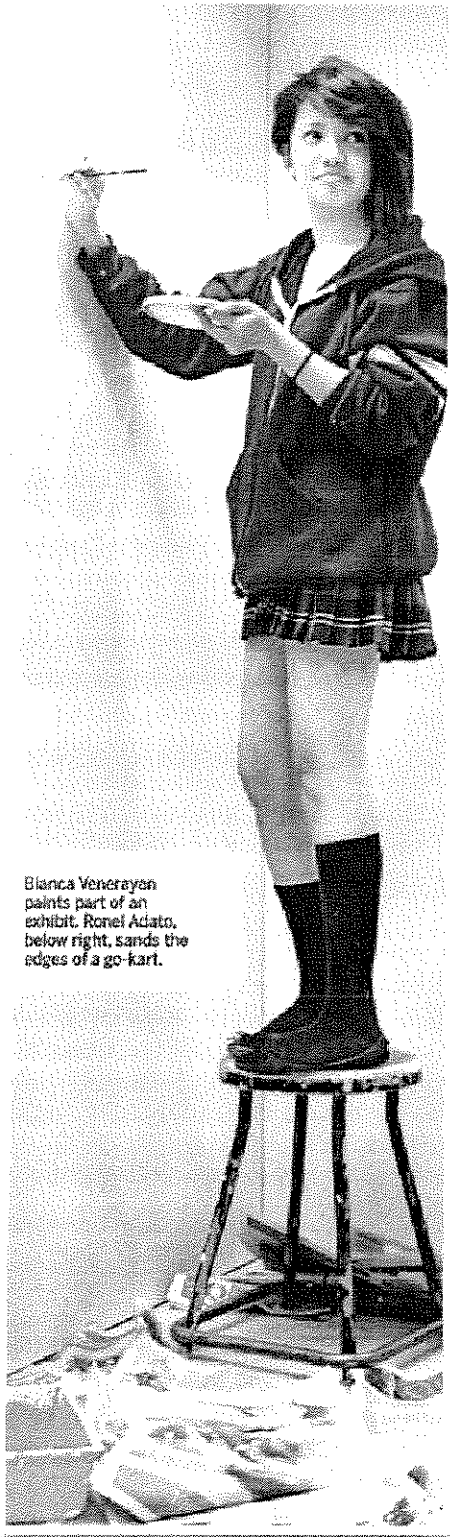
The day the Sun dropped by for a visit over 30 students from Grade 11 and 12 were preparing to leave for a youth leadership weekend retreat up in Huntsville, where they would lead other schools in leadership activities.

And for those who need extra help — it's available.

"Our teachers are not only subject teachers, but also teacher advisers that have 18 students in their group that they work with throughout their high school career," Coburn said.

"It allows you to have that close, caring adult relationship with students."

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Bianca Venerayan paints part of an exhibit. Ronel Acato, below right, sands the edges of a go-kart.

VERONICA NEMRA/TORONTO SUN PHOTOS



Alyanna Alzata with her art work.

Below, left to right, Michael Bryce, Nathan Sequeira, and Kimberley Villaluz paint a target for an art show.



TORONTO AREA HIGH SCHOOLS

Toronto's top/bottom of '08/'09 & the improving/declining schools over most recent five years with fastest changing school listed first:

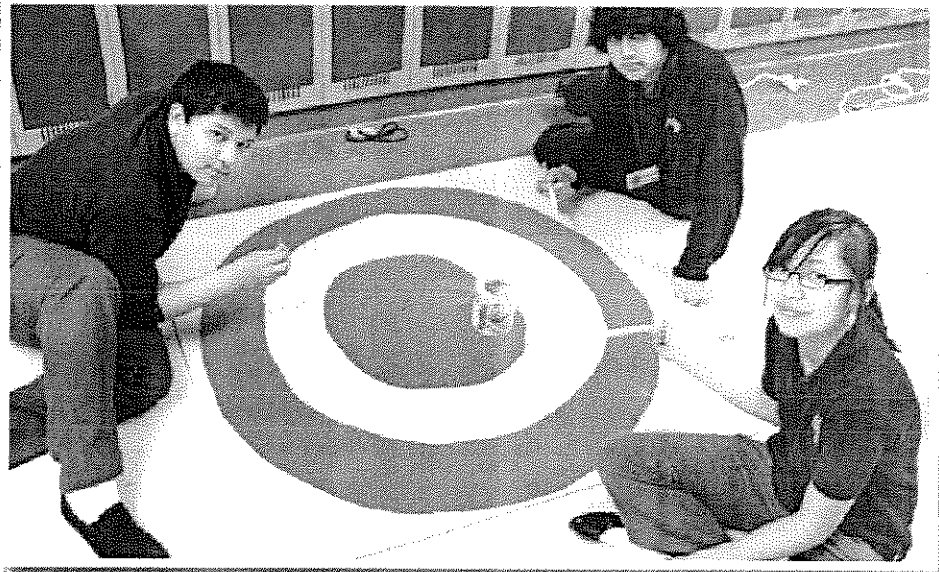
TOP SCHOOLS	AFFILIATION	CITY	OVERALL
Etobicoke School/Arts	Public	Toronto	8.8
Cardinal Carter Academy/Arts	Catholic	Toronto	8.7
North Toronto	Public	Toronto	8.7
Leaside	Public	Toronto	8.6
Earl Haig	Public	Toronto	8.4
Mary Ward	Catholic	Toronto	8.4
Ursula Franklin	Public	Toronto	8.2
Humberstone	Public	Toronto	8.2
Neil McNeil	Catholic	Toronto	8.2
Malvern	Public	Toronto	8.2

IMPROVING SCHOOLS	AFFILIATION	CITY	CHANGE*
Monarch Park	Public	Toronto	0.79
James Cardinal McGuigan	Catholic	Toronto	0.55
Jean Vanier	Catholic	Toronto	0.42
Malvern	Public	Toronto	0.35
Riverdale	Public	Toronto	0.29
Madonna	Catholic	Toronto	0.28
Thistletown	Public	Toronto	0.25
Mary Ward	Catholic	Toronto	0.25
Parkdale	Public	Toronto	0.24
Danforth	Public	Toronto	0.24

BOTTOM SCHOOLS	AFFILIATION	CITY	OVERALL
Bendale	Public	Toronto	0.0
Nelson A Boylen	Public	Toronto	0.0
Sir Robert L Borden	Public	Toronto	0.0
Timothy Eaton	Public	Toronto	0.0
Eastern Commerce	Public	Toronto	0.6
C W Jefferys	Public	Toronto	1.6
Downsview	Public	Toronto	1.7
West Toronto	Public	Toronto	1.8
Kipling	Public	Toronto	1.8
George Harvey	Public	Toronto	2.0

DECLINING SCHOOLS	AFFILIATION	CITY	CHANGE*
Kipling	Public	Toronto	-0.38
West Toronto	Public	Toronto	-0.25
St Mary's	Catholic	Toronto	-0.25
Sir John A Macdonald	Public	Toronto	-0.13

* The Rate of Change measures the schools improvement or decline over the most recent 5 years.



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