

# A Silver Lining

*A serendipitous result of the education crisis has been the emergence of student self-reliance.*

**By Cameron Fleming**

Last week, Jim Wooley of the Waterloo County Secondary School Athletic Association told *The Record* that local high schools are running at “85 to 90 per cent” of where they would normally be in terms of extra-curricular activities.

This reinforces what interested parties in the education system already know: the crisis of extracurricular activities that caused such a panic in the fall is fizzling out.

Teams and clubs are returning to the halls of the region’s schools and, while some unrest still exists in other boards, the Waterloo Region District School Board seems to have returned to normal.

At the very least, co-curricular activities are once again running in something approaching their former glory.

But this is not to say that all is as it was. After all, a little bit of labour unrest builds character. While extra-curricular activities have returned, they have also changed.

Teachers have learned to run activities more efficiently. More importantly, however, students have learned how to run activities on their own.

If there is any silver lining to the rapidly-fading ‘crisis’ in education, it is this renewed sense of self-sufficiency.

Two weeks ago, Kitchener Collegiate Institute hosted the Sears Drama Festival. Nine schools participated and, all together, they mounted 12 productions.

Every year, some of these productions are actually written and directed by students. This year, however, the number was staggering.

Out of 12 plays, eight were directed by students, compared to the more usual number of one or two. In the absence of teacher support, students decided the Sears Festival was worth their energy and pursued it whole-heartedly.

In this case, the lessened presence of staff this year has proved to be a major opportunity for student directors to develop their own talents.

This is a story that has been repeated at all the secondary schools of the region. While teachers and the Ontario government fought over who was the true guardian of the interests of students, the students themselves decided it was time to apply their own initiative and energies to extracurricular activities.

Rather than allowing themselves to become political pawns, students in many cases took responsibility for their own education outside of class.

To a certain extent, students asserted their independence, and teachers and government should welcome the change this brings. To function within a leaner, more efficient education system, students will have to play an integral role in organizing activities by students for students.

Students will never be able to divest themselves completely of the need for staff supervision, nor should they try to do so.

Yet the widely-feared education crisis of earlier this school year may well have the effect of causing students to be more confident in their ability to take leadership positions within their schools.

In the final analysis, we may find that the uncertainty that dogged schools earlier this year will have been almost worthwhile.

So, while the fighting between teachers and the government was the sort of interruption public education desperately does not need, the squabbling has inspired students to direct plays, organize events, and take charge of their own education and their own future.

And even for something as terrible as a ‘crisis in education,’ a challenge that drives students to accomplish these feats can’t be all bad!

*(Mr. Fleming is an 18-year-old student who is a member of the Community Editorial Board of the Kitchener Waterloo Record. Reprinted with permission from the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, April 9, 2001)*