It's grad year

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What are students thinking as they head into the final year of high school

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Whether the experience is good or bad, high school plays a major role in the lives of most teens. From tough term papers to football games and questionable cafeteria food, kids gather memories, both positive and negative, during their four-year terms.

But regardless of the experience to date, all must undergo a common reflection by the time Grade 12 rolls around: The end is nigh, and soon they'll each be kicked out into the "real world." Many are oblivious as to what awaits them, but gnawing fear is also laced with anticipation.

For students entering their final year in high school, it's a big step and one that must be taken carefully. Kids are encouraged to have fun during their "grad year," but there are also a great many concerns that mustn't be pushed under the rug.

For starters, the first semester of Grade 12 is a hot-spot for post-secondary qualifications. Universities and colleges are on the look-out for top marks, high attendance, and extracurricular involvement. Along with this added stress, students have to think about prom, graduation, and end-of-year awards ceremonies.

To top it all off, they need to consider the prospect of applying for scholarships and making enough money if they plan to pursue further education. With all this new information to be concerned about, some teens may crack under the pressure.

Gina Geddes, a prospective grad of Harrison Trimble High School, has her own opinion on the mysteries of her Grade 12 year. "We're the oldest in the school now, and you never know what to expect no matter what grade you're in," she says. "Grades have always been the main point in every school year (but) university is just around the corner and, as terrifying as that sounds, I've got to save up some money and finally do it.

"As for prom and graduation? Well, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it." When it comes to grad-year festivities, Gina is adamant in her opinion: "I will most definitely be participating! Hopefully I'll be helping with them and organizing them too!"

Laura-Gail Thompson is a Moncton High student heading into her grad year. "What makes this year so different from the rest is the knowledge that this is the last year with all the people I grew up with," she says.

Despite any grief Laura may feel at this prospect, she's determined to make her year the best ever. "I will be going to however=many events I can get to," she says. "I don't want to miss anything that I might regret later in life. As for the prom, my dragon boat team is taking care of my prom dress, which kind of worries me a bit."

Like Laura, Kyle Benner is another 2011 Moncton High grad who knows exactly what he wants. "I'll be going to all the grad events and I'll be going to nationals for wrestling, too," he says. "I might even go to a few dances, since I've only been to two of them since Grade 9, and one of them wasn't even at my school!"

Kyle considers the grad events important because, "I want to get more social and have fun all throughout the year, which will make it go by faster." Despite his fun-filled intentions, Kyle also acknowledges the seriousness of his final year. "Grades and scholarships are going to be important this year so that I don't have to pay so much for college," he says. "I don't want to have a ton of student loans."

Nathan Rinzler of Bernice MacNaughton High School is also entering his Grade 12 year. "I'll be striving to achieve the highest marks in school so that I am able to obtain as many scholarships as possible," he says. "I'm constantly checking for scholarships I qualify for that will help me offset the cost of my education so I can start on the right foot when I enter the business world."

While Nathan expresses a distaste for prom, he is eager to take part in other grad year festivities."I am very interested in being part of the 2011 Dragon Boat squad," he says. "I would also like to have a position on BMHS Grad Council so that I have an opportunity to help my fellow grads and become more involved in extracurricular aspects of the school."

Hannah Allen is a Moncton High graduate of 2007. She has gone through the high-school process and has a few words of advice for students entering their Grade 12 year. "My advice would be to learn how to really balance your time properly," she says. "It's bad to stress out too much. You have to concentrate on your work but you also need to find time for your friends."

Hannah also stresses that you need to, "stay focused on where you want to be in a year." When it comes to university and scholarship applications, Hannah has been through it, too. "I personally didn't apply to a bunch of universities. I just chose a few that I was really interested in, since it costs money to apply."

As for scholarships, "You win some, you lose some," Hannah says. "The important part is to try because otherwise you're definitely not going to get anything. Some scholarships take tons of time to fill out, but you should do them anyway." Hannah is currently in her fourth year at Mount Allison University studying English and German literature.

All-in-all, it can't be denied that grad year is a time for both study and celebration. Students have almost completed their high school careers and are just about ready to step out into the real world, but must also maintain a good grade-point average as well as a positive attitude throughout the year.