Teachers of year 10 classes across the state face a conundrum at this time of year: while there is almost a month left before the Christmas break, most have exhausted the curriculum.

As of last year, students no longer sit the statewide School Certificate exams. Instead, teachers submit grades for a replacement credential, which are due this week.

With the year 10 course wrapped up, schools are left to fill the days with programs and activities not on the curriculum but nonetheless engaging and hopefully useful.

But they are up against students hungry for holidays and waning attention spans.

At Merrylands High School, students are learning study skills for next year, getting career advice, obtaining first aid and lifesaving skills and doing work experience.

"The last two to three weeks you can be quite flexible, creative and purposeful in what you do," principal Lila Mularczyk said.

As an incentive, she holds school reports until the end of the final day of term, assuming parents will be eager to get them.

"I'm sure parents want to have the reports and not wait six more weeks," 15-year-old Nadia Berjou said. "So everyone has to come.

If parents are told classes are simply watching movies, it is probably the work of their crafty teenagers.

"Please never underestimate the creativity and resourcefulness of a teenager," Ms Mularczyk said.

The principal at LaSalle Catholic College, Bankstown, Michael Egan, said the school tries to avoid reminding students the year is ending.

"As soon as you start finishing, for some that's the signal that nothing matters any more," he said. "If you do any event that tells kids we're finished, if you have a dance for example, it's all about hairdos and suits and partners and not a lot about school.

He said keeping the students engaged is not nearly as difficult as it was a few years ago when year 10 students had finished their exams.

He said there was still a small spike in absenteeism that was "not restricted to year 10", which he thought could be in part due to some private schools finishing earlier.

"Parents see a larger number of young people around and there's a false sense that it's OK to take their child out of school," he said.

His school runs drug and alcohol sessions and has had visits from head injury associations, wheelchair basketballers and car crash rescuers.

The Department of Education issued a memo to principals this month, stating: "All students in kindergarten to year 11 will be required to attend school up until the last day of teaching...Prior to this date, students in all year groups should be engaged in meaningful work based on the curriculum and syllabus requirements."

Rachael Bowden, of the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, agrees it can be tough convincing students of the value of those final days.

But she said it was an important time for young people to learn personal development skills that might not be covered by the curriculum.

"Often that supposed dead zone is actually very well filled by skills that offer that social support at that point," she said.

And if there is any doubt about how their time is being used, she said, just call the school and ask.