

POSITION PAPER ON THE 'COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PROGRAM'

Presented to the

REGINA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

and the

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

by the

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS OF THE

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WORKING COMMITTEE

Consisting of:

Regina Native Community Awareness Society

North Central Community Society

Regina Native Women's Association

Connaught Parents' Group

Regina Native Race Relations Association

Cathedral Community Association

Regina Native Concerns Committee

Kitchener Curriculum Committee

Introduction

We are a number of community associations and organizations who have been involved for the past several months as part of the Community Schools Program Working Committee. We include community and parents' associations, Native organizations, and others who are concerned about and involved in the education area.

We have spent many, many hours reviewing and discussing the Community Schools Program. Our major concern has been the lack of consultation in the initial stages of developing the program. We feel that with our initial involvement, many of the concerns we raise in this paper could have been dealt with at that time. However, it is obvious the Program will be implemented and we decided it was important that we participate and work together in the Program.

We have a number of concerns about the proposed Agreement that is to be formalized between the Department of Education and the Regina Public School Board. We will outline these in detail in this paper.

We also feel it is important for us to collectively state that we feel it is the Board of Education's responsibility to listen to and act upon the concerns we will outline. We feel we are representative of the community and some of us have been directly involved in the education area and in the schools where the Program is to be implemented.

We see our participation and support of the Program as a vital and necessary part of the Program. We feel this participation and support can and will benefit the Program.

In order for one to understand the changes we have proposed, it is necessary to refer to the Agreement which is the third draft recently distributed. Rather than include the text of this Agreement, we have outlined the areas and sections that we would like to see

changed or amended.

Agreement - Page One - Goals and Objectives

to encourage 'lift'.

In Number 1, sections (i) and (j), we feel the wording of these clauses should be "to actively involve" not simply "to encourage". We feel that this wording places more emphasis on the intention to actually involve the community.

Agreement - Page Two - Goals and Objectives

In Number 1, section (k), we wanted this added to the Agreement because we feel it is essential that Native people be involved in the Community Schools Program. We feel that without the involvement and participation of Native people, the Program will not succeed. We feel that this clause does not separate Native people, but simply reaffirms their participation. In the two schools within the public school system designated as Community Schools, Native students make up a large part of the school enrollment. In Kitchener, it is about 50% and in Connaught, it is 25%.

We feel that without this clearly stated in the agreement, there could be a danger of the Community Schools Program only having non-Native involvement. With this clause added, this puts the onus on everyone to ensure Native people are involved and are equal participants in the Program.

We are in support of increased opportunities for Native people in education, employment and other areas. We feel that Native people's participation and involvement in the very programs that most affect them is essential if the situation facing Native people is to change.

Agreement - Page Two - Staffing

In number 2, section (b), the original Agreement stated the community residents would be involved and consulted about the staffing procedures. This was then changed to simply state that the community would be provided the opportunity to make recommendations to the Board of Education about staffing.

We would like to see this changed again to the following:

"that the residents of the community be actively involved in the staffing procedures of the Board."

We feel that we should be involved in the staffing for a number of reasons. One is that we are aware of and involved in the community and we know it best. We feel it is essential that the staff chosen for the Community Schools Program have a good understanding of and familiarity with the neighbourhood and its residents.

If the staff chosen for the Program do not have this understanding and cannot relate to the people of the area, the Program will not succeed. If the staff cannot even get in to the homes to meet the parents and residents, there is little they can do to actively involve the community in the school.

Agreement - Page Two - Agreement with Councils

At the last meeting prior to the third draft of the Agreement, the Working Committee had agreed to include a clause drafted by the community organizations to include as Number 2, section (c) of the Agreement. However, when the Agreement was re-drafted to include this and other amendments, the exact wording was not used. The present clause is a misrepresentation of what had been agreed upon and should be deleted and replaced with the following clause:

"to enter into a written agreement with each Community school Council which will guarantee consultation with the Council on matters pertaining to the implementation, development, amendments to, or termination of the Program."

We do not feel this takes away or diminishes any powers the Board may have. It simply ensures community participation and involvement. If the Program is to be a community program, the community must be involved.

As community organizations we do not want to control the Community Schools Councils. We want to work with them and support them in their efforts. At present, no Councils are established to ensure this participation and

e feel it is our responsibility to see that the community interests are brought to the attention of the Board.

We feel that this clause is so important and essential, and that without it, the concept of 'community' schools would be lost before the program even starts. In other words, a community school must have the participation, involvement and support of the community. Without this, the program will do nothing but provide lunches.

Agreement - Page Two - Termination

In number 4, section (b), we feel that the clause in the original agreement should remain and that the present section (b) be changed to (c).

This would then read:

"(b) either party, for failure of the other party to uphold the terms and conditions herein,

(c) ~~that~~ either party, sixty days after a formal statement of intent has been submitted to the other party."

Agreement - Page Two - Policies & Regulations

We feel that this clause should be deleted since the Community Schools Program is not one covered in the existing policies and regulations of the Board. The Program is a totally new concept and may well establish new programs and policies not covered in the existing regulations.

Schedule - Page One - Definitions

In number 1, section (g), there was no previous definition of 'community' and we feel it is important that this be defined. We ask that the following be added:

"'community' means all residents within the attendance area of the community school and/or the parents or guardians of students who attend the community school."

We feel that the community as a whole could and would add to the

Program. There are many people who can and will benefit from the program who may not have a child at the designated community school. These people may also want to participate in the programming and will have valuable contributions to make. These people should be eligible to be represented and involved in the Community School Councils.

One of the declared intentions of the Community Schools Program was to involve residents of the community in activities at the school. Therefore, it would seem logical to have some representation of such people of the Community School Councils.

Schedule - Page Two - Personnel Selection

In number 4, we feel that since this is a relatively short-term program, there is no time for someone new and totally unfamiliar and ill-equipped in terms of relating to area residents to gain the required rapport and understanding necessary to make the Program work.

Although academic qualifications are important to some extent, we feel the emphasis should be on the human qualities of the staff. (The Program seemed to imply from the beginning that Native people would be given preference in staffing in the whole Program.)

In other words, we would like to see staff who have an understanding and knowledge of the residents and their backgrounds. Without this, few people will be able to relate to the staff.

We would also like to see the last clause of number 4 to read:

"and without restricting the generality of the foregoing, the board, wherever possible, shall attempt to recruit candidates who have resided in or are familiar with inner-city, cross-cultural neighbourhoods."

Again, we must emphasize our point about the understanding and familiarity that is necessary on the part of the staff of the Program.

The staff must have the ability to relate to and communicate with the residents of the Community Schools areas. We are assuming that the Board of Education will not place academic qualifications before the ability to effectively communicate with children, parents and teachers.

Conclusion

We have outlined and presented these changes with the best of intentions. We have no ulterior motives in our involvement in the Community Schools Program. We are involved because we care about the education system and how it affects our children and our communities.

We recognize that the agreement is to be signed by the Department of Education and the Regina Public School Board and we are in no way assuming that community associations and organizations have any power of veto over the ultimate agreement to be signed.

However, we are requesting these changes because we want the Community Schools Program to be representative of the community. We are acting in good faith out of our sincere concern to have true and meaningful community involvement.

We have sometimes felt that the Board of Trustees has felt threatened by our involvement as community associations and organizations rather than appreciating this obvious evidence of community concern and support. We have put much time and effort into the program in the past several months because we have a strong commitment to our communities.

We support the Community Schools Concept as outlined by the Minister of Education. We would like to add that the Regina Public School Board is the only board in the province to have such involvement and participation in the Community Schools Program at this stage. We feel this is an advantage to the Board, the Department of Education and to the communities involved.