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## Community schools plan delayed again

By Matt Bellan  
of The Leader-Post

Disagreements over wording have delayed implementation of the Regina education board's community schools program again.

The board decided at its weekly meeting Tuesday to send the draft of the program agreement back to a working committee of community agencies, board and education department representatives for further discussion.

The decision came after some trustees said they couldn't accept certain changes requested by the community groups, including demands teachers for the program be hired locally, whenever possible.

They also disagreed about how much say community groups should have in the detailed running of the program.

### Negotiating agreements

The department has been negotiating separate community school agreements with school boards in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert for schools with large numbers of native students.

To be paid for totally by the department, it involves hiring native teaching associates to help regular teachers in classrooms. It also includes hiring a community schools co-ordinator — a professional similar to a social worker working with parents and teachers — and other features to get the community more involved in schools.

The original agreement was drafted by the provincial government and the wording changed slightly by the board early last month.

The working committee then responded to the board's changes and came up with yet a new draft of the agreement.

Among other things, it put back a clause trustees earlier deleted — that wherever possible, the board try to recruit candidates "who have resided in or are familiar with the neighborhood comprising its school division."

Mary Hicks, board chairman, told Tuesday's meeting she was against putting the clause back. "It appears to me a double standard. Surely native community residents are the same as any other residents. I get the feeling we're making a distinction here."

Trustee Eric Crosbie said the clause probably wasn't intended to prevent the board from hiring the best possible teacher. "But if all other factors are equal, the person living in the neighborhood would best have an understanding of parents and students."

Trustee Dr. John Beke said: "The problem with clauses like this is that it becomes the priority in hiring, rather than the best interests of the child."

Trustees said they also wanted to discuss with the working committee a clause guaranteeing the board will consult with community school councils on all matters relating to the community schools program. The councils are to be made up of parents and other interested residents.

Beke and Hicks said they were concerned about that leading to small community groups controlling the program.

Gaye Beechy, chairman of Connaught Parents' Group, representing parents at one of the public schools chosen for the community schools program, said in an interview the board is going to have to decide whether it wants "board schools" or "community schools" in the program.

"The way things stand, they appear to want a board school," she said, referring to trustees' apparent reluctance to yield power over programming to community groups.

Beechy said the board doesn't understand the details of the program. "They haven't been to any of the working committees. I'm appalled about how ignorant they are about the program."

She said the Regina public board is the only one so far that hasn't yet reached an agreement with the department on the program, including the separate board here and boards in Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

"But I want something that's good in the end — if it takes two years, whatever."

Hicks said in an interview she had hoped the agreement would be signed by September, but "the best-laid plans of mice and men . . ."

The department may have reached agreements with other boards, but they aren't identical, she added. "Maybe they didn't have the same number of people giving input as we did. It's unfortunate, but you can't rush into it."