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Program proposals

A committee representing parents of French immersion students attending Regina public schools has drawn up a list of suggested improvements for the program.

The suggestions, presented to the board at a public meeting at Campbell Collegiate Wednesday night, include among other things:

- Improving access to French immersion for parents throughout the city by increasing the number of schools offering the program and providing "proper transportation" to those schools.

- A thorough, extensive and objective evaluation of parents and teachers in the program.

- In-service training, including an upgrading program for teachers.

- The department of education providing more curriculum materials.

- More hiring of teachers in Quebec and Ontario, where French immersion teachers are available.

- Providing French immersion programs suited to children with special needs, including those needing enrichment or having learning difficulties.

- Hiring a bilingual consultant for the program with time to spend on the task and closely involved with the board in planning.

- Improved communication between the board and parents of French immersion students.

French immersion program supported by parents, board

By Matt Bellan
of The Leader-Post

Parents and the Regina board of education have expressed confidence in the board's French immersion program.

The show of support came during a sometimes stormy meeting at Campbell Collegiate Wednesday night that included attacks on the board, the media and critics of the program.

About 130 people, including parents of French immersion students, the staff of Massey School, the board and others attended.

A committee representing parents of immersion students at Massey, Connaught and Sherwood Schools, the three public schools offering French immersion, organized the meeting.

Harvey Linnen, chairman of the committee, said it decided to hold the meeting partly to outline to trustees major areas where improvements can be made in French immersion.

But the main reason for holding it was to let the board know the majority of parents of French immersion students support the program, he said. This follows alleged recent attacks on it by a smaller group of parents.

The board held a series of closed meetings with critics of the program during October and November, Linnen said. Those attending included, among others, a former teacher in the program with personal concerns "involving criticism of the teaching staff at Massey."

"We're concerned you're hearing too narrow a view. You listen to criticism, not to support."

Linnen criticized the board for holding closed meetings, saying they lead to suspicion and distrust by those excluded.

He also criticized a Leader-Post story last week reporting mistakes by French immersion teachers on worksheets they handed out to students.

The story gave several examples of the mistakes and offered correct versions. But Linnen said in several cases the corrections themselves were wrong.

"If all our work was judged every day, you would find mistakes in our work...The old argument that if you can find some errors in a teacher's worksheet you can prove the program inadequate is false and slanderous."

The school conducts annual standardized tests showing students in the French immersion program perform average or above average, he added. Teachers hired for the Regina public program also have above average qualifications.

Regina board of education chairman Mary Hicks denied Linnen's charge that the board invited parents critical of the program to a closed meeting, saying Ron Hikel, one of the parents involved, asked for the meeting in a letter to the board.

"As far as the articles that appeared in the press, why, we were as shocked as everybody, but you can't control the press."

There were repeated interruptions as Hicks continued speaking. One member of the audience demanded Hicks be replaced by a more neutral chairman.

Trustee Les Hammond pleaded for calm. "We can't do business if you keep standing up and yelling at us. I don't want to stay if you can't keep order."

Calm returned. At an audience member's suggestion, the board and members of the audience held a vote of confidence in the French immersion pro-

gram and nearly everyone in the room raised their hands in support.

Trustee Dr. John Beke defended the board's holding closed meetings with parents critical of the program because the discussions sometimes involved personal matters.

"There are occasions like suspensions when you have to hold in-camera meetings."

Massey School principal Hugh Reoch said French immersion students there are happy with the program and doing well in it. "Some kids want to go to school at 7:30 a.m."

French immersion teachers there welcome the board's recently announced plans to evaluate the program, feeling such an evaluation is due because the program is several years old, he added.

Lack of tests for French proficiency is a problem, though. Students wrote a test in April, 1979 drawn up by a university graduate.

Median scores were 71 per cent in Grade 1, 85 per cent in Grade 2 and 61 per cent in Grade 3.

Asked in an interview why the scores dropped in Grade 3, Reoch said he didn't know but the results weren't cause for concern.

"It was a one-shot test. I don't see that you have to hang everything on a one-shot test."

Phony milk

READING, England (CP) — Residents here awoke recently to find that their empty milk bottles left out overnight had been painted white by a practical joker. A spokesman for the dairy said, "It was nothing to do with us."

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