

Community schools program likely to be maintained says minister

By Marlon Marshall
of The Leader-Post

The Department of Education's community schools program will probably be maintained and perhaps expanded, Education Minister Gordon Currie said Thursday.

The pilot project, which involves 16 schools in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert, is currently in the last year of a three-year trial.

The report of a review committee, headed by Dr. Carl Bognar of the Educational Research Institute of British Columbia, is expected to be ready this summer.

Currie is confident the report will recommend retention of the program.

"I fully expect it will come back as a glowing report," he said after a speech at an Indian/native studies conference in Regina.

"It has been an outstanding success."

The community schools program provides additional resources to selected schools, many of which have high Indian and native enrolments.

Launched in the 1980-81 school year, the program is designed to provide addi-

tional educational opportunities for students, increase communication between home and school and build a closer relationship between the school and the surrounding community.

Currie said experience gained through the community schools project could help develop other programs for students with special needs.

"I see the possibility of us building from this kind of model to expand many initiatives, to do more than we've done in the past to accommodate Indian and native students who need special programs for a period of time," he said.

Currie also had good news for the Northern Lights School Division, which this spring narrowly averted forced closure of its 30 schools.

Currie guaranteed schools operated by the division will be in operation next September, but he's not saying who's going to foot the bill for treaty Indians attending off-reserve classes.

"Those schools will re-open in the fall," he said in an interview.

"I hesitate to say more because I don't want to prejudice our negotiating

position (with the federal government.)"

A federal government decision to cut off tuition payments for treaty Indians attending off-reserve schools forced the division to the brink of financial ruin early this spring, board spokesmen said.

The province stepped in to ensure the schools would stay open to the end of June, but didn't promise to provide long-term financing.

Currie still says the federal government should pay the bills for the off-reserve students.

"We insist the federal government must continue to assume its responsibility for the education of treaty Indians, whether on or off the reserve," he said in his speech to conference delegates.

But he later conceded there might be room for some compromise.

"Whenever there are negotiations, I suppose there is a little give and take, or else you'd never get an agreement," he told reporters.

"We can't let this situation go on and on."