

Native education changes proposed

By Matt Bellan
Of The Leader-Post

Regina separate school board consultants have proposed a native education program for the separate school system which would cost about \$800,000 if approved.

The program, outlined in an interim report tabled at a board meeting this week, calls for a major improvement in educational services for natives over the next three years.

The report says the measures are needed to combat a high dropout rate and other problems facing natives.

Among its major proposals:

- Lowering pupil-teacher ratios in schools with high concentrations of native students to 20 to 1 at a cost of \$156,000 in 1981.
- Giving principals time off from regular duties to monitor and co-ordinate new native education programs.
- Increasing the number of counselors for native students.
- Hiring teacher aides for classrooms and community aides to improve relations between home and school.

- Hiring teachers specially qualified to teach native children.

- Setting up pre-school programs for native children.

The report recommends the program start this spring with spending of \$294,000 recommended in 1980-81 and about \$500,000 in 1981-82.

Education director Wendelin Herle said in an interview Tuesday trustees voted Monday to refer the report to board administrators for further study.

He said administrators are awaiting the education department's own proposals on native education, to be tabled in the legislature shortly.

"We're awaiting a specific program from the minister of education relating to native education. We have to see how that dovetails with the particular recommendations in the report."

Herle said the board is waiting to see how much money the education department will provide in its upcoming budget before deciding how much it will spend on the proposed program.

It is also awaiting a provincial government survey, expected to be released in the next few weeks, showing the number

of native students in both school systems.

Sister McGuigan and Miller High Schools and Holy Rosary, Sacred Heart and St. Michael's elementary schools have the highest concentrations of native students in the separate system, he said.

Herle also disputed a reporter's claim in a Leader-Post story Tuesday copies of the report were unavailable to the media at the board meeting Monday.

"There were four copies on the press table," he said.

The report says the majority of native students are underachieving and dropping out of school, quoting a recent Saskatchewan study showing 90 per cent of registered Indian children in the province fail to graduate from high school.

It says only 47 per cent of native students are at the appropriate grade level for their age and 50 per cent are behind one grade or more.

The report says native students move frequently. With an increasing shift from rural to urban centres, many face serious problems as they attempt to fit into an urban school system.

"Socially they must meet new students and teachers. Psychologically, they may feel lonely, fearful, confused and alienated . . .

"Academically, they must adapt to different programs, routines, teaching styles and methods of evaluation."

The report also says native high school students may not see the relevance and possibilities of education, finding the school structure too rigid.

One of its main recommendations involves hiring teachers with "special characteristics" to teach native or disadvantaged students.

Herle said the board has in mind teachers with empathy, warm personalities, an ability to "associate" easily with natives and special training.

"At present there are few qualified natives to work in schools. We're bending over backwards to find them."

The board has already offered teachers in-services on native education this year and money will probably be available for further native education training for interested teachers this summer.

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