

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
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Tabled by Mr. Kalsch
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COMMENTS ON SURVEY OF EDUCATION, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, 1972
by Ft. Smith Educational Advisory Board
January 16, 1973

The Ft. Smith Educational Advisory Board, elected by the parents and interested citizens of Ft. Smith, submit the following opinions and comments on the Survey of Education, Northwest Territories, 1972.

In general, the recommendations of the survey strive toward ideals and goals which are worthwhile and good, although in some cases they are and will remain impractical for some time to come. However, there are a few recommendations which we strongly disagree with, a few which need to be further clarified, and a few which need to be added.

Section 2: Purpose, Objectives and Goals of the Territorial Education Programme
Page 14: Moral and Spiritual Needs

A. We recommend that religious instruction be considered an integral part of school curricula and that it be no longer segregated into "Roman Catholic" and "Protestant" but that a non-denominational course be prepared in conjunction with religious leaders in the communities, and given by trained teachers, clergy, or other acceptable instructors.

Page 14-15: Moral and Spiritual Needs, Physical and Mental Health

B. We feel that the curriculum should include units of study on alcohol, tobacco, and narcotics ("drugs") so that students can be fully informed before they make decisions as to whether and how to use these increasingly available commodities.

Page 22-23: Aesthetic Experience and Appreciation

C. The word music is not mentioned anywhere in this report as far as we can determine. It can perhaps be inferred from the expression "fine arts," but the report omits any specific reference to a medium of instruction which can cut across all cultural lines just as surely as "art" and "artistic expression" which are clearly discussed. Music is very important not only in "Education for Leisure" (page 21), but also in developing an awareness and appreciation as well as skills in singing, playing musical instruments, rhythm, self-expression, and enjoyment. We feel that more emphasis should be placed on music as a medium of instruction by all the elementary classroom teachers as well as by specialists in larger schools.

Another medium which is not mentioned by name is drama. In both music and drama instruction, continuity of program in these fields is very important, and every effort should be made to provide a continuing program in these subjects so students may carry on from year to year in band, orchestra, chorus, or dramatics rather than having merely one semester or one year and no further opportunity in the same line. Continuity of staff is vital.

Sections 4 and 5: Elementary Education and Secondary Education
 Page 28 #12 "That where practical elementary schools be open for the entire year, and that schools offer twelve monthly instructional periods from which children and parents would ordinarily select learning sessions equal to at least eight instructional periods each year."
 Page 35 #39 "Junior and Senior High School programmes should be offered on a year round basis. Students should be allowed to enter programmes at any time subject only to the availability of space."

D. These revolutionary new concepts would lead to complete chaos if introduced suddenly into any one community. Decisions as to the dates

of the school year should be decided by an entire community, rather than on a family basis. Summer schools would be a great asset in opening the schools for the entire year to those who choose to "catch up" or take additional subjects, on both elementary and secondary levels, but would not require a full teaching staff on a year round basis. How could a teacher plan any continuity in his curriculum if his students come and go any time it is convenient for them? How could a reasonable teacher-student ratio be maintained?

Page 28 #13 "The 25 to 1 ratio be used as a guide to the total number of teachers only."

E. For effective teaching and learning, it is imperative that this ratio NOT include specialist teachers such as art, music, craft, physical education, and remedial reading teachers; counselors; or administrators such as vice-principals or principals.

Section 6: Continuing and Special Education

Page 45 #65 "That the school guidance and counseling service be expanded so that such assistance is available in elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, to provide assistance and support for both children and parents."

F. We heartily approve this recommendation and all others throughout the report which emphasize the need for adequate counseling service. We wish to state, however, that in Ft. Smith where the need for counseling at all levels is very great the two full-time counselors we did have have been reduced to classroom teachers, thereby having little or no time to counsel individual students or their families. We need our counselors, and we request that this situation be remedied immediately.

Page 49 #74 Higher Education

G. We strongly approve the recommendation for development of a community college service, using the Ft Smith Adult Vocational Training Center as the nucleus of an expanded program as proposed in the survey.

Page 57 #83, #84

H. Psychologists, educational social workers, and such additional guidance personnel are badly needed during this transition time and should be instituted as soon as possible.

Section 7: Curriculum Development

Page 61 #95 "The school ordinances be amended to remove compulsory attendance regulations."

I. We strongly disagree. If compulsory attendance is not required, much social pressure will be removed from students and parents, thereby causing even more dropouts than we have at present and increasing the welfare rolls and juvenile delinquency problems. It is regrettable, but not all parents are aware of the value and importance of education, and children are certainly not qualified to make such important decisions which may handicap them for life. However, we feel that a compulsory attendance regulation should be enforced in a practical manner, such as suspension of family allowance checks or welfare assistance where children are not sent to school. Elimination of attendance laws would lead to even more haphazard attendance than we have at present, with some students attending three or four days a month perhaps, thus disrupting the classroom and courses of study even more than at present. If the Department of Education says that education is not important, which is what they would be saying in effect by

having no attendance laws, many parents and students will adopt this attitude also, thereby defeating the entire purpose of establishing a northern curriculum.

We feel that kindergarten should be included in the compulsory years of schooling, being a vital key to later success in school.

Page 63 #98(c) Quarter system and semester system

J. We have seen the introduction of the semester system in Ft. Smith result in absolute confusion, with two changes of schedules occurring in the high school in the first two months of school, September and October 1972. A study should be made to determine what number of pupils and courses need to be available in a high school to make the semester system (and also the proposed quarter system) feasible. If all courses can be offered both semesters or every period in the day, every student will be able to choose the course he needs to complete the particular course of study he is taking, but this is possible only when there is a large student body and number of instructors. When a course can be offered only one semester in two, or only one period during the day, perhaps conflicting with another course the student needs, he may be thrown back a whole year by failing one course. We need more research before trying such completely different systems and schedules. It appears that the objective of the semester and quarter system is to push as many students through school as fast as possible, but is this really necessary or even desirable? Perhaps the old, less complex "Year" system is really the most efficient in schools of the size we presently have in the territories.

Section 9: School Building--Construction, Management, and Maintenance
Page 74-75

K. The only minimum building standards set forth in the survey are those for kindergarten space and equipment (page 25 44). Maximum size is given for elementary schools (Page 31) of 25-33 classrooms, but no other specifications are presented. Nothing is stated about building specifications for secondary schools. We have observed in our own community the purchasing and beginning of renovations on entirely unsuitable buildings for our secondary schools, thereby giving us unsatisfactory quarters for our junior and senior high classes. Furthermore, these renovations were halted for one year without explanations, and only on special request to the Commissioner of the NWT and the Director of Education for the NWT by the Ft. Smith parents were renovations resumed on January 11, 1973. We feel that we need a new high school, not additional renovations of unsuitable buildings which we suspect will be continued as the need for expansion becomes essential. Such policies as this lead to inferior quarters for education and thereby an inferior quality of education. A policy should be set forth with certain minimum standards for building construction, size, and equipment for all levels of schools.

Section 10: Teaching Personnel and Staff Training
Pages 76-86

L. No mention is made of substitute teachers. In all cases qualified teachers should be hired as substitutes if available, rather than non-teachers or non-certified teachers. This has many times not been the case in Ft. Smith, and our children end up with a poor baby-sitting service rather than instruction, even when certified teachers are available for substituting.

Page 79 #152 "Preference should be given to teachers who have spent all or part of their elementary or high school education in the Northwest Territories..."

M. We feel that quality and teaching ability is more important than Northern preference.

The Ft. Smith Educational Advisory Board hope that these comments will be considered in the revision of the school ordinances and in the formation of policy for education in the Northwest Territories.

Respectfully submitted,

Nilah Simmons

Mrs. Norman Simmons, Secretary
Ft. Smith Educational Advisory Board