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THE *Northwest Territories*



TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

ESTABLISHMENT
OF
BOARDS OF EDUCATION
IN
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Submitted to: The Honourable Dennis Patterson
Minister of Education
Government of the Northwest Territories
Education Task Force on Implementation

by: Christopher R. Reid
President

March 6, 1983

During its November 1982 session the Legislative Assembly considered the report of the Special Committee on Education. The report resulted from a two year study by a committee created as a result of the following motion introduced by Tagak Curley, M.L.A. for Keewatin South, during the February 1980 session of the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas there are many educational problems faced by people of the N.W.T., and particularly with the Natives, including high drop-out rate, poor comprehension, poor parent-teacher relationship, low recruitment of Native Teachers and foreign curriculum for Northern lifestyle, lack of proper high school facilities, and lack of continuing and special education facilities;

NOW THEREFORE I move that this Assembly establish a special committee on education with support staff to inquire into all aspects of educational policy in the N.W.T. and an interim report of its findings be tabled during the fall session in 1981 and the final report and recommendations be made by the beginning of 1982 and the size and nomination for membership be made by the striking committee of this Legislature."

Mr. Curley's motion was carried and the Legislative Assembly appointed the following members to form the Special Committee on Education:

Tagak Curley, M.L.A.
Keewatin South

Bruce McLaughlin, M.L.A.
Pine Point

Nellie Cournoyea, M.L.A.
Western Arctic

Dennis Patterson, M.L.A.
Frobisher Bay

Robert Sayine, M.L.A.
Great Slave East.

The Special Committee began its work and eventually accumulated a staff of 21 persons. Three persons on the Special Committee's staff were from the Northwest Territories: the secretary to the Committee, a research assistant and a manuscript typist.

Be-that-as-it-may, the Special Committee tabled its final report entitled Learning: Tradition and Change in the Northwest Territories during the May 1982 session of the Legislative Assembly in Inuvik.

It is evident from the final report of the Committee that the people and special interest groups of the North share the original concerns of Mr. Curley as expressed in his motion to establish the Special Committee in the first place. Consider for example, the common concerns expressed by the people to the Special Committee:

- 1) Many students, on leaving school, are not competent to pursue a traditional life nor to compete for jobs in a wage economy.
- 2) Which language to use for instruction was a hotly debated item.
- 3) Measured in terms of achievement, students may reach high school without the knowledge and skills required for grade 9.
- 4) Irregular attendance is a common problem.
- 5) Many persons complained to the Special Committee about the behaviour of young persons.
- 6) Many persons were concerned over the prospect of having to leave home for education after grade 9.
- 7) Few teachers from Southern Canada have had adequate preparation to teach in Northern schools.
- 8) There are too few Native teachers.
- 9) Turnover among teachers is high and interrupts the continuity of education programs.
- 10) Inservice programs and professional development programs are inadequate.
- 11) Many parents in the N.W.T. never had a chance to attend school.
- 12) Despite an obvious need for Adult Education, the program has a low priority, no legislative support and a poor budget.
- 13) A highly centralized Education system has not developed policy or programs judged to be acceptable or effective at the community level.
- 14) There is an immense gap between the Department of Education conception and production of a curriculum and to implementation in the classroom.

- 15) Limited funding and inadequately trained staff prevent many children from obtaining the special attention they require.

The members of the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association share all the concerns listed above. Naturally, one would expect that once the Committee identified the concerns of the people viz a viz Education, that they would design a prescription to alleviate those concerns. At this point, this Office will not list the recommendations of the Special Committee but will wonder how the recommendations of the Committee addresses the concerns of the people. It seems to this writer that the concerns of the people were accurately identified but the recommendations of the Committee were developed in isolation - in spite of the common problems that were identified.

Actually, the recommendations of the Committee for a new educational structure are a spin-off of the Manitoba Educational System. That's not surprising when one considers that six of the chief advisors to the Special Committee were from Manitoba.

In any event, the major debate on the Special Committee's report occurred at the November 1982 session of the Legislative Assembly. As debate entered its fourth day, this Office realized that the Yellowknife media was interviewing only members of the Special Committee. Consequently, the general public was bombarded with a one-sided view of the recommendations of the report. This Office contacted CBC Radio and requested to be interviewed because while the N.W.T.T.A. supported the educational direction espoused by the Special Committee, we felt that the people of the North and all employees of the G.N.W.T. should be informed as to the impact of adopting the report. CBC was more interested in making the point that the N.W.T.T.A. did an about turn on the report and edited my 30 minute interview accordingly. To add fuel to the fire, this Office refused to appear on the "Focus North" TV Program because once again CBC was setting the stage to give the Special Committee yet another platform from which to push their report. This point was evident from the original guest list:

- 3 members of the Special Committee
- 2 members of the Education Task Force on Implementation
- 1 N.W.T.T.A. President
- and for good measure, 1 School Board Chairman and 2 students.

To make a long story short, CBC and the Special Committee had their day and the Legislative Assembly adopted the report in what can be considered as the most irresponsible session of the Assembly. Irresponsible, because the Members of the Assembly really couldn't understand how the recommendations resulted from the concerns of the people; irresponsible because there was no basis in research that these recommendations would indeed alleviate the common concerns; fiscally irresponsible because an analysis had not been conducted as to how much the adopted recommendations would cost. It is one thing to promise a new education system - it is yet another to find the money for a system we really are not sure is going to work.

The foregoing brings this Office to the major reason for this paper: the impact that the creation of Divisional Boards of Education will have on the Public Service and the People of the North.

During debate on the Special Committee's Report, this Office attempted to convince the Minister of Education, Mr. Patterson, and the Member for Keewatin South, Mr. Curley, to be honest with the people and inform them as to how the report will affect their lives and their employment status. Unfortunately, the Minister and Mr. Curley were more interested in treating the report as their sacred cow and in forcing the report's acceptance than in being objective with the people and employees of the Commissioner.

It is the intention of this paper, therefore, to isolate one aspect of the Special Committee's Report and to examine its impact on the public service and Northern people.

This Office will concentrate on the recommendations regarding the establishment of Divisional Boards of Education for this, the first in a series of papers on the Report of the Special Committee on Education.

Once the November 1982 debate ended, the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories clearly outlined in its recommendations to the Executive Committee the exact direction of the administrative aspects of education in the N.W.T. The significant recommendations follow:

- A. The Minister of Education may delegate the administration of Education from Kindergarten to Grade 10 to Divisional Boards of Education.

Note: N.W.T.T.A preference is that Divisional Boards be responsible for the Kindergarten to Grade 12 Program.

- B. Each education division shall be guaranteed staff to administer, coordinate, and implement all of its basic programs.

Note: The proposed divisional board structure is on page 49 of the Committee's report.

- C. Every community shall be represented on a Divisional Board of Education.

- D. All educational staff working in the communities shall be employees of the Divisional Boards of Education.

- E. The direct administration of schools in the N.W.T. shall be transferred from the Department of Education to the Divisional Boards of Education.

Now, let us translate the above recommendations into terms we can all understand:

Based on the interpretation of the above recommendations and the debate of our legislators relative to these recommendations, it is logical to assume that the Legislative Assembly wishes to:

- A. create Divisional Boards that will have the same status, powers and responsibilities of school boards such as those found in Yellowknife and southern Canada.
- B. establish Divisional Boards as the Employer of all educational staff.
- C. transfer the ownership of schools, educational offices and educational staff housing to Divisional Boards.

These are laudable objectives indeed - certainly in line with Government's policy to devolve the decision making authority of Government to the local levels.

It may surprise most readers at this point that the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association supports the objective of the Legislative Assembly to create Divisional Boards of Education with the full rights, powers, responsibilities and levels of funding comparable to School Boards elsewhere in the country. Before proceeding with that objective, however, it should be a priority of the Legislative Assembly, the Commissioner, and the Department of Education to inform members of the Public Service and the general public exactly what impact creation of Divisional Boards will have on the current employees of the Commissioner and the people of the North. It is logical to assume that the groups identified above would want an opportunity to consider and debate the method by which the administrative recommendations are implemented especially if the means of implementation is going to affect their lives.

In light of the above, the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association wishes to bring the following major issues to the attention of the Government of the N.W.T., the Minister of Education, the Task Force on Implementation and to the People of the North:

MAJOR ISSUES Re: Creation of Divisional Boards of Education as envisioned by the Legislative Assembly:

A. PERSONNEL AFFECTED

There are many in the Northwest Territories who have the impression that only the employment status of the 632 Government Teachers will be affected by the creation of Divisional Boards of Education. Remember, "all educational staff working in communities shall be employees of Divisional Boards....".

Besides teachers, this staff includes Superintendents of Education and his regional staff, classroom assistants, janitors, school secretaries, plus other positions that exist because schools, education offices and educational staff housing exist.

According to our estimates, approximately 1200 Public Servants will have their employer status changed as Divisional Boards are created across the Territories.

In addition, as the Commissioner transfers this staff to the new employer, then consider the number of management, assistant management, clerical ... etc. ... positions at headquarters that will be affected as the Government of the N.W.T. transfers its responsibilities for payroll, employee benefits, classification, teacher recruitment, staff training, employer housing ... etc. ... to divisional boards.

B. IMPACT ON N.W.T.T.A. and N.W.T.P.S.A.

The N.W.T.T.A. has received assurances, through debate in the Legislative Assembly, that all teachers in the North will continue to be our members, that our membership will not be eroded, that the N.W.T.T.A. will not be disintegrated. We are confident, therefore, that the Minister of Education will seek our assistance and cooperation as the recommendations of the Special Committee are implemented.

According to our estimates, however, the Northwest Territories Public Service Association (N.W.T.P.S.A.) could lose approximately 450 of its members.

Current employees such as classroom assistants, educational clerical and janitorial staff, etc., should be aware that when Divisional Boards become the employer, the above personnel will no longer be Public Servants and, therefore, the N.W.T.P.S.A. can no longer represent these employees.

C. POTENTIAL LAY OFF PROBLEMS

The total government work force projected for the 1983-84 fiscal year is 3354.9.

As stated earlier, if we create Divisional Boards as envisioned by the Legislative Assembly, then approximately 1200 Government employees will change employers. In other words the Commissioner would transfer responsibilities for 1200 of his employees to Divisional Boards. (The Education person year requirements, alone, for 1983-84 is 1118.9.)

A change of that magnitude will have considerable impact on headquarters' staff alone.

Consider for example:

- 1) the number of secretaries, clerks, lower managers ... etc. ... in payroll whose jobs exist because these 1200 employees must be paid every two weeks.
- 2) the number of person years that exist in employee benefits because these 1200 must have their superannuation, G.S.M.P., Dental Plan and other benefits processed.
- 3) the person years in employee relations because two major collective agreements have to be bargained and administered. The G.N.W.T. will deal with only one agreement after the transfer to Divisional Boards.

4) the person years in teacher recruitment.

In short, the person years existing in any department that exist because schools, teachers, education office, etc., exist. These positions will become redundant in the places they now exist.

D. POTENTIAL FOR JOB CREATION

During debate, the Special Committee spoke of the jobs that will be created as a result of their report. The Committee was referring mostly to the new Divisional Board structure and the fact that Divisional Boards will be guaranteed staff to administer programs.

On page 49 of the report, the Special Committee lays out the staff structure of Divisional Boards (10-15 positions).

When we look at the proposed Board Structure on page 44 we realize that many of these boards will be created around less than 500 students.

Let us be realistic and tell the people that if one creates a Board around a small number of students then the only staff that is going to exist at Board level is a Superintendent and a secretary. The Board just won't have the budget to create the structure outlined on page 49.

With the small boards proposed on page 44, the level of educational services will deteriorate. The finances do not exist to create these structures for small boards.

The Special Committee's Report, therefore, has little potential for job creation.

The above outlines some of the major problems associated with creating the type and number of Divisional Boards as envisioned by the Legislative Assembly.

However, this Association is not opposed to the Divisional Board concept. As the Government proceeds to that end, it is imperative that all public servants and Northerners be informed as to the impact this move will have on their jobs and the quality/quantity of educational services in their area. In addition, before implementation, Northerners must be given time and opportunity to react to the proposals of the Education Committee on Implementation.

With that in mind, the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association suggests that in three years, all communities in the N.W.T. will be under the jurisdiction of a Board of Education. To that end, this Association makes the following recommendations:

1) that, during the fall 1983 session of the Legislative Assembly, the Minister of Education introduce legislation that would allow Local Education Authorities to exist at three levels:

a) Committee (existing at community level only)

- b) Regional Education Society
- c) Regional Interim Board

Note: Legislation allowing for the existence of Education Societies at the community level must be rescinded.

- 2) that the Minister introduce legislation to create Regional Societies as follows:
 - a) Baffin Region Education Society
 - b) Keewatin Region Education Society
 - c) Inuvik Region Education Society
 - d) Fort Smith Region Education Society
 - e) Kitikmeot Region Education Society
 - f) South Slave Region Education Society
 - g) Fort Simpson Region Education Society
 - h) Fort Rae Region Education Society
- 3) that each Regional Education Society be formed by the Chairpersons of the L.E.A. Committees in that region.
- 4) that the Minister establish in each Region a team of specialists whose task will be to train and prepare the Regional Education Society for Regional Interim Board Status not later than April 1986.
- 5) that Regional Education Societies be granted Interim Board Status when, in the opinion of the Minister, a particular society has been adequately trained and is prepared for that higher level of authority.
- 6) that Interim Boards of Education be granted all the rights, responsibilities and powers of Boards of Education elsewhere in Canada, with one exception:

The Commissioner will remain the Employer of all Educational Staff during the Interim Board stage of this development.
- 7) that in May 1986, the Minister of Education introduce legislation that would:
 - a) create an N.W.T. Federation of School Boards affiliated with the Alberta School Trustees Association.
 - b) incorporate all Interim Boards as the following Regional Boards of Education:
 - i) Baffin Regional Board of Education
 - ii) Keewatin Regional Board of Education
 - iii) Inuvik Regional Board of Education
 - iv) Fort Smith Regional Board of Education
 - v) Kitikmeot Regional Board of Education
 - vi) South Slave Regional Board of Education
 - vii) Fort Simpson Regional Board of Education
 - viii) Fort Rae Regional Board of Education

- c) transfer the ownership of all schools, education offices, education staff housing, etc., to the eight Regional Boards.
 - d) transfer the employer status of the appropriate education personnel from the Commissioner to the Regional Boards of Education.
- 8) that all educational staff including classroom assistants become members of the N.W.T.T.A.
 - 9) that the N.W.T.T.A. be recognized as the exclusive bargaining agent of all education personnel in the N.W.T.
 - 10) that one master Collective Agreement be bargained between the N.W.T.T.A. and the Federation of School Boards and that agreement be binding on the eight Regional Boards of Education and the N.W.T. Teachers' Association.
 - 11) that the teaching staff be protected from any loss of benefits.
 - 12) that teaching staff (if they choose) be grandfathered for the purpose of superannuation benefits.
 - 13) that Regional Boards of Education be responsible for the Kindergarten to Grade 12 program.

The foregoing recommendations apply to the Educational Program currently being administered by the Department of Education.

With respect to the Public and Separate School Boards in Yellowknife, the N.W.T.T.A. recommends as follows:

- 1) that in May 1986, the Minister of Education transfer the ownership of and responsibility for Sir John Franklin Territorial High School and Akaitcho Hall to the Yellowknife Education District No. 1.
- 2) that the Public and Separate School Boards in Yellowknife continue to bargain their current Collective Agreements with the N.W.T.T.A.
- 3) that teaching staff transferred from Sir John Franklin be grandfathered (if they choose) for the purpose of superannuation benefits.
- 4) that the Sir John staff be protected from any loss of benefits.
- 5) that the Yellowknife Separate and Public School Boards be 100% funded by the Government of the N.W.T.
- 6) that the Public and Separate School Boards in Yellowknife be responsible for the Kindergarten to Grade 12 Program.

In conclusion, the above recommendations present a skeletal outline for achieving the goal to create Boards of Education in the Northwest Territories. The route we propose is designed to minimize cost by utilizing existing, known structures in the N.W.T. For example, the proposed Regional Boards are created within current government regional boundaries because these boundaries are familiar to the people and because educational offices already exist in each region thus eliminating the need to construct new buildings to house Boards of Education and minimize the need to physically transfer current educational staff.

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher R. Reid
President

CRR/JJ

c.c. Legislative Assembly
Executive Committee Secretariat
John H. Parker, Commissioner
N.W.T.T.A. Central Councillors
All Teachers