



Superintendent's Supplementary Report

Wednesday, October 25, 2006

SSRSB PROGRAM REVIEW: RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Background

During the last school year, the South Shore Regional School Board authorized that a "Program Review" be carried out under the direction of the Director of Programs and Student Services, Ms. Trudy Johnson. Phase I of the Review, completed in June, addressed questions related to the programs currently offered in our schools, the basic program that the Board should provide with the necessary supports in place, and the requirements to support changes in programs. Phase I was completed by having three committees, elementary, junior high, and senior high, conduct separate reviews and then their findings were integrated into one report (see attachment). This report, prepared by Ms. Johnson, was subsequently "received" by the School Board last June. The term, "received" is significant in that the Board has taken no position to either accept or reject the report's recommendations; it has simply been received for future consideration. Now it is time to decide how this consideration will take place. What are the next steps in the Program Review?

Next Steps

Recommendation 10 requires, "That the Board formulate a response, with respect to its intentions regarding Program Review, so that this may be shared with the schools", and of course, this includes the communities of the schools. In consultation with the Directors, I offer the following "next steps" for the Board to consider in moving forward with the Program Review:

1. The Senior Admin. Team, consisting of the Superintendent of Schools and the Directors, will review the recommendations in the Program Review Report to assess what has been achieved already and what might be given greater priority in planning for the next school year. The Superintendent of Schools will present the findings of the Senior Admin. Team to the Board with the understanding that some of the recommendations may be turned back to the appropriate standing committees of the Board. The standing committees will consider specific recommendations assigned for consideration and then report to the Board.
2. The Superintendent of Schools will review the recommendations with the school administrators to bring them up-to-date and to seek their input into any follow-up action.
3. The original report from Ms. Johnson and this report will be distributed to all school advisory councils and they will be encouraged to submit their concerns, questions and suggestions on follow-up.
4. Phase II of the Program Review, a School Utilization Study, will proceed right away, under the Direction of the Director of Programs and Student Services, with the expectation that the Board would receive a School Utilization Study Report before June 30, 2007.

School Utilization Study

The Phase II School Utilization Study requires further explanation. When the Board decided to proceed with this Program Review, this phase II study was described as having an internal and external component. The internal component is that the Board's own staff will gather data related to projected enrolments, busing schedules and capacities, and excess classroom capacity. Also, a more general facility review, related to the need for maintenance and construction upgrades will be completed. The

external component is that an individual or firm would be hired under contract to develop recommendations with respect to how the Board can best provide the basic programming requirements for all students. In developing these recommendations, consideration would be given to school staffing allocations, grade level configurations in schools, school enrolment and local demographic data, student transportation requirements, student transfers, and school boundaries. **One of the primary questions would be, “What adjustments in staffing allocations, grade configurations, and school boundaries might contribute to a more effective delivery of programs in each school?”**

I wish to be “up front” about the possible implications of the School Utilization Study as it relates to the permanent closure of schools. In any school utilization study, student enrolment decline is one of the important factors. When enrolments are in a rapid, steady decline, the impact of the decline on the ability of a school to deliver the required program effectively should not be ignored. To ignore it would be irresponsible. **Having said this, I wish to be clear that this particular school utilization study is not a school closure review process.** There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, the permanent school closure review process that has been in place in Nova Scotia for many years has been “put on hold” and a new process is being developed. A provincial committee should complete its work early in 2007 and submit a report to the Minister of Education. It would be untimely to come out locally with recommendations on school closures before a new process is legislated for Nova Scotia. Secondly, this school utilization study will assess whether or not a school's declining enrolment is affecting or will affect negatively the delivery of programs. It will determine what additional board resources may be required to provide the program in a small, declining-enrolment school, over and above what is provided as a school system standard. It will not assess the relative advantages and disadvantages, to the students, the school or its community, of closing any particular school. Any consideration of school closures would come in subsequent years, through the newly legislated, permanent school closure review process. **Simply put, the schools that are operating under the jurisdiction of the South Shore Regional School Board will continue to operate next year and any formal consideration of school closure would be under a process completely separate from and subsequent to this School Utilization Study.**

If these next steps, as I have defined them, are acceptable to the Board, we will get things underway as soon as possible, so that a final report can be completed before the end of the school year.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Gunn
Superintendent of Schools