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SASKATCHEWAN NATIVE EDUCATION IN K - 12: A CONCEPT PLAN

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SASKATCHEWAN NATIVE EDUCATION

IN K-12: A CONCEPT PLAN

Introduction

This paper presents a concept plan of a Native controlled K-12 education system for Metis and Non-Status Indian people in Saskatchewan.

The purposes of the concept plan are to provide a model for consideration and discussion and to help determine some options preparatory to a fully detailed plan for development and operation of a Native school system.

The motive for planning in the K-12 area will be found in the Gabriel Dumont Institute's publication (January, 1987), Native Education in Saskatchewan: A New Mandate, which shows that existing school systems have not been effective in meeting the needs of Native people.

The Mandate paper calls for an interim strategy in K-12 by which the Gabriel Dumont Institute" . . . will seek agreement with school boards in those districts where the retention rate for Native children is especially low to develop pilot schools" (p. 12). The longer-term plan, the plan for a five-year period beyond 1988, is more comprehensive: "Where numbers warrant, Gabriel Dumont Institute seeks powers similar to those of existing separate school jurisdictions in order to establish educational delivery capacity for Native people within the K-12 level, under a system of local boards" (p. 14).

This topic presents perhaps the toughest choice facing the delegates to the 1988 Gabriel Dumont Institute Annual Cultural Conference, for it will require of those who are parents of school-age children to decide between the mainstream schools their children now attend and the proposed new Native-controlled institutions for K-12 education.

The concept plan for a Native (in this paper, meaning Metis and Non-Status Indian) controlled K-12 system that is discussed below is organized under the following topics:

- I Distinctive Features of a Native School
- II The Organization and Government of a Native School System
- III Implementation Strategy
- IV Financial Considerations
- V Legal and Constitutional Issues

I DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF A NATIVE SCHOOL

1. Aims Based on Equality of Opportunity

Mainstream education has tended to separate Native children from others and to train them chiefly for labor: witness the preponderance of Native children in "applied" and vocational programs. If Native children are to be rendered capable of governing themselves and living fully as human beings--whether in mainstream society or in Native self-government structures--they must be provided with an education that will prepare them for citizenship and the leisure arts as well as for making a living.

The aims of education proposed for a Native school follow from the principle that all children are equal as human beings and all have the same three demands in their futures: the duties of citizenship in a democratic society, the obligation of each individual to make the most of himself or herself that his or her capacities allow--to lead rich and fulfilling lives, and the requirements of work.¹ The New Mandate paper posits these aims of education as (i) citizenship, (ii) leisure, and (iii) labor (p. 21).

2. Community Operated

The Native school is directed by a board elected from the community served by the school. The local school board will exercise the powers of its mainstream counterpart, and, in addition, the board will be the means of the community's involvement in the school's programming through such measures as

a local curriculum committee, community volunteers in the school, and the sharing of the community's recreational and cultural resources. One of the responsibilities of the school's professional staff will be to develop strategies for community development and community involvement in the school's processes. The board and the community will be motivated to exercise a role in the school's education programming to the extent that its input and advice of its committees is seen to resolve itself in the policy and operation of the school.

3. Teaching Method Appropriate to Native Learning Styles

The teaching method in the Native school shall be appropriate to Metis and Indian learning styles and shall include coaching, seminars, and lecture methods. The use of methods appropriate to the students' learning style implies the retraining of some teachers and other forms of professional development.

4. Excellence in the Quality of Instruction and Standards

The Native education system, its personnel, facilities, and students shall meet or exceed all requirements of mainstream education. Excellence in the quality of instruction and standards of achievement² will be developed through professional development techniques and the administration of a sound educational program which includes planning, supervision of the quality of instruction, and evaluation both continuous and periodic.

5. Pre-School Tutelage Program

There are two rationale for beginning school for Native children at age four:

- (a) Because of poverty and social problems in some Native families, it is found necessary that children be assisted in their early development for readiness to benefit from schooling. Programs for disadvantaged pre-school age children in the United States such as "Headstart" and "The Little Red Schoolhouse" have proven beneficial.
- (b) The European experience and research in North America³ shows that children are capable of real learning well before age five.

6. Native Cultural Content

The Native education program will include Native cultural content including, where so determined by the local board, aboriginal language study. The cultural content of the school program will not be limited to certain subjects and activities but will modify the corporate culture of the school. Reference is made here to the Saskatchewan Department of Education Minister's Advisory Committee Curriculum and Instruction Review (February, 1984), Directions: The Final Report, which recommends that elective courses and a school environment improvement program be determined for all grades at the local level (pp. 46-47).

7. Enriched Curriculum

Many Native children attending mainstream schools find that because of poverty and neglect at home they are at a disadvantage comparative to other children who have the benefit of out-of-school training in skating, music, swimming, dance, and other valuable cultural and recreational skills. Often these skills are utilized at school in music performance, games, and outings, but the skills are not taught at school.

The Native school curriculum shall be as approved by the Department of Education, and, in addition, there will be formal education in music theory and performance, recreational skills, and in Native cultural arts.

II. THE ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNMENT OF A NATIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM

1. Policies and Principles

The following principles will obtain in the organization and government of the Native school system:

- (a) Jurisdiction: The Native school (or schools) falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Education and under the terms of the Education Act.
- (b) The Native school system is Native directed at all levels: local, district, and provincial.
- (c) Where non-Native people form a part of a Native school community, these will be represented on local and district school boards and will otherwise be accorded minority rights in education.

2. The Saskatchewan Native K-12 Board

The Gabriel Dumont Institute Board of Directors will take on the role of a provincial directorate for public and secondary Native education. The Gabriel Dumont Institute itself will add to its staff a director of K-12 education whose responsibility will be, under the direction of the Institute's Executive Director, to oversee the implementation and operation of a provincial Native K-12 system.

3. The Director of K-12 Education

(a) The Gabriel Dumont Institute Staff Structure

Once the initial research and development phase is completed

and funding is available, the position of Director of K-12 Education will be authorized and filled by the Institute.

Currently the Gabriel Dumont Institute staff is organized under six directorates: SUNTEP

Tech: On-Campus

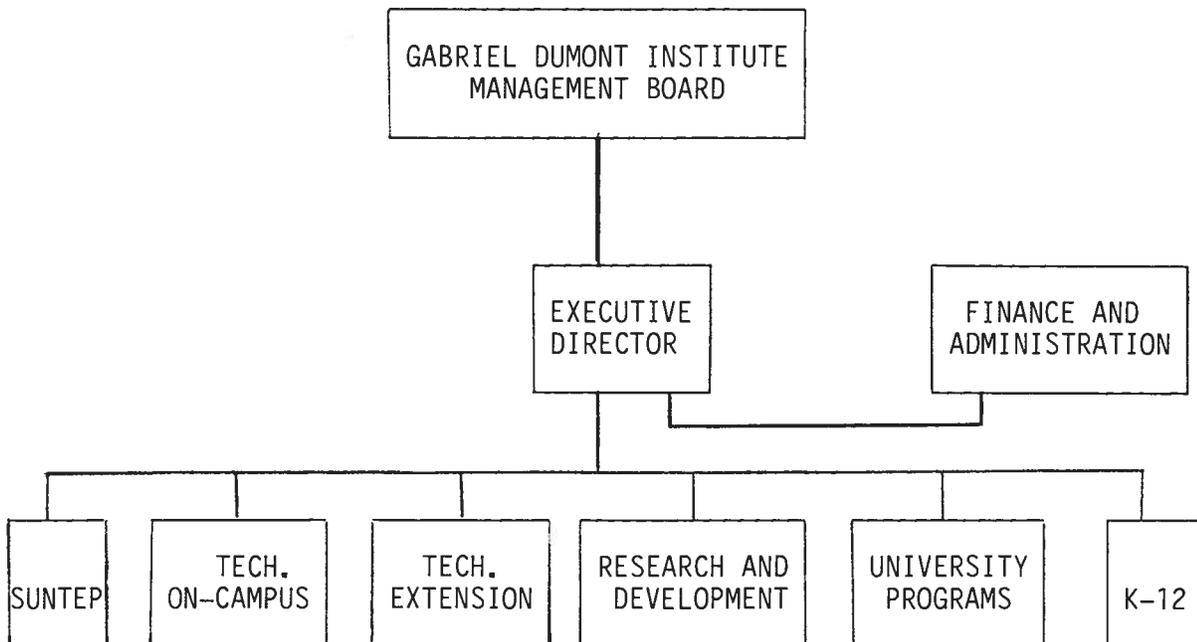
Tech: Extension

Research and Development

University Programs

Finance and Administration

The appointment of the Director of K-12 Education will add a seventh directorate. An organizational chart of the Institute which includes the proposed K-12 directorate is given below:



(b) Duties of the Director of K-12 Education

Under the direction of the Executive Director of the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the Director of K-12 Education will oversee the implementation and operation of a K-12 system. More particularly, the duties of the Director will be

- research and planning;
- development of local educational councils;
- development of K-12 programming in communities throughout the province, including pilot projects, and support services;
- administration of the Native K-12 provincial programming;
- liaison with the Department of Education relating to standards, curriculum, and financing;
- evaluation.

4. The Community Development Unit

Under the direction of the Director of K-12 Education, the Community Development Unit will conduct basic field research to determine numbers and other conditions that may warrant development of a Native school. The Unit will also function as animateur or facilitator in order to develop the community and organizational structures necessary for a local Native education board.

5. The Saskatchewan Native K-12 Commission

Each local Native board will have the right to designate one of its members to an advisory body to be known as the Saskatchewan Native K-12 Commission.

The Commission will have the power to advise the Gabriel Dumont Institute Board on matters of K-12 education.

The Commission may also carry out other functions similar to those of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association.

6. The Native Education Council

The Native education council is an autonomous education corporation exercising control of aspects of education (for example, planning, curriculum, delivery of some instructional services) under agreement with an existing non-Native school jurisdiction.

The Native education council will function under one of two conditions: (i) to operate as an interim measure (interim to full control) in agreement with an existing non-Native school jurisdiction to deliver specific Native educational services; or (ii) where Native enrolment is significant but does not warrant the organization of a Native school board and a Native school.

7. Mandate and Authorization of Native Schools

Where possible, the Native school board will enter into an agreement with the existing non-Native local school jurisdiction to deliver educational services. Where the existing non-Native school jurisdiction does not grant such authority to the Native school board, then the recourse will be to apply to the Department of Education.

It may be necessary that the Government of Saskatchewan amend the Education Act to provide a legal framework to enable

Native people a means similar to that provided to Catholic or Protestant minority education through education for separate schools.

8. Status Indians and Non-Native Peoples

Where Status Indian people and non-aboriginal people wish to participate in Native controlled schools, they may be represented on local and district Native school boards, according to local arrangements.

III IMPLEMENTATION

1. The North

In any of the schools in the North where the student population⁴ and the local board are predominantly Native, the implementation of Native control in K-12 of the kind that is described in Part II of this paper would require that the Gabriel Dumont Institute enter into agreement with the Minister of Education. It should be assumed that the existing local board and school staff would remain intact; it should also be assumed that there would need to be support for the plan from the local board and from the community served by the school⁵

As a measure interim to comprehensive implementation of the plan, this concept of Native control will be introduced in one or two pilot schools during the first year and in an increasing number of schools in years following.

2. The Urban South

In the cities and towns of the province where the population is not predominantly Native but which nevertheless have a Native population sufficient to support a Native-controlled school (or schools), the Gabriel Dumont Institute will implement a Native K-12 school separate from existing schools.

In cities such as Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert, the Native population is large enough to support more than one Native school. Smaller cities that have a substantial Native population such as Yorkton, the Battlefords and Meadow Lake, and

intermediate size communities, such as Nipawin and Fort Qu'Appelle, could support all - Native schools.

The establishment of the Native school in such communities will include the following tasks:

- (a) research, planning and development;
- (b) development of a local Native school board;
- (c) recruitment of staff and students, and procurement of building space and materiel; and
- (d) conclusion of the necessary agreements with the Minister of Education.

The strategy contemplated for the development of a Native school in the case of each community would be to phase in the project in the first year at the grade level or levels which indicated the greatest need and thereafter to expand to include the other grades.

3. The Rural South

- (a) The Saskatchewan Department of Education's discussion paper Rural Education: Options for the '80's (February, 1981) indicates as of that date approximately fifty schools in the rural south have more than 15% Native and Indian enrolment and approximately 15 of these schools have a Native/Indian enrolment of 30% to 49% (p. 14). This information is now dated: rural school enrolments have been declining while the Native population is growing at more than double (2.4%) the rate of the non-Native population. Meanwhile the status Indian students have been leaving "town

schools" with the development of on-reserve facilities.

(b) In those communities where Native enrolments warrant, Native schools with the distinctive features outlined in Part I of this paper shall be established. The schools shall be developed, governed, and organized as part of the system described in Part II of this paper.

(c) In those communities where Native enrolments are significant but do not warrant the development of a Native school as such, a local Native education council will be organized and will enter into such agreements with the local school jurisdiction as will modify the school environment to meet the needs of Native students.

These modifications sought will be those that respect the cultures of both the majority and the minority attending the school and will be related to those distinctive features of a Native school described in Part I of this paper:

- (i) aims of education based on quality of opportunity
- (ii) community operated
- (iii) teaching method appropriate to Native learning styles
- (iv) excellence in quality of instruction and standards
- (v) pre-school tutelage program
- (vi) Native culture content
- (vii) enriched curriculum

Native education councils in this context are not to be construed as being merely advisory (and are not to be identified with the "Local School Advisory Committees" provided for under Sections 137 - 142 of the Education Act,

1978). The Native education council in the context and meaning provided here is an autonomous corporation exercising control of well-defined education functions under a formal agreement with the school jurisdiction.

IV FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Public schools in Saskatchewan are funded from a combination of local taxation, tuition fees, and provincial grants.

Native schools would raise funds from these same sources.

2. The provincial grants are provided to make it possible for each school system currently operating to deliver an appropriate level of programs and services without an unduly high tax rate while enabling the school system to retain full local autonomy. The provincial grants range from 0% to 90% of the system's education costs, depending mainly on the capacity of the school district to raise revenue. In some rural areas where the considered or computational mill rate is high, the grant is at 0%. In Regina and Saskatoon, grants represent roughly 50% of operating revenue. In the North, a high percentage of the total education revenue is in the form of provincial grants.

3. Because of the depressed economic conditions of Native people, a larger part of the costs of education for Native people in the proposed Native-controlled schools will derive from provincial sources.

Such is the case now.

In the North, where the Native enrolment represents well over 60% of the total, the provincial contribution, as we have seen, is at around 90%. In the urban South, the percentage of total revenue required that is contributed by the province in

schools of high Native participation is driven considerably higher because of special grants to community schools; and by other high cost programs such as special education and vocational schools. Similarly, in the rural South, for reasons of the depressed economic conditions of Native people and the utilization of high cost educational programs by Native students, the percentage of the total education costs borne by provincial grants is higher where there are high Native enrolments.

4. The average operating cost for public education in Saskatchewan is approximately twenty dollars per pupil day. The average cost per pupil day for Native children is higher because of the numbers of Native children attending in the higher cost Northern areas, and because of the relatively higher Native participation in high cost programs such as community schools, special education and vocational education.

5. The projected cost per pupil day in a Native school will not be higher than the current rate, but the overall education costs will be higher because of the anticipated improved retention of students in school. Currently, 90% of Native children do not complete high school, and in the North, the median education achievement level for adults is estimated at grade six.

The proposed pre-school tutelage program also represents a projected absolute increase in costs.

6. The Gabriel Dumont Institute takes the position that the

federal government has a fiscal responsibility for Native education and cultural development that it does not have for non-aboriginal people.

7. There are in the province in the order of 1500 social housing rental units owned by a number of Native-controlled non-profit corporations for which properties school taxes are currently assigned to established school jurisdictions. These taxes and the property taxes paid on Native-owned properties would represent a substantive local revenue base for Native controlled education.

V LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

1. It was shown in Part II of this paper that agreements between Native education councils or boards and existing school jurisdictions appear to be enabled under Section 92(b)(iii) of the Act. Section 92 may prove useful in enabling interim measures in Native K-12 development and as a basis for ongoing agreements between the existing school jurisdiction and the Native education council in those communities where the Native enrolments do not warrant separate Native schools.

2. The Minister may, subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, under Section 10 (d)(ii) of the Act "notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, make provision for the establishment and operation of experimental and special schools."

This provision of the Act may enable the establishment of some Native-controlled schools according to terms specified in this Concept Plan.

3. Similarly, Section 10 (1) also empowers the Minister (i) to authorize textbooks (j) to prescribe subjects of instruction, to define compulsory and optional subjects and course requirements and (l) to make provision for the teaching of teachers, including those required for new or special programs or services to pupils.

4. However it may be that the proposed Native education plan may be enabled within existing legislation, it would be desirable to have special legislation (similar to that provided to minorities of Protestants or Roman Catholics under Section 22 (2) ff.) for the establishment of Native school districts.

Under such legislated framework, Native school boards and councils may still find it economical and otherwise mutually beneficial to arrive at local agreements for purchase of services, joint use of facilities and support services, and other forms of cooperation with mainstream or existing boards.

NOTES:

1. This statement of aims was formulated by Mortimer J. Adler, The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus, (New York: MacMillan, 1984) 2.
2. For a useful definition of the terms of quality of instruction, see the Introduction to Arthur J. More, Okanagan-Nicola Indian Quality of Education Study, (Penticton: Okanagan Indian Learning Institute, 1984).
3. Russell Gersten and Thomas Keating, "Long Term Benefits From Direct Instruction," Educational Leadership 44, 6 (March, 1987): 28-30.
4. A discussion on the Native school population in the North (now somewhat dated) will be found in the Saskatchewan Department of Education 1981 publication, Rural Education: Options for the '80's, p. 14.
5. The problem of underachievement of Native students in the North and the suggestion of alternate measures are discussed in the Department of Northern Saskatchewan recommendations of Task Force II (January, 1988), A Report to the Minister of Northern Saskatchewan on Education for the 1980's.