

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 15, 2008

TO: Board of Trustees
FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT: Cree Extended Alternative Program
ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Mary Cardinal Collins, Gloria Chalmers, Margaretha Ebbers, Lorna L'Hirondelle, Gary Jackson, Kerry-Ann Kope, Stuart Wachowicz, Marie Wood

RECOMMENDATION

That the Cree Extended Alternative program be approved for implementation in September 2008.

* * * * *

Background: In May 2007, the Board of Trustees approved an Aboriginal Education Policy which states "The Board, as an advocate of choice, supports the provision of Aboriginal culture and/or language-based alternative programs based on interest." This policy was approved by Board following intensive consultation with many members of the Aboriginal community regarding education of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students.

Currently, Edmonton Public Schools supports a range of alternative programs for students wishing to acquire proficiency in one or more languages. Examples include French, Arabic, Chinese, French, Hebrew, German, Spanish, Ukrainian and more recently, Punjabi. These languages are offered in a variety of options: some as a second language, some are bilingual, and French Immersion with the additional choice of early or late entry points. Of our indigenous languages at the elementary level, currently the Cree language is offered as part of a Language and Culture program through the Awasis alternative program at Prince Charles School.

Rationale for Recommendation: The 2008 release of the 2006 census data indicates that Edmonton is the second largest Canadian centre for urban Aboriginal population (52,000) representing 5 per cent of its total population. Between 2001-2006, the Aboriginal population has grown at a rate that is more than triple (27 per cent) the rate of increase of the province's non-Aboriginal population (10 per cent). Indigenous language use is not showing the same growth trends. Blair and Laboucan (2005) point out that the major indigenous languages in Alberta (Cree, Dene Sutine, Dene Tha, Dene Ka, Kainai, Siksika, Pikuni, Nakota, Saulteaux and Michif) are currently at risk of disappearing by the next generation.¹ In an article by Crawshaw (2007) Laboucan suggests that the loss of Cree language is also a loss of culture as

there is no distinction between the two.² Since language is the way of passing on culture, they cannot be separated.

The 2002 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy framework of Alberta Education lists a number of goals and strategies designed to support FNMI learners. One of them is to “Strengthen the use, sharing, recognition and value of indigenous knowledge and languages” (p. 9)³. Cree bilingual, Blackfoot and Michif (as part of a Medicine Wheel full day Kindergarten program) are available in other Alberta school jurisdictions and First Nations School Authorities.

Proposed Program: The proposed Cree extended alternative program (Appendix I) was developed by a team of district staff with education, teaching and administrative experience in Cree language and culture. It reflects input from a broad range of community members including Elders, parents, agencies who work with families and members of the Canadian Institute for Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute. The program is based on the provincial K-12 Cree Culture and Language program but has been augmented through an emphasis on Cree values across all aspects of the curriculum, nature based programming, regular community involvement and extending the use of Cree language from thirty minutes a day to between 30-50 per cent of the day.

Plans for Implementation: In consultation with school staff and Program Distribution, it is recommended that the Cree Extended program be located at Abbott School. Implementation will be dependent on interest expressed by parents and enrolment in the program at Abbott School in the spring. It is anticipated that the program will begin at Kindergarten (or Kindergarten and Grade 1) and expand one year at a time.

Abbott School is the recommended site for a number of reasons. It currently serves a high number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. The Abbott community has a high number of Kindergarten students and has a history of programs that have involved the extended community, including an Aboriginal Head Start program through the Ben Calf Robe Society. An Aboriginal cultural liaison worker has been very active in the school for several years and there is a climate of respect and diversity.

Transportation: Transportation needs will be reviewed. In order to provide transportation to Abbott School, there may be significant demand for additional buses to be added at the cost of \$37,600 per bus per year. A limited transportation service area would be possible using existing routes, if all current and future curb service was integrated with the fixed route services. School hours at Abbott School may need to be altered so they are compatible with other schools that can share routes.

Program Establishment Costs: Standard establishment grant funding for the new Cree Extended alternative program located at Abbott School will be consistent with other alternative programs. New alternative programs receive a one-time establishment grant of \$319 per student in the first year, plus \$319 per students for enrolment growth in the second year. It is also recommended that Abbott School receive the \$319 per student grant for new student enrolment growth in the third year.

Next Steps: If the recommendation is approved, the district and Abbott School will advertise the program, hire a Cree speaking early educator to begin meeting with the families, develop resources and make connections with other Cree programs in band schools. Additionally, Programs staff as well as Aboriginal Education staff will work with the teacher and the school to begin some of the initiatives related to community involvement and family language learning.

ES:ce

APPENDIX I - Cree Extended Alternative Program Description

¹ Blair, H. & Laboucan, B.J. (2005). The Alberta Language Initiative and the Implications for Indigenous Languages. *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 29 (2) p. 206-214

² Crawshaw, C. (2007). Cree Language Lessons. *Legacy Winter 2007* p. 36-37.

³ First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2002) *Alberta Education*.
<http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/fnmi/fnmipolicy/policyframework.aspx#Statement>

Cree Extended Alternative Program Description

Name: Cree Extended Alternative Program

Program: The Cree extended alternative program is an innovative approach to enhancing Cree language instruction. There are four main characteristics:

1. Cree values
2. Nature based programming
3. Community involvement
4. Extended use of Cree language

These four characteristics are not mutually exclusive, but instead complement one another.

Cree Values: Cree Values such as Kinship (Wahkôtôwin), Working Cooperatively (Mâmawohkamâtowin), Sharing (Wîcihitowin), were used in shaping the development of the program as well as in the program itself. As an example, prior to writing the curriculum, Programs, Consulting Services and Curriculum personnel went to meet with parent and community groups to develop some common understanding of which aspects of Cree culture and which values might be appropriate to embed in the program. Kinship (Wahkôtôwin), was identified as being a main value and so all outcomes from Cree Language and Culture K – 12 Program of Studies and from the Kindergarten program, related to family and kinship, friendship and relationship building were clustered under Kinship. The same was done for Getting Along Together (Miyowicitowin) and others. Another aspect that was mentioned was the importance of celebration and ceremonies. While certain ceremonies will be included in the program (such as smudging, pipe) these are to be decided with the community and Elders once the program has been approved.

Resources to support these values are being gathered from Cree programs in surrounding areas such as Hobbema, Onion Lake and Saddle Lake. Some resources will be created by the teacher hired for the program, others through resource development.

Co-operative grouping, shared responsibility and getting along will be key features of the daily life in this program. Children will be encouraged to help each other learn, and to respect the wisdom of others in the community.

Nature based programming: “Aboriginal worldviews recognize the interconnectedness of all living things and the spirit that exists within each.”¹ An important feature of the program will be regular outdoor hands-on investigation in order to explore these connections. Opportunities will be created to note and celebrate the changing seasons, to explore various ecosystems, and to become familiar with plants and animals both urban and rural. Children will be encouraged to understand the need to protect and take care of their Earth.

¹ Our Words, Our Ways: *Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners*, (2005) Alberta Education: Edmonton

Community involvement: Promising practices in Aboriginal Education include welcoming the extended community into the school². In addition to parents, Elders, grandparents and other community members will be encouraged to develop ongoing relationships with the school community. This involvement may include being part of an advisory team that meets on a regular basis to help guide the program activity, being a resource person, or providing regular support in the classroom. This process is already being modeled by inviting Elders to provide feedback and advice on the draft program and curriculum. This process will continue to shape the program as it grows from Kindergarten to Grade 6.

Extending the use of Cree language: The proposed Cree Extended alternative program will offer the Cree language 30-50 per cent of the day instead of the 30 min/day language instruction provided by typical Language and Culture programs. Additional opportunities for language exposure will come through family activities such as: Cree backpacks that will provide Cree activities for the family to engage in; opportunities for weekend or summer cultural and language camps; linking Cree speaking community members with families.

Curriculum: A committee composed of Aboriginal Education (Consulting Services), Programs, Curriculum as well as an outside consultant who works in the area of Cree Language and Culture prepared a draft curriculum. This curriculum extends the approved Cree Language and Culture K – 12 Program of Studies with language based activities from the Physical Education Program of Studies, from the infusion of Aboriginal perspectives into the core subjects and adaptations from the Grade one health and art Programs of Studies. The Curriculum is presented in draft as it will be revised as required during the process of implementations, based upon the feedback of teachers and staff working on the curriculum development. The development ideally will see the K – 6 draft curriculum developed in the 2008-2009 year, with junior high and high school elements following in the subsequent two years.

Students: The program, as with other language programs in the past, will initially be established as a Kindergarten, or K-1 program to begin in 2008, with a grade added each year until Grade 6. Subsequently, students will be able to enrol in the program in Kindergarten or Grade 1, with admittance at a later grade depending on their Cree language fluency.

Staffing: The teachers will need to be fluent speakers of Cree, measured by the fluency test administered through our Language Centre. They must be knowledgeable about Cree values and culture. A working knowledge of Cree syllabics will be an asset, but not mandatory.

District Support: The district will provide funding through the Programs and Curriculum units to support the hiring of the teacher for the additional months of May and June to work on resource development, recruitment and community meetings. Curriculum and Programs will continue to pay for the external Cree expert who will lead the development of the Program of Studies. Additionally, consultants and a Cree speaking liaison worker from Aboriginal Education will be available to facilitate where needed.

² Our Words, Our Ways: *Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners*, (2005) Alberta Education: Edmonton

Location: Criteria for the selection of the initial site included having a healthy Kindergarten population and being in the northeast area of the city. The northeast was targeted because the 2006 city census data indicate that is where many of our Aboriginal families live. The census demographic data is supported by our district data which tracks the number of self identified Aboriginal students. District schools with the highest percentages of self identified FNMI students, outside of transition programs or language and culture programs, are located in the northeast corner. Also by offering a program in another quadrant, we hope to serve more First Nations and Métis students closer to home. Currently students are bussed from 51 school catchment areas to the Awasis program at Prince Charles School.

Typical practice is to identify a school once the program has been approved. However, as Aboriginal practices suggest, it was important to work with the community in the development process. Thus early in the fall, Program Distribution and Alternative Programs identified Abbott School as the site that met these two criteria: strong Kindergarten numbers and high numbers of Aboriginal families. Additionally, Abbott School has had a history of innovative programs that involve the extended community. For the past number of years, a First Nations cultural liaison worker has been active in the school and there is a climate of respect and celebration of diversity in the school. These two factors will contribute to the success of the proposed program.

Program Monitoring and Review: As is the case with all alternative programs, monitoring information will be collected annually in regard to achievement and student, staff and parent satisfaction. As with all new alternative programs, a start up grant will be provided. During the implementation phase, assistance through Programs, Curriculum and Aboriginal Education will be offered. The program will be reviewed periodically to determine whether modifications are required to keep the program current and viable.