

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 13, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Delegation from Metis Child and Family Services Regarding Sherbrooke School

ORIGINATOR: A. Sherwood, Board Secretary

INFORMATION

Mr. Lanny Der, Program Manager Metis Child and Family Services, has requested an opportunity for Mr. Donald Langford, Director Metis Child and Family Services, to appear before the board regarding the future of Sherbrooke School.

A letter from Anne Sherwood, board secretary, dated May 8, 2003 advising that arrangements have been made for Mr. Langford to be heard by the board on **Tuesday, May 13, 2003 at 7:45 p.m.** is attached (Appendix I).

AS:mmf

- APPENDIX I - Correspondence from A. Sherwood, Board Secretary
- APPENDIX II - (Green Pages) Correspondence submitted by Metis Child and Family Services

May 8, 2003

Mr. Lanny Der
Metis Child and Family Services

Dear Mr. Der:

Your e-mail below is acknowledged with respect to your request to appear before the board regarding the future of Sherbrooke School. Accordingly, arrangements have been made for your presentation to the board on **Tuesday, May 13, 2003 at 7:45 p.m.**

To assist you in making your presentation, please be advised of the following board procedures:

- **You may be assisted by an advocate or representative to make your presentation. We ask that your presentation not exceed 10 minutes in length. You and/or your spokesperson must be prepared to clarify issues and answer questions for the trustees at the meeting.**
- **Board meetings commence at 6:00 p.m. and are held in McCauley Chambers on the second floor of the Centre for Education at 102 Street and Kingsway. Underground parking is available. Two seats will be reserved for you and your assistant/spokesperson near the centre microphone in McCauley Chambers where you may be seated until called by the chairman.**
- **A decision regarding your request will be dealt with at the next meeting of the board unless otherwise agreed to by a majority vote of the trustees present. *Please note that a decision with respect to the possible closure of the Awasis Program at Sherbrooke School will be made at the Tuesday, May 27, 2003 board meeting and your presentation will be taken into consideration in the board's deliberation as part of the information gathered through the public consultations.***
- **If you have information you want provided to trustees with respect to your request, please provide one reproducible copy to the Board Office no later than noon today (as I mentioned in my May 6, 2003 e-mail to you). This information will be included in a report to board.**
- **A copy of the complete board report being sent to trustees with respect to your presentation will be provided to you on Friday, May 9, 2003.**

Please note that the agenda for the May 13, 2003 board meeting and related board reports will also be accessible from the district's internet site later the afternoon of May 9, 2003 at: <http://www.epsb.ca/board/agenda.shtml>

Would you please contact my office at 429-8021 once you have received this letter to advise:

- whether you will be submitting information today
- whether you will be assisted by another spokesperson and, if so, who that person would be
- where the report can be sent to you on Friday.

Thank you.

Sincerely



Anne Sherwood
Board Secretary

cc: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools
A. Habinski, Executive Director School and District Services
Doreen L'Hirondelle, Principal Sherbrooke School
J. Bidulock, Director Planning

APPENDIX II

From: L. Der
Sent: May 7, 2003 3:34 PM
To: Anne Sherwood
Subject: Re: Request for Presentation at May 13, 2003 Board Meeting

Ann:

Metis Child and Family Services is requesting the opportunity to appear before the Edmonton Public School Board on May 13, 2003 to make a presentation regarding the future of the Sherbrooke School. Metis Child and Family Services provide support programs to students of Sherbrooke School through funding from Region 6 Child and Family Services and Canadian Heritage in the areas of after-school, cultural, recreational, counselling and tutoring support programs. We feel that we have been effective in assisting and encouraging Aboriginal students to stay in school and complete their education.

Presentation on the Proposed Closure of Sherbrooke School May 13, 2003

1. Preamble

Research shows that people who have more education are often healthier and live longer than people with less education. We know that health status goes up with every level of education people finish.

People who are more educated usually have more job opportunities, greater job security, higher job satisfaction and higher incomes. But the real contribution is that education gives people more control over their lives. People have more control when they can evaluate options, make choices and take action to improve health. Education gives people the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to take control.

In spite of concerted efforts by all levels of government over the past 10 to 15 years, Aboriginal people in Alberta remain substantially disadvantaged in comparison to the general population as measured by commonly used socio-economic indicators such as educational attainment, labor market participation, employment, and income.

Demographic trends underscore the importance of supporting Aboriginal youth to complete their education. Alberta's Aboriginal population is young (46% under the age of 19) and growing (more than twice the birthrate of the non-Aboriginal population). Edmonton in particular, has seen a dramatic increase of 8,105 Aboriginal people from 1996 to 2001 (according to 2001 census figures, the overall Aboriginal population is 40,930).

Alberta's education system has served a majority of Albertans well, however Aboriginal people in general have not experienced the same degree of success. The numbers of Aboriginal people completing high school and post-secondary programs have not risen in the same proportion as for other Albertans.

The reasons behind lower educational attainment are complex. Aboriginal people face numerous barriers to learning. Factors such as government legislation, policies and actions, the long-standing effects of residential schools, and others have resulted in many individuals losing their language, their sense of culture and identity, and skills as parents. Such losses, in turn, lead to multi-generational problems of alcoholism, drug addiction and other abuses. These factors affect family dynamics and the ability of parent(s) to effectively support their children in school.

Lack of success in school gives rise to other problems. Aboriginal people are over-represented in the justice and child welfare systems. They have higher unemployment rates and are more likely to be receiving social assistance.

Aboriginal youth turn to gang activities. And, Aboriginal people have a higher proportion of disabilities and other health-related problems as compared to other Albertans.

Education must be a priority if Aboriginal people are to improve their personal and family situation, and gain the same advantage as the general population. In order to encourage this, success in early grades is required. If students do not have positive experiences and successes in elementary and junior high school, they will have difficulties in later years because they will not have a foundation to build upon. They will be discouraged from putting their best efforts forward.

2. Sherbrooke School Program

Sherbrooke School offers a unique program that meets the special needs of Aboriginal students.

Sherbrooke School has approximately 135 students that come from across the north side of the Edmonton, of which 98% are of Aboriginal ancestry. It is estimated that as high as 75% of the youth are high-needs and high-risk. Many come from single parent families and are poor. Family violence and abuse is common. Many have not been successful in other schools and have cited racism, inability to adjust to mainstream school expectations and discipline, poor home situations, lack of parental support, and other related issues as factors affecting their lack of success. Many may be affected by FASD.

Aboriginal students have benefited significantly by attending Sherbrooke School. The unique features of Sherbrooke School reflect their special needs:

- a. Through funding from Canadian Heritage and Region 6 Child and Family Services, and the support of the Food Bank, Metis Child and Family Services Society (note: the agency provides services to all Aboriginal people in the Edmonton area) provides a wide range of support to the school. These supports include:
 - an after school program
 - organized recreational and sports program
 - in-class support and tutoring
 - Elder support
 - cultural activities (including Metis jigging, Pow Wow dance, regalia making, etc.)
 - school liaison with parents
 - counseling and one-to-one support
 - encouraging community involvement
 - a summer program
 - U of A Native Student Services Tutoring Program (Wahpatiheu)

These supports have encouraged and supported students to stay in school.

- b. The make-up and dynamics within Sherbrooke School contribute to its success. Over 80% the teaching and support staff (Sherbrooke School and Metis Child and Family Services Society) are of Aboriginal ancestry. Not only are they aware of, sensitized to, and understand the issues faced by the students. Many have lived through the issues that the students are going through when they were growing up. As a result, they know what is needed to encourage and promote success with Aboriginal students in school.
- c. Staff are well connected to the Aboriginal community and often have personal knowledge about the student's social and home situations. Many of the staff attend community functions that students and their families attend. As a result, they are able to build a personal and trusting relationship with the students and can pick up on subtle and non-verbal cues that may otherwise be overlooked in a larger mainstream school setting. Students are also able to tell staff things that they would normally not be comfortable saying to someone else. This has often led to issues being addressed before they become a crisis.
- d. Many of the students tell us that they feel comfortable at Sherbrooke School. Their experiences in other schools have been negative. They tell us that "no-one really cares about them in other school", that "they are teased and bullied because they are Native", and that "they get punished because they don't understand what is being taught and teachers don't help them". Many students say that they feel more comfortable and welcomed at Sherbrooke School and are not afraid to come to school.

3. Results To Date

Metis Child and Family Services receives funding from Canadian Heritage and Region 6 to provide support programs and services to Sherbrooke School. We are required to highlight the outcomes of these programs and services. The following commentaries have been forwarded to Canadian Heritage and Region 6 to outline the results and achievements:

- a. Many of the students have not been academically successful in other schools. Students usually enter Sherbrooke School with an academic standing of one or two levels below grade level. In the 2002 school year, there were significant gains in the Grade 6 and 9 Language Arts Provincial Achievement Tests and the HLAT reading and writing tests (District assessment tool). This was a tremendous gain in the school's academic results.
- b. Two of four students that won the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee Youth Awards for 2002 were from Sherbrooke School.
- c. Our Métis Dance and Traditional Dance troupe were involved in several public performances.
- d. The Circle of Courage model, which emphasizes self-correction rather than laid on disciplinary measures, and the community conferencing approach are used in managing conduct and discipline. These approaches

combine the traditional Native American child rearing philosophies with current child development theories and a mediation approach to resolving conflicts. Over the past two years, progress has been made in reducing the severity and frequency of severe incidents in the community. For the 2003 school year, we have had no reports of this nature.

- e. According to our School Satisfaction Survey 82% of elementary students and 97% of junior high students find schoolwork interesting.
- f. We have an active Student Council who has a voice in the school and plans for various student events.
- g. We have active parent volunteers who assist with the snack program and lunch supervision.
- h. We have an active Intra-mural sports League for Junior High students. For the 2003 school year, there was an all girls volleyball team, and a boys' and girls' basketball team.
- i. We have an Elder's program whereby an elder is available in the school two days a week. The Elder instills pride in our students as she provides them with traditional teachings. She also brings the sweet grass ceremony in the school and is involved in prayer circles with students.

4. Recommendations

Sherbrooke School has been in operation for 5 years only. It was set up quickly and the decision is being made to close it down quickly. One of the primary factors that the decision is based on is the enrolment rate. Sherbrooke School has demonstrated significant success with a very high needs/high risk Aboriginal student group in a very short time. Yet there has been no consideration for the impact the school has had on the success of the students.

- a. It is recommended that a comprehensive evaluation be conducted to determine the success of the program before a final decision is made on its closure

Sherbrooke School is targeted for closure because it only has a 30% occupancy. There has been no formal strategy to increase the enrolment rate since it was opened.

- b. It is recommended that a consultation process with the Aboriginal community, the Edmonton Public School Board, and other stakeholders be undertaken to obtain their views and assistance to increase the enrolment

Sherbrooke School has a capacity for 700 students. With a 30% utilization rate, the space is under-utilized. The Shumka Dance School currently rents space at the school. No efforts have been made to rent out other space.

- c. It is recommended that a concerted effort be made to attract community groups and agencies to rent/lease space at the school as a means of more fully utilizing space.

Relationships between the Sherbooke community and Sherbrooke School have, at times, been strained. Some Sherbrooke community residents have said that their property has been vandalized and their children harassed by students from Sherbrooke School. They also indicated that the community has not been respected by some of the adults and students at the school. On the other hand, Sherbrooke School has made concerted efforts to improve relations and increase community awareness of its program by inviting community members to celebrations and school open houses over the past two years. Nonetheless, greater effort is required on both sides to enhance communication and relationships.

- d. It is recommended that Sherbrooke School and the Aboriginal community establish a collaborative approach to support the school program and to liaise with the Sherbrooke community.