

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 23, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dosdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Millwoods Christian School Alternative Program

ORIGINATOR: Angus McBeath, Department Head

RESOURCE

STAFF: Gloria Chalmers, Bob Clark, Jim Davies, Mary-Ellen Deising, Faye Parker, Eila Stenberg

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the attached agreement between Edmonton Public Schools and the Millwoods Christian School Society (Appendix I) be approved.
2. That the Millwoods Christian School Alternative Program be approved for offering in the district, beginning in the 2000-2001 school year.
3. That the attached facilities use agreement between Edmonton Public Schools and Calvary Community Church (Appendix II) be approved.

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Background

Over the past two years, district administration has been involved in discussions with representatives from the Millwoods Christian School Society (MCSS) regarding the possibility of the private school they operate becoming an alternative program within Edmonton Public Schools. These discussions have resulted in the program agreement and the facility use agreement which are appended to this report, and the administration is now recommending that the board approve the offering of the Millwoods Christian School alternative program in the district beginning in the 2000-2001 school year.

Millwoods Christian School has been operating in Edmonton for 22 years. It currently serves 320 students from kindergarten to grade 12. The school is located at 8704 Mill Woods Road, sharing a joint site and space with Calvary Community Church (CCC), which owns the school building and adjacent portable classrooms. Although the school was originally begun to serve the children of the members of Calvary Community Church, it has for many years

now been an interdenominational school serving all families who choose the school and wish their children to be educated in the evangelical Christian tradition.

MCSS Support for Joining Edmonton Public Schools

MCSS is a society comprised of representatives of the Millwoods Christian School school council and the Elder Board of CCC. In April 1999, MCSS voted unanimously to support the draft program agreement. Over 90 per cent of the congregation of CCC also voted in support of the agreement and of the school becoming an alternative program within Edmonton Public Schools. Based on this level of support, MCSS has requested that the administration bring the alternative program proposal forward to the board.

Context of the Recommendation

The administration's recommendation that Edmonton Public Schools agree to establish the Millwoods Christian School alternative program is based on the district's belief that public education can and should serve all families in the community, and on our long-standing support for program choice. In addition, the district has learned through its Logos alternative program and the Edmonton Christian School alternative program that non-denominational Christian education responds to a deeply felt need on the part of many families. Being able to serve the students of Millwoods Christian School would give the district the opportunity to earn the trust of families who have not previously been willing to entrust their children's education to the public system.

Some of the key district parameters reflected in the proposed agreement are:

- The program would be offered under section 16 of the School Act, which enables boards to offer alternative programs based on religion.
- The program meets the requirement of the board's program policy as it relates to religious instruction and alternative programs based on religion, in that it is non-denominational and non-proselytizing. The non-denominational aspect is reflected in the program's long-standing open-admission policy and the fact that, although it is based in the evangelical tradition of Christianity, it is not tied to a specific denomination. Calvary Community Church is a non-aligned Church that serves the Millwoods community. The program is non-proselytizing in that it does not teach catechism or doctrine or encourage students to join a particular church or denomination. The families currently enrolled in Millwoods Christian School represent over thirty churches, mostly located in south-east Edmonton. Less than 30 per cent of the families are from Calvary Community Church.
- The program would be under the governance of Edmonton Public Schools' board of trustees, and all board policies and regulations would apply to the program.
- The program would continue to follow the Alberta Learning curriculum.
- All staff in the schools would be Edmonton Public Schools' staff, and would belong to the Alberta Teachers' Association or the appropriate CUPE local. Staff groups have been kept informed of discussions.
- Admission would be open to all interested families.
- Allocations would be provided on the same basis as to other schools and programs.
- Total cost to the district of offering the program and utilizing the school buildings does not exceed the net amount of grants that would be realized because of having the program in the district.

Key elements for MCSS that are also reflected in the agreement are:

- The program would be based on the Vision and Mission Statement in Appendix I.

- The district recognizes the important and legitimate role of MCSS in helping ensure that the integrity and intent of the alternative program are maintained.
- Substantive change to the Vision and Mission could only be initiated by MCSS, but would also have to be agreed to by Edmonton Public Schools' board of trustees.
- MCSS would have input when the selection of a principal was required, and the principal would involve them in the processes for staff selection in the school.
- Current teaching, support and custodial staff would be considered for positions with Edmonton Public Schools.
- Section 16 of the School Act permits the collection of fees related to non-instructional components of alternative programs that are over and above the cost of regular programs. MCSS would collect fees related to supporting the Christian education components of the program, the buildings and transportation. In the initial period, MCSS would also collect a 'transition fee' to help cover costs associated with staff pensions, becoming part of the district's wide area network, and similar transitional items.
- Proposed fees for 1999-2000 would average \$950 for the first child in a family, \$850 for the second child and \$750 for the third child. There would be no fee for the fourth and subsequent children. The Society also runs a transportation system. Families who access that system would pay \$250 per child per year for the service. The Society also provides assistance with fees for needy families. The proposed fees and their breakdown are detailed in Appendix III.

Building

MCSS would retain responsibility for the capital needs of their building. In this way, the school building would not compete for capital funds with district-owned buildings. In recognition of MCSS's responsibility in this regard, a facilities use payment has been identified in the agreement. The amount is not market driven, but includes amounts that would normally go to the school as maintenance and utility allocations. MCSS has agreed to give the district's maintenance department the opportunity to bid on maintenance work in the buildings. Custodians would be EPSB staff.

The facilities use agreement is attached in Appendix II. Staff from Facilities Services have conducted an inspection of the buildings, and report that they have been well maintained and are comparable in condition to district facilities of the same age.

FP:GC/fp

APPENDIX I – Proposed Program Agreement between EPSB and MCSS

APPENDIX II – Proposed Facilities Use Agreement

APPENDIX III – Proposed Fee Structure 2000-2001