



Chignecto-Central Regional School Board
Emergency Meeting
05-00
April 19, 2000

An emergency meeting of the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board was held on Wednesday, April 19, 2000 in the Audio Visual Room at Cobequid Educational Centre, Truro commencing at 6:30 p.m.

Present

Kaaren Barkhouse
George Bruce
John English, 7:00 p.m.
Lloyd Gibbs
Jim Grue
John Henderson
Tina Hurley
Bernie Knockwood
Ron Marks
Marilyn Murray
David Myles
Robert Parker
Mary Stevenson
Marilyn Thompson
Trudy Thompson

In Attendance

Karen Casey
Ann Hamilton-Wood
Elmer MacDonald
Gary Miller
Brian Murphy
Robert Renouf
Dale Sabean
Helene Smith
Harry Munro
Bruce MacIntosh
Nancy Mosher

Absent

Cheryl Cutler, with regrets

Chair Mary Stevenson called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. She stated that Sunday and Monday (April 16 and 17) School Board

Chairs and Superintendents met in Halifax with Department of Education officials. She asked Elmer MacDonald to give a summary of where we go from here.

Prior to Mr. MacDonald speaking, Chair Stevenson asked that School Advisory Council Chairs remain behind in the same room for a meeting with Lawrence Ryan.

Superintendent, Elmer MacDonald, gave a chronology of meetings pertaining to the 2000-2001 Budget as follows:

April 11

Board Chairs, Superintendents and Directors of Finance met with the Deputy Minister to receive profile sheets outlining funding for the fiscal year 2000-2001.

April 12

Board Members were provided with a copy of the profile sheets and a preliminary overview by the Superintendent expressing grave concern about the impact on our system of a \$7.6 million shortfall.

April 14

Board Chair, Superintendents and Directors of Finance were advised of scheduled meetings on the 16th and 17th of April.

April 16 (2:00 p.m.)

Superintendents met to compare impact statements.

April 16 (4:30 p.m.)

Superintendents met with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union Executive

April 16 (6:00 p.m.)

Superintendents, Board Chairs, Nova Scotia School Boards Association personnel and Directors of Finance met to discuss the budget impact on school systems and prepare a provincial reaction to the budget.

April 17

Board Chairs and NSSBA personnel met with the Minister of Education.

Superintendents and Directors of Finance met with the Deputy Minister and Department of Education staff.

April 19

Emergency School Board meeting to discuss the preliminary impact of the budget on the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board.

Mr. MacDonald then reviewed the handout entitled, "Budget 2000 ~ Devastation of the Education System" [copy on file] which was put together on Sunday evening by the Superintendents, Board Chairs, NSSBA personnel and Directors of Finance. In reviewing this handout, Mr. MacDonald indicated that approximate figures were used.

Mr. MacDonald also reviewed another handout entitled, "Teachers' Workforce Adjustment Options", presented by the Department of Education [copy on file].

In continuing with his report, Mr. MacDonald cited the impact of this budget on our board in terms of dollars, showing a shortfall of \$7,464,500 and stating that the Board is required to approve a balanced budget. He went on to cite where proposed reductions might fall.

In concluding his report, Mr. MacDonald indicated

that it is critical that the School Board approve a staffing formula so schools can be advised of the number of teachers they can expect next year;

this has to happen before next Thursday, (April 27) if the Board is able to meet its contract obligations regarding the layoff of permanent contract teachers;

staff will be prepared to recommend a staffing level to the Board by next Tuesday (April 25) night ~ "In Camera" first and publicly as soon as possible thereafter;

the figures have not varied since the first announcement.

Prior to opening questions from the floor, Board members were given the opportunity to comment and/or ask questions as follows:

With these cuts, we will not be able to keep the inclusion philosophy which the board had worked so hard to develop successfully

Our kids will lose tremendously

Not prepared to tear this system apart ~ we have a moral commitment to provide at least a decent education to our children

Refuse to vote for a budget that will rip hell out of this system ~ this board worked very hard over the past three years to implement such programs as Tech Ed, B/E/S/T, etc.

Suggestions were made to change the timelines for teacher cuts

The School Boards had no input into the budget preparation [when Boards asked to participate, there was no response from the Department]

There is a need to reconcile the information given to the School Boards with that announced in the press

Concern was expressed with regard to special education, students at risk, etc. and cuts to same

There was no rationale given for cutting at the Junior/Senior High School level

No other information was given to the School Boards

We have a large number of term contract teachers who are replacing teachers who have been out on various leaves and are planning to return and a large number of teachers who are requesting various leaves

In regard to teacher cuts, programs must be considered

Bruce MacIntosh noted that there are legal implications to be considered "In Camera" in terms of not accepting or conforming to the budget

Concern was expressed with the dismantling of the School

Board or undermining the educational system

Mr. MacDonald noted that he had just received another invitation from the Deputy Minister asking to reconvene the Education Funding Review Work Group on April 26.

Questions/comments from the floor included:

Steve Proctor (Chronicle Herald) cited the information from the Strait Board refusing to accept the budget and asked if that were an option for the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board. Mary Stevenson noted that this board has not considered it at this time.

Stuart Logan (Chair of the West Pictou School Advisory Council) agreed with the timeline issue and went on to speak about the provincial debt and asked where else would the government get the money and stating that there has never been enough money for education.

Kerry Rowe (parent) expressed appreciation to Elmer MacDonald for the stand that he has taken on behalf of our students. She indicated that the timelines are ridiculous and further asked how parents can fight back against the bully, John Hamm? A suggestion was made that the School Advisory Council sit with their MLA's.

Sandy Barrett (parent from East Pictou) asked what the CCRSB thinks about student walkouts. Mary Stevenson said that personally she would never encourage students to walk out.

John Sipos (parents from Maitland) indicated that if cut must be made, they should start with administration and the extra five buildings that the board using for offices. Terry Matheson, who has a formal education from the province of Nova Scotia gave seven alternate suggestions for funding education.

Debbie Reid (parent) asked a question of Bruce MacIntosh with regard to the fire code and whether the Board would encourage breaking the law by having 50 students in a classroom. Bruce MacIntosh stated that the Board has an obligation to provide student and teacher safety; one of the many factors that board must wrestle with. In response to a question about school closure, Mr. MacDonald indicated that we do not anticipate any school closures. She further asked about bus runs if some drivers are cut and it was noted

that it is quite possible that children will be on school buses for a longer period of time or have longer waiting period for buses. She also commented on the P3 schools running over budget by \$20M, the same amount as the deficit ~ interesting!

Emily Scammell (first year University student) stated that she learned self confidence and asked what students can do other than walk out to show their displeasure in the budget. Chair Stevenson suggested letters to the Editor, MLA's, etc.

Brian Bevens (student at Bible Hill Junior High School) stated that he and others who walked out earlier in the day did so on their own and were not encouraged to do so by teachers or anyone else.

Janet Savary (parent and School Advisory Council member) asked about the impact on schools being built. Mr. MacDonald stated that there is no impact on the schools being built; that the capital money is for capital repairs such as replacing roofs, etc. He further explained that the money for bus purchases has always been more than required and the balance would be put to this use but with the new budget, if there were a surplus after the purchase of buses, it must be returned. She noted that our schools are not maintained to the standard they should be.

Lloyd Rector (parent and School Advisory Council Chair) stated that we must keep our teachers in the schools and further asked the Board Solicitor to explain the ramifications at the public meeting. Mr. MacIntosh stated that it is not the time ~ this must be discussed "In Camera".

Ashley Myers (Grade 9 student) stated that she is concerned about the large class sizes and the fact that she wants to be known by her name and not a number. Mrs. Stevenson assured her that she would never become a number because she came forward and spoke about this.

Bert Cail emphasized that we have a system next to none and that we would like to keep it that way.

Gail Dickie (Bible Hill Junior High School Advisory Council Chair) asked if the Board would consider meeting again with the Minister of Education. Mrs. Stevenson noted that it was suggested and they would meet again and that an invitation had been received to reconvene the Education Funding Work Group on April 26.

Ralph Welton (Warden of Cumberland County) stated that it is ironic that this budget with its cuts to education should come down during Education Week. He also asked if the School Boards had considered saying, "We are resigning in mass ~ you solve the problem." Mary Stevenson said she could not speak for all but she personally had thought of it.

Sam MacDougall (parent and grandparent) stated that it is unbelievable that the Minister and Premier don't know the facts of the matter. He made a request to the School Advisory Councils to make every attempt to organize and take up the challenge to make education a priority for the students we serve.

John MacDonell (Hants East MLA, teacher on leave and parent of 4 children, ages 8 to 13) stated that there is a need to be fiscally prudent but there is also a need for sensibility. He further stated that government should take reasonable steps and save some services and cited the fact that the Government forgave Michelin more than \$20M. He suggested that parents, school advisory councils, etc. camp out on the steps of MLA's homes and offices and make use of the opposition and politicians.

Chair Stevenson thanked everyone for coming and stated that another meeting would be forthcoming and would be announced.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned on motion of Marilyn Murray at 8:12 p.m.

Helene C. Smith,
Board Secretary

Mary Stevenson,
Board Chair
