

Oral French alternatives heard by board

Oral French will not be dropped from the curriculum in elementary grades 6, 7 and 8 in the Cochrane-Iroquois Falls Board of Education schools.

At the regular meeting of the board, March 7, in Cochrane trustees of the elementary panel decided that Oral French programs will be left up to the co-ordinating principals of the Cochrane, Iroquois Falls and Matheson. Alternate programs for these three areas were suggested to board members Monday night.

Co-ordinating principals Dennis Draves of Cochrane, A.J. Taylor of Iroquois Falls and Bernie Jones of Matheson, each suggested programs to improve upon the present Oral French program without eliminating it. They had been asked previously to investigate the feasibility of alternatives and report back to the board for a final decision.

According to David D. Powell director of education, because of enrolments, the elementary panel of the C.-I.F. Board of Education is facing severe financial limitations. Mr. Powell suggested that one of the

means of cutting expenditures was the possible abandoning of the structured twenty minutes per day Oral French program in grades 6, 7 and 8. He asked that less expensive alternatives be considered in its place.

"Oral French has been successful up to grade 5 under the present system," said Mr. Powell. "After that it turns kids off because the same approach is used and it is continued for too many years."

At the February 21 meeting of the board held in Iroquois Falls Secondary School a delegation of parents turned up to protest what they thought was the removal of Oral French in the senior elementary grades. One parent expressed it in a letter: Knowledge of French is essential for children today. To renroll (her) children in Immersion French was impossible because she felt they couldn't cope. But she didn't want them to drop French, particularly during the three years just before entering high school. It was pointed out during the meeting that no prerequisite is required for grade nine French.

The alternate suggestions

from the principals were heard Monday night.

Bernie Jones suggested that Oral French in Matheson be offered as an elective. This would offer a 1½ hour session in Oral French for grades 6, 7, and 8 probably on Friday afternoons. It would be a 'cultural' approach to the language which, said Mr. Jones could be described as 'negative' at this point. The program would include French Canadian folk songs, dances and drama. It would be given in both French and English and probably be an informal class.

For Iroquois Falls Public schools Allan Taylor said that the alternative for grades 1 to 5

would be, first, four 25 minute periods instead of five 20 minute periods. This would give the 100 minutes necessary for the Ministry of Education grants and free existing staff members to concentrate on 6, 7 and 8 for approximately one hour each Friday. The actual content of the course has yet to be decided said Mr. Taylor, but it would be a 'viable, interesting' course.

Dennis Draves of Cochrane suggested that teachers do not consider the present 20 minute program now being offered a success. Over the course of the coming year he would develop a modified program. Trustee Ron Deck of Cochrane read a letter from A. Murphy, principal of

Cochrane's Commando School, supporting Mr. Draves.

Board members agreed that viable alternatives had been heard and the three co-ordinating principals could pursue them.

"We must get word to the public about this," said L. Cutten, acting chairman. It was decided to invite the public to the next board meeting which will be held in Iroquois Falls Secondary School March 28, not the 21st as scheduled. Should any parent wish to attend and hear the alternatives and to have a say on the question of Oral French in the senior elementary grades they may do so.