

Move to Hastings Board nixed

Whitney parents not interested in transfer

By Henry Bury

The Intelligencer

The Sir James Whitney School community is not interested in having its deaf education program transferred to Quinte-area school boards.

Instead, it supports maintaining the "status quo" relationship with the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training or, failing that, the establishment of a new provincial agency to oversee its seven schools for the deaf, blind and learning disabled.

That's the consensus of concerned individuals who attended a public forum Wednesday night at the Dundas Street West school. Several of the 200 in attendance voiced opinions on the three proposed options on the future directions of provincial and demonstration schools to the special ministry review team assigned to gather public input.

Wednesday's forum was the first of 11 planned for various parts of the province, until Feb. 17. Cities holding forums include Ottawa (tonight), Milton, Brantford, London, North Bay, Sudbury, Toronto and Thunder Bay.

The three options being studied by the review team are: maintain the current arrangement whereby the education ministry directly supports the seven provincial schools; transfer deaf and blind programs to local school boards; or establish a new provincial board or agency to look after provincial schools.

Several parents ruled out the second option of transferring responsibility to local school boards.

Susan Young, parent of a deaf

child and president of a stakeholders committee at Whitney, acknowledged school boards are already under-funded and adding responsibilities for deaf education will even make it worse.

"I really like the third option. It's the most viable and creative alternative. Option two (transferring responsibility to local school boards) is something most parents aren't interested in," Young said.

Said one parent of a junior school student, "Option two

Malkowski said through an interpreter the question before the review team is "how best to provide the programs to meet the students' needs" while, at the same time, ensuring the financial viability of each of the schools.

The MPP said the first option of maintaining the status quo is simply a "risk" since schools will have to rely on future elected governments for their continued existence.

As well, with dwindling government grants, there could be major funding cuts to their various operations.

But with the third option — creation of a new provincial body to oversee provincial schools — schools will not only receive more autonomy in their operations but they won't be dependent on future governments for their survival.

With that option, he said provincial schools could solicit outside funding from private companies and social service departments to enhance their programs, rather than relying strictly on government grants.

"Economically, changes have been forced upon us. The government just doesn't have the money it used to," he stressed.

The review team will analyze comments from the 11 public forums and then prepare a final report to the education minister. A final decision on the future direction of provincial schools will then be made sometime in June.

The government intends on proceeding with the restructuring in September of 1995.



MPP Gary Malkowski discusses issues with parents.

would cause the eventual demise of deaf schools, like Sir James Whitney."

She then asked if the third option — establishing a new provincial body to look after schools for the deaf, blind and learning disabled — would mean that students would still remain at Whitney from pre-school to high school graduation.

Gary Malkowski, parliamentary assistant to Education Minister David Cooke and the only deaf MPP, told the parent, "Yes, the answer is yes. That would happen."

Earlier, he reiterated the minister's comments that "there is no plan in the works to close any of the provincial schools. I would hope you keep that in mind."