

School boards have mixed reaction to ruling

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The chairman of the Renfrew County Roman Catholic Separate School Board is "ecstatic" and his counterpart at the Renfrew County Board of Education isn't surprised at last week's ruling of the Ontario Court of Appeal that legislation extending full funding to Catholic secondary education is constitutional.

"I'm very pleased that it has turned out this way," said RCRCSSB chairman Joe Trimm. "Of course it would have been nice if the decision would have been unanimous."

The Court of Appeal ruled 3-2 in favour of the constitutionality of the legislation known as Bill 30.

"We have always believed that full funding is constitutional," chairman Trimm said. "The decision means that we can continue with the plans we have made and that the next installment of funding will be on schedule."

RCBE chairman Ron Grenier predicted the months to come will "be interesting" noting the 3-2 split decision indicates there "were mixed emotions on it."

Education Minister Sean Conway has expressed the hope the legislation can be in place in time for the next school year in September.

Both chairman Trimm and RCRCSSB Director of Education Frank Turner are encouraged by the minister's resolve.

"We're expecting that the legislation will have been passed by the time students return to school in September," Mr. Turner said. "This will give us new security, and enable us to work better with the RCBE and the CFB Petawawa board."

However, chairman Grenier isn't so sure Mr. Conway can meet the time frame he has set.

"I don't know whether he can be successful at it," the RCBE chairman said. "The opposition will likely look at it a little stronger this time and it'll go back to committee. I really think it'll end up in the Supreme Court (of Canada)."

Chairman Trimm agrees an appeal is forthcoming and indeed that process has been initiated by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and the Metropolitan Toronto School Board.

"I don't know much about the appeal to the higher court, but we will go ahead as if it is constitutional," he said.

Mr Turner is not concerned about an appeal nor is the chairman of the

RCRCSSB's Completion Committee Terry Mulvihill.

"Those who are appealing are simply taking advantage of the judicial process," stated Mr. Turner. "I'll admit I didn't lose a lot of sleep over the appeal in the Ontario court for that matter".

"So far that situation is hypothetical," stated Mr. Mulvihill, who does not view an appeal as a serious threat to the work of the committee. "Those who are considering the appeal want to study the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal before they decide how to proceed. Their decision on how to proceed may be weeks or months away, and the higher court's decision could take a year."

Want Changes

Now that a legal decision has been made, the RCBE hopes some alterations will be made in the legislation by the time it reaches Queen's Park.

"We all know it's going to come," chairman Grenier said of full funding. "In what form we don't know. I think Bill 30 will be changed dramatically."

Director of Education Howard Hempstead concurs.

"Now that there's been a decision," Mr. Hempstead said, "we would hope that if we're proceeding with Bill 30, the government will make significant changes in Bill 30 that we have been recommending all along."

In a brief submitted to a provincial legislative committee in Ottawa last summer, the RCBE outlined several of its concerns.

They included declining enrollment, the "school within a school" concept proposed by the RCRCSSB, a provision in the legislation which stipulates ratepayers forward tax dollars to either one system or the other with no option, and the future of board trustees who represent the interests of separate school ratepayers.

"Bill 30 needs some very significant changes to make it work in Renfrew County," Mr. Hempstead said.

Discussions?

RCRCSSB chairman Trimm said negotiations with the public board on implementation will continue. He feels the court ruling will give a much more practical base for

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discussions with the RCBE.

Mr. Mulvihill agrees with this assessment.

"So far, the RCBE has wanted to discuss plans only up to grade 11," he said. "They wanted the constitutional issue to be settled by the courts before they discuss grades 12 and 13. We expect they will be open to negotiations related to those grades now."

While it's probable discussions between the boards will carry on, whether or not the RCBE will change its "one year at a time" approach to negotiations remains to be seen.

The public board is on record of not only wanting the constitutionality of full funding to be established but also the enactment of the legislation before it proceeds past year-by-year negotiations.

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Chairman Grenier said he really didn't expect a ruling for a couple of weeks, but last Tuesday's announcement practically coincides with the full board meeting in Pembroke tonight (Wednesday).

Mr. Hempstead said the full funding issue was not on the agenda, but chairman Grenier predicted it would be discussed

Cobden, Ont KOJ 1K0

Opeongo High School principal, Don

After 18 years manning the helm, Don Whillans has resigned from his position as principal of Opeongo High School.

Mr. Whillans submitted his letter of resignation to the Renfrew County Board of Education last week. He will, however, continue with his responsibilities as principal until the end of the current school year.

He began teaching 35 years ago at the old Cobden and District High School, and he has spent his entire career working in Renfrew County.

Mr. Whillans told the Sun last Friday that he's enjoyed his years of teaching. But, at 58 years of age, he believes it's time to give someone else a chance in the principal's chair,

and to perhaps make room at the other end of the employment chain for the hiring of a young teacher.

"It's not easy to leave, but it's time. Let somebody else carry the torch."

Carrying the torch for Opeongo High School is something which Don Whillans has always taken a great pride in. In fact, he was instrumental in introducing the Cobden and Eganville school boards in discussions which led to the building of the new high school.

Opeongo High School has been suffering from declining enrolment for several years, and the implementation of full funding for Catholic

high schools threatens to reduce the student population even further. However, Mr. Whillans believes that the school will survive intact.

"It will prevail in spite of all the controversies," he says. Any solution to enrolment difficulties, he adds, must consider the future of the students first and foremost. "Anything that limits the potential of the students is unacceptable."

Raised in Ottawa, Mr. Whillans graduated from the University of Guelph and the University of Toronto before coming to Cobden in 1951. He began teaching at Cobden and District High School, and he later married one of his first students.