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Separate board attempts to explain full-funding situation

The Renfrew County Roman Catholic Separate School Board has published an eight page newspaper to tell ratepayers in the area "what the situation is" in regards to full funding for separate schools and public education.

The Separate School Reporter is being distributed in Pembroke area newspapers and through schools and church parishes.

Dave Marcus, the director of finance for the board, said Bill 30, the provincial legislation that gives full funding to Roman Catholic separate schools, means that Catholic ratepayers have equality.

He said the county separate school board has no desire to destroy the public education system. Marcus said the public schools are a good education system. But, Marcus added, many "Catholics want a faith integrated program."

"I feel both boards can provide good education," Marcus said, pointing out that students will have a choice of the two systems.

Co-operation

He said a key to the issue now is co-operation between the two Renfrew County boards and Marcus said he believes that the "men and women of good will (in both boards) can accomplish this."

In an interview last week, Marcus talked about some of the issues. He said that the numbers of students are sufficient in Pembroke to allow each board to have its own high school. He suggested that the Renfrew County Board of Education can afford to give up one of its high schools in Pembroke. "It won't hurt their quality of education," he said.

Public needs information

Marcus said there is now a lot of information that the public does not have. "It is a complex issue," he said explaining why the separate board has published the Reporter.

The newspaper insert explains what the separate board has to offer. He said it will give all of the ratepayers an opportunity to choose whatever system they want.

"We (the separate board) thinks the public has to know," Marcus said.

The Reporter is just the beginning of a continuing process of publicity, Marcus said. He said that there will be literature published for other areas of the county as well.

With new education requirements, Marcus said the separate board has to have the public funding. "We have to have public supported Catholic high schools," he said. "Our mandate is to supply education."

Marcus said that full funding is the law and it has the support of all three political parties in Ontario.

He said it is the result of full funding that the separate board is interested in, "regardless of how it was achieved."

The Reporter includes a letter from Leo Buckley, the chairman of the separate board.

In the letter, Buckley says, "There are obviously differences of opinion to overcome but I am optimistic that good will and everyone's desire to provide a quality education to all the students in the county will prevail."

"The Separate School Board believes that the public must be kept informed of the Board's efforts in education and the issues that confront us. For this reason, the board has launched this new publication, The Separate School Reporter."

Five pages of the Reporter describe various programs and types of education offered by the Separate School Board, two of the pages are dedicated to the issues in Pembroke and one page is headed, "Catholic education in Renfrew County needs you!"

The Pembroke Story

In the Pembroke issues section, called "The Pembroke Story" it points out that full funding does not mean a new Catholic high school will have to be built in the city. "Statistics show that there is ample room in the two existing public schools (Champlain and Fellowes) for all secondary pupils in the Pembroke area and for that reason the separate school has requested that one of the public schools be transferred to the separate school board."

It says that all ratepayers paid for the public high schools in Pembroke. "Up to December 31, 1986, all ratepayers paid secondary school taxes to the public board. In addition much of the capital cost of these buildings were covered by grants from the provincial government and provincial funds come from all ratepayers," it says.

It explains that the separate board needs one of the high schools because Bill 30 states that a separate school board must be able to provide a "viable secondary school education" and this means the separate school board must be able to provide a full range of secondary programs. "To do this secondary accommodation is needed," the Reporter says.

The Reporter says presently 42 per cent of all secondary pupils in the Pembroke area are the children of separate school supporters, approximately 900 pupils, which the board feels justifies moving into one of the public high schools.

It also comments on a public school board suggestion that it would give up Pembroke Senior Public School to the separate board.

PSPS is inappropriate

"The public school board decided in 1970, that the PSPS facility was an 'inappropriate' facility for secondary pupils. Seventeen years later it certainly is still an 'inappropriate' facility for secondary students."

The Reporter says that, if the public board gives up a high school in Pembroke, it will not lower the quality of education. "It will allow each board to offer full secondary programs. There will be healthy competition as well as healthy co-operation by both boards to supply the best possible education."

It also points out that, under Bill 30, all students have open access to secondary schools which means the children of public school supporters may choose to attend a separate high school or the children of separate school supporters may choose to attend a public high school without the payment of fees.

The pages dedicated to the issues in Pembroke are summed up in a box that says the separate board believes:

- The Pembroke and area community deserves two properly equipped secondary schools.

- Separate school supporters have the right to a full range of secondary school programs for their children in a Catholic high school.

- The separate school board's plans will treat all students fairly, treat all ratepayers fairly, enhance secondary education for all pupils, be cost effective and be in the best interests of the whole community.