

Board Report

A public eye on education

Henry Wisniewski

The Commission on Declining Enrolment in Ontario, chaired by Robert Jackson, a former director of the Ontario Institute for studies in education, predicts that student enrolment in our school systems will decline drastically over the next few years. It is estimated that by 1990, there will be 1.6 million children in our schools. This is a 16 per cent drop from the present enrolment of 1.9 million.

Mr. Jackson also says that more than 6,500 teaching jobs will be lost.

With the above figures in hand, the Jackson Commission goes on to say that teachers should be tested every five years to determine if they still qualify to do their jobs. This should supposedly be done to insure quality of education in a period of declining enrolment. A chorus of "yays" and "nays" to this proposal is heard from sources stationed on opposite sides of the fence. And any value which may have been found in discussing such a recommendation is lost.

Yes, there is declining enrolment in our educational system and probably a certain number of teachers will be declared surplus over the next few years and released from their positions. If some teachers are let go, how do we ensure that the best ones remain in the system. Five year certification seems like the dreamer's answer to reality. Instead of maintaining quality of education, it may in fact only promote the creation of more bureaucratic structures and mean greater control by the government in order to carry such testing out.

Presently a teacher seeking certification remains on probation status for two years during which evaluations are made as to that person's ability to qualify in the teaching profession. This initial screening process seems to work well as people not meeting minimum qualifications are weeded out. When a teacher moves to a higher classification level or if problems are detected in performance, evaluations are again carried out. However, it does not appear that systematic evaluations of performance are made regularly on an annual basis. If we want to preserve quality, performance evaluation may be the more logical course to follow rather than a five year certification process. Such evaluations carried out by one's supervisor compiled with periodic visits by a school board inspector would certainly keep teachers on their toes.

Criticisms are often heard about the incompetency of some teachers. But it should be realized that the inadequate employee is only one side of the problem. If poorly qualified teachers are in our school system, the main responsibility

lies with the Board of Education.

It is the school board that should take the initiative and begin a dialogue with the teachers' federations to develop an equitable and fair system of performance evaluation if the present one is not all it should be.

Guidelines for standards of performance can be set down by the Ministry of Education with local boards, ensuring that qualitative levels are maintained. Proper and regular performance evaluations will mean that when teachers have to go because of a surplus situation, the best qualified will remain regardless of seniority.

Declining Enrolment and Demographic Change

Everyone nowadays speaks of declining enrolment. Though this may appear to be the reality, now we must carefully weigh any long distance predictions. Declining enrolment over the next 30 or 40 years assumes that birth, death, and immigration patterns will remain constant. This cannot be assured. It is doubtful that we shall again see in our lifetimes the "baby boom" that occurred in the mid forties, but increases in birth rates could again take place over the next several decades. Before we dismantle our educational systems, this factor plus research in alternative uses of school facilities should be sufficiently explored.

Dr. Blossom T. Wigdor, a member of the Science Council of Canada, made the following comments in his recent paper entitled Implications of the Demographic Changes in the Canadian Population over the next 25 years (1978-2003 A.D.).

"Although the next 25 years may not see drastic changes in the demand for elementary education there are some indications of increases in adult education demands both because of rapid technological change which may require more frequent updating of skills, and possibly more leisure with a demand for learning facilities. Premature (and excessive) cutting of education budgets may create serious dislocations and eventual shortages, and what is needed is more careful analysis of what levels of funding for education would be necessary to maintain reasonable volume, composition and quality."

It appears that actions relating to declining enrolment, whether release of teachers or closing of schools, be handled in a cautious and national fashion. In this process, all parties in the educational partnership should be involved: the administrator, the trustee, the teacher and the taxpayer. Even though some winding down of the educational system may be necessary over the next few years, we better be sure that what is done away with is truly not needed.

Horticulture Club held awards night

The annual awards night was held at Trinity Parish Hall on Monday, November 27, and due to the stormy conditions the turnout was not as big as usual.

The meeting opened with Mrs. Kay Island at the piano for the singing of O'Canada. President Gordon Smith welcomed everyone and a special welcome to our guests, Clarence Tink, District Four Director, and Mrs. Tink; Mr. and Mrs. Murray McFiggin of Cobourg and Mrs. Pallance, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Mayne who is visiting from England.

The minutes were read, treasurer's report given and after a brief discussion it was decided to pay \$25.00 towards a float in the Santa Claus Parade to be prepared by the Kinsmen.

After a proposed slate of officers was presented by Cecil Reed, past president, Mr. Tink conducted the election of officers. Past President, Cecil Reed; President, Gordon Smith; 1st Vice President, H. C. Linstead; 2nd Vice President, Harry Mayne; Secretary, Amy Gresham; Treasurer, Lyn Mitchell; One Year Directors, Cicely Scroggs, Gordon Munro, Helen Rose, Cora Reed, and Marjorie Rutherford; Two Year Directors are Harold Black, Mrs. Harry Mayne, Mrs. Wayne Rusk, Mrs. Robert Griffith and Mrs. M. Tozek.

Mr. Tink called all the officers to the front, presented them to the audience and congratulated each one. He wished the Society members a happy Christmas and successful New Year. He also announced that a judging school will be held in this district for two days in April, May and June.

The door prize donated by Hazel Roberts, was won by Mrs. Ida Mills.

Mrs. George Gummer led the list of point winners for the year winning the Rutherford Trophy (a Canada goose from Hoselton Studios). Isabel Gummow won the Bank of Commerce Rose Bowl and Gordon Smith, the Harnden Rose Bowl for the best African Violet.

Gift certificates for high points went to George Gummer and Cecil Reed (from Simpson Sears). Gordon Smith from Cruickshanks; Elizabeth Rutherford from McConnells and Amy Gresham from Sheridan Nurseries. With prize money from George Hees, Russell Rowe, Blair Heeney and \$25.00 from Port Hope Society in appreciation of George Gummer's services as Judge, many exhibitors received a bonus in addition to their prize money.

Mr. Maurice Smith gave a program which was a decided contrast to the weather outside. She showed slides of a garden on the small island of Franada in the Caribbean, showing its development from the construction of the house overlooking the ocean to its present beauty seven years later with many closeups of some of the tropical blossoms. He was thanked by Gordon Smith for giving us such an enjoyable experience.

The meeting ended with a special Christmas lunch served by Cora Reed and her group—sandwiches, delicious cookies, jellies and Christmas cake.

Next meeting in January takes the form of a pot luck dinner. Hope to see you all there.