

SCBE contests, prudence, legitimacy

Last Wednesday, the committee of the Ontario Legislature hearing opinions about the provincial government's plan to give the province's Roman Catholic separate school boards more money, to enable those school boards to have Grade 11 and 12 in their high schools, were given the opinion of the Simcoe County Board of Education. The Simcoe County Board of Education opposes the giving of more money to the country's Roman Catholic Separate school board.

The text of the SCBE submission, edited for space, follows.

We recognize that our presentation comes at a time when many voices have been heard by the committee, when the constitutional issue is before the Court of Appeal, when measures to provide interim funding are in place and when the issue of trustee representation has been temporarily addressed. We wish, nevertheless, to add our views to those of others who are opposed to the extension of funding to Roman Catholic secondary schools and who are concerned about the effects of this decision on the quality of education in this province and in our county.

We recognize as well the limits of a consultative process that seeks advice after the fact. We find it difficult, Mr. chairman, to take much solace in being able to address the mechanics of the implementation of a policy to which we are fundamentally opposed.

The failure to provide for prior public debate on one of the most significant policy decisions in Ontario's political history has caused a very significant portion of Ontario's educational community to become alienated from its government. The committee is well aware that the ability of an elected body in a democracy to govern and to provide leadership is intimately dependent on a high level of mutual trust between legislators and electors. It is regrettable, therefore, that the trust of so many has been damaged by the promotion of bad policy and by what can most charitably be termed an unfortunate political process. We trust that if some form of the proposed legislation is to prevail, the role of this committee will provide more than a cathartic exercise for those who are upset by the legislation. We trust also that the minds of members of the committee are not lost to the practical difficulties of the 12th year of the 1970s or to the folly of an entrenched through public funded state religious schooling.

We contest both the prudence and

legitimacy of extended funding and by resolution of the board support the position of the Metropolitan Toronto School Board on the constitutional issues. Although we have co-operated with our co-terminous separate board, we cannot support decisions made locally and approved provincially which will see the proliferation of small secondary schools in Simcoe County. In this latter regard, it is unfortunate that the board's willingness to co-operate with its co-terminous board and with the planning and implementation commission has been construed by the chairman of the commission to mean both explicit acceptance and implicit approval of the policy to extend funding and of the planning of our co-terminous board. Neither attitude is held by the board which sees as its first duty the delivery, promotion and protection of public education in Simcoe County.

Our presentation does not provide comment on every aspect of the

which it employs a staff of approximately 3,200. Our secondary schools have long provided a board range of programs with a tradition of excellent educational service to their communities, happily and successfully accommodating both Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic families.

Until recently, the separate school board in Simcoe County has operated two small secondary schools, one in Midland and one in Barrie.

This September, four additional Roman Catholic secondary schools were opened, in each of Orillia, Collingwood, Bradford and Tottenham. Each of these schools is located in a community where there is adequate accommodation in the public secondary schools for all students, with the exception of Tottenham where no public secondary school exists. These new schools are quite small and one may easily conclude that unless there is significant growth in the county, they will continue to be

will be academic schools, leaving to the public schools system the high-cost programs and hard-to-serve students? Our experience is that unless money is no object, these small schools will find it a challenge simply to meet the demands of academic programming within the limits of responsible funding.

Furthermore, if no incentives exist for a separate board to provide a full range of programs it may be in the financial interest of separate school ratepayers to leave the provision of high-cost programs as the responsibility of the public board.

We suggest, as have others, that Roman Catholic school boards which share equally to ensure the availability of a broad range of secondary programs, if necessary by purchase agreements with public school boards. We would find it objectionable if our co-terminous board, having been granted access to public funds for secondary purposes, should decide to restrict its programs almost

school boards will be able to provide appropriate programs and services to their resident pupils without increasing an additional local tax burden.

Simcoe County is typical of boards in the province in that our secondary expenditures exceed the provincial grant ceilings. We believe, therefore, that the automatic transfer of the assessment of secondary separate ratepayers to our co-terminous board will mean an increase in taxes to our public school ratepayers if our current level of service is to be maintained since we will be required to fund our over-ceiling expenditures from a reduced assessment base.

Public school ratepayers must not be expected in this manner to subsidize the expansion of the separate school system. Can we assume that the government will undertake to revise the general legislative grants to guarantee that an additional local tax burden will not be incurred by public boards?

The expansion of the

systems who may face redundancy because of a transfer of students to separate schools. We support the position that separate boards must hire staff currently employed by public boards and agree that the final legislation must contain a protection procedure to preclude discriminatory hiring practices.

Simcoe County is an example of a situation where the transfer of students and of staff has gone quite smoothly. Ten teachers whom the separate board were required to hire from among our staff were found through a process of voluntary transfers and arrangements were all quite congenially effected. Nevertheless, our co-terminous board has made it clear that it prefers not to employ non-Roman Catholic personnel. Indeed, it was only at the insistence of the planning and implementation commission that the separate board finally generated a policy statement agreeing to the employment of non-Roman Catholic teachers. We understand the motivation for such preferences but human rights issues related to non-discriminatory employment practices must have precedence over religion if the Roman Catholic community wishes to have the benefit of public funding for its schools.

With regard to the staff transfer provisions set out in section 136 (1) we have two major concerns, both of which we realize have been addressed by a number of presenters.

1. Bill 30 may cause public boards to assume on-going financial responsibility for staff who are affected by transfer clauses. This would occur specifically in the requirement of public boards to retain, perhaps indefinitely, certain redundant staff and also in the responsibility of public boards to maintain portions of a former employee's accumulated sick leave credits. In our view the economics related to staff transfer lie clearly with the government and the receiving board, not with either the transferring employee or the public school board. Staff who transfer must take with them both salary and benefits which must be protected through government guarantees until they are matched or exceeded by the receiving board.

Furthermore, the responsibility for retaining staff who do not match the qualifications of teachers required by the co-terminous board must not be left with the public board. We find this notion of legislated overstaffing unacceptable and stress that public school ratepayers must not be asked to contribute to

this subsidization of Roman Catholic schools.

2. We agree that a co-terminous separate board must hire from the public board based on the number of students who transfer and the public board's staffing ratio. However, Bill 30 as it stands will make collective bargaining unnecessarily more difficult due both to difficulties related to identifying specific persons to be designated for transfer and to the inclusion of a provincial arbitration process.

As other presenters have suggested, the designation of positions rather than persons will ease these difficulties. A combination of voluntary transfers and the identification of staff to transfer through redundancy procedures negotiated between the public board and its employee will generate the staff which the co-terminous separate board will be required to hire. In effect, the most junior teachers who are redundant annually will comprise the "list" of teachers transferring to the separate board.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION

The provisions in legislation for the continuation of the planning and implementation commission are unacceptable. While our chief concerns are related to the over-broad powers and authority vested in the commission, we want to note that the costs of another provincial bureaucracy and the costs of the inevitable hearings are alone sufficient to question the prudence of retaining the commission as a mechanism in the management of the educational enterprise in Ontario.

We therefore are at pains to reconcile the message of projections of additional costs that will be necessary to support two parallel secondary school systems. Since no new sources of provincial revenue have been identified in the planning we wonder from where these additional funds will come.

We have heard, too, the promises of government that public boards will not be financially disadvantaged through the extension of full funding to Roman Catholic separate schools. We would like to think that this will be the case, that students in our elementary and secondary schools will not see their quality of education diminished through a loss of revenue or an increase in costs related to the establishment of Roman Catholic secondary schools. Our past experience with provincial funding for education leads us to believe otherwise. Indeed, we are firmly convinced that there

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proposed legislation with which we have concern. Rather it is focused on issues most pertinent to our local situation, particularly with regard to issues of finance. It will be helpful to the committee to have some brief background information on Simcoe County.

SIMCOE COUNTY BACKGROUND

Key factors in the educational enterprise in Simcoe County are size, diversity and distance. When the board was formed in 1969 it amalgamated school boards which previously existed in 37 separate urban and rural communities. Geographically, the county is one of the largest in Ontario, so that most decisions related to the provision of educational services are made more difficult by the significant distances between schools, particularly at the secondary level. In fact, the transportation of our students is a major undertaking involving some 21,000 students transported a total of 49,500 kilometres daily. In terms of enrolment, the board is one of the largest in Ontario, providing education for 25,000 elementary students and 15,000 secondary students, representing approximately 85 percent of the total elementary and secondary enrolment in the county. The board operates 15 secondary schools, and 77 elementary schools for

limited both in size and in program.

SMALL SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The board is not without considerable experience in the operation of small secondary schools. There is no doubt that in a small school an excellent program can be provided in a richly intimate environment, but there are obvious physical and economic constraints to offering broad programs of study, particularly in the areas of basic level instruction, and technical and business education. These traditional constraints are made more difficult by the increased demands placed on schools through the requirements of OSIS and Bill 82.

There is considerable information available to the government on the difficulties associated with operating small secondary schools. We question most strongly, therefore, the prudence of committing scarce provincial funds to a duplication of facilities, programs and services when such expenditures will not demonstrably enhance the quality of education now available within the county and indeed may put in jeopardy the viability of small schools operated by the public board.

We question too, whether there will be available in secondary schools operated by our co-terminous board a full range of secondary school programs. Or can we assume that they

exclusively to academic areas. If the legislation is unable to identify provisions to persuade Roman Catholic school boards to accept their program obligations, we strongly recommend that the basis for providing public funds be altered to reflect more clearly the operating costs of a board which provides programs to meet the needs of all its students.

Finally, in this section, we ask the committee to ensure that guidelines for the approval of separate school plans provide for the protection of small public secondary schools in single school communities.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

Since its inception the board has been financially conservative, incurring annually one of the lowest per-pupil costs in the province. We appreciate the need to provide an economical service to our school communities and have diligently endeavoured to do so. In recent years, we have been exhorted by the minister of education to recognize the need for provincial restraint in educational finance, and we have seen in our own county a continuous transfer of costs for education to local municipalities as measures of provincial restraint have been effected from year to year.

The government has indicated that both public and separate

separate system will be accompanied by major demands for capital funding for land, facilities and equipment. We believe additional expenditures in Simcoe County are totally unwarranted since adequate space is available in existing schools. We recommend that restraint in this regard be practised and that the provisions of provincial funds for capital projects fully take into account the existing and prior needs of public boards.

This board provides programs which are unlikely to be available in the separate secondary schools and we are prepared to enter into purchase agreements to make these programs accessible to separate school students. There are, however, differences in costs for the development and provision of various programs, most especially in technical and special education areas. We believe the purchasing board ought to pay fees that reflect the actual program costs and recommend that the committee review carefully the regulations for calculations of tuition fees to ensure that public school ratepayers are not required to subsidize separate boards.

TRANSFER OF STAFF

We appreciate that efforts have been made in Bill 30 to lend protection to teachers in