

Restructuring education, any difference?

by Denise Dicy

OHSWEKEN - Decisions had to be made regarding the future of the Six Nations Education Project (from here on referred to as the Project) and on August 31, Council was forced by time and circumstance to take the educational debate to a political platform in order to come to some resolution on an issue that continues to be a bone of contention for many on Six Nations.

Councillor John Peters was elected to the chair until Chief Steve Williams, who was en route from the airport, could relieve him.

Discussion turned fairly quickly to the issue of restructuring the Education Board.

"Get rid of the Board all together and let the Home and Schools take it" was the sentiment of Councillor Dave Green, making reference to an amendment proposed by Councillor Melba Thomas during the August 25 meeting which called for the recruiting of new board members from each Home and School.

The question of how many people go to these Home and School meetings was lodged by Councillor Dave Johns.

"Hardly any," was the response by Terry Lynn Brant, a parent, former teacher, and potential Board member.

The limitations of the Home and Schools as a base for the Board were pointed out further by Charlie Thomas, who commented that parents had very little to do with the representatives going to the main board, and Larry Green, who said that the "existing mandate of Home and Schools is very limited."

From the restructuring of the Board, discussion turned to the question of whether Norman Jacobs, Rebecca Jamieson, and Claudine VanEvery-Albert would be resigning from, or staying on with, the Project.

"I've made the decision to go back to teaching," said Jamieson. VanEvery-Albert also chose to return to the class room due to the "indecision on the issue of the project."

Jacobs commented that his contract had expired and that further direction would have to come from the Confederacy Council.

The rest of the staff from the Project expressed that whether or not they returned to work in the morning depended on the outcome of today.

The question of whether there was sufficient funding left to continue the Project to the end of the fiscal year without dipping into Council's budget was

brought up by Peters.

There's an existing budget from the Project that can be manipulated to cover any shortages, said Councillor Barb Curley who also sits on the

system attending high school, college, university... "I would like you to think about that we have to fit into a provincial system" for at least 8 years.

"If I.L.T. gets a separate school

"Language and culture should be supplemented by teachings at home if parents feel that the teachers are not doing the measure of Native perspective that they want,"

Steve Williams, Chief Councillor

Education Board and the Project's Steering Committee.

Jamieson also said that there were other monies available to the Project, such as \$120 000 that DIA will make available if negotiations continue.

With it being common knowledge that the community wanted education to remain apolitical, Councillor Winona Johnson asked, "Why is Council making decisions?"

"You twelve people were put in those twelve seats to represent the people. The people are begging you, pleading you, to do something," said Charlie Thomas in response.

Lois Thomas, representing I.L. Thomas School, then brought Council's attention to a letter from the I.L.T. Steering Committee. The letter was a response to Council's question from last week whether I.L.T. would be willing to sit down with the Project and the Board and come to some resolution of their supposed differences.

The letter, reported to represent 65-69% of the I.L.T. families, expressed three points: 1) that the Board is "now seen as an elected body on education under Band Council", 2) that the Steering Committee would rather have the "status quo over the Education Project", and 3) that Council's stamp of approval for I.L.T. to have a separate school board is needed before DIA will provide funding.

"We have nothing to do with electing that body (the Board). We are Six Nations, not a little board of nations," commented Johnson.

Other rebuttals to the I.L.T. letter came from Alton VanEvery, and Councillor Dave Green.

Let's look at it as a life long perspective, said VanEvery. A child can spend 8 years in the Indian system but will spend up to 15 years out in the Provincial

board what's going to happen to the other schools?" asked Green. "Are we going to have six school boards? What makes I.L.T. any different than the other schools?"

"Is what I.L.T. wants in your system?" asked Councillor Dave Johns to A. Michelle Hill, Education Board Chairperson.

"I believe it is," said Hill qualifying her statement by saying that it was her perception.

At this point, Chief Williams arrived, and took the chair, Williams suggested that the motion that Six Nations Council authorize the Education Project to continue to work on education until March 1995 and request the seconding of Rebecca Jamieson and the interchange of Claudine VanEvery-Albert be withdrawn and reworded so to divide the issue of the Project's continuance from the issue of staffing.

Winona Johnson, who made the motion, and Morley Lickers, who seconded it, agreed to do so. Johnson then made the motion to keep the Project going.

If there was a brand new Board, would I.L.T. reconsider working with the new Board to address their concerns, asked Chief Williams.

"Language and culture should be supplemented by teachings at home if parents feel that the teachers are not doing the measure of Native perspective that they want," was Chief Williams response to I.L.T.'s continued fixation on having a separate board so to ensure the language and culture curriculum that they desire.

Before voting on any motion, the conflict of interest issue was once again brought up. It was decided that it was up to Councillors Curley and Johns to declare a conflict if they felt it applied. Neither did so.

The motion that Six Nations Council authorize the Six Nations Education Project to continue to March 1995, contingent on the funding available, was carried. Those opposed were Councillors John Peters, Dave Johns, and Melba Thomas.

The second issue that needed resolution was who Council was going to second to run the Project. VanEvery-Albert remained adamant that she would stay in the class room but, for Jamieson, she said her decision would depend on what the job would entail and what would happen if what Council expected was not feasible.

The motion that the job entail the restructuring of the Board, based on all Home and Schools and representatives from the Secondary and Post-Secondary levels, by the end of October was made by Green, stipulating that it is to be left in the hands of the communities as to who is placed and how.

The motion was carried despite the objection by Curley that there was not "a lot of difference in the process" suggested to that which was followed.

If the Home and Schools do not want to participate, "does the coordinator come back here for direction?" asked Jamieson before responding that she is not prepared to take on the task as presented.

To ensure the working conditions of the staff at the Project, a motion was made, and carried, that the contracts be re-negotiated by Ken Jacobs utilizing the existing funds.

A new Memorandum of Understanding will need to be drawn up due to the changes that have happened, contended Chief Williams.

"I would have preferred that education run from the community without any political interference from either side. Indian Affairs would only deal with an elected system so we were hauled back into it," said Chief Williams before closing the meeting.