

New plan would have reserve schools open Nov. 13

By Beth Gallagher Expositor Staff

OHSWEKEN — Six Nations Chief William Montour has released details of an "action plan" designed to get reserve children back to school by next week.

He met with members of the Six Nations-New Credit School Committee, a parents group, on Monday night to discuss the plan, which Chief Montour developed with Indian Affairs officials late last week.

The plan sets out a number of conditions which must be met if schools are to open next Monday, Chief Montour said. The conditions include:

- Optional summer school programs for grades 7 and 8 students.
- An independent evaluation, conducted jointly by the department and community, of the education system on the Six Nations and New Credit reserves.
- An additional \$40,000 for the community's education project.

Marion Martin, chairman of the school committee, said at least one representative from each of the 12 reserve schools attended the meeting.

She said she didn't want to discuss the results of the meeting until the representatives had passed along the information to parents at all the schools.

"My position is that everyone on the reserve should know first."

The \$40,000 government offering comes nowhere near what education project co-ordinator Rebecca Jamieson said she would need to finish the project.

In mid-October Ms. Jamieson told band council she would have to resign unless the federal government gave her an additional \$435,000 to complete the community project, which will outline how Six Nations can take control of its own education system in the early 1990s.

Chief Montour said Monday the project will have to be done in a "piecemeal" fashion.

"The minister's jaw almost dropped to his

chest when I told him how much we needed for the project," said Mr. Montour.

The plan does not include a provision for complete removal of asbestos — the most contentious issue in the nine-week stand-off between parents and the department of Indian Affairs.

Parents of about 1,200 children on the two reserves have refused to send their children to the 12 schools until all asbestos is removed from the buildings and the structures are brought up to safety standards.

Chief Montour said Indian Affairs Minister Pierre Cadieux is steadfast in his position that all asbestos does not have to be removed because experts have assured him the asbestos levels in the buildings are safe.

"I'm not entirely pleased. I would have liked to see everything (all asbestos) out," said Chief Montour.

The other conditions contained in the action plan had been developed before Chief Montour's

meeting on Friday with Gerald Kerr, regional director general for Indian Affairs.

The department agreed to providing funding for an independent consultant to test the schools for asbestos, fire safety and structural soundness. The action plan also requires Indian Affairs do a quarterly monitoring of asbestos levels for one year.

The commitment for three new schools to be built within seven years was also reaffirmed, said Chief Montour.

He said he will meet with Indian Affairs officials again on Friday with preliminary results from air quality testing done in the schools this week.

The results from a more sensitive method of testing, Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM), won't be completed for two weeks, one week after the scheduled opening date.

Chief Montour said he intends to have an "information sharing session" with members of the community later this week.