

Immersion Program gets #8 School

by Denise Dicy

OHSWEKEN - After being passed between the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), the Six Nations Education Board (SNEB), and Band Council all summer, the Grade 9 Immersion Program has been given a home as Band Council passed a motion to transfer the recently vacated #8 School to SNEB for the use and benefit of the Immersion Program during their Political Liaison Meeting held Monday night.

While this is one issue settled there is a fly in the ointment as funding for Operation and Maintenance (O&M), or lack of it, continues to be a concern.

Band Council Chief Steve Williams stressed that he would rather see School #12, a one room facility, used as O&M would be less costly than for #8. However, the parents from the immersion group had already turned that option down.

Arguments against the use of #12 came from Gloria Thomas who referred to the number of students expected for next year (60 for grades 9 and 10), and that the facility will also be the home of three curriculum development projects, as illustrations to show that a one room facility would not be adequate.

One of the concerns of council, as voiced by Councillor Roger Jonathan, was who would be covering the costs of O&M as some deficiencies in the #8 building have already been identified.

Currently, DIA has committed \$250 000 to the Mohawk and Cayuga Immersion Program and it has been stated many times

Program Services at DIA's Southern District Office, that the sum is to be all inclusive.

Citing the Indian Act and DIA's obligation to fund education for children under the age of 16, Gloria Thomas and Ron Thomas urged Band Council to direct or help pressure DIA to provide O&M funding as needed.

DIA, however, is sticking to their \$250 000 figure which includes O&M costs based on a formula whereby the Haldimand Board took their total operating cost and divided that figure by the number of students coming up with a per student cost which DIA has allotted within their funding, according to Raslack.

"We told the planning committee how we could fund their project and they were to do the planning and allocation of funds based on that premise," said Raslack when contacted by *Teka*.

Within the Tuition Agreement with the Haldimand Board of Education, however, O&M costs is set at \$75/child which, according to Gloria Thomas, wouldn't cover the costs here.

When Thomas' observation was presented to Raslack he said that it's not a surprise that those costs are there.

As for DIA's obligation for funding education for students under the age of 16, his response was that "we satisfy our obligation with High School students by purchasing services with local boards."

We went as far as we could with the Immersion Program, said Raslack noting that DIA does not handle the High school program, the Haldimand Board does.

may be handling the high school program any O&M costs that can't be covered by the funding provided by DIA will not be falling to the board.

So far the parents of the Immersion students have committed themselves to raising the money for O&M on their own even though, according to one parent who spoke up, they've been told that it's not right that they should have to.

The scenario that if #8 is used for educational purposes it is still an educational facility and therefore the responsibility of DIA was put forward by Councillor Dave Green but it was a stone that has already been turned by the Immersion Group.

"We've tried all the angles," said Gloria Thomas.

While all the angles may have been tried, the one who is left holding the proverbial bag is the SNEB who through Council's motion now has the onus of responsibility when it comes to O&M funding for #8 as that facility is now transferred, along with the costs, to that board.

"They really dumped it on us," was the response from SNEB's acting-chair Keith Jamieson when told of Council's motion.

What we agreed to was to act in an administrative capacity, there was no discussion regarding the provision of O&M from the board, he said adding that what they could do (as the board has no money) is assist the Immersion Program in securing funding.

Due to the urgency of the issue, with the beginning of the school year coming next week, the second reading for Council's motion was waived.