

Extension planned by North of Superior board

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high school, "it would also assume full jurisdictional rights and responsibilities of all separate school students (elementary and secondary) and all English and French separate school ratepayers in all towns of their board..." concluded the Impact Statement.

The public board contends that the viability of schools under its board would be adversely affected if the proposal is accepted by the Planning and Implementation Commission. (Bill 30 states that the operation of a Catholic high school must not affect the public high schools especially in single high school communities).

The public board is concerned the approved proposal would 1) fragment the Manitowadge high school because of course duplications causing an increase in costs, 2) adversely affect students, 3) cause the public board to lose its autonomy to operate its own high school independent of the separate board, 4) cause an increase in taxes for homeowners and local industries, and 5) cause fragmentation along the lines of religion and language.

Small communities

Below is some background information on the Lake Superior Board of Education that was included in the board's Impact Statement.

The area along the north shore of Lake Superior covered by the Lake Superior Board of Education contains four small, single-industry communities. They are Schreiber (CPR), Terrace Bay (Kimberly-Clark), Marathon (James River) and Manitowadge (Norandogeco).

Each of these communities has a single high school with enrolments of between 200 and 300 students.

By urban standards, the total enrolment of all these schools would constitute a small secondary school and the individual community high schools would not be considered viable.

Given the geographic realities of the board, the board has continued to operate these high schools despite great hardship and high cost.

Public board members feel that because the high schools are so small at present, the taking of French students from the system would threaten the viability of education for all students. It would also result in increased operation costs, contends the board.

The North of Superior board contends that it does not plan to set up a separate stand-alone high school anywhere ever.

The board believes the plan is a natural extension of the elementary programs offered at Ecole Notre Dame de Lourdes over the last 25 years.

The board also contends that the proposed courses would provide a viable education due to the growing Francophone population of Manitowadge.

Increased taxes?

The public board claims taxes will increase for homeowners and industries if the proposal becomes realized.

It takes money to run the existing facilities and to offer the existing programs in the public high school.

If students are divided into French and English, Catholic and public, those existing facilities and programs must continue with fewer students- the public board will have less ratepayers to draw from resulting in increased taxes for the remaining ratepayers.

Public School Trustee M. C. Papineau told the News that she has no problem with the legislated rights (Bills 30 and 75) of the Francophones.

She said the student numbers are not there in Manitowadge to offer more courses for the French students than they are offering now.

Papineau said she doesn't know why there aren't more of the elementary students requesting more French language courses when they get to high school.

"We can't do it- we can't make it run. We're doing the best we can to offer options," she said. Papineau said the kids are not signing up for the French language classes.

Papineau calls offering the French courses a case of supply and demand. If there was a demand, the public board would supply the courses, she said.

Because of the low number of students at the high school level, Papineau said the public board cannot offer a wide choice of courses at the high school level. The reason is the ministry of education gives grants on the number of students in the existing high school and does not fund for programming, she said.

The main contention, she added, is that the students don't have more choice now- so fragmenting the student population further would mean less quality education for all students.

Papineau contends that if the public board can't offer the French language courses now, how can the North of Superior board expect to be able to afford to do it after the division of the students.

The extension would mean that the public board would have less ratepayers to draw from. This could result in even less course options.

Papineau said that most of the costs for any secondary school programs offered by the Separate board will be funded by provincial grants.

The rest will have to be absorbed by the Catholic ratepayers and could result in course duplications and higher costs for all taxpayers, she said.

Papineau believes that all the money should go toward creating a really good single high school instead of dividing the students in relation to religion and language.

Co-operation to benefit the kids

George Matys, separate school director of education, told the News that it is necessary that the two boards co-operate so that the end result would be beneficial to the students.

He said it is not right that the elementary students who take all their courses in French must revert to only one French course once they reach high school.

Matys said the intention of the North of Superior board is only to add one more course in French and also to provide an infrastructure that would have the responsibility of better serving the students.

What of the cost?

Matys said that it would cost the public board far more to offer more French courses than it would cost the Separate board.

The Separate board, he said, already has needed personnel and services- things the public board does not have.

As far as the French elementary students not taking many French language courses when they reach high school, Matys said that is because they do not have the adequate guidance to direct them. This will be provided if the extension goes through.

Matys said he did not expect the present confrontation over this issue. What the board is proposing is not "serious" he said.

He said there will have to be a "cooling-off period" because of the unfortunate publicity the issue has attracted.

The plan may not be approved, he said. If a mandate is given to proceed, at that time there will be something real. Right now a plan is "not definite" said Matys.

He continued that co-operation is necessary for the benefit of the students. What is being proposed is just a co-operative model.

Matys would like to avoid direct confrontation. That is why the North of Superior board is having low-key, small-type meetings.

Matys would like to see the situation resolved in a collaborative fashion between all concerned- he

does not want to see any "unnecessary duplication" of courses either, he said. (More on this important issue on page 8).

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