

School Closures?

Options

Opportunities

Obstacles

School Closures

- Announced closures
 - 2007 – Boards voted to close 24 schools
 - 20 in 2007
 - 3 in 2008
 - 1 in 2009
 - 3 schools had grades deleted
 - In a news article in the September 08, 2008 Leader Post it notes that as many as 25 schools may be reviewed for closure this year.

A public response to announcements

- In April, 2007, Jamie Message, a grade 12 student of Crane Valley school, wrote an open letter to the Premier in which he noted:
 - In a small school we become family – a closure will effectively rip this family apart.
 - Moving some students to a larger school will seriously affect their learning and social life.
 - By taking away the school, you will kill the community. The school is the reason some of these small towns exist.

Powers of Boards – Sec. 87 of the School Act.

- At any time prior to the intended date of closure the Board may close a school or eliminate grades with the consent of the school community council.
- The Board may close a school or eliminate grades subject to a review arranged in the context with stated deadlines.
- A motion for changes must be made on or before Oct. 15 the year before the change.

Board Powers (con't)

- The Board must publicize its intent to change the status of the school. Notices are to be placed:
 - In conspicuous places within the attendance area
 - In the headquarters building of the jurisdiction.
 - On the jurisdiction website.

Board Powers (con't)

- The Board must establish a review committee on or before November 1 that consists of:
 - four members of the school community council
 - two individuals appointed by the council of the town or village that host the school under review:
 - one is to be an elected member of council
 - one is to be member of the community appointed by the council

Board Powers (con't)

- The board must make a decision regarding potential change to close or change the status of the school by Feb. 1 prior to the effective date of change.
- By March 31 the Board must hold a meeting with the electors to advise them of the potential for change.

Why are schools closed?

- There are two primary reasons why decisions are made to close a school or eliminate grades. These are:
 - The school is considered too expensive to maintain in its current state.
 - The school cannot offer the variety of programming to meet the needs of students at the upper grade levels.

Options for consideration

- Schools of Opportunity
 - Despite the Board’s decision to close a school, the school may remain open if the Minister designates it as a “school of opportunity.”
 - If the school meets the conditions of the regulations, it may exist as a school of opportunity for two years.
 - During this time, the Board cannot conduct further reviews.

Schools of Opportunity (con't)

- At the end of the two year period, the Minister can declare the school open until a new review is completed.
- Details regarding conditions that must be met are addressed in the School Act regulations (sections 95.9 - 95.93) and the Handbook for School reviews.
- This option is restricted to rural communities.

Independent Schools -- Types

- Registered Schools
 - All independent schools must register with the department of education.
 - These schools may set their own curriculum as long as it meets the main objectives of the provincial curriculum.
 - They are not required to hire certificated teachers, however, each individual must acquire a letter of eligibility.

Independent Schools – Types (con't)

- Accredited Schools
 - Any registered school may apply to become accredited with the department.
 - Each accredited school must follow the Saskatchewan curriculum.
 - Must hire certificated teachers.

Independent Schools – Types (con't)

- Religiously-based schools
 - May be either registered or accredited.
 - Accredited schools may offer up to 2.5 hrs. of religious instruction per week, however, not for credit.
 - Approximately 80% of registered/accredited schools in the Province are religiously-based.

Independent Schools – Types (con't)

- Alternate Schools
 - These schools are established to meet special educational needs of particular students.
 - They are accredited and must meet the requirements of accredited schools.

Independent Schools – Types (con't)

- Historical High Schools
 - Schools that were established many years ago to provide secondary school programs in communities where none existed in the public system.
 - These are accredited and must conform to the requirements of all accredited schools

Independent Schools – Types (con't)

- Associate Schools
 - Are accredited independent schools that have since entered into a contractual arrangement with a public school system in the Province.
 - There are currently nine in the Province.

Independent Schools

- Conditions for formation
 - Each school must have a board with at least three members representing different family units.
 - Each school must enroll at least two students between the ages of 6 and 21 from at least two different family units.

Independent Schools

- Funding
 - The only independent schools that currently receive funding from the Saskatchewan government are:
 - Historical High Schools
 - Alternate Schools

Independent Schools

- Inspections/regulations
 - all schools are expected to meet government expectations regarding the safety of buildings and programs.
 - all are subject to some form of inspection

Independent Schools – Validity as an Option

- **Myths about Private/Independent Schools**
 - **Myth # 1: Private Schools are expensive.**
 - Contrary to common misconceptions the vast majority of Canadian private schools are small, inexpensive and often rely on subsidization.
 - The average tuition of 150 schools in Ontario during the 2004-05 school year is under \$ 5,000 in contrast to \$7,800 spent to educate a child in the Ontario public system.

Independent Schools – Myths (con't)

- **Myth # 2: Private Schools are exclusive.**
 - Private schools actively strive to attract students rather than selectively turning them away.
 - Few schools have entrance exams or exclude students based on past academic records.
 - In private schools, lower income students often benefit from programs and attention not available in their assigned public school.

Independent Schools – Myths (con't)

- **Myth # 3: Lower-income families are not interested in private education and can't afford the tuition.**
 - Lower income families from across Ontario submitted about 10,000 applications for Children First tuition assistance over the two years prior to the article.
 - In the current year, 28% of the applications were from single-parent households.
 - 29% of Canadian families who attend private schools are from families with incomes below \$ 50,000.

Independent Schools – Myths (con't)

- **Myth # 4: Private schools are not accountable and are free from regulation.**
 - Private schools are accountable to the parents of the students. If there are problems, parents will move their children.
 - School facilities must comply with provincial law.
 - Private schools are often affiliated with other organizations that have set expectations.
 - In Provinces where private schools receive public funds, the schools must comply with moderate to extensive provincial reporting.
 - In Alberta, the 175 accredited private schools must follow the provincial curriculum and report annually on their progress and achievement.

Independent Schools – Myths (con't)

- **Myth # 5: Families attend religious schools only for faith-based curriculum.**
 - According to both American and Canadian research, the top reason parents choose a school is educational standards.
 - In a survey of parents participating in the Children First program 87% indicated that they selected their child's private school based on its academic quality.
 - Parents also cite good teachers and enforced codes of discipline as key deciding factors.

Independent Schools – Myths (con't)

- **Myth # 6 – Providing government funding to independent schools hurts the public system**
 - Research by the Frazer Institute indicates that funding to private schools actually increases achievement for both systems. This results from increased competition.
 - A publication from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation supports Frazer Institutes findings.
 - (see Useful websites in handout for website addresses)

Obstacles/Challenges

- **Funding**

- Since most private schools do not receive government funding, it would be advisable to pursue the government regarding funding
- Both B.C. and Alberta provide funding for independent schools.
- Recently, Alberta raised the level of funding from 60% of the instructional grant to 70% and added funding for administration and operations

Funding (con't)

- In Ontario, the Frazer Institute has a program – Children First: Schools of Choice – that provides funding for needy families. Families may apply for funding assistance up to 50% of actual tuition up to a designated maximum. I have had brief contact with them and believe it would be a good idea to request them to consider a similar program in Saskatchewan.

Additional Alternatives

- Charter Schools
 - Alberta has a group of schools that have been designated Charter Schools.
 - The concept is not unique to Alberta, however, Alberta is the only Province in Canada that has approved this alternative.
 - These may not be religiously-based. However, they must have some specific instructional focus or program to justify consideration.

Charter Schools (con't)

- In Alberta, schools must first try to enter into a contractual arrangement with a local jurisdiction similar to Associate schools.
- If they fail in this endeavor, they may register as a Charter School with the Department.
- There are currently about one dozen of these schools in Alberta.

Charter Schools (con't)

- The most recent addition occurred this fall -- the school in Valhalla, a community northwest of Grande Prairie.
- The local jurisdiction had voted to close the school, however, local pressure and an “in” with the Premier resulted in the designation.

Other Alternatives

- Home-based schooling
 - Parents register their children with a jurisdiction but choose the curriculum they wish for their children
- Virtual schools
 - Students may work at home or in a regional centre and take their schooling on line.

Representation

- From what I understand, there is no one body in the Province that represents all independent schools.
- I believe it would be a good idea to pursue this possibility – the resulting “voice” would be of benefit to all independent schools.