R E S P O N S E   T O   T H E   D O C U M E N T

"SCHOOL FACILITY LOGISTICS"

By WOODS GORDON & CO.

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C O N T E N T S

1. INTRODUCTION

The essence of this paper has grown out of our concerns that some response from the citizenry should be brought to the attention of the Alberta Department of Education.

Although the Woods Gordon report contains much substance and many implications for the future, it does not explicitly address itself to the methodology for achieving change. Further, there appears to be some naivete as to how the Alberta education system operates (e.g., no mention made of variety of school systems licensed in the Province).

This paper then addresses itself to a response to those recommendations appearing in the report which are of particular interest to ourselves. The paper goes on to introduce our concept of community school (a position now taken by many groups and individuals in the Province) as one basic method for bringing about significant change in the education system.

A brief summary in the form of conclusions addresses itself specifically to our primary concerns.

Finally, we are left with some unanswered questions as to the role of this task force and the mandate given it by the Department of Education.

The following are our thoughts and concerns with regards to the Woods Gordon report.

2. RESPONSE TO SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT

RECOMMENDATION #1

"DEVELOP A COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLANNING GROUP AS A TECHNICAL SUPPORT
TEAM FOR PLANNING, DEVELOPING GUIDELINES AND MONITORING RESULTS. THE WORK
OF THIS GROUP SHOULD REFLECT THE ACTION PLANS OF OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS
INCLUDING CULTURE, RECREATION, PARKS AND WILDLIFE, AND HOUSING AND PUBLIC
WORKS."

If the intent of this recommendation is to make planning resources more
accessible to local school boards, we can support the intent. The recommendation,
however, leaves us with several questions. We are unclear as to exactly what
the role and responsibility of this group is to be, particularly in terms of
where it is to fit into the decision-making process? In other words, we
question how much power this group is to have and whether local school boards
would have an option to or be required to consult with this group?

We can perhaps see that such a group might be useful if
1. it could be consulted on an optional basis by the local school board, and
2. their role is to present information on all alternatives open to the
school board rather than to promote only one approach.

Finally, we wondered who had expressed the need for such a group and
exactly whose need and what need the creation of this group was designed to
meet? We wondered if another level of bureaucracy was being created
unnecessarily? In other words, would it not be just as effective for the various
departments mentioned to be contacted by school boards, and if required in a
particular situation, a joint meeting be held?

RECOMMENDATION #3

"CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THE TRANSFER OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL PLANNING
AND IMPLEMENTING TO THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD."

We agree whole-heartedly with the statement, but feel that "HOW" this is
done is important, if it is really going to be accomplished. We question how

this might fit with the responsibility and/or authority given to the Community Facilities Planning Group (Recommendation #1). Also, "ALL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING" is what is stated here, yet later it states "PLANNING AND IMPLE-MENTING SCHOOL FACILITY PROGRAMS." Are the school boards to be planning (and implementing) facilities, or programs within the facilities? Are these not dependent upon each other? Therefore, if the local boards are responsible for program planning, should they not also be responsible for facility planning? We think they should!

"AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, BOARDS OF EDUCATION SHOULD BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE REPRESENTATION FROM THOSE COMMUNITY GROUPS WHO WOULD WISH TO UTILIZE THE FACILITIES."

We agree with the concern that seems to be behind this statement, that increased community input is essential for increasing community responsibility and support. But, we feel the "HOW" that is being proposed is impractical. Which community groups should be included? If all are welcome, the Edmonton Public School Board, for example, could be so large there would not be a meeting place big enough. And if all are not welcome, those left out may be rather disconcerted with their lack of representation.

This proposal seems to be not only confusing the issue but ineffectual in accomplishing the goal of increasing community responsibility and support. Are not our trustees already supposed to represent us? Would these groups, then, not have double representation?

"...ANY GROUP IN THE COMMUNITY WHICH HOPES TO BENEFIT FROM THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SCHOOL FACILITY SHOULD BE CONSULTED."

We feel that input from community groups is very important. But how valuable that input might be is determined by "HOW", again, that one gets it. If the aim of the recommendation is considered, educated, responsible input, then to simply give a group a plan and request comments on a one-shot basis is NOT good enough. Important in getting relevant input from community people is:-

   1. their awareness of the alternatives,
   2. their awareness of effects of those alternatives,
   3. their awareness of the purpose(s) or needs that those alternatives are meant to meet,

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4. assessment by the community as to the needs or
purposes being relevant to the community both now
and for the future,

5. time to digest, question and research,

6. time to get response from others in the community,
for truly REPRESENTATIVE input,

7. resource people who can give complete, unbiased
information to the community re: recommendations #1,
2 and 3, as well as regarding the vehicles possible
to accomplish recommendations #4 and #6.

Any "HOW" (structure) must provide for the above to be effective.

"IN THE LONG TERM, THESE GROUPS WOULD BE REPRESENTED ON WHAT MIGHT BE
CALLED A LOCAL COUNCIL. EVENTUALLY, THESE COMMUNITY GROUPS MIGHT BECOME AN
INTEGRAL PART OF AN ELECTED POLITICAL STRUCTURE."

The structure of a "Local Council" may be a possibility for some
communities, but it is not necessarily realistic, effective or desirable for
others. We believe it is important not to structure things in such a way that
we eliminate input from concerned citizens. There must be flexible routes
for community input, as communities are not all comfortable with the same
vehicle(s) for involvement.

RECOMMENDATION #4

"ENCOURAGE SHARING FACILITIES WITH OTHER PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS AND ALSO PRIVATE
ORGANIZATIONS."

We agree with the idea. The advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

Crucial to actually accomplishing the above, though, again is "HOW" it
is done.

It is important to realize that sharing facilities is only one part of the
community school concept.

We feel that the operationalizing of the total community school concept
is the only method that will effectively accomplish this recommendation.

A philosophical and operational description of our concept of community school follows on pages 7 and 9.

RECOMMENDATION #5

"UNDERTAKE POFULATION FORECASTING BASED ON THE TEN REGIONAL PLANNING AREAS IN ALBERTA. ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, POPULATION FORECASTING IS THE MOST CRITICAL DETERMINATE FOR ESTABLISHING SCHOOL FACILITY REQUIREMENTS. ....

We agree that population forecasts of the projected school enrollment should be taken into account in establishing school facility requirements, but we do not agree that it should be the most critical determinant. It seems incongruous that such a determinant is suggested as the most critical in the same report that recommends sharing of facilities by various organizations. i.e. usage of the facility by people other than school children.

We suggest that there are other important determinants to be considered:

1. the impact of the presence or lack of a school facility in a neighborhood in terms of the facility's potential as a community focal point.

2. the need in a neighborhood for facilities for community use,

3. the proposed uses of the facility other than those academically and child-oriented, and

4. the special programs proposed for the school (e.g. french immersion).

We are also concerned that the report does not appear to address itself to the existence of two school systems (separate and public) as well as numerous private schools.

We question whether the fact that there are no school boundaries has been considered to a sufficient extent? The non-existence of school boundaries allows children to be drawn to one school rather than another for various reasons. For example, the operation in one school of a program of morning, noon hour and after school care may attract children from one area to attend school in a different area.

RECOMMENDATION #7

THE PROVINCIAL SUPPORT TO THE RATIO OF EXISTING STUDENT PLACES TO ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF A UTILIZATION RATIO, WHICH WOULD DECREASE THE SUPPORT ELIGIBLE TO ANY DISTRICT WHICH ALREADY HAS EXCESS SPACE ACCORDING TO THE RATIO CHOSEN.

Although we agree with the idea that enrollment projections may be one of several indicators used in decisions regarding construction of new schools, we feel our concerns outlined in response to recommendation #5 apply to recommendation #7 as well. We feel too, that once again the idea of building flexible multi-purpose facilities that can be shared by different agencies and organizations and whose use can change to meet the changing needs of the community is relevant here.

"THE MECHANISM IS BASED ON THE RATIO OF THE TOTAL STUDENT PLACES IN A DISTRICT TO THE MAXIMUM ENROLLMENT PROJECTED IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS IN THAT DISTRICT. IN ORDER TO PERMIT THE REQUIRED FLEXIBILITY FOR THE TYPE OF SPACE REQUIRED IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO COMPUTE SEPARATE RATIOS FOR ELEMENTARY, JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL SECTIONS AND TOINCORPORATE SOME FLEXIBILITY FOR SPECIALIZED CURRICULA. UNDER THESE CONTROLS THE PROVINCE WOULD NOT PROVIDE ANY SUPPORT TO A LOCAL BOARD WHEN THE RATIO OF STUDENT PLACES TO ENROLMENT EXCEEDS AN ESTABLISHED MAXIMUM."

We question whether the flexibility suggested in the above statement is sufficient to satisfy the need to consider the other determinants that we suggested in our response to recommendation #5.

3. THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL CONCEPT

For purposes of understanding our concept, we have separated the concept into a philosophical description and an operational description.

3.1 Philosophical Description

It is clear with respect to present school buildings that form has followed function. That is to say, the design of present school accommodations reflect their intended use for kindergarten through grade 12 only. What is needed to provide a prospective, or undergirding philosophy, of the new use to which schools are to be put, is a fresh approach to our understanding of the interaction between community and education. An educational philosophy which provides this undergirding has already been formulated and is popularly referred to as "community education". To date, this educational philosophy has not remained merely at a theoretical level but has been translated into action through a community school movement encompassing many but not all schools in North America. Jack Minzey has provided a very simple definition of community education, namely: "a process that concerns itself with everything that affects the well-being of all citizens within a given community". Expanding on this, Carrillo and Heaton have said, "this definition extends the role of community education from one of the traditional concepts of teaching children through one of identifying the needs, problems, and wants of the community and then assisting in the development of facilities, programs, staff, and leadership toward improving the entire community". Further to this they stress "it is essential that the people who are going to live with community education programs be included in establishing them. There are many ways to encourage informed participation that would not require change in school organization, new personnel, or additional money. One dedicated person with zeal can persuade individuals, agencies, and organizations to offer services on a one-to-one basis - services like tutoring, transporting students, or offering backyard playgrounds".

Community, for our purposes, is defined as a group of people who share awareness of their commonalities and participate in the process of meeting mutual needs. This definition allows community education to take place almost everywhere. It is not bound by geographical limitations, nor by building limitations.

The community school is where living and learning meet. This is where the intellect and the environment interact to seek solutions to the problems of humankind individually as well as effectively. Community education is generally centered in the community school. However that does not mean that all programs take place here. Operating as a community school, a bridge is created to the community and communication and participation go both ways.

In summary then, community education provides the philosophical under-girding which allows greater use than is evident presently of school buildings in this Province. This educational process is not really a new formulation. It is simply the return to a form of education enjoyed by previous generations and in that sense constitutes a move to a back to the basics education.

1. Community Education[1] - is a process in which community people utilize educational, democratic and sound research methods for both individual and community betterment. By design, the community education process ideally exhibits all of the following characteristics:

   1. There is an effective and systematic community interagency cooperative relationship and interagency commitment to the use of the community education process.

   2. Strong emphasis is placed on facilitating informed and learned citizen involvement in local needs identification, decision making and problem solving.

   3. Priority is placed on full utilization of existing local human and physical resources as a basis for considered community action in the common interest.

   4. The community school and other community agencies and resources are viewed as integral parts of a total community education system. Educational methods are seen as important tools to be employed in a

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(1) The following is an excerpt from "Recommended Community School Policy, Principles and Procedures", Interdepartmental Community School Committee, Education, Advanced Education and Manpower, Recreation, Parks and Wild-life, Culture, Government of Alberta (77-10-26), Based on other ± OCSC.

coordinated manner for community good by any or all community based
agencies involved in education, recreation, culture, health, social
development, crime prevention, agriculture, consumerism, religion,
ecology, economic development and so on.

5. Stress is placed on encouraging community self-help, volunteerism,
community initiative and self-renewal through the process of community
education.

6. An important aspect is the development of opportunities and training
so local lay and professional people can assume community leadership
roles.

7. There is an offering of supplementary and alternative educational
opportunities for community members, regardless of age, to extend
their skills and interest and to bring about community improvements.
Education is viewed as a lifelong process. All forms of education
are considered potentially useful in this regard, including the use
of technology and the mass media.

An important underlying goal in the above considerations is the fostering of a
sense of community. It is assumed important that people who live or work in
a community know and care about each other.

3.2 Operational Description

Community schools, as perceived by ourselves, are not imposed on a
community, but rather emerge from the community as a means by which various
issues and needs may be met in the community.

In the City of Edmonton, a joint arrangement between the City of Edmonton
Parks and Recreation Department, and the Edmonton Public and Separate School
Boards provides for the designation of a set number of schools in the city as
"community" schools. Funding for this program comes from Project Co-operation
Community School Incentive Assistance grants through Alberta Recreation,
Parks and Wildlife.

The funds are used for the hiring of a community school co-ordinator and
for limited multi-purpose development (e.g. new public address systems, new

security systems, etc.)   Only after the school has been designated and staff hired are the communities informed that their school in the community is now a "community school".

Our concept of a true community school is one in which residents of the community perceive and actively participate in activities which they have designed or given input to and which are centered in and around the school community.   Residents who have this opportunity are, from our perspective, more likely to be committed to, and interested in the activities of the school. The school is seen as being responsive to the needs of the community rather than the other way around.

This concept does not depend on funding or hiring of staff.   The reason for this situation is that volunteers from the community are responsible for designing, co-ordinating and implementing various community activities in and around the school.   Funds for materials and special equipment would come from community based fund raising activities or from special "community" grants provided by such programs as "Project Co-operation".

Because each community has very unique characteristics, it must be noted that no one formula is applicable for the emergenc of a community school. For example, an inner city school which caters to a transient, ethnic oriented population would become a different community school than say a school which serves a somewhat homogeneous middle class suburb of a city.   That is not to say that each school in its own right could not become a community school, but rather that each school would have access to different resources - both physical and human, to help its emergence as a school capable of responding to the individual needs of the community.

It should be noted that present formulas for designating (in itself a negative connotation) community schools, do not take into account the uniqueness which is described herein.

What then, does a community school look like?   Here again there is no one design or physical arrangement that will be applicable for the needs of each community.

There are, however, some significant examples of community school centres which are having a very positive impact on their respective communities.

The Britannia Community Services Centre in Vancouver is one attempt at integrating the school with the community. In this project schools, recreation facilities (i.e. swimming pool, arena, gymnasium), social service offices, parks offices, health clinic and community police operate out of one facility. The center is designed for maximum usage by the community and because the community helped in the design of the center, it is able to respond to their needs and just as important, there is a commitment by the community to the center.

A similar type of center has been partially completed in Red Deer. The Dawe Center attempts to provide similar types of services and activities to the community as a result of significant input from the residents of the area as to what kind of a facility would in fact be most responsive to their needs.

Schools such as the Garneau School and Glenora Schools are very much community schools in Edmonton even though they are not <u>designated</u> as such. Many schools, such as Alex Taylor School and M.E. LaZerte High School in Edmonton, although now <u>designated</u> as community schools, were community schools as we have defined them, long before they were given special status as community schools.

Our point here, is that a community school is one which is seen by the residents as being a centre for the life of the community. It does not necessarily need external recognition as a designated institution. The schools can be seen by the residents as being community centers for learning and playing. The design, therefore, should allow for significant input from the community <u>after</u> they have been alerted and educated towards what alternatives a <u>true</u> community school can offer. Responsibility for this educational process should be jointly shared by school boards, municipal government and organizations such as the Federation of Community Leagues.

4. CONCLUSION

Throughout our response to the recommendations in the Woods Gordon report several themes are repeated:

1. Effective implementation of a policy of community use of school facilities requires an understanding and acceptance of the philosophy of community education.

2. Our support of a shift away from 'centralized' decision-making at the provincial government level to decentralized decision-making at the local school board and community level.

3. Our belief in the importance of community input which is informed, educated and responsible.

4. The desirability of flexibility in approaching community use and planning of school facilities such that the needs and resources of a particular community are considered and the uniqueness of each community is recognized.

5. Our support of multi-purpose, flexible school facilities which fit the present community's needs and can accommodate future needs.

5. QUESTIONS FOR THE TASK FORCE

Beyond our concerns with this document, we also have a number of other concerns and questions. Specifically - what is the jurisdiction of this task force? If the task force is not to put all this material together, summarize, and make recommendations, who is going to do this? Why not the task force? (Normally these seem to be the duties of a task force.) Where does our input go from here? What process is the information taking, towards whose decision?

When some recommendations or decisions are being made, will we have a chance for further input before they are final?

How and when will we be able to get answers to these questions?

We are hoping for a reply.

Thank you.

SIGNED:

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