

*Community  
Alliance for  
Public  
Education*



*Chairman: Duncan Brown  
Phone: 250-748-3274 /250-709-0527  
Email: [cape@shaw.ca](mailto:cape@shaw.ca)  
Web: [capeincowichan.bc.ca](http://capeincowichan.bc.ca)*

---

***Principiis obsta...Finem respice / Resist the beginning... Consider the end***  
**Diary of a Mad Trustee**  
**Open Board Meeting on February 20th, 2008**

The meeting on February 20th was a study really – you would think that the whole point of school board meetings might be to offer timely information to our elected reps so they can make conscientious decisions about the serious matters that govern program delivery and the care of our district.

I don't mind a bit of cabaret from time to time but I do prefer it not occur in the board room at the expense of trustees. We have a report from a task force that met last year to review alternate education in this district and we were expected to examine the recommendations coming from administration purported to arise from that report. We did manage to shame the administrators into delaying the process until we could actually digest the task force report. And since the recommendations call for the closure of the South End alternate site as well as the Chemainus site and the capping of CVOLC at 125 along with some vague attempt to duplicate some of these services within the mainstream high schools this is no laughing matter.

This is the tale in point form because it is just too dumb to describe any other way.

1. Trustees would not receive the report prior to the meeting where they would be expected to vote on the recommendations.
  2. Trustees would receive the report.
  3. Trustees discovered that the report they were given was not the full report but a summary
  4. Trustees were assured that the summary was exactly like the full report
  5. When challenged about the lack of consistency between the content of the summary and the recommendations we were told that the recommendations were reflected in the content of the full report
  6. We declined to make a decision on the recommendations without reading the full report
  7. We were then offered the full report and the opportunity to read it before returning to the next meeting to debate the recommendations
  8. Somewhere a 3 year old wondered why they had not done this to begin with
- (with apologies to three year olds)

As there had been no previous presentation of this material and there had been no consultation with education partners outside the task force members including 1st Nations, parents and teachers - for trustees to vote in a hurried way on these recommendations without a thorough discussion with all these groups would have been reckless. These proposals represent a complete redirection and structural pull down of the alternate education system and I do not believe that this board has the mandate or the knowledge to do this. This is sweeping and potentially damaging to our student population. When they closed Reconnect out at the Lake/ 2003 – many of the kids there simply were deprived of the opportunity to continue their education. The previous superintendent in an open board meeting during the discussion around the current in- school site out at the Lake acknowledged that district efforts to discover what had become of former students from Reconnect had determined that many if not most had simply failed to return to the system at any location. This will happen again if we close these sites. We don't have to guess because we know from previous experience. If we accept that as probable it would be unthinkable to take these steps knowing the outcome for those kids.

Alt Ed is supplied at a cost of \$8246 per just slightly over the district average of \$8198 per – this being true we must accept that abandoning these sites makes no fiscal sense since it is clear from past experience we will lose a sizable number of our kids and the commensurate funding. The costs at Chemainus and SEAS are around \$18,000 each to sustain the site therefore if by closing those sites we lose even a few students apart from the loss of their learning opportunities we would find our savings again cancelled out.

There is no real contradiction between recognising that for some 'at risk' students encouragement to remain in a regular school setting with a self paced approach is effective for them but this does not appear to be useful for all kids especially those who have ongoing issues with staff, other students or who find themselves expelled from their high school. Also – many of the kids in Alt Ed according to the teachers are there partly due to their own need for flexible time because of jobs and child and elder care commitments. They do not have the sorts of lives we would like to think all our children enjoy – they have adult responsibilities -need paying work – they need us to still care for their future. Therefore I believe that the onsite locations are really to serve a very different need from the Alt Ed free standing locations and it is important to distinguish those needs.

Again we have to ask that since closing the sites makes no fiscal sense and certainly will not serve the young people what is the motivator for these broad changes placed before us so hurriedly and without adequate reflection in the company of the wider school community.

Watch this space for the club final on this event – the 200 metre slipstream behind administrators who would love to be rid of a whole student population that does not enhance our achievement contract figures. Imagine how our grad rates would soar if we could rid ourselves of the kids who don't measure up to the pettiest characteristics of learning? This is the public system after all – surely the less successful students can find something else to do – "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?"

On a final note a premise to eliminate two trustee positions from the board briefly came to the table. It was pointed out that since enrollment has dropped and we want to be seen to be making common cause with our community we should bite the bullet and cull our representation to save the \$20,000 it costs to reimburse a trustee for their time. I could not disagree more – despite the fact that the idea was well intentioned I spoke vigorously against it. School board representation according to the School Act is not tied to enrollment in the schools but to the voting population in the district. It is clear that our area is growing and also it is true that with the forced amalgamation of districts #65 and #66 back in 1996 we lost representation. There is simply no sustainable rationale for reducing our numbers. Trustee positions do not belong to those who currently fill them – they belong to the community and the School Act does provide a fairly rigorous process for changing trustee numbers. Frankly I think that carving back representation on the premise that this will save money merely bestows credibility to the falsehood that we are coping with a fiscal crisis which we are not. If we can cut a cheque for 10 grand a month to the guy who oversees our BCeSIS program or vote to raise administrators' salaries we can afford to pay our elected reps their tiny stipend. We need a stronger voice from trustees - we should esteem our role enough to sustain it for ourselves and those who come later who may do a much better job. If trustees wish to make common cause with their communities as the next election looms they can best do this by stepping forward and leading their community in opposing the dismantlement of public education.

And so ends today's sermon.

Your trustee Pal  
Eden

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.