

APPENDIX "C"

THE PROVINCIAL REVIEW REPORT OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

AND PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SYSTEM: AN EXPANDED DESCRIPTION

DESCRIPTIONS OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

1. A PRIMARY ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

This primary alternative program began as a half-day kindergarten program in one pod of an open area neighbourhood school. At the time of this review, the program had expanded to include grade two and the total enrolment was forty pupils in a family grouping environment. Unlike most alternatives, the majority of these pupils resided in the local school community.

Because of parental demand for the extension of the program, the school board established it as an alternative program but designated it as a separate entity within the host school. The principal of the host school was also the principal of the alternative program. The staff of the alternative was included in the staffing complement of the host school. The pupils were actually enrolled in the host school.

One full-time teacher was responsible for the entire program. There was also a half-time teacher who participated in a team teaching situation during the morning. This half-time teacher was the behavioural resource teacher in the host school in the afternoons. The facilities of the alternative program, therefore, were used when needed by certain host school pupils and vice-versa. One paid classroom aide was available also on a daily basis. This assistance, however, was at no cost to the school board.

As required by the board's policy for alternative programs, an advisory committee was established to assist the principal in a consultative capacity. This committee also had a representative who could attend the community meetings of the host school. The principal in conjunction with the advisory committee reviewed the progress of the program on a semi-annual basis.

Planning sessions were held monthly in the evenings. At these times the staff met with interested parents and discussed the program for the coming month. In addition, parents were invited to participate in the daily classroom activities. The degree of participation and involvement was high.

General meetings for parents were held every two months. Teachers were invited to attend. Any items raised at these sessions were submitted to the advisory committee.

Usually the parents learned of this alternative program by word-of-mouth. They said they chose this setting for their children because of the opportunity to have a voice in the decision-making process and because of their perception of the excellence of the program. The parents had confidence that the teachers would provide a program which was highly individualized, child-centred, and integrated in nature. No withdrawal services were provided as these needs were regarded as being met within the classroom program. Although this program was perceived by parents to be a school within a school, the children of the alternative program could participate in certain activities of the school at large such as choirs, concerts, and assemblies. The staff and parents utilized the human, natural, and material resources of the community in an on-going way to support the program. As a result, the program has developed a strong sense of attachment both among peers within the family grouping and families within the area. A growing sense of ownership by parents was evident.

A day-care centre was available on-site for a fee. This centre served mainly the pupils of the host school, but some children from the alternative program also benefitted from this service.

## 2. A PRIMARY-JUNIOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

This parent-initiated junior kindergarten to grade six alternative school was located in a conventional junior school which was experiencing declining enrolment. The school had the use of two basement classrooms and three portables, one of which was used for storage. A separate office for the alternative school was located in the basement with kitchen facilities adjacent. The alternative school made use of some of the host school's facilities such as the general purpose room and the library.

Approximately ninety pupils were enrolled in this school. The principal of the host school was also the principal of the alternative school. There were four classroom teachers, each with responsibilities for two grades. The teacher of French and the teacher-librarian, who were assigned to the host school, also had teaching assignments in the alternative school. Aides provided by the board were available for the two full-day kindergartens. A half-time secretary was also provided. All other support personnel provided by the school board for conventional schools were available to the alternative school.

Quality day-care services formed an integral part of this alternative community. Indeed, a close working relationship existed between the day-care and alternative school staffs. Four of the private day-care staff served as aides to the teachers of the alternative school. The governance of the alternative school was unique in that the parent executive council had definite responsibilities for both the day-care services and the alternative school. This council exercised an employer role with the former and an advisory role with the latter. It was comprised of parents, each of whom represented a classroom in the school, plus the teachers and principal. This group handled all policy-making for the school, including involvement in interviews for prospective staff, and the setting of agendas for the general meetings which were held regularly for all parents.

Each classroom teacher met monthly with his or her pupils' parents to discuss programming for the coming month. Parents were invited to suggest themes and to share their expertise in the classrooms. Any issues could be forwarded to the executive council for resolution.

The programs appeared to be similar to those offered in any conventional primary-junior school. Some pupils participated in the co-instructional activities of the host school which also provided resource withdrawal services for a few pupils in reading and language.

Parents chose to have their children attend this school as a result of a conscious choice based on the following factors: (i) the unique setting, (ii) the high degree of parental involvement in both governance and classroom participation, (iii) the availability of quality day-care, (iv) the greater sense of community, (v) the congruent philosophy of staff, (vi) the full-day kindergartens, and (vii) the congruent value system of staff and parents. This choice was made despite the fact that for the majority of these parents, this alternative school was not in their immediate neighbourhood. The determination to have their children obtain a sound education in a caring environment was the prime motivation.

### 3. A PRIMARY-JUNIOR-INTERMEDIATE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

This was one of the few alternative schools in the sample which occupied completely a regular junior school building. It enjoyed all the facilities of a well-equipped conventional school. In addition, it had easy access to public transit.

At the time of this review, there were 202 pupils and 9.5 teachers in a junior kindergarten through grade eight continuum. There were no tests required for admission, but parents were expected to see the program in operation before admittance was granted. The principal interviewed all parents and prospective pupils before any final decisions were made. At that time, both the parents and the pupils were made aware of the necessity for each of them to make a commitment to participate actively in some way in the life of the school. There was a sizeable waiting list for this alternative school.

The school had a well-produced handbook which included the school's aims and objectives, the school's organization and program, and the roles of parents, children, principal and teachers. All parents were members of the general parent group which met at least four times yearly to discuss major issues. There was a complex committee structure and each parent was expected to belong to at least one committee. The executive committee, which met once every two weeks during the day with the principal, consisted of the chairpersons of each of the school committees. This group established school policy, coordinated the work of all committees, and published an annual report. Minutes were kept of each meeting and circulated to all parents and staff. An effective teacher aide program was developed by staff and parents to train parents as volunteer aides to assist staff. There was also a student council composed of two pupils from each class.

Inherent in this school's policy was the principle that the teachers were responsible for program and the principal was responsible for the excellence of the staff. Both staff and principal, however, considered the suggestions and criticisms of the parent committees in accordance with the overall aims and objectives of the school.

The programs offered were highly individualized yet integrated. There were ample, stimulating manipulative materials. Classroom spaces were organized flexibly with shared tables and open working areas. No rotary system existed at any grade or division. Classroom timetables, therefore, were more flexible with large blocks of time, both structured and unstructured. The curricula, however, were balanced in all areas including music and drama. Pupils in grades seven and eight were bussed to a senior school for Family Studies and Industrial Arts. Community resources were used extensively. Field trips were common. Competition with one's own achievements was stressed in conjunction with self-evaluation. There was a self-contained special education class. This special education teacher provided enrichment and remedial programs throughout the school and pupils were withdrawn from regular classroom programs to attend. Program adjustments within all classrooms were evident.

As most of these pupils did not reside in the neighbourhood adjacent to the school, co-instructional programs such as primary, junior, and senior choirs, instrumental music, drama, and sports activities were provided by staff before 9:00 a.m. and during lunch hours. Although this was not a school which advertised itself as a bilingual school, French was taught informally by the classroom teachers from junior kindergarten to grade four. In grades four through eight, however, core French was taught by a half-time teacher. Interestingly, there were four certified French teachers on staff. This facilitated the incidental, informal, aural learning of the French language in the school, particularly in the early years.

Day care for pre-school and school age children was on site. It was an incorporated non-profit, community-based organization which occupied one classroom and an office in this school. The day-care program had been successfully integrated into the daily life of the school. This was especially true in the kindergarten through grade one years as many of the primary pupils had attended the pre-school child care component. There was on-going communication between the school and day-care staff. Moreover, the child care staff, including infants, attended all school assemblies and special events. Some secondary school students enrolled in Family Studies courses were actively involved in the program, and some high school students were paid assistants for the after-school part of the program. Volunteer assistants included some seniors and some handicapped citizens from the local community.

#### 4. AN INTERMEDIATE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL (GRADES 7-8)

Parents, in conjunction with two teachers from a Primary-Junior alternative school, initiated this Intermediate alternative school. It was located on the third floor of a conventional junior school adjacent to public transit where it occupied four well equipped classrooms. The principal of the host school was also the principal of this Intermediate Alternative. A half-time secretary was provided by the school board.

Forty students, twenty in each of grade seven and eight, were enrolled. Two full-time teachers were assigned to the school. Special needs of some students were provided on a withdrawal basis for forty minutes daily by a resource teacher assigned to the host school. Use was made of the gymnasium facilities of the host school as well as the library resource centre. Core French was taught daily by an itinerant teacher provided by the school board.

Frequent use was made of community resources. Students had regular opportunities to do some community service each week. These experiences were negotiated with the staff and the community agencies involved such as senior citizen homes and day-care facilities. Written reports by the students were required on the projects undertaken.

Students were encouraged to participate in on-going, shared decision-making. Contract learning was a major component whereby every student received a series of contracts each containing material organized in themes. Contained in a typical contract was a variety of tasks, ranging from drill and practice exercises to research reports. Basic skills were stressed. Peer evaluation, self-evaluation and teacher evaluation were inherent in the process. This negotiated contract approach required the students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to learn to budget time, and to establish realistic goals for themselves in consultation with their teachers. The staff, parents and students were pleased with the level of individualization achieved and the progress being made.

The curriculum was highly student-centred and integrated. A balance within the curriculum in areas such as music, drama, family studies and industrial arts had not yet been achieved. This, however, did not deter parents and students from deliberately choosing to attend this alternative. These clients believed that the benefits of this program far outweighed any deficiencies.

The students had divergent backgrounds, abilities, talents, and interests. Most had no previous experience in conventional schools. All but one student lived outside the immediate neighbourhood. A few travelled considerable distances to attend. Many students said they would eventually attend alternative secondary schools. A few, however, preferred to attend conventional high schools. All students appeared to be supportive of this particular environment because it allowed them to have some control over their daily lives and to exert some independence. The affective domain was a major focus of the curriculum and the guidance program played an important role.

The students held weekly class meetings with the two grades combined. These were chaired by various grade eight students and were like open forums where any concerns were shared. The teachers assumed the roles of group members.

A board of directors, comprised of four parents and the two teachers, met regularly to discuss any problems and to provide suggestions for the daily life of the school. They provided input concerning curriculum planning and program evaluation and were involved in staffing decisions, fundraising activities, facilitating the use of parent and community resources, and helping new parents and students adjust to the school. Concerns of any parent could be brought to the attention of the board of directors.

5. AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM (GRADES 9-10)

This program was established as a school board's Early School Leaving Committee Project, to accommodate English language and French language students whose school attendance patterns had been demonstrably unsatisfactory. Most of these students had achieved little success in conventional school settings for various reasons, and it seemed that they required an alternative form of schooling to meet their particular needs. All students were directed to the program by an I.P.R.C. They were of early school leaving age (14-16) who were referred by local hospitals, counsellors, welfare agencies, and other schools from within the local jurisdiction.

The alternative program was located in a conventional high school where it made effective use of the facilities and resources of the host school. Twenty-four pupils were involved. Resource services within the program included Special Education, Counselling, and Guidance. Other support contacts were with community organizations such as Placement Agencies, Childrens' Aid, Probation Officers, and Child and Family Services.

An important component of this program was the creation of an environment for learning that would elevate the pupils' self-esteem and the modification of program design to meet the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils. Skill development was also a priority.

Students signed contracts to complete certain programs of study. A program was designed in such a way that the student worked more independently than in a conventional school and, as a result, felt somewhat more in control of his/her program. In order to accommodate the students' educational needs, a flexible curriculum was designed that conformed to Ministry curriculum guidelines. A work experience component was provided through a student-based enterprise known as the "hat and candy business". The students manufactured the



candy, marketed it, and maintained records that related to it. The community-at-large was involved in the program and was very supportive of it, not only in providing input to the curriculum but by employing students as they completed their courses of study.

6. AN INTERMEDIATE-SENIOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

This school, which occupied a wing of a senior elementary school, had an enrolment in Grades 9 to 13 of 134 students, all of whom were taking courses at the advanced level. Students, parents and teachers were expected to be involved fully and co-operatively in the life of the school. Volunteers such as university professors, masters from Community Colleges, and other professionals from the community in the areas of business, industry and the Arts also participated regularly.

School policy was set by an Advisory Council consisting of five teachers, five parents, and seven students (one representative from each grade plus two student members at-large). The Advisory Council, which met monthly, was apparently empowered to decide on unresolved disputes between students and staff and was in charge of long-range planning for school activities. Decisions were made at a weekly general meeting of students and staff. Two staff members served on a yearly rotational basis as co-ordinators of the school and a Board-appointed principal visited at least once a week.

Courses were offered in English, Science, Mathematics, History, Geography, Physical Education and Visual Arts. The school also offered an Interdisciplinary Course which was based on themes selected by students and teachers and which was taught in several sections by three or more staff. The Interdisciplinary Course was designed to break down the barriers among the disciplines. War and Peace, Utopias and Dystopias, the Decade of the Sixties, The Life Cycle, and The Holocaust of World War II were themes selected for the course. Guest speakers were invited to supplement the course, and films were used where applicable. Although most courses at the school were semestered, on occasion, a course would operate for a full year. Most students took eight courses, several of which had an independent study mode.

## 7. A SENIOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

This school, which was a series of linked portables, had very adequate resources. It enjoyed good rapport with the local community and with other schools in the system. With 139 students and eight teachers, it offered a wide range of academic subjects, from Latin to Computer Science, at both the General and Advanced Levels. The predominant program mode, emphasizing process as well as product, was individualized instruction with a significant component of independent study. Since the school opened eight years ago, it has provided structured and creative learning opportunities so that students may develop the skills of self-education.

The school offered an alternative to students who, for various reasons, either wished to transfer out of conventional educational settings or who, having dropped out, were highly motivated to continue their formal education, but who wanted an environment that gave them a greater sense of self-esteem.

Students built their own timetables within certain prescribed requirements: weekly individual conferences with subject tutors; attendance at all scheduled group sessions; involvement in independent study; participation, where appropriate, in field trips, lab work, research, and work experience. The "in class" expectation was a minimum of three hours per credit per week within a pattern of flexible scheduling. Attracted by such flexibility, several student athletes of international calibre attended, and one disabled student found "flex time" an enabling advantage over more traditional schedules.

To enrol in the school, students must have attained at least Grade 10 standing and be interviewed by two staff members. The screening procedure focussed upon the ability of the student to read at the appropriate grade level and upon the degree of commitment which the student would be required to exhibit in the school.

While there was little evidence of a formal structure for "student government", the students clearly felt they had considerable input into the decisions affecting their academic and social lives. Through conferencing, group work and learning contracts, a close bond between students and staff resulted. Teachers felt they had a sense of control through the staff team approach to consensus management. The teacher who had responsibility for the overall management and daily running of the school was proactive in terms of cooperative planning and professional development.

This was a demanding academic learning environment within which staff, students and parents enthusiastically defined and supported demanding individualized programs. Students were highly accountable to their tutors whom they met weekly and from whom they received feedback on all assignments, tests and examinations. Parents were highly supportive of the monitoring and reporting system, which included a "Credit Audit", a statement issued every six weeks defining the progress of the student clearly in terms of quantity and quality of work done.

#### 8. AN ADULT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

This school offered programs at four facilities some 20 or 30 miles apart. Three programs were in large urban areas and one in a rural community. Seven teachers instructed 145 students: 35 at Basic, 73 at General, and 37 at Advanced Levels. The main campus was in a renovated elementary school, and occupied five classrooms. The other three locations had smaller facilities: a large room in an old Town Hall; two technical shops in a high school; and an area in a new shopping mall which was converted into two classrooms. Some staff taught in more than one location. The Principal, with additional responsibilities for Continuing Education, Driver Education and Heritage Languages Programs, travelled to all locations.

The programs, which were initiated eight years ago, served adults who, for the most part, had resumed their schooling for job-related needs. Many sought to upgrade qualifications for career advancement in the local auto industry. In some cases, parents who had raised families had also returned to school.

Students were required to attend classes for three hours each day, generally pursuing one credit at a time. Thus, credits were normally obtained in eight or nine weeks. Because students were able to start courses every two months or so, they found it easier to move between employment and school. The mobility of the school population is illustrated by the fact that, for an enrolment of 145 students, 36 were admitted and 20 demitted in one month.

Full credit courses were offered in English, Social Science, Family Studies, Life Skills, Mathematics, Science, Biology, Chemistry and Physics, and were based upon Ministry Correspondence Course material. A "refresher" course, consisting of .3 credit modules in English, Mathematics and Science, was available. Multi-level, multi-subject classes were common. In the rural location, 14 students took English courses ranging from Grade 9 to Grade 13 for three hours each morning. For the afternoon, the teacher travelled to another facility where he taught ten students in English and Mathematics. The predominant mode of instruction and evaluation was teacher/student conferencing.

Seminars and small group instruction were also used on occasion and were regarded as the natural result of individually paced programs. At the main campus, a science teacher instructed 24 students each afternoon for three hours: 11 students, in various groupings, in Biology, Science and Mathematics; and 13 students in the "refresher" course. By balancing her time in group, class and individual instruction, this teacher appeared to be meeting the needs of her students. These teaching assignments required a high degree of organization and commitment as all teachers functioned as guidance counsellors as well as teachers of a wide variety of subjects.

The community roots of this program were deep: many students sought their Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma so that they could advance in specific job situations; the day school operation grew out of a need to provide shift workers with the means of graduating; the classes in the shopping mall were provided by the Youth Employment Service; the School Board's Alternative Education Coordinator met every month with the Regional Agency representing support services for social care and the unemployed.

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