



Aboriginal School Division Workshop Report

January 24, 2011



DRAFT

**Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg
Aboriginal School Division Workshop
Held on Monday, January 24, 2011 (10:00 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.)**

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I. Introduction

This one-day workshop represents an early step in the possible creation of an Aboriginal focused school system that would be created in order to enable urban Aboriginal people to have a bigger role in determining how Aboriginal youth are taught within a publicly-funded school system.

The purpose of the workshop was to:

- Work to establish the principles that would guide the future operations of an Aboriginal focused school system.
- Identify and develop strategies to deal with anticipated challenges and opportunities.
- Determine the role and future proceedings of a steering committee which would take the lead in advancing the concept or vision associated with an school system directed by urban Aboriginal peoples.

The purpose of this report is to provide a documentation of the proceedings and discussions which took place at the workshop on January 24, 2011.

II. Approach to the meeting

The ACW contracted Shaun Finnigan of McKay Finnigan and Associates to serve as facilitator for the workshop. In both structuring the agenda and facilitating the discussion, a conscious attempt was made to ensure that all voices could be heard and all issues could be dealt with.

Upon review of the proposed agenda (see copy – Appendix A), the group concluded that the meeting would take a less formal approach and a session where each participant was able to speak out about their expectations, reasons for supporting, and concerns regarding this type of initiative.

The workshop started with a brief presentation by Damon Johnston, President of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg (ACW), who explained the issue at hand and the role of the ACW. From his standpoint the central question that needed to be answered is ‘should we establish an Aboriginal School Division and why?’

III. Current System; successes and failures

It was agreed by all attending the meeting that the fundamental reason for creating an alterative Aboriginal focused educational system is because the current system has failed and continues to fail in successfully addressing the needs of Winnipeg’s Aboriginal population. A discussion took place as to what is and what isn’t working under the current system. The following is the list of what was mentioned during the workshop:

What is working

- The current size of the School Division enables it to more easily allocate funds towards support programs, such as a child guidance clinic, as it has a greater population to which to provide service.
- Union agreements provide financial and benefit incentives for quality teachers.
- Outreach program established in the late 1960s is an example of the current system's ability to change to address the needs of Aboriginal youth. (The participant did however explain that this change resulted from a difficult and convoluted process, which indicates the difficulty for such a large system to change).
- The Children of the Earth high school (COE) has been recognized nationally as a model of education. This is due to its innovative programming specifically designed to achieve a high level of success among Aboriginal students.

What is not working

- All too often, Aboriginal teachers/students/administrators feel that they have been treated in a discriminatory way by non-Aboriginal people including teachers/students/administrators. Often poor decisions by non-Aboriginal people, while well intentioned perhaps, are entrenched in a racist system.
- Existing system continues to reinforce a colonial relationship or paradigm.
- Existing system continues to reinforce a power and privilege dynamic.
- The current boundaries of Winnipeg School Division #1 are too large for the representation of the Board of Trustees and more specifically, representation of Aboriginal students.
- Current system is there to serve adults rather than children and youth. e.g. regimented 9 to 5 learning and teaching schedule is suitable to an adult (teacher) with a stable home-life rather than a child (student) with an unstable home-life.
- Often school is an alienating experience for Aboriginal children and youth.
- Difficult to shift ways of operating by people connected to the system due to personal insecurities. Parents are often the best ones to create change in the system.
- Frustration in seeing the inabilities of the current system to successfully address early childhood development (Grade 3 and under).
- Outcome-based model. Heavy focus on outcomes by classes and students results in creating a "winners and losers" dynamic. E.g. History of the 'major work' program in the 1960s, where the 'smart' students were separated from others and received privileged treatment by teachers.
- No teaching of Aboriginal identity. E.g. Indigenous languages, pre-fur trade history.
- With the example of the Children of the Earth (COE) school, parental or community involvement is based on voluntary participation and, as a result, is not effective.

- In the past, COE served as a ‘dumping ground’ for difficult students by other schools, thus compromising the program.
- Collective bargaining – creates or reflects a teacher culture that is more focused on personal gain rather than concern for the well being of the larger community (i.e. greater education level of youth).
- A past program; the Ndinawe transitional school received short term funding and autonomy that resulted in high level success. Now it is under school division control and the success levels have drastically decreased.
- Within the current School Division governance model, North End schools tend to receive the same funding as the South End schools with the exception of the pupil teacher ratio. When examining the social repercussions, such as crime and poverty, it should be the reverse we need to understand that equity is not equality and that funding should be allocated in proportion to need.
- Current system creates a ping-pong or pinball effect where students are shuffled from one school or program to another while continuously and incrementally being set back in the long run.

IV. Guiding Principles

The following principles resulted from overall discussion throughout the day. Initially, the principles were intentionally identified by the meeting participants and, subsequently, more were added as the discussion ensued. The participants seemed to generally be in agreement with most, if not all, of the listed principles. However, this list does represent an initial attempt by the committee to identify guiding principles and will, undoubtedly, provide the grounds for future discussions.

- The Governance model shall be a shared one between Non-Status First Nations, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.
- Recognize the need for Aboriginal Identity to be relearned.
- Involves all cultural groups (i.e. Non-status First Nations, Inuit, Métis, First Nations, and others)
- School imbedded in Indigenous pedagogy and ideology (e.g. overall concern for the group rather than the individual).
- Bi-multicultural model – participation without compromising cultural identity (i.e. language groups, First Nations from outside MB boundaries, etc.)
- Recognize traditional role of women as teachers and leaders.
- Acknowledge our right to exercise sovereignty as a means to improve our economic/social/cultural situation (refer to the United Nations document, Harvard University study)
- A model based on equality among all.
- Effective means of ensuring accountability, such as legislation, on the part of teachers.
- “No-fail” parameters to be recognized (a new system must be designed so that it cannot fail)

- No tolerance for oppression, either through individual behavior or through systematic structure.
- Recognize different forms of intelligence so that everyone receives the opportunity to grow and develop.
- Our children are given the opportunity and it is an expectation for our teachers to aim for the highest not the lowest.
- Acknowledge the collective rather than the individual – less competition.
- Involvement of the community (e.g. parents) in school programming.
- Learn and make decisions based on past successes and failures. (e.g. Children of the Earth High School).
- Deepen the understanding of urban Aboriginal condition while being mindful of rural/urban connection to our community and schools.
- Divisional boundaries that allow for Aboriginal students from all corners of the city; and not just the North End.
- Not get limited by the same structural boundaries of existing system (i.e. economy of scale)
- A publicly funded system that permits autonomy

V. Charter vs. School Division models

There was a discussion regarding the structural form that an Aboriginal focused school system could take. Most of the participants were aware of precedents of the Manitoba Francophone school division (DSFM) as well as the charter school model that exists in the U.S. and in the province of Alberta. To clarify, charter schools are an attempt to gain some of the advantages of the private-sector schooling without leaving the public sector while a school division is an entirely autonomous publicly funded administrative body. The following are the various arguments in favor of the two models. There was also discussion regarding alternative models that would incorporate some organizational elements of both of these models.

Benefits of Charter model

- Ability to be excluded from the collective bargaining process of the teachers union would allow more freedom to consider other forms of rewards such as incentive bonuses, eagle feathers etc. and allow alternative teaching/learning times. Ununionized status with bonuses above the average wage would attract the best teachers.
- Less risk of getting limited by the same structural boundaries that affect the current system (i.e. economy of scale).
- Avoid collective bargaining conflicts. The settlements or contracts that are reached within the various school systems all relate to each other.
- Ability to maintain a greater level of autonomy.
- Principle of discontinuing system of oppression that is symptomatic of existing school systems is more likely to be realized in an autonomous organization
- Symbolically, more powerful to have an autonomous body – a clearer break from colonial oppression and pursuit of our own vision.

Benefits of School Division model

- A model loosely based on the existing in-province example of the DSFM.
- May provide ability to leverage property taxes.
- Easier to leverage existing programs and services already established by the public school division (e.g. child guidance clinic, disability services, etc.)
- Transfer agreement would enable easier transition and address immediate staffing issues and other related issues.
- Ready made system, with buildings, staff, policies,,,less work at the front end

Benefits of other models

- To exist as an independent organization that would administer various charter schools. This would ensure that some of the benefits of both charter school and separate school division could be realized.
- Exist as a school division that has access to school division buildings.
- To operate as primarily publicly funded with additional fees collected by outside organizations (e.g. Reserves, MMF, AMC).

The consensus following this initial discussion was that a more thorough analysis of the various organizational models was needed in terms of the costs/benefits and relation to the principles that would embody an overall vision.

VI. Challenges

Throughout the discussion, various short term and long term challenges were identified.

Short term challenges

- Public perception will be that this initiative is itself a form of discrimination.
- Determine the specific structure of the organization (i.e. charter school vs. school division, legislation, and policies)
- Lack of high profile members on the steering committee (e.g. Shawn Atleo, Phil Fontaine, Lloyd Axworthy, others)
- Obtain public support (federal and provincial) to fund a process to help achieve consensus and commitment to address the current situation.

Long term challenges

- Acknowledge and understand the nature of funding shortages currently experienced by the DSFM. Learn from this as a cautionary example.
- Construction of infrastructure to support schools and programs requires a lot of short-term capital that could compromise overall program in long run.
- Collective agreements with unions will be prove to be difficult process.
- Co-management with the community and the need to establish clarity regarding various duties (e.g. hiring and firing of staff) and understanding where they meet.

- To be fully aware that, as a publicly funded organization, inevitable funding shortages for programming will prove to be a chronic issue and challenge.
- Acknowledge that not all Aboriginal children want to attend an Aboriginal focused school.

VII. Next Steps

The following are the short term 'next steps' that were identified as doable and will lead to further discussions/decisions.

- Develop a 'package' or 'map' that clearly explains the vision and what is being proposed. This would serve as vehicle for better ensuring political influence and 'buy-in' from others.
- Consult with and research other school divisions and programs including;
 - o DSFM
 - o University of Winnipeg high school
 - o Ndinawe transitional school
 - o Children of the Earth
 - o other international examples, (New Zealand in particular)
 - o Frontier School Division
 - o 'Survival School' concept from 1990s
- Identify important questions that need to be asked such as;
 - o How to do teacher training?
 - o How to do child assessment?
 - o How to address streaming versus academic programming?
 - o How to approach union relations?
- Undertake further research including;
 - o Cost/benefit analysis
 - o Synthesize demographic analysis
 - o Review studies by Chalmers and Lalonde and Jeffery Canada.
- Develop a political (and perhaps legal) strategy (e.g. Charter challenge) using Charter and Human Rights code documents.

VIII. Appendices

Appendix A

**Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg
Aboriginal School Division Meeting
January 24, 2011, 10am**

AGENDA

1. Introduction

- Explain format of meeting
- Identify participants and personal motivations/perspectives

2. Project Overview and Current Developments

- What's working now and why?
- What isn't working now and why?
- Reasons for the establishment of School Division
- Other models (DFSM, Charter Schools)
- Current and Prospective Developments

3. Identify Challenges (SWOT?)

- Done as a group

4. Strategy for Success

- Done as a group
- Strategies to address identified challenges

5. Next Steps

Appendix B

**Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg
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List of Attendees

Rebecca Blaikie - Co-director of CEDA

Laara Fitznor - Associate Professor, University of Manitoba

Damon Johnston - President, Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg

Kathy Mallett- Co-director of CEDA

Sonia Prevost-Derbecker - Executive Director of Ndinawe Youth Resource Centre

Freeman Simard – Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg

Leslie Spillet – Executive Director, Ka Ni Kanichihk.

Florence Zaharia – Elder

*A group of students from the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Education came to observe.

Appendix C

Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg Aboriginal School Division Meeting January 24, 2011

Flipchart Notes

Aboriginal School Division – Why?

(The following is feedback provided regarding the conceptualization of the model of a Aboriginal School Division)

- 'Conceptualization'
- Social and Financial cost-benefit analysis
- Governance (shared model; urban, First Nations, Métis, Inuit)
- Early Childhood Development
- Research e.g. Chalmers & Lalonde
- Identity – To be relearned
- Cautions – treatment of teachers and students
- Involves all cultural groups (i.e. Inuit, Métis, First Nations, Non-status) e.g. DSFM challenge of who gets accepted in light of decreasing francophone population of MB.
- Culture – School imbedded in Indigenous pedagogy and ideology. Those not from culture group are invited to be students.
- Bi-multicultural model – participation without compromising cultural identity (i.e. language groups, First Nations from outside MB boundaries, etc.)
- Demographic analysis to establish model.
- Use United Nations document
- Administrative arm – understanding and define of this needed.
- Equity
- Women as teachers and leaders
- Curriculum that incorporates history that includes fur trade, ping pong (pinball) effect, individual family histories.
- Not so focused on outcome – not outcome-based

(The following are the notes taken following the lunch break several new participants arrived at this point)

Charter vs. School Board

- Union vs. non-union....
- Negotiables vs. non-negotiables (e.g. child guidance clinic, disabilities service systems, other specialty services)
- Full integration division or stream
 - o Assess benefits
 - o No fail – parameters needed

- Risk analysis needed (e.g. funding for needs)
 - o High, medium, low
 - o Structure to deal w/ issue
 - o Ensure accountability (teachers)
- School board and division → Charter not wanted?
 - ↓
 - Collective bargaining (folded & settled)
 - ↓
 - union – incentive bonuses (Jeffery Canada research – systems that allow failure)
 - ↓
 - Recruit the best teachers
- More about Aboriginal governed school – what we want.
 - o Modeled on DSFM
- Not get limited by same structural boundaries (economy of scale)
 - o Learn from (Children of the Earth, Child and Family Service) including past mistakes.
- Organization to run several different charter schools as an option
- Transfer agreement
 - o Affect union agreements
 - o Address immediate staffing issues and other issues
- Legislation needed (to hold people accountable) in MB for charter schools
 - ↑
 - Opposition to concept
- (*Organization*) Seen as ‘a right’
- Cautions need to be written out.
 - o Charter argument
 - o Ensure that process with public is not as difficult.
 - o Break from system. Realize a different vision.
- Need to acknowledge:
 - o Role of unions
 - o Incentives for employees
- Assessment needed (of teachers and others...)
- Concept of ‘survival school’
 - o Understanding of culture
 - ↓
- Difficult to sell to...
- Avoid ‘white supremacy centre’ role of schools – no oppression (they need us myth, industry)
 - o Can’t be lost
 - o Modeled on other systems (e.g. welfare, homeless shelters)
- Existing situation (stigma)
 - o North End schools are lesser than...
 - o Curriculum gets compromised
- Historic ‘major work’ program – not a good system
- Acknowledge different intelligences
 - o Recognized in order for people to develop / grow.
 - o Principle: Our children aim the highest not the lowest.

- Principle: Acknowledge the collective rather than the individual – less competition.
 - o Create a system of relationships that acknowledge every child and where they are at.
 - o Create a system of mastery for everyone.
- All good but need for graduates to economically succeed.
- A publicly funded system that permits autonomy.
- Collective bargaining conflicts. They (bargains) need to relate to each other.
- Confront the need to defend existing system. E.g. bringing elders into school
- Children of Earth – (parental) community involvement – voluntary basis resulted in not sustainable
- Learn from positive programs of COE (e.g. pre-med, all girls classes, all around improvements from early days (built on sand))

↓
Time factor was a limit
- COE is an ‘academic high school’ with only 230 kids
Vs.
R.B. Russell → trade oriented
- COE in the past a ‘dumping ground’ for difficult kids to deal with.
- Traditional rather than monetary incentives. Teachers need to understand this.
- Difficult to say non-monetary incentives.
- Develop a ‘product’ → useful during election time (October?)
- Recognize that all provincial political parties not seeing ‘outside the box’.
- Recognize not all Aboriginal kids will want to go to Aboriginal School Division School. E.g. DSFM – open to kids who want to go to French immersion.
- Look at DSFM legislation.
 - o participant talked to them about survival school concept.
- Frontier School Division as an organization to consult.
- Deepen the understanding of urban Aboriginal while being mindful of rural/urban connection. Look at successful off-reserve models.

(a diagram of budget allocation schemes was drawn by participant)

- School Division boundaries are now to bring in Aboriginal students from all parts of City, not just the North End.
- Public (federal and provincial) funding to address situation → Consensus; now is the time to ask. Linked to human rights documents.

Next Steps

- Synthesize into a ‘package’ or ‘map’ – vehicle for creating a different vision
 - o Other models needed
 - o Rights based approach.

- Consult with DSFM
- Analysis
 - o Cost-benefit
 - o Issues are identified and itemized
- What are the questions that need to be asked?
 - o How to do teacher training?
 - o Child assessment
 - o Address Streaming vs. Academic
 - o Union relations
- Strategies (e.g. Charter challenge)
 - o Documents Charter and Human Rights code
- UofW high school as separate from school system. 'South College?' 2-3 years in operation.
 - o Perhaps expand this program into community → needs further discussion.
- E.g. Ndinawe transitional school had a short term funding arrangement and had great results. Now bad results under school division control → needs research.
- Research any ~~Australian~~ or New Zealand models

Challenges

- Capital from the actual buildings needed.
 - o Could Aboriginal School Division leverage school division buildings
- Co-management and community –
 - o identify the various duties. Where the two meet and don't meet.
 - o Hiring and firing – should be governance role.

(Meeting adjourned 3:45pm)