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The Honourable Sean Conway, Minister

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ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SYSTEM

A. INTRODUCTION

A provincial review of publicly supported alternative schools was conducted by Ministry of Education personnel during the 1984-85 school year. The review was exploratory in nature, the intent being to determine the current state-of-the-art with respect to alternative schools in the public system. Readers who wish to study the findings in greater detail may obtain a copy of "The Provincial Review Report of Alternative Schools and Programs in the Public System: An Expanded Description" from a regional office of the Ministry of Education.

For the purposes of this review, the following two descriptors were used:

- o A public alternative school is a school that is operated as an alternative school by a school board and for which a September School Report had been submitted to the Ministry of Education.
- o A public alternative program is a program that is operated as an alternative program by a school board.

The review sample include all public alternative schools (29) and most of the alternative programs (36) that had been identified by directors of education. French-immersion programs were not included.

In the sample, all pupils of alternative programs were enrolled in conventional schools. In contrast, all pupils of alternative schools in the sample were enrolled in alternative schools.

B. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the provincial review of alternative schools and programs in the public system were:

- 1) to ascertain the number, kind, and purposes of public alternative schools and programs that have been established and maintained by school boards;
- 2) to explore the organization of public alternative schools and programs in light of ministry policy, as contained in the Education Act, regulations, The Formative Years, Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions, and curriculum guidelines; and
- 3) to solicit from students, teachers, parents, administrators, trustees, and representatives of community agencies their ideas concerning the overall effectiveness of education in public alternative schools and programs, and their suggestions for improving that effectiveness, where necessary.

C. PROCEDURES

A team of two or three reviewers spent up to two days in each alternative school and program, doing the following:

- o conducting an enrolment audit
- o observing formally two classroom teachers and their pupils for three hours each
- o interviewing the same two classroom teachers for approximately one hour each
- o interviewing the principal
- o interviewing a supervisory officer and a consultant/supervisor/co-ordinator from each school board who were responsible for alternative schools and programs
- o interviewing trustees, parents, students, and representatives of community agencies

- o examining course calendars, timetables, pupils' notebooks, projects, materials, courses of study, etc.
- o visiting informally other classrooms in each alternative school and program

D. FINDINGS

The findings pertaining to objectives 1 and 2 (see p.2) are presented and discussed separately; findings relating to objective 3 are incorporated throughout the report.

Objective 1: Number, Kind, and Purposes of Public Alternative Schools and Programs

a) Number

The sample included sixty-five alternative schools and programs organized by twenty seven school boards. Although eight school boards had established the twenty-nine alternative schools, twenty-one of them were maintained by one school board. The thirty-six alternative programs included in the sample were organized by twenty-one school boards.

b) Kind

Subsection 149(10) of the Education Act requires that a school board "ensure that every school under its charge is conducted in accordance with this Act and the regulations". Thus, technically, alternative schools and programs, and conventional schools must be similar. The reviewers found that, in many ways, they were. The key difference, however, was the emphasis placed on certain elements. A particular alternative school may have been established, for example, to promote equality in the decision-making process among parents, administrators, and teachers in so far as curriculum planning and the overall operation of the school were concerned. Thus, emphasis on various themes produces alternative schools and programs: one school may stress personalized instruction; another may develop a free-flow curriculum based on pupils' interests; and a third may be heavily involved in independent study.

Table 1, Kinds of Public Alternative Schools and Programs, illustrates the structural pluralism that existed in the review sample. Eight general kinds of alternatives have been identified.

TABLE 1
Kinds of Public Alternative Schools and Programs

Kind	Grades	Number of Schools	Number of Programs	Enrolment	Number of Teachers
Primary	JK-3	4	1	38 - 149	1.5 - 5.0
Primary-Junior	JK-6	3		63 - 140	4.0 - 6.0
Primary-Junior-Intermediate	JK-8	4		35 - 202	2.0 - 9.5
Intermediate	7-8	4	2	31 - 69	2.0 - 3.5
Intermediate	9-10		8	8 - 24	1.0 - 4.0
Intermediate-Senior	9-13	7	7	29 - 590	3.0 - 34.0
Senior	11-13	5	1	61 - 207	3.0 - 9.0
Adult Education	9-13	2	17	17 - 403	1.0 - 32.0

The enrolment figures in the table highlight one of the common features of public alternative schools and programs - their size. Most tended to be much smaller than conventional schools; in some situations, the small size seemed to the reviewers to promote a high level of flexibility and personalized instruction. Furthermore, it appeared to the reviewers that a sense of community among parents, teachers, and pupils frequently prevailed since more opportunities to share meaningfully in the total schooling process existed.

The following is a brief, general overview of each kind of public alternative school and program.

A significant finding of this review is that Primary, Primary-Junior, and Primary-Junior-Intermediate alternatives were, for the most part, essentially learning-style alternatives; any pupils whose needs could be accommodated within the alternative were enrolled. However, Intermediate, Intermediate-Senior, Senior, and Adult Education alternatives tended to be, for the most part, essentially client alternatives; schools and programs were designed for a particular clientele: pupils age fourteen to fifteen, potential early school-leavers, advanced-level pupils, etc. Many of these client alternatives were also learning-style alternatives in that they stressed a certain mode of curriculum delivery to their clients: experiential learning, correspondence education, independent study, contractual learning, etc.

Intermediate Alternatives (Grades 7 and 8)

Three of the Intermediate alternatives (Grades 7 and 8) in this sample were initiated by highly experienced teachers who had taught previously in conventional schools. They had apparently perceived a certain degree of inflexibility and rigidity in the organizational structure of senior elementary schools and a related stifling of their creativity as teachers. They also believed that able pupils should be producing a much higher quality of work. Therefore, alternatives for more able pupils in Grades 7 and 8 were established to challenge their intellectual needs in imaginative ways.

Many of the pupils transferred from conventional Junior schools into these Intermediate alternatives (Grades 7 and 8) for the two-year program and then proceeded into conventional secondary schools. Others transferred from Primary-Junior alternatives. After completion of Grade 8, some enrolled in secondary-school alternative schools or programs. These Intermediate alternatives for pupils in Grades 7 and 8 seemed not only to attract pupils from other educational jurisdictions (public and private) but also to accommodate a clientele that might otherwise have attended private schools.

The extent of parental involvement in the governance of these alternatives fluctuated from school to school. In one of the schools, involvement was quite extensive. In the others, however, parental participation was similar to that in a conventional school. A general finding of the review is that parental involvement was most intensive at the elementary-school level, particularly in the Primary alternatives. Although a decrease in parental involvement occurred in the governance of secondary-school alternatives, the reviewers were told that parental interest in their children's education in these alternatives was high.

One of the alternative programs in this sample was initiated by a school board to counteract the high drop-out rate that was occurring in that jurisdiction. Potential drop-outs throughout the school system, identified according to defined criteria, were referred to this program in which counseling, personalized instruction, and positive reinforcement and support designed to bolster self-esteem were ongoing. Most of these pupils had average to above-average academic potential, but their performance, behaviour, and attitude indicated to their teachers that they would soon become school drop-outs.

A finding of this review is that all elementary-school alternatives in this sample were English-language alternatives. Some French-language alternatives, however, were in the sample at the secondary-school level.

Intermediate Alternatives (Grades 9 and 10)

The eight Intermediate alternatives (Grades 9 and 10) in this sample were programs initiated by school boards to accommodate the needs of pupils who were regarded as potential drop-outs. All pupils enrolled in these programs had difficulty coping with the demands of a conventional school. Most had behavioural and/or emotional problems, low self-esteem, erratic attendance patterns, poor work habits, and depressed motivational levels. In some jurisdictions, the program was regarded as an alternative to Supervised Alternative Learning for Excused Pupils (S.A.L.E.P.), a last chance to be a full-time pupil in the school system. Two of the programs were one year programs for pupils age fourteen and fifteen. In five of the programs, the pupils were regarded as exceptional and had to be recommended to the program by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (I.P.R.C.).

Intermediate-Senior Alternatives

Most of the Intermediate-Senior alternatives in the sample had an academic focus. In two of the alternatives, there was a particularly strong technological focus, and, in five of the alternatives, independent study was emphasized as the essential mode of curriculum delivery. Three of the alternative schools offered mainly advanced-level courses. Several of these alternatives were designed to accommodate both potential drop-outs within the system and people who wished to re-enter the system to continue their education.

In contrast to Primary, Primary-Junior, and Primary-Junior-Intermediate alternatives which were parent-initiated, Intermediate, Intermediate-Senior, Senior, and adult education alternatives were initiated for the most part by teachers, administrators, and school boards. In one instance, however, parents did initiate an Intermediate-Senior alternative school that currently attracts a clientele who are quite capable of handling advanced-level credit courses. Although there was a high level of parental participation in the governance of this school, there was less in the others. This finding seemed to the reviewers to be indicative of a general pattern: parental involvement in the schooling process tended to be much more intensive in parent-initiated alternatives than in alternatives initiated by teachers, administrators, and school boards.

Senior Alternatives

Of the six Senior alternatives in the sample, five offered independent study as the essential mode of curriculum delivery. Most of the pupils were studying at the advanced level. Parents were not involved in the governance of these schools which were initiated by teachers, administrators, and school boards. These Senior alternatives had a strong academic focus.

Adult Education Alternatives

Most of the Adult Education alternatives in the sample were designed for adults who wished to re-enter the school system during the day to pursue their education. In many instances, students' requests defined the program offerings. Correspondence-education materials were used in more than half of these alternatives. Independent study of units specially designed for the adult learner was another mode of curriculum delivery.

Several school boards purchased courses from the Ministry of Education's Independent Learning Centre (formerly the Correspondence Education Branch). These courses were distributed to the pupils and marked locally. Frequently, boards assigned one teacher to teach several of the courses. As a result, sometimes teachers were made responsible for courses for which they were unqualified.

Alternative programs varied to meet the needs of distinct groups of adult learners, including Native people in outlying reserves, shift workers in local industry, and single parents. Many of these students needed ongoing social support in addition to formal education; therefore, teachers frequently maintained close liaison with various community social agencies. In schools where single parents attended, the need for day-care was particularly evident.

c) Purposes

Public alternative schools and programs are established by school boards in Ontario for elementary, secondary, and adult pupils. They presently strive to satisfy a wide variety of purposes:

- o to promote particular philosophies and approaches to learning and school governance
- o to accommodate pupils whose needs are not being met satisfactorily in conventional schools
- o to preserve and enhance particular heritages
- o to provide specialized emphasis in certain disciplines for talented and/or interested pupils
- o to challenge pupils to become self-motivated learners by having them take more responsibility for their programs of study
- o to facilitate the re-entry of pupils into the school system

Summary of Objective 1

The findings of the reviewers related to the first objective of the review pertaining to the number, kind, and purposes of public alternative schools and programs, included the following:

- o There was tremendous diversity among the alternative schools and programs in the sample.
- o The key difference between alternative schools and programs in the public system and conventional schools seemed to be that emphasis was placed in alternative schools and programs on certain significant elements such as co-operative decision-making and parental participation in curriculum planning and the governance of the school. This emphasis is the underlying characteristic of these schools and programs and represents the alternative.
- o Alternative schools and programs have been established and maintained by school boards in Ontario to fulfil various purposes.

- o Eight general kinds of alternatives have been identified in this review.
- o All elementary alternative schools and programs in the sample were English-language alternatives. However, some French-language secondary-school alternatives were included in the sample.
- o One of the common features of public alternative schools and programs was their small size. This factor permitted a level of flexibility and personalized instruction that is almost unattainable in many large schools. A sense of community could usually be detected among parents, teachers, and pupils who appeared to have more opportunities to share meaningfully in the total schooling process.
- o Alternative schools and programs do not accommodate the needs of all pupils; they may not have the special programs, services, and resources required to meet the specific needs and interests of some pupils.
- o Some public alternative schools and programs were accommodating a clientele that might otherwise have been attending programs in other jurisdictions or other educational institutions.
- o Parental involvement was most intensive at the elementary-school level, particularly in the Primary alternatives. Less active parental participation in the day-to-day operation occurred at the secondary-school level.
- o Primary, Primary-Junior, and Primary-Junior-Intermediate Alternatives in the sample were, for the most part, essentially learning-style alternatives; any pupil whose needs can be accommodated within the alternative may be enrolled. However, Intermediate, Intermediate-Senior, Senior, and Adult Education alternatives tended to be, for the most part, essentially client alternatives; schools and programs were designed for a particular clientele. Many of the client alternatives were also learning-style alternatives in that they stressed a certain mode of curriculum delivery.
- o Parental involvement in the schooling process tended to be more intensive in parent-initiated alternatives than in alternatives initiated by teachers, administrators, and school boards. All Primary, Primary-Junior, and Primary-Junior-Intermediate alternatives in the sample were parent-initiated. Most Intermediate, Intermediate-Senior, Senior, and Adult Education alternatives were initiated by teachers, administrators, and school boards.
- o In jurisdictions that purchased courses from the Ministry of Education's Independent Learning Centre, teachers were sometimes made responsible for courses for which they were unqualified.

Objective 2: Organization of Public Alternative Schools and Programs

Although it is not possible to describe in this report the organization of each alternative school and program, the following themes, which seem to be more global in nature and common to most of the sample, will be explored briefly:

- a) the principal's role in the governance of alternatives
- b) governance and a sense of community
- c) the teachers in alternatives
- d) the curriculum of alternatives
- e) school-board policies
- f) publicity
- g) pre-registration, registration, and enrolment criteria and procedures
- h) conventional schools that house alternatives

a) The Principal's Role in the Governance of Alternatives

The leadership role of principals responsible for alternative schools and programs seemed to differ somewhat from that of principals in conventional schools. This difference was perceived by the reviewers to be an alternative. In one jurisdiction, a principal of an alternative school was called "Principal of Record", which implied, to the reviewers, a different role expectation.

During interviews with principals, several of them expressed concerns to the reviewers about their roles as principals responsible for alternative schools and programs. They were unclear as to how to perform their professional duties as defined by legislation and policy in situations where an important feature of the alternative was shared or co-operative decision-making in the governance of the school. This concern apparently becomes evident in situations where the majority of parents and staff decide to proceed in directions that are basically incompatible with the principal's beliefs and orientations.

Most principals responsible for alternative schools and programs in the sample had other responsibilities. Several were principals of conventional schools which consumed the bulk of their time and energies. Some were principals of continuing education; one was a principal of several alternative schools. In a few jurisdictions, superintendents served also as principals responsible for alternative schools or programs. One alternative school did not have a principal; instead, a vice-principal had been appointed to perform the duties of a principal.

Since many principals carried out their duties by telephone and/or on-site visits on one day or less per week, the alternative school or program actually appeared to the reviewers to function primarily as a result of the team efforts of teachers, pupils, and parents. The principal performed basic administrative functions and served in a consultative/advisory capacity for the staff, parents, and pupils.

Reviewers were told that the person appointed as principal responsible for an alternative school or program should be one who not only understands clearly its purposes and organization and how he/she is to function in that learning environment, but also one who wants to be part of that alternative because he/she believes in the concept. Some principals, for example, inherited alternative schools or programs because they were transferred to the principalships of the host schools that housed the alternatives. In other cases, alternatives were moved into the host schools because there was available space. In some jurisdictions, principals of conventional schools were assigned the responsibility of alternatives that were located in church basements, storefronts, community facilities such as the Y.M.C.A., and schools that were closed because of declining enrolments.

b) Governance and a Sense of Community

The reviewers found that in parent-initiated alternatives there seemed to be a strong sense of community. If the alternative was to survive and thrive, it would be because the community of parents, pupils, and staff made it do so. This finding was applicable in varying degrees to other alternatives as well. People were involved in the alternatives because they wanted to be involved. Voluntarism, then, was a significant feature of all alternative schools and programs, whether parent-initiated, teacher-initiated, or board-initiated.

The reviewers were told of instances where the cohesiveness and survival of alternative schools and programs were threatened because of certain fundamental disagreements. It seemed that harmony and stability, as well as commitment to the commonly shared purposes of alternatives, were necessary conditions for their survival.

Changes were made to the organization of some alternatives to make them more acceptable to the majority. Some of these changes altered radically the paths that were originally plotted for them. In well-established alternatives, these changes were quite appropriate since the pioneer clients who initiated the alternatives were no longer affiliated with them.

No two alternatives in this sample had identical governance structures. A key finding of the review was that the most sophisticated and democratically oriented governance structures involving parents, teachers, and pupils were in the Primary, Primary-Junior, Primary-Junior-Intermediate, and Intermediate (Grades 7 and 8) alternatives. Although teachers and pupils seemed to be participating together well in the governance of secondary-school alternatives, parental participation was significantly less than at the elementary level.

c) The Teachers in Alternatives

The reviewers were generally impressed with the level of commitment and the quality of curriculum delivery in the majority of alternative schools and programs. The teachers were, for the most part, well-qualified and highly experienced educators who had taught previously in conventional schools. In each alternative, they functioned as members of a team.

Parents often participated in the interview process when candidates who applied to teach in elementary alternatives were being considered. This, however, happened less frequently at the secondary level. On occasion, the principle of voluntarism was not followed when teachers were administratively placed into alternative schools and programs. The reviewers were told that all teachers should be committed to the philosophy and purposes of the particular alternative before accepting a teaching position at it.

One advantage of teaching in an alternative school or program seemed to be that a teacher was free to apply his/her philosophy in an environment that was totally supportive of it. In most cases where parents and teachers shared commonly held purposes and philosophies, learning environments appeared to the reviewers to be healthy, mutually supportive, productive, and satisfying.

Nevertheless, the reviewers were told that the shared accountability for the success of alternative schools and programs did place added pressures on teachers. Since most principals had additional responsibilities that commanded large chunks of their time and energy, teachers were left to keep the school or program functioning properly. They actually performed many of the daily tasks that principals customarily perform in conventional schools. In conventional schools, parents contact the principal regularly to discuss concerns; in alternative schools and programs, parents usually contacted the teachers directly. Parents and teachers in alternatives worked closely and communicated regularly. The reviewers observed these procedures even in schools where the principal was stationed on site.

Usually, one of the teachers was designated to assume overall leadership of the alternative school or program. He/she co-ordinated the day-to-day operation of the alternative, conferred with the principal, and provided guidance and support for the other teachers. In addition, he/she usually taught full time. An interesting finding of the review was that most of these people did not hold recognized positions of responsibility. Although this lack of recognition was prevalent at the elementary and secondary levels, there were, nevertheless, a few jurisdictions where headships had been established in the secondary panel.

It is virtually impossible to describe accurately the instructional styles of teachers in this sample except to say that most tended to lean towards small-group approaches and individualized instruction. Most were diagnosticians and learning guides. Their duties included some or all of the following:

- o creating a challenging learning environment
- o aiding pupils in setting goals
- o suggesting ways to achieve those goals
- o helping to clear obstacles
- o keeping records on each pupil's progress.

A common feature of alternatives in this sample was an emphasis on certain affective areas: fostering self-confidence, responsibility, initiative, and enthusiasm. In some instances, strategies designed to enhance the affective domain far outdistanced the emphasis placed on academics. This was due in part to such factors as the commonly shared purposes of alternatives, the philosophical base on which these alternatives were designed, and the characteristics of the pupils.

Although teachers, for the most part, were striving to comply with Ministry of Education policy, there were examples of non-compliance. The absence of formal opening or closing exercises, as stipulated in Regulation 262, was one fairly common example. There were others, however, particularly in the curriculum of alternatives, which will now be addressed.

d) The Curriculum of Alternatives

Public alternative schools and programs must adhere to the requirements of The Formative Years, Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions, and curriculum guidelines. The following areas, however, were identified by the reviewers as needing attention. It should be stressed that these situations are not applicable to all alternatives in the sample.

i) Balance in the Curriculum

The curricula of most Primary, Primary-Junior, and Primary-Junior-Intermediate alternatives were child-centred and integrated. More emphasis, however, needed to be placed on balance. Certain subject areas were frequently emphasized to the virtual exclusion of others. This was especially apparent in those alternatives that stressed a free-flowing curriculum where pupils make instructional decisions with little formal direction from teachers.

Although most alternatives were small, staffs were required to provide full programs of study. This was quite difficult where teachers did not have the expertise and/or interest to teach certain subjects. Music, for example, seemed to be a neglected subject at all levels. Depending on the alternative and the staff, other subjects were also neglected or ignored entirely.

ii) Evaluation of Pupil Progress and Reporting Progress to Parents

A wide range of methods for evaluating and reporting pupil progress was employed in the alternatives in this sample. For the most part, methods were similar to those utilized by conventional schools:

- o observation
- o formal examinations
- o self- and peer evaluation
- o teacher-made tests and checklists
- o conferences with parents and pupils
- o the issuance of student achievement forms.

In some alternatives, the reviewers detected a de-emphasis on competition, testing, and the recording of pupil progress. Although the evaluation procedures were generally appropriate, the following weaknesses were observed in one or more alternatives:

- o the absence of any formal assessment strategies
- o the absence of formal examinations at the secondary level
- o the issuance of student achievement forms that do not indicate the program of study offered in the alternative
- o the issuance of student achievement forms that were not signed or co-signed by the principal
- o the non-issuance of student achievement forms
- o the granting of full credits to students who had not been exposed to all of the core content as prescribed in the curriculum guidelines
- o the granting of full credits to students who had not received the prescribed allotment of instructional time.

iii) Resources and Facilities

In this sample, staff allocation and budget allotment for alternative schools and programs were made according to the same formulae used for conventional schools. Since these formulae were based primarily on the number of pupils enrolled in each alternative and since most alternatives were small, it seemed that, in elementary alternatives in particular, strategies designed to improve the adult-pupil ratio and the inventory of learning resources available to the pupils were being pursued constantly.

The reviewers were generally impressed with the quality of human resources available to pupils in alternative schools and programs. These ranged from parent volunteers who performed many tasks in the alternatives to extra staff paid for by the parents themselves. Indeed, at the elementary level, parents seemed to be involved in a multitude of fund-raising ventures ranging from bake sales and fun fairs to voluntary contributions of a recommended sum of money. Parents were usually told before enrolling their children that fund-raising would be an ongoing activity. Although participation in fund-raising activities was not mandatory, it appeared to the reviewers to be a definite expectation of all or most parents in elementary alternatives. The funds raised were applied to a number of needs identified by the parents, pupils, and staff:

science materials, computers, educational excursions, arts and crafts materials, etc. Some school boards provided secretarial assistance as well as educational assistants and noon-hour supervisors to oversee the lunch program. In a few alternative schools, community workers were hired to encourage people to re-enter the school system to pursue their formal education.

In some situations where day-care was provided, day-care workers assisted the teachers regularly in the classrooms. Such co-operative ventures were regarded positively by staff, parents, and pupils. Indeed, day-care was an integral part of most Primary, Primary-Junior, and Primary-Junior-Intermediate alternatives, and close links between school and day-care staffs were common. In contrast, however, there was a clear need for day care in adult education alternatives to facilitate attendance in these programs.

Most educators in alternative schools and programs participated in the many professional-development opportunities provided. The services of the school boards' resource personnel were also available if required. The reviewers were told, however, that in-service geared more to alternatives in education was a definite need.

The use of the community as a resource and as an extension of the classroom was a special feature of most alternatives. In some alternatives, all pupils were visiting community resources at least once each week. Such experiences were regarded as worthwhile substitutes for some of the neglected or ignored subjects.

It appeared to the reviewers that the material and human resources in the Intermediate, Intermediate-Senior, Senior, and adult education alternatives were generally adequate, as were the facilities. The general areas of weakness were as follows:

- o Facilities and equipment for sciences, the arts, and business and technological studies were either non-existent or less than satisfactory.
- o In most of the Intermediate alternatives (Grades 7 and 8), for example, facilities and equipment for physical education, industrial arts, and family studies were either non-existent or less than satisfactory.
- o Library resource centres and guidance services were either non-existent or less than satisfactory.

- o. Co-instructional activities were limited in alternative schools and programs. It seemed that this type of enrichment was either incorporated into the curriculum of the alternatives in some way or ignored completely. A partial explanation for the latter seemed to be that pupils generally travel long distances to public alternatives; therefore, an extracurricular program was not appropriate. Since many of the pupils were engaged in enrichment and recreational activities outside regular school hours, co-instructional activities did not appear to be a priority for most alternatives.

e) School-Board Policies

Some school boards had detailed written policies concerning the establishment, maintenance, and evaluation of public alternative schools and programs. Most, however, did not. The reviewers were informed that such written policies were indications to the entire school system that public alternative schools and programs were being supported and promoted by school boards.

The reviewers found some misleading labels attached to alternatives. Some jurisdictions named their alternatives "schools" although they were actually programs. Others named their alternatives "programs" although they were schools. A few referred to their programs as "alternate" programs. Furthermore, the reviewers found certain alternative programs to be functioning as though they were schools. The parents, pupils, and staff perceived them to be schools in the sense that they identified themselves with the program and not with the host conventional school where the pupils were actually enrolled. In these cases, there was little interaction between the constituents of the alternative and the host conventional school.

f) Publicity

School boards publicized their alternatives in many ways. Although pamphlets and other publications were produced to describe alternatives to parents and pupils, the reviewers were told that most people learn about alternatives by word of mouth. System referrals were becoming more prevalent as principals, guidance personnel, and teachers in conventional schools accepted more readily the existence of alternatives in their systems and the benefits that some pupils could derive from attending them.

Since the survival of alternative schools and programs depends on the principle of voluntarism, most must market their own products and sell them to prospective customers. In elementary alternatives, and to a lesser extent in secondary alternatives, the reviewers found that the parents became the sales staff. In other situations, teachers, assisted by some parents, sought ways of attracting pupils to their alternatives. All seemed to have their networks of contacts and ways of publicizing the alternatives. This mobilization of parents and staff produced in several alternatives annual waiting lists of families who wished to enrol.

The reviewers were told frequently that alternative schools and programs should be promoted in more positive ways by school boards and the Ministry of Education so that more people will become aware of their existence.

g) Pre-registration, Registration, and Enrolment Criteria and Procedures

The reviewers observed that, for the most part, each alternative school and program had its own pre-registration format. Parents, teachers, and pupils frequently comprised an interview committee. For some of the Intermediate alternatives (Grades 9 and 10), an I.P.R.C. determined placement. In most cases, however, the pupils and parents dealt directly with the teacher who had been designated as the person responsible for the day-to-day operation of the alternative. Frequently, all teachers in the alternatives shared in the pre-registration process, which usually entailed an interview, during which the alternative was described, followed by a tour of the facility by the prospective pupil accompanied by a pupil of the alternative. The candidate was usually required to bring his/her report card to the interview. Once the pupil and his/her parents indicated a desire to register in the alternative, the teacher accommodated that desire on a first-come, first-served basis. Those who were considered to be unsuitable in some ways for the alternative were counselled to try other alternatives that might be better able to accommodate their needs. The ultimate decision, however, rested with the parents. The pre-registration process was intended to maintain the sense of community that existed in the alternative and, at the same time, to meet the needs of the pupils.

The reviewers observed that, in most cases, the principal was not actively involved in the pre-registration and registration processes. In at least one instance, the September School Report was signed by the teacher in charge, not by the principal. As well, in another alternative school where all teachers were engaged in the pre-registration process, inconsistency in the conducting of interviews was noted. Some pupils were asked by one teacher to write a standardized test before being admitted, others, who were interviewed by different teachers, were not. There may be a need to ensure a basic consistency in pre-registration procedures in each alternative.

The recording of attendance required improvement in some situations. Pupils arriving late for school were a common sight, especially in situations where distance from home to school was particularly great. The enrolment audit conducted by Ministry of Education staff revealed that some alternative schools and programs were not using the proper registers for pupils engaged in independent study. For the purposes of this review, the wide variety of programs and courses for adults were not identified in a consistent fashion by school boards. In those courses and programs for adults which were identified, the reviewers found discrepancies in the identification of full-time, part-time, and/or continuing-education pupils.

Some educators expressed their concerns about the possible effects of the ministry's "Memorandum 1984:B-5" on the funding base and program organization of alternative schools where the program was perceived to be in the independent-study mode.

h) Conventional Schools that House Alternatives

Reviewers noted a need for school boards to ensure a basic equality of essential services for host schools that shared accommodations with alternative schools and programs. One example is presented: a Primary-Junior alternative housed in a conventional Primary-Junior school had a full-day kindergarten program. The host school, which was experiencing a decline in enrolment, had a traditional half-day Kindergarten program. Members of the local school community questioned why their school was not providing the same level of service for parents in the area that the alternative school was providing for parents, most of whom resided outside the local school area.

The reviewers noted that, in most situations, alternative schools and programs were using some of the facilities, services, and resources of host conventional schools.

Summary of Objective 2

The findings of the reviewers related to the second objective of the review pertaining to the organization of public alternative schools and programs, included the following:

- o Most alternatives in the sample were considered to be congruent with Ministry of Education policy to a large or very large extent.
- o The leadership role of principals of alternative schools and programs seemed to be somewhat different from that of principals of conventional schools. This difference was perceived to be an alternative.
- o Many principals were unclear as to how to perform their professional duties as defined by legislation and policy in situations where an important feature of the alternative school or program was shared or co-operative decision-making in its governance.
- o The ideal person appointed as principal responsible for an alternative school or program was perceived by teachers and parents to be one who should, not only understand clearly its purposes and organization and how he/she is to function in that learning environment, but also one who should want to be part of that alternative because he/she believes in the concept.
- o Voluntarism is a significant feature of all alternative schools and programs.
- o A common belief was that teachers need to be in tune with the purposes of alternatives and should want to be teachers in alternative schools and programs.
- o A sense of community is the pillar of most alternatives. Harmony and stability, as well as commitment to the commonly shared purposes of alternatives, are necessary conditions for their survival.
- o The most sophisticated and democratically oriented governance structures involving parents, teachers, and pupils were in the elementary alternatives of the sample.
- o In most alternatives, there appeared to be a shared accountability among all constituents for the success of alternative schools or programs.
- o A common feature of alternatives in this sample seemed to be the emphasis placed on certain affective areas. In some instances, strategies designed to enhance the affective domain far outdistanced the emphasis placed on academics.

- o Balance in the curriculum was an area identified by the reviewers as needing attention.
- o A wide range of methods for evaluating and reporting pupil progress was employed in the sample. Certain weaknesses, however, were observed.
- o Participation in fund-raising activities appeared to be an expectation of parents in elementary alternative schools and programs.
- o The reviewers were told frequently that alternative schools and programs should be promoted in more positive ways by school boards and the Ministry of Education so that more people will become aware of their existence.
- o Most school boards did not have written policies concerning the establishment, maintenance, and evaluation of public alternative schools and programs.
- o In most cases, principals were not engaged in the pre-registration and registration processes.
- o Some school boards did not ensure a basic equality of essential services for host schools that shared accommodation with alternatives.
- o The Ministry of Education's "Memorandum 1984:B-5" has created concerns about the possible effects on the funding base and program organization of alternative schools where the program was perceived to be in the independent-study mode.

E. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Conclusions

The reviewers interviewed more than five hundred pupils, parents, members of the community, and educators who expressed their ideas about alternative schools and programs. From these interviews emerged two commonly expressed beliefs:

- o People learn in different ways and need various kinds of organizational structures and instructional techniques.
- o No one type of school or program is best for all.

The establishment of alternative schools and programs in the public system was perceived by the reviewers to be a strategy for change in response to these two common beliefs. In recognition of the growing number of people who have been pursuing alternatives outside the public system, school boards in Ontario have created more viable alternatives within the public system. It needs to be re-emphasized, however, that alternative schools and programs are not appropriate for everyone.

In this sample, the reviewers observed such positive features as personalized instruction; trusting learning environments; parental participation in school governance; creative use of community resources; self-motivated learners; and shared accountability among students, staff, and parents. There were, however, definite areas that needed to be addressed: greater congruence of practise with existing legislation and policies; governance; curriculum; evaluation of pupil progress and reporting progress to parents; resources and facilities, school-board policies; publicity; pre-registration, registration, and enrolment criteria and procedures; and greater equality of essential services.

The reviewers, at times, could not clearly distinguish the difference(s) between what was occurring in an alternative school or program and what would normally occur in any conventional school. In some cases, the only discernible alternative was the size of the school and/or the role of the principal. In others, it was flexibility, clientele, and/or governance. For parents and pupils, however, differences were frequently related to emotional support, sense of community, equal voice in decision making, personal attention, respect, and acceptance. The emphasis placed on certain of these variables was the key difference between alternative and conventional schools and programs.

Recommendations to School Boards

The following recommendations are made by the reviewers to improve the quality of education in alternative schools and programs and to promote their establishment and maintenance:

- SCHOOL-BOARD
POLICIES
- 1) For pupils whose needs would be better addressed in other than conventional schools, the establishment of alternative schools and/or programs should be considered.
 - 2) Where alternative schools and/or programs are established, policies concerning their establishment, maintenance, and evaluation should be formulated;
 - 3) Where alternative schools and/or programs are established, their difference(s) from conventional schools and programs should be clearly articulated.

- 4) The roles and responsibilities of supervisory officers, principals, teachers, parents' and pupils, as outlined in Ministry of Education and school-board policies, should be clearly described for each alternative school and program.
- 5) Supervisory officials and principals should ensure that alternative schools and/or programs are congruent with Ministry of Education policy as contained in such documents as the Education Act, regulations, The Formative Years, Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions, and curriculum guidelines.
- 6) Where possible, the criteria for the selection of a principal and teacher(s) of an alternative school or program should include the following:
 - i) a clear understanding of its purposes and organization and how he/she is to function in that learning environment
 - ii) a desire to be part of that alternative because he/she believes in the concept.
- 7) Strategies should be developed to promote the existence and legitimacy of alternative schools and programs to parents, students, and school staffs.

CURRICULUM

- B) Regular reviews of alternative schools and programs should be conducted to ensure that the following areas are being addressed satisfactorily:
 - i) balance in the curriculum
 - ii) evaluation of pupil progress and reporting progress to parents
 - iii) adequacy of resources and facilities
 - iv) pre-registration, registration, and enrolment criteria and procedures.

FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

- 9) A basic equality of essential services for host conventional schools that share accommodations with alternative schools and programs should be assured.
- 10) For alternative schools and programs that have inadequate resources and facilities, arrangements should be made, where possible, to use the resources and facilities of neighbouring conventional schools.

PROFESSIONAL 11) In-service geared to alternatives in education should be
DEVELOPMENT provided for principals and teachers of alternative schools
and programs.

DAY-CARE 12) Studies should be undertaken related to the establishment of
day-care centres in elementary, secondary, and adult schools
and programs.

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