

Kelsey School Division - A History

1970s

Growing Pains

The 1970s began an era of the Kelsey School Division that can be characterized as one of expansion, change, and conflict. The growing student population due to construction and pulp mill workers' families moving to The Pas put pressure on the school system in several areas. Chief among these were school facilities, teacher hiring, busing, and curricula.

To meet the shortage of classrooms, plans had begun for additions in the late 1960s at Kelsey and Opasquia elementary schools, and at Margaret Barbour Collegiate Institute. The two elementary school additions were designed to link the two earlier school buildings at each of these sites, and by doing so to provide for new school offices, gymnasiums, art and science rooms, kindergarten rooms and libraries. In addition, open area teaching facilities were incorporated into these school plans.

In 1969 the Sacred Heart parish had ceased operating its school due to financial difficulties and while the Kelsey School Division incorporated these students, there was no room in the public schools to receive them. Until 1973 the KSD rented the Sacred Heart School building and operated the school. In 1971-72 it was one of four school buildings that came under the authority of the Kelsey School principal. Its students were incorporated into the new Mary Duncan Elementary school in 1973-74.

Pressure on school space, especially in the Kelsey Elementary School area, had resulted in a year of staggered class hours (8 AM-noon, 1 PM-5 PM) at the grades 4-6 levels during 1970-71. In 1971-72 the grades 4-6 classes were relocated to the basement of Keewatin Community College while the Kelsey School addition was under construction. At Opasquia Elementary School consideration was given to closing a block of Eighth Street to use as a playground during that school's construction, but instead it was decided that recesses would be cancelled. It was a great relief when both additions to these elementary schools opened for 1972-73.

As the Mary Duncan Junior High school student population located in the old Margaret Barbour Collegiate on Third Street West grew steadily, consideration was being given to building a new junior high school if a suitable site could be found. A site favoured by the school board was on Kelsey Recreation Commission land adjacent to MBCI and, in 1971, 5.5 acres were sold by the Town of The Pas for this use. A new name, Scott Bateman Junior High, was proposed by board chair Jack Johnson. But before this planning could proceed, an arsonist set fire to the junior high school in November 1970, destroying all but the east wing of that school, and planning for a new junior high took on a higher level of priority. The east wing was saved during the fire when Superintendent Harold Grundy called for a local contractor's huge caterpillar tractor to drive through the building and cut

off the advance of the fire. Years later he often stated how he regretted doing so as subsequent rebuilding of that school was complicated due to having to contend with adding new facilities to an old wing. As a result of the fire, grade seven and eight students were separated and placed in temporary accommodations at Keewatin Community College, MBCI and Opasquia School until a new junior high school replacement could be opened in 1974.

For two winters the burned out foundation lay dormant until construction of a new Mary Duncan school, designed as an open area elementary facility, began. Fortunately, the school division offices that had occupied part of Mary Duncan Junior High for years had been relocated to the Guy Hall a few weeks before the fire. Had it not, disruption to the school division's operation would have been even more serious.

With planning proceeding for an addition to MBCI to house additional space for business education and vocational options, the idea of also adding an indoor community pool at this site began to garner interest. Many students did not have a good opportunity to learn how to swim as a result of short summers and only an outdoor pool in Devon Park in The Pas. The idea began to take on considerable community support, and cooperative planning with the Kelsey Recreation Commission for the development of the sportsplex grounds south of MBCI supported this initiative. It was also noted that if the pool was built between the existing MBCI and the proposed high school addition, the costs of two walls of the pool could be saved. An agreement with the Town about the pool project was completed in March 1971.

Pool project fund-raising was chaired by the KSD Superintendent and was supported by various local service clubs. When a letter soliciting donations from KSD's Winnipeg suppliers was ignored by several of them, a letter was sent on behalf of the KSD school board expressing dissatisfaction "with their lack of interest." This triggered a complaint to the Minister of Education by some suppliers, but the fund-raising was successful and the plans for incorporation of the pool into the MBCI addition were approved. When the pool opened, it was the first indoor pool in northern Manitoba, and triggered similar future projects in other northern communities. Later on the decision to attach the pool to MBCI would be aggravated by problems with odour, wall condensation, and shared water, heating and repair costs with the Kelsey Recreation Commission that would complicate the pool's operation.

Another construction issue during this period resulted from the increasing school bus fleet needed to bring in a growing number of students living in the school division but outside of The Pas - from the Carrot Valley, Rall's Island, Batchelor Subdivision, The Pas Reserve, Wanless and Clearwater Lake. A Wanless school building had burned down and the Wanless Community Club sought to acquire this school site for its use. In December 1971 the Kelsey SD board "agreed to transfer the land to the Wanless Community Club with the caveat that it be for a community club only, to revert back to the school division if the community club try to sell it or use it for another purpose." The school board also returned funds that the Wanless community had raised for a new school.

In addition, residential growth in the southern area of The Pas meant that some younger students had a great distance to walk to attend the nearest schools, and parents were concerned. No education transportation grants were available for internal busing but, as school buses became more crowded and bus route times lengthened, the school division responded by purchasing more buses, making routes more time efficient, and seeking a suitable location for bus storage and maintenance. The Department of Education encouraged the school division to proceed with this new bus facility planning once a site was located. A favoured location on the east end of Third Street, next to the provincial women's gaol, was not supported by the Town. Instead, the idea of a joint garage operation in conjunction with the Town of The Pas was proposed for the south end of Town on Centennial Drive. This required the school division to purchase Town land in this area, and to develop a shared operation agreement with the Town. In June 1974 construction was started and its completion was seen as a big improvement for school division transportation.

Kelsey School Division and Keewatin Community College were full partners with the Kelsey Recreation Commission in planning for the development of a sportsplex in the geographical centre of The Pas south of MBCI. A joint agreement was developed in 1973 but this shared venture project ran into funding shortfalls which resulted in progress moving slowly as it was very dependent on resources becoming available. Joint use of facilities (KRC and school division) was attempted and eventually incorporated in the joint agreement. In 1975 the school division cost shared improvements to the pool change rooms. By January 1976 the solicitor reported that "the pool was legally in the hands of the Town". In October 1976 the school board was advised that "KCC had withdrawn support for the development of the sportsplex grounds until the Town lived up to its part of the bargain." Concerns in 1978 by the Town about water and heating costs at the pool resulted in a review that discovered that one water meter, since the pool's opening, had improperly been billing the water costs to the school division. The result was an agreement for the manner in which such costs would be billed more accurately.

Some ideas did not proceed. In 1976 a suggestion was made to excavate the crawl space area under the new Scott Bateman Junior High and turn it into either a running track or a shooting range. While the school board agreed in principle, projected excavation costs soon ended that initiative. In 1977 the KRC noted its frustration with the slow financial support coming from the Town, and in 1978 concern was noted about the poor attendance of the KSD trustee representative at KRC board meetings. But those involved continued to work to a common set of recreation goals and by June 1978 good progress was reported on the development of the Sportsplex grounds and the tripartite agreement.

The idea for the construction of a new town library also resulted in some disagreement. Among the sites considered were the northwest corner of the Mary Duncan Elementary School property and a site adjacent to Keewatin Community College. The school board had offered land adjacent to MBCI in 1973. In the end the Town library was located in the refurbished power plant on Edwards Avenue, and the school division added an enlarged school library to the MBCI south side addition.

With the closure of the old “red brick” school when its students moved into the new Mary Duncan Elementary School in 1973, community debate centred around preserving this building for some other community purpose. After much debate, a suitability report noted that the land was needed for playground by the more than five hundred students at this site, and that upgrading the old building to current building codes would cost almost as much as building a new more useful building. In May 1974 it was torn down.

Disagreement arose between the Town and the school division on another KSD project. Growth of the school division central office staff, a reflection of the growing size of the school division itself, and limitations to the space available at its Guy Hall location, resulted in the start of planning discussions by the school board for a new office building. Various site locations were considered - adjacent to MBCI, within a one story wing of the Opasquia School, and a new location on Third Street East. The latter was favoured by the school board, but the Town’s mayor and council were insistent that the school division should move into a space at the rear of the newly renovated Town library, a space which was smaller than the location currently used in the Guy Hall. Zoning changes to allow for the Third Street location preferred by KSD were denied by the Town in 1979, so for the time being the board offices would remain in the Guy Hall.

Personnel Changes

The growth of the school division’s student enrolment in the 1970s had a direct impact on staffing needs, teacher recruitment and retention, and school programming. In the early 1960s teachers had been hired mainly by the secretary-treasurer, with limited school board involvement. By the 1970s the teacher turnover and growth in staffing requirements would have overwhelmed the old process. The Superintendent took over this function and the 1970s saw a major increase in the number of interviews held in Winnipeg for each teacher eventually hired. Teaching jobs were plentiful in southern Manitoba and in British Columbia the student/teacher ratios had been lowered, so competition to attract teachers to the north was keen. A list of teacher interviews conducted tells the tale: 1971 (58), 1972 (91), 1973 (105), 1974 (112), 1975 (58), and 1976 (60). Teacher turnover each year in a school during this period ranged from 20-50%. Teachers who had grown up in smaller towns would fit into life in The Pas more readily, and often stayed for much longer periods. Housing shortages in The Pas on the other hand added to the difficulty of attracting more permanent staff.

The role of the school division superintendent, Harold Grundy, in the hiring process was eased somewhat with the hiring of an assistant superintendent, George Takashima, in 1971-72 who, with the aid of the school principals from time to time, assisted with the conducting of interviews in Winnipeg during the Easter break. Once hired, primary (K-Grade 3) teachers, many of whom in the early years of the school division had no university degrees, were assisted in their classrooms by a primary supervisor, Olga Greening, whose task it was to ensure a consistent quality of curriculum and instruction was maintained.

To inform perspective teachers about the school division’s improved facilities, the school

division developed a slide presentation in 1977 that was used when recruiting at the Faculties of Education. Thus recruiters could laud the availability of new specialist teaching areas in the KSD schools (physical education, science, music, art, libraries) and get a head start on attracting and signing applicants. The completion of the additions to the KSD schools was a development strongly supported by the school board which believed northern students were entitled to the same privileges as those in the south. Specialist teachers were hired in these areas along with music and physical education coordinators as was a library specialist who could coordinate the development of the school libraries. In the junior high and high school the availability of option courses improved as well. Through an arrangement approved by the Department of Education's Dr. Lorimer in 1973, the Keewatin Community College was charged with making selected courses (ex. food services, welding, power mechanics, carpentry, electrical) available to local high school students as part of their high school credits.

During this decade the school division became associated with two special teacher training programs - IMPACT, a program to upgrade aboriginal paraprofessional staff to become certified teachers over a five year inservice and summer school program, and BUNTEP, a northern teacher education program operated by Brandon University. In 1971-72 Srinivasan Reddy arrived from England. He was hired to teach a grade eight class at the Mary Duncan Junior High but his expertise in English as a Second Language teaching also served the school division well. By 1973-74 he was named Vice-Principal of Opasquia School, and principal of Kelsey Elementary in the spring of 1977. His association with the BUNTEP project led him to be seconded during 1977-78 to Brandon University and, in 1978-79, to the Department of Education. Later he became the superintendent of Frontier School Division.

In May of the 1974-75 school year the school board decided to remove the assistant superintendent position, a controversial move that would continue to be debated at school board meetings into 1976, long after Assistant Superintendent Takashima had left the school division for a position in Ontario. And by the summer of 1976, Superintendent Grundy had also left the school division to fill a position in Brandon. Though there is no record of the board motion appointing a replacement in the school board minutes, Alvin Yaskiw is identified in the role of superintendent in the minutes of the 1976-77 school year. He would remain so for twenty-two years until his retirement in 1998.

For several years the school board (and others) had been requesting that the Manitoba government do something about the lack of special needs student support from Child Development Services. A northern location for this service, The Pas, had been proposed by the KSD school board so service access by students could be improved, but the provincial officials predicted that such a move would require an additional twenty-nine persons to operate a clinic, and no funds were available. Suddenly a breakthrough occurred in August 1972 and the school division's senior administration moved quickly to implement the now approved service. Their first step was to approach Kelsey Elementary principal Vaughn Wadelius to assume the position of Coordinator of Child Development Services in The Pas, and to assist with implementing services in curriculum development, speech language and psychological services. He would be aided in this task by traveling

to various centres in Canada and the USA to research how other systems provided this service.

Wadelius agreed to accept this secondment to the Department of Education, and thus his assistant principal James Fasano took over the new Kelsey Elementary School on the day it opened. A few weeks later, the school division was informed that it did not have the authority to appoint a local CDS coordinator, but CDS provincial director Dr. John Bock came to The Pas, interviewed Wadelius and made the appointment official. The extensive research travel also proved to be nonexistent. The second CDS person to be hired was a speech/language pathologist, and by the following year a psychologist was added to the location in The Pas. Their services were shared with Flin Flon School Division. As 1972-73 school year proceeded, it became clear that many of the tasks that needed to be done locally were those that some other school divisions allocated to a special education coordinator. As a result, Wadelius recommended that the school division replace his position by appointing such a specialist. This was done for the 1973-74 school year when Sharon Rogerson was appointed the school division's first special education coordinator.

In April 1973 the principal designated to take over the new Mary Duncan Elementary School in September resigned. As a result this principal position was advertised and resulted in Wadelius being designated as principal for 1973-74 as a half time position with the other half to continue as a CDS secondment. As the outgoing principal had neglected to order any furniture for the new Mary Duncan school, the newly appointed principal had to spend many evenings in May and June ensuring that everything to outfit the new school was ordered and promised for delivery before school opened in September. The secondment to CDS as a half time position allowed a full time assistant principal to be hired for the new school. This was a good arrangement for it allowed the hiring of a Winnipeg guidance teacher, Gerry Saleski, as assistant principal at Mary Duncan Elementary for 1973-74, while he also assumed a leadership role in the development of the school division's elementary guidance and counselling services. Saleski would, in later years, become a superintendent of Transcona School Division.

This period also saw the role of resource teachers developed to meet the special needs of some students. As well, the addition of teacher aides helped teachers to better address special needs in the regular classrooms brought about by the implementation of Manitoba's Bill 58. This Bill had mandated the integration of Manitoba students who previously had been isolated in special group homes or in special education classes. The Bill caused some concern to the school board, and teachers, as it meant a major shift in instructional methods, school supports, and philosophy of education. The Board's main concerns related to the increased costs associated with this initiative and the lack of training that most teachers had in dealing with the Bill's requirements. Major efforts in professional development and budgeting were needed to accompany the integration process.

The Pas Band Students

Aboriginal students from The Pas Band became part of the Kelsey School Division in the

mid-1960s with the closing of the Indian Affairs run school on the adjacent reservation. Students were bused to the schools in The Pas. In March 1971 the school board was informed that The Pas Band was asking the federal government to build a school on their reservation. While the KSD had opened kindergarten classrooms in all of its elementary schools in the 1960s, trustees noted in 1972 that it would only consider operating the kindergarten on the reserve if requested by the Band to do so. In February 1973 Band member Ella Young was appointed to fill a seat on the KSD board that had become vacant due to the death of a trustee. In response to a request from The Pas Band, the KSD petitioned the provincial Board of Reference to allow a change in the school division's boundaries to add a Ward 4 - The Pas Reserve. This was approved for the 1975-76 school year. During this time Young continued to serve as a trustee and was elected for the new Ward 4 in 1975. In 1976-77 she was replaced by another Band member, Stan Wilson, who continued as a KSD trustee for that Ward until 1980.

In February 1975 discussions were held between the Band's Native Education Department and the Kelsey School Division on the Band's desire to opt out of the general tuition agreement between the provincial and federal governments. This agreement had allowed tuition financial support (in lieu of taxes) for treaty students attending the public schools. By March 1975 the request was formalized by the Band. Concern about a potential drop in revenues from this loss of tuition fees caused the school division to seek additional support from the provincial government. By 1979, concerned about the rate of high school dropouts among its students, The Pas Band hired a researcher to study the issue, and meetings later that year discussed his recommendations with Kelsey School Division.

Curricular Evolution

As the 1970s began, significant curricular changes - provincial and local - had started to take place in KSD schools, following the initiatives started in other Manitoba school divisions and in the USA. In some cases KSD schools took a leadership role in their development and implementation. There were some significant philosophical changes in how education services could best meet the needs of all students, and this was followed by curricular improvements at both the provincial and local levels. Amalgamation of aboriginal students had resulted in efforts to incorporate native studies courses at all levels of the school system.

In April/May 1974 the school division participated in a "Learning for Living" project initiated by an outside resource person. It attempted to provide low achieving primary students with various enrichment activities. The program was not seen in a favourable light by classroom teachers involved, however, as it pulled these students out of class during the regular instructional day and caused envy among the regular students.

Specialist facilities led to improvements in the offering of option, business, and technical vocational courses. In 1973 swimming was incorporated into the elementary physical education program when the new indoor pool was operational. An influx of Finnish students at Kelsey Elementary School initiated a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)

adaptation. A growing interest in French language instruction expanded the basic French in Grade 6 to the lower grade levels, and led eventually to parental requests for French Immersion instruction starting in kindergarten. An optional family studies component was implemented through the various elementary and junior high health programs. In 1971-72 the school division appointed coordinators for physical education and libraries. Another major change and instructional challenge, starting with kindergarten and primary grade levels in January 1974, was the mandatory implementation of the new federal Celsius metric system in 1976.

The rebuilding of Kelsey, Opasquia, and Mary Duncan elementary schools introduced the option of open area school classrooms. This required hiring and training teachers for such a changed educational environment, and was accompanied by more flexible evaluation methods and reporting systems for following the students' continuous progress in learning. Considerable teacher professional development was needed for these changes and for the implementation of much needed changes in language arts and mathematics curricula. The addition of early closing of schools on certain days in order to provide the needed teacher professional development helped to augment the few annual inservice days allowed by the Department of Education.

A unique initiative was "Life Week", an enrichment program designed for all students at Scott Bateman Junior High. Students were able to sign up for various learning adventures outside of school including travel to different sites in Manitoba, Canada and the USA, as well as several local alternatives. In June 1976 it was reported that 540 of the 560 student participants had received credit for their participation.

The trustees supported health initiatives for student welfare. In September 1971 it was proposed that all KSD students have their eyes tested regularly, but this was not supported by Manitoba Health. In 1976 a preventative dental program was initiated by the province, allowing for comprehensive dental care for Grade 1 students. By 1979 the program was under the supervision of local dentists and included a weekly fluoride rinse component in the elementary schools.

At the secondary school level, the start of the 1970s saw some expansions to the traditional university entrance program with the addition in the late 1960s of a general course program, occupational entrance course program, and technical courses through KCC. Many of these additions were through the use of School Initiated Courses (SICs) that expanded the availability of credit options at the high school. For example, Outdoor Education and Driver Education SICs for credit were developed. In 1972 the idea of a band musical program at the high school level was being promoted among the local community service clubs who saw this as a step to having a marching band for community events. The band idea caught on and these clubs raised the funds to begin the purchasing of instruments by December 1973. In September 1975 the first administrative use of computers was initiated at Margaret Barbour Collegiate. By 1977 the possibility of an expansion of the elementary French Immersion program into the high school was being considered, but insufficient students at this level curtailed its implementation for several years. In addition, some requests for German and Ukrainian language instruction for the

high school were received, but these met the same fate, though the school board did seek grants for the instruction of Ukrainian outside of school hours.

Religious Guidance Program - A Unique Experience

It was during this decade as well that some innovations were taken in the public school system in the area of religious instruction. In 1972, a unique religious guidance program was initiated in The Pas through the local Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish. The elementary level of the program was delivered in the Kelsey School Division's public schools under the guidance of Presentation of Mary Sister Leona Fortier, who was hired by the Archdiocese and the Parish as Coordinator of Religious Education, assisted by Sister Ramonde Ouellette. The success of this program during its several years of operation was due in no small part to the energy and initiative of their leadership.

Until this program was initiated, there was little involvement of the school division's parents in utilizing the Manitoba Public Schools Act option of religious education offered during part of the school day. As well, diminishing numbers of religious personnel had meant fewer opportunities in the area for Catholic education in the town's only parochial school, one that was not government funded and had been taken over by KSD a few years earlier. Yet the growth of the program from about 75 students in its first year, to 620 in the second year, and 825 in the third year is an indication of the acceptance by the Christian parent community in The Pas of this opportunity in the public school system, in spite of the fact that this was an optional program. Enrolment would eventually top 1000 students. Parents were provided with an explanation of the program and then gave their signed approval to have their children participate; however, no students were kept in it against their will.

One reason for success was the basic philosophy of the program itself. Rather than a bundle of dogmas and precepts, it taught that religion is part of life, is interesting, and makes one a better person. Another element of its success was the accepting of interdenominational Christian students and volunteers from Anglican, Roman Catholic, United, Lutheran, Ukrainian Catholic and other churches. The children were taught Christian teachings common to all these denominations and this approach provided a larger base from which to draw the 47 volunteer teachers, including several public school teachers in the schools, to operate the 45 classes. About half of the volunteers were Catholic as were the students. The Coordinator had an important and demanding task of training the parent and community volunteer teachers in lesson planning and instructional techniques, assisting in the provision of multimedia materials, and organizing the elementary classes. Elementary classes ran for 45 minutes once during the six-day cycle, as part of the school's timetable. In addition, junior high classes were operated after school, and high school classes on weekends.

Guidelines for teaching were set by the Coordinator who also did coaching, monthly inservice training sessions, and some teaching. The program organized babysitters and a driving service for parents who volunteered to teach. Reporting on the program's progress was made regularly to the school principals and annually to the school division superintendent. With about 40% of the public school students involved, religious guidance

had the opportunity of being an integral part of the development of these students. The program eventually ended by 1980, a victim of increasing operating expenses that had been carried by the Sacred Heart Parish, and the return of Coordinator Sister Fortier to her mother house in Prince Albert.

Goodbye Inspectors

Phasing out of public school inspectors took place during the 1970s. This occurred first by a change in the focus of their roles, and later in their removal altogether when superintendents and principals took over some aspects of their duties. One original task of inspectors had been to evaluate teachers. The inspector would visit and observe a class in operation, write a critique on the observations made, maybe discuss these with the teacher, but then file a report on the findings with the Department of Education in Winnipeg without providing a copy to the teacher. Teachers would have to travel to Winnipeg to see the report. By 1970 inspectors had started to work in teams to conduct a review of specific topics or subject areas in the school division as a whole, and made their reports directly to school boards. In February 1970 a team of five inspectors spent two weeks in the Kelsey School Division assessing Kindergarten/Primary classes, special education and science programs. In March their report to the school board noted that the schools' science programs were above average. In May 1972 an inspector team reported to the KSD board that there were favourable "working relations and communication between administrators, principals, committees and staff" of the school division.

In the fall of 1977, the school board accepted the suggestion of principal Wadelius that it participate in a provincially funded "Internal/External Evaluation" of the Kelsey School Division, the last such project approved by the Department. With Wadelius as chair of this project, a committee made up of a trustee, community stakeholders and Department of Education consultants developed the project over a two year period. It included various components such as assessments of mathematics and language arts achievement of Grade 5 students, and surveys of teachers, parents and the public on their perceptions of the school division's operations. Results were compiled and interpreted by the Department of Education, and the joint committee developed many recommendations which were presented to the school board in May 1979.

Growth in School Board Operations

During the evolutionary period of the 1970s, the school board's managerial functions began to evolve into a more modern operation. This required not only an update in board meeting procedures but also a change in the attitudes of those in school trustee positions. In 1970 when the school division was in competition with others for teachers, having to replace a teacher during the school year due to pregnancy led to a suggestion by one trustee that there should be a board policy requiring female teachers to state if they were pregnant when they were being considered for hire in the fall term. The board seems to have complied with this request, but in September 1975, the superintendent reported to the school board that this policy regarding "pregnant teachers should be revised as he wouldn't dare act on it."

In January 1971 the school board was using a committee system for some of its work, and began to consider the development of a handbook of its policies and procedures in order to better guide administration and teachers. That year a purchase order system was implemented. In 1973, in response to concerns raised by the high school principal, a student laggard policy was developed.

By 1974 the board was advised to seek ways to involve the community in discussion of issues like the community school concept. In June 1975 a standard school board agenda was agreed to. In September that year the conduct of a school trustee who had attacked other trustees in the local press resulted in his being admonished, the board minutes noting that the appropriate place to advocate changes was at the school board meetings. A Code of Ethics for trustees was discussed. As a result of a recommendation from the Manitoba Association of School Trustees in 1975, Board Chair Harry Harapiak suggested that school board meetings should be run following parliamentary procedures. The board also agreed to include regular reports on school division events and add a "dates to remember" item to its agendas.

Policy development continued with policies adopted on student promotion and student placement in March 1976. That month, however, the mandatory retirement age policy was waived for a teacher the board wished to retain for another year. In August the supervisory positions of Transportation and Maintenance were amalgamated. In November, board consideration of a teacher evaluation policy was proposed by the principals and teachers associations which resulted in its adoption. In December 1976 the school board approved a policy of subsidizing the board and room of those who sought to do their practice teaching in The Pas. By May 1977 policies had been adopted in student evaluation and promotion, student placement, and duties of school administrators. The board denied a request in March 1977 by the school principals to receive a copy of the board minutes in order to stay aware of school division developments, but finally in May allowed copies of school board minutes to be distributed.

In January 1978 the board hired Ken Jasper to develop a policy manual for the school division. It was adopted in February 1979. At its June 1978 meeting the school board heard a proposal from principal Vaughn Wadelius and social workers Luke Sabourin and Bruce Unfried for a KSD policy on child abuse for use by teachers. It was adopted. In October 1978 a policy on school accounts was approved, and in November it was agreed to start board meetings with a prayer. By then some standing committees had been designated for conducting board deliberations: Policy, Education Liaison, Finance, Negotiations, Building Maintenance, and Planning. By 1979 a comprehensive policy on principal and assistant principal evaluation had also been adopted, based on the post-graduate work of principal Wadelius.

In May 1978 the board initiated a contest for the design of a KSD logo, and offered a \$25 prize. In June the contest was extended due to a lack of entries, and finally in November 1978 a logo designed by Lawrence Ogrondick was selected.

In April 1979 the Manitoba government had proposed to make superintendents the chief executive officers of school divisions, a position not supported by KSD trustees initially though it was a practice of the school division. In May the legislation was passed making this designation an option for school boards.

Problems and Confrontations

Several issues would arise in the 1970s that would be dealt with by the school board. In some instances these problems would return in later years, and some solutions in this period would themselves become problems in later years.

The school board was cautious about the use of its schools by groups from outside the school division or by religious organizations operating beyond the provisions of the Public Schools Act. When provincial Liberal leader Izzy Asper wanted an opportunity to speak to high school students at an assembly during a provincial election in February 1971, he was refused permission. The Board's position was that such visits should be done at such times that students would have a choice to attend. In March the Board approved a process that allowed political party representatives to address high school students during noon hours or from 3:30-4:00 PM in the MBCI lecture theatre or auditorium. By October 1972 the Board had acquiesced and allowed Canadian history teachers to invite the three political party candidates to speak at the collegiate. And in a split vote in September 1977, the Manitoba Premier, Ed Schreyer was granted permission to speak at the high school.

In October 1971 the Board considered requests for use of a school by a religious organization and concluded that "all religious organizations be refused the use of school buildings when the purpose of their request is the propagation of their particular religious beliefs. Exceptions will be made in instances where such organizations request space in order to further the cause of some community interest." The Board would turn down another such request in September 1977, but in February 1979 a local citizen asked the Board to reconsider this policy so that a religious convention could be held in The Pas and at its May meeting the Board approved this request. In March 1972 The Pas and District Exhibition Association complained to the Board about the use of school grounds by travelling shows. By 1977 the Board sought to develop consistent rules for community use of schools.

While it would be some years before serious implementation would occur, the concepts of community schools and middle schools were being reviewed. The community use of schools outside of school hours continued to grow so that by 1979 it was reported to the school board that such use was 4168 hours per year or an average of 15.2 hours per day.

In December 1971 a delegation of high school students requested the Board to allow a smoking area at MBCI. On a trial basis, Grade 11 and 12 students were allowed to smoke in the main foyer of the high school, but 16 year olds were restricted on site to smoking before and after classes. The trial was deemed a success. The 1980s would see this decision become a significant problem for students and teachers alike.

Conflicts and Lawsuits

The rebuild of the Mary Duncan School after the 1970 arson fire was hindered by contractor problems. As a result the Board engaged a lawyer to confront the lack of progress by October 1972. It was alleged that the slow progress was due to a lack of qualified carpenters available in The Pas. Litigation with two construction companies continued into 1975. MBCI had been a concern as well due to its roof leaking since its construction a few years earlier. Roof repairs had been required in 1973 and the quality of the wall construction at this school was also seen by the Board as a problem. In March 1975 another court case on this issue was started. In January the Public Schools Finance Board agreed to support the Board by paying the legal costs involved.

In November 1971 a former USA marine had been hired as a replacement teacher in a special education class of younger adolescents at Opasquia School. In March 1973 the Board was suddenly faced with a delegation from The Pas Band as a result of an action by this teacher. He had encouraged several of his male students to get marine style crew cuts like his, as a way to develop a group solidarity among his students. Parental permission to do so seems not to have been obtained first and in the opinion of the delegation their cultural mores were violated. The teacher was put on leave. Though the teacher met with the parents concerned, and the superintendent recommended his transfer to another school, the Board took the alternative of buying out the remaining months of his contract so he could leave the school system.

At various times beginning in February 1973 the Kelsey Teachers Association of the Manitoba Teachers Society proposed that the annual Christmas break, then dependent upon the day of the week that Christmas fell, be standardized to a full two weeks in order to avoid mid-week start and end dates of the break. To accommodate this, due to the compulsory number of teaching days required in the Manitoba school year, an earlier start in September or even the end of August would be needed to put this plan into place. Initially the Board was not supportive of this idea, but more serious thought was given to it in 1979 when it was noted that fewer truancies because of a partial week of school and better travel arrangements out of northern Manitoba would result from such a standardization. The Board applied for a change in its school year and the Minister of Education approved the change. In later years the province would adopt a full two week break for all school divisions.

Timetable Renewal

In June 1973 the high school principal began a discussion about implementing a trimester system at MBCI, to replace a full year (ten months) system that had been used for decades. While there was a concern as to whether this should apply to Grade 9 classes which were located at the high school but not included in the provincial Grade 10-12 system, the trimester system was implemented, dividing the school year into three separate sections with fewer courses taken at a time and longer class periods so that a

course was completed in three months. A year later the high school guidance counsellor asked that this system be evaluated. By 1977 the need to evaluate this system was gathering community support. The Board responded in March that year by contracting with Benji Levin of the Manitoba Education Research Consortium to do a review. The MBCI principal did not support a change but the Board was not convinced that the trimester system best served the needs of local students. A special Board meeting was subsequently held in March 1978 to discuss the issues involved and recommended the change to a high school semester system.

That month a trustee's opposition to this decision was reported in the local paper as his saying "the trimester system has served us well." The Board noted that this was not a Board position, and that its view "came to a valid conclusion after review of all information available." The Board also noted that the Kelsey School Division was the last one in Manitoba utilizing a trimester year. In April the Board directed the implementation for 1978-79 on a trial basis a semester system with two five month sections with four teaching blocks of 70-80 minutes each per day. MBCI teachers would teach three periods per day under this system, and several years later this allocation would come under scrutiny again.

Financial Woes

The financial difficulties of this decade began to impact heavily on the school division. In addition to a period of high interest rates, and the prospect of the loss of The Pas Band students when the Band opened its own school, the local municipal property assessment which impacted the school division's special levy for education taxation was among the lowest in the province. By June 1972 the trustees were seeking meetings with the Manitoba Premier to address the loss of revenues. In 1973 the Board advocated more provincial education equalization grants to help areas such as The Pas that had a low assessment base.

The Board's view in September 1973 was that provincial social services contributed to service needs at the schools by "dropping problem cases into schools with no additional support." Trustees even considered if they had the right to refuse entry to such students from outside the community. A meeting with The Pas MLA Ron McBryde asked for a school social worker grant, and in February 1974 the local Social Services agreed to designate a school social worker position.

Reductions in school division expenditures were also controversial, as in April 1974 when one trustee advocating raising class sizes and reducing course options for students. The rest of the Board disagreed, and continued its efforts to meet with Manitoba Premier Schreyer when, for the first time in ten years, the school division's enrolment was projected to drop. For 1975 the special levy was reduced, in part as a result of an increase in provincial grants to northern school divisions. As well the Board debated this trustee's call for the removal of two of its senior division administrators - Assistant Superintendent and Primary Supervisor, but settled on the Assistant Superintendent position only. It would be nine years before this position was reinstated.

Conflict

Relations between the school division and the Town of The Pas took on new levels of controversy during the 1970s with the election of a new mayor. The financial difficulties of the communities within the school division were part of the reason for this, but the animosity of the mayor toward the school board (and some specific individuals in its leadership) heightened the tensions. As the mayor was also the editor of a local paper, his criticisms and often misleading editorials were difficult for the school division to refute with the facts. To make matters worse, controversy was picked up by Winnipeg television and newspaper media and, in the Board's opinion, the media ignored any positive aspects and clarifications offered.

In December 1974 the Superintendent was moved to report to the Board that "the Mayor's role in this was reprehensible and irresponsible" and that the mayor was attempting to divide the school division personnel. To offset the growing disillusionment of staff in general, the Board "declared confidence in staff and endeavors to create a meaningful education environment," and protested to the CBC for its irresponsible reporting.

The Board also initiated parent meetings to discuss school division issues, and authorized a unique public relations response. It began to produce a regular division publication, delivered to residents widely via the post office mailboxes, that reported on positive educational initiatives and school activities, with many photos of students and school projects. Written and edited by teachers, it was well received by the community and ran for a couple of years until a new editor in the local paper provided a more positive outlook.

By January 1975 after a previous unsuccessful attempt to open up a direct dialogue with the Town's leadership, the Board agreed to send a second letter proposing to set up a joint committee to discuss cooperation, but noted "Another letter is to be written asking for a reply to our first letter even if their reply is to tell us to go to hell." This time a reply was received from Town Secretary-Treasurer Tony Moule who suggested that rather than meetings between the politicians, the administration of both groups should try to resolve the outstanding problems.

By 1976 media coverage of school division issues had improved to the point that a local newspaper reporter was commended by the Board for her coverage of educational issues (it may have helped that her husband was a teacher), and even welcomed her new replacement. One individual town counsellor was taken to task due to his ill-informed comments reported in the media. The Town also expressed criticism when the principal of Opasquia School evacuated the school as a result of a gasoline spill at the bulk plant across from his school. The Board supported the principal, noting that the safety of the students will always be a priority.

Information Sources:

Kelsey School Division Board minutes: 1969-1979

Email communication: George Takashima, December 28, 2015

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