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Schools to make pitch to host aboriginal program

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Written by FRANK PEEBLES
Citizen staff
Thursday, 27 November 2008

The four schools on the short list to become an aboriginal choice school will get a chance to have their say next week. Ron Brent, Quinson, Carney Hill and Harwin elementary schools are all being considered for the groundbreaking new facility, and a public meeting will take place at each location.

"The first one will be Monday at Ron Brent," said Charlotte Henay, School District 57's aboriginal education principal. It is scheduled for 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. "On Tuesday it will be Quinson, on Wednesday will be at Carney Hill, and we are at Harwin on Thursday."

The issues at stake are intended to transform northern B.C.'s society. It stems back to the cultural shackles hung around aboriginal necks by the federal Indian Act which is still in effect, and it stems back to the cultural atrocities committed by the residential school policies of the 20th century under which aboriginal families were ripped apart and an attempt was made to eradicate indigenous cultures across Canada.

Those policies and the other physical, sexual and emotional abuse that so many children suffered in residential schools and/or isolated by the reserve system caused a divide in today's school system.

Establishing an elementary school that would teach the regular provincial curriculum but with an overarching aboriginal atmosphere is one of many steps set to be taken by SD57 to better prepare aboriginal students for adult life.

Nobody argues that the lack of academic success for aboriginal students is a problem the province needs to address. However, the decision over which school should house the program is contentious.

Some at Ron Brent, for example, feel the specialized programming and staff that the school has built over the years would be undermined by a new school personality. Others wonder if the proposed new school could be part of a dual track system, like the French Immersion programs that run alongside regular classes in the same building.

Henay said there is no larger meeting planned for the general public to voice their thoughts about the aboriginal choice school. "Not yet anyway." But she confirmed that the public in the areas around the shortlisted schools are invited to attend.

"Everybody's voices are welcome but the decision will be made by the parents and extended family of the kids enrolled in the schools," Henay said.



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