

# Back to basics; Ed. Week not the answer

by Leona Elchuk

The theme of this year's Education Week, chosen by the Provincial Education Week Committee, is "EDUCATION - HOW DO YOU SEE IT." The committee is inviting Albertans to express their feelings about the quality and extent of education in the Province of Alberta.

A public opinion review

sponsored by the committee showed that 53% of those who responded thought the elementary school program should give more attention to the 3 'R's', and similarly a majority of 42% felt the senior high school programs should concentrate more on basic skills and leave specific training for post-secondary education.

According to Carl Daneliuk, Associate Superintendent of Curriculum, EPSB, Education Week gives schools an opportunity to show the public what's happening in education. Feedback from the public, he said, provides a valuable input to the formation of the curriculum. Parents also have an opportunity to appreciate both the difficulties and the strengths of the educational system.

A spokesman for the Alberta Teacher's Association, Tom McConaghy, said Education Week is not the answer to the current demand for education

to get back to the basics of learning. "Because education is an on-going process, this sentiment is a cyclical thing, which occurs more frequently as the educational system becomes more complex." McConaghy reiterated the prime purpose of Education Week is to focus public attention on what takes place in the schools. He expressed hope that public concern over the Provincial Government's 11% ceiling on social services would be generated through the various discussions taking place during Education Week.

McConaghy said the upcoming legislative session will show a general thrust toward restraint, but restraint only in the public sector. "As I see it, only the business community will be exempt from such spending cut-backs."

In order to meet rising costs, school boards will be forced to make cut-backs in the number of teachers hired and in special education programs. In the event that the ceiling is lifted, the boards will then be faced with the dilemma of "catching up." McConaghy stated that "The A.T.A. feels it has an obligation to let the public know how the ceiling will affect the quality of education. Some programs will only be allowed to increase by 5%."

George Labercane, a reading specialist with the Bureau of Child Study, fears that the adaption classes and opportunity rooms for children with long-standing learning problems, will be hurt the most by the ceiling and there will be

no new classrooms open to the educable retarded. Consequently, the size of existing classes will increase and the effectiveness of the programs will diminish. Labercane disagrees with Public Affairs Officer, Mary Layman, who said the ceiling will have no effect on the overall education of the general school population. She feels that current special education programs will easily accommodate those children with special needs.

The impact of limited revenues will be more clearly visible next year when the 76-77 budgets come into effect.

With an 11% ceiling levied on all social services, McConaghy believes that no amount of pressure on the government can further the cause of education. The attitude of the government toward education, he pointed out, was made quite clear when A.T.A. President Pat English challenged Education Minister Julian Koziak to a public debate and was refused.

The benefits of education week will be exemplified next year when the public will again be given the opportunity to express their feelings about the quality and extent of education in Alberta, after the imposition of budget cut-backs.

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