

School District Responds To Education Assessment

by Cynthia Stowell

Findings and conclusions of the Tribes' major education needs assessment completed last November are still filtering down through the tribal government and administration to the community.

The committee that was appointed to oversee the study is now charged with perhaps its most important task: to develop specific program recommendations based on the needs expressed by students, parents and other community people in the survey.

The community itself, where the survey opinions originated, will have a chance to offer feedback at a series of public forums, beginning February 1 at the Longhouse.

Committee Chairman Rudy Clements says that feedback is also desired from local education-oriented committees and programs, the health and social services branch, Longhouse elders and the school district.

509-J administrators have already assembled their responses to the survey into a prioritized list of suggestions. Their ideas will be submitted to the needs assessment committee and synthesized with other ideas to produce a final set of recommendations.

ASSESSMENT WELL-RECEIVED BY DISTRICT

Generally, school staff received the survey findings "with a great deal of interest," said 509-J Superintendent Darrel Wright. "They were very thoughtful and accepted it very professionally."

"It's some of the best information we've ever had," he added. "It substantiates things we've been thinking but didn't have the statistics to prove. Before the needs assessment we were going on our own opinions. Now we have good reliable data."

The needs assessment solicited the opinions of 180 tribal members on such subjects as community educational values, performance of the school system and Tribal Education Programs, the teaching of cultural traditions, Indian students' feelings about their school experience, and career preparation.

Findings confirmed what many involved in the education of Tribal children already believed to be true, adding authenticity to those beliefs. The survey showed that although both parents and students place a high value on education, parents are not actively encouraging their children to continue formal education and students are not living up to their high self-expectations.

The survey also indicated that while children should learn cultural traditions the public schools are probably not the place to teach them.

Adults are either indifferent or negative about the performance of the school system and are favorably disposed to alternatives to the present system, either in the form of a Tribally-run school on the reservation or joint Tribal-District programs in the public school setting.

Tribal students say they like school and feel accepted by staff and peers but these feelings are less common in the upper grades, where students do not feel involved in school activities.

Students and adults say they are not informed of reservation career opportunities. Parents apparently do not choose to assist their children in post-high school decisions.

"The needs assessment showed rather delightfully that a high percentage of students like school and think teachers care for them," remarked Wright. "The district is on the right track but to the extent that the statistics (drop-out, GPA, attendance) are still bad, we need to improve."

According to Wright, the survey findings were distributed to all teachers and meetings were held to discuss and clarify the findings. Faculty in each building met together to offer their suggestions.

The administrative council, composed of principals and vice principals, program coordinators, the superintendent's office and the tribal education director, then "brainstormed" and came up with 42 separate statements which they later ranked by a Q-sort method.

Wright said the administrative offices had a Solution Priority tree instead of a Christmas

Tree this year, made of the ranked recommendations pinned to a door. A meeting January 15 further refined the list to 29 suggestions that are now ready for discussion with the needs assessment committee.

SUGGESTIONS COVER BROAD SPECTRUM

District suggestions cover a broad spectrum of program development and enhancement. At the top of the list is establishing educational alternatives for the higher grades, both in school and out of school. Wright feels this has already begun with the new program at the high school (see story this page) and an anticipated work experience program.

Much recognition is given to the special cultural, academic and social needs of Indian students, and the development of cultural sensitivity among staff listed as a high priority.

Responding to survey findings on cultural education, however, district staff say they are willing to incorporate Indian culture into their curriculum but to let the Tribes take on specific instruction in tradition.

The basic skills need more emphasis, according to staff, to ensure that Indian students are performing up to established academic standards. But support services in the form of counseling and social work must also be improved if Indian students are to develop and maintain healthy self-concepts.

The school district says it can do more to assist Indian students in preparing for a reservation-based career. In fact Tribal Education and the district are working on a career education project aimed at developing basic skills and providing work experience.

Parents should be more involved in school activities, should be encouraged to work with their children at home and be given more opportunities to develop their parenting skills.

District staff feels that Indian and non-Indian students might benefit from increased integration at the lower levels. They expressed an interest in further promoting the type of student exchanges that have been happening this year between Warm Springs and Madras.

While administrators had many more specific suggestions to make, Wright was careful to point out that they are not final recommendations, but simply input for the needs assessment committee.

"We are looking forward to continuing the cooperative relationship with the Tribes that has developed in the last few years," said the Superintendent.

Tribal Education Director Jody Calica echoed his comment. "We can take this assessment

and use it as an indictment against the school district, parents or Tribal Education. But we have to look at it as a means to get a dialogue going to develop more positive programs and policy."

The needs assessment committee will be meeting later this month to set up a timetable for receiving feedback on the survey. So far the school district is the only group that has formally prepared suggestions for consideration.

At Madras High School

Drop-out Program Designed to Meet Special Needs

by Roger Swyer

Directed towards potential dropouts at Madras High School, a new program starting January 22 will offer an "alternative" approach to meeting needs of students having difficulty in regular classrooms.

The class will attempt to "let them (potential dropouts) see things differently," according to Ron Pinkham, Title IV - Part A Counselor. "The class will give them some new alternatives to best situate their own needs," he said.

Course objectives of the 50-minute, semester-long class is to increase self knowledge, develop a positive self-image, gain decision-making skills, develop positive attitudes about education, and improve communication skills. The main effort will be geared to returning students to regular classrooms.

The objectives will be met through learning activities such as guest speakers, self inventories, lectures, group problem solving, and field trips.

"The school system isn't working on special needs of students," said Pinkham. "We're trying to come out with a practical course to turn onto themselves and teach them skills to make it out in the world. This is one approach to deal with special needs of the students."

The drop-out rate for Indian students, who make up a majority of the 34-student class, has

gone above 50 percent, according to Pinkham.

Students enrolled in the class have been selected through teacher recommendations, counseling screening, and administrative review. Poor attendance (20 days or more) failure in two or more classes, or expressed need by the student are factors weighed in selection.

Although there are no seniors presently enrolled in the class they are eligible to sign up if they lack no credits. Freshmen make up the bulk of the class, Pinkham noted, because they are the extreme cases.

The class is being held first period so course instructors and school personnel will know where the students are, explained Pinkham.

After the class, appropriately titled "Alternative Class," students will take classes that deal with basic skills, career-related programs, or work experience.

"We're not going to pressure them at all, yet teach them to cope with problems," said Pinkham. "We'll try to be as positive as possible so they won't seem labeled (by other students)," he said.

The class, approved by Tribal Council and high school teachers, will be taught by counselors Ron Pinkham and Ron Phillips, and Dr. Ernie Weber, Assistant Superintendent of School District 509-J.



ENTANGLING EXPERIENCE - Winter term of COCC's community education got underway earlier this week at the Adult Learning Center. One popular course, Afghan Making, taught by Lucille Fernandez (center), has the maximum number of students allowed to enroll, and already has a waiting list for the next session which begins Feb. 12. Helena Jones (left) and Myrna Courtney were among the lucky ones who signed up before the class filled.

Hatchery Offers Jobs

Out of a job? Willing to work for one week?

If interested, the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery has ten job openings and guarantee 40 hours of work. The job involves marking 100,000 juvenile steelhead that will be released this spring using the coded wire method. No experience is required. All workers will be trained at the fish hatchery.

On Monday, January 29, Dale Long, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and Benson Heath, Assistant CETA Director, will interview applicants at the CETA-Personnel office in the Administration Building.

More information can be reached by contacting the Personnel department.

Fort Hall to Host Basketball Tourney

Action for the Fifteenth Annual Fort Hall All-Indian Basketball tournament is scheduled to get underway February 28 and will continue through March 3 at Timbee Hall in Fort Hall, Idaho.

Sixteen teams from Idaho, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Nevada, North Dakota, Arizona, California, Washington, Wyoming, Colorado, and Canada will be competing in the double elimination tourney.

An open dance contest will be held Saturday night (March 3) with cash prizes being given to winners.

More information can be obtained by writing to Fort Hall Recreation Office, PO Box 626, Fort Hall, Idaho, 83203; or by phoning (208) 237-0600, extension 60, or (208) 237-1156, after 4 p.m.