

Children and the Future: Indian Education at Wallaceburg District Secondary School

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Ontario's Walpole Island First Nation and neighboring Wallaceburg District Secondary School have cooperatively improved the educational environment for Indian students at the Wallaceburg school. In this case study, interviews and archival records form the basis for a description of improved relations between the school and the reserve and the creation of a climate for an observed improvement in student achievement. A great deal of the credit for the improvement is due to the vision and work of the Walpole Island education counselors who work in the school and to a school administration that makes visible efforts to make schooling relevant for Indian secondary students. Nonetheless, problems and unresolved issues remain and are addressed in a series of recommendations in the conclusion.

The picture of an Indian baby, securely wrapped in a beaded blanket, draws the visitor's eyes to a poster with the caption

Our Children—Our Future. Unless a child learns about the forces which shaped him; the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being.

Children, education, and the future are the motif for Harriet Jacobs' busy office at Wallaceburg District Secondary School (WDSS) in Wallaceburg, Ontario. An education worker for 17 years, she has been a powerful and positive adult role model for First Nations students. She has also helped bridge a gulf of misunderstanding that for years divided Walpole Island parents from school administrators and faculty.

Once the special needs of Indian students were recognized, WDSS took steps to meet them. The fruits of these recent initiatives are impressive. Indian youngsters attending WDSS exude a pride in their heritage and increased self-confidence. They seem less alienated and more attuned to the relevance of their classwork. They do better academically. They are more integrated into school activities than at any time in the previous 25 years. Some faculty changed the curriculum and their teaching methods as they learned more about Indian cultural differences. WDSS administrators, working closely with Jacobs and with Wilcy Kewayosh, a Native counselor stationed at the school, have fostered a more sensitive learning environment within the school and have strengthened communication links with Walpole Island students, parents, and with Chief and Council. Some deep-rooted problems persist, such as the high dropout rate, but enough positive steps have been taken during the last few years to warrant cautious optimism about the future.

Historical Background

Prospects were not always so rosy in Wallaceburg. The Canadian government's policy of assimilation of Indians through schooling had been operationalized first, between the mid-1800s and the 1960s, by sending children to segregated residential schools. Those schools seemed to have failed: the government's objective of assimilation had not been achieved and few Indian children completed school. For example, between 1951 and 1962, 94% of them did not receive secondary diplomas, and by comparison the national dropout rate for non-Indians during that period was about 12% (Hawthorn, 1966, p. 130). Ottawa adopted a program of integrating Indians into provincial schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This policy was countered by the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), which responded to federal government initiatives with a position paper calling for Indian control of Indian education. The federal government was persuaded in 1973 to make the idea of Indian control of Indian schools its national policy (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development [DIAND], 1982, p. 6). With the current policy of moving to Indian self-government, both First Nations peoples and the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs recognize that education is a critical component of the process.

This has not meant that most Indian children attend Indian controlled schools. In 1989, 50% of the Indian children in Canada attended provincial schools (Statistics Canada, 1989, p. 4-4). For residents of reserves, tuition agreements between bands and the federal government on the one hand and provincial school jurisdictions on the other provide for the federal government to meet the costs of Indian attendance at provincial schools.

Most First Nations organizations take the position that whether children attend provincial or band operated schools, the education of the young must impart traditional values and a strong sense of cultural identity, pride, and history, as well as the training necessary to make a good living in modern society. Schooling has been destructive of cultural identity, a one-way street to the white man's world (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations [AFN], 1988, pp. 72-73, 107), and this should change. "The new mentality," wrote the Canadian Education Association in 1984, "is a that education can be given based on native values and that native culture can be maintained with the help of the school" (p. 7).

The question of the degree of success in meeting the objective of Indian control of Indian education is controversial. Nine years ago DIAND claimed significant progress, stating that 450 of the 573 bands administered all or part of the school programs on reserves and that the percentage of Indian administrators and teachers in federally controlled schools had grown to 30%. The AFN was less sanguine. In 1988 it claimed that aboriginal peoples of Canada "continue to suffer social disintegration and deprivation under the paternalistic administration of the federal government" that has "failed to implement the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education" (DIAND, 1982, p. 14; NIB/AFN, 1988, pp. 4:9, 13).

Many education studies of the 1970s and 1980s focused on these jurisdictional changes over federal schools on Indian reserves (e.g., Bashford & Heinzerling, 1987; King, 1987; McCaskill, 1987; and Williams, 1982). Until recently few scholars have examined the growing First Nations presence and influence within provincial secondary schools. DIAND reported that the percentage of Canadian Indian children in grades 12 and 13 "after consecutive years of schooling has increased from

about three percent in 1960/61 to slightly under half in 1990/91" (DIAND, 1991, p. 38). Registered First Nations students attending Ontario provincial secondary schools between grades 8 and 13 increased 60% during the 1980s (Mackay & Myles, 1989, p. 12).

How do we account for this growth, and how have Native students done academically? Did secondary schools adjust their policies, curricula, and teaching staffs in response to this influx? If so, did neighboring First Nations communities participate in the process? The educational literature offers few answers to these questions. Case studies of Native student experiences in secondary schools are needed in order to judge the effects of this aspect of federal and provincial policies on First Nations education.

Walpole Island and Wallaceburg District Secondary School

Walpole Island First Nation is located on the rich St. Clair River delta 20 miles south of Sarnia, Ontario. The reserve, which consists of five islands covering 58,000 acres, is home to 3,000 Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi Indians. Walpole straddles strategic north-south and east-west transportation routes, and thus has played important roles—political, economic, and cultural—since the prehistoric era. More recently the reserve has been a national leader in the fight for Indian self-determination. In the mid-1960s Walpole was the first Canadian reserve to remove its Indian agent and to restore self-government. A flurry of band initiated activities followed: construction of a bridge to the Ontario mainland, establishment of a band-owned farm, improved housing and social services, and the encouragement of tourism. Among the first projects instituted by Chief and Council was a new central school. Yet this was only a start at tackling the serious educational problems in the island, where only 2.9% of band members were educated beyond grade 9 (Nin-da-waab-jig, 1987, pp. 100-103).

The history of education of Walpole Island children mirrors the history of national trends. Whether sent to one-room schools on the island or away to residential institutions such as Singwauk at Sault Ste. Marie, the educational objective for the youngsters at least until after World War II was integration into the Canadian mainstream. Teachers downplayed Native heritage. School officials discouraged boys and girls from continuing their education beyond grade 8. Not until the postwar period did DIAND contract with Kent County for the secondary education of Walpole students at WDSS (Nin-da-waab-jig, 1987, p. 92). During the 1960s and early 1970s, WDSS had close to 1,500 students, 5% of whom were Indians. By the late 1980s, the WDSS student population had declined to about 1,100, 9% of whom were Indians (Principal's Reports, 1969-70, 1970-71, 1988, and 1989).

Student Experiences at WDSS Prior to 1974

The experiences of the Indian students who attended WDSS prior to 1974 reflected nationwide trends in Native education. The evidence for that summary statement comes from examining Walpole Island historical documents and WDSS graduation records and by interviewing four veteran teachers and 19 Indian former students. (To safeguard the privacy of those who provided personal and historical information, individual names are not used here; generally, only aggregate data are cited.)

Indian pupils retained some pleasant memories of WDSS. All had attended an off-reserve public school in Wallaceburg before enrolling at WDSS, and therefore the academic and social transition to grade 9 had been generally smooth. Island boys and girls usually had fellow Indians in their classes until reaching grades 12 and 13. Seventy-nine percent of the Indian alumni felt they had received sound academic training and had been treated equitably by the administration. Personal relationships also blossomed, with 74% of the islanders claiming three or more non-Indian student friends. Lastly, most Indian students interviewed had participated in extracurricular activities, although members of sports teams had to hitchhike home because there had been no late bus.

Serious educational problems nevertheless lurked behind the red brick walls of WDSS. Few Indian students were enthusiastic about their classes as a whole or had had career plans. In Ontario, the Basic Curriculum is designed for students who need special or vocational education, while the General Level is for boys and girls wishing to take a grade 12 diploma and move directly into the work force. Young people planning postsecondary study take the Advanced Level Curriculum (Williams, 1982, p. 92). Only three of the 19 alumni had worked within the advanced curriculum for university-bound students. Most had had average or below average grades that did not improve over time. Eighty-four percent of the Indian alumni recalled that teachers made no effort to incorporate Indian culture and history into their classes. Although most faculty treated Indian youngsters respectfully, a few instructors were perceived to be discriminatory. Rarely was this overt; it was in their tone of voice, the low expectations they had for Indian boys and girls, their reluctance to give tutorial help, and their embarrassing "centering out" of Indians in the classroom. No Indian staff had been available to provide social, academic, or career guidance to troubled adolescents. It is no wonder that so many youngsters quit WDSS before graduation.

Incomplete educational records make it difficult to measure the Indian dropout rate from WDSS, yet all interviewees agreed on the severity of the problem. Indian students entering grade 9 probably numbered between 20 and 30 annually. Few earned diplomas. Between 1966 and 1974, for example, an average of four Indians graduated from grade 12 each year, and less than one from grade 13 (WDSS, n.d., "Graduation Programs").

Former students pointed fingers of blame in more than one direction. They claimed that WDSS pushed out some Indians through insensitivity to their special needs. One study of grade 9 students during the 1971-1972 school year showed that 61% saw WDSS as "mainly a white man's school" (Labombard, 1973, p. 17). Indians also criticized Walpole Island First Nation. Parents must always take prime responsibility for their children's education, and before 1974 not enough fathers and mothers insisted that their youngsters attend WDSS regularly and give full effort to their studies. Nor did elected First Nation officials make clear that education was a top community priority.

Problems festered. Each year large numbers of Walpole Island students left the secondary school without graduating. Perhaps Wallaceburg was not a hostile environment, but the lure of the island appeared to be irresistible. For Indians without a WDSS diploma, there were still many jobs in town and on the reserve. Neither WDSS nor island leaders seemed able to prevail against this trend.

1973-1991: Better Times

Interviews with (a) 63 Indians who attended WDSS after 1974; (b) 22 teachers; (c) four Indian staff members; and (d) four administrators revealed several persistent characteristics in Indian education. Indian integration into WDSS continued to be smooth both academically and socially. Reserve youngsters usually had at least one or two fellow band members in each of their classes and were moderately involved in extracurricular activities such as sports and dances. Eighty-two percent of the student interviewees judged their academic training at WDSS to be sound, although the school's curriculum was still only of modest interest, perhaps because so few teachers incorporated Indian culture and history into their classes. One exception was the introduction of a Native studies class in the mid-1970s. Developed by Brian McCormack with ongoing help from Harriet Jacobs, the course has tried to promote a general awareness of the richness of Indian cultures and their contributions to modern society. An equally high percentage of Indians believed that they received fair treatment from their teachers, with one or two exceptions. Similarly, school administrators seemed unbiased. Principal Duncan MacLennan, Vice-Principal Ray Chartrand, and their predecessors have made good-faith efforts to treat Indian students equitably, to support programs geared to their special needs, to highlight Indian achievements at WDSS, and to maintain communication with the Walpole Island leadership. On the other hand, secretaries were singled out for more criticism, perhaps because the students had more contact with them than with principals. Nevertheless, complaints of rude or discriminatory conduct over the last two decades were noteworthy. Last, relations between Indian and non-Indian students had not changed much since the mid-1970s; altogether they were stable and positive and, if any change might be noted, they improved a bit. Problems such as fighting were viewed as coming from individuals, regardless of race. While ethnicity was a factor in forming friendships, the ratio of Indian and non-Indian close acquaintances has remained stable, with Indian students generally having somewhere between a 40% and 60% mix of Indian and non-Indian friends.

Despite these continuing themes since 1974, significant changes in Indian education have occurred at WDSS. One was the hiring of education worker Jacobs in 1975. Her responsibilities have been wide-ranging. They have included (a) supplying instructional help to teachers of First Nations students, such as reviewing textbooks and other readings, planning field trips, and recruiting guest speakers; (b) fostering pride, educational efforts, and regular attendance among Indian pupils through personal counseling and organizing teen sports, social activities, and organization of the Culture Club; (c) distributing supplies to Walpole students; and (d) creating and then maintaining good communication between the secondary school and the island community (Hodgson, 1981; Education Committee Agendas, November 2, 1988; interview with Harriet Jacobs, February 14, 1990; note that two Native staff members briefly preceded Jacobs at WDSS: Myrna Kicknosway, a social counselor who worked only part time at the secondary school between 1972 and 1974; and Sylvia DeLeary, a full-time education worker during the 1974-1975 academic year). Almost all the Indian students interviewed have used and have approved of Jacobs' services. Teachers generally felt the same.

The Culture Club annually sponsored a social event for the entire school. In May 1991, their Spring Gathering drew hundreds of participants to the

auditorium-gymnasium. The morning of the event Jacobs, aided by three island women, brought boxes of food to the Family Studies classrooms on the second floor. Under her supervision, students and adults prepared fruit, vegetables, crackers, cheese, cold cuts of meat, fried bread, and drinks. Jacobs also dispatched carloads of boys around town to pick up last-minute supplies. Another group of Indian students busily counted money from T-shirt and 50-50 drawing sales. In the auditorium, Kewayosh used Jacobs' detailed floor plan to prepare for a mini-powwow, setting up rows of chairs, pulling out bleachers, and arranging traders' tables. The Culture Club then served lunch to several special guests, among whom were WDSS teachers, Walpole community leaders, and federal dignitaries from London, Ontario. Between 1:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., the auditorium and stage, packed with students and adult visitors, pulsed with traditional rhythms. An Indian upperclassman was the master of ceremonies and enticed fellow students of all races to join in the dances. Clearly Indian students were proud to share this aspect of their vibrant culture with non-Indian friends (Project Field Notes, May 8, 1991; references to earlier events sponsored by the WDSS Culture Club are found in Native Studies Advisory Committee Minutes, Kent County Board of Education).

Kewayosh, Jacobs' colleague and fellow band member, had worked at the secondary school only part time until the 1991-1992 academic year, when WDSS became his primary responsibility. His focus was personal, academic, and career counseling. Several Walpole students came from single-parent homes, and Kewayosh helped them deal with their grief over broken families. He also stressed the importance of academic survival techniques at WDSS. Not all First Nations pupils came to the secondary school with adequate study skills or the proper ideas about classroom behavior. Kewayosh helped them adjust to the differences in regulations between WDSS and the elementary school on the island. He helped them learn that they had to speak up in class or be "lost in the shuffle." He urged Indian students to respect the WDSS staff, to do their homework, and generally to get along well with their teachers. Some First Nations students, accustomed to hanging around together, continued this practice at WDSS in the classroom, in the halls, or on athletic teams. According to Kewayosh, they particularly liked to congregate around Jacobs' office, even when she was not there; this helped preserve their identity among hundreds of other non-Indian classmates (Interview with Wilcy Kewayosh, February 24, 1990).

Besides overseeing the important work of Kewayosh and Jacobs, the government of Walpole Island First Nation spoke more openly after 1974 about the reserve's commitment to formal education and tried to play a greater role in WDSS activities. Students agreed that island officials helped by (a) offering financial incentives for good attendance; (b) paying for school supplies, lunches, books, and special class fees; (c) providing inspirational speakers; and (d) recognizing successful students. In November 1990, for example, Walpole educational leaders sponsored an annual WDSS Awards Night at Walpole Island First Nation Elementary School. Several teachers and administrators from Wallaceburg presented the awards for achievement in a variety of subjects. Each young person received a medallion to keep; their names were also engraved on plaques that would hang permanently at the island school (*Jibkenyan*, 1990, pp. 3-4).

A third major change affecting education at WDSS was improved Indian academic performance as indicated by attendance patterns, graduation rates, and statement of career goals. Historically, irregular attendance—classes missed, lost

opportunities to participate in class discussions, homework assignments undone, tests not taken—had weakened the learning potential at WDSS and hence the academic achievement of Walpole Island students. Classmates who skipped days or dropped out of WDSS did so for a variety of reasons. These included parental indifference to formal education and other family problems, poor academic performance and feelings of alienation toward the school, pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and taking full-time jobs.

According to a recent Ontario study that polled Native and non-Native educators, attendance “is the variable most clearly associated with dropping out ... [and] persistent absenteeism always results in students facing almost insurmountable problems with their school work and often results in the loss of the concern, support and respect of their teachers and counsellors” (Mackay & Myles, 1989, pp. 53-54). Walpole leaders understood this and for years have worked diligently to keep their children in school. In November 1970, for instance, Band Administrator L.R. Hopkins informed the Wallaceburg Police Department of the band’s increasing concern about truancy at the local schools. To alleviate the situation, Walpole authorities asked the police “to take into custody any student that may be truant. Then you should contact [Attendance Officer] Mr. Clayton Sands who will come and deliver them wherever they are supposed to be” (Hopkins, 1970).

Despite this and later efforts, Indian attendance at WDSS continued to be a problem (Chartrand, 1987). One of the inevitable consequences was a high dropout rate. A Walpole study noted that in 1967 there were 44 grade 1 students on the reserve, yet 12 years later only three graduated from WDSS on schedule. This was “particularly alarming when we consider that preschool testing indicates Native children have the capabilities of the general population” (WIFN, 1981). Table 1 shows that during the early 1980s dropping out was the major reason for Indians leaving WDSS, while Table 2 reveals for the same time period how few Walpole students reached grades 11, 12, and 13.

Since the mid-1980s, on the other hand, Walpole Island student enrollments at WDSS showed a growing total attendance and a notable increase in those reaching the higher grades (see Table 3).

This new pattern resulted from changes both on the reserve and at the secondary school. Walpole Island First Nation had made education a top priority and had backed up its commitment. Former and current students also attributed much of their educational success to parents who supplied clothes and other necessities, helped with homework, encouraged regular school attendance, participated in parents’ night activities, talked openly about the importance of a good education, provided incentives, and generally acted as good role models.

In addition, Wallaceburg District Secondary School has become a more hospitable setting for Indian students. The administration has sponsored its own special activities that, like the students’ Spring Gathering, bridged the cultural groups. In mid-February 1991, for example, WDSS devoted half a teachers’ professional day to Native education. Principal MacLennan planned the morning’s activities in consultation with several teachers and Indian community members. Following a pancake breakfast in the cafeteria, instructors gathered to listen to Walpole speakers who shared their philosophy of education and clarified the values and learning characteristics of Indian students. Their audience then divided into small groups to compare their reactions to the presenters’ comments and to discuss how they might change their teaching styles (Field notes, February 15,

Table 1. *Why Walpole Students Withdrew from WDSS (School Years 1981-1984)*

<i>Reason for Leaving</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Dropout	131	75
Move off reserve	11	6
Transfer to another school	10	6
Graduate	23	13
Totals	175	100

Source: Derived from Table 11 in Brigham and Brigham (1986, Part IV: p. 43).

1991). A few months later the school staff also accepted Kewayosh's invitation to visit the reserve as a group in order to understand a little better the Indian home environment (Interview with WDSS Guidance Department Head Larry Peters, July 9, 1991).

About that time, WDSS sponsored another cultural orientation. Grade 8 students from the Walpole Island First Nation Elementary School spent a day at the secondary school in Wallaceburg. Arranged by guidance counselor Peters, it involved (a) a warm welcome for the visitors to the school; (b) a panel discussion about how to adapt to high school when they enrolled the following fall, which was led by successful Indian students and by teachers who had worked especially well with Indians; and (c) a chance to eat in the cafeteria and attend some classes (Peters, n.d.). Both groups, students who returned to the island after this preview and teachers who motored back to WDSS after an island visit, were better prepared to work effectively with each other.

A final example of WDSS' commitment to improve the academic achievement of its Indian and non-Indian students was a new policy started during the 1987-1988 school year. It attacked a taproot of the dropout problem, irregular attendance. More stringent truancy and class absence policies stressed speedy intervention by teachers and administrators; informative letters about truancy are

Table 2. *Walpole Island Student Enrollments by Grade at WDSS (School Years 1979-1984)*

<i>School Year</i>	<i>Grade 9</i>	<i>Grade 10</i>	<i>Grade 11</i>	<i>Grade 12</i>	<i>Grade 13</i>	<i>Total</i>
1979-1980	23	27	13	5	1	69
1980-1981	24	23	7	8	0	62
1981-1982	30	16	18	9	1	74
1982-1983	23	20	11	10	1	65
1983-1984	25	36	3	10	1	75

Source: Derived from DIAND Nominal Roll, an historical database that annually lists First Nation children by grade who attend provincial, federal, or Native schools.

Table 3. *Walpole Island Student Enrollments by Grade at WDSS (School Years 1985-1991)*

<i>School Year</i>	<i>Grade 9</i>	<i>Grade 10</i>	<i>Grade 11</i>	<i>Grade 12</i>	<i>Grade 13</i>	<i>Total</i>
1984-1985	17	23	29	3	5	77
1985-1986	17	29	17	10	3	76
1986-1987	14	17	29	16	8	84
1987-1988	23	28	22	12	12	97
1988-1989	19	24	21	12	14	90
1989-1990	19	19	20	21	10	89
1990-1991	36	43	13	12	5	109

Source: DIAND Nominal Roll.

sent to parents, which must be acknowledged and returned to the school; chronically offending students are removed from specific courses or from the school rolls. WDSS truancy cases among all students dropped dramatically from 434 in November 1986 to 222 three years later (WDSS, 1989, pp. 7-8). Walpole Island attendance counselor Mary Sands checked daily on students who missed WDSS classes. She worked closely and extensively with parents, Walpole Island officials, school administrators, and teachers to reduce truancy cases among boys and girls with academic, social, and emotional problems (WDSS, n.d., "November attendance"; WDSS, n.d., "Student handbook"; WIFN, 1988).

Walpole students did more than just stay in WDSS. By the 1980s they were participating more fully in classroom and extracurricular activities. Under the guidance of skillful teachers, many Indian students who otherwise might have been easily offended and stifled by regimented school structures blossomed academically. The most successful instructors were those who respected the Indians' academic potential, treated them sensitively, adjusted their teaching methods to the students' special cultural characteristics, and ultimately won their trust. One key was a special effort to show Indian students that they were accepted and that a teacher was interested in them. One faculty member remarked, "I have never known an Indian who was stupid. They are socially acute and pick up cues" from a teacher who is not sincere.

Individualized instruction also was less threatening to Indians and took into account the children's propensity to avoid classroom projects that they could not do well. Furthermore, a teacher's choice of activities might consider the Indian students' preference for hands-on team tasks. Once started on an assignment, many Indian students tended to be perfectionists, consumed by the creative process and unaware of time. They needed flexible deadlines. Their painstakingly prepared products often were of outstanding quality, showing a capacity for keen observation and incredible space perception; these evoked great respect from fellow students.

The consequences of these changes for island students, although not revolutionary, were remarkable. Of the students interviewed who were currently enrolled at WDSS, 83% said they were planning to attend colleges and universities,

whereas only one former student had listed this as a goal. Half of the former students recalled that they had had no career plans when leaving WDSS. A third of the current students mentioned professions such as medicine, law, or computer programming. Former students gave none of those occupations as possibilities. Graduation figures suggested that the career goals of more recent Indian students were becoming realities. Before the mid-1980s, only three or four Walpole students earned grade 12 diplomas each year. Then came a dramatic change: eight graduated in 1989, 11 in 1990, and 14 in 1991 (WDSS, n.d., "Graduation programs"; *Jibkenyan*, 1991). In September 1971 only seven islanders took postsecondary courses at universities, colleges, and private institutions; 20 years later, 92 students from Walpole were enrolled in such programs throughout Canada and the United States (Education Committee Agendas, 1988; *Jibkenyan*, 1991, p. 13).

Walpole Island First Nation and WDSS highlighted their commitments to such academic achievement in September 1991. Aboriginal leaders from across Canada attended a conference on self-government at Walpole Island First Nation. One morning was committed to young people, and the speakers drove to WDSS to present a Career Workshop. Each adult talked about the importance of staying in school and getting a good education in order to take advantage of the many opportunities that awaited First Nations individuals and communities. Aim high, urged Andrew Maracle, Sr., from Tyendinaga, and you will be successful. Discipline yourself and you can do anything (Field notes, September 26, 1991).

In summary, significant progress in Native education has obviously occurred at WDSS during the last 20 years. Recently surveyed Walpole students felt good about their teachers and relationships with non-Indian peers. Principal MacLennan's administrative team and their predecessors have made good-faith efforts to treat Indian students equitably, to support programs geared to their special needs, to highlight Indian achievement at WDSS, to encourage the multicultural education of faculty, and to maintain communication with the Walpole Island leadership. Both administrators and teachers have noted improvement over the years in Indian student attendance, social integration among students, and general academic achievement. Some faculty, by changing their teaching methods and course student assignments, have been particularly effective with Indian young people. The Walpole social counselor and education worker have been critical links between faculty and the large number of First Nation boys and girls at WDSS. Thanks to Kewayosh and Jacobs, the Indian student was not a troublesome mystery at WDSS; as individuals and as a group, their interests and needs and abilities have been conveyed to faculty and fellow students willing to listen. In Walpole Island, parents and the First Nation Council have increasingly supported, by word and deed, their students and the efforts of Jacobs, Kewayosh, and WDSS.

A history of WDSS during the last 20 years includes more than what the school has done academically and socially for Indian students. It is also a story of how much Walpole Islanders have contributed to the school. Whether in the classroom, at special assemblies to hear guest speakers, on field trips and teacher professional days to the reserve, or at school luncheons and mini-powwows, Walpole Island First Nations people have helped teachers and fellow students to understand themselves better and to appreciate more fully Canada's rich cultural diversity, including their neighbors across the Chenail Ecarte.

The efforts to improve the education of Indian students at WDSS merit emulation by other provincial schools with aboriginal students. Walpole Island First

Nation has not taken over WDSS as it did the reserve's elementary school in 1990, but Indians have greatly increased their influence. The results thus far are impressive. Much remains to be done educationally for this and succeeding generations of island boys and girls, but an important bridge of understanding now exists between the reserve and Wallaceburg. The prospects look good for increased communication between the two communities, which can only strengthen them both—and other secondary schools and reserves that would listen and learn.

Future Prospects, With Some Recommendations

A recent Ontario Native dropout study listed nearly two dozen factors that accompanied or contributed to this phenomenon: from discrimination and poor attendance to pregnancy. Noted too was the

tendency for each group of key players [students, parents, band officials, school administrators, faculty] to believe that the lion's share of the blame for the high dropout rate can be mainly attributed to those factors not under their own control but under the control of others. (Mackay & Myles, 1989, pp. vii-viii)

Walpole students and WDSS were part of this dropout problem. Of the 374 Indian boys and girls who attended WDSS between 1979 and 1991, 111 (29.7%) made it to grade 12. Only 47 (12.6%) of the 374 gained grade 13 status. (These figures are based on analysis of Nominal Roll data; statistics had once been much worse. Walpole Island Band Council noted that in the early 1970s, 95% of its students dropped out before reaching grade 12 [WIFN, 1982]).

To address this and other persistent educational problems, Walpole Island band members and the WDSS must continue to work together instead of pointing fingers. Because there is no single simple solution to academic difficulties, the following recommendations are meant to encourage useful dialogue in similar situations:

Recommendation 1. The First Nation decision to bring grades 6 through 8 from Wallaceburg to the island remains controversial. This and other questions await resolution: should kindergarten through grade 8 be taught at the day school on the reserve, or should Walpole boys and girls attend public school for a year or two in Wallaceburg before entering WDSS? If kindergarten through grade 8 students stay at Walpole Island First Nation Elementary School, how can teachers better prepare students to succeed at WDSS? How much Indian culture, including community values, attitudes, and aspirations, should be manifest in the elementary school curriculum and in WDSS classes? Teachers at the secondary school need to know what facets of Indian culture should be in the courses of study. Presently many reserve boys and girls are disenchanted with the lack of culturally relevant classes, such as Native language, at WDSS. Does the First Nation send clear messages to its young people, to WDSS, and to the citizens of Wallaceburg, that a high school education today is critical for the self-determination of Indian individuals and the reserve as a whole?

More than one WDSS informant remarked that there was only so much that the secondary school could do to reshape its program until Walpole resolved internal disagreements about education. A thorough, painstaking needs assessment would help determine community priorities on several issues. A needs assessment would contribute to the creation of an education master plan. No less important will be a

tenacious commitment to implement school reform, based on the master plan, in face-to-face negotiation with Kent County School Board.

Recommendation 2. The key to keeping boys and girls in school is motivation. WDSS must regularly screen Indian students, particularly the dropout-prone grade 9s and 10s, to catch skill deficiencies before they create psychological barriers. An educational consulting firm tested some of the Indian students in August 1989 and found that many were entering secondary school with skill deficits of three to four years in mathematics, and one to two years in language arts. All boys and girls rated above average in intelligence, yet WDSS consigned them to the General Level because of skill deficiencies (WIFN, 1989). School personnel must also identify and help students who are at risk because of family problems or other issues in their lives. This is particularly urgent in the fall when enthusiasm is high and new school year resolutions are the strongest.

Historically, the first dropouts began appearing in large numbers by late January; this pattern was verified by a review of WDSS Principal's September Reports, 1973-1990. Individualized support networks for these young people can only be designed and put in place by teams of professional school counselors, teachers, and student support workers such as Jacobs and Kewayosh. These mentoring and support groups would be varied: from peer or adult tutors to help those with academic needs, to "big brothers" or "big sisters" who could provide stable adult friendships and role models. An intervention system has built-in costs, particularly school personnel time, yet those dollars pale when compared with the money that might otherwise be spent by Walpole Island, Kent County, and the federal government to support uneducated, alienated, and unemployed young adults.

Recommendation 3. Because dropout-prone students often cannot visualize themselves succeeding at jobs, on the reserve or elsewhere, that call for a grade 12 diploma, sensitive guidance counseling is needed. This too might best be done by teams of reserve leaders, student peers, and WDSS professionals. An Ontario Native student dropout study noted:

Native students were often uncomfortable with the counselling situation if conducted one on one. They reported success with peer counselling and the creation of situations where the purpose of the session is disguised by an activity such as card playing.... There was almost universal agreement that insufficient career counselling was available, and that this, along with a lack of specific career plans, had a significant effect on Native students' rate of school completion. (Mackay & Myles, 1989, p. 57)

Recommendation 4. Walpole Island First Nation Elementary School and WDSS officials should reassess the system used to assign students to study levels, since several informants acknowledged that too many Walpole boys and girls are slotted in the Basic and General courses of study. The schools, reserve leaders, and parents should develop joint strategies to get more First Nation students into Advanced Level, five-year-sequence courses that prepare students for university.

Recommendation 5. The faculty has heard much about unique Indian learning styles, but not enough about specific steps teachers might take with Indian students in their classrooms. Three clear messages surfaced about this during interviews at WDSS. First, more professional days spent at Walpole would help faculty to understand their students better. This does not focus only on Indian student characteristics, such as behavioral norms (e.g., historically "designed to suppress

conflict and promote group unity and survival" [Brant, 1990, p. 538]) and the cultural richness they embody. The faculty need also to understand some negative factors with which they must contend, including their own preconceptions: feelings teachers have about the home conditions of First Nations students, asserts the Ontario Native dropout study, are "seldom backed up by a first-hand knowledge of their Native students' situations outside of the classroom" (Mackay & Myles, 1989, p. 32). Second, because some faculty at WDSS are especially effective in working with Indian students, they should be invited to give more workshops for their peers, particularly with new teachers who usually come to WDSS without formal multicultural training and without experience working with First Nations peoples. Last, everyone admits that WDSS should have Native faculty members, but also recognizes that it is sometimes difficult to find and attract them—difficult but not impossible, so why not mount a campaign to attract such teachers?

Recommendation 6. To help aboriginal students function effectively on and off reserves, parents and provincial officials should model cooperative and productive relationships. Yet across Ontario there has been too much finger-pointing, too many Native parents and non-Native educators blaming one another for school problems. A different initiative is needed. Teachers and parents must strengthen the bridges built between Walpole and WDSS by Kewayosh, Jacobs, and other school and reserve leaders. Teachers and parents must get together more often and in greater numbers, perhaps with special bussing and innovative meeting sites. Once assembled, discussion facilitators could create an atmosphere in which both groups can openly voice their educational concerns, express their determination to make things better, discuss some strategies for achieving this end, and then work hand-in-hand to support students. Common purpose between parents and teachers would send two unmistakable messages to young people: reading and learning are important, and aboriginal people are taking charge of their own education.

Recommendation 7. In reviewing the literature on Indian education, complaints were common about the paucity of historical data. Surely, as with the hiring of Native faculty for WDSS, the time has come to do something about this. In order to monitor and assess long-term trends, WDSS and Walpole Island officials might start a computerized database on their students: how they perform academically as individuals and as a group at WDSS, and how these behaviors change over time. In each student's file should also be relevant data from his or her elementary school and information about postgraduation achievements. In this way parents, educators, and community leaders can monitor how their students are doing and how they compare with others at WDSS and with Indian students in secondary school elsewhere in the province. Eventually, such reliable data could form a basis for educational decision making on the island, at WDSS, at the Kent County Board of Education, and in Ottawa.

In December 1989, the Walpole Band Council adopted a Community Education Proclamation suggested by a group of concerned parents. The document noted that Indian students were expected to "excel to their highest potential" and that the goal of all parties "involved in the education of our young people will be one of support and harmony. All parties involved will be allowed and encouraged to openly discuss and resolve problems" (Walpole Band Council, 1989). WDSS Principal MacLennan, who was aware of the concerned parents' proclamation, wrote to the organization:

Last Wednesday, while speaking at our Grade 9 Parents' Night, I took the liberty of reading your proclamation and suggesting that our children would be well served if we all ascribed to such standards. Please extend my congratulations to all of the members of your group for taking such positive actions. I am sure they will bear fruit. (*Jibkenyan*, 1989)

Continued cooperation can—and must—yield more fruit, for the stakes are high: “Children are the most precious resource of the First Nations,” writes the Assembly of First Nations. “They are the link to the past generations, the enjoyment of the present generations, and the hope for the future” (NIB/AFN, 1988, Vol. 4, p. 1).

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