

The Casket

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READERS WRITE

Why have boards

Now that the minister of education, with assistance from our former chair and a little coaxing from board staff, has formally disbanded the Strait Regional School Board (SRSB), I would like to shed some light on the debate over the Antigonish Women's Resource Center's (AWRC) access to our student population.

This issue arose last year after I received a number of calls from both parents and teachers concerned about the Inspire Program being offered in two schools under a pilot project. When I approached staff, I think it fair to say that staff was completely caught off guard, as they had no idea what I was referring too. A following meeting to clarify the issue was just as frustrating, we were told that the program was after school and that teachers were always present, as mandated by the education act.

Board member Kim Horton, a parent with children in a school participating in the program, refuted both claims. To complicate the issue, I found out through the media that a new program, Healthy Relationships, was now being offered in ten schools, the board never being formally informed and no evaluation ever being done on the Inspire Program.

Contrary to the superintendent's comments, micro-managing, I think, is the role of school boards to act as an oversight, especially when controversial subject material is involved, and make no mistake, some parents views the above mentioned programs as such.

From another perspective, I question why the board has a denominational policy, which in my opinion has sidelined our local clergy, but has no policy when it comes to other ideologically driven organizations, i.e. the AWRC.

I made a motion to terminate the services of the women's center, based on my concerns over confidentiality clauses, my inability to respond to my constituents with information due to my lack of knowledge and my strong concern that sensitive issues relating to our youth should only be addressed by professionals, be they teachers, counselors, nurses or psychologists.

With an \$80,000,000 budget we can afford the best. I know, I should not be judgmental, and with all due respect to our principals, leaving the decision making to them leaves me less than confident. The history of this board and some of its administrators [scandal of 2001] and other less stellar careers of other principals across the province only reinforce my opinion as to why boards were created in the first place.

Boards should not shirk their duties, but I leave that to the electorate.

Finally it took a motion of the board to expose this issue, and in closing I will make two predictions. Not long from now the AWRC will, solicit funding from the SRSB. Secondly, this precedent will see other groups with their own respective

views seeking access to our youth; this should be a wake up call, parents.

Frank Machnik
Former Member, SRSB