

District breaks new ground as it sets up corporation:[Final Edition]

Lori Pappajohn. Record. New Westminster, B.C.: Dec 20, 2003. pg. 3

Abstract (Article Summary)

As uncharted as the waters are, two of the directors, school trustees Brent Atkinson and Michael Ewen, are confident the New Westminster company will succeed. They contend that the more money the company makes, the more money the school district will have to educate its students. But Ewen warns that in its first year, the company will likely lose money.

The Open School began operating under the corporation April 1 and lost, Ewen said, "a marginal amount" in the first quarter, which is the school's slowest time of year. [Russ Pacey], Ewen and Atkinson were not able, as of this fall, to say exactly how much the "marginal amount" was. Pacey thought it was around \$60,000.

How does the corporation operate financially? As of last June, it had borrowed \$170,000 from the school district. More has been borrowed since but, as of November, none of the directors knew, or would say, exactly how much. Said [Doug Wong]: "I haven't checked the amounts this year," adding that he'd know in a week. Atkinson said the accounting is "convoluted" because of the crossovers with the school district. He said the exact figure should be known by December sometime. The loan mainly covers marketing and the salaries of the four employees ([Linda Barron], Ally, Martinique and Pacey).

Full Text (1887 words)

Copyright The Record (New Westminster) 2003

When a money-making opportunity came knocking a year ago, New Westminster School District was one of the first districts in the province to put out the welcome mat. The opportunity came in the form of new legislation allowing school districts to create for-profit companies.

New Westminster School District formed its for-profit company in the fall of 2002 and, since then, it has been navigating through uncharted territory. No other district has gone before. There are no templates to follow. How much money the company will make -- and when it will start making it -- has yet to be determined.

Having borrowed more than \$200,000 from the school district, the business corporation hasn't been without controversy. But it continues to plow ahead -- and, of the 60 school districts in the province, New Westminster and Coquitlam are leading the way on this new venture.

As uncharted as the waters are, two of the directors, school trustees Brent Atkinson and Michael Ewen, are confident the New Westminster company will succeed. They contend that the more money the company makes, the more money the school district will have

to educate its students. But Ewen warns that in its first year, the company will likely lose money.

The company's main goal is to sell education to the world -- specifically China. The market is enormous and mostly untapped. Proponents of the company say it could make as much as \$2 million a year -- money that would benefit New Westminster students.

Although School District 40 Business Corporation was set up last fall, it ran into its first snag almost immediately -- obtaining liability insurance. The directors did not want to be personally responsible if something went wrong.

The company couldn't officially get underway until last spring when the provincial government, which created the legislation to allow school districts to go into business, stepped in and solved the liability issue, providing it through the province's school protection program.

The business corporation officially started operating April 1. At the helm are its directors: school trustees Michael Ewen (the chair) and Brent Atkinson, school district secretary-treasurer Doug Wong and school district assistant superintendent Russ Pacey.

No one gets paid as a director. As the CEO, 80 per cent of Pacey's school district salary of \$120,000 is charged to the corporation. Wong is paid by the school district to keep the corporation's books. That money will later be recovered from the corporation.

Whether more directors will be added has yet to be seen. Said Ewen: "It's an interesting debate. We need to have that debate and it should be in public. The more people you bring on, the more the school board loses control. But the government made it clear that there had to be a separation between the school boards and their business corporations."

The corporation has set up a number of money-making, or money-seeking, areas:

1. The biggest potential moneymaker is the plan to sell the teaching of the B.C. curriculum to schools in China. This would include New Westminster teachers teaching in China. Directors expect this to bring in several million dollars a year.
2. A partnership started last year with the Queen's Printer to operate the Open School, a subsidiary company of the corporation, is expected to bring in \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually.
3. Two fundraisers seek federal, provincial and private money for education-related programs. They could bring in several hundred thousands of dollars to the district annually.
4. Former school trustee Linda Barron is paid by the corporation to raise money for the Royal City Education Foundation and for the school district. Directors expect her to bring in her salary (approximately \$40,000) and more.

Here are the details of each of these four areas:

1. Selling education to China.

In the 1980s, New Westminster was one of the first school districts in the province to convince international students to come to school in New Westminster. Each international student pays \$11,500 tuition, and the district makes a hefty \$5,000 profit per student.

At its peak year, the international program had 220 students and grossed \$2.5 million to the district, which has an annual operating budget of \$43 million.

Now, New Westminster is one of the first school districts to take education into China -- affluent private and public schools that are willing to pay for Canadian teachers and Canadian curriculum. The market is enormous. However, Chinese bureaucracy moves slowly. Negotiations take months. Deals have yet to be finalized.

Ewen expects the Chinese market could bring in \$1 or \$2 million annually to the district. Pacey said that, within five years, they would "hope to make millions. But there is no way to project it until we have one or two partnerships under our belt."

Atkinson said: "I wouldn't hazard a guess."

2. When the provincial government stopped funding the Open School of B.C., which was run through the Open Learning Agency, New Westminster acquired it, its website and intellectual rights. The company develops and distributes correspondence curriculum for schools and home learners provincewide and overseas. It is in partnership with the Queen's Printer. New Westminster paid nothing for the Open School. The Open School has 21 employees.

The Open School began operating under the corporation April 1 and lost, Ewen said, "a marginal amount" in the first quarter, which is the school's slowest time of year. Pacey, Ewen and Atkinson were not able, as of this fall, to say exactly how much the "marginal amount" was. Pacey thought it was around \$60,000.

"It is amazing it did as well as it did considering the transition, a move and the changes," said Ewen, adding that the losses can easily be made up.

"Projections based on the sales to date are that we will make a profit this year of around \$100,000."

Atkinson said the school is projected to break even at the end of its first year.

Atkinson feels that within three years the Open School could be bringing in \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually.

Pacey said the potential for the Open School is in the millions as the market shifts to more online learning.

3. On July 1, Patina Ally and Val Martinique began seeking government grants for the district.

"In the first two weeks, they brought in \$400,000, when they put in a proposal for adult learning that lifted the enrolment cap," said Ewen.

The resource development officers, as they are called, are concentrating on education programs outside of the kindergarten to Grade 12 mandate.

For instance, the district has offered federally funded programs that help people get off welfare and obtain job skills.

"The school district backed out of these things for a whole bunch of reasons," said Ewen. "We're looking at bringing them back through the corporation. Some of us think these are important things to do for the community. We want to provide additional services that otherwise wouldn't be offered and to supplement education for kids."

The resource development officers also applied for HIPPY -- Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters. The government-funded program provides a preschool for at-risk children and their parents in the Robson and Kelvin areas. The goal is to provide educational help for at-risk children at an early age so they will do better once they enter school.

"It's not in the bounds of the K to 12, but it sure benefits the K to 12 system," said Ewen.

4. The Royal City Education Foundation was established 20 years ago as a charitable organization. It raises and disperses funds for the benefit of education in New Westminster. It has approximately \$400,000 in scholarship trust funds. The corporation has hired Linda Barron to fundraise for the foundation. Since she started last January, she has raised more than \$40,000 for the foundation and the school district.

How does the corporation operate financially? As of last June, it had borrowed \$170,000 from the school district. More has been borrowed since but, as of November, none of the directors knew, or would say, exactly how much. Said Wong: "I haven't checked the amounts this year," adding that he'd know in a week. Atkinson said the accounting is "convoluted" because of the crossovers with the school district. He said the exact figure should be known by December sometime. The loan mainly covers marketing and the salaries of the four employees (Barron, Ally, Martinique and Pacey).

What happens in the worst case scenario and the BC runs into financial troubles? For instance, if a virus like SARS put a halt to overseas work, what could happen?

Ewen said the BC would declare bankruptcy and "then the school district has lost the money. But it ain't going to happen."

Regarding liability, Ewen said: "It is a limited liability company. The school district is a shareholder in the company. Shareholders don't get sued and don't go down if the company goes down. If you had Enron stock, you weren't personally responsible. The school district is well-protected and the province is being extra-conservative in its approach. The school district and the province want to be sure we're well protected."

Regarding the potential business risk, Atkinson said: "Most trustees recognize part of it is risk capital. But the potential reward warrants the risk. The Ministry of Education has encouraged these business corporations. We're proud to think we have one of the better education systems in the world. If we can market our education and make money ... but there are no guarantees in the business world.

"The corporation is an ongoing cost. I'm the fiscal conservative. But you have to spend money to make money. You have to monitor, police and see the light at the end of the tunnel without any guarantees. Is it adventurous? Yes. But we were the first out of the gate with international education and it's been very successful."

Trustee James Janzen said the business corporation is a good idea, but added: "We can't be impatient and expect money to gush out of the fountain in the first six weeks. And we have to ensure there is separation between the corporation and the school board. We can't be making decisions for them. They have to conduct negotiations in good faith. It's very different from anything we've ever done before. It's hard to know how hands-on the school board should be, as we are the owners. But the owners of General Motors don't have much to say in the day-to-day running of the company. They hire people to do that for them.

"There's a tendency to think the school board and the corporation are one and the same. They aren't. It's a limited liability company that limits the liability of the shareholders. I can understand how people have a hard time understanding. It will be interesting to see where it goes in the next six months."

Last spring, trustee Lisa Graham was so frustrated over the lack of information about the business corporation that she filed a Freedom of Information request to learn more about the corporation. She said this fall trustees had been given a binder with information regarding the corporation. Graham said she's been going through the information carefully and is "double-checking" some things. However, she did not want to say what they were.

[Illustration]

Photo: Michael Ewen Director; Photo: Brent Atkinson Director; Photo: Russ Pacey CEO

Program changes minds, attitudes:[Final Edition]

Nicholas Riley. Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows Times. Maple Ridge, B.C.: Nov 21, 2003. pg. 12

Abstract (Article Summary)

"We're going to see a whole new generation of kids from Katzie and the other First Nations...the graduation rates will go much further and students will be more prepared for learning," says Bailey, who is also in charge of coordinating the educational programs for the Katzie. "It's a program of kindergarten preparedness."

The Katzie are currently in the second year of a three-year contract with the international program. Based out of Israel, the HIPPY program has expanded across the world, including a growing presence in Canada. And what started with the Katzie has blossomed into a larger effort encompassing more than 60 families across five First Nations in B.C.

As the home visitor of the program at Katzie, [Robin Adams] is responsible for keeping the parents on track and ensuring they understand the curriculum as it unfolds. She also organizes the extra field trips and works with the HIPPY coordinator for all five First Nations to ensure the program is being run smoothly.

Full Text (1265 words)

Copyright Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Times 2003)

Ran with fact box "Forum Held on Diversity" which has been appended to the story.

Jakob Bailey sits at the table with his mother showing about as much enthusiasm as a convict. Squirming and complaining as any four-year-old would, he makes every attempt to escape the reading session so he can go out and play. But after a few minutes of diligent work, Connie Bailey smiles at her young son as they read a picture book together. Jakob suddenly forgets about the distracting world, and asks questions about the book.

Soon the "lesson" is over.

As Jakob runs off to play again, Robin Adams and Bailey talk about the upcoming week, when Bailey will be reading the stories with Jakob, and they go through some activities for the week of learning.

Watching the scene unfold, it's easy to forget that these three are part of the first example of such a program in North America, and sitting in the band office of the Katzie First Nations reserve near Pitt Meadows.

Instead of relying on an education system they liken to a "cookie cutter," the Katzie decided to take matters into their own hands to combat the low graduation rates common among aboriginal students and the apathy exhibited by some parents in their

community. And they're starting before the kids even enter the school system, with the first on-reserve Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPO) program in North America.

"We're going to see a whole new generation of kids from Katzie and the other First Nations...the graduation rates will go much further and students will be more prepared for learning," says Bailey, who is also in charge of coordinating the educational programs for the Katzie. "It's a program of kindergarten preparedness."

The Katzie are currently in the second year of a three-year contract with the international program. Based out of Israel, the HIPPO program has expanded across the world, including a growing presence in Canada. And what started with the Katzie has blossomed into a larger effort encompassing more than 60 families across five First Nations in B.C.

"It's not just Katzie, we've developed a consortium made up of five First Nations," she said, adding Tsawassen, Burrard, Sechelt and Musqueam First Nations are part of the consortium that is headed- up by the Katzie. "Katzie has become the administrator of the program because we have the capacity to do it, and nobody else wanted to."

The program works with youngsters before they enter Kindergarten, with guided activities of at least 15 minutes each day that involve the child and a parent. Supported by home visitors, such as Adams, the parent and child become familiar with various tasks associated with learning and prepares the children for their first day of school long before they even see a classroom.

Although the program is not geared towards First Nations in particular, Bailey and Adams feel it is a great way to start making a difference in their youth's future.

"Our statistics show that our children are a year behind," Bailey says. "It's as much for the parents as it is for the kids, and it empowers the parents to get empowered. Some parents believe that education begins only when you start school."

Bailey, who worked for about two years before getting things started officially last November, said it hasn't been easy fighting against her own people's negative perceptions about the education system.

"It's not going to happen overnight, it's going to be a continuous effort on Robin's part to keep the parents motivated," she said.

As the home visitor of the program at Katzie, Adams is responsible for keeping the parents on track and ensuring they understand the curriculum as it unfolds. She also organizes the extra field trips and works with the HIPPO coordinator for all five First Nations to ensure the program is being run smoothly.

"I work with them for about an hour, and the parents work with the children 15 minutes a day," she says. "If the parents don't have the time, I also work with the children one at a time."

As part of the program, they run a support meeting every Friday for all the parents on the reserve, who come into the band office and discuss ways to improve their childrens' learning and even go through some role-playing sessions to learn more.

"You can see the love of learning in their eyes," Adams says enthusiastically of the children who have been participating, adding the parents are also becoming enthusiastic. "A lot of the parents are more comfortable with me now...at first I had parents who didn't want to open their doors."

Now that the doors are open, Bailey says they are hoping to bring more and more parents on board with the good ship HIPPY as they continue. And next year, Bailey has plans to incorporate aboriginal- specific content into the learning -- something they are not doing as part of the curriculum currently.

Although the first three years of the HIPPY program must stay with the curriculum provided to them, they already have big plans for the program's completion. "We are looking at doing aboriginal HIPPY books," she said. "I think it's going to be mostly pictures, teepees and bannock and eagles will be in here," she says, pointing to the bright, coloured drawings that adorn the pages of the reading material.

They are also now trying to fundraise for gifts and incentives and outside field trips with bake sales and other methods.

Funding for the Katzie's toy lending library came from the Ministry of Children and Families, but the HIPPY program itself is paid for completely by the First Nations community. The consortium hired a full-time coordinator from the Musqueam First Nation, an Early Childhood Education-certified educator who has worked at private schools in the Vancouver area.

It will be a few years before any hard numbers and facts about any increased learning for Katzie and other First Nations children can be determined, as they start HIPPY about three years before Kindergarten and the first group hasn't yet entered a classroom. But they are confident the statistics will show an improvement in many of the areas earmarked by educators as needing a change for the better.

"It's brought the parents and child bond closer together. It has very difficult to get parents to go to parent teacher interviews. Going to this program is going to let them be exposed to an educational program before their child's educational career," Bailey says. "Services can come into place for the child with a slower education...so we can get on those things before they get into Kindergarten."

Bailey said even if she wasn't so connected to the program, she would have signed on her son to HIPPY, as there is no cost, the home visitors make the learning process easier and it will truly help both the parent and child.

"Everything is brought to you, and it will make them a much more confident student in kindergarten," she said, adding there are even hopes that this program could bring the parents themselves back into some form of education.

FORUM HELD ON DIVERSITY

- The TIMES has taken part in a CanWest Global initiative to write and report on diversity in Canada and our communities -- all leading up to a forum this Sunday. You can read more about this project at canada.com.

- On Sunday's BCTV Noon News, there will be a special forum on ethnic diversity and kids.

[Illustration]

Photo: Nicholas Riley, Times / Connie Bailey reads to her son Jakob.