

March, 2021

A number of questions and comments were presented via emails and chat entries to the KSD Board from participants in the Virtual board meeting on March 22, 2021. These were collated and responses were prepared where possible, even for those questions answered subsequently in the presentation.

Several comments were indirectly related to the budget development process: concerns for staff burn out, student specialized supports, loss of teaching resources, etc. At the meeting presentation it was noted that the Board is aware of the tremendous load placed on school administration and staffs during the last year due to Covid-19 restrictions, during which local officials and employees did their best to accommodate the many and changing directives from Manitoba Health and Education departments. We are aware of the potential difficulty facing teachers when schools return to normal and teachers must accommodate students who lag behind in their learning. The Board shares this concern, while the changes to provincial funding support prohibits taking the action that is needed to meet the needs within our school communities.

Causes of the Funding Losses

The Board has reported in the media for the last two years on the causes of its revenue decline: provincial claw-back of previously granted funds given in lieu of any increase in the local special levy, required cuts to senior administrator allocations, the need to set aside additional salary costs that could arise from recent arbitrations awarding increases to teacher salaries (over ruling the provincial government earlier directive to school boards for no increases to be paid for the last couple of years), and a continuing decline in KSD enrolment that has steadily eroded the per pupil grants received from the province. The KSD Board used its reserve funds to retain some staff and prevent a deficit these last two years. Since salaries and benefits are 86% of the KSD budget it is inevitable that less revenue impacts staffing directly. The Property Tax Offset Grant only replaced required reductions from the previous year.

In Town Busing

The Board's initiative to implement a busing supplement that is not funded by Manitoba Education as it is for students living more than 1.6 km outside of the town limits was based on all the same safety reasons that parents who live in the far reaches of the town proper desired it. The C-19 accommodations required a major change to the busing system for students outside of The Pas limits and this impacted the in-town optional service in 2019-20, and subsequently in 2020-21. It is, however, a lack of funding for 2021-22 that prohibits a return of this service.

Class Size

Attention was paid to the appropriateness of class size at each level of the school system. The impact of declining enrollment on staffing is a driver of this statistic. No cap is currently mandated in Manitoba schools (it was removed by the province), but school administrators understand the need to ensure classes are balanced and accommodating within the limits the school division faces.

Special Needs Support

It is a priority in the budget development and staffing that allocated special needs support should continue. Assigned EA support was not reduced.

Principals/Assistant Principals

As with other school divisions, some of the funding is allocated to administrators and requires a specific apportioning of their time beyond administrative duties. School enrolment decline also contributes to a staffing review on a yearly basis and the need to realign some assignments. In some cases, the apportioning of time for more curricular and student interaction was already taking place, just not as clearly communicated. None of this affected the administrative allotment provided for our schools.

Recovery Learning

This is an issue for all schools, and a particular need in French Immersion due to the lack of adequate language instructors. Efforts are being made to find a way to accommodate these needs.

Library Services

It is acknowledged that school libraries play an important role in supporting student learning by providing access to various media. Student enrolment declines directly affect the staffing available to operate these facilities. Exploration of alternate funding is being sought to allow schools to retain this support service.

Grant Writer

This position was cut two years ago as part of a major reduction at one school. Grants raised are usually very targeted to specific supports or activities, not for general revenue. Schools are encouraged to seek grants to augment their project funding.

Top Heavy Senior Division Officials

The KSD senior staff positions can hardly be described as top heavy, as costs are minimal and below provincial average costs. As a result of the retirements of its two senior officials in 2020, and even after successfully appealing Manitoba Education restrictions on replacements, only one was able to be replaced. To service the loss of the legally mandated Secretary-Treasurer position, alternatives were used to try to get through this year - contracting out assistance in the budget preparation, and also appealing to four other staff to take on additional duties. More retirements later this year will add to that work load crisis.

Currently, our Division Office Senior Leadership team consists of two staff who oversee the work required in the Superintendent office, Secretary-Treasurer office, Student Support Services, Transportation, Buildings and Operation, and Custodial services. Both positions require extended hours. It is important to note that all Division Office staff currently oversee two roles, such as the role Payroll-Human Resources, to meet the needs for the Division services.

As part of last year's required cost reductions, all school board travel, in-servicing and meeting costs were reduced or removed. The board also supported a reduction of two of its seven trustee positions, but the long process to do so is governed under the Public Schools Act. This was preempted by Bill 64's planned removal of all Manitoba school boards and school divisions except for the French language Board.