



## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE, BUDGET REPORT**

**Tuesday, January 30, 2024**

**8:30 pm**

**Board Room**

**Administration Building**

**133 Greenbank Road**

**Ottawa, Ontario**

- Trustees Present:** Alysha Aziz (electronic communication), Justine Bell (electronic communication), Donna Blackburn, Donna Dickson, Lyra Evans, Jennifer Jennekens, Matthew Lee, Cathryne Milburn, Suzanne Nash, Amanda Presley, Lynn Scott, Emma Hong (Student Trustee), Malaika Kamanzi (Student Trustee)
- Staff Present:** Pino Buffone (Director of Education), Brett Reynolds (Associate Director of Education), Randy Gerrior (Associate Director of Business Operations), James Proulx (Executive Officer of Information Technology and Digital Transformation), Michèle Giroux (Executive Officer of Corporate Services), Paula Hall (Superintendent of People, Culture and Leadership), Pamela LeMaistre (General Manager of People, Culture and Leadership), Richard Sinclair (General Counsel), Teri Adamthwaite (General Manager, Finance), Stacey Kay (General Manager, Learning Support Services), Sandy Owens (General Manager, Business & Learning Technology), Diane Pernari (General Manager, Communications & Public Relations), Nicole Guthrie (General Manager, Board Services), Samuel Roy (Client Services Technology Specialist), Susan Baker (Acting Committee Coordinator)
- Non-Voting Representatives Present:** Claudine Santos (PIC), Stephanie Kirkey (OSSTF - District 25), Andrew Horwood (OSSTF - PSSU), Jennifer Capitani (OCSSAN), Tracy Shapiro (OCSSAN), Nina Stanton (IEC), Bronwyn Funicello (SEAC), Corine Lassaline (OSSTF - PECCS/PSSP), Susan Gardner (OCETF), Susan Rab (OSSTF - Occasional Teachers), Jamieson Dyer (OCEOTA), Natasha Baines (OSSTF - SSP)

1. Call to Order - Chair of Committee of the Whole, Budget  
Chair Lyra Evans called the meeting to order at 8:41 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Territorial Lands

Chair Lyra Evans acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Homelands and thanked the Algonquin Nations for hosting the meeting on their land.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were filed.

4. Approval of Agenda

**Moved by Trustee Milburn,  
THAT the agenda be approved.  
Carried**

5. Delegations

There were no delegations.

6. Discussion Items

6.1 Report 24-005, 2023-2024 Revised Estimates (R. Gerrior)

Your Committee had before it Report 24-005, providing information on the 2023-2024 Revised Estimates for discussion.

Associate Director Gerrior provided a presentation and highlighted the following points:

- The change in enrolment is based on original projections;
- The funding/expense issues related to the change in projections;
- Costs related to the continuing issue of replacements costs;
- Continued cost pressures related to transportation, school maintenance and other pressures; and
- The reduction in funding created a further deficit of \$500,000.

The Ministry of Education requires that the estimates that were approved in June be revised after the start of the school year to reflect the financial impact resulting from actual enrolment levels. The goal of the Finance Department is to ensure Ministry compliance, review internal processes for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), and fully implement the ERP system.

During discussion, and in response to queries, the following points were noted:

- Snow removal contracts were reviewed to determine if there were any opportunities for reductions. It was noted that the District has received numerous complaints about snow removal services and has had difficulty sourcing reliable contractors due to the demand for service exceeding the availability of supply; and
- The additional \$500,000 in savings will be derived primarily from the administration budget.

## 6.2 2024-2025 Budget Process (oral)

Associate Director Gerrior provided an overview of the budget process for 2024-2025 and noted the following:

- The Ministry is non-committal with respect to future funding and is not expected to release information on grants for 2024-2025 until March or April 2024;
- Any new funding is likely to come from the Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF), although there is no indication that there will be any new funding at this point;
- This District does not anticipate a large increase in student enrolment;
- There are no accumulated reserves available to fund school operations;
- The District continues to remain under Ministry supervision due to lack of sufficient reserves;
- Inflation and rising costs of supplies will continue to impact the delivery of current programs;
- 33 of the 47 school boards (70%) in Ontario are running a deficit budget; and
- Senior staff are identifying their areas of priority, monitoring trends in expenses, looking for areas of efficiency, mapping expenses to budgets, exercising position control, and awaiting Ministry guidance and enrolment estimates.

During discussion, and in response to queries, the following points were noted:

- The cost of occasional teachers (OTs) is related to teacher absences and is beyond the control of staff;
- In 2022-2023, 22 of 47 school boards ran a deficit. The school boards were not identified;

- A number of school boards made presentations to the provincial Finance and Economic Committee and highlighted the challenges of finding reserves to cover rising operating costs, including staff replacement costs; and
- The Ministry has established a working group to examine staff replacement costs.

### 6.3 Needs Analysis (oral)

Associate Director Gerrior provided the following information on Ministry funding for Occasional Teachers (OTs) and the associated costs:

- Elementary funding - \$11.9 million;
- Secondary funding - \$3.7 million;
- Total Ministry funding - \$15.7 million (liked to centrally negotiated contracts);
- Total OT costs - \$32.8 million;
- Projected deficit - (\$17.1 million);
- Additional \$500,000 has been allocated for Behaviour Management Systems (BMS) training; and
- A General Manager of Wellness & Occupational Health and Safety has been hired to focus on prevention.

During discussion, and in response to queries, the following points were noted:

- Staff and union federations are working together to identify programs to support employees and reduce absenteeism;
- Absenteeism in the Fall of 2023 has improved compared to the Fall of 2022, and the necessity to close classrooms due to absent teachers or educational assistants (EAs) has decreased;
- Salary costs for OTs are increasing;
- In response to a request from Trustee Milburn for the cost of replacing absent EAs, Associate Director Gerrior noted that staff is investigating all reasons for teacher and EA absences. He expressed the view that there would unlikely be a significant reduction in absenteeism because of the nature of sick leave benefits and no option to cash out unused sick leave, as was the practice in the past. He added that employees are encouraged to stay home when they are sick;

- The rate of injuries, sick leave, and mental health leave is higher in the elementary panel. Most of the BMS training is provided to elementary staff;
- A number of strategies are utilized by Safe Schools and Learning Support Services (LSS) to support student mental health including, mental health and exercise breaks, well-being plans, and self-regulation techniques;
- Schools utilize a 13-step protocol when replacing absent employees that includes rosters for casual staff and occasional teachers, call-out systems to contact early childhood educators, and asking other school staff (including those who may not be qualified, i.e., breakfast and lunch monitors) to extend their hours for supervision responsibilities;
- There are restrictions on the number of days that retired teachers can work;
- In response to Chair Lyra Evans' request for the number of days of sick leave per employee group and whether there would be significant savings by using lower paid workers to replace higher wage workers for supervision duties, Superintendent Hall advised that the District is fairly successful in replacing absent teachers with a replacement teacher; however, the core issue is the number of days that staff members can utilize for sick leave;
- It is not possible to generate savings when budget reductions of \$500,000 are required to avoid a year-end deficit. The District needs to build its reserve fund before investing in new initiatives;
- The program reviews are unlikely to have any financial impact this year or next year due to the decision-making process required for a program review;
- Senior staff is addressing areas at risk due to insufficient funding on an ongoing basis;
- The demands for additional EAs in the classroom are outpacing supply;
- Andrew Norwood noted that the cleaning load for schools has increased from 15,000 to 25,000 square feet and it is difficult to attract workers at the current pay rate;
- Susan Rab noted the current focus on accidents, injuries and illness. She expressed her appreciation for the conversation on mental, emotional and stress issues and areas over which the District has more control; and

- Superintendent Hall noted that Occupational Health & Safety is taking a more holistic approach to employee wellness and putting preventative supports in place, for example, BMS training, rather than being reactive.

Associate Director Gerrior provided the following information on Ministry funding for 2023-2024 for Transportation and the associated costs:

- Ministry revenues and grants - \$48.9 million;
- Total transportation costs - \$51.8 million;
- Projected deficit - (\$2.9 million);
- Deficit is funded by the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs);
- Transitional funding of \$13.9 million;
- The Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) is waiting for an efficiency and effectiveness report from Deloitte; and
- Transportation considerations include operating at a deficit, transporting students past their local community school, transitional funding ending in three years, Ministry funding not being aligned with market rates, using small vans for solo transportation, and transportation entitlements.

During discussion, and in response to queries, the following points were noted:

- No bus routes were affected by the new funding formula this year; however, 37 routes were impacted due to the loss of one bus operator company and driver shortages;
- Students will not lose their bus transportation solely because of a deficit in funding;
- When transitional funding ends, the Board would need to cover the \$13.9 million with its GSNs, or make changes to its program and transportation delivery models;
- Rural students have fewer options for transportation and may have to travel long distances to access their programs;
- Public transportation is used wherever possible. OC Transpo is also experiencing bus driver shortages;
- There may be some efficiencies as a result of a review of school bell times;

- In response to a query about parent involvement in advocating for increased funding, Director Buffone advised that the Board's advisory committees could discuss the issue and encourage parents to express their concerns to provincial officials. Chair Lyra Evans noted that other statutory committees and school boards have written letters and emails on this issue to their Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) and the Ministry;
- Trustee Scott noted that the Board has participated in a variety of advocacy strategies including meetings with local representatives and the Minister of Education, as well as making presentations to provincial budget consultations;
- Trustee Bell noted the importance of reconciliation and expressed the hope that staff will bring an equity lens to all discussions and consider how Indigenous people are affected by budget decisions;
- A code of conduct for bus behaviour and safety is under consideration;
- Chair Lyra Evans requested information on the cost of bus monitors. She also asked why OSTA discontinued its active transportation initiative. Associate Director Gerior advised that he would bring these questions to OSTA for response; and
- The program review process will be centred on community-based schools that would permit more walking connections to schools.

Chair Lyra Evans noted that several Committee members have requested that all reports, presentations, and a Question & Answer (Q&A) document with answers to questions that were not addressed at the meeting, be provided to the Committee in advance of the meeting.

General Manager Adamthwaite noted that the Finance Department wishes to participate in the Board's advocacy efforts by providing information to support its advocacy work. She noted the time and effort to collect the information and expressed the hope that the information requests would be for data that would produce the biggest impact for students.

7. New Business - Information and Inquiries

There was no new business.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:28 p.m.

Lyra Evans, Chair