



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE BUDGET REPORT

Tuesday, 18 August, 2020
Zoom meeting

TRUSTEE MEMBERS: Justine Bell, Christine Boothby, Rob Campbell, Chris Ellis, Lyra Evans, Mark Fisher, Wendy Hough, Jennifer Jennekens, Keith Penny, Sandra Schwartz, Lynn Scott, Joy Liu (Student Trustee) and Charles Chen (Student Trustee).

STAFF: Director of Education, Camille Williams-Taylor; Associate Director, Brett Reynolds; Chief Financial Officer, Mike Carson; Executive Officer, Corporate Services, Michele Giroux; Superintendent of Human Resources, Janice McCoy; Superintendents of Instruction: Prince Duah, Mary Jane Farrish, Eric Hardie, Shawn Lehman and Shannon Smith; Superintendent of Program and Learning K-12, Nadia Towaj; Human Rights and Equity Advisor, Carolyn Tanner; Manager of Finance, Kevin Gardner; Manager of Planning, Karyn Carty Ostafichuk; Manager of Research, Evaluation & Analytics Division, Joan Oracheski; Manager, Business & Learning Technologies, Sandy Owens; Manager of Communications and Information, Diane Pernari-Hergert; Manager of Risk and Supply Chain Management, Sandra Lloyd; Manager of Board Services, Nicole Guthrie; Coordinator of Financial Reporting, Teri Adamthwaite; Coordinator of Budget Services, Charles D'Aoust; A.V. Specialist, Michael Guibault; and Committee Coordinator, Leigh Fenton.

NON-VOTING REPRESENTATIVES: Jean Trant (SSP), Malaka Hendela (OCASC), Stephanie Kirkey (OSSTF), Melodie Gondek (OSSTF-ESP), Kelly Granum (OSSTF-OT), Jennifer Capitani (OCEOC), Corinne Lassaline (OSSTF), Stacey Kay (Non-Affiliated Staff), Troy Cluff (OSSTF-PSSU), Susan Gardner (OCETFO)

1. Call to Order

Chair Schwartz called the public session to order at 7:01 p.m. and acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territories and thanked

the Algonquin Nation for hosting the meeting on their land.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Trustee Boothby,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Declarations of Conflict of Interest

Trustee Campbell advised that he had declared his conflict of interest at the 11 August 2020 meeting and requested that to be known for all future budget meetings.

4. Delegations

4.1 Andrea Morissette, Parent, Return to School Questions

The delegate did not appear before the Committee.

4.2 Janice Chamberlain, Parent, Return to School Questions

Janice Chamberlain summarized her concerns as follows: proper ventilation, access to safe water and the sanitization of buildings after third party use.

Staff noted that continual updates on the upgrades to site-specific school buildings and broader system concerns will be provided to school principals and communicated to parents.

Ms. Hendela suggested directly sharing information on school websites which pertain to the state of the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment.

4.3 Joel Harden, MPP (Ottawa Centre), Return to School Concerns

Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP), Joel Harden, speaking as Ontario's Critic for People with Disabilities, expressed concern for the government's proposed plan for remote synchronous learning this fall and the effect that the changes in the learning format will have on children and staff with special needs. Leveraging the standards noted in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, he proposed that the Board ask the Minister of Education for additional funding to accommodate the needs of the most vulnerable learners.

Trustee Fisher requested that MPP Harden provide the New Democratic Party of Ontario (NDP) stance on the return to school. The delegate stated that the NDP stands behind the statements delivered by Marit Stiles, the Education Critic for Ontario's Official Opposition. The NDP is calling for a significant amount of funding from the province to fund the hiring of appropriate staff to keep the school community safe. He noted that he will send the action plan to the Chair for distribution.

In response to a query from Trustee Scott, MPP Harden noted that many concerned teachers with mobility issues and compromised immune systems have had to request accommodations or intend to apply for disability leave. Fear is escalating in the educator community due to the proposed unmanageable size of classes.

Staff agreed to provide a response to the questions of MPP Harden regarding his concerns to build small class sizes and to avoid lengthy screen sessions for students accessing special needs support from the District.

5. Report 20-063, 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Carson reported that Memo 20-112, Cancellation of 18 August 2020 Special Board Meeting was circulated earlier in the afternoon outlining that, due to outstanding questions and concerns regarding the budget, it will be difficult for the Committee to arrive at a consensus and recommend a budget to the Board; therefore, the tentative Special Board meeting scheduled to follow tonight's meeting has been cancelled. It is essential that the Board approve a budget prior to 31 August 2020, in order to continue operations beginning 1 September 2020. Staff will recommend a date for a continuation meeting of the Committee of the Whole (COW) Budget as early as possible following the Special Board meeting of 25 August 2020.

CFO Carson announced that new information from the Ministry of Education is permitting boards to approve a deficit of up to 2% this year, which is an increase of 1% from previous years. The budget was adjusted to raise the COVID-related expenditures to the accepted 2% deficiency.

Chair Schwartz noted that as this is a continuation meeting from 13 August COW Budget, an addendum to the meeting package was included today in Memo 20-111, Addendum to the 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget.

Your Committee had before it Report 20-063, 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget.

Moved by Trustee Lyra Evans,

- A. THAT the unconsolidated 2020-2021 operating budget of \$1,008.3 million as presented in Report 20-063, 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget and detailed in the 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget Binder be

approved, subject to Ministry authorization to use the accumulated surplus in the amount required to balance the budget, as amended;

- B. THAT the 2020-2021 capital budget of \$97.9 million as presented in the 2020- 2021 Staff-Recommended Budget Binder, be approved;
- C. THAT the In-Year Deficit Elimination plan presented in the 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget Binder, as amended, be approved;
- D. THAT the accumulated surplus be used to further increase the recommended \$4.0 million COVID expense provision by \$471,491;
- E. THAT the new funding of \$3.5 million as shown in Ministry of Education Memo 2020:B11, Investments to Support School Reopening in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak, be added to the 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget operating revenues and that a corresponding increase in planned operating expenses be reflected; and
- F. THAT the new funding of \$1.9 million as shown in Minister of Education Memo dated 14 August 2020, Additional Guidance and Funding for School Reopening, be added to the 2020-2021 Staff-Recommended Budget operating revenues and that a corresponding increase in planned operating expenses be reflected.

An amendment moved by Trustee Lyra Evans,

- A. THAT the budget for instructional salaries be increased by \$100,000,000, to provide the hiring of 1025 additional elementary teachers, reducing the class sizes to a maximum of 15;
- B. THAT the budget for school operations be increased by \$10,000,000, to provide for additional custodial and maintenance positions at the elementary level;
- C. THAT accommodation costs will be increased by \$15,000,000, to provide for the rental and acquisition of 1000 elementary classroom equivalent spaces;
- D. THAT the budget for school operations be increased by \$5,000,000, for additional custodial and maintenance positions at the secondary level; and
- E. THAT the accommodation costs be increased by \$30.0 million to provide for the rental and acquisition of 1600 secondary classroom equivalents.

In introducing the amendment, Trustee Lyra Evans stated that she consulted with the CFO on the cost of these services. The class size model of 15 students in Denmark has been successful in reducing the spread of COVID-19. The

provincial government has not responded to letters from the District to increase funding to be able to bring students safely back into schools. The \$10.0 million provision by the Ministry to support the reopening of schools is equivalent to 5% of the total share proposed in the amendment. There is a concern amongst trustees that if a budget is not approved, the Board will be suspended by refusing to submit a balanced budget and replaced by a provincial supervisor to assume the duty of the Board. This idea has boards across the province in a state of unrest.

Trustee Penny expressed the opinion that to add \$255.0 million to the existing budget proposal would not be presenting a responsibly balanced budget.

Trustee Fisher noted that the amendment does not meet the required fiduciary duty of care to which a trustee is obliged. The reopening plan must be put forward to create a risk-free environment and adjusted allowances could be considered, however more consultation is required from public health officials.

Several trustees supported the notion of approving a staff-recommended budget if the structures and educators are in place for the safe return of students. They are awaiting further clarity from Ottawa Public Health (OPH) on the plan.

Trustee Ellis indicated his support for the amendment. He highlighted that as described in *the Education Act*, the responsibility of individual trustees is to bring to the Board concerns of parents and students. The concern he is focused on is the well-being of students and their education. He is not expecting that OPH will provide a seal of approval in a substantive way. In The SickKids Recommendation for the Reopening of Schools (July 29, 2020) the guidance statements stipulated smaller class sizes should be a priority strategy as it will aid in physical distancing and reduce potential spread from any index case. He noted that staff has done a phenomenal job in their planning for the reopening of schools and should the extra funding not be forthcoming, he will consider supporting the current budget.

Trustee Boothby voiced her lack of support for the amendment, stating that Associate Director Reynolds has been connecting with OPH every day for several months. Senior staff would not bring forward an unsafe plan for the reopening of schools. Many of these staff members have children returning to school themselves. She hopes that Dr. Etches can meet with the Board next week and though it will not be the doctor's mandate to approve the plan, if Dr. Etches does see deficiencies in the plan, she will speak to those necessary improvements. Trustee Boothby stated that this budget may not be the accurate prediction for an entire school year, however, in this instance; the Board will go back to the province and demand funding for any unpredictable shortfalls.

Trustee Scott advised that, as the only trustee on the current Board who has experienced a provincial intervention through an assignment of an appointed supervisor, she can attest that the appointment resulted in much of the work of the Board being undone and trustees having had little input on policy and budgetary decisions for that entire year. As trustees, they do have an obligation

to ensure that staff has been diligent in their work to create a feasible budget and to then approve a sound budget.

Trustee Bell requested the creation of a document reflecting the expenditures related to the COVID-19 response and a risk analysis associated with the expenditures. She noted that when Troy Cluff, President of the Plant Support Staff Unit (PSSU), presented to the Committee, he highlighted that there were not enough custodians on staff to execute the SickKids cleaning protocol recommendations. Trustee Bell would like to see risks like this example documented for further analysis by the trustees in advance of recommending a budget.

CFO Carson responded that the risk analysis is in progress and noted that the chart on COVID-19 related expenditures and a risk assessment of the expenditures, for the well-being and safety of students and staff, will be distributed in advance of the next COW Budget meeting.

In response to a query from Trustee Bell, Director Williams-Taylor disclosed that a percentage of families and students have registered for remote learning; however, this will not necessarily have a major impact on class sizes. Last week Policy/Program Memoranda (PPM) 164 on Remote Learning was released, outlining the requirement for a certain amount of time for synchronous learning and therefore the creation of virtual schools is being planned. All classes will be adequately staffed.

In response to a query from Trustee Campbell, staff agreed to follow-up with OPH to assess timelines on the response to the letter from the Chair of the Board about the COVID 19 re-entry to schools. In addition, staff will seek confirmation on the invitation for OPH to attend the meeting on 25 August 2020. Director Williams-Taylor reminded the Committee that OPH is not prepared to approve the reopening plans for any of the school boards; however, it is amenable to collaboration and providing a medical perspective.

Moved by Trustee Bell,

THAT consideration of the amendment be postponed until the next Committee of the Whole Budget meeting after hearing a response from Ottawa Public Health and the Risk Assessment provided by staff.

Carried

Trustee Campbell reviewed his budgetary concerns shared with staff in which he questioned whether the health and safety interests of one party were being sacrificed for another. He recalled in the 11 August COW Budget meeting, the CFO noted that in some areas OPH would prefer to see certain expenditures rather than others. Though there has been collaborative dialogue between the District and OPH, some key questions by the trustees have yet to be answered.

In response to queries from Trustee Bell, Superintendent Symmonds reported that the 2020-2021 school year will begin with a flexible and responsive mental health model as the assessment of need continues across the District. Central supports include social emotional learning teachers, itinerant educational assistants and learning support consultants to provide additional support at the school level. The Learning Support Services (LSS) team is working to ensure that the supports for students have been “right-sized”. Additional funding from the Ministry was received in the amount of approximately \$400,000 for mental health support and an additional \$265,000 for special education support. These mental health funds are intended to be used towards additional staffing, to purchase resources to support mental health and well-being, and to help integrate students back into the school setting. Safe and warm welcoming for the student population will be a part of the September introductory orientation. LSS is collaborating with community partners such as School Mental Health Ontario to define best practices and create tool kits to address a situation where students experienced prolonged isolation from their peers and a disassociation from regular school routines. A partnership was forged with Dr. David Tranter, co-author of “The Third Path”, where he is training staff on ways to welcome back vulnerable students. He noted that in the past where it was discovered that additional resources were necessary to fully support students, staff have presented a proposal to the Board through the Special Education Advisory Committee.

An amendment moved by Trustee Hough,

Whereas THAT the technology, communication and advisory mechanisms needed in these unprecedented times mean that school councils and the Parent Involvement Committee need to learn to do things differently, and adapting mechanisms cannot be achieved without access to clear resource support. Accordingly, funds must be made clearly available and allocated to the priority of parent engagement. Specifically; and

THAT a budget allocation of \$150,000 be made for the funding of effective school councils across all schools and the work of an engaged Parent Involvement Committee to ensure it meets obligations regarding communications with school councils and to undertaking activities to help parents of pupils of the Board support their children’s learning at home and at school.

A sub- amendment moved by Trustee Scott,

THAT the paragraph beginning with “Whereas” be removed from the motion as it is not a part of the action on which trustees cast their votes.

Carried, friendly

In introducing the amendment, Trustee Hough stated that funding for parental engagement is critical. The *Education Act, Regulation 612*, requires the Board to consult and engage with school councils on a number of policy fronts, including,

but not limited to policies and guidelines that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents. School councils and the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) have significant obligations under the *Education Act*. Parent engagement is in line with the District's strategic plan, particularly as it relates to the equity priority, and there is a demonstrated need for parent partnership and priority in these unprecedented times. Traditional means of fundraising support will not be accessible for this school year.

Trustee Scott requested clarification on the existing funding through PIC to each school council as part of the provincial disbursements for parent engagement. Executive Officer Giroux explained that, historically, funding for parent involvement came in different forms:

- (a) \$500 allocation for school councils. These funds are still in place and will continue;
- (b) a grant allocation program based on an application process for which school districts, PICs or other agencies can apply. The District applied for these grants consistently working with PIC. The grants have been reduced from an annual provision of \$30,000 to \$10,000 in recent years. The fall Parent Conference and Speaker Series Program was funded with these grants. Last year, the province changed their funding structure which means the grant applications are no longer available. In place of this grant program, the total being received from the Ministry is \$40,000; and
- (c) a small amount of money to absorb costs of PIC such as catering and necessary transportation for committee members. As those costs are centrally allocated for other committees, this money was re-allocated to help fund the Speaker Series program. Additionally, the District pays for the cost of insurance for school councils.

Executive Officer Giroux advised that there is a need for dedicated resources for parent engagement. Under consideration, are various engagement models deployed successfully by other districts.

In response to a query by Trustee Penny, Trustee Hough specified that the \$150,000 sought was to be generated by a reallocation of existing budgeted money.

Trustee Campbell requested clarification on whether support for parent engagement and school councils would be in place without the motion. Executive Officer Giroux noted that she would consult with CFO Carson to identify possible funds in the existing budget for reallocation. There are opportunities to re-think some of the traditional expenses and to bring engagement to a virtual setting where possible. Given the number of changes occurring in this particular year, there will be supplementary areas for investment. The District is examining

drivers of change in parent engagement, including dedicated funding for translation and professional development for principals and educators around engagement strategies with families.

CFO Carson reported that in the budget, a \$130,000 line item is dedicated to parent engagement although it is not identified specifically. If the motion is passed, an extra \$20,000 will need to be shifted from other priorities. He noted that parent engagement occurs within all departments of the District and the individual school budgets supporting the school community.

Ms. Hendela thanked Trustee Hough for bringing the motion forward. She cited *Regulation 612* of the *Education Act* which requires the Board to consult actively through PIC and the school councils. The challenge this year is that school councils will be unable to consult. There is no infrastructure for Zoom licenses for the parent community to meet. She indicated that presently the PIC does not meet its requirement under the *Act* to report on a designated budget. To identify the line item is important as it is a means of accountability for the trustees. By supporting the motion, the message is that this is not a sum of money to be delegated according to staff discretion but rather it is allocated to solely support parent engagement. The Ottawa-Carleton Association of School Councils (OCASC) supports the motion.

Trustee Hough shared that her desire to become a trustee stemmed from her passion for parent engagement. In order to provide a sense of equity in the field of parent engagement designated funding needs to be set in place in order for school councils to be able to move forward.

An amendment moved by Trustee Hough,

THAT a budget allocation of \$150,000 be made for the funding of effective school councils across all schools and the work of an engaged Parent Involvement Committee to ensure it meets obligations regarding communications with school councils and to undertaking activities to help parents of pupils of the Board support their children's learning at home and at school.

Carried

Trustee Campbell inquired about the possibility to submit additional questions to OPH. Director Williams-Taylor responded that as the questions from the trustees ultimately arise from the community, any additional questions will be welcomed. She requested that trustees bear in mind that the timely submission of additional questions by trustees will permit OPH to provide sufficient responses. Questions may be sent to her or to Manager Guthrie.

Trustee Scott noted that the questions in the letter to Dr. Etches were crafted after the 14 August Special Board meeting. They were structured generally by topic to give OPH more opportunity to expand on the questions.

Trustee Bell thanked staff for their dedication to students and education. As Chair of the Committee, Trustee Schwartz extended her gratitude to CFO Carson and the finance team as they continue to adjust the budget to reflect the COVID-19 planning complexities and new ministerial changes to funding. Trustee Scott remarked on the incredible work that has been done in a short amount of time under tremendous pressure and urged the Committee to be mindful of this. Director Williams-Taylor noted that new information continues to be received and to expect another update from the Communications and Information Services department tomorrow morning.

6. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Sandra Schwartz, Chair