



April 28, 2015

Dear Parents & Guardians:

RE: Provincial Budget Devastating for Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools

The Board of Trustees of Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools (WRPS) had an opportunity at its April 28, 2015 Board meeting to review and discuss the impact of the 2015 – 2016 Provincial Budget on students and staff at our schools. The Board understands the economic constraints that we are all facing in Alberta, however, the proposed 2015 – 2016 budget will have a devastating impact on the programs, services and supports provided to our students.

WRPS has been effectively straight-jacketed. We are constrained by reduced funding as a result of a 3.1% reduction in most grants, the requirement that the number of classroom teachers may not be reduced from 2014 levels and that the Minister of Education has directed that school boards must balance their budgets.

In 2014-2015 the Board's operating deficit is projected to be 2.6 million. As a result of the funding cuts WRPS is projecting a 3.87 million dollar budget **deficit** for 2015-2016 school year. Our 2015-2016 budget problem became more devastating when we were informed that we are unable to access our surplus without the express approval of the Minister. The Board therefore, has to cut 3.87 million dollars from the 2015-2016 budget.

In order to submit a balanced budget WRPS must use its surpluses, but the Minister of Education has stripped school boards of their authority to access the surplus unless the Board has ministerial approval. This unprecedented restriction has not been placed on any other elected body. School Boards are being told that they cannot use their accumulated surplus, however; the Government is proposing that they use their surplus dollars to balance their own budget.

Like every other elected body – local, provincial and federal – school boards have surpluses and hold reserves. Yet, we are being stripped of our responsibility to manage our surplus and use our reserves for the benefit of your children and our students. Why are school boards being singled out? The very existence of a surplus shows that school boards have been prudent managers of their finances on behalf of students.

Families and businesses manage their financial resources by setting goals and priorities just like school boards. A family may establish a savings account to replace the shingles on their house or repair their furnace. What would happen if the bank froze your savings account and you were not allowed to access it unless you convinced the bank to give you permission? This is what happened to school boards and our schools with the release of the Provincial Budget.

The Board appreciates the Minister's directive that school boards, "not reduce classroom-based, full-time equivalent teacher positions from the level projected in their 2014 -2015 fall budget update;" however; the Board does not believe that it is acceptable to balance the 2015-2016 budget on the backs of support staff and administration. This means that our most vulnerable students will lose Teaching Assistants and other supports; the very supports that they need to be successful. **This is not acceptable.**

The Board also appreciates the increase in funding to cover the cost of the final year of the agreement the Government of Alberta bargained with the Alberta Teachers' Association. The funding of the 2% salary increase and the 1% bonus for teachers for the 2015 – 2016 school year is, however, well short of the 5% increase in teacher costs that we expect due to grid movement and increased benefit costs.

Our division has always been below the Alberta Education created cap for administrative and governance expenditures but our grant is reduced further by \$294,000 and the Minister expects us to make further reductions. Minister Dirks noted his department reduced its operating budget by 9% and directed these savings to the front lines. WRPS has annually reduced its administrative and governance expenditures by approximately 18% since 2004 and directed these savings to the front lines. The Board is not impressed with the Minister's 9% reduction.

The proposed budget will certainly have a negative impact on the Board's ability to offer programs, services and supports; we need to be very clear, this will negatively impact students and staff. The most problematic changes before us are:

- Being stripped of our authority to manage our accumulated surplus for the benefit of students;
- Plant Operations and Maintenance is significantly underfunded
- Our most vulnerable students are, for the most part, supported by teaching assistants and support staff, which is an area that we will have to cut.

To submit a balanced budget to the Minister the Board is anticipating it will have to do the following:

- Terminate 15.64 full-time equivalent Teaching Assistants
- Reduce 5 full-time equivalent Learning Support Teachers
- Reduce expenditures on services, contracts and fees by \$570,092
- Reduce Career Technology Studies funding by \$108,000
- Reduce French Immersion subsidy by \$71,165
- Reduce Counselling services by 0.45 full-time equivalent saving \$36,000
- Reduce First Nations, Metis & Inuit funding by \$120,000
- Use \$1,128,360 of accumulated surplus (must seek Minister's approval)

If the Minister does not approve the use of the \$1,128, 360 in surplus the Board would have to consider cutting approximately 25 more full-time equivalent teaching assistant positions from the budget.

If you are concerned about the impact that the 2015 – 2016 budget will have on your child we need your support to help advocate for change. Please add your voices to our efforts. Share this message with your MLA, local candidates, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Finance and the Premier. **Tell them you want the government to reverse its decision to freeze school board surplus and reserves so that school boards can limit the negative impact on programs, services and supports for your children and our students without his prior approval.**

Jim Prentice, Premier, premier@gov.ab.ca and/or Calgary.foothills@assembly.ab.ca

Gordon Dirks, Minister of Education education.minister@gov.ab.ca and/or Calgary.elbow@assembly.ab.ca

Robin Campbell, Minister of Finance finance.minister@gov.ab.ca and/or west.yellowhead@assembly.ab.ca

Diana McQueen, Minister of Municipal Affairs draytonvalley.devon@assembly.ab.ca

Veryln Olson, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Wetaskiwin.camrose@assembly.ab.ca

Sincerely,



Deanna Specht, Board Chair
Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools

WETASKIWIN REGIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Budget 2015-2016
Reductions and Balancing Strategies

Instruction

- 2015-16 Shared Services budgeted expenditures have been **reduced** \$139,098; a **-8% reduction**
- 2015-16 Technology budgeted expenditures have been **reduced** by \$398,977. Budget reflects a reduction of 1.6 FTE support staff, an increase of 0.50 FTE certificated staff and removal of one-time hardware replacement costs \$400,000; a **-34% reduction**
- 2015-16 Special Education funding allocations have been **reduced** reflecting a 9 full-time equivalent (FTE) reduction in Teaching Assistants and 5 FTE reductions in Learning Support Teachers (LST). These reductions were required to balance the Special Education funding pool. A 1.0 FTE Behavioural Consultant position has been removed and replaced with a 0.50 FTE District Principal position.
- 2015-16 Counselling funding allocations have been calculated as directed by the funding distribution model. Any additional Family School Liaison (FSL) FTE costs that have been covered by individual sites basic grants have been removed. A reduction of 0.65 FTE FSL's and 0.93 FTE teachers. An approximate combined savings of \$150,000
- 2015-16 FNMI support staff FTE have been **reduced** by 1.47 FTE and certificated staff FTE has increased by 1.70, including 0.30 FTE of a District Principal.
- SCHEP 0.20 FTE is covered by a District Principal reallocating 0.20 FTE back into Norwood School in an effort to address administrative issues.

Board Governance & Administration

- In 2015-16 the 10% **reduction** in the administration funding cap equals \$294,000
- 2015-16 Board Governance and Administration expenditures have increased \$104,433 or 4.28%
- Total expenditures are \$257,100 below the reduced administration funding cap.
 - $\$294,000 + \$257,100 = \$551,100$; a **-18.4% reduction**

Operations & Maintenance

- 2014-15 budgeted deficit of \$836,979
- 2015-16 net revenue is anticipated to reduce by \$783,340, of which \$781,660 is directly offset by reduction in expenditures.
- 2015-16 Alberta Education funding reduction is anticipated to be offset by funding increases for non-resident enrolments.
- 2015-16 expenditure budgets have been reduced by \$84,062 (custodial staff and utility costs); a **-1.7% reduction plus a deficit of \$752,916**
- 2015-16 projected deficit is \$752,916

Transportation

- 2014-15 budget is balanced
- 2015-16 revenue is anticipated to reduce by \$61,293; a **-2.33% reduction**
- 2015-16 expenditure budgets have been reduced to reflect bus route eliminations
- 2015-16 budget is balanced

Balancing Strategies – Projected deficit \$3.2 million

- Terminate all Teaching Assistant FTE not supported by a Special Education or PUF funding allocation. Currently 15.64 FTE additional (9 as a result of Spec. Ed Funding reduction), **savings \$634,984.**
- Reduce 5 FTE LST positions, **savings \$534,000**
 - **\$634,984 + 534,000 = 1,168,984; a -20% reduction**
- Allocate funding for Services, Contracts and Fees based on a per pupil allocation, **savings range from \$196,692 to \$756,792**
 - **\$570,092; a -10.2% reduction**
- Do not allocate CTS funding, **savings \$108,500; a -100% reduction**
- Reduce French Immersion subsidy to a maximum of \$200,000, **savings of \$71,165; a -10% reduction**
- Reduce Counselling by 0.45FTE, **savings \$36,000**
 - **\$36,000 + \$150,000 = \$186,000; a -18.3% reduction**
- Reduce Central FNMI expenditures, **savings \$120,000; a -12.3% reduction**
- Pool all surplus/deficit carry-forward balances in order to address funding constraints, **forecasted 2014-15 surplus carry-forward \$1,128,360**
- Seek Ministerial approval to use operating reserves to transition to a balanced budget.

Requests to Use Operating Surplus

Response from Alberta Education department staff have indicated that the following may be approved by the Minister of Education as appropriate uses of accumulated operating reserves

- Early retirement incentives
- One-time technology hardware costs

Expenditure Per Student Based on 2015 – 2016 Proposed Budget

- Division Average Expenditure Per Student is \$8,426

Small School Subsidy Per Student Expenditure

- K – 6 small school subsidy is \$10,062 or **\$1,636 more per student**
- K – 9 small school subsidy is \$11,386 or **\$2,960 more per student**
- 7 – 12 small school subsidy is \$11,269 or **\$2843 more per student**