

NEWS RELEASE

Winnipeg School Division Board passes 2021/22 budget Reduced provincial investment in education leads to cuts for students

March 9, 2021 (Winnipeg, MB) – The Winnipeg School Division (WSD) Board of Trustees has approved a budget for the 2021/22 school year. The final budget being submitted to the province equals \$421,039,400. Provincial funding to WSD dropped by 1.6 percent or \$2,926,520 for the coming school year. In addition, the Provincial Government has directed school divisions throughout the province to freeze property tax levies at 2020 levels, leading to a reduction of 0.54 percent on the property tax levy for WSD homeowners, or a decrease of about \$8 a year on the average assessed home value of \$225,700 within WSD.

“Reduced provincial investment in education has resulted in cuts for students of \$4,457,395 in our division, and cuts in most divisions across the city,” said Betty Edel, Chair of the WSD Board of Trustees. “The province has also made it impossible for us to raise revenue through property taxes to be able to fund programs that are unique and valued within the WSD community.” Edel noted that community feedback supported a small property tax increase in order to maintain programs and services.

“Moving the burden of funding for unique programming onto property owners wouldn’t be our preference, but the province has made even that option unavailable while also ignoring these valued programs,” said Edel. “While we voted in favor of passing this budget, it was with great reluctance on the part of all Trustees, as we recognize the impact these cuts will have on safety, nutrition and student supports.” Edel notes that WSD classroom-based support in both regular instruction and student support services continues to be among the strongest in Manitoba.

The School Resource Officer (SRO) program in WSD is being cut completely effective July 2021. The cut of \$537,174 is being made solely for financial reasons as results of an internal assessment are currently being collated and have not yet been presented to the Board. In addition, WSD will be reviewing the safety outcomes related to increased 30 kph zones around schools in order to reduce the number of adult crossing guards. This is expected to result in savings of approximately \$164,250 in the annual budget.

Also being cut is the entire \$210,000 milk subsidy for students starting in September which means milk will be available for purchase at the cost price to the division.

A priority for WSD is supporting students in their community school so they can participate to their fullest ability and feel a sense of belonging and connection. As part of its annual review of the continuum of programming for students across the division, WSD has reorganized four Learning Assistance Centres and three Language Centres so that students will no longer have to travel outside their home communities to access these supports. As a result, an estimated two bus routes can be eliminated for savings of \$98,444.

Trustees responded to strong community support for continued WSD funding of occupational and physio-therapy programming, removing it from the proposed cuts. Trustees also chose to reduce cuts to non-salary expenses in schools from 20 percent to 14 percent, for a savings of \$1,033,267. Savings in utilities, unfilled support position vacancies, cell phone reimbursements, enrolment reductions and converting 12-month clerical positions in schools to 10-month positions adds another \$2,414,260 to the required budget cuts for 2021/2022.

Unlike the manufacturing or agricultural industries, education expenditures are made up mainly of salaries for instruction and student support services – approximately 75 percent of the total budget. Operations and maintenance of schools is approximately 12 percent, transportation is just under two percent and administration costs continue to be a low 2.7 percent. To better understand the function of administration, the public is encouraged to view the *Senior Administration Roles and Responsibilities* on winniegsd.ca.

“I encourage our Provincial representatives to fully comprehend the various roles within school divisions so that they are making informed and progressive funding decisions as opposed to the ill-considered and biased actions we’ve seen this year,” says Edel.

WSD is celebrating 150 years of learning this year and has 79 schools, 32,752 students and 4,587 full-time employees. Its purpose is to provide a learning environment that fosters the growth of each student’s potential and provide equitable opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and values necessary for meaningful participation in a global and diverse society.

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Media contact:

Radean Carter – WSD Senior Information Officer
(204) 789-0412 or mobile (204) 771-5352
rcarter@wsd1.org