

Dufferin-Peel Board approves eighth consecutive balanced budget

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board has approved a compliant \$855.5 million operating budget for 2014-15; a budget characterized by Chair Mario Pascucci as "a good news budget for students and the community."

This marks the board's eighth consecutive balanced budget.

"The Board approved a budget that is reflective of our ongoing commitment to balance student needs for a quality Catholic education, with prudent fiscal management," Pascucci commented.

A very significant change to Education funding from the province this year included the transfer of funding for full-day kindergarten (FDK) into the main funding source for school boards, the provincial Grants for Student Needs (GSN). Total provincial GSN funding has increased 3.1 per cent over the previous year to \$22.5 billion, as a result of this change. The overall increase in operating GSN funding to Dufferin-Peel is 2.29 per cent.

The development of the budget was guided by a collaborative, inclusive and transparent process. The board's budget development process and the public budget consultation plan allow for extensive feedback from stakeholders, including input via the board website and delegation opportunities.

There is good news for Dufferin-Peel in many areas. Highlights include new allocations to the base budget including:

\$1 million to increase per-pupil budget allocations to elementary schools to support the increased costs of operating and maintaining FDK classrooms.

\$250,000 to centrally support the professional development needs of FDK instructional staff and resource needs of the FDK programming in our schools.

Students with diverse learning needs, including special education needs, will be supported through a \$900,000 increase in Special Education equipment/technology and digital learning resources.

\$1 million in Special Education staffing and resources to support students with diverse special education needs.

\$1 million increase to utilities allocation due to increases in electricity costs.

\$750,000 increase to transportation to reduce secondary distance eligibility from 4.8 km to 3.8 km.

"In developing the budget for 2014-15, the priorities of quality Catholic education, student achievement, accountability and transparency were paramount in all discussions," observed Director of Education John Kostoff, director of education. "All decisions align with the board's strategic plan and system direction. The budget is also aligned with the Ministry of Education's objectives of improving student achievement, closing the gap in student achievement, and ensuring public confidence in school boards."

Accumulated surpluses are intended to be used as a contingency for unforeseen expenditures and for one-time initiatives. Setting aside accumulated surplus is a sound fiscal management practice and essential to managing the unexpected. Dufferin-Peel has utilized accumulated surplus in the past for one-time expenditures only related to Public Sector Accounting Board (PSAB) reporting requirements and will continue this practice in 2014-15.

"We congratulate the Board for making and supporting the tough fiscal decisions that had to be made in previous years," Kostoff said. "This has positioned the board with a strong financial base with which to move forward."