

TDSB Budget Town Halls

Thursday, May 19, 2022 - Questions and Answers

Afternoon Session – 1PM

Q1: I have a question regarding funding for learning disabilities and, specifically, providing the Empower [Reading] Program and a qualified instructor to a school with an identified student in need of it. I'd like to understand if there is visibility of children with the need in a neighborhood so that the program can be delivered, while keeping costs manageable.

A1: As part of our staff allocation process, we allocate resource teachers at the school level to support schools. In terms of providing additional supports to special education students in our schools, we also have support staff and special education teachers assigned to each of our congregated sites. These are sites where we provide additional supports or ISP programs to students with special exceptionalities. We also have other paraprofessional supports such as speech and language therapists that would also provide additional supports at these sites as well. We do tailor towards students' needs and assign staff based on those needs at each of the sites.

Q2: Is there any plan to increase the number of psychologists, social workers and SLPs that were cut in recent years to support our students and teachers? Waitlists for these services are lengthy - 12 to 24 months long.

A2: At this time, we have not allocated additional funding for 2022-23 for these supports. We work very closely with the Special Education department, as well as the Professional Services department to identify any additional needs. At this stage, there is no plan for increases, but if there are changes, we will review them when looking at our revised estimates next year.

Q3: Will staff recommend areas to cut in lieu of funding shortages? If so, what areas are under consideration? Curriculum programming has already seen significant cutbacks in terms of elective courses available to students and online options provide sub optimal learning conditions.

A3: We have provided several options that would offer little to no impact on student programming, but we are also exploring some changes (i.e: outdoor education) which may have some impact. This is not the final list; between now and June 29, we will continue to seek additional options as we conduct more analysis around our school budgets and other flexible budget savings areas

Q4: Will specialized schools receive any cuts to their budgets for this year or next year?

A4: We will be looking at school budgets overall, but it will be based on a formula looking at LOI and other needs. It won't be specific to specialized STEM, Arts and/or

athletic programs. Any reductions to school budgets will be at a broader perspective for all schools.

Q5: Will the funding for student mental health supports (TDSB received about 2.4 million of 10 million across the province) only be available in the 2022-23 school year or will that be available in future years?

A5: This mental health funding is part of our Grants for Student Needs (GSN) allocation, provided by the Ministry of Education. With the upcoming provincial elections, we don't know if there is going to be a change in government, and whether the province will opt to continue this funding for the 2023-24 year. We do know that this funding is going to be available for 2022-23.

Q6: When a school fundraises, what percentage goes to a sister school a school that is truly in need?

A6: Fundraising is up to each individual school. We do have some schools who are very active in terms of fundraising and have opted to allocate a portion of their proceeds to a school that hasn't been able as successful at raising funds. We can facilitate that, but it is up to each individual school.

Q7: Can the TDSB plan to install air conditioning in schools as the heat waves are going to continue in the coming years thanks to climate change?

A7: We have 583 school, some of which already have air conditioning, but in many of our older schools which don't have ducting and older electrical systems, the cost to install air conditioning is well beyond our means. If a school has a steam system, there is no way to install air conditioning. Our newer builds have air conditioning incorporated, and there are newer buildings where air conditioning has been incorporated, but the challenge for older schools remains. There was an estimate done a few years ago to see the likelihood of getting air conditioning is all our schools, but the associated costs were hundreds of millions of dollars, closing in on a billion dollars. With a growing \$3.7 Billion renewal backlog, this is simply not feasible.

Q8: Is the budget collected by parents/guardians, or is it provided by the government?

A8: The budget is created by the TDSB, but it needs to fall within expectations and the guidelines set by the Ministry of Education. Our funding comes from two sources: the majority of our money comes from the provincial government via transfer payment. Additionally, all municipalities within the school board (in our case, the City of Toronto) are told how much education tax to collect through property taxes. The provincial government determines that property tax amount from the GSN process, but it is coming from two different sources.

Q9: TDSB is consistently denying to provide additional educational supports to assist a special needs student who has been transferred to a regular class, but hasn't been integrated with a regular class for the past 13 years.

A9: It is difficult for us to speak to specific cases in this setting. We suggest following up with the teacher and principal at your child's school and with the Special Education department.

Q10: How can we request a review of teacher allocations for the 2022-23 school year? There appears to be a significant shortage in the forecasted allocations for our school.

A10: Back in March, school board staff forecast enrolment for the upcoming school year. Based on discussions with our planning department and with individual school principals, we develop both the school-by-school enrolment forecast, as well as the board's overall forecast. We then create a staff allocation report for our trustees, stating that will hire so many elementary teachers and so many secondary teachers. After the report is approved by the trustees, we do the rollout process through the spring so elementary schools can set up class configurations and secondary schools can set up their timetables. We then go back and review these numbers in the fall, after the school year starts, and the students are actually in the school. If need be, we adjust our staffing models to the appropriate level based on the number of students at the school. While a school may see a reduction right now because projections predict a decrease in the number of students, we will readjust if this forecast is off or more students come into the neighborhood. By the end of September, the enrolments and the teachers will align appropriately for your school.

Q11: What specifically did the COVID Learning Recovery funding from the province go toward? Has any been allocated for extra Tutoring as was promised? Is it targeted at specific schools, based on LOI? Does that mean some schools would not see any of it?

A11: This is 31.5 million in staffing support funding that's continuing from last year to this year, so we are utilizing much of that funding, as outlined in the slide deck for additional school-based staffing support. Because of the end of our workers protection funding in 2021-22, there have been a reduction in those school-based staffing costs such as, lunchroom supervisors and other support staff. We have utilized this funding to add back some of those positions that were previously impacted.

Q12: Has money been allocated, or will it be allocated to address some of the Human Rights Commission suggestions regarding Right to Read to address literacy gaps?

A12: Staff have reviewed the recommendations themselves and there are plans for professional learning for not only central staff but school-based staff. Staff are still working on understanding the report and while we have started making plans, we still need to determine what is needed to address the gaps.

Q13: Why does the TDSB not introduce differential instructions and an integrated classroom instead of the current special education class where every student is unique in their own abilities, but delivering in one format with abstract targets?

A13: In this specific case, that's not relevant to the budget. This is something best addressed by your principal or potentially special education staff who can speak to the individual circumstances in your child's class.

Q14: What actions are being taken to fill critical ongoing staffing gaps? Our school has had six interim principals for this academic year alone - when can we expect to have an assigned principal to help provide stability for staff and students at our school?

A14: There's a critical shortage of staff in all parts of the economy, right now thanks to the pandemic. Staff and the Employee Services department are working diligently to try to fill those gaps as quickly as possible. We realize it has been a challenge this year and we are making every effort to fill those as quickly as possible. We hope to have stability in our principal pool shortly and we're still working on filling positions for teachers and other important roles as well.

Q15: School ventilation systems have been identified as a priority area needed for upgrades. (thanks to the pandemic and airborne nature of the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19). What area of the budget refers to ventilation system upgrades?

A15: We have received additional funding from the government to be used towards ventilation upgrades. The province has invested \$5.9 Millions towards the ventilation top up this year, and there is an additional amount that we can allocate next year as well. We have also been provided additional in-kind HEPA filter units for school boards during the year. We will be fully utilizing that money to ensure there are sufficient HEPA filter units across the system. Currently, each school does have sufficient HEPA filters for each occupied classroom. We are also using some of that money, along with the Capital Infrastructure Resilience funding for mechanical ventilation upgrades, and filter changes.

Q16: Are the 106 positions from the COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan permanent? Will the \$5.9 million funding announced in November for child and youth workers, child and youth counselors, social workers and school-based safety monitors be available beyond next year?

A16: The additional investments around the child and youth workers, social workers and the child and youth counselors are permanent positions that we have hired. We anticipate these are going to be permanent additions unless there are future changes to our budget that may impact staffing levels.

Q17: Do we know why there has been a decline in special education enrolment? This has an impact on the special education funding line. Are these children moving out of the system?

A17: This decline is not unique to special education. We have seen enrolment decline across the board. We have noticed parents holding their children back in kindergarten since grade 1 is the first mandatory year. We are also seeing migration out of Toronto towards York Region and other neighbouring boards, and less immigration patterns into the city, meaning less newcomers. We are expecting these numbers to rebound in the coming years as COVID19 lessens its impacts on enrolment.

Evening Session – 7PM

Q1: What will the TDSB do to increase education funding to meet the needs of all students and staff?

A1: The Trustees have been appealing for additional funding from the province for years. Trustees and staff continue to advocate for more funding. Earlier this week the Chair appealed for more funding. It is a challenge, because we don't believe the funding benchmarks work for a board this size to support the needs of students in an urban setting such as Toronto. There is not a lot we can do because the funding model is based on enrolment and doesn't take these other factors into account.

Q2: How much of the enhanced \$134 million Provincial Newcomers Supplement in the GSN did the TDSB receive for 2022-23? Does the entire Newcomer Supplement go towards ESL staffing supports?

A2: We are receiving \$24 Million in the newcomer supplement for 2023. We will be utilizing that to complement the ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher allocation. We are working with the staffing office regarding the allocation, as some of the information from schools was sent late, and we are still in the process of reviewing school needs. We will also make any necessary changes closer to the start of the school year.

The supplement is part of our GSN, so it is not earmarked specifically for certain positions – the TDSB doesn't need to report back to the government how this supplement was spent. We have committed to ensure there are sufficient ESL supports at the school and are using the funds to do so.

Q3: Why is there no operational change to reflect the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report findings?

A3: Staff are still in the process of reviewing the recommendations to see what work we are doing towards this already and what we need to further augment to achieve the recommendations from the report.

Some work has already begun - school staff and superintendents have undergone professional learning already and we are exploring rolling that out to more staff.

Q4: How is TDSB addressing the Ontario Human Rights Commission Read to recommendations for early screening, K-2 teaching structured literacy, training and delivery of structured literacy?

A4: This is not specifically outlined in the budget documents, but professional learning is already being rolled out. Staff are continuing to review the recommendations to look at next steps, but at this point we don't have details of how we will address it. Currently, no money has been allotted but it's part of the overall review process we are currently undergoing.

Q5: What Special Education adjustment are you referring to when to say the changes won't affect the level of support for students who need it? There are currently not enough supports for identified students and it's likely that there are more waiting to be identified with the pandemic backlog.

A5: Our goal is to ensure that these changes do not negatively impact our students. We are looking at the declining enrolment in some of our programs, to see if there are ways to identify some cost efficiencies around staffing or around the number of classes we have. We are still reviewing, so we can't provide any specifics, but we will have some more details during the upcoming Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee (FBEC) meetings.

Q6: Did the TDSB and the Ministry of Education not expect increased special education costs due to learning loss and mental health impacts during the pandemic?

A6: The Ministry did provide an increase in funding in special education this year. They increased funding of mental health by about \$10 million province wide. However, at the TDSB, we are facing a shortfall in special education thanks to declining enrolment and the number of staff that we have supporting these programs. We're hoping that with the projected increase in enrolment that these revenues could stabilize in the future. Our spending allocation towards special education is greater than what we receive from the province.

Q7: I'm an ESL teacher at an elementary school and I've been receiving an influx of new students, especially from Ukraine. I currently have 44 students on my ESL list. That being said, my ESL class has been cut from full time to part time for September 2022. How are you monitoring the schools to ensure the students are getting full support?

A7: Starting in November of this school year, the planning department started gathering information for their projections for the upcoming 2022-23 school year. Once they have enrolment numbers for October, they start doing their projections. They work with the principals through the winter to refine those projections, both at the system level and at an individual school level. When we go to our board of trustees with our staffing recommendations for teachers and others support staff, we want to have the most accurate information on enrolment. We create a staffing recommendation and once we have Board approval, we start rolling the staff allocations out to schools (usually following March break). The principals in each school then create their program offerings for secondary or decide their class

configurations for elementary. We then continue to monitor enrolment numbers through the end of the school year, but the next big review in the fall, come September, when we have the actual enrolment numbers at each school. At this point, teacher allocations are adjusted based on actual enrolment. We will add additional teachers at schools where they exceeded enrollment growth, whether it be ESL or any other program and similar, we will adjust in other schools where we may have seen enrolment decline.

Q8: Will there be a reduction in caretaking levels, and if so, how much as part of this budget?

A8: Through the Support for Student fund and the Learning Recovery fund, we've increased caretaking by about 108.5 FTEs (full time equivalents.) There have been some reductions to caretaking due to our decrease in enrollment during the staff allocation process, but we have tried to replenish many of those positions, through this additional funding.

Q9: Are the supports for ESL students equivalent to pre-pandemic levels? Do we do we get into that level of detail within our budget documents?

A9: When we refer to pre-pandemic levels, we are really aiming to ensure that there are sufficient ESL supports across the system, based on the number of students requiring that support. The staffing office is working very closely with the ESL office to look at individual schools and the number of students with ESL needs to determine whether adjustments are needed and if any adjustments could be made also before the start of the school year. We are still working through those numbers.

Q10: How do we get more information about school board advocacy to the Ministry for additional funds?

A10: If you go to our website <www.tdsb.on.ca> and you scroll down, just after the 'News' section, you can see a whole section called 'Advocacy Letters' <<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Advocacy-Letters>>. Here, you'll be able to see all the advocacy letters that typically come from the Chair of the Board to the ministry. For example, there is a recent letter, appealing for additional funding to cover pandemic related costs.

Q11: I'm concerned about the reduction in special education funding and the allocation of staff to support students with IEPs (Individual Education Plans.) For example, my child's elementary school of 500 students went from two staff to one SERT (Special Education Resource Teacher.) How is the TDSB going to provide support to these students, when you have to cut staff across the system?

A11: Similar to what we do for other staff allocations at our school, in September we'll adjust our special education support staff allocation in each school based on the number students requiring those supports. If our projections don't line up with the actual numbers come September, we will adjust accordingly.

Q12: How does TDSB ensure that our education system is up to date with respect to the upgrade in technology?

A12: Within the past 2 years (especially due to the pandemic) we have spent millions in technology upgrades, include upgrades to our broadband and purchasing devices (laptops, tablets, etc.) for students to use during the school shutdowns. We have committed to continue issuing laptops for students in Grade 5 and Grade 9 for the 2022-23 school year. This is a stress on our system, because we aren't adequately funded for technology upgrades, but we are committed to maintaining technology improvements, while being cognizant of our limited resources. Our IT department does phenomenal work to make sure our technologies are up to date, with the best systems for our students.

Q13: It seems the Outdoor Education department is facing cuts due to the loss of some type of grant funding that is not being renewed. How can we try to get this funding reinstated? Connecting students to the natural world is especially important to mental health in the midst of and following a pandemic.

A13: If they're referring to the \$500,000 reductions that we're proposing for year two and year three, this is really driven by whether some of those outdoor education sites are going to see a huge cost escalation with regards to lease renewals. If we can maintain those leases at their current cost or lower, we likely won't consider any reductions in the site. Instead, we will try to identify other options, like reducing weekend programming or charging some of the transportation costs to the schools, instead of to the central departments. These options won't have a direct impact to the programming for students.

Q14: With the given deficit and the proposed model, would library support or books and technology for children be affected?

A14: We're not planning any reductions at this time, but this is a very good question because as technology changes, we constantly evaluate the potential for efficiencies here (i.e: opting for online resources for texts that is constantly amended, as opposed to the books/ hard copies.)

Q15: Will anything impact children's extracurricular activities? How are we managing that?

A15: We expect extracurricular activities to largely return to normal compared to previous years. We thank our teachers for volunteering their time to make these extracurriculars a reality. They are enthused to continue offering these opportunities for our students.

Q16: Is there anything in the budget at this point that would impact healthy snacks for students?

A16: The TDSB has a partnership with the Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS) – they are an arms-length organization that works very closely with our schools

to provide funding for nutrition programs like the breakfast program and the snacks program. They invest upwards of \$20 million to our schools, each year, and there have not been any funding changes to these programs so schools can continue to apply for the nutrition programs.

Q17: Is the TDSB planning on selling or building schools or Outdoor Education facilities to make up for the funding shortfalls?

A17: While we do have sites that we have declared surplus, there is currently a moratorium on closing school sites in the province. We always are looking at right sizing the organization's physicals, but when we sell a building or school that money can only be earmarked towards refurbishing the schools. We wouldn't be able to use it towards operational needs at this point.

Q18: It's very disruptive when we reassess ESL classes or other programs in September after the start of the school year. It often shuffles teachers around and it takes time for students and staff to get settled. Rather than taking away ESL classes and then bring them back later, why can't you look at ESL student enrolment right now in order to let schools with high ESL student enrolment know that they will continue to have ESL in September?

A18: We do our planning with base of the March report to our trustees, and we follow with the allocation of the staffing models to our principals. There are cases where we predict enrolment changing drastically in a school in, and we're confident this is going to materialize. In these rare cases, we do add additional teachers in May and June for principals. In most cases, we need to wait for solid enrolment number in September to have accurate allocations and the least number of disruptions across the entire system.

Q19: What have the trends in school generated funds been over the past three years? Have we seen either a reduction in overall fundraising capacity or widening gaps in capacity school to school or by socio economic status? What are the projected changes in coming school years and how is an equity lens being applied?

A19: Typically, before the pandemic, we would see around \$45-50 million in school generated funds revenues across our 582 schools. Because of the pandemic, that number dropped around \$5 million last year, so this is a significant reduction in our fundraising revenues. This is mainly due to school closures and not having any opportunities for fundraising activities at our schools. With regards to the question around equity, our school budget allocation process takes this into account. A portion of the funding that the board applies is based on need or the Learning Opportunity Index and over the years we've been very successful in ensuring that schools that have needs or do not have the capacity to fundraise would receive more of funding and helping flatten the equity curve, and ensuring all schools have equivalent or equitable access to resources.

Q20: What does a decentralized coaching support model look like? Over the next three years, it appears, like there will be a large reduction of central staff.

A20: We are taking learning from over the course of the pandemic and applying them to these models. We are trying to increase local supports instead of central coaches coming in. We are still reviewing these models and we are exploring other options like finding central staff efficiencies or redefining staff into different roles. The bulk of the changes will come in year 2 and 3. We will likely incorporate PD for our local teachers and support staff, as well as use technology to find efficiencies. We don't have details at this time since it's still undergoing review for changes to come later.

Q21: Is this the biggest deficit TDSB has faced?

A21: No, we have seen bigger deficits in recent years. We don't have previous deficit numbers available right now, but you can find them by looking at meeting minutes from past years.

Q22: Do we have any backup continuity plan in the event of an unfortunate pandemic or similar situation in the future? We want to ensure our kids education is not compromised.

A22: We have learned a lot during the pandemic, and we are proud of the way staff across the entire organization were able to come together and make adjustments to support student learning. We take these learnings away and will keep them on file in case of another unfortunate event where we need to mobilize quickly.

Q23: Will the TDSB report back on how much of the newcomer supplement ends up being spent on items unrelated to maintaining ESL supports it did last year?

A23: We could outline any changes to the spending for ESL when providing revised estimates. We provide new estimates in June when we seek budget approval from the trustees. We also provide a revised estimates update to trustees in November or December.