

Friday, October 16, 2020

TDSB Budget Consultation

The COVID-19 pandemic has, in many ways, changed the way that TDSB operates, and has had a significant financial impact. As we look ahead to next year, we have significant concerns about the residual impacts of the pandemic and the costs that we will continue to face. The following areas are of particular concern:

In-Person and Virtual Learning

- Operating two separate school systems since September – one for in-person learners and one for the more than 80,000 virtual learners we now support.
- Resulted in an increase in costs due to the duplication of many functions.
- Also a significant cost to ensure equity of access for all students (e.g. approximately \$15M on technology).
- Used reserves to fund 280 additional teachers to staff both models appropriately and lower class sizes to keep students/safe.

Special Education

- TDSB has consistently spent more than our full grant to support students with Special Education needs (2020-21 spending above funding estimated at \$59M).
- The unique needs of Toronto's Special Education community requires greater provincial support.
- Additional costs associated with ensuring that these students are fully supported during the pandemic.

Mental Health and Well-Being

- Additional resources are needed to support students and staff during the pandemic, and will continue to be needed beyond this year.
- Additional funding for Social Workers, CYWs, Guidance Counsellors, and Equity Advisors and Coaches required to meet the increasing needs.

PPE and Cleaning Supplies

- Funding provided this year for PPE/Cleaning Supplies: \$460K
- Actual spending on PPE/Cleaning Supplies since March 2020: \$8M
- Funding must recognize reality in our schools and what is needed to keep students/staff safe.

Supply Teacher Costs

- Current funding levels do not adequately support actual staffing costs.
- Increase in usage of sick time since Collective Agreement changes, and an even further increase this year with COVID-19.
- Costs will continue to increase, and boards need additional funding to address this shortfall.

TDSB continues to advocate for additional funding and access to funds in these two areas:

Renewal Funding Backlog

- Current repair backlog is \$3.5 billion as a result of years of inadequate funding.
- Funding improvements in recent years to address emergency issues in schools. Unfortunately, not enough to decrease the backlog.
- Need predictable and sustainable funding for school repairs, especially in light of the pandemic and the need to improve HVAC systems in older schools.

Education Development Charges

- Continue to advocate for access to EDCs. TDSB does not currently qualify because of overall excess capacity, even though significant capacity pressures in many schools.
- If we qualified, we could expect \$500M over 15 years to meet growth-related needs.
- Ask the province to modify or remove restrictions to allow all boards to qualify and use funds for the expansion of existing schools or building of new schools.

Recovering from the financial impacts of COVID-19 will not be easy. However, now more than ever, it is important that students of Ontario are prioritized with strong, predictable and equitable education funding.

Sincerely,



Alexander Brown,
Chair, Toronto District School Board