

the torch



Education will take a hit from inadequate funding

The River East Transcona School Division board of trustees approved a \$201.8-million budget on March 2, 2021. The budget reflects the cap imposed by the provincial government resulting in no increases to school taxes.

Property owners will actually see a decrease of 1.6 per cent in their 2021 school taxes, which may sound great but has implications for our children. The provincial government also promised additional funds to school divisions to offset the freeze on property

taxes. The amount, however, is insufficient to meet the growing needs of RETSD both during the pandemic and beyond.

“This government funding will cover only a small portion of our needs, challenging the division to continue delivering quality educational programs to our students,” said trustee Keith Morrison, board vice-chair. “The government seems to have ignored the realities of rising costs due to the pandemic and the growth in our student population.”

Since 2015, approximately 200 to 300 new students annually have entered the division, with the same number expected to enrol in the fall of 2021 and going forward. The government’s funding is inadequate to meet the growth in student population and fails to account for the considerable costs of essentials such as the extra 400 hours per day for cleaning the schools to keep them safe for students and staff.

“The ability to provide much-needed additional recovery learning, as well as other critical

programs for students, has been thrown into jeopardy,” said trustee Brianne Goertzen, finance committee chair. “This government has clearly not put the needs of our students first and public education will bear the brunt.”

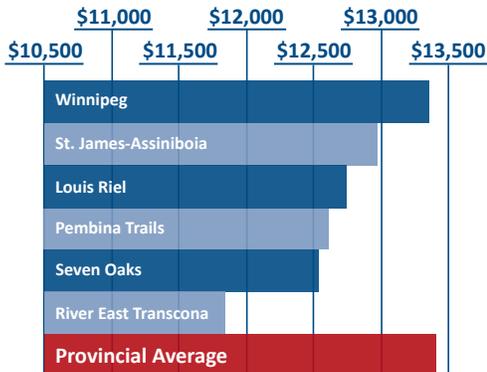
The board of trustees encourages readers to contact their trustee to learn more about the impact of the government’s funding decisions on education in the division. Read more about the budget—and the need for local voices—on the following page.

Budget 2021–22 fast facts

- River East Transcona is the second-largest school division in the province with over 16,700 students in 42 schools staffed by approximately 3,000 team members.
- The division receives approximately 52.8 per cent of its revenue from provincial government program support, 11.6 per cent from the provincial government property tax credit, and another 35.0 per cent from the local property tax base. The remaining 0.6 per cent comes from other revenue sources.
- Based on the 2019–20 FRAME Budget Report, RETSD’s per pupil spending—\$11,881—continues to be the lowest in the Metro Winnipeg area. The provincial average is \$13,374.

- Based on the 2019–20 FRAME Budget Report, 2.6 per cent of expenditures are spent on administration, which is below the government mandate of 2.7 per cent. RETSD has always been below the administrative cost cap. The 0.1 per cent less RETSD spends on administration equates to \$200,000.
- Salaries and benefits represent 86 per cent of the division’s total budget.

EXPENDITURE PER PUPIL



Source: FRAME Report 2019–20 Budget

YOUR LOONIE AT WORK



Salaries & Benefits: 86¢

- 58¢: Classroom instruction
- 10¢: School counselling, resource and library services
- 7¢: School administration
- 8¢: Facility operations, maintenance, and student transportation
- 2¢: Divisional administration
- 1¢: Other

Supplies & Services: 14¢

- 5¢: School supplies and materials
- 7¢: Facility operations, maintenance, and student transportation
- 2¢: Other

Divisional budgets and student success need local voices

Bill 64, if passed, will change how education is funded and delivered in Manitoba. Will it improve student outcomes? A significant change will be the loss of local voices currently provided through elected boards of trustees.

“We’re elected to serve and listen to all concerns and advocate on the community’s behalf, providing real local input into the education, citizenship and well-being of our students,” said long-serving trustee Peter Kotyk. “Trustees are non-

partisan and our promise is crystal clear—to work for all children to ensure the highest public education possible, thus opening doors to opportunities in life.”

Trustees live in the division and know the communities of River East and Transcona. Local knowledge and vested interest about factors that can affect the budget are essential. These can include understanding the impact of a growing student population, thanks to new developments in the

area, and what educational options matter to the community, such as language or vocational programs.

“The board has championed efficiency while supporting quality programs based on what is valued by community members,” noted trustee Jerry Sodomlak, board chair. “Now decisions will be made without local input or knowledge and parents will have less access for support. That’s of great concern for the future of education—who is going to make sure there is a local

voice and focus on best interests and success of our children?”

Residents in the RETSD area are encouraged to contact their trustee to understand how Bill 64 might affect education in the division. More information is also available on the division’s website at www.retsd.mb.ca. Learn about Local Voices Local Choices—and how you can speak out on Bill 64—on the Manitoba School Boards Association website at www.mbschoolboards.ca.

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