



Saskatoon Public Schools
Inspiring Learning



NEWS RELEASE

Challenges remain after provincial budget: Saskatoon school divisions

(SASKATOON, March 27, 2015) – Saskatoon’s public and Catholic school divisions are welcoming the government’s increased financial commitment to elementary and secondary education announced in the March 18 provincial budget, but both divisions say challenges remain, including a lack of funding for enrolment growth.

“We appreciate that the province made education a priority in the budget and we welcome the overall increase in education funding,” said Saskatoon Board of Education Chair Ray Morrison. “However, we are concerned that provisions to address the ongoing pressures experienced due to year-over-year enrolment increases have been removed in this budget.”

“Saskatchewan is growing and the continued enrolment increases in our school division show we are part of that growth,” said Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Board Chair Diane Boyko. “But when we don’t receive the resources we need for those extra students, it’s a disservice to them and the future of our province.”

The public school board is forecasting increased enrolment of approximately 650 students this fall while the Catholic school division, which serves Saskatoon, Humboldt, Biggar, Martensville and Warman, is projecting an increase of 200 students.

The Saskatoon school divisions are among approximately eight divisions across Saskatchewan that are planning for enrolment increases this fall, while the majority of divisions in the province will see their enrolments remain at status quo or decline. In recent years, the government has provided growing divisions with funds for new students as the school year began. That commitment was not continued in this budget.

The board chairs welcome statements from the Ministry of Education that funding enrolment growth will be a priority if money is available mid-year. Morrison and Boyko stressed that in order to plan for and ensure quality learning for all students, the province should fund enrolment growth during the year it takes place.

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Both school divisions acknowledge they are each receiving overall funding increases for 2015-16, but most of the additional resources will be needed to meet the terms of the provincially negotiated teachers' agreement. The provincial budget leaves the divisions with essentially the same funding as last year to cover rising student transportation costs, recent contract settlements with support staff, and higher utility bills.

"Our division has long understood the need to spend efficiently and has made difficult decisions, like cutting full-day kindergarten," Boyko said. "But we are close to the point where we do not have enough money to meet the expectations of our communities, which obviously causes us great concern."

The fact Saskatoon has growing neighbourhoods not yet served by new schools means the divisions are spending more each year to transport students. While funding from the province has traditionally not covered the entire cost of transportation, funds provided in the budget this year were virtually the same as last year. Saskatoon Public Schools has a gap of \$1.9 million, while the deficit for Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is \$1.5 million.

The provincial government did include several good news items for the divisions, including the decision to assume 100 per cent of the capital costs for major facility projects. Also well-received was news that planning remains on track for construction of eight new public and Catholic elementary schools in Saskatoon's growing neighbourhoods. Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools will also build linked schools in Martensville and Warman. A provincial increase to Preventative Maintenance and Renewal Funding is also a positive step to address the challenges of maintaining schools and infrastructure.

Boyko and Morrison said providing a joint response to the budget made sense because their divisions are facing similar funding issues that will affect thousands of children and families. They emphasized the need for the government to respond in a timely fashion to fund enrolment growth and increased operating costs, including student transportation.

"Students are our top priority and we are committed to providing opportunities to all of our students," Morrison said. "We believe in working together with the Ministry of Education to ensure quality learning for all students in Saskatoon and address the challenges resulting from our growing city and school enrolment."

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