

Belt-tightening, balanced budget approved by Board of Education

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools' Board of Education approved a balanced budget for 2016-17 at a special meeting on June 27 to meet the Ministry of Education's June 30 deadline.

"Both the timeline and the money were tight for the process this year," said Board of Education Chair Diane Boyko. "With less-than-expected funding to account for enrolment growth, inflation and to cover teacher salary increases, we're stretching every dollar to limit the effects on classroom learning."

To account for enrolment growth, the division will hire teachers to fill 13.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and educational assistants to fill 2.5 FTE positions. Enrolment growth of 300 students for 2015-16 and projected growth of 365 students for 2016-17 was recognized in the Government of Saskatchewan's June 1 provincial budget with additional operating funding. However, funding is not at a level that allows the division to maintain current per-student spending.

Cost-saving measures approved by the board include not filling vacant non-teaching positions, reassigning centralized staff into classrooms, changes to transportation for 11 schools and reducing program budgets.

"We worked very hard to be able to maintain our teacher-to-student ratio and hire more teachers. But to say some of these cost-cutting measures won't affect the classroom isn't totally accurate. We will have less capacity to support programs like English as an Additional Language, school counselors and literacy support staff," said Boyko.

Boyko noted that these supports allow teachers to maximize their time in the classroom with students.

The province maintained its capital funding commitment for six new schools being built in the division and increased preventative maintenance and renewal spending. These funds are separate from operating funds.

With 44 schools and nearly 17,000 students, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools is Saskatchewan's largest Catholic school division, providing Catholic education from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 in Saskatoon and area, Biggar, Humboldt, Martensville and Warman. We root students in their faith, help them grow in knowledge, and encourage them to reach out to transform the world.

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