

Questions from April 23 COSC Meeting

Thanks to everyone who attended the Council of School Councils meeting on April 23. The following provides a high-level summary of the budget discussion and Q&A session held with Brad Grundy, Chief Financial Officer, David Stevenson, Chief Superintendent of Schools, and Trustees.

Since the meeting, a change in government has resulted in some uncertainty related to what education funding will look like in Alberta for the coming year. We are currently seeking clarification and guidance from the government.

Class size and support for students

A number of comments and questions were asked during the discussion that relate to class size, school-based supports and how the CBE funds special and exceptional needs programs.

In the past few years, the CBE has worked to maintain class size, but the number of students per certificated teacher doesn't tell the whole story.

Today's classroom requires a very different mix of certificated and non-certificated staff to adequately support student learning. Many specialized services for students are available for principals to access including psychologists, braille assistants, deaf and hard of hearing specialists, mental health specialists, occupational and physical therapists, speech language pathologists, translators and more. These central supports are critical to our teachers, particularly to the more than 16,000 students identified with special education needs, and to the almost 30,000 students identified as English Language Learners.

For more information about how the CBE supports our students, we invite you to review [the presentation](#) made during the May 19, 2015 Public Board Meeting on Inclusion.

Reserve funds

A number of questions and comments were made during the discussion that relate to the use of reserves.

Changes to our budget timeline and a new government means there is some uncertainty about whether the CBE will be required to use reserves to balance the budget, whether we will need to seek approval to use reserves, or whether we will be required to maintain a specific reserve budget.

As stated in our [interim budget](#) the CBE is committed to working collaboratively with the Government of Alberta regarding the use of available reserves to support student learning and advancing the CBE's and the government's learning agenda. The amount



of available reserves as at August 31, 2015 is projected to be between 2 per cent and 3 per cent of total CBE revenue.

Input from area directors and principals in the budgeting process

Area directors consult with principals on an ongoing basis on all issues relevant to the operation of our schools and our system. The area directors report to the Deputy Chief Superintendent of Schools, who, with the rest of the Superintendents team, work with all areas of the organization to build the budget for the CBE. The budget process is an ongoing, year-long process that involves regular consultation, conversation and evaluation. Area directors are also involved in the RAM (Resource Allocation Method) roll-out at their respective schools and consulted in system decisions.

School Council's role in a school's budget

As a school council, you have the opportunity to provide advice to our school about its upcoming budget. This is provided under the School Act, and we are happy to have parents engaged in this process. The School Act also states that principals have an obligation to provide school councils with the opportunity to provide advice on foundation statements, policies, annual education plan, annual results report and budget. Your engagement and advice is valuable to us.

Funds are distributed to CBE schools via a process we call RAM. This stands for Resource Allocation Method and is designed to allocate resources equitably while providing choice in the assignment and deployment of those resources to meet the unique needs of the students within each school.

We encourage you to have a conversation with your principal if you are interested in learning more about the RAM and how your school allocates funding. In consultation with staff and the school community, it is the principal's job to develop the budget based on the RAM provided. The budgeting process considers the School Development Plan, the learning needs of students and the impact on programming and staffing. School councils are encouraged to provide advice throughout this process.

For the 2015-16 school year, the allocation to schools through the RAM funding provides for enrolment growth and allows for school staffing levels equal to those of 2014-15 on a system-wide basis. We are currently in the process of understanding the details of the principal deployment decisions for the upcoming school year.

Anticipated costs associated with new schools

New school commissioning costs include all of the supplies, technology and equipment required for a school. This includes things like computers, furniture, gym equipment, musical instruments, photocopiers and stationary supplies. A principal is hired months in advance to get the school ready for opening, including hiring the rest of the school staff and managing the day-to-day operations in this "pre-opening" phase.

These new school commissioning costs, which are currently un-funded, range between \$750,000 for a K to Grade 4 school to more than \$3 million for a high school. These costs do not include the annual cost for staffing.

Health and wellness in schools

We believe in a whole-school approach to health and wellness. Our approach is a holistic philosophy that is embedded in a school's culture. A comprehensive approach to building a healthy school community is a positive and proactive way to promote health and wellness.

Click here to learn more about [Comprehensive School Health](#).

Age limits for students

Currently, the School Act requires that school boards concentrate their educational programming on students who are younger than 19 years of age, as of September 1. The new Education Act directs that age limit for students to attend school will be increased to include individuals who are younger than 21 years of age as of September 1, 2015. This means students can continue to take courses or receive educational programming up to the age of 21 with funding provided by the province. This is intended to encourage more students to complete their education and includes all students, not only those with special needs.

Technology spending in schools.

There is and will be no requirement for students to bring in a device. The school will have other network devices that assist with learning that students can use. At this time, we are still determining what measures will be in place to ensure that students have equitable access to technology across the system and what changes will be made to the CBE's technology strategy.

[Click here](#) to learn more about technology in schools.

Renting CBE space

We rent our facilities to the public on a cost-recovery basis through a joint-use agreement with Calgary Recreation, Calgary Catholic School District and the CBE. For more information on public use of school facilities, view [renting CBE space](#).

Use of CBE facilities for charter schools

Alberta Education directs the use of CBE facilities for charter schools. Alberta Education has directed that the CBE may only charge charter schools a lease rate of \$1 per year. Currently the CBE is leasing 14 facilities to charter schools. Of those, 12 are leased for \$1 per year. By 2016-17 all 14 facilities will be at the \$1 rate. This will represent over a \$1.1 million reduction in CBE lease revenue.

Calculating enrolment projections

The CBE's planning department uses data from the City of Calgary, the preschool census and our own information to make projections. These projections are calculated regularly and reflect changing trends, including population growth or decline across the city.

Due to economic factors, CBE administration revised their forecast of a student population increase for 2015-16 from an increase of 3,755 students (3.3 per cent) to an increase of 2,455 students (2.1 per cent).

Lunchroom supervision in middle schools

Lunchroom supervision ensures that our youngest students have a safe and secure place to have lunch, supervised by caring adults in an environment that fosters and maintains respectful, responsible behaviors.

As students grow older, they become more independent and may no longer require the same level of supervision.

Impact on fees in 2015-16

We wish the CBE didn't have to charge fees but they are an unfortunate reality. In some cases, government funding doesn't cover the full cost of providing programs and services to our students. Fees are charged to cover the gap between the cost of programs and services and the funding. Fees cannot, by law, be used to directly support student learning. Fees are charged on a cost recovery basis and ensure that instructional dollars are not diverted from the classroom for other uses.

We continue to seek clarification from the government on funding for our 2015-16 fiscal year. At this time, we anticipate being able to keep transportation fees and instructional supplies and materials (ISM) fees at the same rate as last year. Noon supervision fees will increase by \$5 per year to cover the increased costs of operating the program.

Support for families who can't afford fees

If CBE efforts to collect fees fail, our last resort is sending the account to a collection agency. If you use a program or service, our policy is to charge you for that program or service.

If you cannot afford the fees, there are several ways that the fees can be waived. Fees are only sent to collection if families have not declared a financial hardship for services they use and after every reasonable attempt has been made to settle the amount owing. No outstanding balances are sent to collections until at least 200 days have elapsed. Our policies require us to work to collect fees owing from any source.

No child is ever denied access to CBE programs or services because of an inability to pay.