

Prairie Spirit approves deficit budget to avoid staff layoffs

Facing a \$7.1 million funding shortfall, the Prairie Spirit Board of Education has halted its program and staffing reductions at \$4.6 million. The Board of Education is unwilling to make further staffing reductions to balance its 2015/16 budget.

Further reductions of over \$2.5 million would translate into layoffs for 45 - 60 staff members in the school division. Given the inequity in the current provincial education funding model, the Board of Education determined it would be irresponsible to make further reductions of this magnitude.

The Board passed the following motions at its June 22 meeting:

THAT the Board approves the 2015/16 school year budget as presented with a deficit of \$2.5 million.

THAT the deficit budget is submitted to the Ministry stating an additional government grant of \$2.5 million is required to balance the budget; Prairie Spirit reserve funds will not be applied to balance the budget.

Use of reserves

The Board refused to balance the 2015/16 budget by using reserve dollars. These funds are set aside for emergent needs or to launch new initiatives.

The Board of Education has already applied \$3 million of limited reserve funds to balance last year's budget, with the assurance that the funding model would be reviewed and adjusted to address significant inequities. Prairie Spirit currently has \$3.4 million in unrestricted reserve funds.

Reducing staff

Reducing school staff by 45 - 60 positions to save \$2.5 million and balance the budget would create a significant and negative impact on learning improvement and student programming in the Division. In fact, current reductions at the Division Office are unsustainable to provide adequate supports to students, classroom teachers and administrators. Since 2012, student enrolment has grown by 700 students in Prairie Spirit schools, with less than 10 teaching positions added during that same time period.

Four budget priorities achieved

The Board established four budget reduction priorities which were followed in the budget deliberations to date and reflect the Board's consistent "student first" approach to decision making. The priorities are: improving student learning; improving adult learning to support student learning; maintaining current staff; and maintaining current class sizes.

Given the inequity in the education funding model and the wide range of reductions already made, it would be irresponsible for the Board to make further reductions of this magnitude.

\$4.6 million in reductions achieved

The Board has already confirmed the following reductions:

- Reduction of five leadership and administrative positions at Division Office
- Reduction of three Facilities staff positions
- Reduction of Division-based teaching positions focusing on career and work exploration, early learning, student support services, home-based education and English as an Additional Language
- Reassignment of Division Office staff to vacant school-based positions
 - Reduction in school division staff supporting community day cares (where provincial funding was not provided to the school division)
 - Reduction in Board governance budget
 - Reduction in Teacher Librarians; staff will be reassigned to classroom teaching positions and others will be transitioned to new Learning Facilitator positions
 - Reduction of funding for school-based budgets
 - Reduction of 21.5 Educational Associate positions in schools
- Reduction of three vice-principal positions
- Combination of small classes, where possible

Next steps

Prairie Spirit is committed to providing meaningful and effective learning opportunities for our students. Adequate funding is required to continue to improve Prairie Spirit's student achievement results.

A review of the provincial education funding model is underway. The results of the review will determine Prairie Spirit's funding for the 2016/17 budget year. If provincial revenues improve, the Ministry may fund enrolment increases during the 2015/16 school year. The Division is projecting an increase of over 300 students this fall. Prairie Spirit remains optimistic that the school division will receive additional funding.

The Board is committed to continue to work with the Ministry to resolve Prairie Spirit's funding shortfall issue.

Thank you to students, staff and parents for showing your support, for demonstrating your concern and for asking the important questions about our budget decisions. As a result, you have communicated a strong message regarding the importance of education in your communities and in our province.

Please visit our budget [website](http://budget.spiritsd.ca) (<http://budget.spiritsd.ca>) for more details.

Expenditure reductions made by Prairie Spirit since 2012:

- \$5.1 million in teacher staffing
- \$2 million in programming reductions
- \$1.5 million in Educational Associate staffing
- \$3 million of reserve funds applied to balance 2014/15 budget
- \$4.6 million in reductions for the 2015/16 budget