



WINNIPEG SCHOOL DIVISION

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# NEWS RELEASE

## Winnipeg School Division seeking ways to maintain programs for children

### Provincial funding announcement raises new challenges for Division

The Manitoba government's public school funding announcement on Monday presents the province's largest school division with a huge dual challenge – how to cover rising costs for existing programs, while receiving no additional funding to pay for the costs of increased enrolment.

The Winnipeg School Division says it was disappointed to learn that it will receive virtually no increase in funding from the Manitoba government in 2012-13 – but it is committed to maintaining vital programs and will seek input from all stakeholders as it makes the difficult decisions ahead.

“Kids and learning are still at the center of everything we do, regardless of the financial difficulties we are facing,” said Rita Hildahl, chair of the Winnipeg School Division Board. “We stand behind the priorities by parents, teachers and taxpayers. All of us are committed to providing the best possible education to our kids, and supporting the goals and programs that matter the most to parents.”

The Division's plight stems from static funding, rising costs and limited revenue sources.

“We are facing a 2.5 per cent increase in enrolment in a year when provincial funding is inadequate to meet existing needs,” said Kristine Barr, chair of the Division's Finance Committee. “There are only two ways to deal with this equation – cut costs or increase school property taxes. Clearly, we have some very tough decisions to make.” The government has reduced the Manitoba Education Tax Credit over the past seven years, which has saved the average home owner in the Division a total of \$300 in school property taxes. However, the gap between expenses and funding for 2012-13 could add \$80 to the tax bill for a typical property in the Division if further cost savings can't be found.

“That means that more than 25 per cent of the tax savings we've achieved since 2005 could be undone in just one year,” Barr explained. “Taxpayers may lose the gains we have all worked so hard to achieve.”

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With operational efficiency at all-time highs, Hildahl said it will be difficult to find further savings. In the past decade, the Division has made great progress in shaving operational costs – for example, through strategies that have reduced natural gas consumption by 30 per cent and water consumption by 28 per cent.

In a survey conducted by the Division last spring, the clear majority of respondents said that cutting programs was the least desirable way to deal with budget challenges.

“They also told us that they place high value on programs focused on priorities like learning problems and disabilities, social justice and Aboriginal Education,” Hildahl said.

“Now we need to go back to our stakeholders to seek their input as to how to deal with this challenge. We need to consider immediate needs and long-term implications. For example, we could cut corners on infrastructure costs. But as every homeowner knows, the longer building maintenance is neglected, the more it may cost in the long run.”

Winnipeg School Division will seek input on its budget at a consultation meeting on February 27, 2012.

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