



Action needed on school board budget projections and resulting cuts

It is school board budget season and, as in previous years, districts are projecting deficits that will impact programming, jobs and services the public relies on. But unlike other years, the COVID-19 pandemic has created larger potential deficits for this fiscal year because new costs and additional pandemic expenses are causing a shortfall in projected revenues. Another factor in school board budgets is government funding for collectively bargained increases, known as “labour settlement funding.”

School districts, like most other local government entities, are not permitted to budget for a deficit. So, for the 2021/2022 budget processes, senior staff and trustees will try to find savings to bring revenue and expense predictions into alignment. Given the proportion of school district budgets spent on labour costs and core operations, members and the public face the prospect of cuts to programming, services and jobs provided by school districts.

As we are in the midst of a third wave of COVID, it is difficult to imagine what September might look like. We expect districts will be conservative in their budgeting due to the continued uncertainty of the pandemic, but are hopeful that the district budgets being contemplated now are based on worst-case scenarios.

Contingency funds budgeted

It is important to note that the B.C. government has budgeted for contingency funds should the pandemic continue, funds that could be used to help the K-12 sector manage costs.

The 2021/2022 B.C. Budget includes:

- \$3.25 million allocated for pandemic and recovery related needs
- \$2.15 million allocated to specific programs and measures
- \$1.1 billion is currently unallocated and reserved for “unanticipated urgent health or recovery measures”

Creating sustainability and avoiding damage

Work is being done to call on the B.C. Government to:

- Extend temporary COVID relief funding/apply provincial contingency funds and provide confirmation of this funding to school districts
- Continue daytime custodial and the higher standards of sanitation and maintenance in K-12
- Ensure that labour settlement funding is applied accurately to school districts, so that each and every district is fully funded for collective agreement cost increases.

This appeal to the B.C. government is happening now in an attempt to avoid damaging cuts and to enable school boards to build budgets with sustainable service levels.

Work is also needed at the local level to ensure that school boards are doing their part to mitigate the challenges of the coming year.

Locals are encouraged to call on their school districts to prioritize the maintenance of staffing levels and to apply less drastic budget projections to minimize the impact on programming. While a responsible approach to the risks of next year is encouraged, we must be vigilant about school boards and senior staff using uncertainty to justify austerity budgets. We must come out strongly against any and all austerity measures.

A reminder for local presidents, unit chairs or members who are interested in getting involved in the school board budget consultation process: register and [attend the School Board Budget Workshop](#), hosted by CUPE National, Wednesday, May 12 at 5:30 pm.

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