

This document is a consolidation of the questions submitted during the Public Budget Information Session which took place on April 24, 2024. Questions are outlined in blue below and are followed by responses. School-specific questions should be directed to the respective school.

A recording of the Session and a copy of the presentation can be found on the DPCDSB website.

1. If the funds are already earmarked for specific items - why would parent/community engagement be needed or encouraged? Are there specific areas where the board is seeking input?

Response

It is important for DPCDSB to hear from our school communities, parents/guardians and other stakeholders. As a result of a deficit position, there are limitations with regard to increasing budget allocations, however there are opportunities to highlight needs and consider re-distribution of budget funds to those areas. The budget development process involves discussion and input to ensure the Board of Trustees approve a budget that meets the needs and goals of DPCDSB as best it can. Comments and input are encouraged. These can be shared through your local area trustee or by email to communications@dpcdsb.org

2. What is the reason for declining enrolment at DPCDSB? Is there any correlation to the high cost of living in the GTA? What strategies are being undertaken to increase enrolment and retention of students? How does open access impact enrolment? What enrolment trends are expected in the future?

Response

DPCDSB works with our Planning Department to understand trends across our region. During the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, DPCDSB experienced a trend in families moving further away from the GTA due to the high cost of living/housing and increased opportunities for remote work. Many GTA boards experienced similar periods of enrolment decline, but are now seeing a slight turnaround. These trends impact both Catholic and public boards. The Ministry has predicted that full-day kindergarten enrolment for 2024-2025 will be lower on a provincial level. The Planning Department expects an overall enrolment decline to continue for a few more years and updates this analysis continuously to capture emerging trends.

A Long-Term Facilities Master Plan – Enrolment Report can be found on the DPCDSB website in the Administration and Finance Committee meeting agenda of April 9, 2024.

DPCDSB prepares and distributes information annually to promote registration at our elementary and secondary schools. Information is sent out to all families, shared with all parishes, placed on community signs and advertised on all DPCDSB social media platforms. DPCDSB also has a unique program through our parishes where information and documents are given to parents during preparations for Baptism.

Open access describes enrolment in secondary schools for all school boards. Prior to 1984, families paid for their children to attend Catholic secondary schools after grade 10. When the government extended

full funding to Catholic school boards for all secondary grades, there was a requirement to allow access to all students, not just Catholics. DPCDSB secondary schools generally retain the enrolment of all grade 8 students moving into secondary and gain 30% of secondary students from the Peel District School Board.

3. What is the financial impact of an enrolment reduction on the board's budget? Does the timing of when students enroll impact funding?

Response

Many grants are tied to enrolment so, as enrolment goes down, overall funding is reduced. However, some of these reductions can be offset by expenditure reductions. For example, with a reduced number of students, there are fewer classes required, so the board can adjust the level of staffing. There are some central, overhead expenditures and staffing that cannot be reduced as easily because most of that activity stays the same even though enrolment is declining, such as providing/maintaining IT networks or the payroll function.

The initial budget allocations are based on projected enrolment. In the fall, the allocations are revised based on actual enrollment for the number of students in school.

4. Has DPCDSB made requests to the Ministry to possibly close schools and buildings not in use?

Response

DPCDSB has made requests to close school buildings. Provincially there is a moratorium on school closures impacting all school boards. The Ministry is not willing to exempt DPCDSB, or any other school board, from the moratorium at this time. If and when the moratorium is lifted, there is a required Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) process that school boards must follow when identifying and preparing to close a school. There are also Ministry regulations around how surplus properties can be sold.

5. For schools that are not fully utilized, can space be rented out to daycare providers, leased to other school boards, converted to community centres or other uses? When space is rented out, where does the revenue go?

Response

Underutilized space, or empty pupil spaces, is an ongoing conversation. On an annual basis, the DPCDSB holds a Community Planning and Partnerships public meeting to solicit interest in sharing facilities. There have been a limited number of organizations that come forward and DPCDSB does have some current space lease arrangements in place. DPCDSB is always cognizant that sharing our school facilities with outside organizations has to be the right fit given the proximity of students. The majority of space use comes from permits and short term rentals. DPCDSB responds to requests from community groups and members and will try and match their needs to the spaces we have available.

The costs for utilities, custodians and the oversight of rentals and leases are all central costs of the board. When the spaces are rented out in schools, the proceeds from these rentals go to the central

operating accounts to offset these costs and to address the extra wear-and-tear on facilities caused by the extra use. Fees charged are based on cost-recovery, as required under the Ministry's Community Use of Schools program, with the exception of certain for-profit organizations.

6. How does the board fund facility maintenance projects? Do all schools receive the same amount? How are facility maintenance and enhancement needs prioritized?

Response

DPCDSB receives funding from the Ministry for School Renewal and School Condition Improvements – both are capital streams of funding. On an annual basis, DPCDSB receives approximately \$30 million, however the long-term projected needs of the board amount to over \$345 million for the next five years.

A Long-Term Facilities Master Plan – Facilities Conditions Report can be found on the DPCDSB website in the Administration and Finance Committee meeting agenda of April 9, 2024.

A recent initiative of the DPCDSB is the replacement of boulevard signs for all schools. This initiative is funded through School Renewal funding that is part of the capital funding from the Ministry. Given the limitations in funding, the initiative has been spread across a number of years.

The DPCDSB facilities team is aware of the challenges with all 151 schools and understands that facility enhancement needs must be balanced against maintenance and repairs of existing facilities in this challenging funding environment.

7. How does the budget allocation process work for special education funds? Are these funds also used to support Education Resource Workers (ERW's) and Early Childhood Educators (ECE's)?

Response

Special education funding from the Ministry of Education is enveloped, meaning that the board can only spend this funding on special education related expenditures and not reallocate funds to other areas. Despite this restriction, DPCDSB has fully spent all special education funding allocated each year over the past several years and additionally contributes \$2-\$3 Million in excess of the grant as the board recognizes the need for these supports. The projected special education envelope funding for the 2023-2024 fiscal year is \$117 million: projected special education envelope expenditures are \$120 million. Financial information is presented to the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) annually as part of the budget planning cycle. The majority of ERWs are funded out of special education funds with small amounts of funding coming from one-time grants. ECEs are funded through the JK/SK classroom funding allocation of the pupil foundation grant.

8. In the classrooms, there are pressures to increase the use of technology and online tools/resources. In addition, parent councils are funding technology for schools. Why is the board choosing not to allocate funds to refreshing/replacing technology devices?

Response

DPCDSB is working on a process to define the device-to-student ratio that can support the needs of schools and each grade level. The plan has to include a refresh model that is sustainable and achievable. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic years, there was a heightened awareness and need for technology related devices and resources and security, including enhanced network infrastructure, devices for students/staff, internet access and online learning resources. The Ministry of Education provided one-time funds to invest in technology which was welcome relief for all school boards, however one-time funding is not sustainable over time. The DPCDSB has over 63,000 devices of which more than half are older than four years or have reached end-of-useful life. The current Ministry funding for technology and network infrastructure needs does not support the refresh/replacement, resource or security needs for our system and this is common across all school boards.

9. The Long-Term Disability (LTD) plan is causing significant financial pressures for DPCDSB. What is the board doing to analyze the root cause of this budget pressure and what strategies can be put in place to address this as a main factor contributing to the board's deficit position? Can stakeholders get access to data regarding LTD costs and cases? Are Long COVID cases/numbers as well as other post viral conditions being tracked?

Response

The LTD issue that DPCDSB is facing is complex and one that the board cannot solve on its own. The LTD benefit is tied to the collective bargaining process which is bargained at the provincial level; it is mandatory that all collective agreement articles that are monetary are necessarily deemed central items. This means that any negotiations tied to cost sharing or employee contributions to the LTD plan must be negotiated by the parties at the central bargaining table.

The Ministry of Education is fully aware of the DPCDSB issue and is committed to work with DPCDSB toward a resolution under a Multi-Year Financial Recovery Plan (MYFRP).

DPCDSB continues to look for ways to mitigate the LTD impact on the financial position, including a recent change in plan provider and utilization reviews. Details of approved LTD cases remain with the LTD plan provider, who has responsibility for adjudication and oversight. As evidenced in the 5-year financial history, increasing costs associated with the LTD plan started just prior and during the COVID-19 pandemic years. The LTD plan is the major contributing factor to the deficit that continues to weigh heavily on DPCDSB financial resources.

10. How often are trades and trade contracts renewed and bid on by new companies since these are such large expenditures

Response

DPCDSB enters into most large contracts for a period of three to five years. Most vendors are not interested in entertaining a one or two year contract due to the commitment required and upfront investments to fulfill the contractual obligations.

11. Can you please expand on the National Food Program?

Response

On April 1, 2024, the federal government announced a \$1 billion investment over five years for a national school food program that would deliver meals to students starting in the 2024-2025 school year. There have been no specific details shared with DPCDSB with regard to funding at the local level or how the program will work. Information is expected soon in order for DPCDSB to implement the program for 2024-2025. Many schools have nutrition program funding through other partnerships and so it is expected that this national program will be an enhancement to what is already in place.

12. Can there be consideration to more flexibility given to school fundraising. How does the board determine where schools can raise funds versus what items are funded by the board? Many fundraisers are food-related sales and our family is concerned about healthy eating.

Response

DPCDSB recognizes the great work that Catholic School Councils, parents/guardians and staff/students contribute to fundraising initiatives that support schools and student needs. Fundraising is informed and guided by the DPCDSB mission and vision and Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) and must comply with municipal, provincial and federal legislation as well as the Ministry of Education Fundraising Guidelines - [School Fundraising Guideline](#)

DPCDSB has a Board of Trustee approved Policy and General Administrative Procedure (GAP) for Fundraising and Donations. This information can be sourced from the DPCDSB website. There are some imposed restrictions on fundraising that must be adhered to, including that fundraising activities must be complementary to, and not in replacement for, funding from the Ministry for public education.

Policy/Program Memorandum 150 ([PPM 150](#)) addresses the nutritional requirements for food and beverages sold on school premises and the limitations around exemptions.

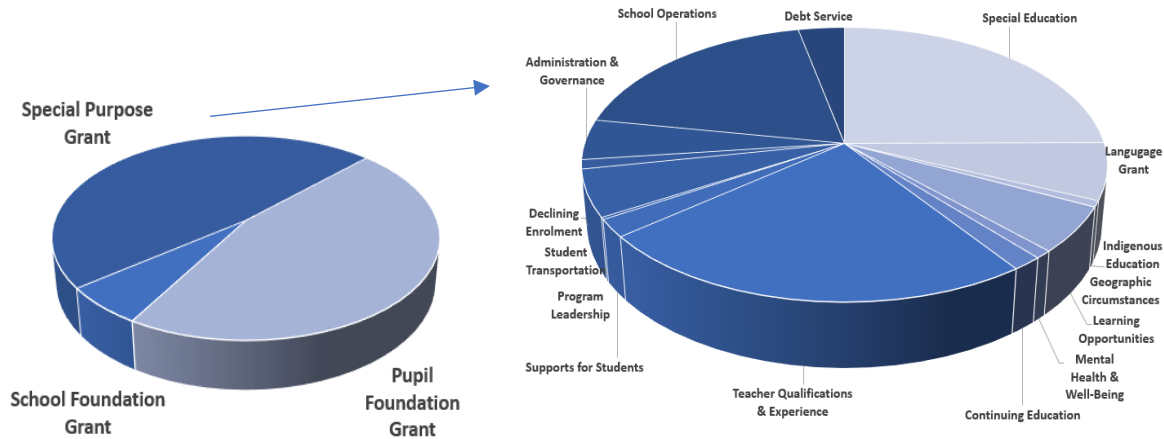
13. Do all boards receive the same budget? Is it a dollar amount per student? Is the per student amount increased for students with additional needs? Will amalgamation of schools improve overall funding?

Response

All school boards receive funding based on the same Ministry of Education funding model, the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). The total funding amount will vary by board based on enrolment, demographics, staffing and other variables.

Under the Pupil Foundation Grant and School Foundation Grant, all school boards are funded based on the same model. These grants are based strictly on enrolment and number of facilities. In addition to the Foundation grants, there are special purpose grants. The special purpose grants recognize the differences that exist across all school boards and thus, funding is based on different criteria, such as rural vs urban settings, transportation needs, special education and language needs.

The breakdown of funding for DPCDSB across all grants can be seen in the charts below.



Amalgamation of schools is not currently possible due to the moratorium on school closures by the Ministry. If DPCDSB was able to close schools, there could be cost savings achieved in building maintenance, utilities and operational efficiencies.

14. What are the long-term plans to rectify the deficit that does not compromise the quality of education for our children and maintain public confidence in the Board?

Response

As mentioned during the presentation, the sheer magnitude of the deficit renders it impossible to solve only at the local board level. The Ministry of Education has to be our partner in reaching a solution to this financial situation. The DPCDSB and its' Board of Trustees have always been budget conscious and have made difficult decisions to ensure financial stability for this board. All budget development discussions and proposed budget reductions are made in an effort to minimize any impact on the classroom and schools. Analysis of the needs of the organization is ongoing and updated on a regular basis. As stated in response to a question earlier in this document, DPCDSB spends above what is allocated for special education because of the resolve of our Board of Trustees and leadership team to ensure our students receive the supports they need.

DPCDSB has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that taxpayers money is used in a responsible way. The Public Budget Information Session is an opportunity to provide transparency and accountability to our

stakeholders around the challenges that DPCDSB is facing and to understand how education funding works.

DPCDSB is working with the Ministry of Education under the MYFRP. Ministry support is essential as the accumulated deficit is not a problem that can be solved locally.

15. Has the board considered elevating programming in schools such as enhanced arts programming, robotics and other enrichment programs to increase appeal?

Response

There are many programs currently offered at DPCDSB schools, including local and regional programs such as Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement (AP), French immersion, Extended French and several regional programs. Please connect with the Guidance department or principal of your local school for more information.

16. Who is responsible for advocating for more funds from the ministry and how successful have they been in the last 5 years?

Response

Advocacy happens in many forms – from parents/guardians, community members, students, school board staff and trustees. A number of provincial organizations work together to advocate to the Ministry on behalf of all school boards in Ontario. This includes the Board of Trustees as members of the Ontario Catholic School Trustee Association (OCSTA) and the Director of Education as a member of the Council of Directors of Education (CODE). Additionally, the Council of Senior Business Officials (COSBO) and the Ontario Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) include staff from all school boards that bring information forward to the Ministry for consideration. The Board of Trustees of the DPCDSB have sent many letters to the Minister of Education to address specific issues and concerns of DPCDSB.

In the last few years, the Ministry of Education has issued an *Education Funding Consultation Guide* to address education funding reform; through a series of guided questions, the Ministry receives feedback from school boards, trustee organizations and other stakeholders.

17. It is not uncommon for teachers to be out of pocket for expenses for their classrooms. How is this sustainable?

Response

DPCDSB does not expect educators to be out of pocket for classroom instructional resources. Schools receive a per-pupil budget allocation on an annual basis to address costs of operating the school, which includes the provision of classroom materials, however this budget allocation is limited and may not sufficiently fund all requests from educators. The school and Catholic School Councils often engage in fundraising events to support and supplement the funds available to invest in enhancing student

resources and events for students. A few years ago, the government introduced the *Eligible Educator School Supply Tax Credit* that allows a teacher or early childhood educator to claim a tax credit on up to \$1,000 of school supply purchases each year.

In addition to the per pupil allocation, there are many central departments that support schools. For example, Program and Learning Services and the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) departments often engage in a central purchase of resources that are then distributed to schools.

18. How much of the budget is allocated to ERW and ECE to retain them?

Response

Salaries and benefits for ECEs are provided through Ministry funding to support average class sizes for kindergarten. Classes with more than 15 students require a teacher and an ECE. The special education grant supports the majority of ERW positions that are working to support students with diverse learning needs within DPCDSB. The Ministry of Education recently announced funding to support the provision of release time for ECEs to attend professional development and learning sessions. ECEs will receive two days of release time over the next three year period for professional development and learning on topics of provincial priority, including reading, mathematics, equity, diversity and inclusion.

19. It would be disappointing if the LTD deficit driver is what results in the closure of our schools. What will the board be able to do to help us clear the LTD deficit from the budget as part of the long term deficit management plan, beyond cuts and closures?

Response

School closures is a topic that all school boards struggle with. Schools are often at the centre of communities and are a hub for many activities, bringing families together. However, there are also many concerns that come with school buildings that have underutilized space. DPCDSB has reported almost 16,000 unused pupil spaces in elementary schools alone; the equivalent of 32 elementary schools with 500 pupil spaces each. A significant cost is attributed to maintaining schools in good condition and ensuring efficient operation of the building. The Ministry of Education currently has a moratorium in place on school closures.

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The LTD issue that DPCDSB is facing is complex and one that the board cannot solve on its own. As mentioned during the presentation, the sheer magnitude of the deficit renders it impossible to solve only at the local board level. The Ministry of Education has to be our partner in reaching a solution to this financial situation.

20. How much does each school/board have to spend on lighting or safety gates on the property?

Response

School boards receive School Renewal and School Condition Improvement funding to address renewal needs and repair/replacement of key building components. School boards are restricted on spending 70% of this annual funding on targeted building needs, such as roofs, foundations, windows and mechanical systems. The remaining renewal funding is utilized for all other needs and repairs of facilities. There are no specific requirements for spend on lighting or safety gates, however DPCDSB is committed to energy conservation, enhancing energy performance and preventative maintenance. Over the last five year period, many schools and board facilities have been retrofitted with new LED lighting, creating energy efficiencies for DPCDSB.

The total estimated cost to address all repairs and other building component needs in DPCDSB schools over the next five years is approximately \$345 million.

21. Where can we get a copy of the slide deck to share at our upcoming School Council meeting?

Response

A link to the slides can be found on the [Board's public website](#) by clicking on the link in this response or by searching for the 2024-2025 Budget webpage.