



## **TDSB Budget Virtual Town Hall Meetings: Community Feedback**

**To:** Special Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee

**Date:** 9 July, 2020

**Report No.:** 07-20-3921

### **Strategic Directions**

- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the TDSB Budget Virtual Town Hall Meetings: Community Feedback report be received.

### **Context**

This year, as a result of the closure of schools and cancellation of in-person meetings at the TDSB due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the TDSB held two virtual budget town hall meetings to ensure that the community had an opportunity to hear directly from staff about the 2020-21 budget, and ask questions and provide feedback.

The meetings were held on Wednesday, July 8 at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. They were promoted on the TDSB website, budget webpage, social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), TDSB Connects for staff and parents/guardians, and through content for Trustee Newsletters.

The meetings began with a live presentation by Executive Officer Craig Snider on the 2020-21 operating budget. Participants were then able to ask questions and leave comments via ScribbleLive. Questions were answered by staff on video.

There were 179 unique page views (48 was the peak at one time) at the 1 p.m. town hall yesterday, and 75 unique page views (31 was the peak at one time) at 7 p.m. town hall.

In total, there were 19 questions/comments at the 1 p.m. town hall, and 14 questions/comments at the 7 p.m. town hall.

Some of the main themes of the questions/comments asked at the town halls were:

- Anti-oppression and anti-Black racism training for all staff
- Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement
- Technology for staff and students to support both in class and distance learning
- Safe return to school in September – costs associated with PPE, caretaking, safe drinking water locations, use to additional sites, smaller class sizes, etc.
- Ministry funding required to support COVID-19 costs and the safe return to school
- Status of Year 2 reductions
- Translation and interpretation services
- IB program
- Bell times
- Advocating for additional funding

Trustees who were unable to watch the town hall, or who would like to review the video or ScribbleLive feed, can access the full archived video and feed on the TDSB website:

[1 p.m. Virtual Budget Town Hall video and ScribbleLive feed archive](#)

[7 p.m. Virtual Budget Town Hall video and ScribbleLive feed archive](#)

Please see Appendix A for a summary of the questions and answers from the two Budget Town Halls.

## **Action Plan and Associated Timeline**

On July 15, a Special FBEC meeting will consider the information received during the town halls and delegations. With this information, Trustees will provide suggestions to staff on changes to the operating budget to be incorporated into the final draft budget.

During the period from July 16 to July 31, staff will update the budget with these recommendations and any new information.

The final report and 2020-21 operating budget will be submitted to Board Services for publication to Trustees and on the public website on July 31. A Special FBEC will recommend the final draft to Board on August 5, with approval of the budget at a Special Board August 6.

Staff will complete and submit the required budget documentation to the Ministry of Education on or before August 19.

## **Communications Considerations**

An archive of the ScribbleLive feed and the video recording have been posted to the TDSB website and linked to from the Budget page.

## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX A: TDSB Budget – Virtual Town Halls: Summary of Questions & Answers From**

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**TDSB Budget – Virtual Town Halls  
Summary of Questions & Answers**

**1 p.m. TDSB Budget – Virtual Town Hall**

**Q: Do professional learning or leadership and learning include anti-oppression and anti-Black racism training for all levels of staff?**

A: The TDSB's Academic team is working on developing these plans, which include equity training and these important topics.

**Q: Is the 1.9M for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement an annual expense or will it be spread over a longer period of time?**

A: It is an annual expense.

**Q: I know you can't comment on back to school plans, but can you tell us any more about what is being purchased for next year to make sure kids are safe when they go back to school? This is obviously a very nerve wracking time for parents**

A: We are working closely with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Toronto Public Health to identify what is needed (masks, gloves, shields, etc.) for when physical distancing is not possible. More details will be provided in the coming weeks to parents/guardians.

**Q: What has been the biggest challenge in developing this year's budget?**

A: The biggest challenge has been that there are so many unknowns and we just don't know what next year will look like at this point. Staff are working hard to plan for all of the different possibilities and build a budget that reflects that.

**Q: Explain a little bit more about how and why we are not making any reductions or changes to the base budget this year?**

A: We did not want to make any reductions or changes to the system during a year when there would already be so much uncertainty. We want to ensure as much stability as we can so that students learning can continue.

**Q: When do you expect to get the specifics about how much money the Ministry will be giving TDSB?**

A: We hope to hear imminently about specific technology, mental health and PPE amounts. Moving forward, we (and other school boards in Ontario) are requesting additional funding from the Ministry to support costs related to COVID-19.

**Q: Does the cleaning/custodial budget (or other budget?) include school improvements such as increased safe drinking water locations (water bottle filling stations, etc) or automatic doors?**

A: We are working to keep the budget status quo have not included increases at this time. We will look to our regular maintenance budget for any enhancements that are required. At this time, our primary focus is enhanced cleaning.

**Q: I appreciate that you are trying to keep the deficit within the permitted envelope but why is there no contingency planning for the rental of additional facilities and staff that may be needed should the decision be made to keep classes to 15 students?**

A: We are facing a challenge because we are trying to build a budget ahead of the finalization of our plan for the return to school. If there are additional needs identified in this plan, then we will have to incur these costs. We are working with the best information that we have right now.

**Q: Thought last yr's budget was a 2 yr plan and that you were committed, when you submitted it for approval in Jun 2019, to enacting the cuts you had planned or substitute other cuts of same value for 2020-21. According to what you just presented some of these cuts will not occur (at all - or at planned level). Yet it seems like you are starting with a fresh slate this yr and just bound by the 1% rule (nothing from last yr). Can you clarify, pls?**

A: We have not made all of the cuts planned for 2019-2020. Our budget is a living document that changes at different points in time (based on additional revenues, for example). While we are in a balanced budget position right now, we will need a deficit recovery plan for 2021-2022 because we are using reserves to balance next year's budget.

**Q: What more is needed in terms of funding from the province?**

A: Complete funding of costs related to COVID-19 is required. School boards across Ontario are feeling the same pressure and need help from the province so that programs don't have to be adjusted to recover this cost.

**Q: How did you get to 3 additional healthcare roles and 96 additional caretakers as the "right number" to support & protect TDSB's 600 schools in Covid times?**

A: Building this budget has been a team effort from all departments. The Health and Safety department identified these as the appropriate levels needed to support the system and the cleaning required as per current protocols. If protocols change, we will look at the staffing levels and adjust if required.

**Q: How will you accommodate a 15 to 1 teacher -pupil ratio within the current GSN.**

A: Right now, it appears that the plan will be to cohort students so only half the students will attend each day. Our Academic team would be better to answer this question, but more information will be shared with parents/guardians and the community in the coming weeks.

**Q: With the additional technology expense, what is the goal regarding student to device ratio? Should school based devices still be shared by students in the classroom?**

A: Our goal is to get as close to 1:1 as possible. Students will keep the technology that was rolled out to them in the spring until we are back to school full time. When students are back full time, that technology will be returned to the schools. More information about this will be presented at the July 15 FBEC meeting. Our planning has taken into consideration the disinfecting of technology, and other items.

**Q: Don't remember exact wording but at one point you wrote that costs may decrease as infection gradually declines. All current talk about the coming of the 2nd wave suggests this is not likely. Have you planned a budget for 2020-21 that will incur COVID costs/reductions for the whole school yr (too much to process for me to understand this!)**

A: We are trying to plan and budget as best as we can given that this is a fluid situation. The reality is that we will need to experience the first month or two of school to get a better sense of what supports our staff and students need in reality. The bottom line is that the health and well-being of our students and staff is our top priority, and we will adjust the forecast to ensure all supports necessary are in place.

**Q: With 12,000 new chromebooks what is the student : device ratio goal? Will existing shared devices not be used in schools?**

A: More information on this is being prepared for the July 15 meeting, specifically what the ratio will be when the technology is back in schools. The long-term goal is to get as close to 1:1 as possible. Students who received the technology during the closure of schools will keep it as we don't know what the fall will look like just yet and we want to ensure they have full access to their learning.

**Q: Is there money to help provide staff with their own devices, especially if remote learning continues?**

A: Unfortunately I don't have an answer to this today, as it is something we will have to look at with our Academic team.

**Q: How will you be soliciting info from parents on their intent to send their kids to school on day 1? How responsive will your budget be to that info?**

A: A survey will be going out closer to the end of July and the results will help us plan as we will have a better idea of how many families are planning to send their children back to school right away in September. We are working with the Toronto Student Transportation Team (consortium with the Toronto Catholic District School Board) to hopefully be able to transport all eligible students and meet all current capacity requirements. We understand, however, that many parents won't be able to make decisions until our plans come out. We understand this challenge.

**Q: How much info will be available before that survey goes out?**

A: Staff have been developing the plan and a draft for discussion purposes will be shared likely next week to start the public conversation. We are aiming to get it out as soon as we can. We are required to present a finalized plan to the Ministry on August 4. We want to help parents make an informed decision as early as possible.

### **7 p.m. TDSB Budget – Virtual Town Hall**

**Q: Do parents have any say in this budget? How can we influence the budget?**

A: There are several ways that you can get involved and have your say. The comments and questions from today's town halls will be provided to trustees. You can also depute tomorrow at FBEC. The deadline has been extended to 10 a.m. tomorrow morning. You can also contact your trustee directly. And advocate with us to the provincial government for adequate funding.

**Q: I heard Minister Lecce say that the government is funding schools boards at record levels - is this true? what other funding do you need?**

A: Funding from the Ministry increases every year because of inflation, as well as collective agreement settlements. Collective agreement settlement funding is flow through funding – we receive the funding, but it flows directly to staff.

**Q: Will the shortfall in IB program savings further affect cost to families and equitable access to the program?**

A: No, it will not. The change will impact our budget but not the fees for the IB program. There are no plans to change the fee structure.

**Q: Are school bell times still changing next year?**

A: There will be no additional changes to bell times other than the ones that we announced last year (to be implemented this year). It's important to note that changing the bell times eliminated the need for 55 drives. Given our current challenges with COVID-19, this will help lessen the pressure on transportation.

**Q: How can parents persuade the provincial government for more funding for school boards? From your presentation it seems that more support is critically needed to open the schools in September.**

A: You can write to your local MPP, contact the Premier, contact the Minister of Education, and advocate with us for the additional funding that all school boards need to deal with additional costs associated with COVID-19.

**Q: I am worried about making the schools safe and maybe adding additional space to our schools? Are we going to be adding more portables to gain more separated space? Is there money for this and appropriate safe portables available? In school daycares are only licenced for part time space usage. Is the TDSB making plans for expanding for the full day care that will be needed if we are doing alt days? Thank you!**

A: We are focussed on ensuring the learning environment for student and staff is safe. This is our top priority. Current Ministry guidance is to cohort students and only have 15 students in a classroom. We are using this to build a model for the fall. We believe that we have enough space for our students across system. We will provide more information on this soon. We are also continuously working with childcares to ensure that students are accommodated this fall. This work is ongoing.

**Q: A lot of families in my ward are having trouble accessing information. how will this information be available apart from interpretation services**

A: Our website contains all of the latest information – all committee meetings are broadcast, the budget website contains the latest financial information and updates, and all FBEC meetings are recorded and broadcast. You can always contact your trustee with any questions. Reopening plans will also be posted online.

**Q: What about support for black students? Is there any funding for anti black racism**

A: We are investing \$1.9M in the new Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, as well as money for professional development that supports our equity goals and Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

**Q: What more is needed in terms of funding from the province?**

A: We request additional funding for COVID-19 expenses. If these expenses increase based on what happens in the fall, we will be faced with budget challenges. Other Ontario boards are in the same position. No school board can adapt to an issue of this magnitude.

**Q: Do we know specifically how much more funding we are receiving for technology. It seems like this funding will be more important than ever for students and staff**

A: We anticipate that the TDSB will receive \$1.8M of the provincial funding for technology. We also hope that the provincial government understands that we need additional funds to support learning from home. In the spring, we distributed more than 60k devices to students. These devices will stay with students so that we can remain fluid because we don't yet know what the fall will look like for our students.

**Q: Why did you cut the Research positions including the most experienced and dedicated researcher of the board at the same time hiring many contractors for the research department? How did this save budget last year since you have more spending in 2019-20?**

A: This was one of a number of different departments impacted as part of last year's budget as we were required to achieve more than \$67.8M in reductions. We are trying to effectively deploy our staff given the resources we have, focussing on the achievement, health and safety, and well-being of students.

**Q: Further to Mathu's question about funding to support Black students and anti-Black racism, is there an opportunity for parents to see:**

- the breakdown of allocation within PD?
- the breakdown of Centre for Excellence budget?

A: Yes. That information will be coming forward to Trustees in the coming weeks. As you know, we are investing \$1.9M in incremental spending for the new Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

**Q: what about language services? for families that are not able to speak English**

A: This budget will see an additional \$600,000 invested in translation and interpretation services to effectively communicate with students and families during this time of uncertainty as a result of COVID-19. All of the major letters we have produced on this topic, and will continue to produce, have been translated and are available on the TDSB website. While not perfect, Google translate can also be used on the TDSB website, in addition to the officially translated letters.

**Q: Earlier this year we heard talk of cutting librarian allocations? Should we expect changes and how does that fit with primary literacy goals?**

Note: this question was submitted late and an answer was not provided.