

COMMITTEE REPORT
EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
PUBLIC MEETING
April 23, 2024 – 6:00 p.m.

TRUSTEES: Amanda Dowhy, Board Chair
Russ Chipps (virtual)
Ebony Logins
Allison Watson
Cendra Beaton, Vice Chair
Christine Lervold
Trudy Spiller

STAFF: Paul Block, Superintendent
Harold Cull, Secretary-Treasurer
Monica Braniff, Deputy Superintendent
D’Arcy Deacon, Associate Superintendent
Fred Hibbs, Executive Director, HR
Steve Tonnesen, Manager, IT Operations
David Lee Bonar, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by the Board Chair. Amanda Dowhy acknowledged the traditional territories of the First Nations. The Board Chair acknowledged stakeholders and members of the public participating in the meeting and reminded media to direct their questions to the Manager of Communications.

The Board Chair provided an overview of a Conflict-of-Interest Declaration and asked the Committee members if they had any concerns. Trustee Chipps declared a Conflict-of-Interest.

The Board of Education received numerous pieces of correspondence concerning the recommended budget plan. Each of these pieces of correspondence have been responded to by the Board Chair and have been retained for record keeping purposes.

2. COMMITTEE REPORT

No Committee Report.

3. PRESENTATIONS

Standing Delegations (SPEAC, SPVP, CUPE 459, STA)

Member groups were given an opportunity to speak to the presentation.

SPEAC-Tom Davis

SPEAC spoke of its concern to the potential reduction to over ratio counselling by 1.37 FTEs, and the potential elimination of the full ECE pilot project which employs 11 FTEs.

Sooke Principals and Vice Principals (SPVP)-Mark Johnson /Ruchi McArthur

Representations from SPVP spoke of the strength of our organization and the clear mandate that it received from the Executive Team with regards to potential reduction mitigation strategies. A robust conversation at the leadership level occurred, the membership supports the recommended budget put forth by staff.

CUPE 459 -Amber Leonard

The CUPE 459 President thanked staff for the 2024/25 Budget Development Process presentation. She requested a change to process following the reduction in allocation announcement from the District. She would like in future for stakeholders to reconvene if the District receives less than the anticipated allotment from the Ministry of Education and Child Care. She asked that the Board of Education consider using their budget reserve, consider increasing rental rates for community use, and spoke of her concern to the potential reduction to custodial coverage (\$150K), the possible elimination of the ECE Pilot Project (11 FTEs), and asked the District to stop contracting services to external agencies as Digital Solutions and Facilities currently uses this practice.

STA-Rita Zeni

Acting President Rita Zeni raised her concern over the potential reduction of Department Teacher Coordinators (3FTE), the possible reduction in over ratio counselling (1.37 FTE) and the reduction in district wide support teachers (\$298K). She asked the Board of Education to review senior management level expenses, and dip into its budget reserve to balance the upcoming budget.

Further the STA has specific questions that it asked the Executive Team. The Acting President will provide these questions to the Board Chair for a response.

Delegations (Members of the Public)

Members of the Public were given an opportunity to speak, and the Board of Education received multiple questions via MS Teams. The comments have been summarized in the following groups:

Eliminate Itinerant Staff Supports for Large Elementary Schools

A staff member spoke about her concern around the elimination of itinerant staff that support large elementary schools. She indicated that clerical members are unable to complete their daily tasks within school hours, and that some are working outside of school hours to keep up. Further they rely on the itinerant staff being on hand when they need to meet accounting deadlines etc. Presently the job load at the large elementary level is unsustainable.

Reduction to Custodial

A staff member spoke regarding the potential reduction of approximately 2 FTE thereby increasing M² coverage. The cleaning protocols introduced during the pandemic have caused issues and custodians find meeting their current workload almost impossible. In addition, when space is rented, it increases the demand on custodians. The Public believes that rental costs should be increased to cover the potential deficit and that no cuts to the custodian budget should occur.

Reduction to Library Assistant Budget

3 members of staff spoke about the need for Library's in our schools, and the need for funded Library Assistants. A potential 15% reduction of the current \$348K budget is being considered (which equals a potential reduction of \$52, 253). The public reminded the Board of Education that a library is a safe space for all students, an essential hub, meeting place and classroom. Further early literacy should be encouraged and the library fully stocked.

Eliminate Early Childhood Educators (ECE) Pilot Project

45 members of the public raised their concerns over the possible elimination of the ECE Pilot Project (11 FTEs) at the Sooke School District. ECEs work with young children from birth to age five; they create and run educational programs that fuel children's intellectual, physical, social and emotional growth. The public felt this critical program should be fully funded and expanded to all classrooms. The loss of this program would be felt immensely by the school, students, and community.

Of note, the District indicated that the 11 FTE currently in the ECE Pilot Project would have the opportunity to remain within our District in EA positions (within Collective Agreement guidelines); as both are CUPE positions, they would keep their seniority, hours would be based on the position accepted, and both roles have similar wage grids.

Busing Fee Model/Reduction in Transportation Routes/Imposing Walk Limits

2 members of the public commented on the busing model fee (\$300/student), and the financial burden it will create for families. Of note, the District does have a fee waiver process in place. In addition, catchment areas may need review if walk limits are imposed. Lastly the public had an issue with the way the Ministry of Education and Child Care defines geographical locations and did not approve of the reduction in routes.

Reduction in Over Ratio Counselling

2 members of the public asked the Board of Education to reconsider the possible reduction in over ratio counselling (1.37 FTE). The public believes that an increase in elementary hours should be considered.

4. BUSINESS

24/25 Budget Plan – Harold Cull

Over the last several years the School District has seen record growth and manageable inflation, this has allowed the District the opportunity for innovation and to add staff and supports to classrooms. Further, much needed requests for infrastructure have been granted by the Ministry of Education and Child Care. However, we are in the midst of an economic shift and current projections show enrolment may be beginning to level after years of record growth. If the inflation and enrolment trends we are seeing follow this path, the District will continue to face fiscal challenges in future years and the Board of Education will need to reassess its financial position alongside revenues and pressures.

Through an extensive consultation process with its leadership team and stakeholders, staff have devised a recommended budget plan for the Board of Education to consider. *As per Section 113 of the School Act (a) a board, by bylaw must adopt an annual budget on or before June 30 of each year for the next fiscal year.*

The School District has a budget pressure of \$2.8M. It is comprised of:

- Employee Benefits - \$1.8M pressure
- Utilities - \$.600M pressure
- Geographic Location - \$.400M pressure

Staff took a balanced approach when reviewing mitigation options. All employee groups were treated fairly and equally. The following were assessed:

- Busing fee models
- Reallocate/reduce staffing levels
- Reduce transportation routes/walk limits
- Reduce department budgets (no school budgets)

The Superintendent took the Board of Education through its recommended budget plan and spoke to the specific potential reductions. Further there were some questions regarding the District's reserve, and the

recommended notion from the Ministry of Education and Child Care that School District have 2% of its funding kept in a reserve for emergency occurrences and one-time funding requests. If the Board approves all recommended measures, staff are projecting an estimated 2024/25 year end reserve of 1.53%.

Staff will provide clarification on the number of classrooms that are currently served by ECEs, if there is an anticipated surplus in school year 2023/24 once Q3 is completed, and if an increase to rental fees is agreed to, a motion to proceed.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 p.m.