

Senior staff at Trillium Lakelands Board of Education made sure trustees were aware at their regular September meeting of the challenges they're facing — including upgrading HVAC systems.

The challenge, according to superintendent of business Tim Ellis, is that although the board received additional funding for HVAC updates of more than \$500,000, boards only have eight weeks to spend it or lose it.

Ellis said apart from ordering new filters and investigating new technologies, TLDSB is waiting on a handful of companies who are now booked into next year to make any real changes to the board's heating and cooling systems — making the government's imposed eight-week deadline all but impossible to follow.

“We are hoping to convince the province to give us more time to contract and spend those funds,” Ellis said.

Trillium Lakelands has received almost \$2 million in additional funding from the province to be spent on PPE, HVAC improvements, transportation, distance learning and additional staffing.

He told trustees of the realities of trying to order PPE and HVAC filters at a time of high demand and low supply.

“There is a backlog on filters,” Ellis told trustees, “because of new legislation in some American states where shopping

malls have been forced to upgrade their HVAC systems.”

Trustees also heard about the likely suspension of the Program Enhancement Fund that supports programs like Trillium Lakelands Arts Camp, the board's concern about having financial flexibility moving forward and the issues being faced trying to roll-out the Learning at Home program for those who chose not to return to learning in person.

Superintendent of Schools Dave Golden, whose portfolio includes the Program Enhancement Fund, updated trustees on the program and changes that may be coming to how it may run in the future.

Every year the board sets aside considerable funds (last year it was \$279,000) to support staff-generated activities that act as enrichment outside the regular curriculum. For 2019-2020, 98 projects were approved but because of labour disagreements and the pandemic many were not completed and \$91,000 remains unspent.

“This may be the last time this kind of money will be available,” Director of Education Wes Hahn said.

Golden told trustees that new mandates from the Ministry of Education have directed boards that until boards are running a surplus again spending like this fund may be a thing of the past.

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