

# Public school board passes \$298+ budget

By Andy Johnson

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The board of trustees at the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board passed this year's budget June 30, to the tune of \$298,362,236, marking an increase of almost \$4.5-million over last year's budget.

The extra expenditures will be funneled towards hiring more staff and purchasing supplies to help students with special needs. However the increase was approved on the condition that the board receive extra special education funding from the Ministry of Education, which is expected to roll out through the Ministry's Cycle 5 Intensive Support Amount program.

The board is confident the money will be forthcoming, as Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy sent a letter stating all Ontario school boards' claims under the program will be covered by the 2004-2005 budget.

The budget is good news for students, according to Port Hope trustee Erin Brown.

"Anything focused on student achievement is a good thing, and that is where this budget is focused," she said.

The budget includes the following:

• A 2-per-cent increase in salary and benefits funding;

• A 2-per-cent increase for school supplies, textbooks and computers;

• \$1.6-million in new funding to cover the first phase in the provincial class-size cap plan for students from kindergarten to Grade 3;

• A \$950,000 increase to transportation grants;

• A 5.2-per-cent increase in school operation grants, 3.2 per cent, or \$629,500, of which is earmarked for increased utility costs.

The high points, from Ms. Brown's perspective, include the extra \$1.6-million to help the board implement the class cap, and new spending on literacy in the primary grades.

She is also excited about a poverty intervention program the board has had for a number of years. It was championed by former chair Bob Willsher, who passed away due to cancer a few years ago. The board has allocated \$50,000 to the program this year. It gives each high school \$2,000 to spend how it sees fit, on areas such as helping students go

on field trips or purchase necessary sports equipment, or breakfast programs, as well as a \$20,000 fund which schools can apply to for specific programs. While the program is a gem in the school board's spending list, Ms. Brown would like to see spending increased in the future.

The low points, or shortfalls, of the budget mainly stem from the fact the board does not yet have all the information it needs on funding that has been announced, but not yet rolled out or detailed. It makes it tough to form a budget, said Ms. Brown.

"The frustration with this is we don't know what a lot of our dollars are yet, and we will be doing major revisions in the fall."

Those areas include special education, and the voluntary moratorium on school closures. The ministry has pledged funding in both areas, but boards haven't seen it yet, and don't know what it will amount to.

Board chair Angela Lloyd said the board still expects to collect its share of a promised provincewide \$345-million for literacy and numeracy, ISA funding, pupil accommodation, the rural education strategy and technology.

"We look forward to receiving the details on our share of these additional funds, once they are announced. As always, our focus will be on using our resources to improve achievement of our students," she said in a press release.

This year, the school board's budget envelopes are less flexible than in other years, said Ms. Brown. For example, envelopes such as school renewal or new pupil place grants must only be spent on those areas. That puts the KPR board in a tough spot. Because of its rural nature, and the high number of small schools, the board has come up short on its principal budget. This year the board made a decision not to twin any more schools to share one principal, so the needed funding must come from somewhere else.

The only spending areas the board is allowed to borrow from are administration and governance, so that must be the source of the money needed to meet the principal salaries, Ms. Brown said.

The budget includes an anticipated decrease of 577 students this year as a result of declining enrollment.

## The Colborne Chronicle



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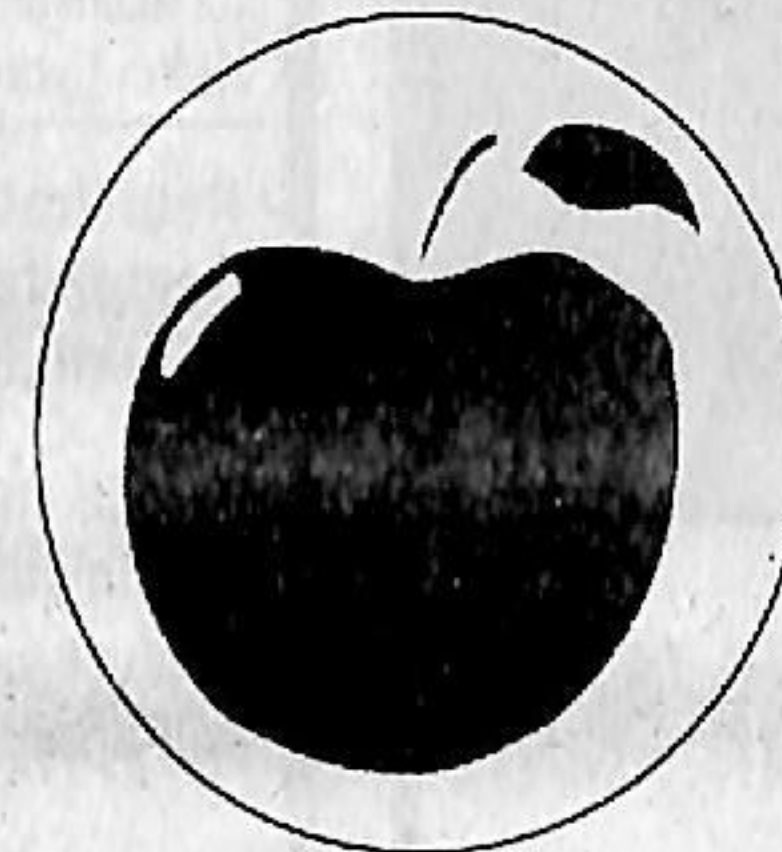
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