

Trustees eye limiting Kindergarten classes

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That has meant that parents haven't had to line up to enroll their children, or enter a lottery for a limited number of available spaces.

For the coming year, the extra demand over what is provincially funded is expected to result in 10 additional classes, at a total cost of about \$1.35 million.

"Our tendency has been to meet the demand, but with the news of the shortfall, I think we need to look at this," says Oakville Trustee Anthony Danko. "The sentiment at some boards is only to move as quickly as the funds allow."

The board currently offers the all-day program at 10 schools, with an expansion to an additional nine schools this September. The program is to be offered at all schools across the province by September 2014, at which point it is expected to be fully funded.

Danko admits that limiting the numbers in the program would upset people, particularly with next year's Kindergarten enrolment already underway, but says otherwise the board will need to cut the money from somewhere else.

"In some ways, I think it's easier to not put something in place than to dismantle something that's already there," he said.

Trustees heard that the provincial operating grant for 2012/13 will be \$265.7 million, up 0.6 per cent from this school year. However, the increase is only because of a

similar increase in enrolment, explained board senior administrator Stacey Zucker.

With the grant essentially flat-lined for the year, the board will find itself about \$2.4 million in the hole just to cover its current programs and operations. Add in the rising cost of utilities and transportation, as well as some spending the board has identified as priority, and the deficit could rise to \$3.5 or \$4 million, Zucker told trustees.

By law, school boards are not allowed to run deficits, so staff will be looking at a variety of ways to balance the budget, she added.

In addition to reviewing all departmental budgets to "squeeze out the last little bit that we can," staff will also review non-classroom staffing levels, deferred maintenance possibilities and staff development areas.

The preference for spreading the cuts across a number of areas has come about as the result of an "in-depth consultation process" undertaken recently, said Zucker.

Through discussions with staff, committees, school councils, union representatives and the public, staff found no evident consensus on areas where spending cuts should be made. An online public survey rated various board activities for importance, and resulted in ratings ranging from 3.63 to 4.26 out of 5.

"If you rounded them, they'd all be four out of five," said Zucker, who suggested the results imply that everything the board does is important to someone.



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