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School funding 'manageable,' Crothers says

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

Cautious school boards in York Region aren't celebrating, even after hearing they'll win with Ontario's new basic formula for funding education.

The per-pupil "foundation grant" based on students, not levied from local taxes — raises operating grants 8.6 per cent for the district Catholic board, and 4.6 per cent for the district public board, over three years.

Catholic and more rural boards have more to gain, while richer boards in Toronto and Ottawa-Carleton stand to lose many millions in operating grants.

But other "special purpose" grants — covering school construction and maintenance, special education, transportation and other key areas for the growing region — have not been revealed, and won't be for a week or two.

"Nobody's waving flags because there are a lot of unknowns right now," said Catholic board spokesperson Chris Cable, adding the board's treasurer John Sabo will try to give its trustees an overview Tuesday.

"Don't expect definitive numbers," Cable warned yesterday.

Public board chair Bill Crothers warned the operating grant numbers are projections, not guaranteed amounts.

"We get more money than last year but we've got more students to educate," Crothers said.

The Markham trustee said the province hasn't clearly defined the categories in which it wants money spent. "What," he asked, "do they include in school administration?"

The new funding system will force the board to make adjustments, Crothers added, "but our first impression is that it's quite manageable."

JK coming this fall?

York Region's district school board will run its own Junior Kindergartens this coming school year — it's a question of how many and when, says board chair Bill Crothers.

The board announced this week that the program, cut after provincial support for it was slashed in 1996, would be coming back.

But trustees and parents won't know for at least two weeks if can start in September, said Crothers.

"People want answers," acknowledged the Markham trustee. "We're try-

ing to buy ourselves another month."

He suggested the board is running short of time for a September start. Adding 10,000 four-year-old pupils by then also means finding 100 teachers and 100 classrooms, Crothers said.

The province's new funding formula includes an Early Learning Grant, which the ministry of education says will give boards flexibility to offer "alternative learning programs" for students in early grades or start-up JKs.

"It's a local decision," said ministry spokesperson Danielle Gauvin.

Move okay: local Tory

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al Liberals, Prentice and Cross hold a different view. At the grassroots level, the party's strong. The grassroots has "a strong voice," and that voice is not calling for a merger, said Prentice.

While a life-time PC, Stouffville resident Cliff Moss, 81, is not disturbed by the loss of its party leader. "Charest did the right thing," said Moss. "It's for the good of Canada. I believe in Canada. I think Mr. Charest and (Prime Minister Jean) Chretien will work well together. I've never voted Liberal in my life but I'm happy with this. Mr. Chretien and Charest will get along for the good of the country."

A merger between the Reformers and the PCs would only be accepted if it was done to guarantee a united coun-

try, said Moss. "If that's what it would take to save Canada from separation, then okay. But not for any other reason," said Moss.

The PCs will host a leadership race either this summer or fall. While Prentice is suggesting the party take a hard look at former cabinet minister Perrin Beatty or former party leader Joe Clark, Cross thinks otherwise. "I'd rather see a new face than someone recycled," said Cross.

The local Tories do agree — the year ahead will be interesting. And the local PCs are not waiting for the party's upper crust to lead the way. Plans to map out the party's future are underway at the local level. The Oak Ridges PCs holds their annual meeting on April 27, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Lions Hall in Richmond Hill.



Esther Rose (left) and Krista Lawrenson, both Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank volunteers, pack a parcel with foodstuff at the Ninth Line foodbank on Thursday March 26. With the coming of Easter, the foodbank is facing tight times and is asking for food donations.

Food bank kicks off annual Easter drive

JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Reporter

Canned tuna and salmon, spaghetti sauce, cheese spread, pudding mixes, shampoo, tooth paste and tea and coffee are all on the need-list for the Easter food drive getting under way on April 3.

The food drive, designed to ward off hunger for about 300 Whitchurch-Stouffville residents, including 150 children runs until April 11.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank spokesman Jean Anderson said, at this time, the bank has enough canned goods, baby food and pasta but needs lots of other non-perishable

items.

Donations are being accepted now. Food bank bins are set up at The Tribune, Weston Foods, the IGA, the A&P and the local fire hall.

If Anderson and the other food bank volunteers have their way, no one in Stouffville will go hungry at Easter, she said.

Anderson pointed out that housing costs for people living on welfare takes most of their allotment and need the foodbank to get through.

During last year's holiday seasons, the giving at the local food bank tripled.

Food bank volunteers were overwhelmed with the generosity shown, she said.

Gaming club coming to Markham

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

A casino operator has picked a Markham hotel to house its permanent York Region gaming club, a tentative deal the consortium and hotel say would directly create up to 450 jobs.

Embassy Suites Hotel has signed a letter of intent to rent space to Trillium Gaming Inc., the corporation offered an eight-year provincial contract to run a charity casino in eastern York Region, a spokesperson for the hotel confirmed this week.

"We've made an arrangement of a sort wherein

we would be the landlord," the spokesman said.

He added the hotel on Hwy. 7 at Warden Ave. plans to add a banquet hall and a convention facility if a casino deal goes through, leading to 40 or 50 new jobs for hotel staff.

The casino itself means 300 to 400 jobs, each paying, including benefits, \$35,000-40,000 a year, said Ron Richards, a spokesperson for Trillium.

The province has said such casinos can run 24 hours a day and have 40 table games and 150 video lottery terminals. Richards, a consultant acting for Trillium, said the Toronto corporation believes the hotel, central and yet not close to residents, is the "by far and away the best site all around."

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