

Will public budget provide anything new for students?

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

Public school trustees are set to approve a budget for the coming school year but there's debate as to whether it will contain anything new for the average student in their board.

As part of a package they expect to approve with few changes next month, York Region District School Board trustees are to look at a proposed budget tonight. The budget stands around \$583 million and will cover a vast range of items, from office supplies to salaries for the

board's most senior officials.

It also contains some extra money for student programs, such as special education, according to budget committee vice-chairperson Virginia Hackson.

"I think it's a good news budget. Anytime we have additional services, to me that's a good news budget," she said.

Highlights of the budget include:

- An increase of nearly 7.5 per cent over last year's total;
- Extra funding for early literacy programs and an additional \$2.8 million for special education;
- A hike of almost two per cent to the teacher salary grid and a related pay increase for senior bureaucrats.

Citing teacher contracts that expire Aug. 31, Hackson declined to comment on why there's more money in the budget for senior staff members' salaries.

"My concern in talking about this is we are in negotiations with the teacher federations and I hesitate to say anything that would jeopardize our negotiations," she said.

Board chairperson Bill Crothers noted senior staff are to get pay increases similar to any attained by teachers but said the money set aside for salaries is "very limited".

Some departments are getting additional cash to hire more employees, he added.

The board has to address several issues, including extra-curricular activities and extra money, to prevent teachers from striking Sept. 1.

Asked whether the extra cash will be enough to satisfy teachers, Crothers said, "I would hope it would be, but it would appear with all the issues that are surfacing with various pieces of legislation, that will be just one issue of concern (for negotiators)."

Crothers said the budget will not offer anything new for the average student. "For students in the board, it should be absolutely no different. We have a little more money to spend for children," he said.

Trustees are to examine the budget, which doesn't contain any significant cuts to programs, at the board office at 60 Wellington St. W., Aurora after 7:30 p.m.

They are to give the document official approval July 4.

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