

## RESULTS OF CONSULTATIONS, 2014-2015 OCDSB BUDGET

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Over the period January to May 2014, I undertook consultations on the 2014-15 OCDSB Budget with all of the school councils in River Zone. I received input at council meetings, as well as in written form from school councils and individual parents. Below is a summary of the input I received.

The four areas of greatest concern are:

1. Insufficient numbers of EAs, both in-school and itinerant/emergency, to deal with students with special education and behavioral needs at the elementary level;
2. The relatively large size of Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) classes in some schools, and the implications for learning and physical space;
3. The need for outdoor learning centres and play spaces, and the importance of flexibility in Board support in different school environments;
4. The need for more technology resources in terms of equipment (including mobile devices), acceleration of training for teachers and outreach to parents.

Other concerns, stated less frequently are:

- The need for more VP allocation in schools with highest needs. This is particularly acute in the case of a school such as Clifford Bowey, which only has 25% of one VP's time.
- Greater "enrichment" activities (eg. science fairs) for secondary students with dual exceptionalities, including giftedness
- Library resources- both reading material and technician support
- Transportation for field trips and team sports

## THE NEED FOR MORE EA's

This was by far the greatest concern expressed during my consultations. Parents are aware that the services provided by our Board in the area of special education are better than in many other Boards in Ontario. However, I heard a number of examples of the inadequate number of EAs in regular classes. This is particularly acute when one or two students require most of the time of the school-based EAs, leaving other students with special needs or behavioral problems under-served. I heard a similar concern regarding itinerant EAs. It is challenging to secure itinerant support when needed, due to great demand on itinerant EA resources. I know of instances in which students were asked to stay home for at least part of the day until resources could be secured.

## LARGE SIZE OF FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN (FDK) CLASSES

Many School Councils and individual parents are concerned about the relatively large size of FDK classes. While there is recognition that there are two adults (teachers and Early Learning Educators - ECEs) in the class, there is concern that the sheer number of children will be detrimental to student learning and well being. There are related concerns regarding the size and configuration of the original classrooms in some schools, as well as the size of outdoor play spaces to accommodate more students. In previous years the Board has made some provisions for large class sizes by funding new classes. We may have to look at this again in the 2014-2015 Budget.

## OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTRES AND PLAY SPACES

Many School Councils raised the need for new or modified outdoor learning centres and play spaces. These ranged from a costly but needed specialized play space for senior students with developmental disabilities to a modular approach to outdoor learning space that could include trees, boulders and gardens. The problem of fundraising by school councils was a constant theme, and the challenge of matching a \$25,000 grant from the Board was seen as

insurmountable by most. The need for flexibility in Board support was noted as a possible solution in some cases. For example, a school council could develop a 3 to 5 year plan to develop a naturalized outdoor learning space including some of the elements noted above.

## TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES – EQUIPMENT, TRAINING AND OUTREACH

My consultations pointed to the need for more technology resources, in terms of equipment (including mobile devices), the acceleration of training for teachers, and outreach to the parent community. I was fortunate enough to attend an information and consultation session run by the Board's technology team at one of my School Council meetings. The draft policy discussed was "Bring Your Own Device". After a fascinating presentation, teachers and parents talked about the potential and the challenges of making purposeful use of mobile devices in the learning process. It was clear that a major cultural change needs to take place on the part of the entire school community. And, a code of ethics regarding appropriate use of technology will need to be established in all of our schools. The Board should consider whether adequate resources have been earmarked for hardware, training for teachers and communication with parents, if the BYOD policy is to be introduced in September 2014.