**School Boards Anticipating Funding Shortfall in Spring 2014**

**Chris Glover**

School has just started. For the past month Trustees have helped parents and students with bussing issues, class placements, and special needs services. Now, they’re beginning to roll up their sleeves and figure out how they are going to balance their budgets for the next school year. The TDSB, for example, is anticipating a $30 million shortfall (approx 1%) shortfall for the coming school year.

A 1% shortfall wouldn’t be such a problem if the board hadn’t already faced funding shortfalls totalling $200 million over the past four years, which have meant cutting over 2,000 staff who served existing programs. The other worry for TDSB trustees, is that the province tends to make funding changes that cause the anticipated shortfall to grow during the school year. So the anticipated $30 million shortfall for next year could easily hit $50 million when the provincial government releases its budget in March 2014.

When that happens, there will probably be another battle between school boards and the province. The Minister of Education will argue, as she has in the past, that “enrolment is down and funding is up, so what is the TDSB’s problem?” From the Trustee’s perspective, the problem is that the province spends the increased funding and more before it gives it to the board. To put it simply, if the province says to the board, here’s an additional $100 dollars, now go spend $200 on full-day Kindergarten, then the board is still facing an additional $100 shortfall.

This is exactly what has happened over the past two decades, not just at the TDSB, but at school boards across the province. As the province added literacy and numeracy initiatives, negotiated pay increases, and rolled out full-day kindergarten, they provided some, but not all of the necessary funding. This left school boards with the unenviable task of cutting existing services in order to balance their budgets.

Last year there was quite an uproar over proposed cuts to music programs at the TDSB. Although this proposed cut got the most media attention, it represented only $2 million out of a total of $55 million. The music program was saved, but only by adding the $2 million on to a column called “in year savings”. This means that senior staff are looking for ways to make huge cuts during the school year.

As a trustee, the annual budget battle is very tiring. While the provincial government makes good news announcements about full-day kindergarten, labour peace, literacy and numeracy initiatives, they leave it up to the school boards to do the dirty work of cutting staff to pay for the provincially mandated initiatives.

Many of the calls the other trustees and I received at the beginning of the year were due to cuts to staff and services that have been made to balance the budget over the past three years.

This is not just a numbers game. This is about services that are provided to children in our schools. This year, we need to break out of the past pattern and engage the province in a dialogue about education funding in November and December when the province is making its budget decisions that will impact the lives of our students.

Here is the impact on the TDSB of the provincially imposed cuts for 2013-14 and 2012-13:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cuts for 2013-14** | **Additions 2013-14** |
| 248 Secondary Teachers | 147 Elementary Teachers |
| 20 Elementary Guidance Counsellors | 338 Early Childhood Educators |
| 22 Elementary Special Education Teachers | 334 Lunchroom Supervisors  (2 hrs/day = 83 full-time positions) |
| 16 Model Schools Elementary Instructors | *(almost all gains for FDK)* |
| 25 Elementary Librarians |  |
| 17 Education Assistants |  |
| 6 Safety Monitors |  |
| 14 Vice Principals |  |
| 26 Secretaries |  |
| Central Staffing $1.5 million |  |
| Facilities $5 million |  |
| Information Technology $0.5 million |  |
| Reading Recovery Lead Teachers $200,000 |  |
| Central Restraints $235,000 |  |
| Continuing Education $500,000 |  |
| Partnerships $500,000 |  |
| School Budgets (used for textbooks, computers, photocopying etc.) $200,000 |  |
| Operating Grant review target savings of $6 million |  |
| In-year savings target $10.5 million |  |
| Total approx 500 staff | Total = 568 |

Last year, the board faced a **$110 million shortfall** and made the following cuts and full-day Kindergarten additions:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cuts last year (2012-13)** | **Additions (2012-13)** |
| * Cut 4 superintendents and staff (20%) * 10% cut in senior admin staff * 10% cut in service departments – IT, employee services etc. * 200 secondary teachers * 17 Vice Principals * 430 Education Assistants * 4 Special Education Support Staff * 134 Secretaries * 6 School Based Safety Monitors * 2 Aquatics Instructors * 10 Caretaking Staff * Also: * Permit fee increases (45% Jan 1st 2013) * School budgets * International Languages * Closing Cafeterias & etc. | * 394 Lunchroom Supervisors (= 50 full-time staff) * 406 Early Childhood Educators * 215 Elementary Teachers * *(almost all gains for FDK)* |
| Total = approx 1,000 positions | Total 671 staff |

***WHY THIS SHORTFALL?***

1. **Full-day kindergarten is not properly funded by the province and leaves us with an enormous shortfall each year.**
   1. Before the province introduced full-day Kindergarten, the TDSB had two Early Childhood Educators (ECE) and paid them $32/hr. The province introduced full-day Kindergarten in 2008 and funds the ECE’s in the program at $27/hr. Because the TDSB already had a collective agreement with CUPE for ECE’s there is a $5/hr funding gap. In December 2012, as part of the provincial government’s enforced contracts under Bill 115, the TDSB did not have an opportunity to renegotiate this pay scale. As part of the full-day Kindergarten program, the school board now has 1020 ECE’s and the funding gap adds $10 million to the funding shortfall for the next school year.
   2. Last year the province cut the board’s gross budget by $12 million, but mandated the board to open 303 full-day Kindergarten classes and pay for them through existing revenues. This added $25 million to the shortfall.
2. **Declining enrolment.**
   1. Enrolment in the TDSB declined from 2002 to 2012. In 2012 our elementary enrolment increased by 600 last year, but secondary enrolment declined by 1800, for a net decline of 1200 students (1800 – 600 = 1200). Of the 200 secondary teachers cut last year, 60 were due to declining enrolment, others were due to budget cuts from the province. In total about 10% of the cuts last year were due to declining enrolment.
   2. In 2012/13 our elementary enrolment increased by 5, and secondary decreased by 2,357. Of the 248 secondary teacher positions recommended to be cut next year, 115 are due to declining enrolment. In total about 25% of the current staffing cuts could be attributed to declining enrolment.
3. **Pay Equity Settlements.** 
   1. After the provincially mandated amalgamation of the Toronto school boards in 1998, staff in different boards were paid different amounts. The equity settlements that came out of these differences have meant that the TDSB pays many of its employees more than the province funds.
4. **Other Provincial Initiatives.**
   1. Other provincial initiatives over the past decade that were not fully funded include the primary class cap at 20, the literacy/numeracy initiative, and teacher pay increases. As a result, school boards have had to pay for these initiatives from cuts in staff and other programs. So although gross funding has risen over the past decade, net funding is down across the province. The economist, Hugh Mackenzie estimates that net funding per Ontario student declined by $450/yr from 1998-2009. Full-day Kindergarten has meant that net funding has decreased even further.

*Chris Glover is the trustee for Etobicoke Centre at the Toronto District School Board.*