

# the torch



## Public input helps budget planning

Input from the River East Transcona School Division community guided the board of trustees in planning the 2022–23 budget. The board used a new, three-step approach to invite public feedback for the budget, including: distributing an information issue of the Torch in November explaining provincial education funding cuts and requirements; issuing an online survey to community members; and

hosting a virtual town hall to discuss funding and survey feedback.

“The community response was very encouraging and helpful,” said John Toews, vice-chair of the finance, facilities, and transportation committee. “Over 1,000 community members responded to the survey, and we met virtually with about 60 community members in the town hall. Both the trustees

and community members look forward to continuing this process in the fall for the next budget.”

The online survey asked the following question: As a community member of River East Transcona School Division, what do you value in our public school system? Responses included: the importance of student supports; opportunities for students to learn about the arts, language, and inquiry; and the importance of quality public education for all children.

Participants in the virtual town hall discussed the feedback to the survey and asked a variety of questions about issues related to the budget, including tax assessments, variations in divisional funding per student, and provincial funding (see the frequently asked questions and responses on the RETSD Virtual Community Consultation page:

[https://www.retsd.mb.ca/Pages/CCRI.aspx#/="](https://www.retsd.mb.ca/Pages/CCRI.aspx#/=)).

This three-step budget approach was so successful that the board plans to seek community feedback about public education in River East Transcona starting in the fall. Watch for details coming later this year on the division website at [www.retsd.mb.ca](http://www.retsd.mb.ca).

**See details about the approved 2022–23 budget on page 2.**



As this word cloud shows, there are many common themes in what the RETSD community values in public education.

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For more information about the board of trustees, visit: [www.retsdb.ca/BoardofTrustees](http://www.retsdb.ca/BoardofTrustees)

# Board approves 2022–23 budget

Recently, the board of trustees approved a 2022–23 budget of \$215 million, managing to avoid program and staffing cuts despite having a shortfall in provincial operational funding coupled with a deficit of over \$900,000 in funding for wages.

“Budget deliberations were exceptionally difficult this year. With increasing operational costs and reduced government funding, we prioritized our programs and staffing, which are both essential to the success of our students and valued by our community,” said trustee Brianne Goertzen, chair of the finance, facilities, and transportation committee. “With no avenue to raise much needed additional revenue, we had

to pull funds from accumulated surplus to cover costs—this is not sustainable.”

Throughout budget deliberations, the board continually referred to the feedback gathered from the community (see cover story), prioritizing ways to keep what the community values, at the same time needing to find the funds to cover operational costs. The use of accumulated surplus is a short-term, stop-gap measure since these funds continue to dwindle.

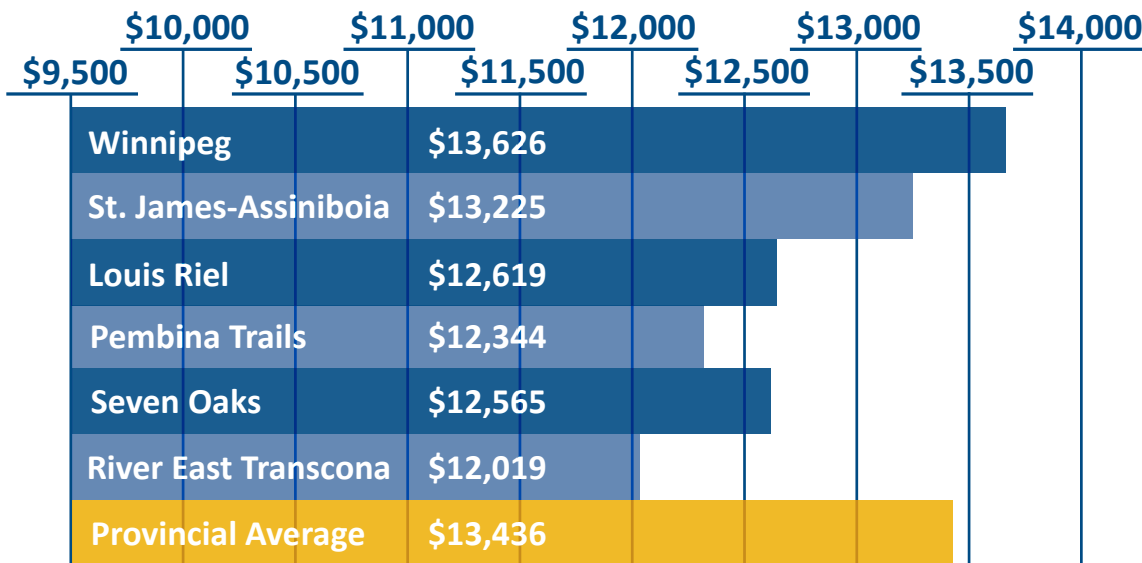
“The government needs to support public education with adequate funding, rather than trying to balance its budget at the expense of quality public education,” Goertzen added.

The division already operates very efficiently, having the lowest per-pupil spending among the six metro school divisions. If provincial funding continues to lag behind operational costs and inflation, combined with the inability to raise funds through increased municipal assessment (property) taxes, next year’s budget will have to include cuts.

Total Budget	\$215 million
Provincial Funding	\$133.5 million
Property Tax	\$76.8 million
Other Revenue	\$1.1 million
Shortfall	\$3.6 million
RETSD Accumulated Surplus to Budget	\$3.6 million

## EXPENDITURE PER PUPIL

Source: FRAME Report 2020–21 Budget



Provincial funding covers 62.1 per cent of the division’s annual operating costs with approximately 35.7 per cent coming from school taxes through property taxes. Cost of living has risen; provincial funding has not kept pace. The division needs to cover 100 per cent of its operating costs, yet the board is no longer allowed to raise property taxes to make up for the shortfall from the province, leaving the division in a growing deficit situation that will have significant impacts throughout RETSD and, most importantly, on teaching and learning in the classroom.



## Secretary-treasurer/CFO appointed

The board of trustees is pleased to announce the appointment of Elise Downey to the position of secretary-treasurer/CFO for RETSD, effective March 2, 2022.

Elise comes fully qualified to this role, having served as acting secretary-treasurer/CFO since July 2020—when the previous secretary-treasurer, Vince Mariani, retired—and as the assistant secretary-treasurer prior to that. Before joining RETSD, Elise was the secretary-treasurer at Sunrise School Division.

Congratulations to Elise on her appointment, the board looks forward to continue working with her.