

## Chinook Board Approves Another Difficult Budget



On June 27, 2022, the Chinook Board of Education approved a budget for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year, with the division facing a shortfall once again. Revenues from grants and other will be \$85.27 million, providing a less than 1% increase in funding which is an additional \$563,111 from the previous year.

The total operational expenditures are \$91.76 million, including salary increases and inflationary costs for insurance, fuel and utilities, resulting in a cash deficit of \$3.85 million which will be funded out of reserves to balance the cash budget. This draw on reserves continues to reduce available resources in future years, with operational reserves projected to be down to \$0 within two years.

The Board has voiced concerns that they will continue to be faced with tough decisions if there is not significant new funding in future budgets. *“Once again, our Board is faced with approving an incredibly difficult budget. Provincial funding has not kept pace with increasing costs, student needs, and inflation. This is not sustainable,”* said Board Chair, Kim Pridmore, *“This past year, we’ve had to draw nearly \$5 million from reserves to balance the budget. We will have to offset a significant deficit again for the upcoming school year, which will reduce our unrestricted reserves to just over \$9 million. If funding continues at this rate, we will have nothing left in our reserves in a couple of years and that is very unsettling.”*

Educational budgets have become increasingly difficult since the 2017-18 provincial budget, which included a shortfall of funding. This led to \$5 million in major reductions for Chinook. In order to limit the impact on the classroom, all other areas of the division have been dramatically reduced, including governance and at central office with senior administration, student services supports, curriculum coordinators, instructional coaches, as well as in technology, facilities and transportation.

*“Over the last five years, certain areas continue to be underfunded, including transportation which has an annual deficit of \$2 million,”* said Director of Education, Mark Benesh, *“Staffing is also underfunded by \$1-2 million and there is a new litany of inflationary costs at another \$2 million. This has created a yearly structural deficit of \$5-6 million. Unfortunately, trying to reduce this deficit is now impacting the classroom. As always, we will do all we can to support all students’ academic, social and wellbeing needs, within the funding that is provided by the provincial government.”* Several other school divisions around the province have recently shared very similar deficit and funding challenges. Many have noted their reserves are quickly dwindling, as they are for Chinook.

Rural school divisions like Chinook have high fixed costs that require sufficient and adequate resources to continue to deliver quality programming for students. Every year, Chinook conducts

thorough reviews of programs, central office, personnel and supports with changes and efficiencies made to reduce expenditures where possible.

Chinook has previously sought to address the funding formula inequities that have resulted in underfunding for the rural school division. The Board has also formally requested local taxing authority be returned to school boards by the provincial government.

## 2022-23 Strategic Plan

*Presented June 13, 2022*

The Chinook School Division Board of Education has established and approved the [strategic plan](#) as a major component of its leadership vision. It is intended that this plan will provide a flexible blueprint to direct the activities of the Board through the 2022-2023 school year. When successful, these activities will actualize the Foundational Statements.

### Provincial Education Plan

The province will continue with an additional year of an Interim Provincial Education Plan for the 2022-23 school year to help address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning and mental health and well being. Work has also begun on a seven year Provincial Education Plan (PEP) beginning September 2023 - June 2030.

### PEP Framework:



Chinook has created an Interim Chinook Education Plan to align with the Interim Provincial Education Plan.

### Learning Response and Mental Health and Wellbeing 2022-23 Actions:

- By June 2023, intervention plans will be implemented for struggling students in Reading grades 1-5 (with a priority on K-2).
- By June 2023, intervention plans will be implemented for struggling students in Math grades 1-9 (with a priority on 3-6).
- By June 2023, a professional development plan will be implemented focused on improving oral language and increasing student learning.

- By June 2023, a plan including resources and experiences to support teachers in deepening their understanding of FNMI culture and ways of knowing will be implemented.
- By June 2023, students will improve in their reading scores as measured by the F & P scores grade 1-3, compared to the baseline scores of June 2022.
- By June 2023, 100% of SCC's will have implemented a Community Engagement and Alignment Plan.
- By June 2023, strategies and resources to the Mental Health and well being of staff and students will be implemented including creating a resource page for parents and students.
- By October 2022, schools will create school plans focused on supporting mental health and well being of students.
- By January 2023, students will feel connected and supported at school with less anxiety and more access to supports as measured by OurSchool data.