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Chinook Receives Provincial Budget for the 2023-2024 School Year

On March 22, the 2023-2024 provincial budget was announced in the legislature, with \$15 million dollars of new money (not received the previous year) to be invested in the 27 school divisions. Chinook received approximately \$400,000 of the new funding dollars, which is a 0.5% increase to cover off inflationary pressures. This increase may be lower, depending on the dollars clawed back due to anticipated student registrations with Sask DLC, the new provincial online school.

The division's recognized grant is \$79.79M. Unfortunately, this will not offset the anticipated inflationary costs in 2023-2024 and will contribute to the increasing funding shortfall for the division. While the Chinook Board of Education appreciates the slight increase in funding and continuation of interim top-up funding given in 2022, Chinook will once again start from a deficit, estimated to be \$4 - \$5 million.

Chinook Board Chair, Kim Pridmore, stated, *"We have to keep emphasizing our need for sufficient resources to support students in their learning, success and well-being. We recognize that the additional funding included a portion for inflation, but with inflation running at 5 to 6%, it only covers a very small portion of our actual rising inflationary costs which increases our year to year deficit."* These rising costs include fuel, bus purchases, repairs, salaries, utilities and insurance. *"For example, the price of purchasing buses for the upcoming year is \$400,000 more expensive than last year. Last year we reduced our bus purchases to lower our deficit, but now they are 25% more expensive to buy. Our reserves will run out very soon, so we will unfortunately need to make decisions that could affect every community in our division."*

Chinook received provincial budget reductions of over \$6 million six years ago, when \$54 million was pulled out from all school divisions in the province. The division has continued to make additional reductions in all areas in recent years as well. *"There are no more efficiencies to be found after significantly reducing costs year after year, while making every effort to minimize the impact on classrooms,"* said Director of Education, Mark Benesh, *"We need and really encourage the prioritization and investment in the education of our students. Otherwise we are forced each and every year to do more and more with less funding."* Inflationary costs have greatly outpaced funding increases and will force the division to continue to make reductions or use the small amount of reserves remaining, which leaves reductions as the only option to cover any future shortfalls in funding.

Additionally, the division was hoping for some targeted transportation funding, similar to the recent Alberta education budget. There was an overall 5.2% increase of new money in educational funding for Alberta schools, while also committing hundreds of millions of dollars to enhance the area of transportation including reducing bus ride times for students over the next three years.

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