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Public schools losing a third of their budget

By Sarah Sobanski

Schools across the area's public board will see a 30 per cent cut in their budgets this year, according to Hastings Prince Edward District School Board's communications officer.

The board continues to experience budget challenges due to reduced funding, declining enrolment, aging infrastructure and excess space, said board spokesperson Kerry Donnell. The cut adds up to about $800,000 from school budgets this year.

?HPEDSB has identified effective management of all resources as a priority,? she said. ?This may result in changes to the way extra-curricular activities, such as sports and clubs, occur at schools.?

She added, ?We are currently working with school leaders to identify how best to distribute funds among schools to ensure continued excellent programming and equitable access to extra-curricular opportunities.?

Bancroft This Week asked to see each school budget in its immediate area but Donnell said they are still being finalized.

?A working group consisting of senior staff and school administrators is in the process of finalizing the allocation methodology ? how school budgets are set. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness and challenges of those allocations,? said Donnell.

She noted schools would be ?advised? of their budgets in the next few weeks, once the group was finished, then full budgets would be released to schools.

?From there the normal processes will take place, which is for staff to review the budgets to determine allocations for the 2017-2018 school year. Up to now, and in preparation for the start of school, each received 50 per cent of last year's budget as a starting point.?

The board is on a multi-year financial recovery plan approved by the Ministry of Education. It was required to develop a balanced budget for the 2017-'18 school year. The plan runs the school years of 2016-'19.

?This required identifying savings in many areas, including permanent staff reductions, consolidating schools, and reductions to professional development funds and school budgets,? she said.

According to Donnell, the board's education centre has also seen budgets cuts over the past two years ? $239,000 in professional development.

?This is the first significant reduction in school budgets in many years, even though enrolment throughout the board has significantly declined. We are committed to maximizing the resources available to support all students to achieve success,? said Donnell.