



NEWS RELEASE

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BOARD OF EDUCATION SUBMITS BUDGET, FUNDING CONCERNS

The Sunshine Coast Board of Education submitted its 2009–10 budget, based on predicted enrolment for next school year, to the Ministry of Education last week. Following this submission, based on a public board motion from June 16, the Board also sent a letter to the Minister of Education, Dr. Margaret MacDiarmid, outlining concerns about the provincial funding of education.

The letter states that for the Sunshine Coast, declining enrolment has led to the loss of about \$916,267 under the Province's per-student funding system, which accounts for about 10 teacher lay-offs. The Board also managed to find approximately \$500,000 due to other lay-offs, cuts and savings, yet the 2009–10 budget is still set for a \$423,966 shortfall that will need to be covered by surplus reserves.

"The Board was more involved in integrating public feedback into this budget than it has been in recent memory, and we're pleased with both the results and the process led by our senior management," said Board Chair Silas White.

Deborah Palmer, Superintendent of Schools, added, "Although there were cuts in some areas, and we have had to find funds in our local budget for provincial initiatives such as curriculum changes and data collection, we are excited to be supporting our students and schools with district money for libraries, music instruction, and special education. We're also keeping up extra local funding for class-size reduction, trades / apprenticeships, early learning, technology, special education programs and curriculum support."

The letter to the Minister raises concerns for the future. "We're happy getting surplus money from previous budgets back into the classroom, as that's what it has always been intended for, but by law boards of education cannot run deficits," said White.

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“Therefore, it’s an alarming situation when a board has to dip into surplus reserves in order to balance its preliminary annual budget. It’s a clear indication that the annual funding we’re getting from the Ministry is about \$424,000 short of covering the core educational needs and requirements for the Sunshine Coast and our students.”

At the June 16 Board meeting, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer John Pritchard estimated that after covering the budget shortfall and setting aside the Board’s \$600,000 contingency, there would be less than \$400,000 left in unrestricted funds.

The Board is hopeful that the provincial government’s commitment to increase funding to education, despite economic circumstances, will be substantial enough to prevent further budget shortfalls.

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