

Park West Publisher

February 2019

LEARNERS TODAY, LEADERS TOMORROW

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Divisional Budgeting and Provincial Funding



School funding in Manitoba is calculated using a formula guarantee, which ensures that divisions receive at least 98 per cent of the previous year's total. That equates to a 2% decrease in provincial funding for many divisions, including Park West. This means \$221,000 less for Park West in 2019-2020.

There are differences in the relative wealth of school divisions based upon their local tax base. Targeted provincial funding in the form of equalization grants is used to address this inequity. Like many divisions in Manitoba, Park West receives an equalization payment. While our enrolment for next year is projected to increase by about 40 students, it is not enough to receive an increase in funding from the province. This is because as our enrolment goes up, the province increases our base funding but decreases the equalization funding so the net impact on our division is zero.

Overall, this equates to almost a 6% decrease in funding from the province since 2016-17, despite Park West's enrolment decreasing only 2% in the same timeframe. This provincial funding decrease is compounded by a limit on local taxation. For the second consecutive year, the province is instructing divisions to cap increases to their local education property tax at 2% for the 2019-20 school year. For Park West, a 2% increase in local taxation equates to about \$210,000. This allowable increase in local tax will be about \$11,000 less than the reduction in provincial funding.

In the funding announcement, it was noted that Bill 28 (the Public Services Sustainability Act) would minimize staffing increases due to the freeze on salaries. This does not account for things such as teachers who receive normal increments in their first 10 years of employment. Another staffing area which has impacted our bottom line is a significant increase in the number of maternity leaves in our division this year and last year. This increase in budgeted salaries and benefits spending will necessitate a reduction in spending elsewhere in our budget. In addition to higher salary costs, we have required increases in maintenance and transportation as well as other needs that may require divisional investment.

Now that we have the provincial funding announcement, we can continue working on finalizing our budget for next year. One area of increased focus has been involving stakeholders even more in the process. For the first time in many years, we held two pre-budget evening sessions for the public; one in Russell and the other in Shoal Lake. We also implemented a comprehensive stakeholder survey in which over 1100 parents, staff, and students provided input into our strategic planning and financial priorities. On February 6, we convened a special meeting with our municipal governments to ask for their perspective on our budget. There will also be a public budget meeting on February 21 as well as opportunities on February 28 for any requested presentations to the Board.

Refugee Simulation

-submitted by Mrs. Mathison, HCI

On Monday, November 19, Kelly Fuhr from the Brandon School Division travelled to Hamiota Collegiate to give students from the Park West School Division a refugee experience. Some students from Strathclair, Shoal Lake, Decker, Miniota and Hamiota, who read the book Refugee for Global Read Aloud, participated in one of the three refugee simulations that were organized for that day. The students were put into families where they worked together to make important decisions that would keep their families safe and allow them to survive. The students quickly learned how difficult the journey was going to be from their home to a refugee camp or a new country. It was interesting to watch how each family made decisions, had discussions and negotiated with border guards, military and other families. When the simulations were over, the discussions that occurred were so important. Each session brought about interesting ideas, emotions and connections. The students were able to relate to the characters in the book, and the simulation brought their stories alive. The students, in a safe environment, were able to walk a mile on the refugee's journey. Thank you to all the people who supervised and supported this experience. Thanks again to Kelly for spending time with our students.

School Safety and VTRA



In our first newsletter of the year, we provided an overview of some of the new procedures that we were implementing to improve the safety of students and staff. These included locking of all interior doors, restricting access to schools during the day, and enhanced procedures for school visitors. We will now provide a quick overview of VTRA or Violence Risk and Threat Assessment.

Schools, post-secondary institutions, and communities react in their own unique way to trauma. Traditional crisis response has typically been a short-term intervention immediately following the incident. VTRA is referred to as the "missing link" in violence prevention. It is the process of deliberately trying to "connect the dots" or data that paints the picture that someone is moving on a pathway towards serious violence before the violent act occurs.

Park West School Division has trained many staff in the VTRA protocol as a collaborative response to assessing potential violence with an overall goal to making schools and communities safe. Our most recent training in January was facilitated by divisional staff and included educators from Park West and neighbouring divisions.

When being trained, participants work through real case studies to help hone their own assessment skills and learn how to assess risk and develop treatment/intervention plans for persons at risk. The VTRA model is intended to support agencies and professionals work collaboratively as multidisciplinary teams focusing on best outcomes for children and youth, using early intervention, prevention, and aftermath strategies for crises, trauma, violence, and conflict.

Internet Safety

Major Pratt School recently hosted Val Caldwell who presented to students, staff, and parents on the topic of internet safety. Val has been providing presentations on the topic of safety around the use of technology for 9 years. Her personal and professional passion is to provide current and relevant tools and information to children and adults to help them use their various forms of technology and social media as safely as possible. Val addresses the various forms of hidden sexual exploitation that exists in the "virtual world".

Val has spoken to well over 10,000 children in grades 4 - 12 throughout Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well as countless parents, caregivers, and professionals. She draws her experience from her 9 years working as a Program Facilitator for CFS Western as well as being a busy Mom of 2 teenagers. Val shares countless personal stories that involve a variety of social media related experiences. Her open, dynamic, entertaining and extremely honest style of presenting resonates with audiences of all ages. It has been noted that she has the ability to take extremely difficult topics and discuss them in a way that puts everyone at ease. Her presentations have been well received and highly recommended for anyone who works with youth or has their own children as the information pertains to all users of technology.

We will bring the world to our **students**

to prepare our students for the **world.**



Career Fair



Our Career Fair for high school students is now scheduled for May 23 in Russell.

Career Day 2019 will bring together approximately 500 Grades 9 to 11 students from seven schools across the Park West School Division to learn about educational opportunities as well as a career opportunities that are available to them as they make decisions about their future. This local event provides a special opportunity for area employers to meet with our young people and discuss job opportunities and the skills they are seeking.

The focus of this year's Career Fair is preparing for the unexpected and being resilient in life and in work. This links directly with the HTN grant criteria of increasing social connectedness, resilience, and supporting people's ability to cope with life challenges. This is the second consecutive Career Fair to focus on mental health. A pre-learning activity will focus on developing resilience. We also have two breakout sessions in which current and recent high school students will reflect on how they deal with life's challenges. The day will culminate with a presentation by Kerri Twigg, a job search and career strategist, will discuss the changing job market and how to stay resilient and keep options open through education and career development.

Stakeholder Survey

Park West School Division is committed to the development and preparation of every child in our school system. We are in the process of creating our strategic plan that outlines long-term priorities, goals, and strategies for our school system. To that end, we asked for feedback from our stakeholders as we develop a plan that will help us prepare for future challenges and opportunities.



Over 1100 parents and guardians, staff, and students completed a stakeholder survey prior to Christmas. Divisional results will soon be available to all stakeholders on the Park West website. The information collected will be used to inform upcoming budgeting and planning. Individual schools will have access to their specific feedback. Thanks to everyone who participated in the survey.

Teacher Recruitment

As part of our regular work in recruiting new teachers, Park West School Division sends a divisional team to the Career Fair for Education students at Brandon University. This event is scheduled for the last week of January.

We continue to be impressed with the high quality of teacher candidates that are graduating from Brandon. It is not surprising that the majority of our hiring results in BU grads joining our division. Their focus on preparing teacher candidates to be effective and engaged educators in rural settings aligns perfectly with our divisional mandate.

Local Voices, Local Choices

The provincial government has launched a review of K-12 education in Manitoba. The Manitoba School Board Association is the governing body of all school divisions in Manitoba. They have developed a campaign called Local Voices, Local Choices to promote the value of local school boards and divisions. The MSBA website states the following in their Local Voices campaign:

Two matters which may be under consideration in this review are the large-scale amalgamation of the current 37 elected school boards in our province, and a possible move to appointed, rather than elected, school boards. School boards are grassroots, democratic institutions. Alone, either of these changes would severely undermine the ability of communities to shape local schools. Together, they could silence the community's voice in education completely. If you value education and your ability to help shape local schools to meet community needs, we encourage you to voice your concerns about these possible changes with provincial government officials, including the Premier of Manitoba, the Minister of Education and Training, and your local MLA.



Adverse Weather Procedure

On February 8, for the third time in two weeks, Park West was closed due to adverse weather conditions. While we have a procedure for adverse weather, we thought it appropriate to provide some additional information. Like all other divisions, our mandate is to have schools open with teachers teaching and students learning. On occasion weather conditions create safety issues. The safety of our students and staff is our priority.

Recently, we have had some comments on social media that suggest that Park West never closes, is always the last to decide, and the last to close. This is not accurate. Our closure today is the seventh closure in the last three years. We had two days in both March 2017 and March 2018 and now three days in 2019. Of these seven closures, the one on February 8 was the first for which a decision was made on the morning of the closure. We acknowledge the frustration and challenge that this rare event creates for many families.

We are not the first division to close. However, we are also not the last. Extensive consultation goes into deciding whether buses run and whether schools are open. This involves several discussions between the Superintendent and Transportation Supervisor, often over multiple days leading up to the closure. Divisional bus captains are engaged and we connect with Superintendents and Transportation personnel in neighbouring divisions. We examine current and forecasted weather and collect as much information as we can regarding road conditions.

On most occasions over the past three years, we have made decisions the previous night. On February 8, the decision was made at 6:00 am which is consistent with our weather procedure.

We send notifications regarding bus cancellations and closures as fast as possible once the decision has been made. We prioritize contacting regional radio stations and getting the message on our divisional webpage. We also have expanded notification to other social media including Facebook and Twitter. On February 8, we had some challenges that delayed our divisional website update. We apologize for any inconvenience that this created and will work to ensure it does not happen again.

The Division wants to be responsive to legitimate concerns and suggestions. To that end, we will review our divisional procedures and practices regarding weather-related emergencies. This will include, but not be limited to:

- Provision of additional clarity regarding when schools and the division will close
- Development of improved procedure for notifying parents, stakeholders, and for updating social media
- Examination of how closures impact extracurricular activities both in and out of the division

If you have thoughts, comments, or suggestions on how to further improve our procedures and practices, please contact the division and share your perspective.

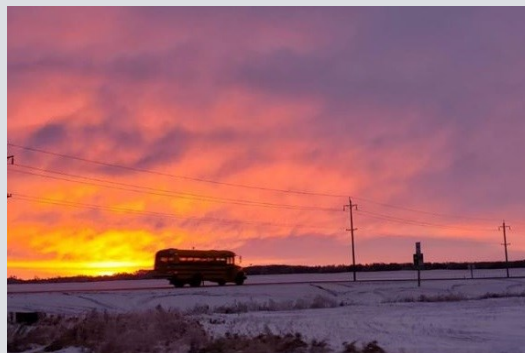


Photo by Maximus Willmott-Bennion

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