

Media Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 28, 2019

RE: 2019/20 Fall Budget

Remaining committed to its core budget priorities of allocating resources for direct classroom instruction, classroom supports for learners with complex needs, mental health supports, and literacy and numeracy skill development, Rocky View Schools (RVS) Board of Trustees approved the 2019/20 fall budget, Nov. 28, 2019.

“Although the government’s delayed budget announcement and subsequent funding reductions posed many challenges for our jurisdiction, the 2019/20 Fall Budget preserves services to students by drawing on reserves, reducing education centre spending, adjusting school allocations and introducing additional bus fees,” said Board Chair Fiona Gilbert. “As demonstrated through this budget, our board continues to put students first and endures to provide them with the exceptional education they deserve.”

According to Director of Finance Karyn Golem, RVS’ 2019/20 fall budget reflects the addition of 923 new students – up by 268 students from spring projections. With expenditures of \$278.7 million, over 77.6 percent will be directed towards instruction, 13.2 percent to plant operations and maintenance, 6.3 percent to transportation, and 2.9 percent to governance and administration.

“Of the total monies available for instruction, 84.2 per cent will be directed to schools,” said Golem. “In addition to \$1 million in school-based reserves being repurposed and \$753,000 held back this fall in anticipation of potential provincial budget cuts, schools absorbed the further reduction of \$40 per student by reducing supply and equipment and making a handful of temporary staffing adjustments.”

Golem explained that following the release of provincial grant rates with the Alberta government’s 2019 budget, Oct. 24, 2019, RVS identified a \$10 million budget shortfall for the 2019/20 school year due to the reallocation of Alberta’s class size grants and school fee/transportation fee replacement grants. To address the shortfall, RVS will be drawing down \$4.32 million from central reserves and \$1 million from school reserves, with education centre budgets reduced by \$1.53 million and school budgets by \$1.75 million.

In keeping with the Board’s budget priorities, Golem said RVS was able to preserve the \$360,000 increase for inclusive education to support the complex needs of learners, bringing the total to over \$12 million to support RVS’ most vulnerable students. In the area of mental health, enhanced funding provided by the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery supported the increase of a .9 full-time equivalent teacher, and the maintenance of positive behavior specialists that were previously supported through the jurisdiction’s operating budget.

To address the \$1.53 million budget shortfall at the education centre, the learning department reduced two IT positions through attrition, as well as withheld a \$250 thousand contribution to reserves for teacher laptop replacements. The remaining monies were found across the centre through the reduction of substitute release time, supplies, contracted services, professional learning funds, and delayed projects intended to be completed this year.

-more-

The re-introduction of a transportation fee of \$308/student for riders who attend their designated school and live 2.4 km or further from that school helped to offset a \$1.4 million budget shortfall in the transportation portfolio. Anticipating future funding shortfalls in this area, the board approved an increase of \$50 thousand dollars to allow for a route efficiency review to be completed during the school year. As the revised bus fees will not cover the entire transportation budget shortfall, nor the route efficiency review planned, both expenditures will result in further use of the board's central reserves.

While significant uncertainty continues to be felt across the province by all boards, Board Chair Fiona Gilbert acknowledged a second funding challenge that lies just around the corner for the board.

"In recognition that reserves are not a sustainable resource and the current budget contains a one-time provincial transition grant of \$5.1 million, our board acknowledges that significant reductions will be required for the 2020/2021 school year," Gilbert said. "Given our board also awaits a new provincial allocation model to be unveiled, the impact of these reductions is not yet known; however, will require significant consultation and consideration to ensure the best education for RVS students.

"Our board will be reaching out to our learning communities early in 2020 to discuss budget and program priorities moving forward," she added.

Rocky View Schools' fall budget will be posted to the jurisdiction's website under "Publications" shortly.

For more information, contact:

Erlene Gococo
Communications Officer
403.945.4146

2019/20 Budget Backgrounder

Board Budget Priorities

Rocky View Schools' annual budget is driven by the goals and strategies of its Four-Year Plan to foster innovators in their learning journey, while addressing the operational needs of the jurisdiction. Recognizing that the Superintendent will demonstrate fiscal responsibility by continuing to pursue efficient and effective services, the Board of Trustees has identified the following key priorities to guide the 2019-2020 budget process:

- Direct classroom instruction;
- Direct classroom support for learners with complex needs;
- Mental health supports; and
- Literacy and numeracy skill development.

In addition, the Board directed administration, Nov. 14, 2019, to address RVS' budget shortfall by:

- Utilizing system and school reserves, while striving to maintain levels at 3.5 per cent of operations – a reasonable limit recognized by the Auditor General as sound fiscal management;
- Avoiding mid-year staffing reductions, recognizing reductions are likely in 2020/21; and
- Introducing additional student transportation fees to offset the loss of the government's Transportation Fee Replacement Grant.

Budget Highlights

- Enrolments in the spring 2019 projected an increase of 655 students or 2.6 per cent growth over the previous year. Actual Sept. 30, 2019, enrolment counts resulted in 923 students for a total increase year-over-year of 3.7 percent.
- Overall revenue is projected to be \$272.7 million, 2.1 percent lower than anticipated in the spring, despite the additional growth of 268 students by Sept. 30, 2019.
- Alberta Education per pupil grants were reduced by class size initiative funding. This resulted in approximately \$11.6 million less instructional funding, which will be partially offset by a \$5.1 million one-time transition grant (\$203 per student).
- Transportation and instruction fee replacement grants were eliminated for a net reduction of revenues from spring projections of \$4.1 million.
- The Classroom Improvement Fund (CIF) was eliminated as was projected in the spring.
- Transportation fees for riders who attend their designated school and live 2.4 km or further from that school riders were implemented by the Board on Nov. 14, 2019, equating to an additional \$1.4 million in revenues, partially offsetting the impact of the transportation fee replacement grant which was eliminated.
- At the K-8/9 grade levels, no new classes will be added, while high schools saw an increase of 4.5 full-time equivalent teachers to reflect a growth in enrolments.
- In response to reduced funding, governance and administration budgets were reduced and will remain at 2.9 per cent of expenditures, which is still well below the cap of 3.6 per cent.
- Central learning budgets saw significant cuts of approximately \$850 thousand with the majority of reductions seen in the technology branch, ensuring maximum support for Inclusive Education Services (IES) could be maintained.
- Six million dollars of reserves is being used in 2019-20 to help achieve a balanced budget.