

Funding Insufficiency Belies Budget Rhetoric

The education funding allocated in the 2023-24 provincial budget will not be enough to maintain the current operations of the province's 27 school boards, which are now uncovering the local financial implications, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association said at the time of its April Spring Assembly.

"The reality of this budget is becoming much more alarming as the detailed analysis happens," said Jaimie Smith-Windsor, president of the SSBA, which is a non-partisan organization representing all boards in the province.

"The funding for school operations falls short on many fronts," Smith-Windsor said.

Furthermore, the way the government presented the numbers on budget day is misleading to the public, she continued.

The \$49.4 million, or 2.5 per cent, operating-grant increase announced in March was a comparison to 2022-23 budget-day figures, not to the actual amount divisions received last year.

At least \$35.5 million of that is not actually new. That includes \$20 million allocated in July 2022 for

inflationary increases that was included in school divisions' 2022-23 budgets, as well as \$15.5 million provided in December for enrolment increases that had exceeded projections by 3,840 students.

"It is an irresponsible misrepresentation to frame these dollars announced last year as being part of an increase," said Smith-Windsor. "The funding of education with public money should, at the very least, be transparent and easily understood, whether the news is good or bad. The public needs to be engaged in the bigger conversation about the value of education and the investment we put into it."

The remaining \$13.9 million equals an increase of just 0.7 per cent for 2023-24. This falls short of what is needed to maintain the status quo, with boards facing increasing costs in many areas.

These include support staff collective agreements; teacher salary increments and local agreement costs; statutory benefit increases and other payroll-related costs; and fuel, insurance and utility increases. Additional factors include other general inflation,



Jaimie Smith-Windsor spoke to reporters on Budget Day.

unprecedented enrolment growth and the continuing need for specialized programming.

Preliminary estimates suggest funding shortfalls will be of a magnitude of multiple tens of millions. In the coming weeks, school boards need to consider options that might include staffing and programming cuts.

"Boards have been advocating for adequate and sustainable funding for a long time and our ability to deliver services to students has been eroded in recent years," said Smith-Windsor.

"With significant surplus revenues and the development of a new Provincial Education Plan, boards expected better investment in Saskatchewan's future from this budget," she added.

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SSBA Reacts to 2023-24 Budget Announcement

On provincial budget day in March, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) recognized the small increase in funding for the school system, but cautioned that the increase falls short of covering pressures due to inflation and enrolment growth.

“The operating increase announced in the 2023-24 budget does not cover the expenses that school divisions are facing,” said Jaimie Smith-Windsor, president of the SSBA. “This budget contributes to the existing instability and continuing erosion of the publicly funded education system and school boards are increasingly concerned about that.”

Boards have worked hard to keep up with the pressures of inflation

and enrolment growth – but when the operational funding doesn’t cover the actual costs, the funding isn’t there to pay for any investment in achieving high-quality outcomes for students.

“We have been advocating for adequate and sustainable operational funding for quite some time and we have noticed that the ability of boards to deliver services to students has been eroded over the last several years,” Smith-Windsor continued on budget day. “School boards are facing uncertainty and may have difficult decisions to make, once again.”

As school divisions receive their operational budget details through the education funding distribution model, they will have a better sense



of the local budget response and circumstances, which might vary among regions, she noted.

School boards recognized this year’s funding for capital projects, though inflation has caused challenges and uncertainty related to those initiatives, as well, the association said on budget day.

Boards also continue to advocate for strategic co-ordination with the Ministry of Health on mental health and wellness initiatives.

Other Association Activity



Forty-nine participants from 26 school divisions attended the General Insurance Plan Seminar held in Saskatoon in March.

The session engaged school divisions’ CFOs, risk managers and facilities personnel on varying risk mitigation strategies.

Areas covered included legal liability communication strategies, facility user group insurance program for SSBA members and SSBA claims and renewal processes.



SSBA President Jaimie Smith-Windsor contributed a guest column in April that was published by the Regina Leader-Post and the Saskatoon StarPhoenix.

To read the column, headlined “Opinion: Saskatchewan should view education funding as an investment”, please visit one of the newspaper’s websites directly:

- [Leader-Post](#)
- [StarPhoenix](#)

2023 Saskatchewan School Boards Association
Spring General Assembly

Members gathered in Saskatoon April 5-6
Presentations are available on the [SSBA website](#)



President's Address
Jaimie Smith-Windsor



Executive Director's Address
Darren McKee



Greetings
Hon. Dustin Duncan, Minister of Education



Keynote Speaker
Alec Couros, University of Regina



Board members attending the
2023 Spring General Assembly



Board members attending the
2023 Spring General Assembly



"The mission of the SSBA is to provide leadership, coordination and services to member boards of education to support student achievement."

President:

Jaimie Smith-Windsor

Vice-President:

Dr. Shawn Davidson

Catholic Constituency:

Jerome Niezgod

Central Constituency:

Christine Gradin

Conseil scolaire fransaskois Constituency:

Élizabeth Perreault

Indigenous Constituency:

Kimberly Greyeyes

Northern Constituency:

Nathan Favel

Southern Constituency:

Robert Bachmann

Urban Public Constituency:

Donna Banks

Executive Director:

Darren McKee

Board Development and

Indigenous Education:

Ted Amendt, PhD

Communications and Strategic Services:

Jill Welke

Corporate Services:

Catherine Vu

Employee Benefits and Insurance Plans:

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If you would prefer to receive *The School Trustee* by hard copy, please contact the Association at the email address above.

Calendar Update

Upcoming SSBA Events in 2023:

Employee Benefits Plan Seminar

May 4-5, Regina

Education Scholarship Application Deadline

Aug. 31

Award of Distinction Nomination Deadline

Sept. 30

Premier's Award Submission Deadline

Sept. 30

Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medals



SSBA President Jaimie Smith-Windsor



SSBA Vice-President Dr. Shawn Davidson