



## **Local School Boards Face Provincial Budget Challenges**

*Boards, Administration and Teachers Share Their Concerns*

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The provincial education budget was announced by Alberta Education on October 24. On Friday, October 25, the details of that budget were shared with school divisions.

While the overall provincial funding for education has remained the same, the reality is there has been a dramatic reduction in funding, which will be felt in both our school divisions. A key impact came with the reallocation of funding for class size and classroom improvement to support student enrollment growth across the province. As a result, both Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools and Red Deer Public Schools will face higher deficits than originally planned.

Both school divisions anticipated funding shortfalls for this school year. However, now that we have seen the details and actual numbers in the provincial budget, more adjustments will have to be made. Red Deer Public Schools is facing an additional \$3.5 million loss in funding on its original budget of \$125 million and will need to fill that gap. Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools will see a \$2 million reduction in funding from its original budget of \$115 million.

This means both jurisdictions will have to use accumulated reserves to cover the deficits beyond what was originally anticipated. While our shared priority is to have the least impact on the classroom, this funding shortfall will ultimately have an affect on all classrooms, programs and students. Beyond that, our schools continue to grow and now more than ever, we are experiencing more complexity in our classrooms with students and teachers needing more support.

Both Divisions now have important and challenging decisions to make as a result of the provincial budget. It will be even more difficult to make these changes mid-year.

“In preparation for projected funding changes, we reduced our allocations to schools and some programs by two per cent for the start of the 2019-2020 school year. This decision has offset the bulk of the more than \$2 million loss in funding we experienced with Thursday’s provincial budget. We will use our reserves to eliminate the remaining deficit, but we also are concerned



about funding allocations going forward,” said Superintendent Dr. V. Paul Mason at Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools.

“After hearing more details of the 2019 Provincial Budget, Red Deer Public will be forced to reevaluate some of our priorities. These are priorities that were set before the 2019/20 school year and reevaluating them mid-year will have a significant impact to staff and ultimately students. This could also mean examining school fees for next school year to offset costs due to the shortfall in provincial funding,” said Stu Henry, Superintendent for Red Deer Public Schools.

Teachers in both Divisions are also concerned.

“Teachers know that a fully funded education system is a good investment for government that pays off exponentially for our society in the future. Unfortunately, these budget cuts likely means that more students, especially those who require additional learning supports, may not have access to tools and resources that they need to fully realize their potential, despite having the very best teachers in their classrooms,” said Stephen Merredew, Alberta Teachers’ Association Local 80 President representing teachers in Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools.

“Teachers are disappointed with this budget. Once again, teachers will be asked to do more with less, but they shouldn’t have to. Our children are our most precious resource in this province and they deserve better than what this government has brought forward for education funding,” said Kelly Aleman, Alberta Teachers’ Association Local 60 President representing teachers in Red Deer Public Schools.

As both divisions continue to grow, the question of funding and future budgets remains a concern.

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