

Statement by TDSB Chair Robin Pilkey on Board Decision on Budget Reductions and Balanced Budget

Last fall, the following words were in the preamble to the 2018-19 budget approved by the Board:

The TDSB is currently in a stable financial position as a result of steady enrolment and previous difficult decisions needed to balance the budget.

One year and one new provincial government later, and our world has changed dramatically.

At the beginning of our budget process in early March, we were facing a challenging, but manageable \$25.7 million dollar structural deficit.

By the end of April, after two Ministry of Education school board funding announcements, the TDSB's budgetary challenges worsened considerably as the Ministry grant reductions topped out at \$41.2 million dollars. We then faced a \$67.8 million dollar budget shortfall.

We knew then, and we know now, it was not possible to reduce the Board's budget by \$67.8 million without affecting staff or programs.

As the provincial government balances its budget with cuts to municipalities and school boards, somewhere down the line, there is a real impact on communities – a real impact on people – in our case, parents, students and staff.

Looked at one way, the budget reductions faced by school boards across Ontario are the many faces of the provincial government's fiscal restraint.

The abrupt and last minute Ministry of Education grant reductions to the TDSB's budget meant that both staff and trustees had to turn their attention to a budget strategy that focused almost exclusively on how to balance the budget.

In short, we needed to determine where to reduce spending with significant attention to the impact on students, schools, parents and staff.

The budget reductions approved tonight were guided by the Board's budget strategic drivers or priority budget areas. These priorities were also influenced by extensive consultation with our communities that included more than 15,000 submissions to our online budget consultation.

This was followed by more than 20 meetings of the Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee, more than 100 public delegations to the committee, and more than 250 written submissions, as well as many meetings, calls and emails with constituents.

Trustees have spent almost two months evaluating, scrutinizing and, in some cases, changing the proposed reductions. We have been mindful of the concerns we have heard from parents, students and staff.

It should also be noted that the final budget reductions will have less of an impact on programs and services for students and support staff because there is a significant budget reduction - \$17 million - to the Board's central administration, senior team and centrally-assigned staff.

That said, not all programs and services valued by the community could be saved given the enormity of provincial cuts to the TDSB's budget.

There will be some service and program reductions. Some will be delivered differently to both reduce costs and to ensure that there is equity and fairness for students and parents when it comes to access.

While the focus of the Board's attention has been on budget reductions, it is important to note that we will be holding the line and maintaining, and in some cases, exceeding last year's investments.

We expect consistent funding for Special Education, school and student safety, supports for Early Years Literacy & Intervention, and Model Schools. The Board will continue its ground-breaking foundation work this year to build a culture of Anti-Racism across the school system.

Some of the delegations that appeared before the Board have urged trustees to reject budget reductions. This is in spite of the trustees' legal

responsibility to submit a balanced budget plan to the Ministry.

Over the last 20 years, when school boards did not balance their budgets, a provincial supervisor was appointed. This is not an option.

Only the Board of Trustees can ensure that budget reductions, and service and program changes happen in a way that is fair and equitable.

Only the Board of Trustees can approve budget reductions and a plan to balance its budget in a way that is open, transparent and consultative with the public.

And as challenging as it has been to make these reductions, I believe the Board of Trustees made the best of a most difficult situation with provincial budget reductions that came at us very late in the budget process.

Through this process and into final decisions on the budget reductions, the TDSB will **not** relinquish its role to continue to stand up for public education in

Toronto and to be a leader in delivering high-quality programs and services for the communities we serve.