



Saskatoon Catholic Schools 2005 budget protects classroom learning

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, April 25, 2005

On Monday, April 25, trustees for Saskatoon Catholic Schools passed a 2005 budget that balances the school division's resources between protecting the integrity of teaching and learning in the classroom and in maintaining its school facilities.

"With the 2005 provincial budget allocation to Kindergarten to Grade 12 education being set at the same level as in 2004, we had some serious challenges in finding the necessary resources to balance our budget while maintaining programs, staffing, services and buildings at what we believe are necessary and appropriate levels," explained Jim Carriere, Board Chair.

Maintaining these levels means a property tax mill rate increase of 2.8%. However, coupled with the government's new Education Property Tax Credit, property taxes will still decrease by 5.2%, or \$53, on a house worth \$100,000.

"While we would have preferred not to increase the mill rate, we continue to be leaders in the province in the effective and efficient use of our resources," Carriere added. "Saskatoon Catholic Schools has consistently been the leader with the lowest cost per student ratio of any school division, public or Catholic, in Saskatchewan for a number of years."

Priorities for the division continue to be a faith-based education for students and staff as well as supporting and enhancing programming for students with diverse needs. The government does not fund the faith dimension and only partially funds the various programs for students with diverse needs from stay in school programs to students with disabilities. This year, the division will also put additional resources into math teaching and learning and early literacy.

The division also faces increased costs for facility maintenance, student transportation, utilities, insurance, support and service staff contracts, out-of-scope staff and learning resources. In addition, property tax re-assessment has had a major impact with Saskatoon's assessment growth reaching 13.5% and the provincial government's assessment recognition set at 8%. The Foundation operating grant provided a further 2.7% through basic rate increases to the division still leaving a gap on assessment of 2.8% or \$1,292,691.

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The government did close the gap in funding between urban and rural school divisions slightly again this year with approximately 3.6% more on a per student basis. However, urban school divisions still receive about \$135 less per student than rural divisions. As well, the government is providing an additional \$165,000 in 2005 to the division for shared services for students with diverse needs. Again, there remains a significant gap in funding for shared services and for student technology between urban and rural divisions.

Efforts to reduce costs and increase revenues also continue. Saskatoon Catholic Cyber School is the largest virtual high school in Saskatchewan and it, as well as the International Students' Program at St. Joseph High School, generates revenue for the division. The division is also in the second year of implementing a five-year Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) project, which will provide phones for classroom teachers, eliminate the need for school intercom systems and improve overall communications. This is expected to save the division \$200,000 per year once it is fully implemented.

Saskatoon Catholic Schools has more than 15,000 students in five high schools, 34 elementary schools and two associate schools. The division employs approximately 1,600 teaching, service and support staff. The purpose of Saskatoon Catholic Schools is to assist parents and the local church community in the formation of students in heart, mind, body and spirit.

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For more information, please contact:

Mona Etcheverry, Communications Consultant
Saskatoon Catholic Schools
Telephone: 659 -7077

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