

Sunrise mill increase unavoidable

Province provides negligible increase, tells divisions to get funding from ratepayers

By Tony Zerucha

The Sunrise School Division proposes an \$82.8 million budget for 2024-25, up \$7.3 million from 2023-24. The mill rate increases 6.9 per cent from 11.517 to 12.32. Assuming a 50 per cent education property tax rebate, the homeowner of a \$400,000 property will see a hike of \$72.18 on their bill.

Presenting the Sunrise 2024-25 draft budget Feb. 22, Secretary-treasurer Jody Thiessen said most of the increase is due to salaries, seven new school buses,

inflationary increases, and some budget additions. The mill rate increase is unavoidable, as Sunrise received only \$222,000 from the Province of Manitoba for operational increases. They also received \$364,000 for a nutrition funding program, leaving them with a 1.8 per cent overall increase, one of the lowest raises in Manitoba.

"There were a number of school divisions that saw a range of funding from 1.7 per cent all the way to 11.1 per cent," Thiessen said. "Sunrise was on the bottom end at a total of 1.8 per cent.

In the end, an increase from the province of operational costs of \$222,000 doesn't go a long way when it comes to an overall budget of \$75 million [the total in 2023-24]."

"When the province made their announcement, they directed school divisions to make up the difference by going to the ratepayers; that was clear language from the province," Chair Paul Magnan said. "I'm very confident this is going to be the trend we're going to in most divisions if not all school divisions across Manitoba.

I would say it's probably going to be seen in every school division in the province. That will become clear in the coming weeks."

Student enrollment was stable at 4,799. Around 80 per cent of students take buses to school on one of 91 routes. Transportation costs rose five per cent to \$6.2 million, primarily due to wage and fuel increases.

"We spend substantially more than other divisions on transporting pupils due to our large geographic area," Thiessen said.

Maintenance costs are up seven per cent to \$7.8

million. Thiessen said contributing factors included insurance and general pressures on maintenance.


Sunrise School Division employs 383 teachers. Costs for instruction rose eight per cent, or roughly \$3.4 million to \$44 million. Additional teachers and support staff have been hired, and more funds have been earmarked for distance education at Hutterian schools and technology renewal plans.

Student support services costs have risen 12 per cent to \$15.5 million. Thiessen said the gains are due to

anticipated wage equity, additional support staff and more occupational therapy. Administration rises seven per cent to \$2.4 million.


"Sunrise continues to find efficiencies to ensure we comply with provincial directives," Thiessen said. "Increases for the current budget are once again a result of anticipated wage equity costs, liability insurance increases, and professional membership increases."

The division's online payment system and ward boundaries will undergo reviews.



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Sunrise chair Paul Magnan said the province directed school divisions to make up the funding difference by raising taxes.

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