Upper Grand District School Board approves roughly $550 million combined budget

Written By SAM ODROWSKI

The 2025-2026 school year budget for the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) was recently approved by board trustees.

The budget was developed over several months and focuses on the priorities outlined in the board's Multi-Year Plan (MYP).

However, ensuring the $499.9 million operating budget and $49.7 million capital budget were balanced and compliant wasn't without challenges, according to the UGDSB.

?The budget is balanced and compliant with Ministry of Education requirements. However, it does not come without risks. Cost pressures exist in several non-classroom, service areas. Staff have worked to pare down non-classroom expenses in services areas across the organization,? reads a UGDSB press release.

UGDSB chair Ralf Mesenbrink commented on concerns around the sustainability of reducing expenses.

?We have approved a balanced budget for 2025-26 that remains true to our Multi-Year Plan goals and continues the direction given by the board two years ago with respect to funding reading and mathematics supports beyond what is funded by the government. This was accomplished through the thoughtful, strategic work of staff, paring non-classroom expenses to the bone,? said Chair of the Board, Ralf Mesenbrink. ?Some of these expense reductions, however, are not sustainable year after year.?

Operating revenues for the 2025-2026 budget include $489.3 million in Core Education Funding from the provincial government and $10.6 in other revenue sources.

Of the total revenue, instruction-related expenses such as staffing costs $417.5 million, school facilities costs $42.9 million, school transportation costs $26.6 million, and central service departments costs $12.8 million.

UGDSB Director of Education Peter Sovran shared his outlook on the budget document for 2025-2026.

?This budget is more than a balancing of revenue and expenses for another year ? it's a commitment to staying focused on our priorities,? said Sovran. ?It keeps classroom-based learning, student outcomes, and enriched educational experiences at the center of everything we do as we work together to realize Vision 2026+.?

He added, ?This balanced budget carries risks. Reductions in some service areas mean our ability to replace non-critical assets may be delayed, response times for staff supports could lengthen, and innovation initiatives might slow.?

The District 18 Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) union in Upper Grand delegated at a recent UGDSB board meeting, where a petition was presented with over 650 signatures from education workers, parents and supporters.

The petition requests that the Government of Ontario increase annual government investments in public education and provide immediate and dedicated funding to address the backlog of school repairs and maintenance needed to ensure a safe school environment. The petition also asks the province to end the recruitment and retention crisis to ensure students have the teachers and education workers needed to support their success.

UGDSB trustees unanimously approved a motion to write a letter to the Ministry of Education expressing concerns with chronic underfunding in education throughout Ontario, following the OSSTF delegation.

Mesenbrink said ?constant budget pressures? as a result of chronic underfunding leave him ?concerned about the future? of education in the board and across the province.

The UGDSB has over 35,000 students enrolled across its 65 elementary schools and 11 secondary schools in Guelph, Wellington and Dufferin County.

The board employs more than 4,000 education and support staff who are aided by the contributions of volunteers and community partners.

In a report last year, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that Ontario's core education funding has dropped by $1,500 per student since 2018.