



## EXECUTIVE REPORT TO FINANCE AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE

**TO:** Finance and Facilities Committee

**FROM:** Manny Figueiredo, Director of Education

**DATE:** March 11, 2021

**PREPARED BY:** Stacey Zucker, Associate Director, Support Services and Treasurer  
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**RE:** **Consultation Results for the Identification of Board Priorities to Guide 2021/2022 Budget Development**

### Action x Monitoring

#### **Recommended Action:**

That the 2021/2022 Board Budget Priorities be approved as:

- Improving Student Achievement
- Mental Health and Well-Being
- School Revitalization
- Special Education
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

#### **Background:**

The Finance and Facilities Committee has been assigned the responsibility for “Budget Planning and Development” of the annual budget. Finance and Facilities Committee reviewed the Budget Development Process and agreed that we will facilitate a consultation process on Board Budget Priorities and encourage greater stakeholder participation in the consultation process by connecting with more internal groups.

HWDSB sees the identification and finalization of Board Budget Priorities as a very important and foundational step in its Budget Development Process. A Leading Budget Planning and Development Practice is to demonstrate that the annual budget is linked to strategic Board-approved goals and priorities. The identification of the Board’s Budget Priorities will assist with the understanding of all Board stakeholders of the core programs and initiatives that the Annual Budget is designed to support. As a school board develops its budget it is helpful to establish a clear statement of the Board’s Budget Priorities to ensure that decisions are influenced by these priorities. Accordingly, an online survey was conducted from January 26, 2021 to February 25, 2021 which received a total of 609 responses (352 responses for the 2018/2019 and 347 responses for the 2017/2018 consultation). The purpose of this report is to share with Finance and Facilities Committee the results of this consultation. Appendix A – Summary of Online Survey Findings is provided for Committee reference.

#### **Staff Observations:**

The budget consultation survey confirms that respondents are very supportive of the Board Priorities for Budget development purposes. On average, across the five priorities, 90% of responses indicated that HWDSB should remain committed to the five priorities as shown in the table below.

**Feedback on whether HWDSB should remain committed to the six priorities:**

<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Mental Health and Well-Being	96%	4%
Special Education	95%	5%
Improving Student Achievement	90%	10%
School Revitalization	85%	15%
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Learning	82%	18%
<b>Average % across response options</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>10%</b>

**Feedback on the importance of the six priorities:**

<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Special Education	1
Mental Health and Well-Being	2
Improving Student Achievement	3
School Revitalization	4
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Learning	5

**Conclusion:**

Therefore, as supported by the results of the public consultation the foregoing recommended action will serve to approve and reaffirm the listing of Board Priorities that will influence the development of the 2021/2022 budget.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the consultation exercise has also served to help achieve the following benefits:

- Improve the public's understanding of issues and builds strong lines of communication.
- Help the Board to become fully aware of the possible impact of a decision.
- Allow the Board to make informed educated decisions, considering the public's views.
- Establish a better environment for the implementation of decisions because people have been able to participate in the process and understand the reasons for the decision.

As part of Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's (HWDSB) commitment to accountability, the board informs its community stakeholders of its budget for the upcoming school year to show how it uses its resources, efficiently, effectively, and equitably.

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's Strategic Directions focus on achievement, engagement, and equity matters and there are five strategies which are the focus of the 2021-2022 [budget priorities](#).

Research and Analytics developed a survey to gather public feedback on HWDSB's proposed board-wide budget priorities. This report summarizes the results of this consultation.

### **The Survey**

A six-question survey was posted on the HWDSB website from January 26th, 2021 and closed on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The survey consisted of closed and open-ended questions which allowed respondents to comment on each of the priorities and to share their concerns and ideas.

### **Results**

#### **Q1. Please indicate which group you belong to.**

609 respondents took part in the survey. 60% (366) of respondents were staff members, 31% (190) were parents/guardians/caregivers, 6% (35) were students, and 3% (18) were community members.

#### **Q2: Do you think HWDSB should be committed to these priorities?**

Budget Priority	Yes	No	Total responses
Special Education	95% (564)	5% (31)	100% (595)
Mental Health and Well-Being	96% (564)	4% (26)	100% (590)
Improving Student Achievement	90% (517)	10% (56)	100% (573)
21st Century Learning	82% (457)	18% (102)	100% (559)
School Revitalization	85% (479)	15% (85)	100% (564)

#### **Q3 - Please rank each of the priorities, where 1 is 'most important' and 5 is 'least important'**

In order of highest to least important, respondents ranked the priorities as follows:

1. Special Education (most important)
2. Mental Health and Well-Being
3. Improving Student Achievement
4. School Revitalization
5. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (least important)

#### Q4 - What direction(s) should HWDSB take with regard to each priority?

In the results below, respondents were able to choose multiple options to indicate which priority they wanted HWDSB to focus on in terms of information on the website, the allocation of additional resources, and in terms of community engagement.

The percentage and number of responses indicate that all priorities would benefit from communication on the website, a greater allocation of resources, and more consultation with expert groups and committees.

Post more information about this priority on the HWDSB website (1031 responses)	Allocate additional resources to students, schools and clusters on a per-need basis (1958 responses)	Engage in consultation with expert groups and committees (e.g., Parent-Involvement Committee) (1377 responses)
Mental Health and Well-Being (22%, 224)	Special Education (25%, 494)	Mental Health and Well-Being (25%, 336)
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Learning (21%, 219)	Mental Health and Well-Being (22%, 442)	Special Education (21%, 293)
School Revitalization (20%, 212)	Improving Student Achievement (19%, 370)	Improving Student Achievement (19%, 263)
Improving Student Achievement (19%, 190)	School Revitalization (18%, 338)	School Revitalization (18%, 246)
Special Education (18%, 186)	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Learning (16%, 314)	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Learning (17%, 239)

#### Q5. Please provide additional direction(s) you would like for any of the priorities:

Respondents made hundreds of comments for each of the priorities. These comments were collated and grouped together in the following summary:

Special Education (268 comments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed equity and anti-racism priorities into special education.</li> <li>• Provide inclusive before and after school programs.</li> <li>• More arts program funding.</li> <li>• More resources for enrichment programs</li> <li>• Resources for students to gain life skills.</li> <li>• More specialized digital resources to support student learning.</li> <li>• More specialized classes to suit all needs.</li> <li>• Re-open/keep open self-contained classes.</li> <li>• More EAs with more 1:1 support for students.</li> <li>• Ensure staffing consistency to avoid students going through a revolving door of staff.</li> </ul>

- Smaller groups of students so that the needs of every child can be met.
- More support and training for all staff needed (i.e. on differentiated teaching and learning)
- More special education staff in all schools, not just select schools.
- French speaking staff and support staff in French Immersion schools.
- More staff qualified to support high achieving students.
- Make EAs, CYCPs, BCBA's wages better to attract well qualified and motivated staff.
- Earlier and more efficient diagnosis/assessment
- Improve waiting times for referrals, assessments, and support implementation.
- Simplify and clarify the IEP process.
- More information for parents on IEPs and IPRC.
- More check-ins with students who have an IEP.
- Better sharing of information with EAs.
- Value the input of parents and students in determining what services are needed for each student.

#### Mental Health and Well-Being (231 comments)

- Embed equity and anti-racism priorities into mental health and well-being priorities.
- Staff need specific resources for supporting BIPOC students.
- Educate staff on how to support students with mental health needs from an anti-racist, anti-oppressive framework that addresses systemic barriers to wellness (i.e., poverty, disability, racism, transphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, etc.).
- Training for staff in the form of webinars with mental health experts.
- More specialized resources and staff (i.e.-EAs and CYCPs, psychologists, social workers) are needed-They are the caring adults that students need.
- Provide resources beyond a helpline (i.e.-where to find a therapist, study group, social worker, community events, physical health programs, extracurricular activities).
- Support staff and teachers to integrate discussions on mental health in Social Studies or Physical Education lessons.
- Plan for the re-integration of students after a prolonged absence from in-school learning.
- Pre-plan services to help students and families who will have developed mental health and physical health issues during the past year/as a result of the pandemic.
- Pay attention to staff mental health too-staff is struggling.
- Use arts and music programs to provide a positive space and place for students to express themselves and gain support and joy.
- Act on the Bullying Panel Review recommendations from JK and upwards.
- More action and less talk around what the school board is doing in terms of supporting staff to deal with student mental health issues and difficult behaviors.
- Engage and educate parents on how to support their child's mental health and well-being.

- Engage the community and the City of Hamilton in providing resources and support for schools and families.

### **Improving Student Achievement (160 comments)**

- Staff and families need clarification on what this budget priority aims to do/what it means.
- Engage students and parents in reporting back to teachers on what the student is struggling with and how they're progressing.
- Embed equity priorities into the student achievement planning and decisions-this should be from an anti-racist and anti-oppressive framework/lens.
- Look after student and family basic needs (nutrition, mental health, etc.) and academic achievement will improve.
- Allocate more money and resources to lower socio-economic families and neighborhoods.
- Bring back hands-on learning for students in Special Education.
- Develop different measures to assess student achievement other than exams, grades, and EQAO.
- Reward students who are achieving well.
- Make learning basic skills mandatory (i.e. reading, writing, math, listening, technology basic skills).
- Early interventions for students who are lagging behind in math and reading.
- Develop virtual and in-school libraries. Foster a love of reading culture where students read often from a diverse selection of literature.
- Create before and after school programs that support creativity, teamwork and student organization because students are spending a lot of time in front of screens. Hire extra staff to make this happen and budget to have this running at all schools for the sake of equity of access for all students.
- More funding for student programs such as the Audition Based Program of the Arts and Empower.
- Hire and fairly compensate EAs and other specialized staff to support students.
- Compensate bus drivers fairly so that students get to school on time and there's no learning loss.
- Update the technology and resources teachers use in the classroom to teach.
- Plan and support gifted and high achieving students too-they are often not supported and pushed.
- Give students flexibility with deadlines.
- More resources to meet the needs of ESL students in schools, especially in schools that have many ESL students.
- A focus on student accountability.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (134 comments)

- Define what “competencies” are (what are the skills that students should have gained by a certain age?).
- Clarify to students and families that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning is not all about technology (i.e.-the importance of financial literacy, coding, research skills, choosing information wisely, etc.).
- Embed equity priorities, including updates on sexual health, consent, being transsexual, LGBTQ+, and Indigenous studies.
- Support students and families in getting and increasing the speed of internet access.
- Bring back school computer labs and plan time for students to use these as part of their learning.
- Students have spent a year intensely on different types of technology-there should be a balance next year with focus on interaction, getting outside, nature, sustainability, anti-racism, and creativity.
- Do not over-emphasize the importance of technology in teaching reading, writing, and math skills.
- Provide staff with time to learn technologies during work hours.
- Communicate with other boards to understand what is working well.
- Provide updated and better access to technology for students in schools.
- Reassess the current technologies available to students and buy what they need to learn (i.e. laptops not iPads).
- Educate students on responsible and healthy use of technology.

### School Revitalization (127 comments)

- Embed equity priorities such as all gender washrooms, and all gender changing rooms.
- Less money towards sporting activities and more towards arts programs which are consistently underfunded and therefore provide less opportunities for all students.
- More appropriate desk size for students because this is an equity issue.
- Check school infrastructure safety- deteriorating roofs, walls, air conditioning, HVAC systems, asbestos, shaded areas in playgrounds, and accessibility.
- Upgrade washrooms to be touchless and ensure all school doors can be opened with automatically.
- Ensure all schools have similar play zones for students-it is an equity issue when some schools have playscapes and others have fences off grass.
- Students with special needs should have sensory rooms and improved resources.
- Keep schools in neighborhoods to avoid the need for bussing.
- Have a multi-year plan for school revitalization and make a commitment to implement this plan.
- Listen to what administrators in schools say their school needs and use this as part of the planning.
- Prioritize revitalization projects (i.e.-it is less important to have a new track field and more important to fix roofs, ventilation, and washrooms).
- Ensure that there are adequate drop-off zones for students because many are taking risks jumping out of cars on busy roads.

- Hire more cleaning staff to ensure clean and safe spaces for students and staff.
- Check that all schools have appropriate gym sizes and sporting resources.

**Q6. Please list additional priorities that HWDSB should consider committing to for the 2021-2022 budget.**

There were a total of 240 responses to this question. The responses have been grouped into themes:

Additional priorities to consider	Example of comments
Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and immediately respond to families and students who say they feel unwell and, unsafe - including students whose peers are aggressive/violent.</li> <li>• Clarity on consequences for students who are violent and who threaten violence against peers and staff.</li> <li>• Engage first responders in schools and look at how they can support students in schools through mentoring, safety education, problem solving.</li> <li>• Invest in staff mental and physical health because they are the front-line workers in schools.</li> <li>• Acknowledge and meet the needs of support staff and occasional staff-they are often forgotten.</li> <li>• Ensure safe school environments (i.e. salting walkways, fixing buildings, security).</li> <li>• Hire mental health staff and place them in schools.</li> <li>• Planning and execution of the Bullying Panel report to be communicated to the public with regular updates on what action is taking place.</li> </ul>
Equity & human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This should be the primary focus on the school board's annual plan and HWDSB should develop and build programs for its diverse student groups.</li> <li>• Students with special needs are falling into the cracks because they are not provided with EA and specialized staff support.</li> <li>• Hire Indigenous and other specialized staff to meet the needs of our diverse students-students should see staff who are like them and who represent our diverse society every day in schools.</li> <li>• More and better French resources-consider French writing teams to update and create resources.</li> <li>• There is a high number of ESL students at HWDSB-make resources available to support these students.</li> <li>• Review current teaching resources to ensure equity and diversity.</li> </ul>

Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make connections with community partners to offer services in schools for students with behavior and mental health issues.</li> </ul>
Reallocate funds where most needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to staff about what is needed and implement changes.</li> <li>• Provide staff with the training, resources, technology, and supplies they need to meet student learning needs and standards.</li> <li>• Assess where staff are needed and re-allocate funds there-for example, there is a real shortage of EAs and IT staff.</li> <li>• Re-allocate funds to have smaller class sizes and hire more staff.</li> <li>• Re-allocate funds to sports and arts programs as a way to provide students with a variety of activities.</li> <li>• Re-allocate funding from standardized testing to additional classroom resources.</li> <li>• Re-allocate funds to training staff on new curricula and technology they are expected to teach/use.</li> </ul>
More focus on basic skills & closing gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate money and resources to strengthening basic skills such as math, reading, writing, cooking, nutrition, financial literacy for all students, from a young age.</li> <li>• Offer summer school for all students who want to catch up/close the gaps in their learning.</li> </ul>
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on climate education, planting trees, solar and wind energy, electric heat pumps, paid parking at schools, rewards for reduced emissions (i.e. walking to school).</li> </ul>
Family engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage families by offering tutorials on The Hub, technology, supporting their child during classroom activities.</li> </ul>