

Report Title: 2026-2027 Budget Consultation - Feedback Results
Submitted by: Roxana Negoï, Superintendent of Business Services and Treasurer
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1. Analysis

This report provides the Board of Trustees with the results of the budget consultation process. Under the Education Act, school boards are allowed to file a compliant (deficit) budget, using board reserves of up to 1% of their provincial (funding) allocation. Regulation requires school boards to eliminate the deficit within two years, or request approval from the Minister of Education. The Halton District School Board has filed a compliant (deficit) budget for 4 years in a row, and in the current year received Ministry approval to run a deficit of \$7.1M, with the strong recommendation to balance the 2026-2027 budget.

In order to do so, while also facing enrolment decline, the 2026-2027 budget will reflect reductions in all areas of the school board impacting staffing and non-staffing budgets. Over the past 2 years, enrolment declined by over 1,800 students, and it is projected over the next two years that enrolment will decline by another 1,500 students. Enrolment is the main driver of Core Education funding, and as such, declining enrolment reduces the available funding across all funding allocations, not just the teacher in the classroom, but all the wrap-around supports for the students, including special education supports, student mental health and well-being and school operations and maintenance. As a result, it is estimated that savings of \$10 to \$14M will be required in order to balance the 2026-2027 budget, unless enrolment projections improve or Core Education Funding parameters increase.

The budget feedback process was launched earlier this year, to facilitate a meaningful consultation and allow for decisions to be made in a timely fashion. During October and December 2025, a total of 23 budget workshops and presentations were facilitated, with over 500 participants, including staff, trustees, union leaders, parent and school councils and Special Education Advisory Committee members. These sessions generated 116 budget ideas for consideration, and discussed feasibility for implementation as well as identified potential consequences.

To complement the information gathering from the various budget workshops and presentations, the public budget consultation process was launched in December 2025, with the launch of the Budget Input page, where information on the current year budget was

provided, questions were answered and a Public Information Engagement Session was held on January 19, 2026 in advance of the survey launch. The survey received a total of 3,181 responses, a 53% increase over the prior year. Majority of the responses were received from parents/guardians (50%), staff and students members provided 24% and 23% of responses, respectively, while community members and organizations contributed 3% of responses. Approximately 19% of responses were received by respondents who endorsed multiple roles (e.g., parent and staff). There was a significant increase in the number of student engagement this year, with their overall participation increasing from 4% last year, to 23% this year.

The detailed summary of survey findings is attached to this report. Overall respondents identify the following areas of priority for the HDSB to consider in making budget decisions:

- a) There is a strong desire to maintain or reduce class sizes to improve learning outcomes. It is important to note that class sizes are provincially mandated through labour negotiations and funding. Individual school boards have very little flexibility to accommodate smaller class sizes within their budget. The HDSB allocates additional resources to certain priority schools or programs in addition to funded class sizes, and as a practice does not support triple grades within smaller schools. These practices are continuing into 2026-2027.
- b) Respondents stressed the need to prioritize upgrades and repairs to school facilities. The HDSB has historically spend below the funding allocation in this area, as the majority of funding has always been directed to students and the classroom. The current proposed reductions however, do not contemplate a reduction in school repairs and maintenance, instead focus on operating efficiencies and building automation.
- c) Respondents identified curriculum delivery, special education supports, student mental health and well-being, teacher training, integration of Artificial Intelligence and extracurricular activities as areas of continued focus. The HDSB has always allocated more resources than funding on instruction, special education and student well-being. These remain areas of priority for resource allocation even during periods of financial challenges. However, declining enrolment impacts all funding areas, and it is not possible to maintain the same level of supports across the system. As resources, enrolment and funding are balanced with fiscal responsibility and sustainability, there is a need to align the budget to funding to the extent possible. In order to minimize the impact on these areas, the HDSB is contemplating operating efficiencies that do not impact staffing first, increasing revenue opportunities and improving student retention rates.
- d) Respondents prioritized equitable access to resources, opportunities, and support,

focusing specifically on students from historically underserved communities. This aligns with the strategic priorities of the Board, and the budget development objectives. Additional funds and resources are allocated to priority schools or student populations based on needs, academic results and school level feedback. This practice will continue into 2026-2027.

- e) Respondents stressed the need to reduce administrative overhead at the board level, amongst senior staff, corporate and central program staff. Balancing the budget considers all staffing areas within the system, including corporate and central program staffing. In addition, senior staff have also contributed in containing the cost and number of the leadership team. Since 2017-2018, the Ministry of Education has funded 4 additional superintendent level positions, and have mandated schools on a couple of occasions to hire additional superintendents to fill these funded roles. The HDSB senior team has added no new superintendent positions, instead the current senior staff received added responsibilities and the funding for these 4 positions was directed towards additional staff to support students. Furthermore, Trustees do not receive salaries for their role and work on the Board, instead they receive a nominal honorarium, and are funded accordingly.
- f) Respondents also offered suggestions for consideration in reducing spending around professional development, technology and consolidated procurement. These are strategies that are always reviewed and considered, in particular as contracts are renewed. Respondents inquired about additional details around expenses and how funds are utilized. The HDSB public website contains great details of the budget, funding and expense breakdown, as well as interim Board reports that provide progress during the year. The budget breakdown can be found under [Our Board/Budget and Financial Information](#) public website, while the interim financial reports, are provided under [Our Board/Board and Committee Meetings](#), as part of the respective Board of Trustees public agenda package. Interim financial reports are reported in November, January, April and June.
- g) Comments regarding transportation focused on reducing costs and optimizing services. Student transportation is provided by the Halton Student Transportation Services (HSTS) consortium, offering services to both the HDSB and the Halton Catholic District School Board. Routing efficiency is an annual process, with a bus typically servicing 3 schools. Student transportation is an area closely aligned to funding. In this current year, HSTS engaged a consultant to conduct an overall optimization study with the goal of identifying additional efficiencies. The result of the study supported that the current route structure and efficiencies of the HSTS are optimized to the extent possible and

that the annual review is effective in identifying in year savings, once registrations are finalized. This process will continue into 2026-2027.

- h) Respondents identifying as students have identified as areas of focus extracurricular activities, sports and arts programs, increased access to technology, investment in student mental health and well being and school maintenance and repairs.

As mentioned in previous reports and presentations, the HDSB spends approximately 98% of the budget to support students directly in the classroom and indirectly by means of facilitating student transportation, repair and maintenance of school facilities and grounds, and providing central program support to school level staff and students. The feedback received from the consultation process will inform our review of existing budget allocations to ensure we maximize the support for students, while continuing to be fiscally responsible and operate within limited funding parameters.

1.1 Governance Alignment

Under the Education Act, section 232 (3) and (4) the Board of Trustees are required to approve a balanced budget, with some exceptions for a compliant budget, which would allow for an in-year deficit which could be the lesser of 1% of the provincial allocation calculation or the balance of the accumulated surplus available for compliance. This report is part of the budget development process.

2. Background

Annually, school boards are required to develop a budget that allocates available funding to addressing the diverse needs of the system. The key objective of the Budget Development Process is to align the allocation of resources with the Multi-Year Strategic Plan, the Special Education Plan and the School Renewal/Capital Plans; identify school-based staffing requirements; identify budget challenges and opportunities; and gather input from the various stakeholder groups.

In preparation for the 2026-2027 Budget, HDSB invited input from parents, guardians, students, staff, and community members. A virtual Public Information Session was held on January 19, 2026, to educate the community about how the board is funded, and how resources are allocated. Feedback was gathered through an online survey which was available from January 20 to February 1, 2026. The survey asked respondents to share feedback on the following two areas:

- (1) As we continue to review our programs and resource allocation, please share any feedback on how HDSB can support you in minimizing the impact of budgetary reallocations; and
- (2) From a list of priorities, identify the top 3 areas that are most important to you and that you feel the HDSB should keep in mind when making decisions about resource allocation and reductions.

In addition to the online survey, separate budget discussions were held with staff, trustees, Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), school councils and union leaders. Budget discussions will continue with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and with trustees at future Committee of the Whole (COTW) meetings.

3. Financial Impact

There is no direct financial impact of this report, however feedback received from this consultation is reviewed by senior leadership and will inform the recommendations and final decisions around reductions and resource allocation to be included in a draft budget to the Board of Trustees. Without the release of the Core Education Funding, there remain many uncertainties with regards to funding continuation, particularly for timed investments. A draft budget presentation will be scheduled for the Committee of the Whole on May 19, 2026, with a

draft budget report to be presented to the Board of Trustees at the June 2, 2026 meeting.

4. Multi-Year Strategic Plan Alignment

Priority Alignment: Environmental and Global Citizenship; Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion; Indigenous Rights and Education; Kindness, Connection and Community; Learning, Engagement and Achievement; Mental Health and Well-Being

The Board of Trustees have governance over the financial resources allocated to the Halton District School Board, and the resource allocation to support the Multi-Year Strategic Plan in a manner that is fiscally responsible and compliant with appropriate statutes and regulations. The budget development supports all of HDSB commitments under the Multi-Year Strategic Plan, by facilitating the allocation of resources for a successful school and fiscal year for students and staff. Budget consultation and feedback is an important part of the budget development process, providing input into the decision-making process.

5. Attachment(s):

- 5.1. Appendix A - 2026-2027 Budget Consultation - Detailed Summary of Survey Findings

Respectfully submitted,

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