

Public school budgets released

By Sarah Sobanski

Area public schools are facing cuts at a reduced rate thanks to government funding for the most part. For two schools however, the cuts equal out to what other schools across the board are facing.

Hastings Prince Edward District School board announced in September it was cutting school budgets by an average of 30 per cent. That's \$800,000 from budgets controlled at the school level, according to board communications officer Kerry Donnell.

School operations such as cleaning, maintenance, utilities, clerical support, etc. are provided centrally and are different than the school budget, Donnell responded to *Bancroft This Week* via email following the paper's request that the board release individual school budgets from this year and last.

The school budget supports school program and special transportation costs, school-initiated professional development, bank, phone, photocopier charges, extra-curricular activities, etc, said Donnell.

In October, the board received more than \$600,000 from the province's Rural and Northern Education Fund. The board allocated a sixth of this fund to the school budgets of its 26 funding-eligible northern and rural schools. The rest went to operations costs at these schools.

The schools Birds Creek, Coe Hill, Hermon, Maynooth, York River, North Hastings High School collectively received an additional \$14,192 for their school budgets. This amount is the schools' share of the \$100,000 that was allocated to northern and rural school budgets from the Rural and Northern Education Fund, said Donnell. The predicted 30 per cent cut was less than this for these 26 northern and rural schools.

Donnell said the \$100,000 brought the collective school budget cut across the board to \$700,000. The fund wasn't enough to offset proposed budget cuts to northern and rural schools including area schools.

The average cut to elementary schools across the board was 16 per cent. That average was cut in half for Bird's Creek, Coe Hill and Maynooth public schools who saw decreases around eight per cent each between \$1,000 and \$2,000. York River Public School was harder hit with a 15 per cent cut or around \$7,000.

Hermon Public School had an extra \$167 added in its budget, a one per cent increase. It and Deseronto Public School were the only schools in the board to see increases for the 2017-'18 school year.

For Hermon PS specifically, that school previously had a fairly small budget to start with. The funding worked to its benefit, said Donnell.

High schools saw a 28 per cent average cut. North Hastings High School was on par with this average. It lost 29 per cent of its budget or nearly \$40,000.

Secondary schools experienced greater decreases due to higher enrolments, said Donnell.

Bancroft This Week asked if the fund would offset budget cuts next year as the board fulfills its multi-year financial recovery plan. Donnell said that had yet to be determined.