

2022-23 Rural and Northern Education Funding Allocation Report

Background:

Since it was established in 2017-18, the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) has improved the education experience for students from rural communities by supporting initiatives such as:

- Improving programming and support services in rural schools
- Continuing the operation of rural schools
- Enhancing student transportation options

Funding is allocated based on the number of rural students and factors measuring the density of rural student enrolment in the board. The ministry has identified 37 Bluewater District School Board (BWDSB) schools eligible for funding.

Annually, BWDSB has had the opportunity to identify local needs and allocate RNEF funding accordingly. Past allocation supported by Trustees are identified in the table below.

On March 22, 2022, the 2022-23 Grants for Student Needs was released and included an inflationary increase to the RNEF allocation of \$16,350 for a total of \$1,256,929 to the BWDSB. The proposed investments for 2022-23 are also reflected in the corresponding table.

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Rural Operations Deficits	\$ 436,370	\$ -	\$ -
Technology Master Plan (TMP)	507,733	870,579	906,929
School Budget Increase	120,000	120,000	120,000
Innovation Fund	20,000	20,000	20,000
Playground Upgrades	70,000	70,000	60,000
Shop Upgrades	60,000	60,000	50,000
Learning Recovery and Re-Engagement	-	100,000	100,000
Total RNEF Allocation	\$ 1,214,103	\$ 1,240,579	\$ 1,256,929

Financial Impact

Prior investments initiated through RNEF funding align with the board's strategic plan and priorities identified in the budget consultation conducted as part of prior budget process, including:

- investments in school budgets to support classrooms
- additional technology to modernize classrooms and to support staff
- utilizing funding opportunities to address risk and support for students

Past decisions to address the challenging costs of underutilized schools has created an improvement in efficiencies in board buildings that has resulted in stronger operations in recent years. Therefore, RNEF

funding that was used to minimize the impact of rural operating deficits can be redirected to support student device opportunities.

In January 2022, RNEF funding was designated to support a 1:1 device ratio for secondary students. Prior to 2021-22, annual contributions from RNEF to the Technology Master Plan (TMP) were approximately \$500K. To meet the resource requirements of a 1:1 device ratio going forward, the board will allocate approximately \$900K annually to the TMP.

The concept of learning recovery and re-engagement was introduced in the 2021-22 budget process. RNEF funding generates an opportunity to empower individual schools to promote learning recovery and re-engagement based on local needs and interests in alignment with the board priorities. As such, staff recommends that existing RNEF investment toward learning recovery and re-engagement continues.

In recognition that five Owen Sound area schools are not permitted to receive RNEF investments, an additional \$15,000 investment for learning recovery and re-engagement will be sourced from central budget.

The recommended allocation supports rural school operations in a long-term financially sustainable manner, while also recognizing the opportunities prioritized in the budget development process.

Recommendation:

That the Business Committee of the Whole receive the '2022-23 Rural and Northern Education Funding Allocation Report' for information.

Submitted to
Bluewater District School Board
Business Committee of the Whole
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