

New cash prompts tax freeze

BY JILLIAN AUSTIN

The average household in Brandon will see a school tax freeze this year, thanks to a last-minute revision to the provincial Tax Incentive Grant.

The Brandon School Division

reversed its proposed special levy rate of 9.1 per cent and accepted the new TIG in a closed-door meeting yesterday.

It means the division will now receive \$1.8 million from the province — up from the original announcement of \$1 million.

“We’re very pleased,” BSD chair George Buri said. “... It seems that the government has really responded.”

The Brandon School Division’s controversial 9.1 per cent special levy increase sparked an outpouring of criticism from Brandon Chamber

of Commerce and city residents.

Now, taxpayers will only see the special levy increase as a result of the 2.6 per cent annual average growth in assessment.

“The effect on every property, whether residential or commercial will ... be dependent on what

happened to their property during reassessment,” division secretary-treasurer Gerald Barnes said.

Brandon East NDP MLA Drew Caldwell is thrilled with the school board decision.

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» Caldwell thrilled with resolution

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“I’m very, very pleased that the Brandon School Division is joining with the majority of school divisions in Manitoba working with the provincial government to keep taxes down for property owners in our province,” Caldwell said. “(The grant) was designed to do exactly this.”

The school board will have to reduce its 2010-11 budget expenditures by just \$85,000.

“We can basically keep our budget as we decided on Feb. 16, and just cut \$85,000 from it,” Buri said.

The revised TIG comes after the school board met with representatives of the Manitoba Education Schools Finance Branch last week.

“At this time the board expressed concern regarding increased funding to meet our

projected enrolment increase resulting from the increase of immigration in Brandon,” Buri said. “This increase necessitates that English as an Additional Language programming and services be expanded.”

The province responded by changing the calculation of how they arrived at the expenditures.

According to Barnes, the TIG was originally calculated on 50 per cent of the average increase in expenditures over the previous three years. They increased that number to 65 per cent and adjusted for the projected increase in enrolment.

Trustees will consider the budget reductions, after receiving public input at the March 1 board meeting.

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