



World Class Learning in a Rural Environment

Funding Allocation Review Submission March 2018

*Respectfully Submitted by
SD 10 (Arrow Lakes) Board of Education*

SD 10 (Arrow Lakes) – A Truly Rural and Remote District

Located in the West Kootenay region of the province, SD 10 is a truly remarkable rural and remote district. Each of our small seven schools are located in rural and remote communities, hours away from any airport, regional hospital, or services. Our district continues to be in enrollment decline which has caused significant challenges and also fostered powerful creativity and innovation as we strive to provide “World Class Learning in a Rural Environment”, our motto, for all our learners.



We call ourselves “small is amazing” and we do all that we can to leverage the resources we can to make amazing things happen for our students’ learning. Our signature pedagogy in the district is place-conscious learning and we ensure that what we *do* have – a spectacular mountain environment with pristine lakes and great communities - informs the landscape of learning for our kids.

We operate our district on a glass-half-full paradigm, focus on what we have, not what we don’t have, and yet, given our rurality, we also face many funding-related challenges. Thank you for the opportunity to share our context with you.

427 terrific students in 7 awesome schools in 4 diverse communities.... in the middle of nowhere



Each of our seven schools are small rural schools at the heart of their communities

- Arrow Lakes Distributed Learning School
 - 45 K-12 students with teachers who primarily serve students in SD 10
- Burton Academy School (Outdoor Education and Entrepreneurship)
 - 14 students Grade 10-12
- Burton Elementary School (to be re-opened in 2018)
 - 10 K-3 students from the small community of Burton (population 150)
- Edgewood Elementary School
 - 22 K-7 students from the small community of Edgewood (population 200)
- Lucerne Elementary Secondary School –
 - 88 K-12 students from the small communities of New Denver, Silverton, Rosebery and Hills (population 1500)
- Nakusp Elementary School
 - 151 K-7 students from the small community of Nakusp (population 2500)
- Nakusp Secondary School
 - 128 Gr 8-12 students from the small community of Nakusp (population 2500)

Current Funding Formula Acknowledges Some Aspects of Our Rural Schools and District

The current operating budget funding formula somewhat addresses the needs of our district given that the formula recognizes some of our unique geographic factors. Indeed, **without the small community supplement, geographic factor, and student location factor allocations, we would not presently be able to provide an education for our students.**

It is more expensive to operate schools in rural places, and especially so in districts with significant geographical challenges, making us both rural and remote. **We would like the revised funding formula to continue to recognize and support education for our small rural and remote schools and remote district.** Our amazing students all need and deserve access to quality education.

A Geographically-Dispersed District

To get from one end of the district to another, we drive up remote highways, along the edges of Slocan Lake, over mountain passes, and across the Arrow Lake by ferry. Mud slides, ferry breakdowns, blizzards, forest fires and power outages are events we regularly face in SD 10.

Getting staff together for a district Pro-D day, trustees together for Board meetings, or students for a district-wide Maker Day involves several hours of travel, and of course, additional cost.

On winter roads, it can take six hours to get to the nearest airport, or the regional hospital, or to a specialist medical appointment. Any meeting held in Vancouver, requires that we not only have to travel and stay the night before the event, but also stay the night of the meeting, as it is not possible to safely travel home over dangerous mountain roads at night.

Geographical and Transportation Issues that Impact Student Learning and our Budget

Our geography is both a blessing and a curse. We live in paradise. Picturesque tiny communities cling to the sides of steep mountains in the Kootenay Rockies.

We are located between the Monashee Range to the west, and the Selkirk Range at our eastern reaches. Our school district stretches from its northern reaches at Galena Bay and Trout Lake, 40 minutes south of Revelstoke on the south side of the Arrow Lake ferry landing, all the way to the southwestern reaches across the ferry at Fauquier on Arrow Lake, near Edgewood. We wend our way to the top of the Monashee Pass, and as far east across the Summit Lake pass to Slocan Lake, then southwards along Slocan Lake as far as Enterprise Creek. Nakusp is the “big city” – a village of only 1500! It’s a large geographic span, all on narrow winding roads. It’s hard for visitors to get to us, and hard for us to get out of the district.

Our spectacular lake and mountain settings, though beautiful and great for outdoor learning, also create challenges for us which impact the education of our students and which are crucial to include in a funding formula calculation. Most everything costs more to provide an education to our learners!

Here are some examples of the challenges we face, illustrating the need for the funding allocation system to reflect these additional costs in providing and supporting rural K-12 education:



High Student Travel and Transportation Expenses

- Not only do we have to run seven busses to serve the needs of our students all across the vast geography of our district in getting to and from school, but,
- Any elementary athletic tournament, Track Meet, National Aboriginal Day, or fine arts event or presentation also requires school bus travel within the district, and,
- As voiced in recent consultations around our 2017-2022 District Strategic Plan, the need to continue to ensure that both cross-district and out-of-district travel continues, and is increased, is seen as imperative to ensure our students' learning opportunities
- All athletic teams must travel for a minimum of two hours, and up to ten hours out of district in order to participate in school sports events – just to play another team!
- Parents and students spend a considerable amount of time fundraising to allow our students to attend a play or music event, play school sports, participate in cultural programs, or visit post-secondary institutions. Our district budget is not adequate to support the costs of providing these aspects of educational opportunity
- Work Experience opportunities are very limited in our small communities, and so students must travel to gain this valuable part of their learning
- An illustrative example of funding which did not capture the actual realities of our geography was the provincial Coding Initiative. Our district received \$22,000. Had we sent two Coding Lead teachers to the Train the Trainer sessions in Trail (a drive on winter roads of three hours each way, and necessitating overnight accommodation for two nights and additional TOC costs) we would have exhausted more than half of our funding just to train two teachers. Other districts in the region, classed as “rural” but with easy access to Trail in SD 20, received far more despite their minimal travel costs. Funding for these provincial initiatives is typically based on FTE, not actual rural and remote district costs which means that our “share” with our lower student enrollment never covers the actual costs and disenfranchises our learners or educators
- Likewise, the recent extra Transportation funding of \$42,000, although most welcome to assist us in additional costs that we face for Student Transportation, in no way recognizes the very real challenges that SD 10 faces in student transportation both within the district for regular bus service along remote roads and highways to transport children to school, or the costs of travel for curricular learning, sports, cultural or Career Education programs. Neighbouring districts with minimal student transportation expenses receive far more funding with far fewer expenses.
- **These funding inequities exacerbate already inequitable access for our learners to educational opportunities that are within easy reach of other districts and schools in the region and across the province.**



Special Education Costs More Given Multi-age Class Complexity and Geography

- Along with most districts in the province, our costs for providing services to students with special needs far exceeds the provision in the current operating grant
- However, in SD 10, we have additional costs due to our geographical distance from any service providers or regional centres

- We must contract for services with a Deaf and Hard of Hearing teacher, a physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, school psychologist, and autism specialists in order to support our students. In addition to their fees, we must also pay travel and accommodation and additional days for them to travel to our remote and rural schools
- We spend more than twice the allocations for Special Education. Our classrooms are inclusive learning environments for all students and effectively embrace their diverse learning needs, but the costs far exceed the funding provided
- Over many years, the Board has kept class sizes lower than provincial averages to help address the difficulties that our teachers face in already complex multi-age classrooms, made all the more complex by supporting a wide range of students with diverse needs
- All schools in the district are multi-graded; our cohort sizes are small. In our K-3, Grade 4-7 and Grade 8-12 multi-age classes, widespread across the small schools in our district, we already struggle classes to meet the needs of all learners.
- And, we hear constantly from our teachers and principals and vice-principals that with the increasing complexities of students with very significant special needs as well as mental health concerns, that our resources are stretched thin.
- **Ensuring adequate funding for students with diverse needs is an area of top priority, as the needs of all learners need to be considered.**



Professional Learning Costs Intensified Because of Our Geography



- It costs more to bring educational consultants to our district for professional learning, given additional travel costs for car rental, mileage and accommodation
- In order to support the professional learning of our staff – from our part-time Payroll and Benefits Manager to our Principals and Vice-Principal, our teachers - out of district is crucial. The costs to attend meetings or conferences is higher in our district, due to our geography and remote location.
- The BCSTA Trustee Academy, BCSTA AGM, and Branch meetings all involve additional travel expenses – even greater than many other “rural” districts in the region
- **There are fewer opportunities for professional learning and higher costs to access them in our small, rural and remote district**



Attendance at Regional or Provincial Meetings Adds to Budgetary Pressures

- It is crucial that like other districts, our staff attend regional or provincial meetings; these additional travel expenses add to the cost of running a small district
- Our Superintendent/Secretary-Treasurer’s travel to attend provincial or regional meetings, including various Ministry meetings is likewise a significant expense due to the remoteness of our district

- **With fewer senior staff than larger districts, the demands on our staff who all have multiple roles, causes not only increased stress and burnout, but also increased direct financial costs**



Costs for Energy, Shipping and Maintenance are Higher due to Geographical Factors

- Due to our geographical location, we are unable to heat our schools with natural gas, a cheaper fuel source
- Instead, we are restricted to using propane and electricity, both energy sources that are more costly than those available in neighbouring or northern school districts or those at the coast
- **Though we have been fortunate in recent years with SEP capital funding for solar energy projects, LED lighting refits, and roofing infrastructure replacements which are making a difference in energy consumption, our ongoing operating costs will remain higher than average**
- Shipping costs to and from the district are also elevated due to our remote location
- Often, we are forced to spend transportation and maintenance staff time and fuel costs too, to access bus repairs, to pick up building material shipments, to take delivery of new busses and district equipment – all additional costs that we face due to our location at a distance from regional centres



Lack of Support from Regional College (Selkirk College)

- Though we have a positive working relationship with our regional college, Selkirk College is a small post-secondary institution with limited resources itself
- While our neighbouring districts, SD 8 and SD 20, have access for their students to vibrant learning through college ACE-IT and SSA programs as well as University Transfer programs, we are too far away and have too few students to make it feasible for these programs to be available for our students, despite repeated lobbying and discussions with the college over the years
- Selkirk College is happy to enroll our students, but the college cannot help them while in secondary school in SD 10, unless our young people move to bigger centres with Selkirk campuses, leave their families, and leave our school district
- If there are college liaison days that our secondary students can access, the district must pay for transportation for students, and arrange TOC extra time for staff given the distances to centres such as Nelson, Castlegar or Trail, two to four hours away, making for lengthy school field trips. Again, an inequitable expense for educational programs which are easily accessible to most other students in BC
- As a result, we creatively try to cobble together learning opportunities for our secondary students within the district, and fund travel outside the district to access career and trades learning experiences, but **our students' learning is compromised due to lack of equitable resources and access to education**
- It is not uncommon for families to choose in their children's graduation years to relocate to larger centres to allow for greater choice and options for their children. Sadly, this trend continues to impact district enrollment



Access to Equitable Learning Opportunities for Secondary Students



- We struggle to provide fulsome secondary programs given the size of our schools. In order to offer a modest range of courses, we have to dedicate additional funding for small secondary electives, particularly Grade 10-12 courses
- **It just costs more to offer secondary programs with enough choices to personalize opportunities for all students; almost all secondary courses in the district are multi-graded in order to offer options**
- Our staffing costs are high because we endeavour to provide as many face-to-face course choices and meet as many needs as possible
- Our district is well-regarded as passionately innovative, and incredibly creative for our success in providing very cool and unique educational experiences for our kids (eg: Mountains as Teachers; Outdoor Education and Entrepreneurship; Food and Sustainability programs), yet, it is just not possible for our learners to have access the same learning, the same breadth of courses, as in other parts of BC
- We depend on BCLN online learning courses for most graduation choice courses at secondary in three secondary schools: Lucerne Elementary Secondary with 30 secondary students, Arrow Lakes DL School with 20 part-time secondary students and Nakusp Secondary (the BIG secondary!) with 128 students
- Yet, even with online learning, teacher support is crucial to student success – we have learned over many years, the critical role that teachers engaged in blended learning need to play in order to keep our DL and online learning student success rates high
- **Despite all the constraints and pressures, we have good success in graduation rates for all learners and even better for Aboriginal learners (88% - 100% six year completion rates) – we work hard and innovate to ensure success for our learners!**













Recruitment and Retention of Teachers, PVPs, and Senior Staff

- It is a challenge to recruit and retain staff in our tiny rural and remote district intensifying the costs for recruitment in our annual budget
- Often we post jobs two or three times before finding an applicant
- **There is not enough space in our budget to afford a Director of Human Resources, and so the Superintendent/Secretary-Treasurer also acts in this role, intensifying her already complex position in an effort to keep costs down, and put funds into other areas to support student learning**
- **Soft costs are significant – the time for reference checks and interviewing, for HR support - but so are the hard costs of placing advertisements, costs for relocation or placing new exempt hires higher on the grid, providing moving expenses to attract staff or enhancing professional learning both internally and outside the district**

There are many challenges we face in SD 10 due to our small communities, small schools, declining enrolment and geography. Despite the challenges, we are a very successful district, with caring and dedicated staff, with strong relationships with our communities, and with a pro-active and responsive Board of Education. We always keep kids at the centre of all that we do.

So --- what do we want from a new Funding Allocation System?

-  A system that recognizes and provides funding for the unique geographic factors that make education more costly in all areas for our rural AND remote schools and school district
-  A system that recognizes the intense role complexity and additional expenses inherent in being small, rural and remote - for our learners, for our Board of Education, and for our staff
-  Equity and access to high quality learning for all students and especially small secondary school students – education costs more for our learners; lower class sizes are essential just to provide basic choice and personalization
-  A funding allocation system that considers FTE to a much lesser degree than the actual costs of running a small district with its intense rural and remote factors
-  Funding that is dependable, long term, and enables us to do long term planning
-  The district has accumulated a surplus over many years by ruthlessly cutting in every possible area which did not impact students. For the past two years, we now spend from the accumulated surplus each year, just to try to keep the quality of teaching and learning happening despite the year-to-year funding reductions
-  Funding “protection” that stays in place, protects us given the constraints of rurality, and doesn’t harm us by reducing our operating budget by 1.5% compounded each year.
-  Were the current “funding protection” with its 1.5% reductions each year to continue, we will spend all our surplus on providing merely basic education for our children, and then once that surplus is exhausted, compromise our students’ learning
-  We need a funding system that allows us to plan long term, without surprises and constant cutbacks.
-  Predictable and secure funding despite reductions in enrollment. Our enrolment forecasts continue to show reductions, and yet we must provide a high quality education for all learners

Thank you for your consideration of our submission, and the opportunity to present the face of a very innovative and successful, yet challenged rural and remote school district.

Map of SD 10 (Arrow Lakes) in context of adjacent communities

