

School District #60

*Submission to the
Funding Model Review Committee*



School District 60
Peace River North

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Introduction to School District #60 Peace River North



School District 60 (Peace River North) was incorporated on April 12th, 1946. District schools provide education services to 6 184 students in a catchment area covering 93 254 square kilometers.

The Peace River North School District is located on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains in the northern tip of the Canadian Prairies. The region's economy is both prosperous and expanding. This positive economic outlook is based on the petro-chemical, renewable energy, agriculture, forestry, tourism and commercial/service industries.

Our schools range in size and number including an Open Learning School, three two-room rural schools and four kindergarten to secondary schools.

The major center, Fort St John, hosts six modern elementary schools with a seventh opening in 2018, two middle schools, and one large senior secondary school. There are also three elementary schools in the surrounding communities of Taylor, Charlie Lake and Baldonnel.

Our *Energetic Learning Campus (ELC)* is situated in the *Pomeroy Sports Center* and currently has 178 Grade 10 students learning in a unique 21st Century environment.

We are in the process of building a new school (the *Margaret "Ma" Murray Community School*) for K-6 students that is scheduled to open in September 2018. This school will serve approximately 385 students and will have an onsite Daycare and a large community gymnasium.

The district also hosts a Distance Education school, serving a wide area of Northeastern BC and parts of the Northwest Territories and Yukon. Our district's student population is diverse. First Nations students make up nearly 20% of our student population. Many other countries and cultures are represented within our ESL students, our International Students and the remainder of our student population. The district's character is equally diverse, with a blend of rural and urban philosophies and the distinct provincial perspectives of two strong provinces; Alberta and BC.

There is also a strong northern influence within our community philosophy that values personal resilience, the sense of entrepreneurial spirit, and hard work.

The district is committed to providing a quality education program to all students. Highlights of our educational programs include a commitment to early intervention, French Immersion, inclusion-based student support services, a band program, the meaningful integration of technology, a residential construction program, the Aboriginal Student Support Worker Program, an Outdoor Education site, and a strong focus on transitions to careers as evidenced in the Secondary School Apprenticeship and Dual Credit programs.

Mission

All of our students will graduate, walking the stage with dignity and grace.

Dream Statement

We are a community of learners striving together to build success for all. We have a safe, healthy and welcoming environment. Staff and students connect through caring and laughter.

All members of our learning community are valued and respected. Cultural differences are honored. We all belong.

We nurture body, mind and spirit and believe in finding the beauty in every human being.

We provide a variety of learning environments, both in and outside of the classroom and through the integration of technology. With the help of our community partners, we involve students in authentic learning experiences.



Students discover and pursue their interests and strengths. They are actively engaged and are willing to step outside their comfort zone in order to challenge their learning.

We are excited about our learning. We take time to share our stories and celebrate success. We are proud to see students become more confident in their skills and abilities, open to on-going learning, and prepared to make a difference in our world.

Values

The five core ethical values seen as most important to guide our daily lives include: Respect
Compassion Honesty Responsibility Relationships

Goals

1. Academic excellence
 - All students will make progress and reach their potential
 - A student's education will be a rich and well-rounded experience
 - Students will have flexibility and choice in their learning
 - Learning will take place in an environment of innovation, inquiry and creativity
2. Positive personal and community contributions
 - Students will understand their own identity and their relationship to others
 - Students will be sensitive to commonalities and differences among and within cultures
 - Students will understand how their actions impact others and the environment
3. Career Connections
 - Career programs will enhance career opportunities for all students
 - Providing both knowledge and opportunities to students so they can successfully transition from high school to work and/or post secondary pursuits
 - Students will learn skills to prepare them for the digital world
 - Students will learn through authentic, relevant and meaningful learning experiences

Motto

Together We Learn



School District #60 – Input for Funding Model Review

Introduction

The Board of Trustees of School District #60 would like to thank the Committee for providing us with a number of opportunities to provide input. We understand that the development of a new funding model is a daunting challenge. Finding a model that ***promotes student success in the context of change, that supports vulnerable learners, is responsive to local contexts, flexible, predictable, accountable to taxpayers and can work for a wide variety of diverse and different districts*** is no small order. Improving upon a model that in past has felt like it generated inequities, is a noble goal, and we hope for a positive outcome.

To help inform your efforts, SD 60 can offer the following insights. We'd like to see a model that ***adequately supports and resources ministry initiatives, and accounts for regional factors such as climate, distance and geography that impact our ability to do good things for students***. We'd appreciate a model that ***supports all learners, especially our vulnerable, challenged and indigenous students***, and we'd like to see the model ***be predictable and accountable but less tied to red tape and multiple layers of bureaucracy***.

Peace River North is geographically large, demographically diverse and economically subject to the ebb and flow of the energy sector. We exist in a rugged and far flung territory that generates a multitude of challenges in terms of climate, geography, distance and provision of services. While truly energetic and welcoming, northern districts are perceived to be lacking in some of the geographic benefits and urban based services that assist others in attracting a consistent flow of qualified staff. Similarly, our ***northern location and climate generate higher costs for provision of services, construction, and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure***, factors a new funding model should consider.

We would like to see a model that ***generates greater equity of access to key learning supports such as student transportation and the recruitment, retention and professional development of duly qualified staff***. Such a model needs to include programs of ***strategic incentives and supports*** that recognize geographic realities and demographic factors.

Past funding models have been driven by head counts and data. We recognize a new model will need to ***consider the number and nature of students served*** by each district. Any model needs to establish a ***fair base level*** of resources both for the increasingly mythical "average" student, and for the ***constantly growing numbers of learners with unique or special needs***. It should recognize all learning delivery models equally; ***funding distributed learning models as well as brick and mortar programs***. While we may bristle at labels such as remote and rural, there does need to be some recognition that economies of scale that are applicable in more compact settings may not be as viable here. ***Delivering quality programs in diverse and distant settings may require supports beyond those simply generated by head counts and ratio driven formulae***.

Northerners are resilient, resourceful and innovative, all qualities that will serve students well as we implement the new curriculum. ***However, we'd like to see any new funding model ensure that accountability and economic stability features align carefully with the transformational agenda***. We'd like to be certain that ***innovative practice would not be punitively impacted by audit procedures*** that are better matched to an earlier time. While ***accountability is important***, it should be attainable

without the imposition of multiple layers of reporting forms and reports.

We appreciate that the search for an improved model that fair and equitable model is not an easy task. ***Changes to the current funding model have sometimes generated "winners and losers" through the redistribution of resources.*** Our experience with transportation funding and the shift to a geographic location factor has demonstrated that change can be difficult and can bring about unintended consequences. We are hopeful any changes to a new funding model will have a positive impact on student learning.



Theme 1: Student Success in the Context of an Evolving Education System

We believe that funding should always assist the implementation and application of new initiatives and direction from the Ministry of Education. Our education system is moving in the direction of 21st Century Learning and in support of this our district has built and designed the Energetic Learning Campus (ELC) and Margaret ‘Ma’ Murray Community School with that concept in mind. However, the 21st Century ideal was not fully funded for our district. The technology, walls, furniture for 21st century classrooms costs. Our ELC and ‘Ma’ Murray schools both have removable walls, moveable tables and chairs, technology embedded within the classroom pods and other great things to enhance student learning for the 21st Century and beyond. These flexible items cost more than the traditional designs, yet required large subsidies by the Board from per-student funding to implement.

Additionally, SOGI is a great policy, and with SOGI policy in mind we designed the bathrooms in ‘Ma’ Murray as universal washrooms; but could not design universal change rooms because the Ministry funded construction neither allowed the budget or the space required. Conversely for our district to fully implement the intent of the SOGI principles, we would need funding to retrofit all of our schools. We would also like to ensure that future funding for any new builds is sufficient to ensure we are fully able to implement the universal design principles.

It is hard to implement a policy direction or new ways to enhance student learning when these things are underfunded or unfunded. Like many northern districts, we have a surplus every year because we are unable to fully staff. Our annual budget is prepared with the correct staffing allocations we require. When we are unable to hire, we redeploy non-enrolling staff, utilize TOC’s and non-certified teachers. This has a positive impact on the budget thus generating a reserve. If there ever came a time when we were able to fully staff, we would likely be in a structural deficit.

Our district has a vibrant Dual Credit and Trades Training program with students graduating as apprentices and / or with several first year university credits. This could not happen without partnerships without industry, community stakeholders and higher learning. We would like to see these opportunities continue and be enhanced and would never want to see a formula where innovations are penalized. Ground-breaking practices like the “shoulder-tapper” program were conceived in SD60 given that necessity is the mother of invention, particularly for rural, northern districts.

Theme 2: Education for Special Needs, Vulnerable and Indigenous Students

All themes are essential to ensuring student success, but this theme is probably the most important, as children cannot learn if they do not have their basic needs met. These needs include food, feeling safe, love, etc. This may require a breakdown of the traditional ministerial 'silos' and mandates, in order to meet the needs of our students. We recognize this will have implications for upfront costs, however we also know that the future savings will be vast. We would really like to see cooperation between Ministries to be able to provide wrap-around services to children, especially in those communities where the professionals are scarce.

Students with Special Needs

In order for a student to qualify for Special Needs funding, the student must be assessed and identified and have an IEP in place. Currently if our students need an assessment, they will be on a waiting list in our own community and there have been incidences when they waited to be assessed until middle school. Some of our families have the means to obtain these assessments outside of the education system in the closest urban center of Grand Prairie, but it is in Alberta. The closest BC urban community where these assessments can take place is a 5 hour drive away. We would like the ability to use these assessments to obtain funding for our students even if they are from another jurisdiction.

We believe that there should be no caps on levels 1, 2 or 3 students and this funding should follow these students from k-12. Their needs are varied and it should not be a 'one size fits all' model. Districts should be allowed to leverage community services, if they do not have the ways or means within the education system.

The students that need these supports must meet the criteria set out in the Ministry's Special Education Services, A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines. This can be an onerous task that takes personal resources to ensure compliance, without compliance children can be re-classified and funding removed. We would like to see a model that deals with the whole child and can ebb and flow with the needs of the student.

Vulnerable Students

Vulnerability comes in all shapes and sizes; these could be our children living in and out of the foster system, children living in poverty, refugee and immigrant children, children with PTSI, children who have been abused or neglected and not within the foster system, children with absentee parents, indigenous children who are living with intergenerational trauma, children who are being bullied, children who are bullies, LGBTQ+ children who are afraid to be themselves due to family/religious/community values. Vulnerability can be seen as a spectrum depending on how the child copes with what can be considered the context of their lives, both inside and outside of the 8x5 timetable. This may require a re-examining of 'how' we do business in our system. Teachers are there to teach; they are not social workers, yet they are consistently being asked to be in that role.

This could mean looking outside for best practices in how to have services that meet the needs of the 'whole child', along with the way and means to do this. It could be partnerships with industry to

provide food for food programs, but this requires staff time and energy and cannot happen on the sides of their overwhelmed desks. These types of initiatives need to be supported and that takes funding.

Indigenous Students

We have a focus in our District of Indigenous learning and ways of knowing. This includes local Indigenous language learning and Indigenous history. We recognize that our staff, community members, and students are on the path to Truth and Reconciliation and everyone is at a different point. To help bring our educators along this path requires professional development and this generates costs. To provide resources and programming to our students also generates costs.

Some of our students have to room and board in Fort St. John each week to attend High School. These students come from remote communities and a daily bus ride would take several hours. These students also come with extra challenges; during the week they are removed from their families of origin and have limited supports to guide them. They would also be classified as vulnerable students.

Transportation is an issue for these students, if they live on reserve they may have to travel long distances to attend school and the conditions of the roads are not always the safest. The conditions of the road are not in the purview of the Ministry of Education but if a road can't be travelled kids can't get to school. Additionally, our District lost a significant amount of transportation funding under the funding revision to the Student Location Factor. We would like to see this portion of the formula changed so that the basic costs of transporting our students are covered. Our district considers this a basic right, an access to education issue.

Theme 3: Responsiveness to Local Circumstances

The current model attempts to but does not fully consider unique enrolment and student population dynamics. Many Districts are a mix of an urban center, rural communities and remote communities. School District 60 is an example of this – although Fort St. John is considered urban for our rural and remote communities, it is considered rural compared to Prince George. This brings challenges for recruitment and retention of staff and in terms of equity of supports for student transportation and availability of course subjects.

Our school district is at the whim of the resource sector and the boom and bust economies that can occur. That consideration along with our birthrates does not fully allow us to accurately predict enrolment rates. It is hard to be responsive, when we don't know how many students are coming through the doors.

We would like a style of funding to help us navigate these issues that is flexible and predictable and not administratively onerous.

Fun Fact:

Between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016 there were 672 births at the Fort St. John hospital (http://www.perinatalservicesbc.ca/Documents/Data-Surveillance/Maps-Tables/MapBirthsByFacility2015_16.pdf).

Theme 4: Flexibility

Flexibility with increased paperwork is not truly flexible, nor is cutting staff at the administrative level for 'administrative savings' while at the same time increasing reporting requirements and tracking. Special purpose grants have multiplied over the years, as have the paperwork requirements to report on the grants. The block funding has been eroded and considerable resources in time, money and personnel have to be dedicated to paperwork, management and accountability reports.

We recommend a funding model that would remove the levels of bureaucracy that are administratively inflexible. We would like to be able to demonstrate a track record of improvement, or where improvement does not materialize, a plan to modify or change; rather than the layers of paperwork.

In addition, when a large portion of the finding is targeted it takes away the Districts ability to be responsive to actual needs within the District. We all want the best for each and every child. Our professional ethics will stretch each dollar of funding as far as possible and ensure each is being used appropriately.

Theme 5: Financial Management and Accountability



We believe that the ministry mandated board approved Financial Health Policies on Budget Development help address many of the challenges in this area. We would like the new funding formula to include an allowable percentage for surplus that is co-developed to meet local needs.

As a growing district our enrolment is hard to predict. Over a three-year span, we gained over 300 students, then were down 100, then back up 200. We budget conservatively and to be fully staffed but we need a reserve to ensure that we have the resources to provide seats for unexpected students to sit, put teachers in front of them and provide resources for their learning, until we finalize our numbers in the fall for the Ministry of Education.

We would also encourage the committee to consider metrics for boards to follow and funding for trustee professional development in financial management and accountability. We recognize that all trustees bring added value to the diversity of the board, but financial management may not be their individual strength. Professional Development costs money, particularly in the North and we believe Trustee training would help accountability. Every worthwhile function held down south costs a minimum of \$1000 to send each attendee. Thus we are forced to pick and choose who we can afford to send to courses when it's not just a sky train ticket and lunch per-diem.



Theme 6: Predictability and Costs

Districts do require stability in funding and predictability in costs in order to manage resources and fund programs. An ideal funding formula would provide revenue to equal the expense; however currently some items are not funded at the actual expense.

Our district recently underwent a Learning Services Audit, which resulted 2 immaterial changes. However, we choose as a district to fund the needs identified each year and continue to run our Learning Services department at a deficit of approximately \$3.7 million per annum. Therefore the special needs funding, we receive does not meet the needs.

When we had a line item for student transportation, our district was at a deficit of approximately \$200k per annum. When the line item for transportation disappeared and was replaced with the Student Location Factor, our district subsidized transportation funding at \$750k per annum. In the 2016/2017 school year, while we received an additional grant of just over \$425k to supplement student transportation; however our transportation continues to run at a deficit of \$300K per annum (depending on fuel costs).

We do recognize that funding actual expenses may be a utopian idea because as a district whose enrolment is unpredictable due to the nature of the community we live, we have a challenge predicting our actual costs from year to year. Being allowed to carry a reserve helps with the unpredictability challenge but so would a multi-year budget cycle. The additional benefit of a multi-year budget cycle would be the ability to plan for large unfunded expenses over a number of revenue cycles.

Theme 7: Geographic, Economic and Demographic Factors

Our district met with the committee in Prince George and the districts in the room all agreed that, in consultation with stakeholders, the Ministry of Education could develop a definition of Rural and Remote. We find it frustrating when some Districts express their rurality when we consider them urban. We would like to see definitions that give consideration to such things as population, population density, level/lack of local services provided, geography, and distance to a larger center.

Rural and remote districts encounter unique challenges and it costs more to deliver an effective learning program for our students. Stikine (SD 87) is the largest geographic district with the smallest number of students. The new funding model needs the flexibility to take into account where students live and where they attend school. Data supports that an urban/rural gap exists and that an even wider gap exists between urban and remote. Additional funds are not the answer to everything but hopefully the funding formula revision will address the inequities where possible

We have a significant challenge hiring certified teaching professionals. For example, our District is operating with 15 letters of permission this year; all but three are at smaller remote schools. The other three are required to staff our shop classes. We would prefer to hire certified instructors but simply do not have the ability to do that without additional incentives. We are asking for relocation

incentives, loan forgiveness programs and capital funding for teacherages. Last year we had a situation where we had to cover an unexpected leave for a large portion of the year. The only solution was the bus driver who drove the kids to school, taught the class as a non-certified, and then drove them home after performing her custodial duties. We need the ability to provide equity in instruction for these rural and remote children. We have 3 municipalities along with a large regional district, all within our school district.

Our district is not eligible for seismic upgrades, but we do need new and replacement schools. We conversely have challenges with freezing and thawing due to our long winters. This can lead to flooding of school and damage the structural integrity of the school. The funding model should assist districts with replacement of schools whose structural integrity is in question and/or maintenance to improve the life and quality of the school building. Our oldest school is Ecole Central opened in September of 1945. It is on our capital plan for replacement but with enrollment growth, in addition to aging facilities, it will be another 10 years before we can hope for replacement. In the meantime, the older buildings require significant annual maintenance to remain welcoming spaces for learning. Another school we have slated for replacement is Charlie Lake Elementary also opened in 1945 at a capacity of 220. It currently has 389 students enrolled due to 6 portables added to the structure in the 60's. So we have a very old school with portables attached that far exceed their useful life and considerable annual costs just to keep it from crumbling around the children. Recently, the school has dealt with water ingress and has the gym sinking, we do what we can to address issues as they arise with our annual facility grant however the funds are just not sufficient when all our facilities require significant attention.

We sincerely appreciate the unique geographic factors funding however the funding does not meet the needs when we consider our additional costs for staffing, transportation, professionals, services, and utilities. Base funding for remote and rural is required.

Conclusion

You may have noticed that we have left out of all of the various statistics and citations from experts and organizations within the OECD, United Nations, Education Leaders, Statistics Canada, BC Stats, etc. We did this because we have seen the documents from the committee and the Ministry of Education and feel that a knowledge exchange to support the needs has already taken place. As a Board of Trustees, we come from varied backgrounds and we have done our own knowledge exchange, to ensure all of our diverse trustees understand the 7 themes put forward.

We all want to do what is best for students in the province and ensure they leave us being the best *for* the world. We have highlighted the 'big ideas', specific needs and things we would like to see in funding for districts across the province. Thank you for your commitment to this process and the opportunity to submit a written report.



ELC Staff and Students showing support and love for Humbolt