

Quesnel School District

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Board of Education

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Independent Review Panel
K – 12 Sector Public Education Funding Model Review
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The Board of Education for School District No. 28 (Quesnel) is pleased to offer this written submission in response to the current funding allocation model. Our district is committed to meeting the needs of a diverse student population, providing a wide range of learning opportunities for students and building the capacity of our staff. We live our model "Together We Can".

School District No. 28 serves an estimated population of 22,096 (2011 Census). The District encompasses 23,720 square kilometers and our buses travel approximately 3,800 kilometers per day.

The student population as of September 2017 was 2990 FTE. The students are currently serviced by the following educational locations:

- 12 Elementary Schools;
- 1 Secondary School;
- 1 Junior School;
- 1 Alternate School location and 1 Distributed Learning location; and
- 4 StrongStart locations.

The District has experienced declining enrolments in the past; with a drop of 1,929 students (39%) from 2000 to 2015. This resulted in five school closures during this same time period. Student enrolments have stabilized in the past few years, and some areas are now experiencing growth.

Our submission includes 16 recommendations, and we offer the following guiding considerations:

- The funding formula must address the financial differences that exist in supporting students in all areas of the province. It is clear that it is more expensive to educate students in rural communities. A definition of school types should be established to include the following categories: remote, rural, urban and metro.
- A rural funding factor must be included to address the increased costs of all services and goods, recruitment and professional development of staff, stability of the local economy and the vulnerability of citizens. A transportation funding factor is critical for student safety and regional fairness.



- The formula must support the best possible outcomes for students therefore it should not be linked to the attainment of specific outcomes (trailing indicators) rather districts should be supported in implementation of the evidence based practices that are leading indicators of student success.
- The funding formula has the power to push societal change. Targeted funding for indigenous students requires us to focus our attention on critical needs of our identified students. Similarly changing the funding that supports students with special needs to a needs-based model moves us to a more inclusive education system. It would allow educators to begin conversations with parents about children's strengths and needs versus their deficits and the difficult road to diagnosis.
- The formula must adequately fund the operating cost of each school district.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the new funding model for students with special needs move closer to the actual funding required to meet the educational needs of students with special needs. Please refer below for a funding model to be considered for students identified as having special needs.

Rationale: Across the province, it is well known that government funding for students identified as having special needs is significantly underfunded. In our District, and many others, the actual levels of service required and are paid for by the District are not even ½ covered by the funding received. If every District is experiencing these issues, this is an indication that the existing funding formula is ineffective.

The new funding formula should include a needs-based funding model. This would be a move from a medical model with pressure to diagnose student disabilities to a model where the needs of students determine the programming and required support. The medical model continues to result in a limiting view of student potential. In the North and rural areas of the province there are many barriers to accessing required medical services for designation therefore many students are undesignated and unfunded. These barriers include a lack of medical specialists, travel and stay in regional centres to attend assessment clinics, specialty staff in district to complete assessments to make referrals (school psychologists, vision teacher, speech-language pathologist, deaf & hard of hearing teachers and occupational therapists).

The following funding model be considered for students identified as having special needs.

1. Remove Low and High Incidence Designations from the funding model.
2. Include a Needs-Based Model and remove the Ministry designation categories A through P.
3. A needs-based model be developed with three levels of need – level 1 - intensive need, level 2 - moderate need and level 3 - minimal need. The levels would be focused on the actual supports the districts must provide to educate the students effectively, including educational, behavioural, medical, and

physical supports, as well as the provision of necessary equipment and technology. The criteria for inclusions in these categories would be based on planning tools that create a Student Profile. The student profile would include a score across the domains of intellectual development, behaviour/emotional functioning, self-determination & independent living, communication, academics, and other health factors thus determining the level of need.

4. The audit process would move from a focus on paperwork compliance to one based on the provision of educational services aligned with the funding allocation. Recommendations and feedback could focus on evidence-based practices and support programming for all students
5. The funding formula must consider the variability of vulnerable students across the province. An allocation factor could be developed using indexes such as EDI, MDI, social services index and MCFD inputs to create parity for vulnerable communities.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that specific consideration be given in the new funding formula to rural districts.

Rationale: We refer the committee to the Rural Education Report. The key recommendations related to funding are to take a comprehensive review of the K-12 funding allocation system to better reflect the operational and educational realities of operating schools in rural and remote settings. Funding based on enrolment alone does not reflect these higher costs of delivering comparable programs and services between urban and rural settings.

To do this, we believe funds should be provided within the operating grants to address unique rural issues such as student transportation, equity in learning opportunities for secondary students, professional development and staff recruitment and retention.

- Student transportation: Refer to recommendation #5. Student transportation is not currently funded specifically in the operating grant. The expense is highest in rural districts that cover an expansive geographical size and where schools are located far apart. These services are critical to the students served as many a time it is the only means of getting to school.
- Professional Development: Training and in-service matter experts reside or travel to urban areas, leaving rural districts to send representatives to obtain training in these areas which not only mean travel costs but also result in TTOC costs. It also leads to train-the-trainer models which are less effective than having the expert visit locally. However, due to cost constraints and lack of funding for areas such as professional development costs, it is often not feasible to have these kinds of sessions.

- Equal learning opportunities for secondary students: providing equitable learning opportunities for secondary students also comes at a higher cost. To offer a broad range of elective courses, we must open up courses with less than full class sizes which we dedicate more resources to. In certain instances, if courses become too small, they are cancelled and students miss out on learning opportunities that they would find valuable.
- Staff recruitment and retention: It is more challenging to deal with recruitment and retention in smaller, rural districts. It is often difficult to recruit specialists such as speech and language, psychologists, counsellors, and teachers for the deaf and hard of hearing. Providing additional incentives for staff in rural districts to remain to reduce turnover and increase stability for students in the classroom.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that funding protection be continued.

Rationale: For Districts such as ours that have experienced a rapid rate of enrolment decline in a short period of time, funding protection has allowed a gentler transition to reduced funding which has allowed for a more thoughtful approach in right-sizing our District. The lack of this funding could lead to rash decisions on significant cuts which potentially have major impacts on students via reduced programming and supports. Just because students leave the District, this does not translate to an immediate reduction in dollar for dollar cost reduction. For example, buildings still need to be heated and maintained, transportation costs (which are not specifically funded) still remain the same as the routes don't change due to a loss of students in any one year. Even the reduction in teachers is complex as a declining enrolment doesn't necessarily happen in any one neighbourhood, thus you may not necessarily remove teaching staff based on a ratio of teacher to students.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that the new funding formula provides additional dollars based on vulnerability scales such as EDI, MDI, MCFD services, and the social services index to enable school districts to provide vulnerable students with needed supports. EDI data for many school districts has shown increasing vulnerability in K students over the past 10 years.

Rationale: Vulnerable students in rural communities without access to therapeutic services rely on school and school districts to provide increasing levels of support. Many vulnerable students are not identified in special needs categories, thus there is no funding provided. These students may experience significant social/emotional issues, have intensely challenging behaviour, and have families who are impacted due to trauma and poverty. The Community Links dollars, while appreciated, only grazes the surface of necessary supports this population requires.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that the Ministry of Education mandate student transportation services and that a distinct formula for allocating student transportation funding be developed as part of the operating grant.

Rationale: Student transportation is currently not funded under the existing funding formula. The expense is highest in rural districts that cover an expansive geographical size and where schools are located far apart. These services are critical to the students served as many a time it is the only means of getting to school. Costs of transportation including wages for drivers, supervisors at transportation hubs, insurance and the cost of fuel are very high and must be specifically funded.

Recommendation 6: It is recommended that a new salary differential formula be created based on cost differentials for salaries and benefits for all employee groups compared to the lowest school district salaries and benefits in the province.

Rationale: The current formula recognizes the salary cost differences between the average teacher salary in each school district and the provincial teacher salary. Cost differentials for other employee groups and benefit cost differentials are not recognized. BCPSEA has negotiated provincial benefit plans for support staff and teachers that have significantly increased the cost of benefits in our school district. BCPSEA also created regional salary grids for principals, vice principals and other exempt staff positions.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended that the classroom enhancement funding (CEF) continue to be allocated on an incremental cost basis until there is common province-wide collective agreement language for teachers. It is further recommended that the impact of enrolment changes on the cost related to the implementation of restored collective agreement language be recognized in the annual funding allocations.

Rationale: The restored teacher collective agreement language differs greatly from district to district. The distribution of funding must match the costs dictated by specific collective agreements. Failure to do so would create financial hardships to districts that must provide higher levels of service to meet the terms of their specific agreements.

Recommendation 8: It is recommended that the funding formulas for the annual facilities grant – both the operating and capital portions – be increased in light of many buildings around the province requiring a significant amount of deferred maintenance.

Rationale: Especially in areas of the province that are not seeing growth in their districts, there is little to no opportunity for replacement schools. This means far more money is required to maintain very old buildings. While the School Enhancement Program (SEP) has brought about some relief since its introduction a few years ago, the amount of deferred maintenance is staggering and additional funding is required



in this area in order to address life-cycle maintenance. Allowing additional funding in AFG (both capital and operating) will give Boards of Education more flexibility in capital maintenance and to be more agile with change as maintenance issues of an emergent nature do come up which usually are significant enough exhaust the block of funding.

Recommendation 9: The funding model should account for school district own sourced revenues (international students, rentals etc.) to ensure equity of educational opportunities for all students regardless of where they live.

Rationale: Inequity will exist if Districts are able to generate their own supplemental revenues when others cannot. All students in the province are entitled to an equal education with the same resources which can only be achieved if the playing field is level. Rural districts are unable to attract international students and industry partnerships. In addition, any rental rates received in our district barely cover the costs of renting out empty spaces in schools.

Recommendation 10: It is recommended that base per pupil funding be allocated based on student headcount for grades K-9 and based on course-driven FTE calculation for students in grades 10 – 12 with minimum funding for 0.875 FTE (assumes 1 block of 8 is a spare block).

Rationale: Under this model, we are encouraging our grade 10 – 12 students to take 8 courses (and in our district, we often see one of these blocks as a spares). Some students take more than eight courses.

We realize not all students will complete the courses they register in at the beginning of the year. However, the fact that most students are originally enrolled in a full course load allows even our most vulnerable students to have a greater chance to graduate. In addition, the school district must staff schools based on course enrolment at September 30. This staffing cannot be reduced when students decide to drop a course in which they have enrolled. In rural districts, there is often one high school and thus we simply cannot cut staffing easily once course enrolment is set by September 30th.

This model also supports students who want to explore courses beyond those required for graduation – such as fine arts and sports electives.

Recommendation 11: it is recommended that the basic per pupil allocation for distributed learning (DL) students enrolled in blended DL (those that combine in-person teaching support for distance learners) courses be set at the same level as regular school-aged base per pupil allocation

Rationale: DL programs are critical to providing access to educational programs for many students in the province. Funding DL needs to be directed at models of DL delivery that offer a higher level of student success. An effective way of carrying out DL is to use a blended-learning model. If the per pupil funding allocation for DL were different, our district would implement a blended model of DL.

Recommendation 12: It is recommended that the Rural Education Enhancement Fund (REEF) remain in place unless the funding formula is sufficiently adjusted for rural districts to take into account the higher costs of educating students (see recommendation 8). The loss of REEF through the replacement of funding for rural districts should not negatively impact the districts currently receiving this grant.

Rationale: We are one of the few districts that have received REEF funding. This funding is critical to our district as it is the only way we were able to keep 2 of our schools on the outskirts of our community open. Without this continued funding, these schools would have to be closed immediately.

Recommendation 13: Aboriginal Education funding should be increased and remain targeted as school districts work towards education equity for our indigenous students.

Rationale: Increased targeted funding in this category would support districts to provide additional learning supports and the teaching of local languages. Presently very few school districts across the province offer indigenous languages. Our commitment to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is critical for our students, families and educational partners in FNESC.

Recommendation 14: it is recommended that the support staff portion of the Learning Improvement Fund (LIF) grant be incorporated in the operating grant formula as part of increased allocations for students with special needs.

Rationale: The support staff portion of LIF was introduced in connection with provincially negotiated collective agreements which are set to expire in 2019. The grant has enabled our school district to increase the hours of work for our Education Assistant's and improve services we provide to students with special needs. These dollars are considered important and necessary in light of the lack of funding for special education (see recommendation 1) and including them in the operating grant demonstrates government's continued support for students identified with special needs.

Recommendation 15: It is recommended that the provincial government fully fund increased and unexpected costs such as exempt staff wages and employers health tax, as well as cover unfunded inflationary costs like provincially negotiated benefit plan costs and general inflation on other supplies/services.

Recommendation 16: It is recommended the government prepare a multi-year rolling operating and capital budget that addresses inflationary pressures and anticipated cost increases, making firm commitments to fund these items in advance so districts may plan accordingly.

Rationale: School Districts have no method of increasing revenues to respond to unanticipated or increasing costs. Rather than funding these increases and changes, Boards of Education must make difficult decisions which impact student programming and services to ensure a balanced budget. Boards in recent years have been faced with

announcements such as the Employer Health Tax, Administrative Savings, Next Generation Network costs and many others and have scrambled to deal with the repercussions. Government has also allowed a thaw in wage freezes for exempt staff but provided no additional funding. Consistently, Boards across the province have advocated for adequate funding to cover increasing costs without any stable and predictable action being taken by government.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

BOARD OF EDUCATION
QUESNEL SCHOOL DISTRICT



Gloria Jackson
Chairperson

GJ/tr

- c: Board of Education of School District No. 28 (Quesnel)
The Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Education
The Honourable Carole James, Minister of Finance
Ms. Coralee Oake, MLA
Ms. Sue-Ellen Miller, Superintendent of Schools/CEO
Ms. Bettina Ketcham, Secretary-Treasurer
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Mr. Stephen Hawkins-Bogle, Co-Chair – Quesnel Principals and Vice-Principals Association
Ms. Lisa Kishkan, President - Quesnel District Teachers Association
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Ms. Selena Weiers, Chairperson – District Parents Advisory Council
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