

April 30, 2018

To the Independent Review Panel:

Response to the Document “K-12 Public Education Funding in British Columbia, Funding Model Review Discussion Paper, March 2018”.

As one of the founding Members of Dyslexia BC, I am continually hearing from parents of dyslexic students about how frustrating and difficult it can be to access services within the public and private systems for their children with reading and writing issues. It is disappointing to see that this review was only for “public” schools when private schools do get special needs funding on the same basis as public schools and in some cases even more for certain designated special needs.

Dyslexia is included within the twelve Ministry of Education’s designated categories for special education, falling within the category of Specific Learning Disability. Conservatively, 10 percent of the population has dyslexia and according to Dr. Sally Shaywitz, of the Yale center for Dyslexia, 20 percent of the population has dyslexia.

Yet, in British Columbia **only about 3 percent of the students get reported to the Ministry of Education as having a learning disability** on an annual basis. BC Ministry of Education special education policies apply to the delivery of services and programs for students with “dyslexia.” However, supplemental special education funding is not allocated to this group of students in BC.

Dyslexia is invisible; and has to be diagnosed (particularly in severe cases); or at least identified in order for a proper remedial plan to be implemented. Early identification of struggling readers, and remediation as early as kindergarten, is imperative to reach these learners. In the United States the majority of the individual States are making legislation to screen for dyslexia as early as kindergarten, and train teachers yearly so that they can use systematic evidence based reading methods in the classroom. (Washington just passed this legislation in March 2018).

Screening for dyslexia can occur as early as 5 ½ years old and the need to do full blown psycho educational assessments for these students will decrease if the students with mild to moderate learning disabilities are remediated early and in the classroom. North Vancouver (under the guidance of Dr. Linda Siegel, UBC) has already proved this with a long-term study. As well, the Coquitlam school district

has recently performed a pilot study screening in 6 schools and will continue through out the district because of positive results starting with students at the kindergarten age.

In 2002 a category specific to Severe Learning Disabilities (of which 80 to 90 percent is dyslexia) called the J category, was taken away completely in the Province of BC. Mild, Moderate and Severe learning disabilities are treated equally (when they are not equal at all), within the current funding model and are all *considered to be taken care of with the base funding allotment* along with all other designated high incidence special needs. This action by the BC Ministry has made the dyslexic community even more invisible within our schools. The priority for special needs students that do not generate extra funding is non-existent, no matter how severe the learning disability is. It is almost expected that parents will pay for tutoring or private schools out of pocket if they want their children to improve with their reading. With some districts routinely telling parents that they should go to private schools to get services.

I learned earlier this year in a Student Services advisory committee meeting for the Coquitlam School District that when the Ministry Audited the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in the District they only looked at the IEP's that were in "funded categories". **Not one IEP for a child with dyslexia** or any other learning disability was looked at by the Ministry during their review in Coquitlam in 2017, and I would suspect this is common practice by the Ministry in other Districts as well.

I do agree with the statement on Page 7; "There are vulnerable student populations which are not specifically included within the funding formula, and the data being used to calculate existing allocations may not be comprehensive enough to capture the true landscape of vulnerable student populations in school districts." This is a very good description of what is happening to the dyslexic community.

However, I don't agree with the statement on Page 7; "The current funding directs a disproportionate amount of time and resources towards administration, assessments, and paperwork, rather than direct services to students," particularly for the dyslexic/learning disabled community. The level of time, resources and administration needs to be sustained to ensure that there is some sort of accountability to these students. If anything, there needs to be more administration and resources for the dyslexic students. There is a disproportionate amount of time and resources put towards categories that produce extra funding.

On page 8, the statement of "The current funding model incentivizes school districts to devote a great deal of time and resources towards assessing students in order to secure additional funding". This is absolutely true in both private and public

schools. Which means that the dyslexic students and other learning disabilities fall to the very bottom of the priority list.

I do hope that a more comprehensive investigative review/audit is completed before any changes are made to the funding system. Quantitative data should be collected to eliminate any bias as well as consulting with the "K-12 sector stakeholders."

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathy McMillan', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Cathy McMillan,
Founding Member
Dyslexia BC