



BC Confederation of
Parent Advisory Councils

BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC)

Submission to

The Independent Panel for the Funding Model Review

Thursday May 17 2018 in Vancouver, British Columbia

Introduction

The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) appreciates the correspondence we received regarding the K-12 Funding Model Review and the continued opportunities to provide input on behalf of the parents and guardians of over 565,000 children attending provincial public schools. For over a decade, parents across BC have raised a number of issues with the current per-pupil funding model and have echoed many of the repeated recommendations of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services which calls for adequate, predictable and stable funding for K-12 public education.

We are pleased the Ministry of Education is “committed to fostering a flexible, personalized and sustainable education system, which is focused on strong outcomes and equitable access to educational opportunities for all students.” We commend the Ministry for undertaking the long-overdue and significant task of a holistic review of the K-12 funding model.

We support the Panel’s “Statement of Principles”; regardless of the funding model, these are critical and any model should fully adhere to these. The challenge is substantial, but also attainable with due diligence, and continued consultation and testing before final implementation. We believe that the Panel’s final recommendations must support equitable access, flexibility, transparency and, above all, be student-focused and reflective of students’ learning needs.

As a key education partner, we believe that a revised funding model and allocation process should align with the Panel’s “Statement of Principles”, the redesigned curriculum and with Ministry of Education and School Districts’ values. We believe the funding model should better support changes in the revised curriculum such as educational program delivery, including more flexibility, individualized learning, and cross-curricular studies. We also recognize the need for structure and accountability within the formula and for the efficient use of all funding.

As the provincially mandated voice of parents uniquely representing student interests, we will be providing feedback on the Funding Model Review throughout the process. Our comments and recommendations reflect our own Mission and Vision and the numerous member Resolutions that have been passed advocating for changes to address local district and larger provincial concerns.



Recommendations Overview

We believe that the Funding Model must facilitate educational programming and service delivery that is cohesive, consistent and transparent; parents have an expectation of service for their child that should not be affected by ability or disability, location, or socio-economic factors.

We acknowledge that while there are certainly challenges with the current funding formula, there are elements that work well for some school districts. We believe it is now time to truly be meeting the needs of the “whole child” throughout K-12 public education, regardless of district.

We believe we must move to a student-centered approach in the planning and the execution of the funding model. There are challenges that need to be addressed to remove the barriers of equity across the province. Our recommendations are strongly aligned with our own Vision and Mission, our member Resolutions and with the Panel’s Statement of Principles.

Recommendations to Improve Equity

Our Vision statement echoes the views of parents across the province: “Each learner in public education in our province has the opportunity and support to thrive, and reach their full potential, in a diverse learning community of inclusion and equity.”

With the recent Supreme Court ruling, parents are more acutely aware of the variable factors that affect the learning conditions in our classrooms and the need for more appropriate resource and support levels for many of our students and classrooms.

Indigenous students, students with diverse and complex learning needs, English Language Learners (ELL) and other vulnerable learners (including children in care) should continue to receive additional funding over and above the funding provided in the block allocation to school districts.

I. Address Unique Classroom Needs

Recommendation 1: That the per-pupil funding allocation be flexible enough to address unique classroom needs that are not funded by separate supplemental funding and additional funding to fulfill collective agreement requirements.

Often, the dynamics of a classroom (i.e. the particular combination of students and staff) create some unique needs that require extra supports and resources that would not fall within one of the current funding categories. Classroom needs are unique to the grouping of students and staff within that classroom. There are factors besides numbers that influence the dynamics and level of support and intervention required by classroom students: socio-economic status, environment, demographics, mental/physical health, English language proficiency and social, emotional & communication skills. Classroom needs include learning needs in addition to classroom management needs and are unique to the grouping of children in the class.



II. Address Unique Geographic Factors

Recommendation 2: That the unique geographic supplemental funding be revised to address the specific challenges identified through the rural education engagement process and the Rural Development Strategy.

A student should not receive a different learning experience based on location. While there needs to be flexibility, there also needs to be accountability. A child who moves from one district to another should not receive less than they did before; a degree of consistency and an expectation of standard delivery across 60 districts is required. The revised curriculum is the “standard” across all districts with local variance but not at detriment of the students’ learning.

Regardless of where a student resides, parents have the expectation that the education and level of services their child receives is similar and consistent. Supplemental funding for unique geographic factors must be utilized to improve equitable access to learning programs, supports and services rather than solely access to physical learning spaces. It is the expectation of parents that funding for unique geographic factors is to create more consistency in program implementation for students. In the Rural Education Report, parents specifically highlighted the need to address “inequities of educational opportunities and the barriers to participation”.

The current funding model provides supplemental funding for: small communities and remote schools; low enrolment; student population density; distance of schools from communities there should be continued acknowledgment of the additional costs to provide education in rural and remote areas of the province. And flexibility to address local issues such as recruitment, retention and transportation.

III. Address the Needs of Indigenous Students

Recommendation 3: That there be continued support for targeted funding to school districts to help meet the unique educational needs of Indigenous students in alignment with the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Targeted funding for Aboriginal education should be used to address specific programs, supports and services for Indigenous students. The Funding Model review is an opportunity to improve the approach to funding services for Indigenous students in alignment with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, specifically:

Article 14.3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.



IV. Address the Needs of Low Incidence Learners

Recommendation 4: That supplemental special needs funding and designation criteria be brought in-line with the actual costs of services and supports that our special needs students require. This new criteria must be based on student needs and ensure that students can equitably access a full day at school.

We recognize that students can and do transfer seamlessly from district to district. Unfortunately, for most students with complex learning needs this is not the case. Students with complex learning needs deserve the same consistency and seamless transition that all students expect in the BC public education system. Children receiving additional support must maintain the same level of support should they move districts within a school year to maintain consistency in their educational program.

Parents have strongly reiterated the need to increase provincial funding to cover the true cost of meeting the requirements of designated and non-designated students with special needs in accordance with Ministry of Education guidelines for special education and inclusion.

According to a survey we conducted in September 2017, a startling number of students are not receiving a full day of educational instruction. Many parents of special needs students reported that due to lack of supports, special needs students were regularly not scheduled for a full day at school, parents were asked to keep their children at home when their supports were cancelled for the day due to illness or absence, and parents were asked to pick up their children from school when they had a behavioural incident.

An immediate significant change is needed to bring supplemental special needs funding and designation criteria in-line with the actual costs of services and supports that our special needs students require. All students deserve access to a full day of school. It is our firm belief that supports to complex learners should be based on the needs of the student and that no child should be sent home due to lack of available resources or appropriately trained staff

A more standardized supplemental funding criteria and framework would provide a level of “equitable” access across districts. It would create clear identification procedures to provide a framework for identifying students who meet the criteria for Levels 1, 2, and 3 funding. It would provide a process by which the needs of the individual are assessed and an individual program is developed to meet these needs. It provides opportunity for flexibility in how the funding allocated to districts is used. And it would encourage families to access provincial assessments, community supports which may provide additional information to support educational programming.



V. Address the Needs of High Incidence Learners

Recommendation 5: That the funding model ensure student services and classroom supports are protected. By creating protected funding envelopes, districts will still have flexibility to address local needs, supports and interventions.

As stated in our submission to the [Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services](#), the change from targeted funding to block funding has had significant impact on the level of services and supports to students with learning differences. Many parents are told that districts are allocating much more funding to special education than the students actually receive. Unless the amount of high incidence targeted funding that was rolled into the per-pupil allocation in 2002 is taken into account, this is a flawed comparison.

The original per-pupil block funding was intended, when multiplied by the total number of students, to provide sufficient funding to support the classroom as well as the needs of high incidence special needs students (including Gifted, Learning Disabilities and moderate to low behaviour support/mental illness). In the years following implementation of the block funding model, Boards of Education faced ongoing budget challenges and districts began focusing available funds towards the classroom. As a result, less money was available to support the early intervention, assessment, services and supports needed by high incidence special needs students. While cuts were also made to services and supports for low incidence special needs students, the presence of supplemental funding for these designations served to be somewhat protective.

As stated in the FMR Discussion Paper, "the percentage of students designated as having special needs within the border BC student population has stayed relatively constant over the past 15 years, the number of students being diagnosed in supplemental funding categories has increased by 65% since 2002. Overall, student enrolment has fallen by 10 percent during this period." Identification of special needs students has suffered as resources and funding have declined. There is little incentive for schools to go through the process of identifying a student if it only serves to establish an expectation of support without the means (be that funding or trained staff) to fulfil those expectations.



Recommendations to Balance Accountability with Flexibility

Recommendation 6: That resources are allocated to Boards of Education in the most efficient manner and ensure that resources provided are being utilized as intended.

Recommendation 7: That targeted funding envelopes are created to allow for a balance of flexibility and accountability. Supplemental funding that is calculated based on the number of identified students must be used to address the needs of the identified groups for the following purposes:

- a) Targeted funding envelope for all low incidence learner supports (ALL Level 1,2,3 designated students)***
- b) Targeted funding envelope for high incidence learners within the funding block***
- c) Targeted funding for Aboriginal Education for Indigenous students***
- d) Targeted funding envelope for ELL supports and services***
- e) Targeted funding to supplement Community Link for vulnerable students***

Targeted funding ensures that funds intended for one use cannot be spent to another purpose or to cover funding shortages in other areas. Although we agree that districts require flexibility, we believe that creating targeted “envelopes” specifically for supports and services to groups of students (rather than to individual students) within the funding allocation balances the need for flexibility and accountability.

School Districts must develop strategic plans to demonstrate how Aboriginal, ELL, Gifted, vulnerable, inclusion will be supported. School district’s public budgeting process should report out what goes to high incidence and low incidence supports. Funding supplements for vulnerable students recognizes the following factors: Socio-economic; demographic vulnerability; and educational attainment. We must ensure that funding intended for vulnerable students is used to directly impact students.

A high accountability standard of in the public budgeting process could also be applied to other district funding.

Community Link funds must be prioritized to ensure that all eligible students receive a breakfast and lunch program. We need to address the provincial issue of vulnerable/at risk students arriving at school without having had breakfast and not able to get breakfast at school; the funds are being used for other things, not as intended.



Recommendations to Improve Transparency

Recommendation 8: That funding is calculated using a clear, easily understood and transparent methodology.

Recommendation 9: That supplemental funding due to variances in collective agreements be reported as supplemental funding with clear indication of the purpose, and allowable uses.

For parents and the public to be able to engage more fully in the district budget process, there needs to be more transparency in how districts report the Ministry of Education District Operating Grants, Supplemental Funding, and how the funds will be allocated by the district.

The revised funding model needs to be more accountable and transparent to parents. All stakeholders should be able to clearly see that funding that is targeted for a specific use is used for its intended purpose.

There have been a number of challenges with the restoration of language as directed by the Supreme Court ruling. Although the restoration of language has been a fair process, it has not resulted in equitable distribution of funds to districts. Over 15 years, Boards of Education had made difficult decisions on what would be cut to balance their budgets, with each district identifying their own priorities. A number of Boards prioritized smaller classroom size and/or specialist teacher ratios leading to some inequitable application of the Classroom Enhance Fund (CEF). These are the unintended consequences with the restoration of language and the allocation of the CEF. District parent representatives from across the province tell us that their districts need additional flexible funding to fulfill these local needs such as more Education Assistants (EAs), custodial services and occupational and physio therapists.

Funding that is triggered by collective agreements is usually highly restricted. Transparency is about ensuring that funding differences which are a result of collective agreements are well understood.

Conclusion

We again applaud the Ministry's efforts to review and revise the fund model to address the system inequities. We appreciate the recognition of the overlap of mental health and the view of the whole student. Health, mental health, children and families and education Ministries should be working together for the benefit of the child. This is an unprecedented opportunity to look to and work with other Ministries to fund costs that the Ministry of Education currently bears. Many schools perform services that may fall under the purviews of the ministries of MCFD, RCYBC, Health, and Mental Health and Addictions. By looking for opportunities to use schools as hubs for "wraparound services," communities will be better served and costs could be borne across ministries.

We believe, as other stakeholders do, that a new funding model and the transition to a new formula should:

- "do no harm" to any school district or districts
- be student-focused and meet the true cost of appropriately educating any, and every, child or youth in kindergarten through to graduation
- account for the significant differences in family demographics, geography (urban, rural, remote), specific and unique learning needs of students, and context among school districts
- be an iterative process and be reviewed regularly to ensure it appropriately addresses the rapidly changing education landscape in K-12 public education
- be transparent in both its processes and foster accountability in its results

We understand that the funding model review process may not include a discussion and revision of the quantum or funding level. If this is the case, then it is our fervent hope revising the funding model is merely a first step of many to a truly inclusive, and ever-evolving K-12 public education system.