



**Submission from BCEdAccess to the Independent Review Panel
on the
Funding Model Review Discussion Paper
“K-12 Public Education Funding in British Columbia”**

Who we are

BCEdAccess has nearly 1400 parent/guardian members, from all over BC, and we are growing every day. Our mandate as grassroots volunteers is to advocate publicly for equitable access to education for students with special needs, and to provide their parents/guardians with support, education and training around that right.

Introduction

Our focus in providing feedback around the discussion paper will be on Theme 2, part 1, Students With Special Needs.

We are very encouraged that that the Ministry of Education is open to “explore the ways in which BC’s funding model can support equitable access and improved outcomes”. It is not an easy task with a wide variety of challenges that affect our education system. It's important to our group to see the willingness to open a conversation and review the current model.

Before we address the questions contained in the discussion paper, we would like to bring up two important points:

1. That we would have preferred that an in-depth needs assessment be done before considering a new funding model.
 - What level of funding would it take to enable students with diverse learning needs equitable access to educational opportunities comparable to those of their typical-learner peers?
 - When was the last time a needs assessment was conducted?
 - Do we know what's actually needed in this age of technology and changing curriculum?

2. That changing the funding model alone won't change much if the funding level itself isn't adequate. The resounding consensus from the many submissions we have read to date make it clear, as it is to us, that more money is needed, not simply a new model. It is our hope that redistributing the same amount of money is not the ultimate goal, but instead revising the funding model is merely a step along the path to a truly inclusive and modern K-12 public education system.

Key Questions

1. Should an alternative, non-diagnosis (or reporting-based) model of funding students with special needs be considered?

Initially it seemed our membership was divided in some ways on this question. Some favoured the diagnosis model for various reasons, while others saw the wisdom of moving to a needs-based model.

After some examination of the question, the answer emerged in this way:

Both a medical diagnostic model through psychoeducational assessment and a needs based model at the school are required to properly provide equitable access to education for students with diverse learning needs. Without the psychoeducational assessment, many students will fly under the radar because they are able to mask their needs for many years until they start to display unexpected behaviours, or fall behind academically, or both and more.

As was established in the Moore decision (Moore v. British Columbia (Education)) the supports a student needs are the ramps that provide students with access to their education and in order to decide which type of "ramp" each student needs, it is necessary to assess them with adequate and appropriate tools.

At the same time, these types of assessments, as pointed out in the discussion paper, can have very lengthy wait times and there is a systemic inequity in that some families can afford to access these assessments privately, while others cannot.

A needs based model is important in developing strength based supports for students, and will also help to support students who have not yet been assessed. We would like to advocate for a provincial model of assessment if this is part of the approach, as currently there are a variety of tools from district to district, leading again to inequity in the model.

2. How can a new funding model ensure that individual students, in all parts of the province, receive the support they require in a timely manner?

We believe that the answer to this question truly lies in doing a provincial needs assessment of the state of funding for students with special needs, and in setting up appropriate data collection measures that come out of this assessment.

3. How can a new funding model reduce administrative costs and increase resources dedicated to services to students?

In taking away targeted funding for high incidence students and putting it into the base student amount, it took away the dedicated support required by those students and made it so that support and services available to those students has eroded or disappeared over the years. Parents/guardians of this category of students spend many additional dollars every year for specialized services directly related to their education that are just not available in the public system. Restoring that targeted funding, and further, expanding it to include a portion of funding for those without a specific diagnosis but with clear needs, will ensure that those funds don't disappear in administrative costs.

At the same time we feel that those administrative costs should be funded. They are needed to ensure quality programming and supervision. The discussion paper appeared to hint at the idea that the assessment of students is an administrative 'burden' that needs to be overcome. The suggestion of eliminating this "burden" would leave educators and parents without the knowledge that can actually guide them to support a student.

We are very concerned about the idea of removing targeted funding. We have already seen that this has not worked out well for one group (high incidence students) and we can only anticipate further issues if other categories are similarly treated.

4. Could the funding model better support special needs students in ways that result in better outcomes for students?

Ultimately, the needs of the student should take priority, not their diagnosis. Many students have overlapping diagnoses and the IEP document currently only recognizes one of those, leading to poor planning for supports. Further, accountability around these documents only extends to checking on documentation, and not around whether they are effective, which is a much more important measure. We would like to see accountability directly around the quality of IEP goals and the success of their outcomes.

Conclusion

We are very pleased to see the effort to look at the funding model and to attempt to address the inequities and find a better way forward. We also appreciate how the discussion paper recognizes the intersections and overlap of mental health. Health, mental health and education ministries should be working together instead of in siloes. We would further add that vulnerable student populations so often intersect with diverse learners as well, so any policy that benefits one typically benefits all.

Systemic issues in K-12 education in BC will not be addressed by a revised funding model. Investing in training educators and staff from when they are at university and throughout their career on inclusive education could save a great deal in the long run, both in education funding and future societal costs. Investing in supports and assessment for children even before they enter Kindergarten through early childhood education and supported childcare development will have a similar effect, and we commend the current government for their commitments in this area.

We look forward to further updates on this review and encourage you to contact us for should you wish for more feedback or information.

Tracy Humphreys, founder

bcedaccess@gmail.com

www.bcedaccess.com