



The Gifted Children's
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Independent Review Panel
K-12 Public Sector Education Funding Model Review
K12FundingReview@gov.bc.ca

Dear Panel Members:

The Board of Directors for the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, a parent advocate and support group representing parents from across BC, is pleased to be able to make this submission to the Funding Model Review Panel.

As the Special Education Policy Manual (2016) defines, "A student is considered gifted when she/he possesses demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of exceptionally high capability with respect to intellect, creativity, or the skills associated with specific disciplines. Students who are gifted often demonstrate outstanding abilities in more than one area. They may demonstrate extraordinary intensity of focus in their particular areas of talent or interest. However, they may also have accompanying disabilities and should not be expected to have strengths in all areas of intellectual functioning" (p. 53).

From this definition it follows that gifted children have a variety of strengths and challenges that can present themselves in complicated and often misunderstood ways. These complexities include gifted students who have multiple exceptionalities (such as giftedness and ADHD), and gifted students who historically may have faced multiple barriers (such as First Nations and Metis students, and English language learners; Ministry of Education Inclusive Education Branch, 2018). Under the current system, however, special needs students can only be assigned one designation, leaving the inter-sectionality of their diversities unaccounted for in funding or educational practices.

The policy manual also states the importance of identification and adaptations within the educational system to address the complexities of their learning needs. "Early identification of students who are gifted is an important element in planning and delivering appropriate educational programs for these students. Some gifted students whose abilities are not identified and addressed early may exhibit secondary emotional and behavioural difficulties. District screening and identification procedures should be in place to ensure consistency of access to programs designed to support gifted students" (p. 53).

Unfortunately, the reality is that gifted students are seriously underserved within the current BC educational system. This lack of service stems from two main sources: a drastic decline in the recognition and identification of gifted students, and a deficiency in appropriate educational programming.

In 2002, the education funding formula changed so giftedness became one of the special needs categories allocated as “high incidence”. Designated funding for gifted and other high incidence students was removed, and replaced with block or general funding. Between the 2001/2 and 2016/17 school years, 69% fewer gifted students were identified (BC Teacher’s Federation, 2017). Over this same period there was a pattern that all high incidence students were less likely to be identified (average 35% decline), but compared to the 11 other special needs categories, the drop in the number of identified gifted students was by far the most extreme.

Why would the drop be so drastic for gifted students specifically? Reports suggest this type of occurrence is related to the common belief by some educators, parents and policy makers in the “myth that high ability students don’t face problems or challenges” (Moon, 2009); a belief that they will “be OK on their own” and that special services are optional. However, gifted students, like all other special needs students, in fact do need educational adaptations to support an appropriately challenging academic environment, as well as to provide recognition and support for the social-emotional challenges their unique profile requires.

First, and most important, high-ability students need an appropriately challenging and supportive educational environment where the instruction is within their zone of proximal development—neither too easy, nor too hard. In addition, they need an educational climate that supports high-level academic achievement, actively eliminates stereotypes that limit aspirations, and includes peers that applaud academic achievements (Moon, 2009, p. 256).

However, due to the draft revisions contained in the 2017 Special Education Policy Manual, we have grave concerns that rather than providing for gifted programming as suggested by Moon, the situation in BC may become worse rather than better. The Special Education Policy Manual draft has new language that states: “Identification of a student who is gifted must be determined by a qualified health professional (Certified School Psychologist or a Registered Psychologist) following a psycho-educational assessment” (p. 98).

Under the current system that is already under-identifying gifted students, assessments for giftedness are being done by special education teachers, gifted helping teachers or other qualified personnel with groups or individual students. Under the new Policy Manual (2017) these group-level tests and multiple personnel could no longer be used to identify gifted students. Instead, psychologists would need to administer 1:1 testing that takes several hours of their time. This is a potentially far-reaching problem, as there are already very long wait lists for students who have

been referred for testing by psychologists. This would be very costly, and require a large increase in psychologists employed by school districts to restore the number of identified gifted students to at least the 2002 levels; levels that are widely accepted as prevalent across education institutions and supported by research. Other problems arise related to the limits of psycho-educational assessments and their ability to include all diverse gifted students (First Nations, Metis, and English language learners). Again, further funding would be needed to train personnel and add additional testing or other materials to appropriately identify all gifted students in BC.

After being identified, gifted students need to be provided with appropriate learning opportunities, as set out in the current and also the proposed revisions to the Special Education Policy Manual developed by the BC Ministry of Education. This means teachers need professional development in gifted pedagogy to enable the delivery of appropriate differentiated learning opportunities. Without this, gifted students cannot benefit from an inclusive classroom. In addition, support specialists working with the gifted need to be provided and well versed in best practices for gifted education.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Remove the division between “low incidence” and “high incidence” funding; either fund both as part of the base allocation, or both with dedicated funding.

Recommendation 2: Provide the necessary funding to meet the requirement for designation by school psychologists or registered psychologists that is prescribed by the Ministry of Education in the “Special Education Services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines” or ensuing updates to this manual.

Recommendation 3: Allow for multiple designations in the special needs categories, and make required changes within reporting and funding formulas.

Recommendation 4: Increase funding to teacher in-service professional development. This is needed so educational professionals are trained to appropriately recognize and refer all of their diverse students to the gifted identification process, and to provide up-to-date gifted programming for those students in their inclusive classrooms.

Recommendation 5: Increase funding to support programming for gifted students to accompany the expected rise in numbers of identified students. This increase in programming will be needed to align with the reversal of the 69% deficit that has occurred since 2002.

References

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