

February 19, 2018

The K–12 Public Education Funding Model Review Committee

via email: k12fundingreview@gov.bc.ca

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the education funding model review. The Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education is a grassroots group of parents who have children in public schools in the Vancouver and Victoria areas; we also have connections with parents across the province. We are writing to highlight issues that we would like to see resolved in whatever the new model may be, as well as questions that will be important for the funding review committee to consider. It is essential to note that, ultimately, the most important factors are the adequacy, predictability, and stability of funding coming from the province. Without these, any funding model will be doomed to fail.

The current funding model puts the onus on districts to decide which programs and schools to fund in their yearly requirement to balance their budgets. Districts have attempted to protect what they consider “core” classroom programs by reducing or cutting altogether items such as education assistant hours, maintenance and custodial services, and music, fine arts, and gifted programs.¹

This has led to a situation where districts vary in the services and programs offered. Even within districts, schools vary in programming depending on PAC fundraising for items now considered “optional.” Our survey of PAC fundraising demonstrated that PACs subsidize much more than the clichéd playground construction. PAC fundraising pays for music instruction, art instruction, sexual education, classroom supplies, books, art materials, PE equipment, and technology, to name just a few.²

Furthermore, as the range of programming offered by schools is reduced, parents and families have to spend increasing amounts of money on items like art instruction, music instruction, and supplies for their individual children. This is in addition to contributing to the funds raised by their PACs. The parents of children who need support but are not considered “highest need”—and therefore do not receive enough or any resource teacher support—spend money on tutoring in basic literacy, reading, and math. High school students increasingly require tutoring because they are taking online courses due to reduced course offerings in school.

¹ BC School Trustees Association Budget Response Update, May 22, 2015: dsweb.bcsta.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-77442/2015-05-22_bcsta_update.htm

² Appendix B of PAN's 2017 submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services: panvancouver.ca/uploads/6/7/1/4/67145647/20171006_scc_for_budget_2018_19_f.pdf

The inequities that exist in this situation are stark and alarming. No child’s quality of education should depend on their parents’ ability to fundraise or to outsource educational support. Whether children receive a well-rounded education, which includes exposure to the arts and music, should not depend on which programs the district decides to cut that year.

The effects of budget cuts and increasing inequities have been felt even more severely by students with special needs, as advocacy groups such as BCEdAccess and Inclusion BC have demonstrated.³

The absence of specialized arts teachers and dedicated rooms for arts education has been institutionalized in the Area Standards policy, which sets out how new schools will be constructed. The Area Standards policy requires elementary schools to be built without dedicated rooms for the arts and with very little space outside of enrolling classrooms. Dedicated funding for arts education at the elementary level and a change to the Area Standards policy to allow art rooms to be built are necessary in order to reverse the disappearance of fine arts from BC’s elementary schools.⁴

We would like to see the Ministry re-centralize the task of deciding what is necessary and included in a quality public education, fund those programs adequately,⁵ and fund them transparently. This would include designating specific funding for specific programs and costs—such as arts instruction, educational assistant time, custodial services, technology—so that money intended for one use cannot be spent for another purpose by the district.

There may also be opportunities to look to 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 Health, Children and Families, 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.

In short, a successful funding review will include the questions: What is included in a quality public education? How do we make sure educational services are delivered equitably? and What is the role of the school in the community?

Sincerely,

The Parent Advocacy Network

³ inclusionbc.org/our-priority-areas/inclusive-education; equitableaccesstoeducation.wordpress.com

⁴ Appendix C of PAN’s 2017 submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services: panvancouver.ca/uploads/6/7/1/4/67145647/20171006_scc_for_budget_2018_19_f.pdf

⁵ That is, increase operational funding from current inadequate levels, per recommendations from the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government services: Recommendation #22 in 2014, #2 in 2015, #49 in 2016, and #66 in 2017.