



School District 19
(Revelstoke)

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***K-12 Public Education Funding Model Review
Regional Trustee and Staff Working Sessions
April 16th, 2018 in Kelowna***

Submission from School District No. 19 (Revelstoke)

Location: Hollywood Road Education Services Site
1040 Hollywood Road
Kelowna, BC

Date: Monday, April 16th, 2018

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share in the provincial government's K-12 public education system funding model review. We have structured our feedback to loosely align with the K-12 public education in B.C. discussion paper published by the Ministry of Education in March 2018.

Theme 1: Student Success in the Context of an Evolving Education System

During our discussions of the key questions related to this theme, there was considerable concern with the link that appears drawn between the application of a funding model and the potential to have that impact educational gaps and/or improve equity of access to educational programs and services.

It is our belief that funding cannot directly "incent" improvements to individual student success. The implications of suggesting that funding is tied to specific student outcomes is not appropriate. Defining "individual student success" given the variety of contexts throughout the province, and the broad range of opportunities that exist for our students, most certainly goes well beyond the current data collected at the Ministry level such as FSA and school completion. These measures do not adequately create an appropriate picture of that individual student's success.

Our students have benefitted from the significant flexibility that our Board of Education has enjoyed over the years in terms of developing programs and services specific to the needs of our students. Board Authorized Courses specific to healthy outdoor living and Dual Credit opportunities in the trades to name a few have been successfully implemented under current funding models.

While per course funding has facilitated the addition of courses that take place outside of the regular timetable, this model does require a base enrolment which can limit those opportunities in a small school environment like ours. We would welcome a funding approach that recognizes that in the initial stages, low enrolled courses that align with the principles of the redesigned curriculum, should be supported.

It is our hope that throughout the Funding Model Review flexible options that facilitate rural small school and district programs are considered, while protecting the stability necessary to provide ongoing programming and opportunities for all students.

We know that a relatively small percentage of overall district funding comes in the form of targeted direct funds for specific purposes. It is the Board's belief that the Ministry should limit targeted funding in most areas. We believe that targeted funds in the area of Aboriginal Education and the Early Learning StrongStart grant are stable and predictable and have resulted in quality programs and services for students. Funding announcements that are directly related to broader government policy or current directions do not necessarily align with district directions. Further, these funds are less likely to be linked to student needs and they lack the ability to consider local context. While our students have benefitted from programs such as the "Shoulder Tapper" and "Trades" grants, those funds do not provide a stable part of well-planned student programming year to year.

We believe that our plans for student success, our reporting processes and our efforts to improve and enhance student outcomes provides high levels of accountability. Funding should not be directly linked with those important processes.

Theme 2: Education for Special Needs, Vulnerable and Indigenous Students

The Revelstoke Board of Education believes that a review of the current model of diagnosis and of Ministry categories is necessary. However, it has not been our experience that individual student programs and supports for students have been delayed by a “disproportionate amount of time and resources towards administration, assessments, and paperwork” as noted in the discussion paper. We have taken the approach that our funding allocation decisions are made without consideration for whether a student is in a “designated” funding category. Our supports are put in place based on student needs, with testing and assessments considered in program development, not in “meeting a criteria”. Our Board has demonstrated the ability to identify the educational needs of students who require additional supports and services and has not relied on Ministry designations for direction.

Our local processes prioritize student programs and services and we have worked diligently to ensure that those necessary programs and services are not directly connected to whether a student is “funded” according to a Ministry category.

Significant changes in our understanding of how students learn suggests that a funding model that provides more of a needs-based approach would provide for more stability and a more appropriate application of the funding. Identification of vulnerable populations and students who require support beyond regular instruction is key to any revisions in funding drivers. Funding within this area should reflect our continued understanding of the mental health issues and needs of our students. We have been able to provide extended services to students that are not “funded”, such as access to medical and mental health services in our high school, largely due to local partnerships and our ability to direct funding to priority areas.

We encourage the thoughtful consideration of funding changes that do not limit our ability to continue to make decisions based on student need, as identified by our educator teams working with those students, and we recognize that the current “designations” do not reflect appropriately, the needs of students.

Theme 3: Responsiveness to Local Circumstances

Our Board believes that the responsibility for allocating resources and meeting the unique characteristics of our district falls to the Board. We do not expect that a funding model can be tied to the actual “unique” needs of a district. While this would guarantee equity, it is not realistic to expect that a funding model could possibly achieve in defining the needs of 60 districts. However, the model must allow for flexibility in funding so that Boards can ensure quality programs and services as we address our own local circumstances, and in the case that conditions exist that can be quantified equitably, responsive funding to mitigate those conditions helps create stability.

One such example would be the funding protection model which worked well in our district. Any funding allocations that are designed to address unique factors in a district must have a clearly defined criteria given that all districts have “unique” needs.

Theme 4: Flexibility

The Revelstoke Board of Education would welcome the opportunity to have enhanced flexibility, autonomy, and supports reducing restrictions on “outside the block” funding.

However, we do recognize that some restricted and targeted funding may add a layer of accountability to ensure provincial consistency in the system. Targeted Aboriginal Education funding on the education side and AFG funding on the operations side are examples where flexibility is not as important as ensuring quality programs and operations across the province.

Theme 5: Financial Management and Accountability

The Revelstoke Board of Education has a comprehensive budget process which begins each spring, involves all stakeholders and is fully focused on students.

The current model of the base funding built on spring projected enrolment followed by the September 30th final grant announcements makes it challenging for Boards

to plan to spend 100% of annual operating grants. As we continue to pass only balanced budgets, we know that those budgets must include contingency amounts to protect against excessive expenses that are not predictable. During the past three years, our Board has experienced what we could refer to as “good luck”. Weather conditions (mild winters) and healthy staff (reduced replacement costs) have results in very small underspent budgets and therefore, surplus.

Through our Fiscal Management policies, our district’s spending is monitored closely and adjustments are made with a goal to ensure that all funds are spent in the current operating year on programs and services that are benefitting students. The BC School Trustees Association has provided sound guidance in this regard. We welcome further discussion about “surplus” amounts and recommendations regarding contingency.

Theme 6: Predictability and Costs

We would welcome a review of models that are not largely tied to enrolment. Many of our district expenses are not connected directly to the number of students enrolled. However, per pupil funding is necessary as long as spending and resource allocation decisions are driven by collective agreement language. There are “base” amounts required to operate that are affected only slightly by changes in enrolment. Our Board would welcome a multi-year predictable sustainable approach to funding. Our current model for spending AFG funding provides a good example of the long-term effects of planning that come with predictable funding.

We believe it is critical that all fixed costs are fully funded provincially. Inflationary expenses are predictable and should therefore be factored into our funding. Once again, this structure will afford Boards the opportunity to exercise local decision making and flexibility with core funding, rather than having to reduce services to students to account for pressures such as changes related to the elimination of MSP premiums and the new *Employer Health Tax* to cover off costs.

Theme 7: Geographic, Economic and Demographic Factors

Our Board welcomes clarity around funding connected to unique needs. We recognize the challenge that results in creating an equitable provincial model that adequately reflects a tremendous range of factors. Transparent policy and decision making will be important as any changes in this area are contemplated.

Next Steps

We believe the task of changing the funding formula should not be underestimated. While we value the opportunity to contribute, we respectfully request that the Ministry of Education approach the final changes cautiously, and with full knowledge that the more significant the change, the higher the likelihood of unintended consequences that could have significant negative impacts on students and the quality of education we have come to expect and deliver.