



**Submission to Funding Model Review Panel
Ministry of Education
April 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you at the Regional Funding Model Review Panel Session in Prince George on Tuesday, April 24, 2018. We greatly appreciated the opportunity to share information about our school district and provide input on the Funding Model Review Discussion Paper. This written submission will provide an overview of some of the information we shared with you, as well as additional information we were not able to share due to the time limitations.

Overview of School District No. 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin)

School District No.27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) is located near the center of British Columbia. It is one of the larger School Districts in province and covers 61,195 km².

The geographic area of School District No. 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) (SD27) encompasses most of the southern Cariboo-Chilcotin region from 100 Mile House and environs in the south to slightly north of Williams Lake, east to the Cariboo Mountains, and west into the Chilcotin and the coast range. The communities of 100 Mile House and Williams Lake are the principle population centres and form the nodes for secondary education in the School District. Grades K to seven students are dispersed in many smaller outlying schools as well as medium to large elementary schools in close proximity to the main centers. Throughout the more remote and rural areas of our district, are a number of rural elementary-secondary schools supporting students from K to grade 10.

Within SD27, there are currently 22 schools serving approximately 4650 students. The student population of our schools vary from one large high school (approximately 1300 students) down to six small schools (fewer than 25 students each). Here is a breakdown of our school populations:

- 6 schools serving fewer than 25 students
- 4 with enrollment between 25 and 50 students
- 1 with enrollment between 50 and 100 students
- 5 with enrollment between 100 and 200 students
- 1 school with enrollment between 200 and 300 students
- 3 schools with enrollment between 300 and 350
- 1 high school with enrollment of approximately 600
- 1 high school with enrollment of approximately 1300 students

Over 25% of our schools have enrollments of fewer than 25 students, and nearly 50% of our schools have an enrollment of less than 50 students. The majority of these schools are in small communities which are a significant distance from the next closest school.

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School District No. 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) honors the traditional territories of three distinct First Nations: Carrier/Dakelh, Chilcotin/Tsilhqot'in, and Shuswap/Secwepemc, comprised of 12 individual First Nation Bands, plus the Cariboo-Chilcotin Métis. In consideration, our programs and services are sensitive to the cultural protocols of these three Nations as well as the Métis and Inuit.

***Note: SD27 has used First Nations to represent all First Nations people including the Métis and Inuit. After consultation with communities, the term First Nations was their preference.**

Funding Model Review Discussion Paper (FMRP)

Our submission will focus on the themes of the discussion paper and providing our input on each theme.

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

The FMRP states:

“The recent rural education engagement process found that many small school districts, or those where students are more geographically dispersed into smaller schools, already offer a high degree of personalization, while school districts operating a greater number of larger schools may find it more challenging to allocate appropriate resources and supplies to achieve a comparable level of personalization.”

While we would agree that smaller schools, such as many in our district, have been very creative and better able to personalize education within multi-grade classrooms, there is still a challenge with how smaller rural schools are funded, and the lack of choice in available courses. In our rural secondary program (grades 8-10), we are able to provide core courses at the grades 8-10 level; however, there are very limited choices for specialty courses and other subject areas of interest that students may have.

The first key question we would like to focus on for this theme is:

“Can the funding model be modified to help close educational gaps and improve equity of access to educational programs and services?”

It is our opinion that, yes, the funding model can be modified to close gaps and improve equity of access. As mentioned previously, there are challenges in providing access to education opportunities in small rural/remote schools. Our students in remote areas do not have access to the choice that students in larger schools may have. Many of our rural and remote schools have challenges with recruitment and retention of staff. Many programs or speciality courses are dependent upon the area of expertise or interests of teaching staff. If one of the teachers does not specialize in woodwork or metal work, then the school is not able to offer shop

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courses. If there is not a teacher with music or art as an interest, then the students are not able to access art or music course options.

The funding model needs to be responsive to addressing the gaps in access and equity of education throughout the province. Students from all corners of British Columbia should be able to access courses in their areas of interest.

The second key question we would like to address in this theme is:

“Should funding directly incent improvements to individual student success?”

It is our feeling that, no, funding should not be incentivised by improvements to individual student success. Public education needs to adequately support the needs of students and provide the best learning opportunities for all students. The gaps in equity need to be addressed; however, by tying this to individual student performance leads to the potential for those needing support not receiving adequate funding and supports.

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

As outlined in the FMRDP, we are in agreement that the current model sees more time and resources spent on administration, assessments and paperwork versus providing services to students. The resources we receive need to be directed towards supporting students. There is a need for balance between reporting and administration and ensuring that students are provided with resources and support they require.

The first key question we would like to address in this theme is:

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?

Our district also continues to struggle to recruit trained professionals, such as school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and others. Without these professionals available within our district, and our communities through the health authority, we face significant challenges with timely assessments of students. The rural/remote factors for our district also present challenges as students and their families must travel to a distant community and sometimes stay for multiple days just to be assessed. This places a financial hardship on many families and they are simply not able to do this. There is a need for students to have access to timely assessments within their home community or in their school.

One suggestion is looking to set ratios for school psychologists and other specialists within school districts and provide direct funding for those positions outside of block funding. Other recruitment suggestions for specialists include offering loan forgiveness, moving expenses, etc. to encourage them move and stay in districts in rural parts of the province.

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Vulnerable students:

The next key question we would like to address in this theme, regarding vulnerable students, is:

How can a new funding model contribute to improved equity of access to services and improved outcomes for vulnerable students?

Our superintendent recently attended the BCSSA Spring Forum on Embedding Formative Assessment. Dylan Wiliam provided a presentation and was speaking about vulnerability. He stated that vulnerability is determined not by a school's socio-economic profile, but that of its students. To ensure we are addressing the needs and better able to provide services to our vulnerable students, we need to identify the needs of individual students. Addressing vulnerability is not a one-size fits all approach. All students have different needs and we need to take the individual needs into account.

In the present funding formula, SD27 receives approximately \$70,000 per year under the vulnerability factors. This is not sufficient to provide the supports required for our vulnerable students.

Indigenous students:

The next key question we would like to address in this theme, regarding Indigenous students, is:

Should there be a more explicit link between funding and closing the educational gaps for indigenous students?

Currently the targeted dollars provided are not sufficient to support students. However, funding should not be tied to performance. Dollars should be targeted at measures to close educational gaps for First Nations students.

The majority of our targeted funds are allocated to staffing and the largest priority is language programs. Within our district there are three distinct nations with three distinct languages. The communities in our district are supportive and wish for a continued focus on languages.

The discrepancy between the funding levels provided by the Federal Government to First Nations communities for on reserve students continues to be significantly lower than the funding the provincial government provides. We have four communities who have entered into Local Education Agreements with SD27. As our funding is reduced by the provincial rate for those students covered by the LEA, this leads to communities being billed a higher rate than the funding provided to them. There needs to be an equity in funding and access to education for the First Nations/Indigenous students across our province.

The next key question we would like to address in this theme is:

Should funding be allocated to boards of education to include a per pupil amount based on self-identification?

Yes. It should also include geographic factors, such as travel distance to school; and economic factors of students, including those living on reserve verses those living off reserve. Many

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students on reserve receive additional supports from their communities; however, those living off reserve do not. We are only able to offer grades 11 and 12 in our major centres, 100 Mile House and Williams Lake. Parents from our outlying remote communities must send their students to board in Williams Lake to attend grade 11 and 12. These students often have siblings and one parent makes the choice to move into town with their child(ren) during the week. The other alternative is finding a boarding arrangement with other family or friends. This leads to challenges in that a family is separated, as one parent must stay behind in the community for the family to be considered living on reserve in order for students to receive additional supports. This is creating an inequity in access to education for our students from these communities.

Theme 3: Responsiveness to Local Circumstances

The first key question we would like to address in this theme is:

“Should different districts receive different funding rates based on their size/enrollment context or other factors?”

The needs of a district need to be factors of how funding is provided. There are economies of scale achieved in districts with larger enrollment compared to those with lower enrollment numbers. There are differences in the cost of heating buildings in different areas of the province. For example, our furthest school is 634 km round trip from our board office and our maintenance yard. It is a significant cost of travel to send staff to the school to perform maintenance, provide IT services, etc. We have another school, Naghtaneqed Elementary Secondary, (enrollment of approximately 20 students) located in the remote Nemiah Valley (distance of 396 km round from our board office) which is in a community without power. We use diesel generators to provide electricity and heat to this school building and our teacherage. These are some of the unique factors that need to be considered.

Theme 4: Flexibility

Flexibility is difficult when between 80% and 90% of our budget is directed to salaries and benefits for staff. Our human resources are most important in providing education to students in our district; however, once we have allocated staffing it leaves only between 10% and 20% of our budget. Our district’s transportation costs are approximately 8% of our overall operating budget. This again reduces the amount with which we can be flexible in our spending. We will speak more about transportation in Theme 7.

Theme 5: Financial Management and Accountability

For many years there has been a discussion around “accumulated surplus.” This term provides an inaccurate reflection of what these funds are. The majority of these funds within our district are allocated funds. Many come from specialty positions we are unable to fill including school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and others. We want to fill these positions and need to budget for them; however, there is a systemic shortage of qualified professionals

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in these professions. If we were able to recruit into these positions, we would utilize the funds. If we do not budget for these positions we need to fill, we run the risk of having to cut other programs throughout the year. This is not an acceptable option.

Over many years, school districts have also faced challenges with additional costs downloaded throughout the school year. It is best practice in business to have a contingency fund to address these unexpected costs. In the past we have seen the following cost pressures:

1. Major fluctuations in fuel prices. Our buses drive 8,500 km per day to transport students to school. Any increase or decrease in fuel costs has a significant impact on budget and spending.
2. MSP premium increases and now the change to the Employers Health Tax.
3. BC Hydro and other utility cost increases.
4. Unfunded wage increases for our excluded/exempt staff.

This list is just some of the major cost pressures we have faced. Many of these changes come mid-year and we must deal with them; which means we must plan and prepare for the eventuality.

Our school district is one of the few remaining in funding protection. This past year saw significant challenges as we arrived at the point where we are almost out of funding protection. We saw an increase of approximately 75 additional students we were not anticipating. This meant that we not only lost our funding protection at 1.5% of our budget, but we also did not receive any additional funding for the 75 additional students. As these students are not all dispersed evenly across the district, this meant we had to create additional classrooms without any additional funding. Many of these students (approximately 40) were also special needs students and as we are in funding protection we received no additional funding for the supports required for these students.

Theme 6: Predictability and Costs

The first key question we would like to address in this theme is:

“Are there mechanisms that could be introduced to the funding model to reduce the fluctuations in funding year over year?”

One option to be considered is looking at the actual costs of operating school buildings. With 25% of our buildings having enrollment of fewer than 25 students, funding on a per student model does not provide sufficient funding to provide staffing as well as heat, electricity, and other maintenance costs just to keep the building open. This needs to be accounted for in the funding model. We use a district-based funding approach and as such we use funds that are generated from our block funding to provide additional support to our smaller schools. This is a requirement to keep these schools open. There are many fixed costs that do not fluctuate based on student enrollment. If we are committed to ensuring students have equitable access to education in their communities, we also need to receive adequate funding to keep the building open regardless of the number of students attending. We still need to have at

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minimum two adults in the building for safety. Even if the student numbers would provide staffing for a one-room school, that is not safe in remote and rural communities with limited access to emergency services and lack of cellular phone services.

The next key question we would like to address in this theme is:

“Should new mechanisms be considered to equalize the cost differential amongst school districts for items that may be more fixed, such as compensation and staffing levels set by collective agreements?”

Consideration should be given to providing funding related to direct staffing costs. Many districts have staff on different levels of the pay grid. With this, it means that one district may have higher staffing costs due to more staff with a masters degree and at the top end of the years of experience grid. Other districts have teachers who have less years of experience and are on the lower end of the grid. This provides them savings in their actual staffing costs and a disparity across the province.

Theme 7: Geographic, Economic and demographic factors

The key questions we would like to address in this theme are:

1. “What geographic economic and/or demographic modifiers should be part of the funding model and what weight should they have relative to overall student enrolment?”
2. “Should different funding approaches be established for different groupings or types of school districts (remote, rural urban, and metro)?”

Through our review of the discussion paper we also identified a few additional questions:

1. We would like a definition of remote, rural, urban and metro? What is seen as remote or rural in one district can be very different from another.

It is important to recognize that the costs are higher to provide education in small rural schools compared to a larger centre where economies of scale can achieve cost reductions. The needs of a one-room grades K-7 or K-10 school are different from a school with 150 to 1000 or more students.

When looking at additional costs for our small remote and rural schools, some of the increased or additional costs include:

- Heating costs for remote schools, currently school on diesel generator with no power in community, pellet boilers, etc. For example, the utility costs for Naghtaneqed School make up approximately 10% of the district’s total utility costs, yet the school is a small building with about 30 students.



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- Staffing levels: It is not only meeting classroom size and configurations as per the Memorandum of Agreement, but for us it is also about meeting school class size averages in the intermediate level. We also face challenges in ensuring that more than one adult is available to provide for safe environments for all. We also struggle with attracting certified teachers to staff our rural and remote schools and TTOC coverage when needed.
 - Costs of providing teacherages and housing for staff: According to collective agreements we are able to recover a small portion of the costs of the buildings; however, there are additional maintenance costs as well as costs for maintenance staff to travel there when required. At this time, we have approximately 15 teacherages.
 - Travel (mileage and time) for support staff, IT, maintenance, etc. to get to the school to perform work when required.
 - Recruitment and retention – a challenge to recruit and retain staff in remote schools with limited staffing and limited services in communities.
 - Transportation – it costs more to transport fewer students in rural areas. Fewer number of students means the same costs for a bus and driver; however, the per student amount is much higher. Currently approximately 8% of our budget is focused on transportation. Our buses travel 8,500 km per day and 1.7 million km's per year.

Approximately 60% of our students ride a bus to get to school. We also have parents who travel an additional 250,000 km per year to get their students from their home to the nearest bus stop. We also provide funding of approximately \$84,000 per year on a transportation allowance to remote families where bus routes are not feasible. This transportation allowance is provided in the form of mileage costs to drive their students to the nearest bus stop. Many of these parents are driving 50 kms one way to get their student from their home to the nearest bus stop.

- Students in grades 11 and 12 in our remote communities must board in Williams Lake to access grade 11 and 12. We provide students with a \$500/month boarding allowance and also have a separate bus that brings these students into Williams Lake on Sunday evenings and takes them home on Friday afternoons.

Vulnerability and economic factors also need to be considered in the equation; however, there needs to be a view to the individual student's needs versus a larger macro view.



Conclusion

In conclusion, we feel that any changes to the funding formula need to address the equitable access to education for all students regardless of where they reside within the province of BC.

There is a need to include factors, including the actual costs of providing education for students, which include the fixed costs such as that of operating a building, staffing, supports for students with additional learning needs, and additional supports for First Nation students.

We have reached out to our stakeholders including the local teacher's association (CCTA), support staff union (IUOE), principals and vice principals association (CCPVPA), district parent advisory council (DPAC), parent advisory councils (PACs), and our exempt staff. At the writing of this document, we have not received any feedback from our stakeholder groups.

Thank you again for the opportunity to meet with you and provide our input. We also appreciate the opportunity to share additional information with you in writing.

Tanya Guenther, Chair

Board of Education of
School District No. 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin)