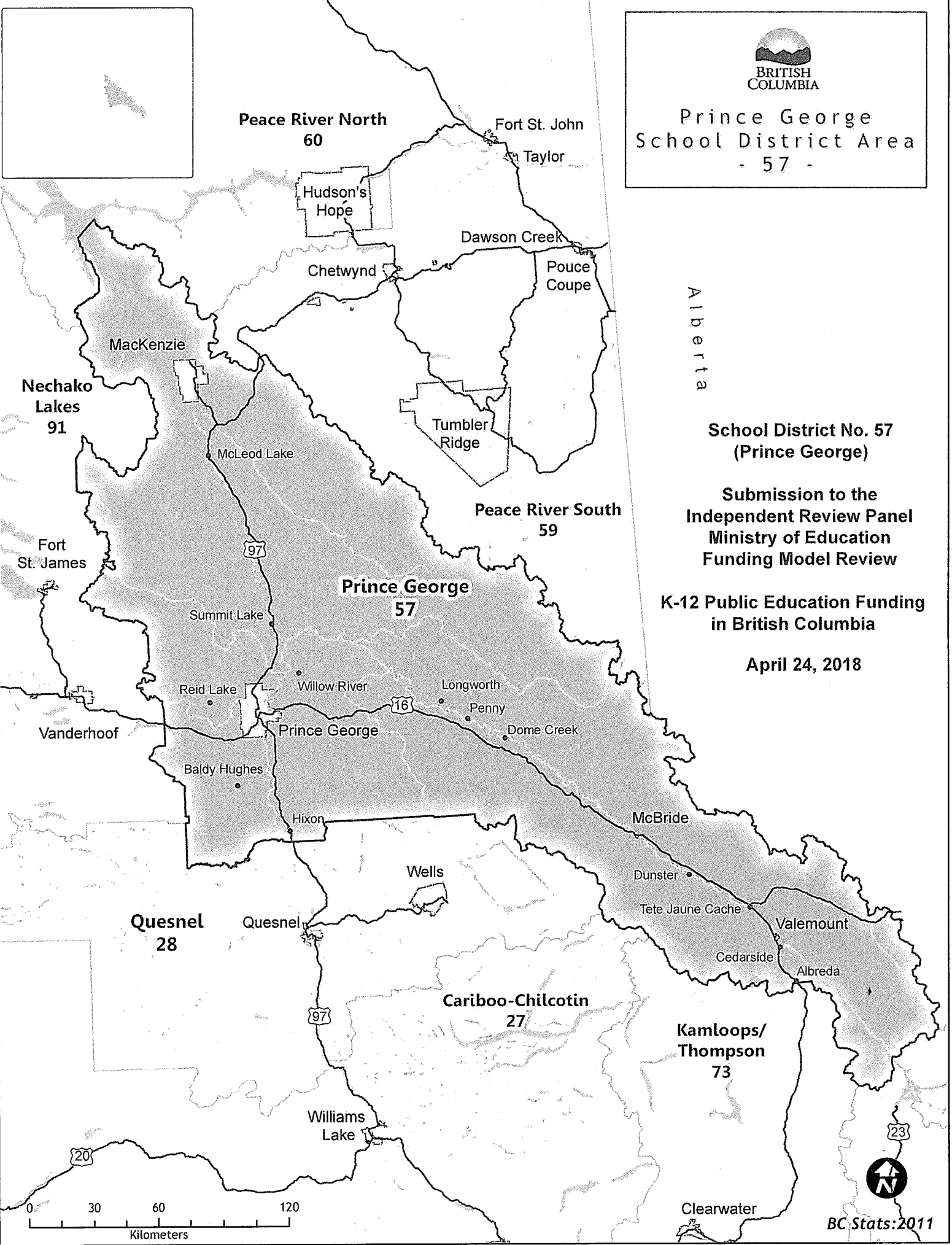




Prince George  
School District Area  
- 57 -



Alberta

School District No. 57  
(Prince George)

Submission to the  
Independent Review Panel  
Ministry of Education  
Funding Model Review

K-12 Public Education Funding  
in British Columbia

April 24, 2018



**SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 57 (PRINCE GEORGE)**  
**SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL**  
**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION FUNDING MODEL REVIEW**  
**K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**April 24, 2018**

The Board of Education of School District No. 57 (Prince George) welcomes this opportunity to make this presentation as part of the review of the model for K-12 Public Education Funding in British Columbia. We have a proud tradition of providing constructive comment and recommendations in support of public education in British Columbia. Most recently that tradition was continued through presentations to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

In preparing for this presentation we have reviewed our presentation made on October 8, 1997 to the Ministry of Education's Education Finance and Facilities Advisory Committee. The main theme of that presentation over twenty years ago was fair and equitable funding. It is interesting to note that not much has changed in that twenty year period with respect to concerns about funding, yet at the same time so much has changed in public education in British Columbia in the same period.

**District Context**

School District No. 57 (Prince George) acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh people in Prince George and McBride, the McLeod Lake Indian Band in the Mackenzie region, as well as the Simpcw First Nation in Valemout.

School District No. 57 is located in the centre of the province, extending from the City of Prince George 190 kilometres north to Mackenzie, 60 kilometres south to Hixon, and east to McBride 210 kilometres and Valemout 300 kilometres. The district encompasses 52,000 square kilometers and is the second largest school district in the province in geographical size. It has a student population of approximately 13,000 school-age and adult students enrolled in 32 elementary schools, and 8 secondary schools. In addition our Centre for Learning Alternatives provides Level 3 alternate education programs, continuing and distance education programs, and education services to a small number of international students. The school district's amended annual budget for 2017-2018 is \$170.4 million. During the 2017-2018 school year the school district employed 1,485 full time equivalent (fte) staff including 770 fte teachers, 305 fte educational assistants, 67 fte principals and vice-principals and 250 fte support and other professional staff.

## **PRIORITY THEMES**

School District No. 57, by a consensus of Trustees and its Senior Administration, has prioritized the seven Themes identified in the Discussion Paper. The top three themes identified are:

1. Theme 2 – Education for Special Needs, Vulnerable and Indigenous Students
2. Theme 3 – Responsiveness to Local Circumstances
3. Theme 7 – Geographic, Economic and Demographic Factors

### **Theme 2 - Education for Special Needs, Vulnerable and Indigenous Students**

#### Students with Special Needs

There must a recognition that the inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms has had and will continue to have significant implications for all students in the classroom, and the instructional and non-instructional staff that support those students' learning.

We believe that the current system calls for a significant expenditure of time and financial resources in the diagnosis and reporting of special needs students in order to support the existing A to H funded categories. Strong consideration should be given to a model that focuses on response to intervention strategies that are effective in supporting the learning and achievement of students with special needs. Significant expenditure of time and financial resources needed to meet reporting and auditing requirements would be better spent on providing the resources necessary to support learning.

A model focussing on needs based supports and strategies, encourages those staff supporting the learning of students with special needs to establish interventions that prove most helpful to each student. Such a model provides for easier student transitions through the primary, intermediate and graduation programs, as the strategies that have proven successful for each individual student are well established.

#### Vulnerable Students

A new Funding Model should give consideration to the many indicators that are currently used to identify vulnerability such as the Social Services Index, (SSI), the Early Years Evaluation (EYE), and Early (EDI) and Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI).

Indices that are available for all school districts in the province could be embedded in a revised funding formula in either or both the Operating Fund and the Special Purpose Fund.

#### *Recommendation*

*That the Operating Fund Vulnerability factor, and the Special Purpose Fund CommunityLINK funding be combined and be based on verifiable, provincially available indicators and indices.*

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### Vulnerable Students – (continued)

In previous years, our School District has advocated for cooperation amongst the social service Ministries of the BC Government in providing services to vulnerable students. That advocacy has occurred through presentation to the Government's Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, and through motions considered and passed at the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA) Annual General Meeting. Currently, the provincial government has at least five Ministries focussed on Social Services. - the Ministries of Children and Family Development, Education, Health, Mental Health and Addictions, and Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Those Ministries must work cooperatively in support of vulnerable students and families. Because students attend school each week day for ten months of the year, school is the most stable and supportive environment for many vulnerable students and their families. To these students and families, in many respects, K-12 public education has become the resource of default. Those employed in public education have accepted this responsibility regardless of whether or not they have the financial resources and professional expertise to meet this responsibility.

#### *Recommendations*

*That the Funding Model Review, in consideration of the Principles of Responsive, Equitable, and Stable and Predictable, identify and coordinate all Government of BC Social Service Ministries in support of vulnerable students and their families.*

*That the Funding Model Review include recognition and appropriate allocation of all provincial government funds in support of student learning.*

*That whatever the government determines the mandate for K-12 public education to be, that it be fully funded.*

### Indigenous Students

Although we take exception to the use of the phrase "Targeted Funding" we believe that the current system of allocating additional funds based on students who self-identify as Indigenous to programs specific to the language, culture and support of these students is appropriate. In School District No. 57 we receive over \$4 million of this funding annually, and 90% of this funding is allocated to staffing. In keeping with the principle of Responsiveness, each school in our school district includes staffing with the specific mandate of improving results for Indigenous Students. In turn all students benefit from an improved understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, and understanding of local Indigenous culture.

#### *Recommendation*

*That the current method of allocating incremental funds in support of Aboriginal Education be retained.*

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### Theme 3 - Responsiveness to Local Circumstances

Theme 3 of the Discussion Paper concludes noting that “the current model may not appropriately consider different enrolment and student population dynamics within a single school district, especially in those school districts that have both large urban centres and rural and remote satellite communities”. This statement very clearly describes School District No. 57 (Prince George):

- Greater Prince George, including the rural communities of Hixon, Giscome, Nukko Lake, and Bear Lake – 92.5% of student enrolment.
- Robson Valley, including the primarily rural communities of McBride and Valemount, two and three hours east of Prince George which until 1968 were incorporated as School District No. 58 – 2.9% of student enrolment.
- Mackenzie, primarily a remote, resource based community developed in the 1960’s, two hours north of Prince George – 4.6% of student enrolment.

The Discussion Paper’s Key Questions for this Theme clearly identify that further investigation is required. We agree:

- That there should be a combination of base and supplemental funding and that the current funding model is slightly over-weighted to base funding.
- That funding should be calculated on a headcount basis for Kindergarten to Grade 9 and that funding should be calculated on a course/credit basis for Grades 10 to 12.
- That many of the current factors are appropriate, however a review of their relative weighting is appropriate. Please see our “Economies of Scale” recommendation in Theme 7.
- That a school(s) offering Kindergarten to Grade 12 education are key to the economic stability and future of many rural communities.

#### *Recommendation*

*That a revised funding model recognizes the importance of a school to rural and remote communities directly through a Rural Factor as suggested in the Discussion Paper.*

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## **Theme 7 – Geographic, Economic and Demographic Factors**

During this Board of Education's mandate it has made rural education a priority. It convened an Ad Hoc Committee on Rural Education that provided fourteen recommendations to the Board in January 2016. A copy of that Report was provided to the Ministry of Education when then Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Education, Linda Larson, was tasked with an inclusive engagement process to consult and report on Rural Education. That Report, in draft, was recently released. We strongly support the Report's Findings and Recommendations.

### *Recommendations*

*That the Findings and Recommendations of British Columbia Rural Education Report be considered and reflected in this Funding Model Review.*

*That clear definitions of Remote, Rural, Urban and Metro school districts be developed and used as a foundation for Unique Geographic Factors that may be determined by this Funding Model Review.*

*That this Funding Model Review address the Rural Education Report's conclusion that the current geographic factors are not sufficient to address the challenges facing rural communities and school districts.*

The Ministry of Education's 2017/18 First Nations Billing Rates identifies per full-time equivalent student funding for this school year ranging from \$9,171 in a "Metro" district to \$29,821 in a "Remote" district. This range of over \$20,000 per student clearly demonstrates that economies of scale are important factors in operating a school district. In this School District, we operate a highly decentralized model of school organization, and well know the importance of economies of scale. For example, our largest "Urban" secondary school is allocated funding of \$6,033 per student and our smallest "Rural" secondary school is allocated funding of \$13,641 per student.

### *Recommendation*

*That an "Economy of Scale" factor be researched, developed, and included in any revision to the current funding model.*

**Other Themes**

In addition, we have the following comments on the other themes.

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

School District No. 57 (Prince George) supports the Principle of Flexibility and its recognition of the autonomy of locally elected Trustees. Boards of Education are in the best place to understand the needs of each of their communities and the students in those communities. It is critical that Boards of Education have the flexibility to develop programs and services that meet the diverse and unique needs of their district, schools and students.

2. Theme 4 – Flexibility

We agree that the number of Special Purpose Grants have grown in recent years, and acknowledge that they are generally required to address emerging circumstances not covered by the current Funding Allocation System. We also agree that the required reporting related to Special Purpose Grants is an additional administrative burden on school districts. The number of grants “outside the block” and related reporting should be reduced. School districts are accountable for their results of operation through the annual external audit of their financial statements.

3. Theme 5 – Financial Management and Accountability

Many of the Key Questions in this theme have been addressed by our development of the Ministry mandated Financial Health Policies on Budget Development, Monitoring and Reporting, and Accumulated Operating Surplus. A draft of those policies has previously been provided to the Ministry.

We agree that the funding model should account for school district own-sourced revenues to ensure equity of educational opportunities for all students. For example, many “Metro” districts generate significant revenue from international fee-paying students. Our experience is that similar opportunities for generating net revenue from such programs are not available to most school districts in the interior or the province. An additional observation is that there is a significant up-front cost of implementing an international student program, and that those funds are better spent on addressing local education needs.

The funding model should ensure equity of educational opportunities for all students regardless of where they live in the province.

**Other Themes** – (continued)

## 4. Theme 6 – Predictability and Costs

School District No. 57 (Prince George) has generally managed to respond to unexpected cost increases in a timely and responsible manner. Perhaps this is facilitated by operating on a decentralized basis. Or, perhaps it is because when called upon, our Board of Education has made the required difficult decisions to operate within the funding available. It is well known that this school district closed seven schools in 2002, and seven schools were closed in 2003. A further ten schools were closed or reconfigured in 2010. All of these closures were primarily in response to changes in funding from the Ministry of Education.

**Conclusion**

We believe that this Funding Model Review is similar to the recent implementation of the new curriculum throughout the province. That implementation took place over a number of years, and in fact was postponed on more than one occasion to provide school districts and the Ministry sufficient time to ensure a successful implementation. We strongly recommend that the lessons learned through the new curriculum implementation process be applied to implementations of the recommendations of the Funding Model Review.

*Recommendation*

*That the appropriate time be taken and that any changes to the allocation of education funding in British Columbia be effective no earlier than the March 15, 2020 funding announcement for the following reasons:*

- 1. October 2018 Trustee Elections. It is possible that there may be a turnover of up to 40% of Trustees following the October 2018 Trustee Elections. It would be very challenging to implement a new Funding Model at the same time as orienting new trustees to all of their responsibilities.*
- 2. 2019 Bargaining for teachers and support staff. Although it is expected that any collectively bargained wages increases and improvements to benefits would be fully funded, it would be unwise to implement a new funding model when over 76% of a school district's operating and special purpose expenses are subject to current collective bargaining.*
- 3. Complexity and challenges of the issues and factors raised during this comprehensive Funding Model Review.*