



BOARD OF EDUCATION

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**SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 61 (GREATER VICTORIA)
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April 30, 2018

via email: K12FundingReview@gov.bc.ca

RE: Board of Education Submission to the Expert Panel on Funding

Dear Funding Review Committee:

I am writing to provide a formal submission on behalf of our Board of Education regarding the funding formula review.

Background

With the release of the timeline for feedback and the visit by the panel to our District, our Board wanted to ensure that we had sufficient information and feedback to provide a fully informed submission for your consideration.

Our process included a day set aside for senior District staff to provide an overview of the history of the funding framework, as well as the current model, its evolution and some of its challenges. One of our sessions involved our stakeholders including representation from our teachers' union, support staff unions, principals and vice-principals' association, paraprofessional association, and our District Parent Advisory Council.

While our submission represents the voice of our Board only, the voices of our stakeholders are reflected and we have noted areas of specific disagreement. Given this process, we are confident that we are able to provide a fully informed submission that reflects the needs of our District.

Our submission is based around some broad themes that contain more specific suggestions within them. While the scope of your mandate does not include increased funding, there are a couple of areas where we simply cannot avoid including commentary on increased funding with the hope that they are worthy of consideration.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That the Ministry of Education build into the funding formula a mechanism that covers the following inflationary pressures faced by school districts:

- a. all provincially negotiated settlements for unions and associations;**
- b. all approved wage increases for exempt staff and administrators;**
- c. all government mandated increases (e.g. increased payroll taxes, Hydro increases, etc.); and**
- d. a Consumer Price Index inflation factor.**

“Inflation is when you pay fifteen dollars for the ten-dollar haircut you used to get for five dollars when you had hair.”

- *Sam Ewing, former professional baseball player*

Rationale:

Districts are currently paying 15 dollars for the haircut they were getting for 5 dollars in 2001 with relatively minor funding increases to cover the difference. Hydro increases, unfunded wage increases, benefit increases, operations and maintenance cost increases, etc. are currently unaccounted for in the funding formula.

Districts rely on flexibility to provide the best educational program to meet local needs; however, the current model is not sufficient enough to cover costs we have little or no control over. Furthermore, schools within our District rely on donations and PAC fundraising to supplement their funding as there has been no funding provided for the inflationary cost of services and supplies.

The impact of such a commitment in the funding formula would be of great value and increase transparency in the system as a whole. It would allow for longer term planning in program implementation, as well as operations.

Recommendation 2:

That the Ministry of Education provide nominal three-year funding allocations to school districts.

“In addition, while the budget submitted to the ministry is a one-year budget, we recommend that in the near term, the District begin the process of establishing a rolling three-year budget that is aligned with the strategic plan.”

- *School District No. 83 - Special Advisor Report June 3, 2016 (page 30)*

Rationale:

More districts are moving towards strategic planning, and rightly so. The Ministry is increasingly critical of board reserves, conservative enrolment estimates, etc. If we move towards multiple-year allocations, boards could plan for multiple years at a time, make more targeted strategic resource reallocations and reduce the need to have significant reserves.

A three-year model would increase funding predictability for districts, but would still need to address increased enrolment and have built-in inflation protection (note Recommendation 1). If funding allocations are enrolment based, enrolment projections should be provided by the Ministry and applied consistently across all districts within the province. The current funding model drives conservatism and results in the growth of reserves.

A model with notional allocations would serve the interests of accountability. Both the District and the Ministry would be able to specifically track results from these multi-year targeted resources.

Recommendation 3:

That the Ministry of Education immediately review the compliance model currently in place.

“We are from the Ministry and we are here to help”

- *Unattributed quote*

Rationale:

Boards of education are responsible for putting the appropriate structures in place to ensure fiscal accountability. Boards are audited on a yearly basis and the vast majority of audits illustrate that there is competent staff and appropriate oversight.

The Ministry, however, has a variety of additional reporting and compliance requirements that create an administrative burden for school districts. Inclusive learning audits, enrolment audits, Classroom Enhancement Fund (CEF) reporting, Special Purpose Fund reporting, etc. all require a significant amount of administrative work while having no appreciable impact on the learning outcomes of students.

The time spent meeting compliance requirements instead of providing service to students is significant. While our Board does not wish to suggest that compliance is not important, we would also point out our respect for the skills and competence of our provincial partners, looking at historical results should illustrate competence in this area.

Recommendation 4:

That the Ministry of Education move to a Profile Funding Model for Inclusive Education.

“The fundamental principle of inclusive education is the valuing of diversity within the human community.... When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the idea that children have to become “normal” in order to contribute to the world.... We begin to look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community, and in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an authentic sense of belonging.”

- *Norman Kunc*

Rationale:

As our District moves to a more inclusive model for providing services, we focus on all students regardless of whether they receive additional funding. The current model is based on a “medical model” of diagnosing weaknesses followed by lagging funding for supports to help fill the gaps.

The current model is flawed for a number of reasons. First, the staff time needed to diagnose students in our District is approximately 18 hours per student. That means that each student being diagnosed loses out on 18 hours of direct responsive support services. Moreover, the requirement to substantiate designations through this rigorous process effectively caps the number of students who may be designated in a given school year, and introduces a systemic bias towards prioritising assessments which will result in the greatest amount of funding. Professionals should have the flexibility to assess student needs and classroom conditions and respond with appropriate supports rather than focus on redundant administrative tasks. Further, some parents do not want to go through the rigorous process required to designate a student, even though their child requires significant supports. This makes early intervention a challenge.

Second, the current model drives behaviours that do not necessarily support an inclusive model, such as parents and others in the system demanding that funding received for a student be targeted to that specific student, even where additional funding could actually assist multiple students. Furthermore, some parents or guardians feel that designating a child places a label on them which may present as limitations in their future. Therefore, no additional funding is received for that child.

Third, the current funding categories do not capture all student needs. For example, students with significant communication disorders and severe deficits in skills such as memory, language, cognition, etc. do not fit the current categories despite their significant needs.

Finally, while our staff do an excellent job under the current model, we feel that a shift in the funding model would be more supportive of an inclusive learning environment. If the basis for our supports for diverse learners is highlighting their weaknesses, how do we support their strengths? This model also does not ensure accountability, it assures compliance. We can prove *what* we are doing but not *how* we are doing in our service of students.

Other jurisdictions have successfully adopted the profile funding model.

We note that our stakeholders hold diverse opinions on this particular issue with some supporting the continuance of the diagnosis model and others in favour of the profile funding model.

Recommendation 5:

That the Ministry of Education provide flexibility in resource allocation.

What do Trustees Do?

British Columbia is a large province with many communities, each having different priorities, needs and unique educational requirements. British Columbians elect their Boards of Education to improve student achievement according to the diverse needs of these communities. As locally elected representatives, the trustees on these boards best understand their respective communities' particular strengths, challenges and demands.

Trustees engage their communities in building and maintaining a school system that reflects local priorities, values and expectations. School trustees listen to their communities; guide the work of their school district; and set plans, policies and the annual budget. Reflecting the strength of local representation, boards report back to their communities on how students are doing: boards are directly accountable to the people they serve.

BCSTA Website

Rationale:

The purpose of a locally elected board of education is to reflect the needs and wants of local communities. Targeted allocations limit the ability to respond to those needs. They often also create additional reporting requirements and limit the ability to plan for the longer term.

Additionally, as stated in Recommendation 3, more boards are moving towards strategic planning. Flexibility in resource allocation allows boards to align resources with strategic goals in order to achieve learning outcomes and ensure student success.

The current funding model has become more and more piece-meal over time as a result of incremental efforts to address emerging shortfalls of the funding model. Stakeholders analogized the current model to a house with many separate additions and patches. The ideal funding model would address the whole house and all of its needs.

We note that some of our stakeholders were not supportive of this aspect of our submission and felt increased targeting would be beneficial as it would ensure transparency and accountability, as well as assurance that cost pressures and new initiatives are not downloaded onto school districts.

Recommendation 6:

That the Ministry of Education ensure that changes to the funding formula do not negatively impact any school district.

primum non nocere - do no harm

Rationale:

The opportunity to review the funding formula is an amazing opportunity to which our Board is excited to play a part. However, this opportunity also presents risks. While our District respects the opportunity for change, we believe that any new model must take the current levels of provincial funding (leaving aside local revenue) as the new floor.

An obvious example would be support for the restored collective agreement languages. Some districts have received more funding per capita than others due to their 1991 collective agreement language and the Provincial/BCTF agreement.

If the collective agreement language remains and the formula is standard across the province, a district like ours would be negatively impacted. It simply would not serve the Government to implement a model that would start off by harming districts.

Recommendation 7:

That the Ministry of Education engage school districts to review the Distributed Learning Model.

“Human behaviour flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge”

- *Plato*

Rationale:

Our Board disagrees with Plato on this one. We know that human behaviour also flows from the funding formula. For instance, funding for schools means more schools; no funding for schools means fewer schools; compliance requirements create paperwork, etc.

On the issue of Distributed Learning (DL), we are proud of the services we provide. Nevertheless, the current model rewards competition between school districts to attract students. Shrinking programs do not enable school districts to provide a broad range of classes and the DL program requires subsidy from other priority areas due to the small class sizes.

While we do not have a specific recommendation, we would like to see the Ministry of Education come up with a solution that will enable the province to better serve the DL community.

Recommendation 8:

That the Ministry of Education review the Annual Facilities Grant.

"When the walls come crumblin' crumblin'"

- John Mellancamp

Rationale:

While not specifically addressed by the funding formula review process, it is imperative that the funding of the annual facilities grant (AFG) be reviewed.

Currently, there is no connection between growing enrolment and the amount of AFG each district receives. Aging facility infrastructure currently requires school districts to redirect operating funds otherwise intended for educational purposes. The use of technology and the creation of unique learning environments tied specifically to supporting positive outcomes for students could also be addressed with improved AFG funding.

Recommendation 9:

That the Ministry of Education provide funding support for Children in Care.

"Of B.C. students in continuing care who began Grade 8 in 2009/10, only about 51 per cent graduated within six years. This compares to a nearly 89 per cent graduation rate for all other students in the province."

- *Room for Improvement: Toward Better Education Outcomes For Children in Care. Representative for Children and Youth, October 2017*

The Greater Victoria School District currently has approximately 200 children and youth in care. Outcomes for these students are in keeping with the provincial graduation rates identified by the Representative for Children and Youth.

There are a number of factors that contribute to lower graduation rates for children and youth in care. These factors include the quality of data that is shared between ministries, the caseloads of social workers that restrict their ability to liaise with schools, and the mobility of children and youth in care. These factors are clearly beyond the scope of the Funding Framework Review.

Nevertheless, the first recommendation of the Representative for Children and Youth in the *Room for Improvement* report is, "That the Ministry of Education allocate specific funding to each school district based on the number of children and youth in care, funding that would be dedicated to support the learning of these students. This should be a priority of the ministry as it undertakes a review of the K to 12 education system's current funding formulas."

A funding framework that takes into consideration the unique needs of children and youth in care is the first step in designing a comprehensive approach to supporting this population of students who require additional resources and support in order to be successful.

Conclusion

The Board would like to thank the panel for the opportunity to provide recommendations for consideration. Our District is one that suffered greatly at the time of the change to the per pupil amount. We had declining enrollment and excess capacities in our schools. We cut and cut and cut and cut. We attempted to keep the impacts away from the classroom. This, of course,

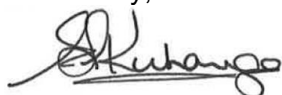
impacted operations and central supports, schools were closed, and, ultimately, the classroom was impacted. The long term impact of a lack of investment in our facilities is now apparent.

Ironically, we are now a school district that does have benefits from the current model. We have increasing enrollment and are largely right sized from a facilities perspective. Nevertheless, the changes noted above would serve us well. This is assuming that the concept of creating a new floor is enshrined in your planning. It would be disheartening as a district to have suffered greatly from the original shift in funding, made changes and adapted to the model, only to be hit again once a new model is in place.

In closing, we appreciate the task of the panel and wish you the best of luck in completing your work.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edith Loring-Kuhanga". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Edith Loring-Kuhanga
Board Chair

Cc: Board of Education
Piet Langstraat, Superintendent of Schools
Mark Walsh, Secretary-Treasurer
Senior Leadership Team