

We write on behalf of the South Park Family School Parents Advisory Council. South Park Family School is a school of choice within the Greater Victoria School District, based on a philosophy of cooperative parent participation. As part of their commitment to the family school community and philosophy, parents are expected to be directly and meaningfully involved in their child's classroom and in the greater school community; supporting both their own child and their peers. Our direct involvement in our children's classroom and school community gives us a clear understanding on how the current funding model impacts our children, which in turn provides the underlying framework for our submission.

Our submissions relate to the Statement of Principles and Themes 1 – 3 and Theme 5 set out in the Ministry of Education's discussion paper titled "*K-12 Public Education Funding in British Columbia, Funding Model Review Discussion Paper*", March 2018 (the "**Discussion Paper**").

Statement of Principles

The current funding model provides a framework for allocating funding from the Province to the 60 provincial boards of education. We submit that any funding model should include a framework for the allocation of funding from each school district to each student. The principles of Responsive, Equitable, Stable and Predictable, Flexible, Transparent and Accountable, which principles are identified by the Ministry of Education in the Discussion Paper as the core principles around which the new funding model will be designed, are the principles which we submit should frame the allocation of funds to each student. We ask the Funding Model Review Panel to create a funding model that places the student at its core, rather than the school district. We submit that each student has a right to stable, predictable, flexible, transparent and accountable funding. Rights can only exist where there is an enforceable obligation, and as such we request the new funding model include a framework in which each student has a right to funding necessary for that student's meaningful participation in the public education system and each school district has an enforceable obligation to the student to provide such funding.

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

In the context of a high performing education system like B.C.'s we need to assess success in terms of those children who the system fails and the catastrophic effect of such failure on those children. The path to success has its foundation in the k-7 program. In these formative years children develop an image of themselves as learners, and for many children, the image is negative. Many children enter the

school system to find that they cannot be participants in our education system, and for many the message is that the cause of such failure is the lack of some ability in the child.

The result of the failure of our system is on those students is at best students who participate in the k-12 convinced of their own lack of ability or deviancy, at worst we lose these children entirely from our schools.

We submit that every child should come out of the k-12 program with a positive image of themselves as learners. The completion rates for our first nations children, our children in poverty, in care, our children with special needs and our otherwise vulnerable children is cause for outrage, but outrage is not sustainable. What is sustainable is an acknowledgement of the importance of adequate classroom support in the k-7 program and corresponding funding.

In order to achieve this goal we submit that the Basic Allocation for each k-7 student must be increased so as to provide a 1/10 student to teacher/EA/TA (full time in classroom) ratio. This increase must be in addition to any support provided to a student under the Unique Student Funding category. An increase in the Basic Allocation will allow for sufficient levels of direct classroom support so as to hold each child up while the school and parents engage with the process of assessments as to unique student needs and planning for those needs are undertaken.

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

South Park Family School Parents Advisory Council believes in inclusive education and the inclusion of students with designated special needs, vulnerable students, and indigenous students into a regular classroom setting in a manner that supports their individual success. But such inclusion must be supported by the panoply of resources necessary for individual success. Children with special needs, vulnerable students, and indigenous students in classrooms must have access to counsellors, aides, support persons, social workers, and public health nurses within the school setting. Inclusion means not only the inclusion of the child's physical body in the classroom, but also the inclusion of the supports necessary for each such child. Such supports include both professionals (EAs, Counsellors, Social Workers, Public Health Nurses, Mental Health Nurses, Speech Pathologists and other learning support professionals) and tangible physical supports (sensory rooms, exercise circuits, exercise bikes, calming rooms). In addition, tangible physical supports require sufficient adults to supervise the individual child's access to such supports outside of the classroom.

We believe our request for a 1/10 classroom ratio for students to Teachers/EA/TA in the k-7 setting is fundamental to the inclusion of indigenous students, students with designated special needs, children in care, children who live in poverty, and otherwise vulnerable students. We submit that such additional full time classroom based professional could be understood as the "Inclusion Assistant", who works with the Teacher to reduce barriers to learning and inclusion. The additional classroom based professional will provide invaluable support for those children who lack a strong parental advocate, and should provide the system with the extra capacity to direct assessments and paperwork necessary for inclusion of all children in our school system. We strongly believe such Inclusion Assistant must be trained adequately to provide such assistance, and note that we believe the self-regulation methodology proposed by Dr. Stuart Shankar is a useful methodology to provide such training.

We believe that medically based assessments of students remain an important component of meeting the needs of children with unique needs. However, we think that the precondition of a medical designation to receiving funding for extra support, is wrong. Unique needs in the context of a right to receive additional supports should be broader than simply including those students with funded medical diagnosis.

It may be that individual student have medical designations, but unique needs for the purposes of the right to receive additional support should flow from a school based assessment. Medical assessments are powerful tools in our toolbox for the purposes of supporting children, however, we believe that school based assessments of unique needs should be available and sufficient to qualify a student for access to unique student funding.

We also believe that funding should be triggered at the time of request for a school based assessment is made. This will provide support to a child with unique needs when such need is needed, not at the end of a slow moving assessment process. We also believe such funding should attach to each unique student for the entirety of the K-12 program, as of right, and not be discontinued, reduced or amended unless parents agree to such discontinuance, amendment or reduction. This will provide for stable and predictable funding for schools, school districts and students.

The monetary costs of such assessments should not fall as an out of pocket costs of parents, but rather should be paid for by our society through public funding. Currently children with unique needs require additional resources as a pre-condition to participation in our school system. However, such funding is currently conditional on parents procuring and paying for an assessment. The current funding model for

children with special needs entrenches at its core a violation of a child's right to receive a publicly funded education, is a violation of such children's charter right to equality and human rights.

A system that requires parents to be the prime agitator for assessments excludes students in care, students who live in poverty, and students whose parents lack sufficient capacity to negotiate the medical assessment framework.

Theme 3: Responsiveness to Local Circumstances & Theme 4: Flexibility

The funding model needs to be responsive to not only the unique characteristics of a school district, but also the unique characteristic each classroom and each child. As school districts and school enrollment changes every year, so does each classroom. School administrators must be able to request and receive additional flexible funding to address issues of negative classroom dynamics or unanticipated or unexpected needs, especially in instances of children entering the school system, children in crisis or where safety of students is involved.

We also submit that the funding model should be designed so as to make available funds to students at the time the need is identified and a request for an assessment is made. Any model in which funding is allocated based on qualification in a previous year will operate so as to discriminate against those children entering into kindergarten, who generally will not have been identified as having unique needs prior to entering the k-12 program, and children below grade 4, who are less likely to have been identified as having unique needs, obtained an assessment and diagnosis as a result of lag time in the assessment process and their young age.

The current system of funding has the effect of targeting segments of the school population based on age, and as a result is a violation of the BC Human Rights Code, as well as Section 15 and Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Theme 5: Financial Management and Accountability.

We believe that the funding model must make school districts accountable to the students for failing to accommodate those students who live in poverty, in care, who are indigenous students or are students with unique needs and for failing to allocate funds as needed to ensure the success of such children. School districts should be accountable to children for how moneys received based on unique needs are spent. Funding should be transparent and parents should be able to monitor how funds are spent and compel school districts to spend funds received for a unique student on the unique student.

As to the issue of budget surpluses identified in the Discussion Paper, we understand surpluses are used by school districts so as to ameliorate the impact of an inadequate quantum of funding for public education. We understand school districts preserve funds to create surpluses so as to be able to respond to emergencies and provide flexibility in funding. As long as the funding model provides no way of accessing additional funding in a flexible or timely manner, we wish to protect a school districts right to retain surpluses.

However, such surpluses must be transparent and school districts must be accountable to children for funding decisions that led to such surpluses. We also believe surpluses are not appropriate for funds received for unique student support.

As to the issue of a school district's ability to raise revenue, we believe that revenues raised from international students should be placed in a common pot to benefit all school districts. It is a fact that affluent urban centres draw international students, and as a result, benefit already privileged communities.

Scope of Funding Model Review

Finally, we also wish to state clearly and unequivocally that a discussion of the funding model which expressly excludes a discussion of quantum of funding is unacceptable from our perspective. Funding for public education as a share of GDP has been falling consistently for 15 years, and BC lags significantly behind all other provinces in terms of public education funding as a percentage of GDP. A discussion of a funding model is only appropriate in the context of a discussion of the quantum of funding. We hereby confirm our position that the amount of funding for public education be increased to an amount in line with other Canadian provinces.

Conclusion:

Thank you for reviewing and considering our submissions and the opportunity to share our thoughts on the current and future funding model.

South Park Family School Parents Advisory Council

Committee for Classroom Supports