

Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association

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Thank you for the opportunity for us to share our feedback on behalf of VESTA regarding the funding formula review. We would like to start by stating that our position has not changed from the points made in the February 2018 Submission to the Funding Model Review process entitled: "Education Funding Model" A Brief to the BC Education Funding Model Review from the British Columbia Teachers' Federation."

This response will be organized into two topics: The factors that we believe need to be in place for the needs of Vancouver schools, teachers and students to be met; and a response to the Discussion Paper that was circulated on behalf of the Ministry of Education in March 2018.

Feedback towards the Funding Model Review:

The current funding model relies on a per-pupil funding formula, which does not acknowledge the fact that each of our students learns in unique, diverse ways, and that many undesignated students require modifications and adaptations that a per-pupil model cannot anticipate or address. By its very nature, it underfunds the needs of schools and districts.

Any new funding formula must provide funding that is based on need, and the fact that meeting the needs of students often requires additional funding in the form of additional staffing or resources. Funding needs to be responsive to the needs of the students as identified by the schools and districts and needs to be sustainable. Even the Standing Committee on Finance and Government agrees that "needs-bases, stable, sustainable funding models need to cover the actual costs, resource needs and professional development requirements of each school district." Without proper or adequate funding, districts are left to "make do" and shuffle money and staffing to address one area affected by underfunding at the expense of another.

With the restoration of our local language, it is essential that the funding formula honors and reflects those changes. Reductions in class size, more supports for students, ratios for specialist teachers all require funding. Without additional monetary resources given to districts, it is once again up to districts to try to "do more with less." Collective Agreements are the shared contracts between two parties that, in order to be followed must be properly funded. It is unreasonable and unacceptable to say that there is no additional funding when Collective Agreement language contractually dictates that there needs to be funding attached in order to be in compliance with those agreements.

School funding models need to anticipate the operational needs of school districts, including, but not limited to the costs of provincially bargained Collective Agreements, inflation, additional utilities costs or fees introduced through legislation. School districts, staff, and students, should not have to budget for these expenses from a fixed amount as part of the total overall operating budgets, and allow districts to manage current costs and plan for the future.

We agree with the BCTF submission, which states: "Resources must be distributed so that every school district, every school, and every classroom has at its disposal the resources to ensure that every child can have their particular educational needs met." We understand that there are examples across

Canada that allow for differentiated funding based on need using a variety of formulas for library services, curricular materials, and technology.

Districts and schools need to be funded in a fashion that allows districts to meet the needs of students rather than trying to ration the available resources to factors that may or may not have had a role in the way funding was allocated or earmarked. In the current model, districts are tasked with making cuts rather than deciding which programs make the most pedagogical sense for the students they enrol. The current model of incremental funding for school-based staffing and school-based support for students with special needs elides transparency and precludes teachers and parents from being able to understand the mechanisms for support, or to adequately access available resources.

The question raised by the above position has to be “whose needs”? Our position as a union is that funding needs to be guided by values of equal access and inclusion. We know well the inequities among schools and also among students, and a successful funding formula needs to take into account that due to the unique needs of families and students, not perpetuate a one-size-fits-all application of resources, especially when schools have unequal capacities to fundraise.

Equity and Inclusion need to be considered in terms of accessible learning spaces, additional learning and adapted resources and especially, in terms of additional staffing. This may require expanding the number of students who qualify for additional funding, but we stand firm that the funding provided for students with special needs should be grounded in identified needs, including the requirement of funding to support the assessment and identification of students whose learning needs are diverse.

This also includes a requirement for funding to be based in a commitment to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the implications for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, including the development and support for new resources and teaching materials.

In Vancouver, with the return of the Graduated Adult funding, we have a rare opportunity to advocate for a funding model that provides funding parity for Adult Education students with their K-12 counterparts, especially given that many of the students who access Adult Education are school aged and taking K-12 courses. If we truly embrace equity, funding for Adult Education must not suffer a reduced ability to provide students with special needs additional support, provide library spaces and additional material resources.

Response to the discussion paper circulated by the Ministry:

We must speak strongly in opposition to the suggestion that outcomes should be incentivized. Funding ought not be punitive, nor be connected to outcomes. We also experience deep concern about the conflation of the needs of students with special needs, vulnerable students and Indigenous students. Students who may be identified as such do may not experience the same barriers to accessing education, and anticipates a model of inclusion that we do not support-one in which students are required to fit into the expectations of a “regular” classroom. Inclusion needs to based on equity.

We also have serious concerns about the questions raised about the process for identifying student needs. We believe that schools need to be able to access information and assessment in order to identify and support, and determine how resources are best provided to ensure that students’ diverse needs are bring met by our system in a way that is just, equitable, and responsive to the learning requirements at each school and in each classroom.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback.

Respectfully submitted,

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VESTA

Committee V representative