

Dear Premier Horgan,

My name is Richard Obayashi, and I am a high school teacher working in the Langley school district. There is an issue that brings me great concern for the future of BC public education. As you know the government is currently looking to change the education funding model and has been reviewing this model for the past two years. The first year, teachers and parents were not involved in this process, as it was deemed a conflict of interest. Publicly, this did not go over well, and the government decided to postpone the implementation of this model for another year, during the course of which to get input from the public and teachers.

In the past year, the government has shared some of their ideas on their new funding model, but has not really consulted educators or the public. This past year the government has begun educating the public on how the new funding model will be implemented. However, despite the governments efforts to explain this model to the public, there are numerous aspects which, nevertheless, remain ambiguous to both the BCTF and schoolboards. That said, there is significant concern that the model is strikingly similar to the new “Prevalence” funding model that was implemented in Ontario. This “Prevalence” funding model is having significant negative impact on their school system. Without proper funding the Ontario school district is forced to make significant changes, such as increasing classroom sizes, which is causing massive teacher layoffs.

Because there has been so little consultation of education employees or the public in order to come up with a successful model for our province, educators are concerned that there will be a similar “Prevalence” funding model introduced into the BC education system. Even with the fear of backlash, more and more schoolboards are starting to publicly share their concerns as they fear how they will run their districts under the new model.

The new education funding model is to be included in the 2020 provincial budget which means that it will be finalized in the last quarter of 2019. This does not leave a lot of time for reconsideration, but with no educational group in support of this new funding model I hope you take a look at the growing list of major concerns:

- 1) A major focus of the new funding models is the simplification of funding, which may not at first seem like a bad idea. However, the education system is not simple and therefore it needs a complicated system to fund it properly. There are a lot of specialized programs that need extra funding, such as fine arts programs, IB programs, honours programs, outdoor programs, computer programs, and most of all special needs programs. If you simplify the funding model many of these programs may not be funded fully.

This would mean that districts and schools would have to choose which programs they could fund and which ones they would need to close down.

2) Not only is the government trying to “simplify” the amount being given to each individual student, but also trying to “simplify” how they will allocate this amount of money throughout the province. Instead of the funding going directly to the school each individual is enrolled in, large sums of money will be given to districts, which will have to decide how much money to give to each school. There will be less accountability to where the money goes. Currently, a parent or guardian of a special needs child can go an advocate for the use of the money their child is bring to that school to make sure that their child is getting the support that they need. With the new mode, the money is no longer connected to their child but just another percentage in a larger system.

3) Special needs programs will likely see a significant impact under the proposed new model. Within BC schools, there is a diverse range of special needs students who deal with myriad of challenges, from learning and behaviour issues to physical and developmental challenges. These students require specially trained resource teachers, EA’s, and programs in order to be successful in, or sometimes even simply to attend school. Currently, the student is funded depending on their particular need. In the new funding model, students are to be funded into one of two base line amounts. This is a substantial issue, as schools or districts that have higher need students will no longer be guaranteed this critical funding. With a lack of essential supports, a significant portion of BC students will not have the tools to be successful.

4) With the lump sum of money model, this can further impact special needs funding. Smaller districts and smaller schools may feel the most impact. The number of students who require special support depends on demographics, but I will use a benchmark of 10%. If the school is small with only 150 students, they will statistically receive 15 students worth of special needs funding. In the new model this school could hire one resource teacher as 15 students is the current maximum caseload. The school will only receive 15 students worth of funding because that is what the statistics will show, but what if this school actual had 25 students who require extra support? The one resource teacher has now almost doubled their maximum caseload, but without the funding this teacher would get zero extra support. What about rural schools that are under 100 students, statistically speaking they will not be funded enough to even have one resource teacher?

5) Similarly, there will also be a difference between funding for rich and poor schools. Lower income communities tend to have a higher amount of students that require extra support. Statistically speaking, however, that school could be provided with the same amount of money as any other school its size, without regard for their unique set of needs and challenges. Classroom teachers will have a harder time

trying to support their entire class if they are spending all their energy trying to support the special needs students who do not have any supports. This means that all students will be impacted. All BC students, without prejudice related to socio-economic or geographical considerations, should have the opportunity to receive a first-rate education, regardless of the school they attend.

6) In the beginning, special needs students will see the greatest drop in funding, but the most concerning effects of this model will come to be seen over time as it gradually comes to impact the rest of the education system as well. To properly identify a student as special needs, the government needs funding for significant testing from specialized educators, which can cost thousands of dollars. The wait list is already quite long in each school and it can take up to a few years for a student to get properly identified in the current system. In the new system, with even less funding, poorer schools may not be able to identify students and wealthier schools will have increased wait times for testing. With less students being identified, this means statistically the entire system requires less money. This means there will be even less support in the following years, since budget surpluses mean smaller budgets in the future. Over time, less supports mean even more students are left unidentified, which in turn means less money. This is a vicious cycle, which will continue until each district has the minimal amount of money to work with for all students.

7) This vicious cycle will be seen in regular funding as well, especially with speciality programs. With less specialized funding, these programs will need to be cut, which in turn means that the next year there will be less specialized programs to fund. With funding in speciality and special needs programs decreasing, it will mean that all school districts will have less money to allocate and will need to make difficult choices. When you add up all of BC together this can mean millions, or tens, or maybe even hundreds of millions out of the system. How will we properly run our education system? Will we have to increase classroom sizes, hire less support, close specialty programs, close fine arts programs, or computer programs or special math and science programs? The new funding model will have a significant impact on the special needs programs first but will inevitably start to impact all of the BC education system.

In conclusion, the new model is “simple” and it means less money for the education system. This prevalence model has changed the Ontario school system and without proper funding they are having to make drastic changes to their system, which is causing teacher layoffs in the thousands. I hope that BC schools will not have to face this same fate. The funding model is not reviewed often and over the last decade 1% of BC’s GDP has been taken out of education. Once we take the money out there is no way to put the money back without cutting from somewhere else or taxing more heavily. Please reconsider the

new system, and consider a system that will help put more money into the BC education system and give our students the proper education that they deserve.

I have made a website with both government and teacher information. Feel free to visit at

<https://bceducationfunding.weebly.com/>

Also please contact me by email at _____ or by phone at _____ to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Richard Obayashi