

ISSUES OF INEQUITY IN FUNDING FOR SLS (STUDENT LEARNING SUPPORTS)

DOCUMENTATION TO DEPUTY MINISTER ANDRE TREMBLAY

1. Inclusive Education

A) Issue to be addressed:

In the new funding framework (April 2020,) Charter Schools were specifically targeted with a funding formula that is significantly lower than other public and Francophone boards. This formula seriously disadvantages Charter Schools and is viewed as unjust and not in alignment with the public education policy statements nor the Minister of Education's expressed support for Charter Schools as schools of choice for Alberta families.

Charter Schools are delighted with the UCP approach to support schools of choice as the Minister has stated publicly many times. We believe the Minister did not intend to seriously disadvantage supporting students with special needs through provision of a strong inclusive education program in public charter schools.

B) Desired action:

Remove the section of the funding framework (Midway in Section C:2 specific formulas exist for Charter Schools) that presents an (arbitrary) formula where 9 Charter schools receive only 26% (average) of the SLS (Student Learning Supports) allocated to other Alberta school jurisdictions.

* Note: the referenced portion of the funding manual does not account for four specialized Charter Schools who have a full school population of students who are considered 'severe needs and are continued to be funded with the previous severe needs formula.

C) Facts:

- In March 2020 when the first shared draft of the funding framework was shared with all Alberta schools, there was no mention that SLS funding for the nine Charter Schools (four have an alternate model approved when they formed as Charter Schools) would be any different from other public/Francophone school jurisdictions.
- April 2020 the budget framework was released, and an addition was included under SLS funding which provided unique formulas that disadvantaged Charter Schools significantly. No consultation occurred with Charter Schools.
- Rationale for where the new formulas originated and what data prompted the formulas was not provided. Explanations varied and changed as discussions continued. Some officials 'felt' that Charter Schools had lower incidences of special needs than all other school jurisdictions in the province. This assumption has not been supported with fact.
- When the SLS funding formulas were developed, how did the department determine that the modifiers for Charter Schools would be significantly less?
- Inclusive education has historically been an issue in Alberta for the past 25 years. Previously, the system of identification for special needs students used identification codes and department approval to secure individual student funding. This did not work well and was replaced in 2004 with a different approach where schools did NOT specifically provide psychological testing (and other expensive forms of testing as required by the Ministry) and left identification and program support up to local school divisions. Funding to divisions was allocated to individual schools.

- The 2004 system is presently being updated (draft Ministerial order on inclusive education) and builds on the previous system with clarity around individual boards being accountable to support resources for all children in a school as needed (this type of support varies significantly from one school to the next.)
- Student demographic in Charter Schools has changed significantly in the past ten years with consistent increases in special needs students. (Refer: Appendix 3 example)
- The new Education Act identifies that Charters must be inclusive in registration approaches (as much as is possible) without violating Charter priorities. This situation is no different from the many schools of choice in large metro public districts. (e.g., elite sport and high academic schools). If all Alberta schools are expected to provide inclusive programs, should it not follow that all receive similar funding?
- Charter Schools are currently providing additional resources and programs to an increasing number of special needs students.
- Misinformation from a few outspoken parent organizations (e.g., SOS (Save Our Students), Alberta School Councils Association) are getting attention of the ministry. This is being promoted through social media. This information is simply not true.
- Recent history of this issue discussed with the previous Deputy Minister:
 March 2020 - Schools of Choice supported as public policy. New funding framework is announced and there is no mention of a funding formula that directly disadvantages Charter Schools.
 April 2020 - new draft funding framework shared publicly, and Charter boards unpack the serious negative impact.
 May - December 2020 - conversations with the Ministry to determine a workable solution the address the concern with Charter Schools.

D) Implications to Charter schools

- Serious funding shortfalls in areas of Students Learning Supports.

E) Reactions

- Strong reactions from Charter Boards.
- Follow up occurred immediately with the Minister and department to find some justification for a formula that appeared arbitrary.
- One step forward was that a few department officials felt that the incidences of special needs students in Charter Schools was lower from other school divisions.
- Data was collected to illustrate this misconception. Suzuki School volunteered for a review which demonstrated that considerable resources were being used to support all students with identified special needs (active individual program plans and programs to address these deficiencies).
- This information collected by AB ED staff was used differently than the intended purpose for which it was collected. (last discussion with the former DM)
- Letters to the Minister, discussions with the Deputy, action plans by The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools (TAAPCS)
- December 2020 - Emergence of the ABED parent group (Albertans for Educational Diversity) - over 100 Charter school parent members escalating their concerns for funding inequities and dissatisfaction with the contradictions of Schools of Choice public policy statements and perceived government in-action to publicly address equity in funding
- We can help in the de-escalation of parent and board reactions.
- You have Superintendent support from TAAPCS educational leaders to promote the government education policy of supporting Schools of Choice for Alberta citizens.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE SLS FUNDING SHORTFALLS
EXAMPLE- Public Charter School vs Non-Charter Public School SLS Funding

ALL CHARTER SCHOOLS								
SLS Funding	Public Charter Schools Formula	Student Count or Percent	Public Charter Schools	Public Non-Charter Formula	Student Count	Public Non- Charter	Difference	% of Non- Charter Funding
Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)	2500 x 8240 (power factor .33) 212.50 x 8240	8240 8240	\$ 184,118.30 \$ 1,751,000.00 \$ 1,935,118.30	5000 x 8240 (power factor .66) 425 x 8240	8240 8240	\$ 3,618,231.07 \$ 3,502,000.00 \$ 7,120,231.07	\$ 5,185,112.77	27%
Student Wellness Program	2500 x 8240 (.23 power factor) \$200,000 x Percent share WMA	8240	\$ 93,370.54 \$ 178,513.35	5000 x 8240 (.45 power factor) Total provincial funding \$40,000,000 Our portion is 8240/733600 x 40 million	8240 8240	\$ 838,391.40 \$ 449,291.78	\$ 745,020.86 \$ 270,778.43	11% 40%
Jurisdiction Composition Factor	650,000 x Jurisdiction composition percent		\$ 553,960.00	Not enough information to calculate accurately.		\$ 553,960.00	\$ -	100%
TOTALS			\$ 2,760,962.19			\$ 8,961,874.25	\$ 6,200,912.06	31%
1. Multi-Disciplinary Team	Change formula to your enrollment Both lines			Change all numbers in red Student count				
2. Student Wellness Program	Change formula to your enrollment change mental health factor to WMA percentage from your school			finance grant calculation sheets for 2020-21				
3. Jurisdiction Composition Factor	Change factor to your jurisdiction composition factor from your school			finance grant calculation sheets for 2020-21				