

Task Force on Special Needs Funding

Report for the Minister of Education
and Advanced Learning



November 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BACKGROUND

In Manitoba, there is great interest in and dedication to providing high-quality, inclusive education for all of our students. As our inclusive culture, beliefs, and attitudes have evolved, school-based systems, structures, and practices have changed to match them. It has become increasingly apparent that our provincial funding structure, specifically our “special needs funding,” is outdated. The existing model of Special Needs Funding Levels 2 and 3 (low incidence categorical grants for students with severe to profound disabilities) was implemented over 32 years ago. Educational partners, including parents, teachers, administrators, superintendents, school boards, and various associations, have raised the concern that the current model has drawbacks.

The Task Force on Special Needs Funding was established by the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning to explore potential changes, improvements, and/or alternative models for funding. The Task Force committee included representation from the Manitoba Teachers’ Society (MTS), Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA), Manitoba Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), Manitoba Association of Parent Councils (MAPC), Student Services Administrators’ Association of Manitoba (SSAAM), and four school divisions (Brandon, Winnipeg, Frontier, and Western).

The Task Force committed to a collaborative, respectful process that is egalitarian and reflects the comprehensive, purposeful, strategic, data-driven process of inquiry outlined in *Got Data? Now What? Creating and Leading Cultures of Inquiry* by Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman.*

The complexities inherent in creating an equitable, inclusive, “user-friendly,” effective, student-centred provincial model for funding are broad and deep. The Task Force’s ongoing discussions include a desire to “level the playing field” across the province to account for the differences from school division to school division. The members were very conscious of not recommending changes where some divisions would be “winners” or “losers.” The Task Force felt it important that divisions must have local decision making, and that the funding model needs to consider the big picture while also considering anomalies. There are new demands such as inter-agency collaboration, mental health, and increased advocacy for specific interventions. The committee agreed that there is a need for accountability, transparency, and a comprehensive communication strategy. Change may be necessary but any change must be done thoughtfully, cautiously, and respectfully.

* Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, *Got Data? Now What? Creating and Leading Cultures of Inquiry* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2012).

PROCESS

The Task Force began by reviewing data provided by Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning that included the following historical information: number of students funded, approval and denial rates, attendance reporting, and actual funding (dollar amounts). This information was examined at the provincial as well as the divisional level. The stakeholders reviewed the data to answer the question “What does this tell us?”

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning staff gathered information on funding models used in other provinces and specifically interviewed staff from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Ontario shared the report they completed in 2013/14 that included a meta-analysis of studies around funding for children with special needs. In addition to telephone interviews, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning staff met via GoToMeeting video conferencing with staff from the Ministry in Ontario to gather more information about the funding models used in Ontario and the process used to determine a funding formula/model. A summary of each province’s guidelines for funding and accountability processes was provided to the Task Force.

Through discussions of funding models, particular concerns were raised about the existing provincial model of funding to school divisions, specifically the impacts of the Funding Guarantee (see Appendix A: Funding to Schools for further information).

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning met with staff from Healthy Child Manitoba and the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) to look at sources of data beyond what is currently available to Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. A number of potentially useful data sources were identified and MCHP indicated an interest in helping to support the department in modelling potential formulas using data from all school divisions.

The stakeholders and school division representatives each had opportunity to make presentations to the Task Force. The presentations from organizations were focused on the organizations’ positions on funding at the beginning of the process. Presentations ranged from informal communications to formal position papers. Of particular note was the perspective of the parent representative. MAPC did not have a position paper but in order to represent the parent voice the organization facilitated a “focused conversation” where they gathered feedback from parents who have children with special needs. The summary of comments received through this process, with a small number of parents providing feedback, was presented to the committee.

The school division representatives were each asked to make a presentation about how they allocate the funding they receive from the province and the funding the school division provides to support the educational programming for students with special needs. The purpose of these presentations was to

provide perspective on the range and scope of services provided in Manitoba schools. This snapshot gave the committee insight into this very important aspect of divisional decision making with regard to providing support to students with special needs.

The committee spent considerable time looking at what we know from other provinces and our historical and school division data. This information was the basis for forming the recommendations of the Task Force (see Appendix B: Data and Presentations).

CONSIDERATIONS

From the discussion that followed each presentation, four overarching goals of the Task Force were identified:

- Recommend a funding mechanism.
- Improve services.
- Improve student outcomes.
- Provide efficiencies to benefit educators and parents.

Furthermore, any funding recommendation should encourage or promote resilience, inter-agency collaboration, support to teachers, and the decrease of marginalization or labelling of children.

As a result of these discussions, the Task Force members agreed that the current model needs improvement and identified the following principles that would need to be taken into account when making any recommendation for changes:

- reflects research
- reduces time spent on the application process (both school division and department staff)
- provides stability/predictability for budgeting purposes
- reflects differences in divisions/schools (equitable)
- is responsive to available resources/community characteristics
- includes accountability, flexibility, and transparency
- focuses on student strengths (i.e., reduces labelling)
- presents holistic (big picture) thinking

The committee proposed that any recommendations for changes to Special Needs funding include an increase to overall funding in order to reflect current costs of educational programming for children with special needs.

It is also recommended that the Special Needs Coordinator/Clinician grant be increased to provide additional support in the area of mental health.

The Task Force developed four funding model options for consideration:

- Option 1: Application-based funding process (current model)
- Option 2: Application-based process with some refinements, such as expanding criteria and/or including more specific diagnoses/broad categories
- Option 3: Formula-based funding, combining the existing Student Services Grant and the Level 2 and 3 (excluding EBD3 or URIS Group A, which would continue to be application-based)
- Option 4: Formula-based funding model for Level 2 and 3, excluding EBD3 or URIS Group A, which would continue to be application-based, with the Student Services Grant remaining unchanged

The latter two options would build on data and the formula currently used for the Student Services Grant that includes indicators related to socio-economic status, transiency, and children in care. The exact formula applying these indicators could be different from that used for the Student Services Grant and/or could include additional indicators. The model could be achieved using support from the MCHIP in determining the formula and providing up-to-date data. All the models would include accountability to continue through the Review and Reporting process and the FRAME report (see Appendix C: Examination of Potential Options for Special Needs Funding Based on Discussions at September 14, 2015, Task Force Meeting).

Task Force members shared the information (including Appendix D: Risks and Benefits) and options with their respective groups and provided feedback/recommendations at the October 26 meeting. Each of the four funding model options were reviewed by the Task Force and issues/themes that emerged were identified and are represented on the Potential Solutions chart (Appendix E).

At the meeting on October 26, as the group was discussing the recommendations, it was acknowledged by all that whatever changes to the funding model that might be made, it was still possible, and in fact advisable, to address the unique needs of some divisions in other ways. For example, because of the unique relationships with the Federal government and the associated funding received, accommodations may need to be considered for Frontier School Division and DSFM.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

At the October 26 meeting, the Task Force agreed to recommend to the Minister that Option 4 be explored. This is not a direction to proceed directly to implementing this option, but rather to spend the remainder of the 2015/16 school year exploring what this formula could look like, modelling what the financial implications would be for each school division and what special accommodations might need to be considered. This would be done through continued meetings with the Task Force with the understanding that a final recommendation to proceed with implementing the formula would come from this group.

In addition, the Task Force is very clear that the implementation of any change must be well planned, comprehensive, and involve all of the organizations represented on the Task Force committee, as well as other stakeholders. Adequate time must be provided for all divisions to implement the associated changes to processes regarding how to assign funding within the local context in order to ensure both that student needs are being met and accountabilities are in place.

It was suggested that the Individual Education Plan Report (IEPR) is an important element to document plans and supports, as well as achievement, related to students with special needs.

It was noted that specific supports must be targeted at helping parents understand the changes to the funding process and to assure them that this does not reduce accountability for supports that should be provided to students.

The members were in agreement that many concerns raised in committee will not be resolved by a change to the funding model.

The Task Force supports a phased-in implementation of any changes (should a change to a formula be supported), similar to the process used for the implementation of the new Provincial Report Card. This would involve a voluntary implementation year where those divisions that were prepared for the change could choose to move ahead, followed by a mandatory implementation year where all school divisions would need to be on board.

Further work is needed on the part of the Task Force to outline a detailed implementation process.

The recommendations to the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning include the following:

1. Increase overall funding for students with special needs.
2. Expand the Special Needs Coordinator/Clinician grant to provide additional support in the area of mental health.
3. Explore *Option 4: A formula based on data that would replace the current Special Needs Grant and leave the Student Services Grant as is (excluding complex,*

interdepartmental applications for L3 Health Care and L3 Emotionally Behavioural Disorders) to determine if an acceptable formula can be created to replace the current application-based Special Needs Funding model.

Important considerations include the following:

- Maintain and communicate the Task Force vision of better and more inclusive programming and support for students. Funding structures need to support best practices and are the next step in facilitating improved programming for students with special needs.
- Develop a funding formula guarantee that is equitable and still responsive to individual division needs/differences.
- At the same time as the potential change to “how to get” funding is developed, an implementation plan that clearly details “how to use” the available funding must be developed.
- Develop a multi-pronged, cohesive communication plan with consistent joint messaging and support from Task Force organizations.
- Provide ongoing conversations, communication, and education within and between multiple contexts (teachers, parents, administrators, trustees, stakeholders).

Members of the Task Force met with the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning on November 19, 2105, to share the Recommendations. Philosophically, there is unanimous support for development of a new, systemic funding structure that is equitable and moves Manitoba toward the development of more inclusive practices and removes the use of a deficit model to access funding. There is a shared belief and cautious optimism that, working together, a model with a distinct “Manitoban flavour” can be created to meet our unique needs.

APPENDIX A FUNDING TO SCHOOLS

The Formula Guarantee ensures that divisions receive no less than the amount of operating support provided through the Funding of Schools Program (which includes support for Special Needs) in the prior school year. It is of particular benefit to divisions experiencing declining enrolment as it ensures that these divisions do not experience a corresponding reduction in funding.

Divisions on the Formula Guarantee that experience an increase in enrolment will begin to see an increase in their overall funding only when grant increases fully offset the amount of the Formula Guarantee. Divisions with increasing enrolment that are not on the Formula Guarantee will experience funding increases from the prior year.

Student Services Grant

The Student Services Grant consists of a per pupil amount combined with socio-economic and children-in-care components.

Counselling and Guidance

Support is the lesser of

- \$83 per eligible pupil at September 30, 2014
- allowable expenses as reported under Counselling and Guidance (Program 270) on the Calculation of Allowable and Unsupported Expenses in the 2015/2016 FRAME financial statements

Special Needs

Support is the total of

- (a) Coordinator/Clinician:

Coordinator/Clinician support is the lesser of maximum support and 2015/2016 allowable expenses for salaries, allowances and benefits, professional service fees, and travel and meetings for qualified clinicians and up to one qualified special education coordinator reported on Appendix A of the Calculation of Allowable and Unsupported Expenses in the 2015/2016 FRAME financial statements. Further information regarding eligible and allowable expenses is available in the *Guide for the Completion of Allowable and Unsupported Expenses* in the FRAME budget and FRAME financial statement files provided to school divisions by Schools' Finance Branch.

(b) Level 2 and Level 3:

Level 2 and 3 support is provided, on an application basis, for approved pupils who require and receive exceptional supports within the guidelines for Level 2 and 3 funding support. Applications are completed by school divisions and submitted to the Funding Review Team, Program and Student Services Branch, to determine eligibility based on established criteria including attendance.

Funding for pupils approved for Level 2 support is \$9,220 per eligible F.T.E. pupil.

Funding for pupils approved for Level 3 support is \$20,515 per eligible F.T.E. pupil.

Level 2 and 3 support is determined based on the number of eligible F.T.E. pupils enrolled on September 30, 2015, and is adjusted thereafter to ensure that additional pupils identified throughout the school year receive funding.

Formula Guarantee

Support is the greater of A or zero:

$A = B - C - D$, where

B = 2014/2015 Base, Categorical, Equalization, School Buildings (Earned) Support and Formula Guarantee

C = the lesser of Level 2 and 3 Support added after September 30, 2014, and Level 2 and 3 Support added after September 30, 2015

D = 2015/2016 Base, Categorical, Equalization and School Buildings (Earned) Support excluding additional Level 2 and 3 Support added after September 30, 2015

APPENDIX B DATA AND PRESENTATIONS

Data Sources

- Interjurisdictional Scan—Special Needs Funding Model
- FRAME Actual
- Special Needs Funding Data—Provincial
- Special Needs Funding Data—Divisional
- The Evolution of Special Needs Funding Level 2 and 3 in Manitoba, April 2015
- The Low Incidence Funding Application, Manitoba
- Funding for Student Services/Special Education, Manitoba
- What Does the Research Say About Models for Funding Special Education?, BC
- Enrolment Report, Manitoba, September 30, 2014
- Sample Letter from Parent Regarding Child's Funding
- Manitoba Education School Attendance Initiative Report, 2014

Information Shared by Stakeholders

- Winnipeg School Division—2015/2016 Special Education Program Projections, General Comments
- Brandon School Division—Summary for Task Force on Level 2/3 Funding
- Western School Division—Thoughts on Categorical Funding
- MAPC Position Statement—Bill 13/Inclusion, May 5, 2006
- MAPC Resolution—Mental Health Supports for Students in Manitoba Schools, 2015
- MASBO Position Re: Provincial Special Needs Funding Model—General MASBO “Position”
- SSAAM—Position on Provincial Special Needs Categorical Funding
- MASS—Special Needs Funding in Manitoba
- MTS—Special Education Funding: Pan-Canadian—Executive Summary
- MTS—Presentation to Task Force on Special Needs Funding
- MSBA—Brief to the Task Force on Special Needs Funding

APPENDIX C

EXAMINATION OF POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS FUNDING

The Task Force applied the following criteria to an analysis of each of the options presented below.

Criteria

Any recommendation for change will

- reflect research
- reduce time spent on applications (divisions and department)
- provide more stability for budgeting—schools will know funding in a timely manner
- be equitable—reflect needs of division/school
- be responsive to changing needs/flexible
- be understandable/transparent
- be strengths-based—no labelling
- include accountability process
- be holistic—big picture thinking
- maintain the Formula Guarantee
- have no “winners” and “losers”
- be implemented in stages

Option 1:

Keep the current application-based funding model.

Note: This could also be accompanied by a recommendation to increase overall Special Needs Funding.

Option 2:

Keep an application-based process with some refinements. These could include

- expanding criteria to capture a broader range of student needs
- more specific diagnoses (e.g., FASD) or broad categories (e.g., neurological)

An additional suggestion was to look at ways to expand application of multi-year funding.

Option 3:

Develop formula-based funding—combining existing Student Services Grant and the Level 2 and 3, excluding EBD3 or URIS Group A, which would remain application-based.

- This model would build on the data and formula currently used for the Student Services Grant that includes indicators related to socio-economic status, migrancy, transiency, and children in care.
- This model could involve Manitoba Centre for Health Policy in determining formula and providing up-to-date data.
- This model requires a revised Review and Reporting process.

Option 4:

Develop new formula-based funding for Level 2 and 3, excluding EBD3 or URIS Group A, which would remain application-based.

- Student Services Grant remains unchanged.
- This model would build on the data and formula currently used for the Student Services Grant that includes indicators related to socio-economic status, migrancy, transiency, and children in care. The exact formula applying these indicators could be different from that used for Student Services Grant, and/or could include additional indicators.
- This model could involve Manitoba Centre for Health Policy in determining formula and providing up-to-date data.
- This model requires a revised Review and Reporting process.

Overall Recommendations

It was suggested that the following two overall recommendations could accompany any of the options above.

1. Increase overall funding for students with Special Needs.
2. Expand the Special Needs Coordinator/Clinician grant to include funding for mental health support workers.

APPENDIX D

RISKS AND BENEFITS

Funding Model	Risks	Benefits
Application-based funding process (current model)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Process continues to require labelling or diagnostic information. ■ Process is time consuming. ■ Process does not encourage a change in how divisions use the funding. ■ Paper process may not reflect need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Process is well established. ■ Funding (supports) are determined using the same criteria across the province. ■ Parents and teachers may feel assurance the funding is being used for a specific child. ■ Approvals reflect need.
Application-based process with some refinements, such as expanding criteria and/or including more specific diagnoses/broad categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Process increases the use of diagnostic labelling. ■ Process is time consuming. ■ Process does not encourage a change in how divisions use the funding. ■ Paper process may not reflect need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Process is well established. ■ Funding (supports) are determined using the same criteria across the province. ■ Parents and teachers may feel assurance the funding is being used for a specific child. ■ More broad criteria will increase the number of students funded. ■ Approvals reflect need.
Formula-based funding combining the existing Student Services Grant and the Level 2 and 3 (excluding EBD3 or URIS Group A, which will continue to be application-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Model reduces accountability for the presence of a disability to get funding from government. ■ Model does not provide direction as to the “level” of funding between the three “levels” of need. ■ Increased advocacy could result as the perception of “determining” EA support would be at the division level. ■ Model changes the role of resource teachers in the school division. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Model increases accountability for how funding is used. ■ Model allows for the range of student need, rather than identifying levels of funding. ■ Model reduces the tendency to equate funding with EA time. ■ Model ensures highest need students have a multi-system plan. ■ Model removes the perception that “determining” EA support is being done by government. ■ Model reduces staff time (school division and government) on the application and approval process.

APPENDIX E POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Issues/Themes	As is: student- specific applications	Improve the student- specific application process	Change to a formula- based model	Other: outside of the mandate of the Task Force
Special Needs Funding does not account for the growing number of students with special learning needs that are not included in the current eligibility.		✓	✓	Student Services Grant
Student Services Grant has not increased to respond to the higher number of students who are experiencing difficulty in school because of mild to moderate needs or at-risk behaviours.			✓	Student Services Grant
Parents and educators want assurance that supports will be put in place. There is a perception that identified funding for a child is that assurance.	✓			Review and Reporting Process
Accountability is essential and primarily the responsibility of the school/school division.	✓	✓	✓	Review and Reporting Process
Principals/teachers/parents are not clear what funding is for and misinformation is common.	✓	✓	✓	
Funding is used primarily for Educational Assistants.			✓	
Student needs do not fall neatly into one level or another but historically funding has been assigned as either .5 or full-time support.			✓	✓
Parents and sometimes educators may not understand, or agree to, the criteria for funding and this is a stressor for all concerned.			✓	

(continued)

Issues/Themes	As is: student- specific applications	Improve the student- specific application process	Change to a formula- based model	Other: outside of the mandate of the Task Force
The student-specific applications are very time consuming for school division and department staff.			✓	
The student-specific applications require parents and school division staff to prove the presence of a disability and encourage labelling.		✓	✓	
The current process means funding is sometimes not confirmed until later in the fall.			✓	
Skilled educators' and clinicians' time should be focused on helping classroom teachers rather than providing documentation to ensure funding.			✓	
Divisions spend more toward student services/special education than they receive from government.			✓	✓

* It must be noted that benefits of the solutions were difficult to determine without having a formula to review.