



REPORT OF THE BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON
Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools

September 2014



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Alberta has a choice—to accept inadequate implementation or to become a world leader in research and successful inclusion practices.

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Executive Summary

Prompted by a myriad of concerns from teachers and administrators in Alberta schools, the Annual Representative Assembly of the Alberta Teachers' Association passed a resolution in May 2013 to strike a Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools. Members of the panel were chosen to represent various roles and perspectives in the education system. They shared their experiences and reviewed research on the state of inclusion in Alberta. The panel concluded that the basic principles of effective implementation have not been addressed sufficiently. Those principles are **(1) shared vision, (2) leadership, (3) research and evidence, (4) resources, (5) teacher professional growth, (6) time and (7) community engagement** (Alberta's Education Partners 2010). Specific recommendations to various stakeholder groups within each of the essential conditions outline steps that can be taken to ensure that inclusion works effectively in Alberta's classrooms. Alberta has a choice—to accept inadequate implementation or to become a world leader in research and successful inclusion practices.



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It is about everyone working consciously and collaboratively toward the common goal of nurturing a vibrant inclusive community.

—Valle and Connor (2011, 207)

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Prompted by ongoing concerns about the state of inclusion in Alberta schools, the 2013 Annual Representative Assembly of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) passed a resolution to strike a Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools in order to provide an arm's-length investigation and subsequent report on this topic of critical importance. Resolution 3-64/13 reads, "BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association establish a blue ribbon panel to investigate and report the impact of inclusive education in Alberta schools" (ATA 2014, 70).

The panel's terms of reference outlined its duties:

1. To review data on the current state of inclusion in Alberta schools, specifically the implementation of the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education 2009b) and the *Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response* (Alberta Education 2010b)
2. To recommend action to ensure that inclusion occurs in contexts that are consistent with Association policies on the education of students with special needs
3. To report findings to Provincial Executive Council at its meeting of May 8 and 9, 2014

At its meeting on June 13 and 14, 2013, Provincial Executive Council named Marc C Arnal, former dean of Campus Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, as chair of the panel.

In addition to the chair, Council named the following members to the panel:

- Dorothy B Arts, Edmonton Public Teachers Local No 37 (school administrator)
- Nancy C Grigg, Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge (representative from a university)
- Lori A Hogue, Calgary Public Teachers Local No 38 (special education teacher)
- Carrie J Luckwell, Red Deer City Local No 60 (classroom teacher)
- Kathy Olmstead, Livingstone Range School Division No 68 (central office administrator)
- Carol D Henderson, ATA past president (member of Provincial Executive Council)
- Joni A Turville, ATA (member of executive staff [secretary])

This arm's-length panel held four face-to-face meetings and one teleconference during the 2013/14 school year to review current information on inclusion in Alberta schools. Panel members represented a broad range of perspectives in the education system, including various roles and organizations; rural, urban and suburban locations; and a range of experience. In-depth research was conducted by the University of Alberta in late 2013 and early 2014. The panel used this data to identify major themes and to recommend actions to ensure that teachers have the supports they need to create effective learning environments and that students are successful in an inclusive system. As inclusion is a complex issue, it is important that this report be reviewed in its entirety.



Alberta Education published the *Setting the Direction Framework* in 2009 and the *Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response* in 2010. The government accepted the 12 recommendations outlined in the *Setting the Direction Framework* and indicated that it would “develop detailed implementation and transition plans for the short, medium and longer term . . . in the context of available resources and in consultation with partners and stakeholders” (Alberta Education 2010b, 2).

Since that time, teachers have seen little improvement at the classroom level for students with exceptional needs, and in some cases supports have actually been reduced. Teachers are concerned that students who have special needs may be falling through the cracks. It is important that the necessary steps be taken to ensure that teachers have the supports and resources required to make inclusion meaningful and successful for all students.

The 2013/14 school year marked the second time the Association has convened a blue ribbon panel on this topic. In 1997, the report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Special Education was published. This panel identified recommendations in the areas of leadership, governance, funding and interdepartmental/interagency coordination. Although there have been shifts in the system since then, many of the concerns identified in 1997 remain today, and many new concerns have emerged.

The members of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools discussed the framework for inclusion, with the understanding that it is the teacher’s job to create a challenging, accessible, motivating learning environment within which all students can develop to their full potential and that it is the job of everyone else in the system to support the teacher’s efforts to do so. The panel also reviewed and affirmed ATA policies and concluded that, for many students, the necessary supports as outlined in policy have not been put in place.



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At the core of inclusion is the concept of making differences ordinary so that all students have a place, feel valued and welcomed, and are equipped for success.

—Alberta Education

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Defining Inclusion

Many of the concerns raised by teachers that prompted the formation of the panel were specifically related to students with exceptional needs, but members of the panel quickly concluded that the research and conversations had to be much broader. The panel was supportive of the broad definition of an inclusive education system proposed by Alberta Education:

The Setting the Direction Framework and Setting the Direction Framework, Government of Alberta Response articulated a vision for an inclusive education system that meets the learning needs of all students, including those with diverse learning needs.

This definition has driven some important and challenging discussions. At the core of inclusion is the concept of making differences ordinary so that all students have a place, feel valued and welcomed, and are equipped for success.¹

However, the panel was concerned that this definition also has the effect of de-emphasizing the supports that are necessary to meet the needs of learners with exceptional needs. The panel also recognized that inclusion involves a much larger conversation about society, equity, and seeing

the strengths and gifts of every person as a valued member of the community. It also recognized that making these shifts takes time, resources and support as we move from a long-entrenched system to something new. There was a strong sense that flipping a switch, offering minimal supports and expecting miracles is unrealistic.

.....

// The issue discussed here is not Inclusion, which is a fundamental human right, but the mandating of a policy while stripping the system of the capacity to implement it effectively. Including all students in learning is necessary if we are to respect human rights and to maximize the potential of each and every learner. But teachers, Education Assistants, and school districts need much more support to make this happen. **//**

—Naylor (2013, 14)



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VISION: To create an inclusive education system
where each student is successful

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Guiding Vision and Principles

The panel reviewed the vision, mission and principles of the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education 2009b) and agreed that they still hold true. A similar vision and mission were used to guide the panel:

VISION: To create an inclusive education system where each student is successful

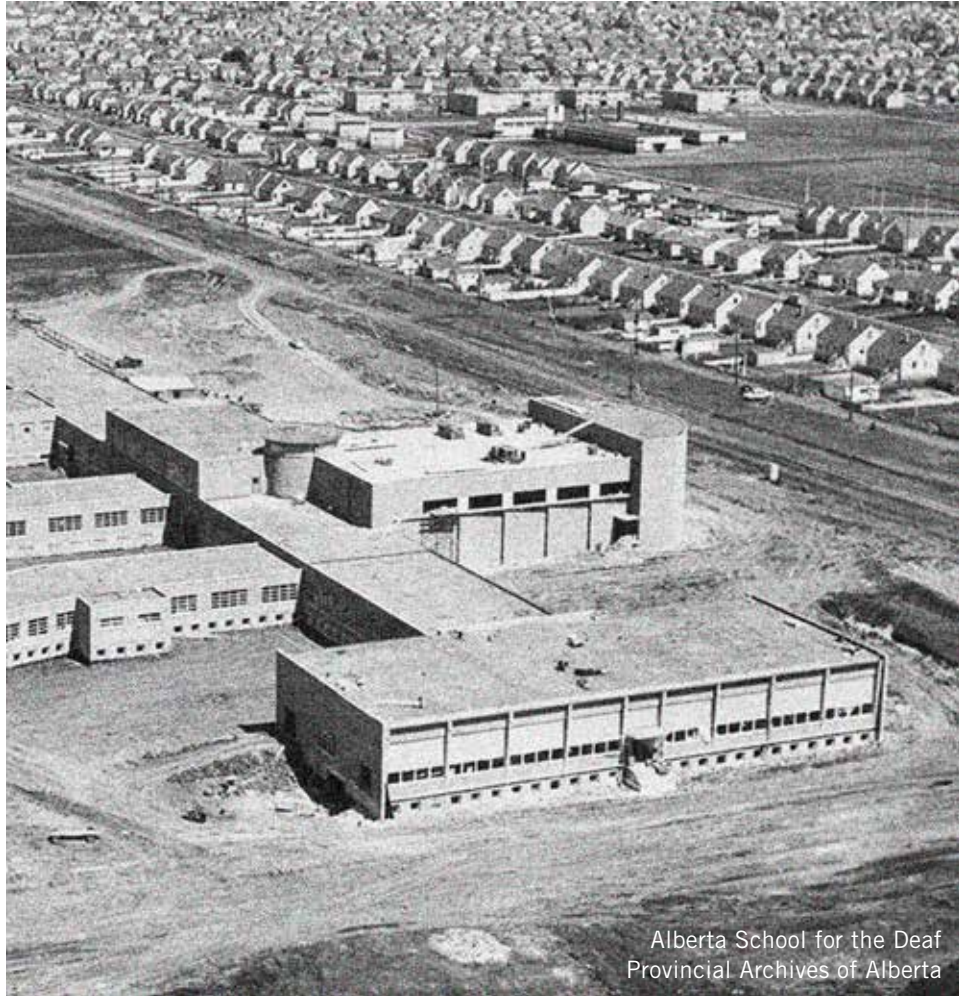
MISSION: To work with stakeholders to build an inclusive education system based on integrity, promising practices and respect for difference

The panel then discussed some of the reasons Canada's wealthiest province is struggling to achieve the mission, vision and principles of the *Setting the Direction Framework*. The difficulties appear to lie not in the foundational elements of the framework but in its implementation and in the operationalization of the recommendations put forth by the government in its response to the framework (Alberta Education 2010b). The government promised "detailed implementation and transition plans for the short, medium and longer term," developed in consultation with stakeholders (p 2). If such plans existed, they certainly were not shared with those doing the actual implementation, nor were they developed in consultation with stakeholders.

The panel then reviewed in detail all 12 strategic directions proposed by the ministry. The consensus was that most have not been implemented, or have been implemented superficially. Alberta Education staff provided the panel with an update on the

recommendations, and the vast majority of the reported progress consisted of documents, videos and other items posted to the Alberta Education website. In the opinion of the panel, few structural or actual changes can be found in the system, and most teachers do not know about or have time to navigate the documents and resources posted. The *Standards for Special Education* (Alberta Education 2004) have not been revised for a decade, and this has also contributed to the fragmented implementation of these strategic directions.

The panel devised a work plan, which included discussing the evolution of inclusive education in Alberta, as well as gathering data in order to clearly understand the current situation and subsequently develop recommendations. Researchers at the University of Alberta were contracted to conduct a study on the current state of inclusion in Alberta schools and report the results to the panel.



Alberta School for the Deaf
Provincial Archives of Alberta

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After World War II, educators began to address
“the needs of exceptional students.” In 1957,
the Alberta School for the Deaf was established.

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The Evolution of Inclusive Education in Alberta

The story of inclusive education is a work in progress whose conclusion has yet to be written. According to Andrews and Lupart (2000, 28), “The Canadian movement toward individualized education and the least restrictive environment for all students has followed a pattern of progressive inclusion similar to that of the United States . . . and, to a lesser extent, Europe.” They further divide the history of progressive inclusion in Canada into seven periods (pp 29–38): (1) exclusion in the country’s early history, (2) institutionalization in the 1800s, (3) segregation from 1900 to 1950, (4) categorization in the 1950s and 1960s, (5) integration in the 1970s, (6) mainstreaming in the 1980s and (7) inclusion in the 1990s and beyond (as shown in Figure 1).

In Alberta’s early times, “the education of exceptional children was considered a responsibility of the affected family” (ATA 2002, 16). In 1923, the Alberta government established the Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives, in Red Deer. In 1977, the institution was renamed Michener Centre.

After World War II, educators began to address “the needs of exceptional students” (ATA 2002, 39). In 1957, the Alberta School for the Deaf was established, in Edmonton (ATA 2002, 42), and

| | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Pre-1800s | Exclusion |
| 1800s | Institutionalization |
| 1900–1950 | Segregation |
| 1950s–1960s | Categorization |
| 1970s | Integration |
| 1980s | Mainstreaming |
| 1990s and beyond | Inclusion |

Figure 1. Inclusive Education Timeline

in 1959, the Royal Commission on Education in Alberta (the Cameron Commission) released its report. It recommended that the Alberta government “administer and finance the education of the handicapped, that the Department of Education arrange services for handicapped children in sparsely populated areas, and that a representative committee be established to study education of the handicapped along broad lines and recommend a suitable program for introduction in Alberta” (Clarke 1960, 98). The commission also made recommendations with respect to gifted children, who, along with “handicapped children,” were subsumed under the category of “exceptional children.”

While public policy in the 1960s may have been founded on the premise that “everyone should have access to schooling” (ATA 2002, 50), not everyone did. Indeed, parent advocacy took root in Alberta toward the end of that decade.

In 1972, the Commission on Educational Planning (the Worth Commission) released its report, which asked Albertans to choose between two potential futures: a “person-centered society” and a “second-phase industrial society.” The commission’s report contained a detailed prescription for special education.

In 1977, Alberta Education released a discussion paper on the goals for basic education, which were then before the legislature. Known as the

Harder Report, the discussion paper “represented a turning away from the humanistic viewpoints expressed just a few years earlier in the *Worth Report* and a return to a more traditional approach to education” (ATA 2002, 55). Accordingly, the discussion paper gave short shrift to the education of students with special needs, suggesting only that “students not capable of achieving the set [curriculum] standards would be given additional time or routed to alternate programs where the objectives would be less rigorous” (Alberta Education 1977, 9) and that special classes would “be set up for those that learn more slowly” (p 41).

In 1982, Canada repatriated its Constitution; in 1984, the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding (the Ghitter Committee) released its report; and in 1985, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force. With that, people in Alberta, as elsewhere in Canada, became more conscious of their legal rights as citizens. As a result, they began demanding that schools become more understanding and inclusive, particularly with reference to the provision of minority-language rights and equality rights.

In 1988, a new *School Act* came into force. Section 3 (now section 8) of the act states that “every individual . . . is entitled to have access . . . to an education program.”² The act also “sets out entitlement to special education programmes, assessment procedures, resourcing, powers and

responsibilities of school authorities, and parental rights” (UNESCO 1995).

In 1989, then minister of education Jim Dinning announced that Alberta Education would review a number of aspects of special education, in cooperation with stakeholders. A discussion paper, which resulted from the first phase of the review, was released in 1990. In 1991, Alberta Education released an action plan, based on responses to the discussion paper and the findings of the working committees and advisory committee established to conduct the review. The action plan made 40 recommendations in the areas of coordination and delivery of services for children with special needs, funding for services to special needs children, and the assessment of outcomes and development of performance standards for exceptional students. A Minister’s Forum on Special Education, convened in 1991 following the release of the action plan, provided participants with an opportunity to discuss the action plan, finalize recommendations and consider implementation strategies.

In 1993, Alberta Education developed a policy on the educational placement of students with special needs. Policy 1.6.1, which remains in effect today, states, “Educating students with exceptional needs in regular classrooms in neighbourhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with students, parents/guardians and school staff.”³

In 2002, then minister of learning Lyle Oberg established Alberta’s Commission on Learning to conduct a comprehensive review of the province’s education system. In its report, released in 2003, the commission made eight recommendations specific to the education of students with special needs in such areas as supports, teacher preparation and professional development, early assessment and intervention, and funding. In recommending the establishment of provincewide guidelines for average class sizes across school jurisdictions, the commission cautioned that “generally, classes with special needs students, students whose first language is not English, and vulnerable and at-risk students should be smaller than the suggested guideline” (p 8). While the government expressed support for all recommendations (Government of Alberta 2003), it is debatable whether they have been implemented.

Just five years later, in 2008, then minister of education Dave Hancock announced a review of special education involving broad public consultations. Led by a steering committee and supported by a working group with stakeholder representation, *Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta* resulted in a new framework for special education. The framework, which envisions “one inclusive education system where each student is successful” (Alberta Education 2009b, 5), makes 12 programming recommendations in the priority areas of curriculum, capacity and collaboration. Just as a

minister's forum had followed the special education review in 1991, so a Setting the Direction Minister's Forum followed this review in 2009. In 2010, the government announced that it would begin to implement its response to the recommendations in three phases: common understanding, capacity building and system redesign (Government of Alberta 2010).

In many ways, the history of progressive inclusion in Alberta is a history of the tension between equity and excellence, between the choices posed by the Worth Commission (a "person-centered society" or a "second-phase industrial society"), between "humanistic ideals, epitomized by individual self-actualization . . . and continued industrial development, focused on an abundance of goods and services" (ATA 2002, 53).

A more detailed history of inclusion in Alberta can be found in Appendix C.

Tensions between old and new systems continue to play out as we attempt to live up to the ideals of inclusive education. "Will the new forces prevail or will the old system resist and undermine the future promise of inclusive education?" (Skytt and Turville 2012, 6).



The Changing Face of Alberta's Classrooms

In addition to changes in policies and practices in inclusive education, the panel also reviewed data that revealed that the classroom itself has increased dramatically in complexity over the last number of years. Although exactitude is difficult, examining some of the available statistics supports anecdotal evidence that there are more students with exceptional needs in classrooms than ever before.

Disability rates for children have risen, as have disability rates for the overall population. In addition, most children with disabilities have multiple disabilities, making program planning and instruction more complex (Statistics Canada 2008). The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada estimates that 10 per cent of Canadians have a formally diagnosed learning disability, and researchers believe that for many reasons, including misunderstanding of the term *learning disability* and reluctance to self-report, the actual incidence is much higher.⁴ Some factors that may be contributing to that increased incidence include the number of premature births and greatly increased survival rates over the last number of years. Of babies born between 20 and 25 weeks of gestation, 22 per cent have a severe disability, 24 per cent have a moderate disability, and 34 per cent have a mild disability (Iacovidou,

Varsami and Syggellou 2010, 133). Alberta has the highest rate of premature births of all the provinces (Employment and Social Development Canada 2010; Tumilty 2012). The most common areas of disability are learning disabilities, speech and language delays, intellectual disabilities and behavioural disorders. The least common are visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries, pervasive developmental disorders and deaf-blindness (Winzer 2008, 16). Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was once considered rare, but Autism Society Canada (2014) now estimates that 1 in every 68 children is born with ASD, and the reported incidence of ASD rose 150 per cent between 1998 and 2004 (Autism Society Canada 2004, 4).

Alberta also has a large number of immigrant families, as well as temporary foreign workers and their families. From 2003 to 2011, the number of permanent resident immigrants in the province rose from 15,839 to 30,963, nearly doubling (Government of Canada 2011a). From 2007 to 2011, the number of temporary foreign workers rose from 37,068 to 58,228 (Government of Canada 2011b). Statistics Canada (2012) reports that most immigrant students do not speak either of Canada's official languages as their mother tongue; these students will require English-

language learning support. Immigrant families may also have challenges that make it difficult to support their school-aged children. Students from refugee backgrounds often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma and other conditions that require extra support to enable them to learn effectively.

In addition, mental health issues are on the rise for children and youth. Research on the health of Canadians estimates that 10–20 per cent of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder—the single most disabling group of disorders worldwide (Canadian Mental Health Association 2014). In addition, 14.7 per cent of children aged two to five years exhibit high levels of emotional or anxiety problems, and 14.2 per cent of children exhibit high levels of physical aggression, opposition or conduct disorders (Government of Canada 2009). Government statistics also indicate that less than one-quarter of children receive appropriate services (p 24).

Various agencies estimate that 30–40 per cent of children could be deemed at risk for a variety of reasons (including pregnancy, drugs and crime), apart from the identified population of students with exceptionalities. Students at risk are not distributed evenly throughout the population. They are most heavily concentrated in families who live in poverty, minority families and families who are not fluent in English (Wotherspoon and Schissel 2001, 324). In Alberta, one in ten children lives in poverty (Edmonton Social Planning Council 2013).

The purpose of examining these statistics is not to focus on labelling children but to illustrate the fact that the pressure of classroom complexity is a real, not an imagined, phenomenon. Moving to an inclusive education system alongside these complexities, without a corresponding increase in supports and services, is a major reason the panel was convened.

The struggle of providing effective inclusive education to all students is not unique to Alberta—indeed, these issues are a global phenomenon (Vlachou 2004). Though some progress has been made in our province, the panel engaged in independent research that revealed that there is much work left to do.



Researchers at the University of Alberta were contracted to conduct a study to capture the experiences of Alberta teachers and administrators. The study, which used a mixed-method research approach, included the following:

Two online submission tools, one for which participants were randomly selected from the active ATA membership and one open to all ATA members. Both tools garnered a total of 1,420 responses.

Focus groups, including members from urban, suburban and rural settings.

Telephone interviews with superintendents representing urban, suburban and rural areas.

The submission tools were voluntary, and participants were free to skip questions or withdraw at any time before clicking the submit button. The tools were identical and consisted of a number of scale questions, in addition to several qualitative questions intended to gather more in-depth comments from respondents. Teachers wrote hundreds of pages of comments. With the average teacher spending 60.8 hours in work-related activities per week, as reported in a recent study (Duxbury and Higgins 2013, 20), the large volume of comments speaks to the importance of this topic.

Researchers from Evaluation and Research Services (ERS) at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension analyzed the data. Descriptive statistics for all scale questions were computed, and t-tests and chi-square tests at an alpha level of 0.05

were conducted, where applicable, to determine whether the differences between respondents from the randomly selected and the open tools were statistically significant and whether opinions from respondents from different types of schools statistically differed. Comparisons between the ATA's Survey on the Teaching and Learning Conditions of Students with Special Needs in 2007 and the results of this survey were also made, where applicable. These tests revealed no significant difference between the two surveys.



Research Limitations

While these findings may be helpful in setting general directions and goals, some of the specific comments may not be applicable to other contexts. The size of the survey sample was more than adequate for identifying common themes and key findings. However, because most of the respondents were self-selected, it is difficult to determine with complete certainty that the results are representative of the larger population. The fact that the responses from the random survey and the open survey have similar patterns, however, does increase confidence in the representativeness of the results. Some of the questions were duplicated from a 2007 study and provided information on trends over time.

The data from the survey and from the focus groups complemented each other. The data from the focus groups allowed the researchers to explore the findings from the survey in more depth. As is often the case with exploratory research, new questions emerged that might become the focus of future research.

The results of this research report formed the basis for the panel's recommendations that follow, and representative comments from the respondents and related research have been woven into the rationale.



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Having teams available to support the creation of effective programs has been shown to increase teachers' confidence in their skills and abilities in an inclusive setting, which also supports more positive views of inclusion.

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Recommendations

After extensive discussion, reading and research, the panel developed a set of recommendations, framed around the elements of successful implementation from *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* (Alberta's Education Partners 2010). These elements are **(1) shared vision, (2) leadership, (3) research and evidence, (4) resources, (5) teacher professional growth, (6) time and (7) community engagement** (see Figure 2). Interestingly, the guide was developed collaboratively by the following education partners:

- Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia
- Alberta Teachers' Association
- Alberta School Boards Association
- Alberta School Councils' Association
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta
- College of Alberta School Superintendents
- Faculties of Education, Alberta Universities
- Alberta Assessment Consortium
- Alberta Education

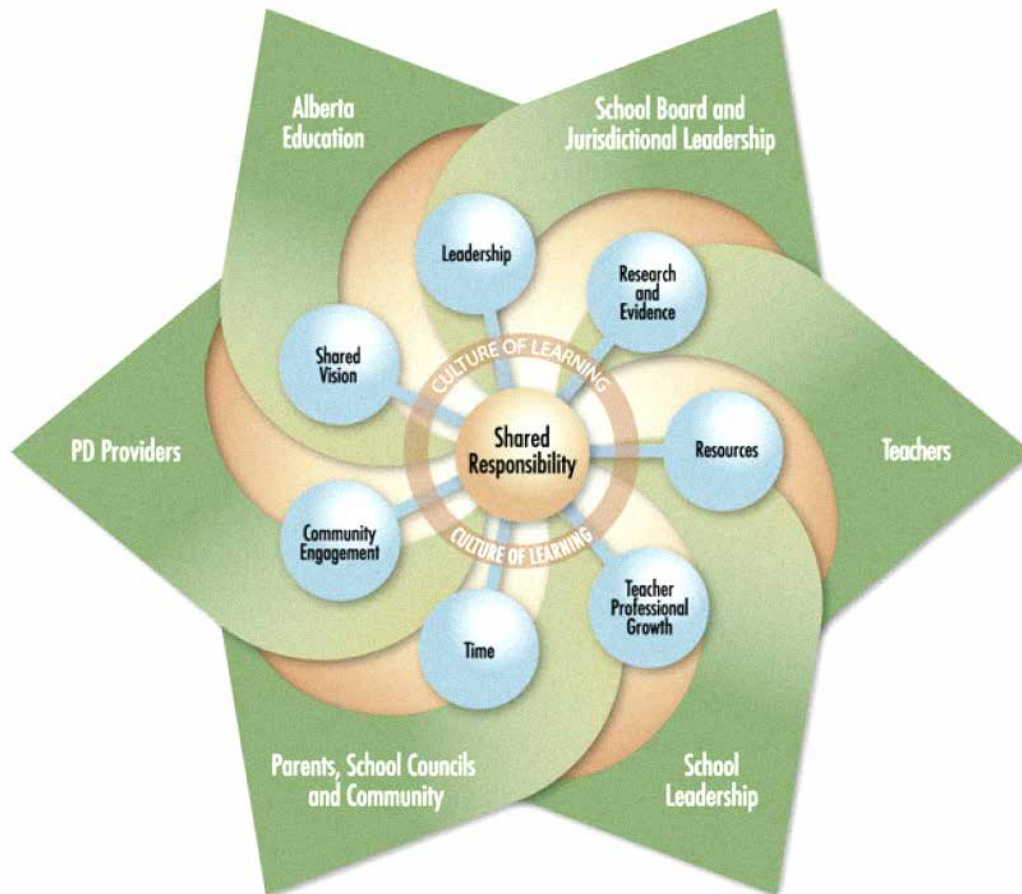


Figure 2. Essential Conditions to Support Implementation
Source: Alberta's Education Partners (2010, 3)

The recommendations were organized around the seven essential conditions because the panel determined that while the mission, vision, principles and goals for inclusion as outlined in the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education 2009b) are sound, many of the gaps in inclusive education can be attributed to the apparent absence of implementation plans.

Each group to whom the recommendation is directed is identified, followed by further detail to support each item. At the same time, it is recognized that, though the recommendations are targeted at specific groups, all stakeholders have a role to play in transforming the system. As

outlined in *A Guide to Support Implementation* (Alberta's Education Partners 2010, 2), "Planning for successful implementation requires an understanding of the characteristics of successful implementation; coherence among plans and priorities; and the intentional efforts by education stakeholders to collaboratively address the essential conditions."

After careful consideration, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools respectfully makes the following recommendations, which were developed collaboratively and supported unanimously.

SHARED VISION



Stakeholders share an understanding of and commitment to the intended outcomes.

| Guiding Questions | Evidence |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the shared vision collaboratively developed with and endorsed by stakeholders? • How is the shared vision articulated and communicated with stakeholders? • How is the shared vision evident in the implementation plan? • What evidence exists that the learning community is “living” the shared vision for all learners? • What process is used to facilitate ongoing review of the shared vision by stakeholders? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong, clearly articulated vision exists that reflects current research, as well as stakeholders’ priorities, needs and contexts. • Stakeholders have a sense of ownership in the development of the vision. Stakeholders also support and can articulate the vision. All stakeholders endorse the vision statement. • Regular stakeholder communications reference the vision and describe how it has been implemented. • The vision informs all implementation decisions. Qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrates how implementation decisions align with the vision. • The vision is periodically reviewed and revised as required. |

Source: Alberta's Education Partners (2010, 3)

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 1—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Establish a provincial stakeholder advisory committee of education partners to develop a provincial implementation plan, guide provincial implementation activities and meet regularly to reflect on evidence gathered about implementation.

The *Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response* (Alberta Education 2010b, 2) states, “The Government of Alberta accepts each of the strategic directions and will develop detailed implementation and transition plans for the short, medium and longer term. These plans will be developed in the context of available resources and in consultation with partners and stakeholders.” If there were any such plans, they were internal to Alberta Education, and there has certainly been no consultation with stakeholders to create plans framed around what is known about successful implementation. It is not too late, however, to work together to create such a

“ A goal without a plan is just a wish. ”
—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

plan. A stakeholder advisory committee could collaborate on developing an implementation plan to address the vision, mission and goals of inclusive education and could meet regularly to reflect on evidence gathered about implementation.



“We need to have a common definition and vision for inclusion.”
—Survey participant

When the Action on Inclusion initiative began, as a follow-up to *Setting the Direction*, a provincial stakeholder advisory committee was struck. In addition, there was a stakeholder working group. Both bodies have been disbanded, and there have been few advisory or stakeholder meetings to communicate information in the last few years. Having a stakeholder advisory committee that meets frequently to guide inclusive education is critical to creating a comprehensive implementation plan, supported by stakeholders, that can be reviewed regularly. Without plans and structures in place, the current hit-and-miss implementation will continue, and students will fall through the cracks.

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 2—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Create a ministry team that will work with stakeholders at all levels to build understanding and support for the vision of inclusive education.

When *Setting the Direction* was launched, a team at the ministry was charged with leading the consultation process and creating a framework. Once the Government of Alberta response was released, this team was disbanded. While a few teachers and staff from central offices were involved in the consultation process, the vast majority of teachers were not. It is imperative that the ministry provide leadership at the provincial level to guide the implementation process—a team of people whose time can be

dedicated to providing face-to-face support for teachers and administrators, as well as other supports, so that the vision and goals are clearly understood. Having staff “infused” in other areas of the ministry is not sufficient. There must be a substantial team in place, made up of people who are knowledgeable about inclusive education and who can dedicate their time to leading provincial implementation.

Another important reason for having such a team is the need to make clear the connections between the myriad of other ministry initiatives, such as *Inspiring Education*, curriculum redesign, high school flexibility and student learner assessments. These relationships are not always apparent. Beliefs can and do change practice, but time and resources must be dedicated so that everyone in the education system has time to find out what their beliefs are and to create a vision for their own jurisdictions, schools, classrooms and communities. Hargreaves and Braun (2012, 16)

“The purpose of the inclusion needs to be clearly understood by the classroom teacher, ... the administration and ... the parents.”

—*Survey participant*



// Coming up with new ideas and designing new programs is exciting work, but the challenge is how to implement these programs effectively. Education has a history of what were thought to be great ideas that never bore the intended fruit because people did not pay enough attention to the hard work of implementing them. // —*Glaze, Mattingley and Levin (2012, 138)*

SHARED VISION

explain that “when change connects with the deep moral purposes and the professional aspirations of classroom teachers, and provides some discretion about how these aspirations are fulfilled, inspiring beliefs can be a significant factor in transforming practice.” These conversations have not often taken place at the grassroots level, so it is no surprise that there is a lack of clarity about and understanding of inclusion.

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 3—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Create clear, multilevel, consistent and transparent communication regarding inclusive education.

Since the Setting the Direction process concluded, there has been insufficient communication from the ministry about regulations, policies, directions, supports and developments. The result has been confusion about what is required, what is in pilot or draft form, and what the current directions are and what the future directions will be. There must be multilevel communication and greater effort to provide consistent, clear information to all stakeholders. Information and decisions must be transparent and available at the same time and to all stakeholders. The provincial stakeholder advisory committee cited in Recommendation 1 could be involved in creating a communication plan that would involve other organizations. Communication must also include face-to-face communication between ministry personnel and school jurisdictions. Posting communiqués and information on a large website and hoping that every person in the system will see and understand them is not reasonable.

// High performing systems do not create system coherence through rigidly aligned bureaucratic structures, but by developing their system's culture. The key mechanism here is intense communication. //

—Hargreaves and Shirley (2012)



“Currently, there is a lack of communication and teamwork that makes it difficult for anyone to be on the same page.”

—Survey participant

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 4—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Work directly with stakeholders to build an understanding of inclusion and an understanding that an inclusive classroom setting may not be in the educational best interests of every student at all times.

A classroom is not a closed structure—there must be commitment from everyone in the system to provide the supports necessary for students to succeed. Every student needs a place to learn and belong. There may be times, however, when the level of support or the specific kind of support required by a student is not available in the classroom, or when the learning environment is not effective for the student. In these cases, alternative placements for various periods of time may be required. Alberta Education's (2007) *Information Bulletin on Standards for Special Education* also outlines the fact that, at times, there may be need for alternative placements, such as

- short-term or long-term,
- for part or all of the school day,
- in a regular classroom setting or in a special education class,
- in a jurisdiction or external to it, or
- in a school, at home or in an institution.

This may be an issue of clarity in communication, but some jurisdictions are operating as if there were never cases where placement outside a typical classroom is considered. Though inclusive



“Full inclusion is an admirable goal, but not just as a way to dump kids with special needs into a regular classroom without many extra supports.”

—Survey participant

education is the ideal, there may be severe medical, behavioural or other conditions where a student's educational best interests would be best met by receiving specialized support for short, intensive periods or longer periods of time. Models of such support can be found in other countries. In Finland, for example, almost every school has one or more teachers who have specialized training and expertise and are available to support students who require intensive intervention inside and outside typical learning environments (Takala, Pirttimaa and Törmänen 2009). If there is a period of intensive

SHARED VISION

intervention outside the typical classroom, all teachers work together throughout this process and then plan together for the student's successful transition back to the classroom, as well as ongoing assessment of progress so that adjustments can be made.

“**T**here is no question that in some classrooms, schools and districts, the rhetoric of inclusion has been used to justify eliminating services and unceremoniously ‘dumping’ students with significant educational needs back into the mainstream with little or no preparation or support. If this is what you have seen, it’s not surprising that the concept of inclusion seems ill-founded and bound to fail. But it is important not to reject a concept and commitment because of poor, half-hearted implementation. Holding those who espouse the goal of inclusion to high standards is a critical part of making inclusion successful.”

—*Sapon-Shevin (2007, 8)*

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 5—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Establish a school-jurisdiction-level inclusive education advisory committee, including teachers, administrators and other stakeholders, to develop a jurisdiction implementation plan, guide implementation activities and reflect on evidence gathered about implementation.

A structure parallel to what is proposed in Recommendation 1 is needed in all school jurisdictions. This advisory committee would give a voice to teachers, administrators, and everyone at the system and school levels. The committee would create short-, medium- and long-term implementation plans for its jurisdiction, following the principles of effective implementation, and meet regularly to reflect on the evidence gathered about how implementation is progressing. It would also communicate these plans to all relevant stakeholders. Some jurisdictions have structures in place, but this is not the case in most jurisdictions. Without a carefully laid-out plan and structures to regularly reflect on the plan, goals will not be achieved.



“We need a clear concise division and school plan. We often feel like they are flopping around according to whichever direction the wind is blowing. Perhaps the top people know what they are doing, but it needs to be communicated clearly to those of us in the little leagues.”

—Survey participant

// Achieving systemic change requires a district vision, consistency in direction, and action over an extended time. District leaders have the opportunity to influence everyone within their system to set aside individual concerns and pursue a common goal: a promising future for all children. **//**

—Glaze, Mattingley and Levin (2012, 145)

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 6—SCHOOLS

Establish a school-based inclusive education advisory committee, including teachers, administrators and other stakeholders, to develop a school implementation plan, guide implementation activities and reflect on evidence gathered about implementation.

The structures discussed in Recommendations 1 and 5 must also be echoed at the school level. School administrators must facilitate open and honest conversations about the opportunities and challenges of inclusion to create a clear vision where “everyone knows where they are going and why” (Glaze, Mattingley and Levin 2012, 151). They need tools to create a comprehensive implementation plan at the school level, including collaboratively developed strategies and tools to assess how the plan is working in order to make necessary adjustments.

It is essential to involve classroom teachers and respect their professional judgment. Only 33 per cent of those submitting responses to the panel felt that their professional judgment was heard and respected when making decisions about students with diverse learning needs. The teacher is the interface between the child and his or her educational goals. Giving a voice to teachers is an essential element in school improvement (Broemmel 2006; Levin and Merritt 2006; Weingarten 2009).



“It’s us [teachers] and we have to make it work. Everyone has a voice and is important.”

—Survey participant

.....

// We know that the best way to create ownership is to have those responsible for implementation develop the plan for themselves. . . . It simply doesn’t work to ask people to sign on when they haven’t been involved in the planning process. **//**

—Wheatley (2006, 68)

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 7—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide a safe, professional environment where teachers and administrators can express their experiences as inclusion is implemented.

Teachers and administrators need a place to share their successes and challenges related to inclusion. In submissions to the panel, only 14 per cent of respondents indicated that inclusion had a positive effect on teaching and learning in their classrooms, compared with 61 per cent in 2007. The panel received many comments expressing appreciation, such as “Thank you for doing this survey” and “I hope the information makes it to the people who could do something to make change happen.” With the complexities of today’s classrooms, there must be trust and open dialogue to celebrate successes and acknowledge and address challenges. If teachers or administrators fear being reprimanded or fear that they may lose their position if they express concerns, honest dialogue will not occur. Research demonstrates that facilitating and modelling effective communication, building relationships, making authentic decisions, celebrating experimentation, taking risks and valuing diverse views are key to engaging people in sustained improvement (Glaze, Mattingley

and Levin 2012; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory 2003; Wang and Bird 2011). Teachers are the linchpins in inclusion, and providing space for openly sharing successes and concerns will ensure that all students can be successful in an inclusive system (Subban and Sharma 2005). Building safe and inclusive environments through trust and honest communication must extend to all stakeholders in the system.

// Strong leaders have the courage and passion of their convictions, but need to be especially attentive to others who do not share that passion. Doing so will enable them to understand some of the problems and challenges more clearly. //

—Glaze, Mattingley and Levin (2012, 144)



“Thank you for doing this survey. This is a critical issue that is impacting education and is being ignored or dealt with in a very superficial way.

The questions you asked will hopefully put teacher voice into the discussions/decisions being made in this area.”

—Survey participant

LEADERSHIP



Leaders at all levels have the capacity to champion the shift from the current reality to the intended outcomes.

| Guiding Questions | Evidence |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are current and future leaders being supported and developed? • How are leadership roles and responsibilities articulated? • What leadership decisions are required to support implementation of the vision? • How are current and future leaders collaborating to build their leadership capacity? • How are leaders working toward sustaining implementation? • What plans are in place to support leaders' ongoing career-long/lifelong professional growth? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plan exists for developing leadership capacity among all stakeholder groups. These plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —clearly delineate leadership roles and responsibilities; —identify future leadership opportunities; —include supports for instructional leadership, as well as facilitation of continuous instructional improvement; —identify champions to build capacity and commitment; and —describe mechanisms for collaboration among current and future leaders. • Leadership capacity is improved and distributed throughout the learning system. • Leaders are collaborating to support and sustain implementation. • Consultation with stakeholders, including parents, has occurred. • Leaders are engaged in ongoing career-long/lifelong professional growth. |

Source: Alberta's Education Partners (2010, 4)

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 8—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Provide immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding for school jurisdictions' implementation plans in cycles of five to seven years to provide the staff, resources and supports necessary to build and sustain capacity in the system.

The number of students in Alberta schools is rising, as is the level of complexity in classrooms. If inclusion is to become a part of the social fabric of Alberta, the government must provide immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding to make the ideals of inclusion a reality. It is possible to build support and capacity in the system, but not without a concerted effort. This infusion of funds, along with multilevel implementation plans, will enable schools to create capacity and support in the areas they feel are important. This could include providing a learning coach or a coteaching program, or hiring personnel in an area of particular need for a school (such as an expert in English-

language learning or First Nations, Métis and Inuit education). Studies also cite professional development through schoolwide action research projects as a way to deepen inclusive practices. It has been suggested that the “last stop on the inclusion journey is controlled by the schools, their staff and local community that supports them” (Hodkinson 2010, 64). Giving schools the funding and the resources best suited to their needs would ensure that the vision of inclusion is realized and would reflect that jurisdictions are at various places on the continuum of implementation.

Alberta is not without such a model. The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) was a

// Inclusion needs tending. It is not something we put in place structurally, then sit back and hope for the best. It is not about a particular teacher's practice or a particular child. It is about everyone working consciously and collaboratively toward the common goal of nurturing a vibrant inclusive community. And achieving that goal requires shared leadership that routinely and thoughtfully takes stock of how actively its inclusive community pursues and enacts new knowledge and innovative practice. **//**

—Valle and Connor (2011, 207)

LEADERSHIP

model of systemwide improvement, research and innovation. Creating a model similar to AISI, with the lessons learned from the previous cycles (including accountability for funding, professional development, requirements for disseminating research and funding cycles of five to seven years) would enable the learning from AISI to create a new model that could truly transform the system and position Alberta as a worldwide leader in inclusive education.



“We can’t make a judgment on something like inclusion until it is funded properly, implemented at the grassroots effectively and people embrace the philosophy. Only then can we make a judgment upon its merits.”

—Survey participant

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 9—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Demonstrate commitment to and leadership for inclusive education by providing ministry staff, knowledgeable in inclusive education, who are able to provide direct, one-on-one, ongoing support to each school jurisdiction in creating and realizing its implementation plan.

Accessible, ongoing support from the ministry is needed in order to assist jurisdictions in creating and implementing successful inclusion plans. This would enable communication to be more clear and direct and would also help to facilitate networking among jurisdictions.

One superintendent remarked,

The clarity around direction is one of the things we're faced with at central office. We went from Setting the Direction to Action on Inclusion to Inspiring Education, and inclusion went from being a very specific focus of our province and rolled into the general operations of our schools. . . . Setting the Direction was about eight years ago, but Action on Inclusion, where we're actually required to make Setting the Direction come alive, was only three years ago, and now the department has even collapsed their department of inclusive learning into that generalized learning category too. So even though it's a strong focus from the government, the clarity around the how-to at the division and some of the supports required have been completely left to divisions to attend to on their own, without solid resources and structures from the province.

Having ministry staff accessible and available in the field would help to identify successes and challenges, and enable more timely responses to concerns that arise during implementation. It would also help to build relationships between the ministry and the people who are working directly with students and other stakeholders.

// Improving learning opportunities for all children will require more than individual talents or school-by-school efforts. It will demand systemwide approaches that touch every child in every school in every district across the nation. //

—Togneri and Anderson (2003, 1)



“Open communication keeps everyone’s priorities the same.”

—Survey participant

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 10—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Clearly delineate stakeholders' leadership roles and responsibilities through clear policy directives and regulations.

Confusion in the field has persisted regarding such matters as funding, coding and the status of initiatives in inclusion, including individualized program plans (IPPs). Gilham and Williamson's (2013, 558) article describing Alberta's inclusion reforms details this confusion:

In 2011–2012, a number of confusing changes occurred on the website Alberta Education maintained to explain inclusive education reform. Alberta Education seemed to profoundly alter the ambitious scope of the inclusion project. In the spring of 2012, the *Action on Inclusion* website and the *Setting the Direction* materials were removed and replaced with this short statement: "*Action on Inclusion* no longer exists as a project or initiative, but the work continues as part of our collective practice to build an inclusive education system in Alberta." . . .

Months later the *Setting the Direction* webpages, its policy statements, and supporting resources were re-posted in the archives, along with a definition of inclusion that resembled the definition used during the reform period in 2009, notwithstanding a small but important change in adjectives. The 2009 definition promised to have students in "typical learning environments and

programs of choice." In the most recent (2012) definition, that has been dropped and replaced by "*appropriate learning environments.*"

In order to effectively implement inclusion, leadership at every level is important, and everyone in the system must have a clear sense of implementation plans. Through interviews, focus groups and submissions to the panel, it became clear that having strong, supportive leaders with a depth of understanding of inclusion and what it takes to support all students makes a huge difference in success or lack thereof. Alberta Education has a responsibility to develop and implement policy directives and regulations that ensure equity across the province for all students. Without these policies and regulations, implementation will be uneven. "The essence of implementation is to make policy come alive through practice" (Glaze, Mattingley and Levin 2012, 138).

Leadership at all levels is the key to effective implementation of equity initiatives. //

—Glaze, Mattingley and Levin (2012, 137)

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 11—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Consistent with the vision of Setting the Direction, eliminate the current coding system at the ministry and jurisdiction levels.

The system of coding students can be traced back to a medical model of recording student deficits. “We believe that the medical model of disability supports the parallel system; thus, it often works as an obstacle to an inclusive education system. Currently, Alberta’s inclusive education programme rests upon the medical model of disability” (Gilham and Williamson 2013, 554).

In the interviews conducted with the focus groups and with superintendents and in the written submissions to the panel, there was an abundance of references to coding, and many people still believe that coding triggers funding, though this has not been the case for two budget cycles. In addition, many school jurisdictions

have retained the old model of coding and funding for distributing inclusive education funds internally—likely because it is familiar and easily replicated. In order to shift to a strengths-based model, it is important to remove the codes. An alternative would be to replace them with descriptors related to strengths and effective programming strategies. This was, in fact, a priority area identified in the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education 2009b, 8): “Rescind current special education coding system in lieu of a data collection approach that centres on what the student ‘needs,’ not what condition the student ‘has.’” The old coding system simply needs to come to an end if the discourse is to change.

// We know that at least some school boards in Alberta still use the disability codification model as criteria for access to specialised classrooms and supports. We suggest that this sustains a traditional special education system that is parallel to and different from ‘regular’ education, despite the claims of learning for each and every student so ubiquitous these days. **//**

—Gilham and Williamson (2013, 563)

LEADERSHIP



“Now the shift is ‘Hey, let’s put an early intervention in place, and if reading is an issue,’ as an example, ‘let’s actually make sure we provide extra assistance and direction to help them overcome that obstacle,’ so that it’s not about labelling them with a deficiency that then stays with them for life. ... We can provide assistance, early intervention, address it, and then as you move them through the system, you can pull support away because you’ve actually resolved the issue, rather than having to continue that support all the way through the system.”

—*Superintendent*

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 12—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that learner assessments required by Alberta Education create multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning.

Assessments required by Alberta Education, including the new student learner assessments, must provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning. Changing questions from multiple choice to drag-and-drop is not an adequate solution. If teachers are differentiating instruction, then the province must assume

a leadership role by supporting differentiated, classroom-based assessments rather than rigid tests that do not serve all students well. “This system of accountability should be perceived as one of the most serious challenges that inclusive education is facing” (Hodkinson 2010, 64).

.....

// Compared to imposed threshold targets on standardized tests, diagnostic assessments and growth or progress measures of student achievement tend to have a more positive impact on teaching and learning. //

—Hargreaves and Braun (2012, 14)



“Research supports accommodations as beneficial for assessments until kids progress to being able to show what they know without their disability interfering with their results.”

—Survey participant

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 13—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that learner assessments required by Alberta Education do not create barriers of access to postsecondary education or entrance to the workforce.

Many respondents in the focus groups and submissions discussed the disconnection between diploma exams and inclusive education. Teachers are expected to modify, differentiate and allow multiple ways of demonstrating knowledge throughout a student's schooling, but then the government requires that all students demonstrate their learning in the exact same way. Students who are not able to do so are often capable of continuing their education in postsecondary environments but cannot navigate the diploma exams. The answer is not simply to add more technology supports, such as speech-to-text. What is required is a fundamental shift in understanding that assessment is more than one exam. In the life of a Grade 12 student, however, it all comes down to one exam on one day for

50 per cent of the grade he or she will need in order to access postsecondary education. This is simply unfair to students in an inclusive system. One study observed,

Many [respondents] felt that for many students with special needs, [a standardized achievement test] was not an appropriate instrument for determining what they could accomplish. Among the concerns that were raised were that it was a paper-and-pencil test that did not represent special education students' wider engagements with learning [and] that its standardized format, along with limited accommodations, was not consistent with the differentiated instruction received by the students. (Hargreaves and Braun 2012, 11)

“Even when given all these [extremely diverse learning needs], teachers are expected to prepare these various levels of students for the same diploma exam, and then those teachers are judged for performance based on those diploma exam results.”

—Survey participant



LEADERSHIP

Postsecondary institutions have processes and supports in place to provide accommodations for students once they enrol, and we should not create artificial barriers that will prevent capable students from realizing their potential.

// The reality of increased heterogeneity has put increasing pressure on those teachers to meet externally-set standards while at the same time responding to the individual needs of students. **//**

—*Stanovich and Jordan (2004, 178)*

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 14—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Require that all curriculum documents that are developed from this point forward clearly address the full range of learners in the school system, and require that related resources developed address the wide range of student learning needs in classrooms.

// It seems that within a rapid changing, market driven and intensified society combating exclusion and creating policies of equality and equity in the curriculum is going to be an even more complicated task but at the same time a more urgent demand. //

—Vlachou (2004, 14)

In *Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response* (Alberta Education 2010b, 3), the government committed to “provide tools to help school authorities adapt and utilize the current Programs of Study and learning and teaching resources for students with specialized learning needs within the context of the student’s school and community.” This was never completed, and within the current curriculum redesign process, having curricula to more easily plan for the range of student learning in classrooms is not a readily apparent goal. As this work progresses, it is critically important to keep this at the forefront of the design of both new curricula and the resources that will be based on these programs. In the survey conducted for the blue ribbon panel, only 8 per cent of teachers indicated that they had satisfactory access to specialized learning resources, compared with 49 per cent in 2007. If new curriculum is too general, it will still fall on the shoulders of teachers to recreate programs without assistance from

“Teachers are becoming burnt out by working after school to develop all these different curriculums to meet the needs of everyone, then the planning for everyone else, the marking and having no down time during the day, as you want everyone to get their needs met.”

—Survey participant



core documents. In addition, the government must require that resources developed are multilevelled and multifaceted to meet the wide range of learners in the classroom. There are models available, including Universal Design for Learning, that could be used as a lens for resource development (Rose and Meyer 2002).

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 15—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Monitor inclusive education funding provided to school jurisdictions and determine the actual costs of supporting all students effectively.

Inclusive education funding is now allocated in a block to school jurisdictions. Having some kind of monitoring or reporting mechanism for these funds would assist in determining the kind of support provided and the true costs of support.

Many schools and school jurisdictions report that the funds provided for inclusion do not come close to the true costs of inclusion and that money must then be taken from programming for other students. One superintendent remarked,

It's taking the funding that we receive and trying to make that funding stretch in so many different ways. . . . With the increase of the type of students and the complexity of our students, certainly our greatest challenge would be to see more funding to provide those services and supports to our children.

Another superintendent said,

When we talk about diverse students, they're the highest cost to our system, and we spend way more supporting our diverse students than we ever receive from the government. So that resource allocation is very skewed. We don't feel that the money that we get to support our diverse learners is accurately reflected in the funding distribution model that we have

from the government. We've voiced that to them, and we've gone through and listened closely to the research behind it and the criteria and how it was worked. We have a very, very clear understanding, but it still doesn't equate to front-line resourcing and how that looks. . . . In a time where we're implementing inclusion. . . . we need additional resources, and it's crucial to. . . . get buy-in and support from teachers and students, but we were getting fewer resources. So that allocation of internal resources has had to offset that need, because the need doesn't go away and we can't not resource it appropriately.

A second issue is the tension between local decision making and ensuring that policies are being followed. This trend is also seen in other provinces:

Decentralization is a double-edged sword. On one hand, districts have been given more flexibility to make decisions about how best to offer required Special Education services to students within their individual contexts. On the other hand, the Ministry has distanced itself from monitoring the educational value of decisions being made—some with the best of intentions but limited financial means. (Fewster et al 2007, 9)

LEADERSHIP

That tension was listed as a challenge in the *Setting the Direction Framework*, and it remains a challenge: “Local decision-making . . . results in inconsistencies across the province in implementation of policies and procedures, and in the provision of services and supports” (Alberta Education 2009b, 7). This inconsistency will continue until policies, regulations and regular assessment of inclusion happens in the system. The Government of Alberta must pay whatever it takes to provide the education all students deserve.

.....

// Even as the rhetoric described the need to reduce the sense of otherness of students with disabilities, a major issue to be dealt with in the reform policy remained how to best manage and plan for the cost of the other. //

—*Gilham and Williamson*
(2013, 557)

“The funds are reactionary—‘We are in trouble with this little person. We need to get an assistant!’—instead of providing support for those who are already identified before they enter the inclusive classroom.”

—*Survey participant*



LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 16—ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Host a symposium on inclusive education to highlight the report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools and to collaborate with stakeholder groups.

There is a great need for stakeholder groups to review the current state of the system and to refocus attention on inclusion, as it has been lost in a myriad of other priorities and initiatives within the ministry. This symposium could be used as a way to share information from the panel's report, as well as to renew the vision and begin the process of creating a provincial implementation plan that includes all stakeholders. During times of population surges, coupled with dwindling resources, education funding is in competition for government dollars (Glaze, Mattingley and Levin 2012). Education is closely related to social justice and social equality, and therefore it is imperative that those who make decisions about programs and those affected by those decisions be involved in charting the course and advocating for the resources and supports necessary to make education a priority.

// Successful inquiry leads to empowerment and transformation. //

—Levin and Merritt (2006, 4)



“It’s really sad to see students not receiving support and teachers who really want to do their best, leaving each day feeling like they have not made a difference. I am truly hoping for some kind of change.”

—Survey participant

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE



Current research, evidence and lessons learned inform implementation decisions.

Guiding Questions

- What data, including current research, evidence and lessons learned, is being collaboratively and systematically collected, and analyzed for the benefit of all learners?
- How is data being used to inform implementation planning and evaluation at the classroom, school, jurisdiction, school board and provincial levels?
- How is data being shared among stakeholders?
- How is expertise being developed in terms of effective uses of data to support implementation?

Evidence

- Existing data, as well as current research, evidence and lessons learned, is identified, collected and analyzed for current trends and implications. Data sources may include environmental scans, consultations, interviews, needs assessments, surveys, literature reviews, case studies and student data.
- Student data should be comprehensive and balanced, including measures that are qualitative and quantitative, cognitive and affective, and based on both classroom and external sources.
- Personnel responsible for managing (collecting, analyzing and disseminating) data are identified.
- Data is routinely and regularly shared among stakeholders.
- Decisions about implementation are informed by current research and supported by evidence and lessons learned. Evidence, research and lessons learned are clearly referenced in implementation plans.
- Formal and informal learning communities are in evidence (professional affiliations; subscriptions to professional journals; and participation at conferences, stakeholder meetings and other professional learning opportunities).

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

RECOMMENDATION 17—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA AND POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

With immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding from the Government of Alberta, establish partnerships with institutions with preservice teacher education programs to conduct regular research in Alberta classrooms, determine the effectiveness of inclusion and advance this field of study.

Ongoing research on inclusive education is of critical importance (Lupart and Webber 2012). Funding for research in this area must also allow for the diffusion of research and knowledge “into readily accessible language and formats for practical use in schools and classrooms” (L’Institut Roeher Institute 2004, 18). Attention must also be paid to the development of reciprocal relationships between schools and postsecondary institutions: active and valued participation by teachers and administrators can guide researchers to ask the questions that are most relevant with regard to the challenges confronting schools (Wagner 1997). Ongoing

research must take place so that there is a clear picture of inclusion and promising practices. This research should also be used to make inclusive education funding decisions and should include a dissemination plan.

// Systematic data collection and reflection can lead to transformation of knowledge and perspective. //

—Levin and Merritt (2006, 3–4)



“The only way to assure a great inclusive program is to spend hours and hours of personal time researching and planning. As you well know, teaching is not a day job, as many people think. It is a 24/7 job, and good teachers spend countless hours each week, each weekend and during all ‘holidays,’ including summer, doing professional development to deliver regular and specialized instruction to their students.”

—Survey participant

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

RECOMMENDATION 18—ALBERTA EDUCATION

As part of the immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding to support implementation outlined in Recommendation 8, establish an inclusive schools network, including an annual face-to-face conference, to share action research and promising practices.

Part of the success of AISI was the opportunity to find schools or school jurisdictions with similar areas of concern and to share research and promising practices (Hargreaves et al 2009). This was done through online networking, as well as an annual face-to-face conference, where challenges and successes could be brought to light. Creating such a network would assist in professional development, coordination and networking, which are essential to achieving systemwide change.

.....

// Especially in remote rural districts, the opportunity to leave small towns to access new ideas and research findings at provincial or regional conferences and establish lateral learning networks with educators in implementing them was priceless. //

—Hargreaves et al (2009, xv)

“Teachers’ roles are becoming more diverse, and so, of course, teachers are definitely needing further training and further opportunities to collaborate to be prepared to address the needs of their students.”

—*Superintendent*



RESOURCES



Human resources, materials, funding and infrastructure are in place to realize the intended outcomes.

| Guiding Questions | Evidence |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the current capacity to support this change? • What human and material resources are required to support this change? • What budget is required to support this change? • What infrastructure is required to support this change? • How might this change be phased in to optimize current capacity and available resources? • What strategies are being employed to authorize, acquire or develop the necessary resources? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The necessary personnel, materials, budget and infrastructure are authorized, allocated or developed through strategic short-, mid- and long-term resource plans to ensure sustainable change. • Resources are obtained through collaborations or partnerships with educational organizations and stakeholders where feasible. • Resources are prioritized and optimized to support implementation. |

Source: Alberta's Education Partners (2010, 6)

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 19—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Establish and implement structures to ensure that provincewide guidelines for average class sizes across school jurisdictions are achieved and that classroom complexity is weighted in these guidelines.

Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003, 67) recommended the following class size guidelines:

- Junior kindergarten to Grade 3—17 students
- Grades 4 to 6—23 students
- Grades 7 to 9—25 students
- Grades 10 to 12—27 students

In setting class size, class composition must also be considered. Classes including students with exceptional learning needs, students whose first language is not English, and vulnerable and at-risk students should be smaller than the suggested guidelines.

In submissions to the blue ribbon panel, only 14 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the size of their classes that included students with special needs, dropping from 39 per cent from the survey conducted in 2007. In addition, only 21 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the composition of their classes. In a scan of the qualitative data generated through the panel submissions, class size, composition and complexity were mentioned more than 400 times. This was also a major theme in the focus groups.

The pressures of teaching in classrooms of increasing size and complexity are taking their toll on Alberta's teachers. Teachers noted that the time it takes to support students with exceptional needs affects the support they can provide to all students in the classroom. One response to this dilemma is to provide more educational assistants, and no one would dispute their importance in the inclusive classroom. However, we need the most highly qualified people in the system—certificated teachers—to work with students with complex needs. A foundational element of effective instruction is formative assessment, and it is this information that



// Modern classrooms are complex communities. Some decision makers have noted that class composition or the degree of diversity among the student population may have a more significant effect than class size on most students' school experience. Inclusion, a relatively new value embraced by the education sector, has serious implications for teachers' work and the supports they require to be effective with all students. //

—Milton (2006, 55)

RESOURCES

teachers need in order to plan and adjust programs for students with exceptional needs. Formative, especially descriptive, assessment takes time and becomes exponentially more difficult the more students a teacher has (Berliner and Glass 2014; Subban and Sharma 2005). Research has shown that class size does matter: the more students in a class, the more time-consuming it is to create effective plans, to understand students as learners and to create the relationships needed to support learning.



“I find it more and more difficult to support these students as the needs of students increase, class sizes increase, the complexity of students increases and the complexity of social situations becomes more dire, and I feel extreme guilt about not being able to reach every child’s potential.”

—Survey participant

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 20—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Expand access to early intervention programs, including full-day, play-based kindergarten programs with certificated teachers, to ensure that children with diverse learning needs have the supports and programs they require before they come to school and into the early grades.

Some early intervention supports are available, including program unit funding (PUF) for students. This funding is provided to school authorities for children with severe disabilities or delays who require additional support beyond that offered in a regular early childhood services (ECS) program. PUF is provided for individualized programming that meets the educational needs of children with severe disabilities or delays who are at least two years, six months of age, and less than six years of age on September 1, and PUF may be paid for a maximum of three years for each eligible child.⁵ There are challenges related to this funding program. For example, if a student begins receiving programming at age two and a half, there will be a one-year gap between the time

when PUF funding stops and the time when the student can enter Grade 1. This funding has enabled a number of innovative programs to develop, and has offered flexibility to provide the supports and services needed to early learners. In the field, however, there is a well-known phrase—"From PUF to poof." This refers to the fact that the additional supports disappear for vulnerable students when they turn six, and the funding in the K–12 system is not sufficient to provide the same level of support. Parents and teachers are frustrated because students' needs do not suddenly disappear on their sixth birthday, but this additional, important funding and related supports do. This kind of intervention needs to continue for most students throughout their elementary years in order to give them a good

// Recent research syntheses . . . reveal that early interventions can produce meaningful, sustainable gains in cognitive, social, and emotional development for high-risk children. **//**

—Neuman (2007, 17)

RESOURCES

foundation as they move through adolescence and adulthood. While it is certainly possible and desirable to fade supports once students are able to manage the day-to-day demands of the classroom (Causton-Theoharis 2009), this cannot be done until the supports have been in place for the period of time necessary to produce this independence.



“If we don’t provide the supports in the early grades, we have lost not only these students (by turning them off learning and school in general) but also our collective ability to maximize each child’s potential by the time they reach Division II.”

—Survey participant

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 21—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Provide Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) boards with direct funding, not just enhanced funding, to facilitate decision making at the RCSD leadership and governance tables.

Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) is intended to provide more effective, streamlined access to supports and services to ensure student success. Stakeholders are supportive of better collaboration and more effective use of services; however, schools are reporting less service, rather than more, under this new model. The complexities of working with Alberta Education, as well as with Alberta Health and Alberta Human Services, have proven to be more than anticipated. At this time, there is a small amount of enhanced funding, but for more substantial projects or changes, representatives have to return to their ministries and plead their case for funding. In many cases, baseline funding provided for these services has not increased. If the baseline money were put directly into each

RCSD and boards were not focused mainly on governance but, rather, had money from each ministry to do the work, changes could be made. At this point, school jurisdictions are bearing most of the burden, as they must attempt to meet the needs of the children in their care. One study states,

Teachers, who receive resources and supports in their classrooms (that are part of a collaborative model for including students with disabilities) and, as a consequence, experience success, raise their sense of efficacy about working with students who have disabilities in their classrooms. In turn, these teachers are more willing to do so in the future.” (Stanovich and Jordan 2004, 184)



“It takes a huge amount of time from division office staff and from other ministries to try to create and build a governance structure that works and aligns with all of the different ministries.”

—Superintendent

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 22—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Develop a provincial standard and provide targeted funding to school jurisdictions to ensure that each school has adequate access to a trained school counsellor, preferably a certificated teacher.

School counsellors work with students, staff and parents to meet the educational, personal/social and career needs of students. Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003, 73) recommended that schools and school jurisdictions "ensure that all students have access to adequate counselling, diagnostic, and other support services necessary for them to succeed."

The commission felt strongly that all students should have access to both career and personal counselling. The American School Counselor Association (2012) recommends a ratio of one full-time equivalent (FTE) counsellor for every 250 students. The ATA also uses this ratio in its policies. The Guidance Council of the Alberta Teachers'

Association has done extensive sampling, and the current average across Alberta for school jurisdictions with counselling staff is one FTE counsellor for every 800 students, which is far

too few counsellors in any system but particularly in an inclusive system. School counsellors are responsible for completing a comprehensive counselling program plan, which directs the preventive and responsive school supports for the personal/social, educational and career planning needs of students. They support initiatives that increase graduation rates, improve attendance, increase student achievement through test-

taking supports, and connect students and their families (including those new to Canada) with community-based resources, as well as many other interventions that remain a focus for Alberta Education and school jurisdictions across Alberta. We also know that students will not

learn if stress or emotional issues are present. School counsellors are also a crucial support in connecting families to the community-based supports they need, such as the food bank or



"Our district took away our site-based counsellors and replaced them with districtwide wellness coaches/grad coaches that travel from school to school. Bring back site-based counsellors who belong to our school and our students."

—Survey participant

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mental health services. The presence of school-based expertise can also facilitate the development of “mental health literacy”—the skills and competencies that allow teachers and other staff to play a larger role in prevention, identification and intervention with children and youth distressed by mental health issues (Whitley, Smith and Vaillancourt 2013).

In their submissions to the blue ribbon panel, only 23 per cent of respondents indicated that they had a satisfactory level of support from a guidance counsellor. Alberta Education must develop a provincial standard for the level and quality of counselling services that students need and deserve.

// School counselors are well positioned to provide a range of support for students with mental health needs. **//**

—Auger (2013, 210)

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 23—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that there is adequate funding to effectively support

- students who require behaviour support,
- English-language learners,
- students who are gifted and talented,
- students who live in poverty,
- students who are new to Canada,
- students from refugee backgrounds and
- students who are suffering from trauma.

Classrooms are complex communities, and some students have exceptional needs. These include students who require behaviour support, English-language learners, students who are gifted and talented, students who live in poverty, students who are new to Canada, students from refugee backgrounds and students who are suffering from trauma. Respondents to the survey identified many of these exceptional needs as requiring much more support than is being provided.

In their submissions to the blue ribbon panel, only 19 per cent of teachers indicated that they had the supports and resources needed to create behaviour support plans, 3 per cent said they had time to create the plans, and 6 per cent said they had time to implement the plans. In addition, there were numerous comments about the detrimental effects of severe behaviour on the learning of the student, as well as classmates. “One way to improve the quality of education is

to ensure that all teachers of students identified as [needing behaviour support] possess the knowledge and skills required to address the myriad challenges associated with this difficult population of students” (Gable et al 2012, 501).



“The design is ‘ad hoc and make do.’ You can’t create inclusion and have budget cuts where facilities are closed or full, specialists are laid off or responsible for thousands of students.”

—*Survey participant*

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Another challenge mentioned frequently was supporting English-language learners in the context of very large, very complex classrooms. The number of students who do not speak English or French as a first language is growing dramatically in Alberta. These students may struggle in school and, if they come from a refugee background, may not have ever attended school before. There must be language support programs, teacher professional development, newcomer support and culturally inclusive curriculum. One superintendent remarked, “We’ve got an increase of English-language learners, and we’re required to do provincial benchmarking. A lot of teachers are not used to or haven’t seen those documents, and they’re expected to and required to do some of that to support them as they teach.”

Teachers are asking for support in working with English-language learners, as this is an area not often learned about during preservice education. Having access to resources, professional development and in-class support would give teachers the tools to support students.

Another group of students often overlooked, but often needing support, are gifted and talented learners. “Expecting gifted students to fend for themselves as the class repeats concepts that they have already mastered is just as unfair as forging ahead while some students are still trying to grasp a concept” (Stepanek 1999, 2). One survey participant remarked that it is a challenge to provide “sufficient one-on-one support for each of our inclusive students, in addition to supporting all other students and providing differentiated programming for gifted students in my subject area all at the same time.”

There are many other students with pressing needs that teachers are unable to meet sufficiently without funding for supports and resources. “When teachers have knowledge, classroom supports, leadership and support from their school administrators and the broader education system, an inclusive approach to quality education for all learners can take root in regular classrooms and schools” (L’Institut Roehrer Institute 2004, 9).

// Teachers are facing ever-increasing demands in trying to meet the needs of students in general education classrooms. The diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities, require teachers to keep abreast of the current research and literature, while struggling to find time to do so. **//**

—*Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010, 42)*

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 24—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Provide sufficient funding to ensure that each student has access to assistive technology to support his or her learning, including funding for related teacher professional development and adequate bandwidth, technical support and electrical systems.

The benefits of having technology tools at students' fingertips are well known, and many of the applications and assistive technologies, in particular, can begin to level the playing field. Learning Technologies: Information for Teachers, a website funded by Alberta Education, explains:

Inspiring Education supports a vision of success for every student in an inclusive education system. Achieving this vision requires focusing on the learner, and leveraging technology to support the creation and sharing of knowledge. In today's classrooms, a wide range of technologies are also creating new options for differentiated instruction and for the inclusion of students with disabilities.⁶

Alberta teachers agree and wish that they had access to such technologies. In their submissions to the blue ribbon panel, only 17 per cent of teachers indicated satisfaction with access to assistive technology, compared with 36 per cent in 2007. There were many comments in the submissions and the focus groups about the need for better access to technology for all students. There is also a need for professional



// Technology can be beneficial when it is wisely integrated with effective pedagogy. //

—Hargreaves and Braun (2012, 14)

development so that teachers understand what tools are available and how best to use them, as well as for support in schools to ensure that the technology is working consistently and that help is available when it does not. One teacher commented, “My school has no access to the technologies I need to meet the needs of my students.” While websites with PDF documents and videos describing how to use assistive technologies are helpful, without the technology itself or the time for teachers to learn how best to use it, these tools will continue to be underused in the system. In an early report during the Setting the Direction consultation process, it was noted, “People [participants in the Setting the Direction consultations] said that to remain ‘leading edge’ in the use of learning resources and technologies will require a major investment in training and professional development. They said the ‘right’

RESOURCES

resources will only be available if all learning team members—including parents—know how to use the technology used by or with the student” (Alberta Education 2009a, 14). In research conducted for the panel, only 18 per cent of teachers indicated that students had satisfactory access to digital resources and textbooks, and only 17 per cent indicated that they had consistent access for students who needed the support of technology.



“We need a provincewide, fully funded (and equally accessible to all students) library of educational supports, such as speech-to-text and text-to-speech software; mind-mapping software; all approved textbooks in digital form (and compatible with previously mentioned software); and other software, programs or interventions that schools currently have to research, subscribe to and pay for on an individual basis.”

—Survey participant

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 25—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Provide adequate supports and qualified health-care professionals for medically fragile students.

Teachers are not health-care professionals, yet both teachers and educational assistants are often asked to provide medical support to students with chronic medical conditions. These conditions are “life-long, and without adequate services [students’] problems can intensify” (Fewster et al 2007, 9). These students require medical intervention provided by health-care professionals. Such supports were touted in *Setting the Direction*, but schools have yet to see many actual supports for such students in the school. Community health-care professionals have an important role to play in providing the level of support these students deserve if we are to become a truly inclusive system (Taras and Brennan 2008).

// Teachers, paraprofessionals and other school personnel should not be the primary providers of healthcare services. School districts and state legislatures must ensure that adequate numbers of nurses and support personnel are available to provide health-related services to children who need them. //

—*American Federation of Teachers*
(2009, 6)



“Having medically challenging students in an inclusive classroom setting without staff who have proper training [is difficult]. Inclusion is very successful in my class for

most students, but the one child who is medically fragile takes up a lot of time and expertise (often taken away from other children).”

—*Survey participant*

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 26—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide appropriate, ongoing training of educational assistants who work with students with diverse learning needs, where assistants are required.

Educational assistants can provide valuable support for students with exceptional needs, but teachers are reporting that the assistance they receive has been in decline. In 2007, 71 per cent of teachers indicated satisfaction with the level of support received from educational assistants, but this dropped to 25 per cent in 2014. Only 33 per cent of respondents in 2014 felt that educational assistants had sufficient training to perform expected duties. In many cases, there is a need for more training for educational assistants as they work with students with complex needs. It is not enough to simply create practice standards for educational assistants. Many educational assistants have no formal training, so there must be a plan in each school jurisdiction for

systematic and sufficient training for assistants. Studies have shown that training customized to meeting the needs of individual students with whom educational assistants are working is important to their ability to do their job, as well as to employee retention (Ghere and York-Barr 2007). Teachers who participated in the research commissioned by the panel expressed a desire to have greater levels of support from well-trained personnel. There must be a certain number of well-trained educational assistants in classrooms; however, reducing class size and complexity is the most urgent priority, as we need to have the most highly trained people—certificated teachers—working with the most complex students.

// Particularly for students with mild disabilities, paraeducators are often untrained in validated instructional protocols or too inexperienced to implement instructional objectives with fidelity. **//**

—Winzer (2011, 58)



“Essentially, not only do we have to teach the students but a lot of time is spent teaching the aides too.”

—Survey participant

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 27—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that all school facilities are fully accessible and provide targeted funding to school jurisdictions with facilities not meeting this standard.

The accessibility of school facilities was one of the items responded to most positively in submissions to the blue ribbon panel: 57 per cent of respondents felt that washrooms, elevators, buildings and the like were accessible. During panel discussions, the issue of accessible facilities was raised. There are still many facilities that are not fully accessible, and there is a lack of facilities for students who need specialized care. Several survey participants remarked that proper bathroom facilities were not in place for students who needed toileting assistance. Others discussed the urgent need to have rooms available for students with sensory sensitivities.

Accessibility may be improved by more fully communicating about the programs school jurisdictions can access to make their facilities fully accessible for students, parents and community members. There is still work to do in creating appropriate spaces for all.

// Inclusion cannot be achieved . . . unless the necessary resources in staff, materials, and buildings are included in financial plans. **//**

—*Education International (2014)*

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



Teacher
Professional
Growth

Teacher knowledge, skills and attributes are enhanced through ongoing professional learning.

Guiding Questions

- How are the needs of the teacher, school, system and province being addressed through professional learning?
- How are current research, evidence and lessons learned informing professional growth planning and the design of professional learning opportunities?
- How are educators using self-assessment to inform their professional growth planning?
- What plans are in place to support ongoing career-long professional learning?
- How are curriculum, instruction and assessment integrated in the design of professional learning opportunities?
- How does participation in professional learning enhance professional practice?
- How are educators collaborating to support their professional growth?

Evidence

- Effective teacher supervision practices and policies are in place.
- Effective teacher mentorship and coaching practices are in place.
- Risk taking and innovation are evident among educators, instructional leaders and the school board.
- Promising practices are documented and shared.
- The Teaching Quality Standard is evident in professional growth plans and informs teacher supervision practices.
- Coordinated, collaborative and comprehensive professional learning plans are in place to support implementation. The self-identified professional learning needs and preferences of participants are being met.
- Teachers have access to and are participating in a variety of learning opportunities that address their needs and preferences. Teachers are reflecting on how their professional learning experiences are influencing their professional practice.
- Teachers are collaborating to support their professional growth.
- Teachers are engaging in ongoing career-long professional growth.
- Teacher professional growth is evidenced in classrooms, schools and jurisdictions.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 28—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide ongoing professional development during the school day to allow teachers to learn and share strategies to support inclusive practices.

Many teachers indicated that their hesitance regarding inclusion most often stemmed from feeling that they lacked the requisite professional knowledge, experience and support, rather than from a lack of support for inclusion itself. The research conducted supported the assumption that teachers need more specific professional development in this area. In 2007, 55 per cent of teachers were satisfied with the inservice they received related to working with students with special needs. By 2014, their level of satisfaction had dropped to 11 per cent. Many studies note that ongoing, thoughtfully planned professional development is key to the success of inclusion (Jenkins and Yoshimura 2010; Konza 2008; Lupart and Webber 2012; Male 2011; Subban and Sharma 2005). Glaze, Mattingley and Levin

(2012, 138) echo the importance of professional development:

In education, we often assume that implementation is primarily a matter of motivation. If we can just get people to *want* to do the right thing, good results will follow. The problem with this view is people may want to do something but not know *how* to do it. Will is one thing; skill is another.

This professional development should be part of a comprehensive plan, taking into account teachers' needs and the learning they need to do in order to support the students with whom they work every day. This could include in-class coaching, coteaching, team-teaching, courses, workshops and peer problem-solving teams.

.....

// Teachers are facing ever-increasing demands in trying to meet the needs of students in general education classrooms. The diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities, require teachers to keep abreast of the current research and literature, while struggling to find the time to do so. //

—Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010, 42)

“I need *time* to properly plan and find the resources I need to address the concerns for these learners. I need *time* to create assessments for these learners.”

—Survey participant



TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 29—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Recognize that teachers in their early years of practice may need additional or different professional development and supports as they transition through the induction phase of their career, and provide this professional development and related supports.

Teachers new to the profession expressed concern about their capacity to deal effectively with classes that are large and complex and about having sufficient strategies to work with children with exceptional needs, to create effective program plans and to provide specialized support (ATA 2013). Reducing the complexity of new teachers' assignments would help them focus on their learning and on the development of important foundational skills (ATA 2013; Ingersoll 2001; Wilson et al 2004). Providing professional development and mentorship tailored to the needs of teachers at the beginning of their careers would ensure that these teachers have the skills and confidence they need in order to work effectively with all students, including those with exceptional needs.



“As a new teacher, I find effectively modifying lessons, independent work and assessments to meet the inclusive needs of students, on a daily basis, to be quite timely and challenging.”

—Survey participant

// As calls for all classroom teachers to be better prepared for inclusive education become increasingly common . . . a consideration of the professional development needs of teacher educators cannot be overstated. **//**

—Florian (2012, 283)

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 30—ALBERTA EDUCATION AND SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Develop a provincial standard and provide funding so that schools have regular, adequate access to specialized district-based or regional teams, and school-based experts who provide specialized consultation, in-class support and support for planning effective programs.

In 2007, 67 per cent of Alberta teachers indicated that they had satisfactory access to specialized professional support in their school, such as a special education facilitator, learning team leader or consultant. That number dropped to 29 per cent in 2014. In addition, access to specialized professional supports (such as speech pathologists, psychologists or physiotherapists) dropped from 56 per cent to 16 per cent over the same period. Such supports were promised in the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education 2009b, 10): “Develop and support a seamless, Alberta-wide wraparound approach that provides timely access to co-ordinated supports to students, families and schools in the right place at the right time.” Having these

supports in place and ensuring timely access to them are critical to making inclusion work. Submissions to the panel affirmed that many of these supports are not yet in place:

- 16 per cent of respondents indicated that they had access to specialized professional support from outside the school;
- 29 per cent indicated that they had satisfactory levels of specialized professional support available within their schools;
- 15 per cent indicated that they had access to district-level inclusive education support personnel;
- 14 per cent indicated that they had satisfactory access to specialized teams;

// Responding to student needs means playing several different roles: teacher, social worker, nurse, surrogate parent. It is no wonder that some teachers have perceived the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms as an additional burden in their already overburdened lives. The situation is often made more difficult by educational cutbacks that frequently lead to larger class sizes. //

—Stanovich and Jordan (2004, 178–79)

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

- 11 per cent indicated that they had timely access to social workers;
- 19 per cent indicated that they had the supports and resources they needed to create behaviour support plans, 3 per cent indicated that they had time allocated to create the plans, and 6 per cent indicated that they had time to implement the plans; and
- 11 per cent indicated that they had the support and resources needed to plan effective transition strategies.

“Typically, the general education teacher has primary responsibility for delivering instruction and intervention to students, and the consultant is responsible for facilitating the teacher’s acquisition and implementation of evidence-based practice to address the problem at hand” (Musti-Rao, Hawkins and Tan 2011, 20). Research has shown that among the biggest stressors for teachers is the role overload they experience in trying to provide supports and services for students without having adequate

support from others in the system (Duxbury and Higgins 2013). Having supports and services available on a regular basis would ensure that students receive the help they need. Additionally, having teams available to support the creation of effective programs has been shown to increase teachers’ confidence in their skills and abilities in an inclusive setting, which also supports more positive views of inclusion (Stanovich and Jordan 2004; Winzer and Mazurek 2011). When issues arise, teachers need immediate support—it is not reasonable to think that pressing issues can wait for weeks or months when a child’s learning is at stake. While models of delivery will differ according to contextual variables—such as the grade level of schooling; school size; urban, rural or remote location; and demographics of the school population—it is clear that the effective provision of such services is of critical importance to supporting teachers in meeting the needs of their students. A provincial standard must be in place so that schools are assured of an adequate level of supports for teachers and students.

“I think our district vision is certainly one that is very embracing of inclusive education, and our teachers and principals have [embraced it] as well. . . . Recently, we have developed the concept of a multidisciplinary team that includes a behaviour specialist and a social worker. They are given a cohort of schools, and they are at the elbow support for both our teachers and providing strategies and help for classroom behaviours and learning challenges.”

—*Superintendent*



TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 31—POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Create preservice teacher education programs such that the expected outcome is that each graduate has a sound working knowledge of inclusion, with related practicum experience.

In a five-year study of teachers in their early years of practice, lack of preparation to support students with exceptional needs was cited as a frequent source of stress, particularly in creating IPPs and working with educational assistants (ATA 2013). During the blue ribbon panel research, one focus group participant remarked, “The type of coursework and the type of exposure and messages that preservice teachers have, the type of training and education that they receive regarding inclusive practices, can go a long way toward giving them the proper tools, and also the proper mindset, to be able to come into an educational environment.”

Studies have shown that a sense of having received inadequate training leads to teachers reporting “significant feelings of inadequacy” (Konza 2008, 43). In research conducted by the panel, satisfaction with teacher preparation was quite low. Only 8 per cent of teachers were satisfied with the preservice education they had received to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs.

// Those teachers who trained more recently are finding that pre-service courses were not enough to prepare them for the realities of teaching students with a wide range of abilities and behaviours. One-semester pre-service courses can certainly raise awareness and introduce prospective teachers to strategies that expand a teacher’s repertoire, but they rarely result in high levels of teacher confidence and expertise. //

—Konza (2008, 43)



“I am feeling a lack of education on my part in how to teach and plan for inclusive learning. I don’t feel that my university education prepared me to meet the diverse needs of the classroom.”

—Survey participant

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 32—POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Ensure that preservice teacher education programs are designed to allow undergraduate students to specialize in inclusive education.

Teachers with in-depth knowledge and background will always be important in the school system. Research has shown that teachers who feel confident about their level of expertise in inclusion also have a highly positive view of inclusion (Wilkins and Nietfeld 2004). Many Alberta institutions with preservice teacher education programs have cut programs that allow teachers to specialize in inclusion, especially at the undergraduate level, and these programs are critical to developing inclusive practices. One researcher observed that “the provision of high-quality pre- and in-service professional development opportunities should become a priority for policy makers” (Male 2011, 185).

“One of the things that I think is a complement to [a teacher education program] is the training for students who have that special ed focus. Those students are well prepared to come into that diverse classroom.”

—Focus group participant



// Parents, students and educators committed to educating all children in general education settings have a right to expect that teachers coming out of teacher preparation programs are prepared to celebrate and teach to the individual differences of a diverse student population. The reality, unfortunately, is that too many training programs have yet to communicate to their teachers-to-be that they can expect to educate all children (with and without identified disabilities) rather than identify and sort children into general education versus other tracks of education. **//**

—Villa, Thousand and Chappie (1996, 42)

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 33—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Create a provincial scholarship program to support coursework in master's and doctoral studies focusing on inclusive education.

Inclusion in Alberta is at a critical stage, and ongoing research is required in order to continue to understand the factors that support and hinder the implementation of inclusive education across the province. Providing funding to support academic programs and research at Alberta institutions with preservice teacher education programs in the field of inclusive education will not only build capacity at universities for research but also allow educators to develop the expertise necessary to work effectively in their schools and school jurisdictions. Those who wish to develop specialized expertise should have the opportunity either to enrol in a master's program or to access individual postsecondary courses to facilitate their professional development. As noted by Waitoller and Artiles (2013, 320), opportunities for professional development are “a pathway for policy implementation considering that new educational reforms demand teachers and administrators to learn new skills and content and develop new predispositions.” A program like this would require targeted and specific additional funding, but such funding would be an excellent investment in the system.

// Universities can conduct research on inclusive school and classroom practice, advocate for evidence-based practice and establish incentives for new researchers to place a focus on issues of inclusion in education. **//**

—*L'Institut Roeher Institute (2004, 18)*

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 34—ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Expand professional development and related supports for members in the area of inclusive education.

Continual professional development, which incorporates the principles of sound research and adult learning into professional practice, is a key factor in the change process for education and is an important part of the ATA's service to its members. "This belief is embedded in the 1935 *Teaching Profession Act*, which states in part, "The objects of the Association are to improve the teaching profession by organizing and supporting groups which tend to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers and by meetings, publications, research and other activities designed to maintain and improve the competence of teachers" (ATA 2011, 139). It is also imperative to include ongoing professional development as a cornerstone of any implementation plan (Glaze, Mattingley and Levin 2012). The ATA is a unique organization that offers supports through various program areas, and there is certainly room to enhance such services. The ATA offers face-to-face support to schools and school jurisdictions in the area of inclusive education practices through its workshop program. With the information gleaned from the panel research, new offerings should be developed by the ATA to support members in the field. One such workshop could assist schools in taking the time necessary to

// Classroom teachers are the key to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in general education because they are responsible for creating opportunities to learn and for removing barriers to learning and participation in their classrooms. //

—*Stanovich and Jordan*
(2004, 170)

develop a vision for inclusive education and create effective inclusive education implementation plans to support Recommendation 6. In addition, there may be opportunities to add other structures to ensure that work on inclusion continues and that it is responsive to the needs of members. It is also important to ensure that these professional development opportunities are communicated to members.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



“Inclusion has been introduced into the classroom, but this has occurred without systematic training. This means that not all teachers are on the same page about how to do their job, and many feel lost. The worst part is that it’s often impossible to tell if you’ve met the needs of the special needs student, or if you’ve truly done

all that you could do to support them. Most teachers are not specialists in autism, or any other disorder. Their experience is situational. Inclusion would work much better if teachers received more training and resources to actually make that inclusion happen.”

—*Survey participant*

TIME

.....



Time is provided to support implementation.

Guiding Questions

- How will current research about change be reflected in the implementation plan as it relates to the time required to effect change?
- What strategies are in place to ensure that each stakeholder group has the time they need to successfully implement and sustain the change (for example, formal and informal learning, reflective practice)?
- What is the overall implementation timeline and how often is the timeline revisited?
- What are the time requirements and timelines for specific tasks or events within the implementation plan?

Evidence

- Strategic short-, mid- and long-term implementation plans are in place to address the time requirements to successfully implement and sustain the change at provincial, regional and local school board levels (for example, time required for visioning, collaboration, communication, planning, professional learning, assessment and evaluation, reporting).
- School calendars, policies, collective agreements, timetables and budgets take into account the individual and collaborative time required to implement and sustain the change.
- Stakeholders have the time they need for formal and informal learning to support implementation.
- Stakeholders employ various strategies to make efficient use of time (for example, job-embedded professional learning, distributed learning).

TIME

RECOMMENDATION 35—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide time, during the school day, for teachers to meet in collaborative teams to develop strategies focused on supporting student learning, particularly the learning of students with exceptional needs.

Teachers in Alberta, as well as teachers in other provinces, are supportive of the broad notions of inclusion (Horne and Timmons 2009), and allowing time to collaborate and problem solve would provide much-needed support. In the submissions to the panel, as well as in focus groups, not having adequate time to plan and implement effective programs for students was mentioned many times. In the research conducted, only 5 per cent of teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the time they had during the school day to collaborate with other teachers in order to meet the diverse learning needs of students. The literature on the importance of providing time to collaborate and problem solve is substantial (Angelides, Savva and Hajisoteriou 2012; Horne and Timmons 2009; Jenkins and Yoshimura 2010; Katz and Epp 2013; Laluvein 2010; Waitoller and Artiles 2013). Teachers' time and collaboration with

their colleagues, other professionals, students and parents are beneficial for the provision of equal learning opportunities (Angelides, Savva and Hajisoteriou 2012, 75). Providing time for teachers to work together to find strategies and approaches that work for their students will allow for the kind of synergy necessary to support inclusion. Also, when the need for more teachers in an inclusive system is addressed, this may provide more flexibility and allow time for teachers to collaborate effectively during the school day.



“The collaboration that happens when teachers have conversations around the students that they teach with the special education teacher in [response] to real teaching and learning situations—this is authentic professional development and is lasting.”

—Survey participant

// Teachers reported that being in control of their own learning, having a critical friend, and open collaboration with peers enhanced their ability to solve the identified school issues. //

—Waitoller and Artiles (2013, 335)


TIME

RECOMMENDATION 36—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Use streamlined individualized program plan (IPP) templates, and provide release time and support for teachers to create effective program plans and other required documents.

Dealing with the myriad of provincial and jurisdictional paperwork related to students with exceptional needs is very time-consuming. Many school jurisdictions have invested time and money in software that is cumbersome and that requires information duplicated elsewhere in student records. The ministry has developed streamlined IPP templates, based on feedback from teachers, and these documents are more succinct and focused on specific strategies that support students in their daily work. Jurisdictions may be reluctant to make this change, but teachers indicate that the IPP documents need to be more practical, and they are also asking for more support and time to develop thoughtful documents.

In 2007, 50 per cent of teachers indicated that they were satisfied with inservice they had received specifically related to developing IPPs; that dropped to 15 per cent in 2014. In addition, only 6 per cent of teachers in 2014 were satisfied with the amount of time they had to develop these plans. One participant commented, “IPPs are *too* long and not a realistic working document.” Teachers recognize that having effective program plans is important in supporting students with exceptional needs, but they need time and support



“Trying to program for this many diversities takes an incredible amount of time in addition to the increasing paperwork that the government/district is expecting to be completed. Each year, the paperwork is increasing.”

—Survey participant

to create them and to review them regularly, with the support of other teachers or professionals.

Renewed focus is required in order to offer more streamlined tools and to provide professional development, time and other supports so that teachers can create useful plans that will guide student programs. There is also a need to involve other agencies, ministries and stakeholders in future changes. Studies have shown that teachers who have more professional development in adapting student programs and creating effective plans are more confident and

TIME

successful when teaching in inclusive settings (Kosko and Wilkins 2009). In the survey conducted for the blue ribbon panel, the level of satisfaction with the amount of time provided to develop IPPs dropped from 32 per cent in 2007 to 6 per cent in 2014, indicating that teachers are given very little time to develop these important planning documents. Related plans (such as behaviour support plans and Success in School plans) also require professional development, time and support.

Effective professional development in special education is inextricably woven into a student-centered, collaborative effort to meet the learning needs of struggling students in academically diverse classrooms.

—Hardman (2012, 19)



“We have a very clear model of how we, as a system, are going to attend to all learners. I think as much as that has been a barrier, it’s also a success. We are seeing people who have embraced kids and are working with kids in ways that are absolutely fantastic. The capacity building that we are seeing in the field with our teachers to be able to meet those needs is also huge. We have a really good coaching model where we

try not to have teachers feel [as though they are] on their own, whether it be with the learning agenda, the tech support or the inclusive element. We have three coaches in each school, and when a teacher needs either coplanning or team-teaching or resourcing, they have a team of people that are leaders in each of those areas that they can go to right at their school level, and that has also been a success.”
—Superintendent

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Parents, school councils, students, community members, businesses, industry and postsecondary institutions are partners in supporting implementation.

Guiding Questions

- How are stakeholders identified or selected to support implementation?
- How are stakeholders engaged in supporting implementation?
- How are the diverse needs of stakeholders addressed to ensure community engagement?

Evidence

- Strategic plans are in place to engage community stakeholders in supporting implementation (for example, stakeholders are involved in curriculum development, are consulted on the development of provincial frameworks and regional/local initiatives, participate in knowledge and skill development activities, and assist in implementation).
- Stakeholders communicate, collaborate, and establish partnerships and networks to support implementation.
- A record of community engagement (for example, participation, representation and results) is collected.
- Case studies or vignettes describe how community involvement positively impacted implementation.

Source: Alberta's Education Partners (2010, 9)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION 37—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Establish a provincewide telephone link and a web-based annotated list of services by geographical region to provide information to teachers, parents and students who need immediate access to specialized services and advice.

Finding existing supports and services can be challenging for teachers, parents and students. At times, there are existing supports that would be helpful, but there is no central place that lists a directory of supports, such as those for mental health, for newcomers to Canada or for counselling services. One phone number and web service would provide a one-stop place for people to find what they need. Creating a comprehensive listing of such services would also help to identify gaps or overlapping initiatives. Such a system was proposed by Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003, 75), and it was compared to the Health Link Alberta service, one number that Albertans can call for health-related advice. Effort would be required to ensure that the information is reliable and regularly reviewed for accuracy. In some cases, such as a mental health crisis, having access to this information could mean life or death.

// Access to an immediate source of trusted advice and support would be invaluable and help allay a great deal of frustration experienced by teachers, parents and students. **//**

—*Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003, 75)*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION 38—ALBERTA EDUCATION, SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS, ADMINISTRATORS, SCHOOL COUNCILS AND TEACHERS

Provide opportunities for parents to learn about inclusive education and to engage in dialogue.

Parents are key partners in education and, other than brief opportunities at the consultation events for Setting the Direction, they have often

// The active involvement of parents in the decisions made about their children with special needs is, and always has been, a high priority for effective service delivery. //

—*Fewster et al (2007, 9)*

been left out of these important conversations and policy changes. For example, many parents do not know that the funding has changed so that there are no longer specific dollar amounts attached to individual students. Parents often have concerns about the lack of support services available for their children (de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert 2010; Winzer and Mazurek 2011). Broad engagement was seen as an important step in the consultation process of Setting the Direction, but there has been little direct support for parents since then. In addition, some parents may be reluctant or unable to become involved for a variety of reasons, including work schedules and language barriers. One example of an initiative to involve

parents would be to develop multilanguage presentations for parents that would be suitable for a variety of settings, such as self-study, school councils and the like. Parents can also provide meaningful input through the advisory committees mentioned in Recommendations 1, 5 and 6. Providing thoughtful opportunities for parents to be involved and informed requires concerted, ongoing effort, and this is particularly important for parents in an inclusive system.



“I think the success really comes when parents and teachers have an understanding of why the philosophical shift, why the decisions are being made as far as what’s happening, because when they’re informed and they have the ability to ask questions and have an understanding, then they’re on board rather than resisting the change.”

—*Superintendent*



.....

It is not too late to make a difference and create systems and spaces where support for inclusion is part of how we live in schools and in our province.

.....





Conclusion

The blue ribbon panel's discussions, research and analysis of data revealed the many gaps in the implementation of inclusive education in Alberta. There are pockets of success, but there certainly is not evidence of widespread success or comprehensive implementation. It is not too late to make a difference and create systems and spaces where support for inclusion is part of how we live in schools and in our province. We can still create access to quality education and environments where all students are able to learn. It is the teacher's responsibility to help students learn, and everyone and everything in the system should support the teacher in ensuring that this takes place. Indeed, implementing the recommendations in this report would position Alberta as a world leader in inclusive education. Creating the necessary environment will take significant and immediate commitment and investment to support implementation. Examination of the data revealed the critical need for comprehensive implementation plans at the provincial, jurisdiction and school levels—the need for shared vision, leadership, research and evidence, resources, teacher professional growth, time, and community engagement. *Inspiring Education* (Alberta Education 2010a, 21) envisions that “learners’ differing needs, cultures and abilities are respected and valued within inclusive learning environments.” This is an ideal to which we all aspire. It is time to move from rhetoric to action by immediately addressing the recommendations put forth by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools. Alberta students deserve nothing less.



Appendix A

Terms of Reference for the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools

MEMBERSHIP

- Chair
- One representative from a university
- Four field members:
 - one school administrator
 - one central office administrator
 - one special education teacher
 - one classroom teacher
- One member of Provincial Executive Council
- One member of executive staff (secretary)

DUTIES

1. To review data on the current state of inclusion in Alberta schools, specifically the implementation of the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education 2009b) and the *Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response* (Alberta Education 2010b)
2. To recommend action to ensure that inclusion occurs in contexts that are consistent with Association policies on the education of students with special needs
3. To report findings to Provincial Executive Council at its meeting of May 8 and 9, 2014



Appendix B

Listing of Recommendations

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 1—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Establish a provincial stakeholder advisory committee to education partners to develop a provincial implementation plan, guide provincial implementation activities and meet regularly to reflect on evidence gathered about implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 2—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Create a ministry team that will work with stakeholders at all levels to build understanding and support for the vision of inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATION 3—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Create clear, multilevel, consistent and transparent communication regarding inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATION 4—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Work directly with stakeholders to build an understanding of inclusion and an understanding that an inclusive classroom setting may not be in the educational best interests of every student at all times.

RECOMMENDATION 5—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Establish a school-jurisdiction-level inclusive education advisory committee, including teachers, administrators and other stakeholders, to develop a jurisdiction implementation plan, guide implementation activities and reflect on evidence gathered about implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 6—SCHOOLS

Establish a school-based inclusive education advisory committee, including teachers, administrators and other stakeholders, to develop a school implementation plan, guide implementation activities and reflect on evidence gathered about implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 7—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide a safe, professional environment where teachers and administrators can express their experiences as inclusion is implemented.

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 8—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Provide immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding for school jurisdictions' implementation plans in cycles of five to seven years to provide the staff, resources and supports necessary to build and sustain capacity in the system.

RECOMMENDATION 9—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Demonstrate commitment to and leadership for inclusive education by providing ministry staff, knowledgeable in inclusive education, who are able to provide direct, one-on-one, ongoing support to each school jurisdiction in creating and realizing its implementation plan.

RECOMMENDATION 10—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Clearly delineate stakeholders' leadership roles and responsibilities through clear policy directives and regulations.

RECOMMENDATION 11—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Consistent with the vision of *Setting the Direction*, eliminate the current coding system at the ministry and jurisdiction levels.

RECOMMENDATION 12—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that learner assessments required by Alberta Education create multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning.

RECOMMENDATION 13—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that learner assessments required by Alberta Education do not create barriers of access to postsecondary education or entrance to the workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 14—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Require that all curriculum documents that are developed from this point forward clearly address the full range of learners in the school system, and require that related resources developed address the wide range of student learning needs in classrooms.

RECOMMENDATION 15—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Monitor inclusive education funding provided to school jurisdictions and determine the actual costs of supporting all students effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 16—ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Host a symposium on inclusive education to highlight the report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools and to collaborate with stakeholder groups.

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

RECOMMENDATION 17—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA AND POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

With immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding from the Government of Alberta, establish partnerships with institutions with preservice teacher education programs to conduct regular research in Alberta classrooms, determine the effectiveness of inclusion and advance this field of study.

RECOMMENDATION 18—ALBERTA EDUCATION

As part of the immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding to support implementation outlined in Recommendation 8, establish an inclusive schools network, including an annual face-to-face conference, to share action research and promising practices.

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDATION 19—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Establish and implement structures to ensure that provincewide guidelines for average class sizes across school jurisdictions are achieved and that classroom complexity is weighted in these guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION 20—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Expand access to early intervention programs, including full-day, play-based kindergarten programs with certificated teachers, to ensure that children with diverse learning needs have the supports and programs they require before they come to school and into the early grades.

RECOMMENDATION 21—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Provide Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) boards with direct funding, not just enhanced funding, to facilitate decision making at the RCSD leadership and governance tables.

RECOMMENDATION 22—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Develop a provincial standard and provide targeted funding to school jurisdictions to ensure that each school has adequate access to a trained school counsellor, preferably a certificated teacher.

RECOMMENDATION 23—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that there is adequate funding to effectively support

- students who require behaviour support,
- English-language learners,
- students who are gifted and talented,
- students who live in poverty,
- students who are new to Canada,
- students from refugee backgrounds and
- students who are suffering from trauma.

RECOMMENDATION 24—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Provide sufficient funding to ensure that each student has access to assistive technology to support his or her learning, including funding for related teacher professional development and adequate bandwidth, technical support and electrical systems.

RECOMMENDATION 25—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Provide adequate supports and qualified health-care professionals for medically fragile students.

RECOMMENDATION 26—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide appropriate, ongoing training of educational assistants who work with students with diverse learning needs, where assistants are required.

RECOMMENDATION 27—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Ensure that all school facilities are fully accessible and provide targeted funding to school jurisdictions with facilities not meeting this standard.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 28—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide ongoing professional development during the school day to allow teachers to learn and share strategies to support inclusive practices.

RECOMMENDATION 29—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Recognize that teachers in their early years of practice may need additional or different professional development and supports as they transition through the induction phase of their career, and provide this professional development and related supports.

RECOMMENDATION 30—ALBERTA EDUCATION AND SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Develop a provincial standard and provide funding so that schools have regular, adequate access to specialized district-based or regional teams, and school-based experts who provide specialized consultation, in-class support and support for planning effective programs.

RECOMMENDATION 31—POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Create preservice teacher education programs such that the expected outcome is that each graduate has a sound working knowledge of inclusion, with related practicum experience.

RECOMMENDATION 32—POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Ensure that preservice teacher education programs are designed to allow undergraduate students to specialize in inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATION 33—ALBERTA EDUCATION

Create a provincial scholarship program to support coursework in master's and doctoral studies focusing on inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATION 34—ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Expand professional development and related supports for members in the area of inclusive education.

TIME

RECOMMENDATION 35—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Provide time, during the school day, for teachers to meet in collaborative teams to develop strategies focused on supporting student learning, particularly the learning of students with exceptional needs.

RECOMMENDATION 36—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Use streamlined individualized program plan (IPP) templates, and provide release time and support for teachers to create effective program plans and other required documents.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION 37—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Establish a provincewide telephone link and a web-based annotated list of services by geographical region to provide information to teachers, parents and students who need immediate access to specialized services and advice.

RECOMMENDATION 38—ALBERTA EDUCATION, SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS, ADMINISTRATORS, SCHOOL COUNCILS AND TEACHERS

Provide opportunities for parents to learn about inclusive education and to engage in dialogue.



Appendix C

More on the Evolution of Inclusive Education in Alberta

The story of inclusion is a work in progress whose conclusion has yet to be written. According to Andrews and Lupart (2000, 28), “The Canadian movement toward individualized education and the least restrictive environment for all students has followed a pattern of progressive inclusion similar to that of the United States . . . and, to a lesser extent, Europe.”

Reynolds (1989) suggests that this pattern has been characterized by four significant strands: (1) from distal to proximal arrangements, (2) from separation to integration, (3) from selection/rejection decisions to placement decisions and (4) from “two box” arrangements to a continuum. He further defines five periods in the history of progressive inclusion: (1) neglect, (2) custodial care, (3) segregated education, (4) mainstreaming and (5) inclusive education (Reynolds 1991).

Andrews and Lupart (2000, 29–38) further divide the history of progressive inclusion in Canada into seven periods: (1) exclusion in the country’s early history, (2) institutionalization in the 1800s, (3) segregation from 1900 to 1950, (4) categorization in the 1950s and 1960s, (5) integration in the 1970s, (6) mainstreaming in the 1980s and (7) inclusion in the 1990s and presumably beyond. The periods also apply to the history of progressive inclusion in Alberta, although, given the province’s relative youthfulness, they do not necessarily correspond to the same decades.

From approximately 1870, when public education is said to have begun in Alberta, through the First World War, “the education of exceptional children was considered a responsibility of the affected family” (ATA 2002, 16). In 1923, the Alberta government established the Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives, in Red Deer. In 1977, the institution was renamed Michener Centre:

The Provincial Training School (PTS) was conceived as a residential school, aiming to enable the “academic, vocational and personal development of retarded children and young adults.” It allowed developmentally disabled children to live apart from psychiatrically diagnosed children, and provided the parents of these children respite of the daily struggles of raising children with special needs. Before the opening of the PTS, Alberta’s mentally disabled children that were not living with their families were usually grouped with psychiatric patients in care facilities as far away as Brandon, Manitoba.⁷

In 1947, “educators . . . started addressing the needs of exceptional students” (ATA 2002, 39); in 1957, the Alberta School for the Deaf was established, in Edmonton (ATA 2002, 42); and in 1959, the Royal Commission on Education in Alberta (the Cameron Commission) released its report.

In a special issue of the *ATA Magazine* summarizing the commission’s report, Stanley Clarke (1960, 92–93), then general secretary of the ATA, described some of the institutional and segregated arrangements for special education that were available in the 1950s:

It is estimated that two percent of the school population or 5,000 students are in need of programs for mentally retarded children offered in special classes, but only 500 are enrolled. There are waiting lists for the Provincial Training School and for schools operated by councils for retarded children. The latter are handicapped for space, training facilities, and finances and are unable to offer the placement and follow-up services provided by the Provincial Training School. The School for the Deaf is commended by the Commission, as are the provisions for educating the blind at centres outside of Alberta. The two Cerebral Palsy Clinics are doing good work but their services also require expansion. The Bowden Provincial Institute and the Alberta Institution for Girls at Belmont both use correspondence courses in the education of older offenders, and at Bowden regular classroom instruction is provided for juvenile offenders. Difficulties include inadequate libraries, lack of teachers prepared for and suited to this specialized job, and lack of adequate psychiatric and guidance services. Throughout all the aspects of special education mentioned above, the Commission recognizes the good work currently being done and the real difficulty in procuring teachers with the proper training.

The Cameron Commission recommended that the Alberta government “administer and finance the education of the handicapped, that the Department of Education arrange services for handicapped children in sparsely populated areas, and that a representative committee be established to study education of the handicapped along broad lines and recommend a suitable program for introduction in Alberta” (Clarke 1960, 93). The commission also made recommendations with respect to gifted children, who, along with “handicapped children,” were subsumed under the category of “exceptional children.”

While public policy in the 1960s may have been founded on the premise that “everyone should have access to schooling” (ATA 2002, 50), not everyone did. Indeed, parent advocacy took root in Alberta toward the end of that decade. As Clintberg (2010, 12) notes,

Late in the 1960s, parents became much more vocal in agitating for services and education for these students and their voices were heard by the then-opposition PC MLAs. Equal educational opportunity was an objective for students who were seen as “normal”; those who were not were placed in segregated programs, either in institutions or in special schools in the school district in which they lived. Students who were segregated in the “other” category had mental, vision or hearing disabilities, and school districts saw little or no obligation to educate them.

The situation continued into the 1970s:

As the decade progressed, it became increasingly apparent that some Albertans had not shared in the benefits of public education. In the 1970s, school boards were responsible for providing services to such exceptional students as they could. Because school boards were not legally required to include special needs students in regular classrooms, those students were often assigned to separate classrooms. A serious problem in providing services for special needs students was the lack of specialist teachers capable of diagnosing and addressing their learning needs.

Given these circumstances, some parents turned to private schools as a means of educating their handicapped offspring. Others became intensely involved in the

education of their children and resorted to political lobbying and legal action to secure the benefits of public education. In 1978, the Supreme Court of Alberta dealt with the *Carriere* case, which prepared the way for the mandatory practice of mainstreaming special needs students in classrooms, a practice that came to prevail in the 1980s. (ATA 2002, 56)

In 1972, the Commission on Educational Planning (the Worth Commission) released its report, which asked Albertans to choose between two potential futures: a “person-centered society” and a “second-phase industrial society.” The commission’s prescient prescription for special education is worth quoting at length:

At least four steps ought to be taken simultaneously to launch a swift attack upon the most evident problems, and to establish guidelines for long-term solutions.

One is to accept and act upon the view that it is the duty of society to provide educational services for every individual child according to his needs, abilities or disabilities. Acceptance of this precept implies our assent to a substantial upgrading in financial support for the schooling of the handicapped. The resulting improvement in levels of service would eventually lead to the incorporation of most of the programs now offered by community agencies and interest groups into our basic education system. In the short run, however, rapid improvement in services could be achieved by building upon the knowledge and resources of those presently involved. Thus, for a brief period—perhaps five years—the adoption of variable sponsorship with vastly increased public support for organizations now assisting the handicapped seems both desirable and necessary.

A second step is to move toward more comprehensive solutions of the issues in the education of exceptional children and youth, within the framework outlined in Figure 5 [in the original report]. Implicit in this framework are two major objectives. One is to provide in-school service for as many exceptional learners as possible. The other is to increasingly meet their needs in relatively normal or conventional learning situations.

A third step is to implement, on an accelerated basis, some of the existing proposals for meeting demonstrable needs. These would include: provision of facilities for the over 500 mentally-handicapped children on the waiting list of the Alberta School Hospital in Red Deer; a rehabilitation centre for the physically handicapped; residence-activity units for dependent handicapped children and young adults; increasing the number of travelling clinics and rehabilitation teams to provide diagnostic and treatment services throughout rural Alberta for those suffering from primary learning, behavioral, social, sensory, speech and physical disorders; and extending the availability of learning materials geared to the unique requirements of the exceptional child.

A fourth step is to establish a province-wide network of services as depicted in Figure 6 [in the original report]. This network would link home, community, regional and provincial efforts on a complementary and systematic basis. Formation of a provincial network might be undertaken by an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary task force under the aegis of the Department of Education. The task force would need to give particular attention to the development of diagnostic and treatment services in the regional learning centres previously proposed, and to their relationship with itinerant and local provisions. Another significant aspect of their work would be to integrate in the network the more sophisticated resources to be found in research, development and training facilities in various hospitals, universities and special purpose institutions throughout the province. (Commission on Educational Planning 1972, 78–79)

In 1977, Alberta Education released a discussion paper on the goals for basic education, which were then before the legislature. Known as the Harder Report, the discussion paper “represented a turning away from the humanistic viewpoints expressed just a few years earlier in the *Worth Report* and a return to a more traditional approach to education” (ATA 2002, 55). Accordingly, the discussion paper gives short shrift to the education of students with special needs, suggesting only that “students not capable of achieving the set [curriculum] standards would be given additional time or routed to alternate programs where the objectives would be less rigorous” (Alberta Education 1977, 9) and that special classes would “be set up for those that learn more slowly” (p 41).

In 1982, Canada repatriated its Constitution; in 1984, the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding (the Ghitter Committee) released its report; and in 1985, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force. With that,

people in Alberta, as elsewhere in Canada, became more conscious of their legal rights as citizens. As a result, they began demanding that schools become more tolerant and inclusive, particularly with reference to the provision of minority-language rights and equality rights. . . .

The equality provisions contained in section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms gave additional impetus during the 1980s to the mainstreaming of special needs students in Alberta classrooms. A broad range of handicapped children who had previously received little education or had been educated in private schools was now integrated into the public education system. (ATA 2002, 62)

In 1988, a new *School Act* came into force. Section 3 (now section 8) of the act states that “every individual . . . is entitled to have access . . . to an education program.”⁸ The act also “sets out entitlement to special education programmes, assessment procedures, resourcing, powers and responsibilities of school authorities, and parental rights” (UNESCO 1995, 66). In contrast, the previous *School Act* allowed school boards to

temporarily excuse from attendance in a regular classroom any pupil whose special educational needs in the opinion of an inspector or superintendent are of such a nature that regular classroom experience is not productive or is detrimental to the pupil or to the school, until the board with the approval of the parent can arrange the needed special education through attendance in a special class or by entering the child in a special school or in any other suitable manner.⁹

In 1989, then minister of education Jim Dinning announced that Alberta Education would review a number of aspects of special education in cooperation with stakeholders. A discussion paper, which resulted from the first phase of the review, was released in 1990. In 1991, Alberta Education released an action plan, based on responses to the discussion paper and the findings of the working committees and advisory committee established to conduct the review. The action plan made 40 recommendations in the areas of coordination and delivery of services for

children with special needs, funding for services to special needs children, and the assessment of outcomes and development of performance standards for exceptional students. In his prefatory letter, Dinning stated, "It's time to look beyond our current ways of doing things and to find new ways of supporting and delivering our extensive network of social, medical and educational programs and services. We need to better organize the support provided by government and other associations and organizations" (Alberta Education 1991a).

A Minister's Forum on Special Education, convened in 1991 following the release of the action plan, provided participants with an opportunity to discuss the action plan, finalize recommendations and consider implementation strategies. In his closing remarks, Dinning identified three clear messages emanating from the forum: "First, the vehicle for integration must be through informed choice by students and parents. Second, students and parents must be involved as meaningful partners in the process of integration. Finally, we must provide support for the process of integration to all involved" (Alberta Education 1991b, 28). Reflecting on a speaker's observations about coercive integration, Dinning "indicated that Alberta Education would build standards and guidelines with primary focus being what is best for children" (p 28).

In 1993, Alberta Education developed a policy on the educational placement of students with special needs. Policy 1.6.1, which remains in effect today, states, "Educating students with exceptional needs in regular classrooms in neighbourhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with students, parents/guardians and school staff"¹⁰ *Special Education Funding: A Handbook of Procedures and Definitions, 1996-97* (Alberta Education 1996) and a *Guide to Education for Students with Special Needs* (Alberta Education 1997) followed in the wake of the policy.

The underfunding of public education in the 1990s "had left schools with mandates but inadequate resources to carry them out" (ATA 2002, 76), including resources dedicated to special education. Following teachers' 2002 labour action, itself the result of underfunding, then minister of learning Lyle Oberg established Alberta's Commission on Learning to conduct a comprehensive review of the province's education system. In its report, released in 2003, the commission made eight

recommendations specific to the education of students with special needs in such areas as supports, teacher preparation and professional development, early assessment and intervention, and funding. In recommending the establishment of provincewide guidelines on average class sizes across school jurisdictions, the commission also cautioned that “generally, classes with special needs students, students whose first language is not English, and vulnerable and at-risk students should be smaller than the suggested guidelines” (p 8). While the government expressed support for all the recommendations (Government of Alberta 2003), it is debatable whether they have been implemented.

In 2008, just five years later, then minister of education Dave Hancock announced a review of special education involving broad public consultations. Led by a steering committee and supported by a working group with stakeholder representation, *Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta* resulted in a new framework for special education. The framework, which envisions “one inclusive education system where each student is successful” (Alberta Education 2009b, 5), makes 10 programming recommendations in the priority areas of curriculum, capacity and collaboration. Just as a minister’s forum had followed the special education review in 1991, so a *Setting the Direction Minister’s Forum* followed this review in 2009 and, again, the forum allowed its approximately 1,000 participants to provide input on the framework. In 2010, the government announced that it would begin to implement its response to the recommendations in three phases: common understanding, capacity building and system redesign (Government of Alberta 2010).

In many ways, the history of progressive inclusion in Alberta is a history of the tension between equity and excellence, between the choices posed by the Worth Commission (a “person-centered society” or a “second-phase industrial society”), between “humanistic ideals, epitomized by individual self-actualization . . . and continued industrial development, focused on an abundance of goods and services” (ATA 2002, 53). As Andrews and Lupart (2000, 43–44) explain:

A dual system of education has gradually evolved in which students with special learning needs are perceived to be the responsibility of special education teachers, and the remaining students the responsibility of regular education.

Consequently, even into the 1990s, the themes of general education reforms were “school choice, school–business partnerships, competition among students and teachers, national standards and curricula, and concurrent moves to centralize and devolve decision-making power.” . . . In contrast, special education initiatives asked for increased and more authentic inclusion of *all* students in regular community schools and classrooms. Clearly, the movements were on a collision course. The general education system was seeking “excellence” and special education was seeking “equity.” . . . Until recently, these concepts were considered incompatible. Contemporary school transformation leaders in special education . . . and regular education . . . are beginning to see that achieving simultaneous excellence and equity in Canadian schools is the means for achieving authentic inclusion.



Notes

1. <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/connection/archive/january-2011/other/setting.aspx> (accessed April 17, 2014)
2. *School Act, 1988*, c S-3.1
3. <http://education.alberta.ca/media/248692/1.6.1.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2014; no longer available)
4. www.ldac-acta.ca/learn-more/research/ldac-research (accessed March 25, 2014)
5. www.programs.alberta.ca/Living/CommonQuestion.aspx?N=770&id=13236 (accessed April 1, 2014)
6. www.learningtechnologiesab.com (accessed April 7, 2014)
7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provincial_Training_School (accessed January 27, 2014)
8. *School Act, 1988*, c S-3.1
9. *School Act, 1988*, c S-3.1
10. <http://education.alberta.ca/media/248692/1.6.1.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2014; no longer available)



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