

Companion document to the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools*



Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools: *Getting It Right*



The Alberta Teachers' Association

www.teachers.ab.ca



Getting It Right

This document is an excerpt from the
*Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on
Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools.*

To view the full report, please
visit www.teachers.ab.ca.





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 listed below have not been addressed sufficiently:

- (1) **Shared vision**
- (2) **Leadership**
- (3) **Research and evidence**
- (4) **Resources**
- (5) **Teacher professional growth**
- (6) **Time**
- (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.



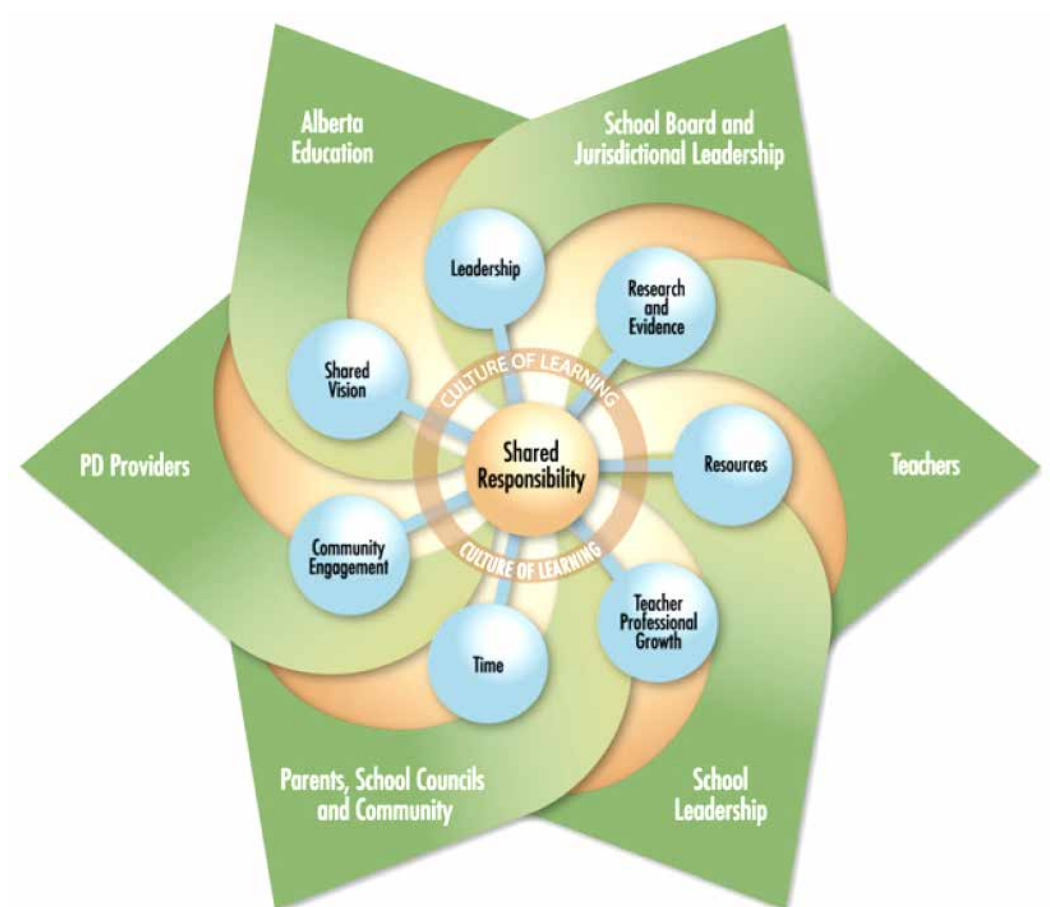
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Alberta has a choice—to accept inadequate implementation or to become a world leader in research and successful inclusion practices.

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Essential Conditions to Support Implementation



Source: Alberta's Education Partners (2010)



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Coming up with new ideas and designing new programs is exciting work, but the challenge is how to implement these programs effectively.

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Essential Condition 1

SHARED VISION



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

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.

// A goal without a plan is just a wish. //

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

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.

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 3—ALBERTA EDUCATION

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

// 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. //

—Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley

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.

// There 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. //

—Mara Sapon-Shevin

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.

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.



// 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. //

—Margaret Wheatley

SHARED VISION

RECOMMENDATION 7—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

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

// Inclusion is not a favor school systems do for students whom they perceive as 'disabled,' but a gift to our common humanity—a way of reconceptualizing our schools and our society. **//**

—Mara Sapon-Shevin

Essential Condition 2

LEADERSHIP



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

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.

// 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. **//**

—Jan Valle and David Connor

LEADERSHIP

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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.

// 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. **//**

—Wendy Togneri and Stephen Anderson

RECOMMENDATION 10—ALBERTA EDUCATION

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

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 11—ALBERTA EDUCATION

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

// 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. //

—Chris Gilham and John Williamson

RECOMMENDATION 12—ALBERTA EDUCATION

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

// 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. //

—Andy Hargreaves and Henry Braun



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.

// 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. //

—Paula Stanovich and Anne Jordan

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. //

—Anastasia Vlachou

LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 15—ALBERTA EDUCATION

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

// 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. //

—Chris Gilham and John Williamson

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.



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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.

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Essential Condition 3

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE



*Current research, evidence and lessons learned
inform implementation decisions.*

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.

// 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. **//**

—Andy Hargreaves, Robert Crocker, Brent Davis, Lori McEwen, Pasi Sahlberg, Dennis Shirley and Dennis Sumara with Maureen Hughes



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// 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. //

—Penny Milton

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Essential Condition 4

RESOURCES



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

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.

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

—Susan Neuman

RESOURCES

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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.

// 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. //

—Paula Stanovich and Anne Jordan

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

—Richard Auger

RESOURCES

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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.

// 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. //

—Amelia Jenkins and Jodi Yoshimura

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.

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

—Andy Hargreaves and Henry Braun

RESOURCES

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RECOMMENDATION 25—GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

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

// 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

RECOMMENDATION 26—SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

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

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

—Margret Winzer

RESOURCES

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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.

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

—*Education International*



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// 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. //

—Amelia Jenkins and Jodi Yoshimura

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Essential Condition 5

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



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

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.

// 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. **//**

—Lani Florian

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.

// 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. //

—Paula Stanovich and Anne Jordan

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.

// 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. //

—Deslea Konza

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 32—POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

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

// 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. //

—Richard Villa, Jacqueline Thousand and James Chappie

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.



// 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*

RECOMMENDATION 34—ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

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

// 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. //

—*Paula Stanovich and Anne Jordan*

Essential Condition 6

TIME



Time is provided to support implementation.

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 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. //

—Federico Waitoller and Alfredo Artiles

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.

// 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. //

—Elizabeth Hardman



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// 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*

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Essential Condition 7

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



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

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.

// 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. **//**

—Saima Fewster, Janice Neden, Marilyn Miller and
Charlie Naylor

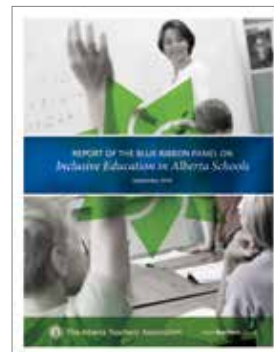




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