

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

December 13, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Executive Director

RESOURCE

STAFF: Danette Andersen, Deborah Brandell, Angelique Case, Vicki Cooke, Jane Farrell, David Hursin, Raylene Finlayson, Jody Lundell, Wendy McKenzie, Judy Miller, Barb Milne, Elaine Piercy, David Piercy, Pat Sachse-Brown, Kevin Stephenson, Sandra Stoddard

INFORMATION

Background

In 2001, a collaborative initiative between the district and community stakeholders was established in support of provincial and district policy related to inclusive placements for students in their community school. This report provides an update of actions that have been taken to provide information and support to students, parents and district staff on inclusion of students with special education needs.

Work with Community Stakeholders

An important part of this work has involved collaboration with a number of community stakeholders. Actions taken with these groups are listed below.

- Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) and Edmonton Regional Coalition (ERC)
 - The Inclusion Working Group: Parent representatives from the ERC and AACL continued to meet regularly with district staff in 2004-05. The group's purpose is to identify issues and discuss opportunities to support inclusion of students with special needs as a genuine option in the district, understanding that the district provides for students with special education needs in a variety of ways. Four meetings were held in 2004-05, with plans for sessions to continue for 2005-06.

The Inclusion Working Group provided input and feedback to support the creation of a document titled *Suggested Best Practices: Welcoming Parents of Students with Special Needs in Community Schools* (Appendix I). This document has been included in the "Working with Parents" section of the newly released district *IPP Guidebook*.

- ERC's 'Parent to Parent Series': District staff presented a session on the topic of Junior High Transition, at a parent information evening.

- AACL & ERC presented information about inclusion to the following staff groups:
 - Special Education Principal Committee
 - Leadership Services Principal Committee
 - Student Achievement Services Team
 - Leadership Training and Development Program
 - Special Education Information Sharing Committee
 - Interdepartmental Inclusion Committee
 - AACL & ERC used the district's *Mailbag* to disseminate information announcing upcoming professional development events.
- Post Secondary Institutions
Consulting Services staff spoke to fourth year education students at the University of Alberta and Concordia about inclusion of students with special education needs in community schools.
 - Private Early Childhood Services (ECS) Operators
 - Information sessions were provided for private ECS operators, highlighting procedures and suggestions to promote a smooth transition for children with special education needs into the school setting.
 - An ECS Transition Facilitator from Edmonton Student Health Initiative Partnership (ESHIP) worked with private ECS operators, parents and district staff to ease the transition of a child with special education needs from private ECS programs into district inclusive community schools.
 - The response to service provided was very positive. Many kindergarten teachers reported that they have a good picture of the needs of students transitioning from Head Start Programs and other private ECS operators, as reports and transitional strategies accompanied the child upon registration in EPS schools.

District Support

Work to support inclusion involved staff in schools and central services. The following is a list of key initiatives.

- Information Sessions for Parents: Information sessions about services and procedures in the district were provided for parents of children with special education needs. Topics included: inclusive placements and district centre programs, information parents can provide to principals, supports available and working with schools.
- Key Contacts for Parents: Danette Andersen and Kevin Stevenson in Leadership Services continued to serve as lead contacts for parents and principals seeking information, assistance or support regarding inclusion.
- Early Education Outreach Program: Early Education provides programming to children 2 ½ years to six years of age who have severe disabilities or delays. The Early Education Outreach Programs at Scott Robertson and Waverley provided support to community schools where children with severe disabilities attended kindergarten classes. A specialized team of the special education teacher, teacher assistant, Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, behavioural consultant, and in-

home specialist traveled to community schools and children’s homes to provide information and programming support to parents and staff. The number of children with severe special education needs served at their community school has increased significantly. About seventy-five percent of the children included in their community school kindergarten in 2004-05 through the Outreach program continued to attend their community school.

Number of:	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Students	0	60	218	346
Schools	0	30	75	102

Assessment results showed dramatic progress for many students. For example, most students with severe language delays are now mild/moderately delayed and a few are now within normal limits. Significant gains were also noted in student vocabulary and in fine motor abilities.

- Consulting Services provided inservices and on site consultation to support teachers who work with students in inclusive classrooms. Teachers and teacher assistants learned about strategies to support best practices and implementation of Individualized Program Plans (IPP). Participants learned how to differentiate curriculum expectations to meet the needs of students. There were also opportunities to share success stories about students in inclusive settings at elementary, junior high, and high school.
- Consulting Services also implemented an initiative to support successful transition of students with severe disabilities moving from one inclusive classroom to another.
- The Beginning Teachers Institute promoted an inclusive philosophy by outlining strategies to meet diverse special needs in an inclusive classroom. Within the year-long institute a number of presenters spoke to the group, including a former student with special needs who has now completed school, and a parent of a child with autism currently in an inclusive setting. Consultants provided an overview of resources and staff who can support teachers in meeting special education needs in areas such as developing and monitoring IPP’s, differentiating when planning, assessing and reporting student achievement, ways to work effectively with program aides, parents and staff. Items related to these topics are also shared through a newsletter and website.
- *An Individualized Program Plan (IPP) Guidebook*, which outlined required elements and a supportive process for including input and ongoing communication with parents was created and field tested in 2004–2005. The document incorporates essential information from Alberta Education’s *Standards for Special Education*, 2004, and supports teachers in writing Individualized Program Plans. A revised guidebook that incorporates feedback from district teachers and Consulting Services was distributed in August, 2005.
- A district Interdepartmental Inclusion Committee comprised of staff from eight central services departments met to share information and discuss strategies to support inclusion of students with special education needs.

- Leadership Services, Special Education and Consulting Services continued to develop a library of articles, websites and books related to inclusion.
- A list of parent volunteers available to present to staff about inclusion was created and updated.
- To monitor inclusive programming in the district, Student Information System (SIS) created a placement button through which teachers identify student placements as included, integrated, partially integrated or congregated. Within Leadership Services, the ERC, AACL and district staff add to a registry of schools where inclusion is in place. This promotes sharing of best practices among staff to create positive learning environments for students with special learning needs.
- The AACL, *Families, The Heart of Community* Conference was held in March 2005. Guest speaker Dr. Roger Slee, Dean of Education, McGill University explored implications of inclusive education, school reform and the challenges and opportunities presented by inclusive education. Dr. Slee also participated in a special session held for principals and senior administrators at the Centre for Education.
- Photos of students with special needs continued to be incorporated into district communications. Communications staff also continued to review communication vehicles and update photos to ensure that inclusion of students with special needs is ongoing.
- Supporting Teaching and Learning
 - Work within the Teaching and Learning Framework continues to focus on Superb Results from All Students. District professional development sessions for leadership staff, funded through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS), focused on teacher collaboration as a means to share effective strategies, successes, and challenges in improving achievement. Conveying the importance of inclusion to support success for all students was a critical element of Student Achievement Services' work.
 - Dr. Sobsey, professor in the department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta presented to the Student Achievement Team and other district staff. He reviewed research about the relationship between student achievement and inclusion. Dr. Sobsey reported that there has been no clear demonstration that placing children in special classes produced improved student achievement for students with disabilities. He reviewed instructional strategies that were supported by research to meet the needs of all learners in an inclusive placement, and emphasized that learning is produced by effective teaching not location.

- **Principal Involvement:**
 - In fall 2004, Superintendent's Council discussed the topic of inclusion of students, and recommended that a process be implemented to gather information and feedback from all principals.
 - The superintendent spoke to all principals at the November 2004 Superintendent's Educational Leadership Team (SELT) meeting about the importance of achievement for all students, and the need to address inclusion of students with special education needs.
 - Principal Support Groups participated in a focused discussion on the topic of inclusion. Responses were summarized into a report that was shared with Superintendent's Council in February 2005.
 - Four themes were identified: policy, rationale, funding, and supports and targets.
 - In spring 2005, Special Education staff collaborated with other central departments to initiate plans related to these themes. Principals and staff indicated that provision of supports in these areas will advance the work of inclusion in our district.

Summary

The district continues to work with AACL and ERC, other community stakeholders, parents and staff to ensure that students with special education needs are supported in their community schools. We are working with staff to promote awareness, expand knowledge and build expertise in inclusion through targeted supports and professional development, in order to make inclusion a viable choice for parents and students.

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APPENDIX I: Suggested Best Practices: Welcoming Parents of Students with Special Needs in Community Schools

Appendix III - Suggested Best Practices: Welcoming Parents of Students with Special Needs in Community Schools

New

Parents have an integral role in their child's education. Parents have a right and responsibility to participate in decisions respecting education of their children. Alberta Education's *Standards for Special Education* 2004 states that school boards must:

- a) "ensure parents have the opportunity for participation in decisions that affect students' education;
- b) ensure parents have information needed to make informed decisions;
- c) invite meaningful involvement of parents in planning, problem solving and decision-making relating to students' special education programming." (p. 9)

Both Alberta Education and the district support inclusion of students with special needs in typical classrooms in community schools. Alberta Education's *Standards for Special Education* 2004 mandates that school boards "ensure that educating students with special education needs in inclusive settings in neighbourhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with parents, school staff and, when appropriate, the student." (p. 10). District Board Policy HA.BP states that "the neighbourhood school is a guaranteed point of entry for all students, and the regular classroom shall be the first option considered." Board Policy IC.AR states that "each school shall be responsible for accommodating all students in its attendance area." Principals and school staff do much to support effective inclusion by initiating positive contacts and maintaining effective collaboration with parents. The following are suggested practices:

- Establish a positive school-wide inclusion philosophy so leadership, teaching and office staff demonstrate a consistent positive approach to inclusion. Parents are initially welcomed by office staff and should hear a common message in all school contacts.
- Be explicit in letting parents know that their child is a welcomed and valued member of the school community.
- Share the same information with parents of children with special needs as with other parents in the school.
- Introduce parents to key school contacts such as the assistant principal, counselor, administrative assistant or office staff.
- Build a team approach. Foster collaboration and open communication with parents.
- Provide parents an opportunity to share information about their child and to describe their vision or main goals for educational programming.
- Provide information required for informed decisions without giving the impression of directing parents toward district centre programs.
 - Parents who have chosen inclusive education may view discussion or sharing of brochures about district centre programs as pushing their child towards a placement with which they do not agree. Asking parent(s) if they are interested in other district programs, while assuring parent(s) that their child is welcomed in their community school, fulfills district policy requirements and keeps communication lines open.
- Use positive statements when communicating with parents. Avoid "no," "if" and "but." Positive responses or statements might include:
 - "Your family is welcome here."
 - "Let's figure it out together."
 - "I'm committed to making it work."
 - "You are welcome to come here."
 - "I don't have all the answers."
 - "Let's work together to make it a success."
- Invite parents to school events and classroom activities.
- information about supports or learning opportunities for parents.