

# EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 10, 2008

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Deborah Brandell, Tana Donald

## INFORMATION

### **Background**

In the spring of 2001 the Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education (ERC) presented information on inclusion to the Board of Trustees. Following this presentation the board approved the creation of a collaborative committee to identify issues and discuss opportunities to support inclusive practices in the district. In November 2004, as a result of recommendations from the committee, district principals participated in focused conversations on the topic of inclusion. Information was categorized into four themes: Policy, Rationale, Funding, and Supports and Strategies. At that time principals requested whole-district initiatives to underpin inclusion work in schools. This committee discussion guided the work of the Inclusion Working Group and led to the development of *Suggested Best Practices: Welcoming Parents of Students with Special Needs in Community Schools* (2005).

### **Inclusive Education in the District**

This report provides information on district activities during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years to support inclusive education.

### Inclusion Working Group

The Inclusion Working Group is composed of representatives from ERC, Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) and staff from Special Education, Programs. This committee provides a venue for collaborative work with community stakeholders to support inclusive education to identify opportunities to support inclusion. The committee has

- provided input and feedback in the development of *How to Create Inclusive School Communities-Administrative Handbook*.
- provided information that was shared with district staff and schools (i.e. ERC's 'Parent to Parent Series' and AACL's Family Conference).
- presented to first year principals, the Special Education Inter-Departmental Committee, the Special Education Principal Committee, high school special needs coordinators and new teachers.

- participated, during the current year, in discussions with representatives from the Executive Team, Personnel, Consulting, Budget, Leadership and Student Achievement Services.

#### Special Education Inter-Departmental Committee (SEID)

Representatives from several decision units met to share information and work collaboratively to support inclusive education. District initiatives are listed below:

- Budget Services reviewed restrictions on the allocation of per pupil funds for students coded Literacy and Strategies. The restrictions were removed effective September 2007. This allowed all school access to fiscal support to program for these students.
- Communication Services reviewed communication vehicles and updated photos to ensure that all students are represented in district brochures and advertising.
- Consulting Services provided in-services to support inclusive programming.
- Staff in Leadership Services functioned as key-contacts for administrative and parent inquiries regarding inclusion. Staff presented to Principal and Leadership Education Development Programs (PED and LED) to ensure upcoming leaders in the district understand district policy and practice concerning inclusive practices.
- Personnel Services included questions specific to district policy on inclusive education when interviewing teachers and support staff.
- Student Achievement Services created a 0.5 FTE principal/consultant position to explore theories related to inclusion in the Differentiation and Community Collaboration AISI projects.

#### Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services North and South (KIDS)

KIDS continued to support children with special needs receiving programming in inclusive kindergartens. A specialized team of consultants and therapists provide information and programming support to staff and parents. KIDS provided targeted professional development for full-day kindergarten staff including information on special needs, English language learners and Aboriginal students.

#### **Challenges**

Notwithstanding the work that has been done, challenges remain. Some family experiences suggest that inclusive programming choices are not consistently supported across the district.

For example:

- parents would like to receive information about inclusive programming options
- some parents seeking inclusion feel they are not welcomed at community schools
- parents feel opportunities for inclusive programming become more challenging in junior and senior high
- once parents have chosen inclusive programming this choice needs to be honoured initially and then across time
- parents feel that the district needs to develop expertise in inclusive programming to support schools in this work

While the welcome and support for parents and students seeking an inclusive education is improving, consistent messaging and actions by district staff is necessary to provide a positive experience for all.

### **Next Steps**

Plans for 2008-2009 include:

- Regular meetings of the Inclusion Working Group will continue.
- An Inclusive Education Pilot, *Supporting Success for Students with Special Needs in Community School*, will start in September 2008. The purpose of the pilot is build staff capacity to support students with diverse learning needs. Six schools will be participating; three lead schools and three beginning schools. This pilot will assist us to develop strategies to address some of the challenges.
- KIDS North and South will continue to support children with severe and mild/moderate disabilities receiving programming in their community kindergarten.

The district continues to work in collaboration with AACL, ERC, other community stakeholders, parents and staff to ensure students with special education needs are supported in inclusive settings in community schools. We continue to promote awareness, expand knowledge and build expertise on inclusive practices through targeted support documents, professional development and pilot projects. Our goal is to promote and support inclusive communities, making inclusion a viable choice for all students and parents in Edmonton Public Schools.

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