

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 14, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees
FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT: Inclusive Education
ORIGINATOR: T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Anna Branco, Deborah Brandell, John Edey, Monica Ellis, Tricia Giles-Wang, Colleen McClure, Ann Parker, Heather Raymond, Jan Small-McGinley

INFORMATION

Introduction

In 2001, a collaborative initiative between the District and community stakeholders was established to support provincial and District policy related to inclusive placements for students. This work has provided a foundation in inclusive practices that will support the implementation the Alberta Education initiative “Action on Inclusion”.

Background Information

Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education (ERC) presented information on inclusion to the Board of Trustees on May 8, 2001. The Inclusion Working Group (IWG) was established and has representatives from ERC, Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) and staff from Special Education, Programs.

2010 - 2011 District Inclusion Update

Edmonton Public Schools continues to support community schools as the first guaranteed point of entry for all students. Throughout the District inclusive opportunities are increasingly available for students identified with special education needs.

The following update outlines collaborative work with community stakeholders and central decision units to support inclusive education.

- Inclusive Education Initiative expanded to include 24 schools (See Appendix I).
- IWG members were invited to attend Inclusion Conference with David Edyburn. A parent night was also hosted.
- Special Education Task Force was established in January 2011 to invite input from invested community stakeholders and district staff.
- IWG parent representatives presented to first year principals and high school Special Education Coordinators.
- AACL conference was attended by district staff.
- Resources were purchased for IWG and members of the Inclusive Initiative.
- AACL submitted responses to three questions: What are some of the areas that you have seen improvement this past year? What are some challenges you are still experiencing? What could improve your current experiences in inclusive programming? (See Appendix II for summary of responses.)

- ERC and Dr. Heather Raymond, Principal Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services, were invited to the Ukraine to train educators and parents in the area of inclusive education. The Edmonton Public School resource *How to Create Inclusive School Communities* was one of the resources used for this training.

Inclusion Awards - Crawford Plains and Belvedere schools received AACL national inclusive education awards.

Learning Coaches - To support “Action on Inclusion” and build district capacity, 24 district staff have been in-serviced in the area of Learning Coaches. Opportunities to network in the upcoming year have been provided.

Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services (KIDS) – KIDS is a multidisciplinary team that work in collaboration with schools and families to support children with special education learning needs. This year, KIDS consultants have worked with kindergarten teachers to develop broad-based strategies to improve the learning environment for all children. When broad-based strategies are effectively supporting children’s learning needs, consultants are more readily available to provide targeted and specific intervention that some children require to be active learners.

Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) - ERECS provides a wide range of supports to students in inclusive education settings in Edmonton Public Schools and north central Alberta. Services are provided in the following areas: educational/behavioural programming, speech language pathology, psychology, physical therapy, occupational therapy, audiology, deaf and hard of hearing, low vision and blind, adapted physical education, and assistive technologies for learning.

In the 2010-2011 school year, ERECS received a conditional grant from Alberta Education to provide at no cost to schools, three-person specialist teams one day per month in 20 urban schools. This is known as the Urban School Project. (See Appendix III for a summary of the Urban School Project.)

Community Partnerships - Programs and other consultants liaise with community partners including: Edmonton Student Health Initiative Program (ESHIP), Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT), Sensory Processing Disorder Canada (SPD), Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, Alberta Association for Community Living, and the University of Alberta to utilize community knowledge and experience to support students in inclusive settings.

Summary

The District works in collaboration with staff, parents and community stakeholders to ensure students are welcomed and supported in their community schools. District staff promote awareness and build capacity on inclusive practices. The District is committed to aligning Edmonton Public Schools work with “Action on Inclusion” by removing barriers to ensure inclusion of all children and youth remains a district priority.

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APPENDIX I	Inclusive Education Initiative
APPENDIX II	Summary of Responses from Alberta Association of Community Living
APPENDIX III	Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) Urban Schools Project Summary

Inclusive Education Initiative

The Inclusive Education Initiative was established to assist the District to implement inclusive practice, to build capacity to support all students, and support school staff to meet diverse needs in their student populations. The initiative expanded this year to include 24 schools, listed below. Staff development has included professional development at the school level, an inclusion conference featuring Dr. David Edyburn who presented on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and assistive technology, and on-going principal/lead teacher sessions. Successes have included; collaboration across decision units, multidisciplinary teams working together to support students in inclusive settings, and whole school conversations about how to support inclusive practices. This initiative will continue to build capacity amongst district leaders.

Avonmore
Balwin
Bannerman
Belvedere
Coronation
Crawford Plains
Dan Knott
Ellerslie
Greenfield
Grovenor
Hardisty
Jasper Place
Johnny Bright
Keheewin
Lillian Osborne
M.E. LaZerte
Montrose
Oliver
Princeton
Rideau Park
Strathcona
Waverly
Westglen
York

Summary of Responses from Alberta Association of Community Living

Question 1: What are some of the areas you have seen improvement in this past year?

- Not much, we are in the same place with pockets of okay and occasional good.
- In some situations, there has been willingness to work collaboratively to figure out inclusion.
- There seems to be more awareness that inclusion is something that schools have to figure out.
- For those schools already working on inclusion there is more willingness to being open to work on best practices.
- More schools (administrators, teachers etc.) are more aware of inclusion. This does not necessarily mean they are willing to do it.

Question 2: What are some challenges you are still experiencing?

- Parental choice is not honoured—still challenged.
- Every year, and especially at transition points such as Grade 6 to 7 and Grade 9 to 10, parents have to ask if their son or daughter can be fully included and know that it is up for debate and they may have to defend their choice.
- Principals and assistant principals are **still telling parents** they cannot have the same quality of supports in the regular classroom. “You cannot have an assistant, you will be in a class with 30 other children with limited or no support, you will not have access to the same expertise.’ Parents are being told they will have to sacrifice quality for inclusion
- Inclusive education as a concept is still not well understood.
- Teachers and administrators do not understand:
 - differentiated instruction well
 - how to ensure students with disabilities are accessing the same grade general curriculum with the appropriate modifications
 - how to establish learning goals within the general curriculum. Still push ‘life skills’ curriculum as the most valuable type of learning if you have a disability or talk about having to generate an entirely separate curriculum if the child is included in the regular classroom because ‘the gap is so big’.
- There is not an accepted process across schools for planning for inclusive education, ensuring positive relationships and communication with parents, demonstrating learning outcomes, etc.
- There is very limited understanding of the importance of facilitating social inclusion and no clear point of responsibility for ensuring it is planned for and evaluated.
- When there is a problem, there is no one who holds schools accountable. Leadership Services has no authority and tells parents they can only be involved at the request of the school.
- Having access to quality inclusive education and feeling welcomed and valued is a lottery. It is entirely dependent on the principal and school and the experience varies wildly from “absolutely” to “you cannot come to this school”.

- Some schools very expertly say the right things but make it clear that choosing this school would be a mistake. They dissuade parents by saying that their son or daughter may not be safe with the regular student body, will not receive a quality or appropriate education, will not receive adequate support, but that they can come if they want to. They make parents feel as if they are being irresponsible if they choose the inclusive classroom.
- Programs of Choice or Alternative Programs are only available to students without disabilities, or only to a limited few.

Question 3: What could improve your current experiences in inclusive programming?

- There must be accountability when a school says “No” to inclusion.
- Parental choice must be honoured.
- Clear messaging, policy and accountability structures.
- Administrators and teachers having easy access to high-quality, well informed consultants and professional development with regards to best practice in differentiated instruction and inclusion.

Summary of Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) Urban Schools Project

In June 2009, after two rounds of consultation with Albertans and a review of literature on approaches to meeting the special education needs of students, Alberta Education released the *Setting the Direction Framework*. The framework contained recommendations for changes in the implementation of services to students with disabilities and diverse learning needs. One of the specific programming recommendations outlined in the framework indicated the need to develop a provincial service delivery model for specialized supports and services. In response to this recommendation, the four Regional Educational Consulting Services (RECS) teams (Calgary, Grand Prairie, Peace River [Francophone school] and Edmonton) secured a conditional grant to pilot the implementation of a service delivery model for specialized supports.

The Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) team chose to place, at no cost to schools, three-person specialist teams, one day per month in 20 urban schools. The following schools participated in the ERECS Urban Schools Project: Aspen at Woodside, Avalon/Lendrum, Beacon Heights, Belmead, Bertha Kennedy (Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools), Crawford Plains, George P. Nicholson, Holy Spirit (Elk Island Catholic Schools), J.D. Bracco, Jasper Place, Jean Vanier (Elk Island Catholic Schools), King Edward, Mee-Yah-Noh, Millwoods Christian, Montrose, Neil M. Ross (Greater St Albert Catholic Schools), Sir George Simpson (St. Albert Protestant Schools), Satoo, Spruce Avenue, Westlawn.

The specialist teams included an occupational therapist, a speech language pathologist and an educational/behavioural programming consultant. Specialist team members worked collaboratively with school based learning team members to implement universal, targeted and specialized supports and services. The project focused on building collaborative relationships between the specialist team members, parents and teachers. Sumera Management Consultants worked closely with the provincial RECS team members to gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the implementation of the RECS projects throughout the province.

Data gathered and analyzed for the midterm evaluation report indicated support for:

- The provision of services by specialist teams on a predictable, reliable schedule – one day per month with dates set in advance. Two thirds of participating schools indicated a preference for services two days per month.
- The provision of services with no need for billing or cost recovery.
- The identification of a key school contact to coordinate services.
- The direction and support of principals.
- The positive, productive relationships established among specialist team members and school personnel.
- The sharing of current resources.
- The facilitation of workshops on topics selected by school personnel.
- Opportunities to build professional capacity, by both specialist team members and school personnel, in the areas of effective behaviour supports, universal design for learning and the pyramid of intervention.
- The provision of services, by the specialist teams, for students the school would have otherwise referred to other service providers (161 students).

- The appropriate identification of students requiring services by the specialist team. These students would not have necessarily been referred by the school team (49 students).

While the changes indicated above are significant, a review of the midterm data revealed the specialist teams and school teams were not entirely conforming to some of the deliverables of the project. Specifically, more implementation time was required to change practice in the area of differentiated instruction and to engage more parents in a meaningful way. The midterm data was reviewed with specialist teams and deliberate efforts have been made since that time to address the areas of concern. It is anticipated that changes in practice will be revealed in the final project report in July. The external evaluator is continuing to collect data on the project and will provide a summary report in the fall of 2011.