E D M O N T O N   P U B L I C   S C H O O L S

June 14, 2011

TO:            Board of Trustees

FROM:          Trustee C. Johner, Special Education Task Force Chair
               Trustee L. Cleary, Special Education Task Force
               Trustee C. Spencer, Special Education Task Force

SUBJECT:       Special Needs Task Force:  Recommendation Report

ORIGINATOR:    T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE
STAFF:         Danette Andersen, Deborah Brandell, John Edey, Colleen McClure, David
               Piercey, Heather Raymond

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the proposed Board Policy IA.BP – Inclusive Education (Appendix I) be referred to the Policy Review Committee for consideration and subsequent recommendation to Board.

2. That the District continue to provide programming for students with diverse learning needs in inclusive learning environments at community schools and designated district sites, with the first option for consideration always being the regular classroom at the community school.

3. That the Administration prepare an Administrative Regulation to accompany the proposed Board Policy and, in recognition of key themes identified in the consultative process, that the regulation provide guidelines for the following:
   - Acceptance and welcoming, with placement in the regular classroom at the community school the first option
   - Communication to all staff and parents about district programming options, and central services support for parents
   - A central services parental point of contact with the authority to act as a facilitator, mediator and advocate for the best interests of the child/student
   - A dedicated section on the district website that provides easy-to-access information regarding inclusive education

- Parental and, as appropriate, student engagement in program planning and placement, as members of the learning team
- Adoption and implementation of universal design for learning (UDL) philosophy, practices and principles that will support all learners
- Strength-based assessments and programming for identification and support of students with diverse learning needs, including access to appropriate augmented and alternative communication support, sign communication, assistive technology and digital resources
- Professional learning in inclusive education values and practices for all staff with opportunities for mentorship
- Professional learning in inclusive and specialized instructional strategies
- Targeted recruitment of qualified staff with academic training and/or experience in inclusive education
- Specialized supports and services for consultation to schools
- Transition support for students entering, moving through, and leaving schooling
- An accountability process involving but not limited to reports to Board, annual results reviews at each school to address the school's accountability on inclusive education practices, and regular audits and reviews of designated district sites

4. That the Administration develop a consistent orientation and registration process that provides accurate information to families when new students first register with the District.

5. That the Administration investigate alternate funding models to support students with special learning needs, and bring an information report back to the Board by January 15, 2012.

6. That, to ensure community involvement, the Administration establish and maintain an external Inclusive Education advisory committee, and that the purposes of the committee be clearly outlined.

7. That the Administration develop a comprehensive accountability framework for the monitoring and implementation of the Administrative Regulation.

8. That the Board include progress on the implementation of the Inclusive Education policy as part of its evaluation processes.

Background Information
At the May 24 Board meeting, the Special Needs Task Force provided an interim report which documented the processes used to gather and process information from November 26, 2010 until May 24, 2011. An executive summary of the information gathered from students, staff members, parents and community members through focus groups and surveys is contained in Appendix II. The approach to implementation of an inclusive education system in Alberta provided by Alberta Education is provided in Appendix III. After reviewing the vast amount of information gathered, this report contains the recommendations that the Task Force wishes the Board to consider to strengthen programming for students with special education learning needs.

Rationale for Recommendations
1. The proposed policy reflects the input received from the full range of consultations, and recognizes the District's role in welcoming the diverse range of students that depend on Edmonton Public Schools to meet their educational needs. The policy focuses on articulating the beliefs surrounding inclusive education valued by Trustees. The title of the proposed policy, "Inclusive Education", is recommended in recognition of this term being more current than one which refers to "special education". It begins with a definition of inclusive education which is aligned to the province's definition and expectations for schooling of students with diverse learning needs. The definition speaks to the attitudinal shift towards acceptance and belonging of all students, and to the District's responsibility in including all students within school programming. It then articulates the Board's beliefs and expectations around an inclusive education system, and around inclusive learning environments. It then ends with the expectation that these beliefs and values be reflected within District practices.

2. Strong support for inclusive programming in both community schools and designated district sites was evident throughout the consultation process.

3. Once the policy is approved, an administrative regulation will be developed to address the identified key themes.

4. Stakeholders expressed a need for consistent, accurate district information to be provided at the time students initially register with the District.

5. Funding repeatedly surfaced as an issue, and there was strong support for looking at alternative models.

6. Parents and community members indicated strong interest in the establishment of an ongoing Inclusive Education advisory committee. (A similar advisory committee has been previously established after the Aboriginal Education Task Force.)

7. The Task Force advisory group requested the development of a comprehensive accountability framework to ensure adherence to the policy.

8. Including progress on the implementation of the Inclusive Education policy in the Board's evaluation processes provides accountability alignment.

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APPENDIX I       Proposed Board Policy IA.BP – Inclusive Education
APPENDIX II      Executive Summary of Information Gathered
APPENDIX III     Approach to implementation of an inclusive education system in Alberta

# Edmonton Public Schools
# Board Policies and Regulations

CODE: IA.BP                              EFFECTIVE DATE:
TOPIC: Inclusive Education              ISSUE DATE
                                        REVIEW DATE:

DEFINITION

An inclusive education system is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education is a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students, including those with diverse learning or special education needs. It is founded on the belief that all children can learn and reach their full potential given opportunity, effective teaching, and appropriate resources. An inclusive education system supports every student to be included within their greater school community regardless of their programming needs or physical placement at any particular time. An inclusive education system provides for the engagement of parents, students, staff and community, and honours family choice.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION STATEMENT

The Board believes that an inclusive education system:
• welcomes, respects, accepts and supports students and families in every school and program
• demonstrates an ongoing commitment to meet the needs of the diverse student population in all school settings
• provides equitable opportunity for all students to be included in any learning program operated by the District
• provides educational and associated services to meet the diverse learning needs of all students
• maintains a high standard of responsiveness, open communication, and accountability
• provides appropriate supports for diverse learners within the curriculum
• provides for a continuum of specialized supports and services to students that is consistent with the principles of inclusive education
• actively seeks partnerships with community organizations

The Board believes that inclusive learning environments:
• visibly demonstrate the qualities of an inclusive education system
• provide welcoming, acceptance and belonging for all students and their families
• emphasize the achievement of learning outcomes for all students through using effective instructional practices; incorporating assistive technologies into instruction; ensuring delivery of specialized supports and services; and utilizing collaborative decision making
• model strength-based programming and assessment activities

The Board supports the targeted recruitment of qualified staff with academic training and/or experience in inclusive education.

The Board expects these values to be reflected in district programs, operations and practices. The community school is the guaranteed point of entry for all students, and, in alignment with *Standards for Special Education,* the regular classroom shall be the first placement option considered.

Reference(s):
*School Act,* Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000, Chapter S-3
- Right of Access to Education Section 8
- Responsibility to Students Section 45

*Standards for Special Education,* Ministerial Order (#015/2004)
*Setting the Direction Framework,* June 2009
*Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response,* June 2010
*Setting the Direction: Moving Toward an Inclusive Education System in Alberta,* revised November 2010

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INFORMATION GATHERED

1. **What supports and services will you need to build your capacity to operate effectively in an inclusive education system?**

   - Ongoing professional Learning for school staff
   - Opportunity to collaborate and share expertise
   - Access to specialized support from central services
   - Improved processes and communication
   - Adequate school resources
   - Clear district mandate and framework for an inclusive education system
   - Action research on inclusion versus segregated settings
   - Freedom from cost recovery
   - Additional resources
   - Time to complete a meaningful consultation process at the school
   - Stronger relationships with staff and community partners
   - Clearly articulated district vision and framework
   - Support for teachers to refine their instructional practice
   - Ongoing professional learning and collaborative team building opportunities
   - Timely access to external supports

2. **How can EPSB ensure that families are welcome, supported and respected in their choice of programming for their child with special education learning needs?**

   - Communicate and administer district policy clearly and consistently
   - Educate and support staff to change practice
   - Enable families to make informed decisions regarding the best choice for the child
   - Improve district communication to parents and schools about programming and services
   - Eliminate the negative financial impact of inclusion on schools
   - Implement a central intake and orientation centre
   - Change district practices to reflect the vision and culture of diversity
   - Strengthen partnerships with parents at school
   - Enforce a consistent culture of an inclusive education system in the district
   - Facilitate access, at all district levels, to programming for students and services for parents
   - Clearly communicate to the public the various programming options available as well as the process for accessing
   - Provide adequate funding to schools for specialized resources and programming
   - Enhance staff knowledge of student needs and programming options available
   - Conduct ongoing, meaningful collaboration with parents and families
   - Create communities of support for families and students
   - Remove barriers that inhibit a welcoming attitude
   - Deliver clear and consistent communication and protocol to schools and parents
   - Build and maintain parent partnerships and meaningful relationships

3. **What model of distribution of financial resources would best serve our students?**

- Principal-Managed, Formula-Based Model
- Principal-Managed Base Allocation + Formula-Based Allocation Dedicated to Special Needs
- Principal-Managed Base Allocation + Wrap-Around Service Team for Special Needs
- Centrally Funded and Managed

4. **What are some high-leverage universal supports that educators can use, at the bottom layer of the pyramid of intervention, that would not only support students with special learning needs, but also provide support for all students?**

- Classroom environment that supports and promotes learning
- Teacher effectiveness
- Behavior support techniques
- Assessment practices
- Technology for learning
- Support external to the classroom
- Peer tutoring and teams
- Flexible, creative and responsive local school environment
- Teacher/student relationship building
- Teacher effectiveness:  differentiated learning and assessment strategies
- Improve adult/student ratios
- Hold staff accountable for their professional learning and performance
- Utilize technology to improve student engagement
- Provide adapted curriculum and resources to support differentiation
- Focus on literacy intervention
- Provide adequate wraparound support for all students
- Build positive relationships with students and staff and develop a sense of community

5. **What other actions should the task force recommend that have not surfaced during discussion of the first three questions?**

- Develop a realistic implementation strategy that respects staff, students and the public
- Lobby for commitment from all provincial ministries and society at large in the vision and implementation of an inclusive setting for education
- Educate advocacy groups to respect ALL stakeholders in education
- Build staff capacity
- Conduct more research
- Focus on the multi-agency approach
- Strengthen existing relationships with community partners
- Celebrate existing programs and services and honor our staff and our students
- Customize the concept of service delivery teams and wrap-around services
- Advocate with Alberta Education for adequate funding and resources
- Collaborate with other school districts
- Celebrate successes and honor/share what works

- Empower staff to improve services to students with special needs
- Protect the rights of special needs students in an inclusive environment
- Vision and Long-Term Commitment to Students with Special Needs

6. **What actions should the task force recommend to improve wraparound, coordinated supports for students?**

- Provide adequate funding to meet the programming and support needs of all students
- Build and maintain 2-way relationships between families and school/community professionals
- Hire more "doers" and reduce the burden on classroom teachers
- Ensure teachers and educational assistants have the skills to maximize learning for students
- Establish district processes to bridge the gap between school and community professional services

7. **What should the task force recommend to ensure accountability and responsiveness in the area of education for students with special learning needs?**

- Conduct ongoing action research to evaluate satisfaction and adapt practice
- Establish and maintain timely, two-way communication between parents and the school learning team.
- Demonstrate leadership by advocating for "parent choice" and enforcing accountability

# Approach to implementation of an inclusive education system in Alberta

**VISION:**

*"Success for all children and youth in an inclusive education system\*."*

**BUILDING CAPACITY:**

Essential for implementation.

**TRANSFORMATION:**

To work together to build an inclusive education system that changes practices to support success for all children and youth.

**WHAT'S CHANGING:**

Government removing barriers to provide the best possible educational experience for children and youth.

Which means: *everyone will need to think and work differently.*

**SHARED OUTCOMES:**

Children and youth are supported in their education success through the co-ordination of appropriate and seamless service from Government of Alberta ministries and community service providers who work with them and their families, during their pre-school to grade 12 education journey.

**COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES:**

- Collaboration
- Shared leadership
- Team-based approach
- School and community are linked
- Persistence - in finding solutions
- Family voice and choice is valued
- Culturally appropriate and sensitive support
- A child or youth's existing support system is valued
- Individual approach
- Building on strengths
- Decisions are based on shared information

\* an inclusive education system means that children and youth, regardless of their ability or disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age are valued in the same way.

**Government of Alberta**

*Alberta*



VISION

BUILDING CAPACITY

TRANSFORMATION

CHANGE

SHARED OUTCOMES

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES

CHILDREN & YOUTH

1 COMMUNICATING HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL

2 UNDERSTANDING & RESPONDING TO STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

3 IDENTIFYING RESOURCES

4 ACCESSING SUPPORTS & SERVICES

5 MEASURING SUCCESS