

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 24, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: District Response to Phase 2 of the Provincial Review of Special Education – Setting the Direction: Towards a System Re-design

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent

RECOMMENDATION

That the attached District Response to Setting the Direction Towards a System Re-Design Phase 2 (Attachment I) be approved for submission to Alberta Education.

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Background:

On February 23, 2009, Alberta Education released its findings from Phase 1 of the Special Education Review. This document identifies common themes heard through the consultation process. Many of the themes and positions identified were consistent with positions put forward in our district submission.

Framework for Phase 2

In Phase 2 Alberta Education puts forward the position that the province needs to move toward one inclusive education system in which

...school authorities will adopt system-side values that promote belonging and create the best learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities. This concept does not limit student and parental choice of school authority or school placement.

MacKay (2007) suggests progress toward realization of one inclusive educational system rests on two pillars “individual accommodation” and “systemic design”. MacKay suggests that identifying and addressing systemic barriers within the educational system will enhance the ability of the system to accommodate individual student needs.

Phase 2 focuses primarily on gathering feedback on aspects of the building blocks of one inclusive educational system noting that the “re-design of the educational system is the logical extension of both the letter of and the spirit of the *Canadian Constitution and the laws of Alberta*”. The administration is supportive of this direction because it has the potential, over time, to increase district capacity to better serve our diverse student population, provide support to staff, use staff expertise more effectively, and meaningfully involve parents in the educational process.

Phase 2 does not address accountability, funding or policy. The province indicates that these areas will be addressed in the next phase of the process.

Stakeholder Input into the District Submission

A letter to parents from the Board Chair, encouraging participation in the consultation process, was posted on the District intranet. Principals were asked to distribute the letter to parents.

The draft district response and a survey were posted on the District website. Parents, community members, and staff were invited to use the survey to provide feedback on the draft response. Ten parents responded to the survey.

Also, an item was posted on SchoolZone, Resources for Parents and Student, inviting feedback from parents. The link to the District website was also included.

District staff were invited to take part in a consultation session organized by the Academy at King Edward school council. Fifteen people were in attendance and provided input on the draft response.

Input received from stakeholders has been incorporated into the proposed District submission.

Next Steps

After Board approval, the written response will be provided to Alberta Education by the end of March 2009. This information will also be used to inform the development of the District's proposed work plan, which will be brought to public board in May.

DB:ja

ATTACHMENT I Setting the Direction Towards a System Re-Design Phase 2, Edmonton Public Schools Response to Questionnaire, March 24, 2009

“SETTING THE DIRECTION TOWARDS A SYSTEM RE-DESIGN PHASE 2” EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS RESPONSE TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Building Block 1. Setting High Expectations for ALL Students

Desired outcome:

All students in Alberta will be considered valuable enough to have provincial expectations set for them. The basis of programming for all students, whatever their particular ability, need or gift, will be the Alberta curriculum. The focus will be on working with partners to ensure that teachers are able to use the provincial curriculum to develop programming to meet the specific needs of their students.

Possible ways to achieve this outcome:

What follows are eight ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

i. Develop a more flexible definition of educational success for all students.

We need to redefine educational success so that it includes more than academic achievement and will also support the opportunity for students to achieve to their full potential.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- A broader definition of educational success needs to be meaningful, challenging, and envision an inclusive future for every student as a fully participating citizen.
- The definition of success should legitimate high school completion in all provincially recognized programs.
- Public perceptions related to students with special education needs will also need to be addressed in this process. The definition of educational success should be one result of the Minister's Dialogue with Albertans.

ii. Set expectations for all students within the Alberta curriculum.

Alberta Education tells schools what students must learn. The curriculum is made up of the Programs of Study (what has to be learned), authorized learning resources (tools to bring the programs to life) and program assessments (testing). Like everyone else, students with special education needs should be working on learning outcomes based on the Alberta curriculum, even if those need to be adapted for them.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
Agree disagree

- An articulated and fully resourced curriculum for all students has the potential to be a strong support to classroom teachers. The curriculum should stress academic achievement and not be limited to social or life skills and ensure students have access to all core subjects. Work experience courses would be an important part of the curriculum for secondary students.
- A range of appropriate resources to support the curriculum would need to be available for student and teacher use.
- Promising Practice:
 - The Knowledge and Employability (K and E) Curriculum for core academic subjects is an excellent model for this work. The curriculum in each subject is designed to be used in age appropriate inclusive classrooms, provides clear recommendations for entry points, requires that parents provide informed consent, has aligned assessments and allows for scaffolding to more advanced programming as student progress.
- Parents must be involved so that they can provide informed consent to programming prior to enrolment in courses.

iii. Develop a system that emphasizes students' strengths and potential rather than limits and deficits.

Each student across the province deserves to be considered as an individual, with particular strengths and abilities. Every student should have a program that meets his or her own learning needs.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
Agree disagree

- Strengths, abilities, interests and gifts become apparent when children are afforded broad access to the richness of inclusive schooling experiences and involvement in the community. "Students grow most in areas of greatest strength". It is equally important to address student needs and to be accountable for provision of necessary supports to enable success.
- Parent involvement is critical to the success of this process. Parents know their children well and have important information to contribute.

iv. Replace coding and labeling with the identification of educational supports, strategies and effective instruction for removing barriers to learning.

Coding is all about identifying what's "wrong" with a student. A more personalized learning profile approach would identify what needs to be different in the classroom to ensure that the student is successful.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
Agree disagree

- Gathering information about strengths, abilities, and interests needs to be included as part of the assessment process and considered in program development. This orientation requires that assessors have detailed knowledge of the student. Parents and teachers are in the best position to begin this process, relying on specialists to provide additional information addition to increasing understanding of student learning needs. The shift away from assessment for coding will enable specialists to concentrate their energies and time on assessment to inform programming.
- While parents supported this direction they expressed concern that removal of coding might be an excuse to do nothing. They want a model of assessment established that includes parent involvement and guarantees ongoing support for students.

v. Use assessment to inform programming.

Comprehensive assessment will be used to inform programming and includes parent insight, teacher expertise and information from educational and health (including mental health) professionals. In a new future, a greater emphasis will be placed on these specialists collecting information necessary for educational programming, rather than on diagnosis for coding.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
Agree Disagree

- An inclusive curriculum would provide the framework for assessment that could link directly to appropriate educational programming.
- Assessments should include identification of student strengths, interests and gifts. They should also identify areas for growth and the educational supports, resources and environmental accommodations required to support meaningful engagement, participation and success.
- Specialists need to work with teachers to ensure assessment results assist teachers to develop an understanding of the student's learning needs and how these may manifest themselves in the classroom. Based on assessment information, the learning team (specialists, teachers and parents) determine appropriate strategies and supports required for student success within the classroom and school environment. This will require that specialists collaborate with the teacher to better understand the classroom context. Specialists should also have knowledge of curriculum outcomes.
- Parents indicated that there needs to be clear thresholds to determine supports and service provision.
- Cultural context of students and families must be considered in the assessment process.

vi. Involve parents in the development, implementation and assessment of programming for their child.

Parents are an important source of information and insight about their child. They are a critical member of the learning team. They should be involved in the development of the personalized learning profile for their child and in its implementation and evaluation.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Active parent involvement should be invited, encouraged and supported. All parent submissions strongly emphasized that parents need to be part of the process from the very beginning.
- Parental choice in placement needs to be honoured.
- Parent involvement in Individual Program Plan (IPP) development and program planning is crucial. Parents must provide informed consent to their child's program.

vii. Clarify Ministry and school authority requirements for gathering data related to all students, including students with disabilities.

School authorities and Alberta Education will still need to know what students with disabilities (and special talents) may need in order to be successful. In the absence of coding, data will still have to be captured; what kind of data and to what end, needs to be sorted out.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Parents felt strongly that districts must have clear accountability criteria for service provision and results.
- Functional assessment to identify strategies and supports required to enable the student to achieve success in learning in the classroom, progress appropriately in the curriculum, and participate fully in the school community should be the starting point.
- Information gathered in the program planning process must be identified in the IPP.
- Input of specialists in this process (speech language pathologists, reading specialists, psychologists, medical doctors) would be accessed based on the needs of particular students.

viii. Include access to early learning programming in planning for students.

If students are to be successful, learning opportunities must begin as early as possible. Early intervention for children with at-risk factors, including disabilities, dramatically enhances their chance of future success. Currently in Alberta, children with disabilities are supported in early education programming prior to entering Grade 1. To be effective, early education programming for young children, just like that for students in Grades 1-12, requires setting high expectations, programming based on abilities and strengths, staff that is skilled and knowledgeable about child development and early intervention strategies, and programming based on collaboration and appropriate learning resources.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
Agree Disagree

- An inclusive system must provide appropriate continuous support and services to facilitate a smooth and successful transition from pre-school to formal schooling. Parents indicated that continued service after Program Unit Funding (PUF) is essential. Grade 1 is a critical year and that is where funding drops off dramatically.
- Access to support currently provided to students in community kindergartens needs to be continued through Grade 3.
- Promising Practices:
 - Kindergarten Inclusive Development Services (KIDS) North and South provides a team of specialists to support kindergarten teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities in community school kindergartens.
 - Special Education Support Team's (SEST) transition facilitator supports the Kindergarten to Grade 1 transition.

SECTION QUESTION

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

One Inclusive Education System Beyond the Classroom

While setting expectation for all students within the Alberta curriculum is fundamentally important to the creation of inclusive schooling, the lived experience of students in schools must complement and be consistent with the outcomes of the Alberta curriculum. Inclusive schooling must look beyond the formal curriculum to questions related to equity of access to the full life of the school (clubs, sports). Organizational factors such as scheduling, hours of operation and transportation can support or create barriers. An inclusive future is predicated on participation to the fullest extent possible in all aspects of school life.

Building Block 2. Using Strengths and Abilities to Drive Programming

Desired outcome:

The education system, made up of the Ministry and its partners, will focus on what students CAN do, rather than on what they are unable to achieve. We will adapt the system to ensure that no student is excluded from being as fully participatory in learning, assessment and classroom experiences as possible.

Possible ways to achieve this outcome:

What follows are four ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

i. Ensure that the Alberta curriculum is accessible for all students.

In the spirit of building one inclusive education system, the Alberta curriculum including the Programs of Study, authorized learning resources and provincial assessments need to be re-examined to determine how to make them more accessible, engaging and meaningful for students with diverse learning needs.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- Individuals with specialized knowledge need to work along side educators in the development of usable resources that are both student and teacher friendly. This process should immediately be incorporated by Alberta Education into the current curriculum development process. Current resources/specialist manuals need to be integrated with curriculum.
- Parents support increased flexibility but encourage the province to maintain accountability measures.
- Promising Practices
 - The District's Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) Differentiation Project has developed teacher understanding of processes and strategies to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners.

ii. Evaluate students with measurement tools that maximize the possibilities for accessibility.

Teachers, along with provincial large-scale assessment tools, measure student success in school. In an inclusive system, where getting a measure of ALL students' progress against the Programs of Study is important, we must address how this might take place. Collectively, we must look for ways for all students to be assessed in a meaningful way, using assessment systems that support inclusive practices.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- Accommodations on provincial achievement tests need to be expanded to allow students to fully demonstrate their potential. This is particularly true for English Language Learners (ELL) and students with special needs.

- Parents have insights that can assist in the development of appropriate accommodations and their input should be sought and given serious consideration.
- Teacher judgment on a range of student assessments must be considered as legitimate measures of student attainment.
- Processes must also recognize the expectations of external stakeholders (employers, postsecondary institutions) for valid assessments of performance.
- Student's who are not achieving success will require more in depth diagnostic assessment.

iii. Create flexible and accessible learning opportunities for every student.

We know that not every student learns in the same way. In the best of all possible worlds, each student in each classroom is given an opportunity to have their learning customized or personalized for them. New research and new instructional approaches make this kind of teaching possible. Concepts like Universal Design for Learning move classrooms away from the limitations of "one size fits all", and have the potential to equip teachers with skills and techniques to offer differentiated instruction to a range of learners, with diverse needs.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Parents indicated that it is essential to maintain support for parental choice in student placement. There needs to be flexibility to enable more movement between sites and fully inclusive settings based on student needs at different times in their schooling.
- Transitions points are a concern for parents. Parents need assurance that supports can be accessed in every classroom and in every school.
- The current organization of schooling requires students to demonstrate curricular expectations within a set time frame. The system needs to be re-designed so that it does not penalize or inhibit the progress of students who require more or less time to achieve curricular outcomes.
- Promising Practices:
 - The District's AISI Technology Project has introduced the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in participating schools. Use of programs such as Voice Threads and Photo Story hold much promise for providing access and engagement in learning.

iv. Ensure that learning resources are available and accessible.

Learning resources are those things that teachers use in internal and external to classrooms to bring the curriculum to life. Learning resources that are accessible and flexible give teachers powerful tools for meaningfully engaging students and creating rich learning opportunities. They support student success and promote instructional practice and design that supports inquiry and problem solving. Accessible and flexible learning resources also reduce the amount of time individual teachers spend on retro-fitting their resources so they can use their time working directly with students.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- The province needs to support development of specialized resources needed by teachers and students which are not attractive to publishers because of low market share. Resources will not always be commercially available. Some resources will need to be created requiring staff time and materials to be available.
- Technology can assist in processes to share teacher developed resources.

- These resources also need to be accessible from the fiscal perspective.
- Digital Repository of Textbooks for Students with Special Education Needs (Alberta Education) is a promising resource for schools.
- Parents can contribute to this process by sharing information with regard to specific learning resources that they have found to be effective with their child.
- In order to make resources truly accessible to students there also needs to be support to ensure that teachers understand the value of the resources to student learning.

SECTION QUESTION

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

3. Building Capacity for School Based-Staff and Learning Teams

Desired outcome:

A team approach to meeting the needs of students. The team would be made up of parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, school administrators and educational specialists who all have what they need to work successfully in support of the learner. For students with more complex needs, other specialists would be invited to be part of the team.

Possible ways to achieve this outcome:

What follows are eight ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

i. Provide specialized personnel to support classroom teachers in the assessment and programming for diverse learners.

It's not possible for every teacher to have a complete understanding of every diverse learner and their particular requirements for success — but some educators make a career of understanding difference and being able to provide advice on differentiated instruction that will prove successful. These specialists are called "learning coaches" and they could work alongside teachers to assist them in accommodating a range of learners in their classrooms. Learning coaches can help teachers to differentiate instruction, develop or find appropriate learning resources, administer diagnostic or classroom assessments, create learner profiles etc. They could become an important part of the learning team.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree Disagree

- The use of school based literacy coaches, lead teachers for mathematics, and technology leads in schools have been effective because they can model effective practice. Learning coaches should be organized so that they can demonstrate how effective inclusive practice at the classroom level.
- Promising practices:
 - The District's Inclusive Schools project involving six schools is engaged in this work.

ii. Strengthen the ability of teachers to teach to diversity.

The magic of education takes place when skilled teachers meet students who are open to learning. Teaching practices vary because each teaching situation is different and in constant change. However, teaching practice is regulated in the Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta (TQS), which was introduced in Alberta in 1997. This, along with the Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy, describes the instructional standard that all teachers are expected to meet throughout their careers. It is a standard set by Alberta Education and implemented by school authorities. A critical component of one inclusive education system is teachers who are prepared to meet the TQS and are supported in their ability to teach to diversity.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree Disagree

- Policy consistent with and ongoing funding to support the transition to one inclusive education system is essential.
- The Teacher Quality Standard (TQS) should clearly identify expectations for teachers related to one inclusive education system.
- Both pre-service and ongoing professional development are needed to ensure that teachers and administrators are knowledgeable about a range of exceptionalities. Provision of province-wide summer institutes on a variety of topics could increase teacher skills.
- Teachers need time to meaningfully incorporate new understandings into their practice.
- Promising Practice:
 - The District's New Teacher Institute provides education on inclusive strategies and differentiation.

iii. Strengthen the ability of principals to provide leadership in an inclusive system

Education leaders who believe in and support inclusive schools are a key element of one inclusive education system. The draft Principal Quality Practice document, developed by an education stakeholder committee in 2006, aims to ensure that all students have ongoing access to quality teaching and learning opportunities to meet the provincial goals of education and that they also have access to appropriate programming based on their individual learning needs. In our education system, it is principals who are expected to ensure this.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- A Principal Quality Practice document should set direction.
- Districts will need to support costs associated with ensuring that all principals have the support to meet these standards.
- Principals are accountable as instructional leaders for the programming and results for all students in their schools.

iv. Reflect the interests of a diverse population of students, including those with disabilities, in all aspects of Alberta Education's work.

Over time, a special education system has evolved in Alberta. It did so with the best of intentions in order to meet the needs of students with particular learning needs. Students and their families have said, however, that special education is "a place they cannot escape". In the spirit of building one inclusive education system, Alberta Education needs to be more focused on meeting the needs of a range of learners across one system, rather than in meeting special education needs in an isolated way. We believe that the Ministry should set a province-wide example, so that a culture of respect and understanding of student diversity develops throughout Alberta – at all levels of the system.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- Modeling change is critical to building credibility with others and provides grounded learning opportunities for those directly involved.
- The province can model co-ordinated work between the Special Education branch and Curriculum branch as well as cross work between AISI and the Special Programs branch.
- A concerted effort must be made to align terminology.

v. Develop standards for training of para-professionals.

There is currently no standardized training for those who do the important work of supporting students and their teachers in classrooms (teacher assistants, for example). The education system should develop and adopt provincial training and performance standards for these staff, so that every student and family who work with an assistant, can be guaranteed a minimum level of expertise.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Many para-professionals have developed a level of specialized knowledge in their work assignments. This needs to be recognized.
- Educational assistants need pre service and ongoing upgrading due to changing demographics and exceptionalities.
- Educational assistants and teachers need collaboration time.
- Jurisdictions currently experience challenges attracting staff to these positions. Practice standards would need to be supported by appropriate resourcing to enable jurisdictions to support professional development and compensation costs for those currently employed in these positions.
- Promising Practices:
 - Our District has hired two Educational Assistant Mentors whose responsibilities include: mentoring educational assistants working in a broad range of classes, providing complex instructional support to Educational Assistants and sharing developmentally appropriate practices and activities.
 - Provincial Coordinators of Alberta Post-Secondary Educational Assistant Programs from Red Deer College, Lethbridge, Portage, MacEwan, Lakeland, Medicine Hat, Keyano, Northern Lakes and Bow Valley have recommended minimum requirements.

vi. Develop provincial and/or regional centres that can provide highly specialized expertise and resources for students.

There is a lot to learn about meeting the needs of students who have rare or exceptionally high needs, as there is about meeting the needs of the many thousands of students who have been diagnosed with learning and attention deficit disabilities. These students have definite requirements for learning and in some cases need specialized supports. It's hard for one teacher to "know it all" in order to be able to successfully include that student in a school setting. But there is a wealth of expertise in the province that can be tapped into. Regional centres, designed to serve communities throughout the province, could act as resource "hubs" that schools can access for support and expertise. Such centres would be an efficient way to meet the needs of students. They would also act as research hubs so that the latest in research and development from across the world was easily available to Alberta teachers.

Strongly ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☒ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- These centers currently exist in many locations in the province. Our support is for a changed model as indicated at the end of this section.
- Collectively across the province it is likely that we have the knowledge to understand and support the "highly specialized needs" of our students. The challenge is linking knowledge with needs.
- Learning coaches, knowledgeable in inclusive schooling could provide an important link between the classroom teacher and these sources of expert knowledge.

- Promising Practices:
 - Using technology to create interactive virtual knowledge centres may be a cost effective way to bridge this gap. Alberta School for the Deaf (ASD) is currently involved in such a project.
 - Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) is currently in the process of collaboratively establishing a Fort McMurray satellite team with those three boards
 - Edmonton Public Schools and four other boards will be working with ERECS to facilitate wrap around services for junior and senior high students presenting with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
 - KIDS North and South provide co-ordinated supports to Kindergarten teachers serving students with special education needs.

vii. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers, parents and all members of the learning team.

In one inclusive education system, the dominant philosophy would be: "we're all in this together" and so learning opportunities for parents, teachers and others would be critical. Parents are advocates for their children and want to do the right things to support them in being successful in school. However, parents have felt that in the past they often had to "take on" the system. Further, the system has sometimes perpetuated this perspective as a result of parties being uncommunicative, unwelcoming or reluctant to listen to and understand the needs of students, because of a range of factors. Ongoing professional development to assist all members of the learning team would be one tool to demonstrate that, in the spirit of an inclusive education system, we have things to teach one another and learn together.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- Parent responses emphasized the need for genuine collaboration, with parents as part of the multi-disciplinary team. They emphasized the importance of valuing other professionals and support for a real team effort.
- Promising Practices:
 - The District's Inclusive Education Working Group comprised of parents, community organizations and district staff work to address issues and concerns. They report annually to Trustees on the status of their work.

viii. Ensure teachers entering the profession have the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to respond to students' abilities and needs.

Increasingly, there is a need in the education system for teachers who have been prepared to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities. This will require the ability to adapt learning outcomes in the Alberta Programs of Study; to select and use flexible learning resources and to accommodate difference in ways that convey to the student and their family that the system will meet their needs, as opposed to any suggestion that a student "does not fit". This cannot be accomplished without training. To prepare teachers in new ways will take system-wide collaboration with Alberta's universities.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- This will require co-ordination at the provincial level with Advanced Education.
- There is a limit to what can be learned through pre-service education. Extended practicum as well as a strong induction program for new teachers as indicated in an earlier section.
- Parents highlighted the importance of helping teachers develop greater appreciation of the parent perspective.

SECTION QUESTION

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

Regional Hubs to Support One Inclusive Education System

The expertise lacking in the province is related to inclusive schooling. It is recommended that the province support the development of regional centres which function as living labs for inclusive schooling. These functioning schools would be places where teachers and principals can see and learn about inclusive schooling in the Alberta context. These could be developed as research and teaching hubs. In terms of research they could serve as locations to pilot curriculum, assess resources, and inform decisions related to process for determining appropriate supports. These centres could provide professional development opportunities for all members of school learning teams through outreach consultation grounded in current practical experience. These schools could also be locations for teacher practicum placements which would support teachers in learning about inclusive practices as part of their pre-service training.

Edmonton Public is currently operating an inclusive education pilot and would be interested in serving as one regional centre.

Building Block 4. Collaborating for Learner Success

Desired outcome:

The provision of collaborative and seamless services and supports to students and families. This would aid in the educational success of students and set them up for success in post-secondary settings, the world of work, or assisted living situations – wherever life may take them.

Possible ways to achieve this outcome:

What follows are six ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

i. Create structures at both the provincial and local levels to enable effective cross-ministerial collaboration

Lots of people contribute to a student's success in school. When a student requires a more complex support team, made up of educational specialists, health professionals and others, it's important that this support team be able to work in a collaborative way. Since not everyone who provides service to a child, works for the education system (made up of school authorities and the Ministry), it will be important to develop policies, procedures and practices that work across ministries. A professional from Alberta Health and Wellness or Children and Youth Services or a service agency should be able to work alongside a professional from Education or a school authority without complication.

This may require the re-alignment of mandates, policies and data systems – and considerable dialogue to get this underway, but in order to offer a logical suite of services to families in order to assure success for the individual student, this important systemic, structural work needs to be done.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- In addition to looking at effective cross-ministerial collaboration it might be helpful to develop purposeful lateral networks or partnerships between and among school jurisdictions to promote collaboration related to district level change to support one inclusive education system.
- Creating immediate opportunities through project dollars would be necessary to explore how to develop collaborative support teams and also to determine which policies need to be changed.
- Promising Practices:
 - Parent Link Centre (Linkages) is a positive example of how groups can come together to identify common priorities to address emerging needs.

ii. Establish full-service school models to enhance cross-agency and cross-ministry collaboration and wraparound approach to coordinated services and supports.

We know that if the objective is for the child to experience educational success, the best PLACE for that work to be undertaken is in schools. At the moment, a student's educational needs may be addressed in a school setting, although their specialized needs (speech pathology, for example) in order to facilitate educational success, may be attended to elsewhere. In Phase 1 of the consultation,

participants told us that if the school could be considered the service "hub", where the collaborative team of specialists operates from, meeting students needs would be considerably easier and children could concentrate on the business of being in school. Wraparound approach to services in this strategy does not just refer to the geography of where a service is offered, it also means a "philosophy" of offering services in a seamless way from year to year, beginning at the earliest possible time and concluding in an effective transition to further education or to the world of work. This strategy speaks to wrapping the services around the student, rather than requiring families to find the services that they need from a range of sources.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- Refer to the previous section Regional Hubs to Support One Inclusive Education System.
- Parents indicated strong support for wrap around services and recognition on the part of educators that the input of specialists is essential to quality service for students.
- Promising Practices:
 - Models of wrap around service that currently exist in the District are the Mental Health Capacity Building projects at Jasper Place High School (Strength, Tolerance, Attitude and Resilience [STAR] program) and Dan Knott Junior High (The Way In).

iii. Reduce the disparity of access to cross-ministry services across the province.

One inclusive education system should be available to any Alberta student regardless of where they live. This strategy will need to look at how regional centres could reduce disparity and how technology can be deployed to "teleport" specialists in to work with a student and their learning team. If the tele-health model can be used in Alberta to bring health and mental health care experts to rural, remote Alberta in a cost effective way, without compromising patient safety, perhaps there are lessons to be learned about how to make such access possible for students, teachers, families and other members of the learning team.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

iv. Increase awareness among parents, teachers, and administrators of the importance of parent involvement as laid out in the Learning Team document.

The notion of a Learning Team and meaningful parent involvement has been in place in Alberta for some time. However, it may not have been "lived" across the province's education system as a concept to which all are committed. In one inclusive education system it will be an essential component of success, and so the philosophy and practices of successful learning teams will need to be taught, adopted and embedded across the education system. This begins with increasing awareness and effective communications, and could result in professional development and public information sessions.

Strongly agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- Parents were unanimous and very clear about their strong support for genuine parent involvement. This is also the District position.

v. Include teaching of the collaborative process in pre-service teacher education and in in-service training for principals and school jurisdiction level administrators.

Historically, teachers (who go on to be principals and sometimes school system administrators) have been prepared in their training for the rigours of the classroom, and the important work of working with families – they have not necessarily considered themselves to be part of a collaborative learning team, working with educational specialists, health and mental health professionals and others. The skill set for effective collaboration can be quite different than the traditional skill set for classroom effectiveness. If the education system of the future demands a more collaborative approach to meeting students' needs, then it is only fair to prepare teachers and other educational leaders for this reality through their pre-service training (their education degree), their practice teaching and in their on-going professional development. Building the skill set for collaboration will be a key component of success in a truly inclusive education system.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Refer to earlier comments related to teacher preparation.

vi. Ensure student records transfer in a timely manner to develop a more efficient flow of student information

It's not possible to prepare a student for success with appropriate programming without an adequate profile of the learner and his/ her history. In an increasingly mobile country, where families are moving schools, school districts and provinces, the efficient and timely transfer of student records is critical. Transience should not be considered unusual or problematic. Students get "lost in the cracks" when their records are slow to move, or do not make it to their destination. Processes of identifying abilities and needs begin over, with the consequent loss of valuable programming time. In a new future, protocols to ensure the timely transfer of student information would be enhanced and reinforced.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Promising Practice:
 - Edmonton Public has begun putting all assessments on PinPoint (document sharing and tracking system) and is moving towards an electronic student record.

SECTION QUESTION

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

Inclusive schooling hubs could take a lead in developing and field testing processes and protocols to support the delivery of seamless wrap around services to students. Use of technology to support adult learning and equity of access to information across the province to information would be an important part of this process as would ensuring that some of the school hubs were located in remote areas.

Building Block 5. Accessing Learning Resources and Technologies for 21st Century Learners

Desired outcome:

A system that is proactive about meeting the needs of students and is progressive about incorporating leading edge learning resources and technologies in the education of all students, including those with disabilities.

Possible ways to achieve this outcome:

What follows are four ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

i. Use available technologies, including SuperNet and videoconferencing, to enhance access to specialized resources, including professionals with expertise.

There are lots of ways for educators to learn and have access to people and information who can assist them in being instructional leaders for their students, in particular those students who may have complex needs. Not all of the learning can be anticipated and covered in universities, not all of the learning can take place in the physical presence of an expert; but if the education system commits to working together to make use of technology to access new knowledge, resources and experts more readily, there is potential for the calibre of teaching and learning support in schools to be higher.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Parents felt that teachers must use available technology to support student learning.
- The importance of e-learning for adults has been referenced in previous sections.
- Promising Practices:
 - Alberta School for the Deaf is offering “on-line” American Sign Language (ASL) courses.
 - UDL has been referenced in previous sections.

ii. Increase access to assistive technologies and specialized services using technology.

The world of technology is changing at a rapid rate, and there are new developments all the time that could be of value in order to accommodate learning for students. Regional centres could be the place that would know about new developments and would work with schools and their school authorities to increase access for students to tools that could make their learning more successful. In a system with hubs of expertise, all learning teams would have increased access to services, technology and research, thus leveling the learning playing field for all.

Strongly ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
agree disagree

- Initiatives related to learning with technology need to be inclusive.
- Parents suggested the adoption of a “Duty to Accommodate Policy” in the Kindergarten through Grade 12 system similar to that which exists in post secondary education.

- Assessments for technology should be a part of the student assessment process using the student, environment, tasks and tools (SETT) framework,
- Promising Practice:
 - The District's One to One laptop project provided students with full time access to a laptop for learning. The project included regular students and those who had been identified with disabilities. Positive results were found for all students.

iii. Develop accessible learning resources to meet the diverse learning needs of all Alberta students.

In one inclusive education system, learning resources will need to be re-thought in order to ensure that they are accessible, engaging and meaningful for all students, including students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree ☒ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

iv. Implement guidelines for accessible resources for resource developers, publishers and school authorities

Developers and publishers of learning resources will need to understand what it means to re-think their products for an inclusive system, and how developing them in this new way is in fact, a benefit to ALL students. Building one inclusive education system will require all partners to think about their work differently – and as the leader in developing learning resources, Education would be in the position to initiate and lead the development and communication of guidelines to ensure that learning resource developers and publishers understand what the requirements are in Alberta's inclusive system.

Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☒ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Don't know ☐

- While guidelines will be helpful, the real driver in the production of resources is market share. Provincial co-ordination in identification and development of the types of resources needed across the province which are aligned to the inclusive curriculum help to address this issue.
- Promising Practice:
 - Province purchase licenses for resources, (e.g., software, Boardmaker) have been wonderful – affordable and accessible.
 - The district has developed teacher resources to support implementation of the K and E Curriculum discussed in Section 1.

SECTION QUESTION

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. The proposed changes described in these five "building blocks" are aligned with the vision, mission and principles of one inclusive education system.

Strongly ☐ Agree ☒ Disagree ☐ Strongly ☐ Don't know ☐
Agree disagree

2. As Alberta Education builds a framework for one inclusive education system based on the concepts described in this discussion guide, do you have any advice for us to ensure success?

- The current definition of one inclusive education system is vague. This has raised concern amongst parents. Some parents define inclusion as “A student of special needs being educated along with his or her peers in a regular classroom along in their community school”. This is what they want for their child. Other parents want their children to have access to congregated sites. What is clear from all parent submissions is that parents respect the choices of others and want guarantees that their choice for their child will be respected and supported. They also expect that equivalent services and supports will be available across the district.
- The building blocks and the topics referenced within each section provide a listing of strong ideas to support the development of one inclusive education system. The next step will be to link these ideas into a meaningful and doable plan for action.
- Supports and strategies will be necessary to assist staff, parents and students to understand the need for the benefits of moving from a dual system to one inclusive educational system.
- Transportation issues are related to the challenges of providing student access to appropriate learning opportunities close to where students live.
- Many of the suggestions have fiscal implications which have not yet been addressed. In tight fiscal times, tough choices will need to be made both provincially and in school jurisdictions. Edmonton Public Schools understands the importance of doing the “right” things to move the whole system forward. However, there will be a need to address individual accommodation requirements throughout this process of system transformation.
- Processes will need to be developed to involve all stakeholders on an ongoing basis in the transition toward one inclusive education system. Building on and expanding the use of promising practices is a positive way to move forward.
- In our current climate it will be important that the province work **with** jurisdictions to develop “intelligent accountability” (Fullan 2005) processes that appropriately reflect student growth and attainment which align with the intended outcomes of one inclusive educational system.

To help us understand and categorize your responses, please answer the following questions.

Where do you live? Please check one.

- ☒ City
- ☐ Town or village
- ☐ Municipal district or county
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Please provide the first three characters of your postal code (example T5K).

T5H

Are you answering this questionnaire as a:

- ☒ Group

What is the nature of your group (see list below) and how many participated in your discussion:

If you are answering as an individual, are you:

- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Parent of student with special education needs
- ☐ Student Teacher
- ☐ Teacher assistant
- ☐ School administrator (principal)
- ☐ Trustee
- ☐ Representative of a school authority (school board administrator)
- ☐ Representative of government
- ☐ Representative of a university
- ☐ Representative of a service provider
- ☒ Other (please specify) School Jurisdiction_____

Only contributions provided to us in one of the formats described here will be accepted. The nature of this consultation does not allow for the acceptance of papers or submissions that fall outside of this process.