

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 15, 2010

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

RESOURCE

STAFF: Deborah Brandell, Gloria Chalmers, John Edey, Monica Ellis, Shelly Jobagy, Belina Pasula, Elaine Piercey, Heather Raymond

INFORMATION

Introduction

In 2001, a collaborative initiative between the District and community stakeholders was established in support of provincial and District policy related to inclusive placements for students in their community school. This work has provided a foundation in inclusive practices that will support the implementation of Setting the Direction initiatives. The District will continue open conversations with parents and community partners as we move forward with this work.

Background Information

Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education (ERC) presented information on inclusion to the Board of Trustees at the May 8, 2001 meeting. Recommendations approved by Board included the creation of a collaborative committee to identify issues and discuss opportunities to support inclusive practices in the District. The current committee (Inclusion Working Group) has representatives from ERC, Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) and staff from Special Education, Programs.

In collaboration with principals and the Inclusion Working Group two documents: *Suggested Best Practices: Welcoming Parents of Students with Special Needs in Community Schools* (2005) and *How to Create Inclusive School Communities - Administrator's Handbook* (2009), have been developed to support schools.

2009 - 2010 District Inclusion Update

Approximately 46 per cent of district students identified with special education needs are receiving programming and supports in inclusive settings. The following update outlines collaborative work with community stakeholders and central decision units to support inclusive education.

Inclusion Working Group: This group meets regularly to identify issues and discuss opportunities to support inclusion. This year the group has:

- Provided input and feedback on the revision of *A Framework for Teaching Quality in Alberta*; as part of the Teacher Qualification Services (TQS) review process by Alberta Education's Teacher Development and Certification Branch.
- Collaborated with representatives from the Inclusive Education Initiative to create Key Messages for Schools.

- Presented on how to support inclusive choices to first year principals.

In May, the Inclusion Working Group met with Superintendent Schmidt to discuss challenges and advocate for change. Concerns were raised about the consent form for specialized assessment. They requested that district staff be identified as Inclusion Consultants. They also indicated some parents continue to experience challenges regarding placement decisions and access to programming. They received a commitment for follow-up on issues raised.

Inclusive Education Initiative: This 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 population. The initiative expanded this year to include 16 schools. Staff development has included professional development at the school level, an inclusion conference featuring Dr. Richard Villa, and ongoing 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 incorporate inclusive practices in their schools. The learnings from this work will support the District in building capacity to implement Setting the Direction's short term priorities. One of the ways the District will continue to support staff development next year is with the inclusion conference. Dr. David Edyburn has been booked as the keynote speaker for this event. In addition, district schools will be invited to participate in the Inclusive Education Initiative next year.

Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services (KIDS): KIDS continues to support children with severe and mild/moderate disabilities receiving programming in inclusive kindergartens. This past year over 1,100 children were provided supports in their kindergarten from a specialized team of consultants and therapists. They provided programming support and information to staff and parents to assist children in accessing learning opportunity in the classroom. KIDS provided targeted professional development for early learning teachers and educational assistants in partnership with ABC Head Start and Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation (E4C). KIDS consultant staff also worked with the inclusive education initiative to offer supports beyond kindergarten in some targeted schools. KIDS supported implementation of the Early Years Evaluation (EYE-TA); a skills-based teacher rating scale that recognizes the expertise of our kindergarten teachers and enables them to identify children who require additional learning supports. KIDS also provided frequent inservicing for approximately 130 Educational Assistants attached to the unit, and offered professional development opportunities for Kindergarten teachers which helped build capacity for programming for all children in their inclusive Kindergartens.

Consulting Services: Teaching and Learning Support Services (TLSS), Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) and Special Education Support Team (SEST) provide a wide range of supports to students in inclusive education settings. Services are provided in the following areas: programming for student differences, educational behaviour, speech language pathology, psychology, physical therapy, occupational therapy, audiology, deaf and hard of hearing, low vision and blind, adapted physical education, and adaptive technologies. TLSS designated two consultants, as part of their portfolio, to work with the Inclusive Education Initiative Steering Committee. Consultants are developing ongoing relationships with schools to move towards job-embedded support in the classroom.

Leadership Services: This unit functioned as a key-contact for administrative and parent inquiries regarding inclusion. Staff from Leadership Services presented to Principal and Leadership Education Development Programs (PED and LED), first year principals and first year assistant principals on district policy and practices concerning inclusive education.

Programs: A number of initiatives were undertaken this year such as: a Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Support Network for principals working with included students was created; facilitated discussions among principals and assistant principals of early education programs to support inclusion in community kindergartens; and initiated Firm Foundations, a play-based kindergarten phonemic awareness program that supports the development of diverse learners' early language and literacy skills. Programs provided a consultant to support program implementation and data collection.

Community Partnerships: Programs consultants continue to liaise with a variety of community partners on a regular basis to utilise community knowledge and experience in order to support students learning needs in inclusive settings. For example, to develop understanding and support the inclusion of students, Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) Canada's president and vice-president collaborated with Special Education Programs to create and publish four SPD information hand-outs for educators. These were posted on the Bulletin Board, an internal website for district staff. Also, Special Education Programs facilitated a presentation on SPD to the Special Education Principals' Committee. To support the successful transition of children into inclusive settings for their first educational experience with the District, Programs consultants meet regularly with the executive director of Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT).

Summary

The District continues to work in collaboration with staff, parents and community stakeholders, to ensure students are supported in inclusive settings in community schools. We continue to promote awareness, expand knowledge and build expertise on inclusive practices. This report highlights celebrations in relation to inclusive education. However, parents and staff continue to experience challenges. Moving forward, our commitment is to identify issues and remove barriers to support inclusive practices in the District. To this end the work has been broadened and incorporated as part of the District plan for students with special education needs.

The District will continue to work with stakeholders and support schools by building capacity to implement provincial priorities in relation to Setting the Direction. Future directions include: continuing to invite open conversations with parents and community partners through the Parent Advisory Group, expanding the Inclusive Education Initiative, building district capacity by increasing staff that are knowledgeable in the area of inclusive education, and reorganizing the Plan for Special Education to ensure it is aligned with provincial short term priorities with regards to Setting the Direction.