

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 17, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Inclusion of Students with Special Needs

ORIGINATOR: Bob Holt, Executive Director

RESOURCE STAFF: Danette Andersen, Judy Craig, Mary-Ellen Deising, Jane Farrell, Veda Lastiwka, Ron MacNeil, Donna Matheson, Marliss Meyer, Judy Miller, Barbara Morgan McDermid, David Piercey, Neil Robblee, Edgar Schmidt,

INFORMATION

Background:

At the May 8, 2001 board meeting, a delegation from the Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education made a presentation regarding inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. Recommendations from the administration came forward to the board on May 22, 2001. One recommendation initiated a committee “of parents with children with special needs including representation from the Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education (ERC), community partners and district staff to review obstacles and best practices of inclusion.” The committee was established, with representatives including: Paul Leung and Paul Kohl, Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education; David Laughton, Edmonton Association for Bright Children; June McCrone Jenkins, Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta; Linda Cundy and Diane Unterschultz, Edmonton Association of the Deaf; Wendy McDonald, Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL). Also attending were a school principal, a principal from Leadership Services, and two Central Services staff who chaired the meetings.

The committee understood that the district sees itself as a district of choice and provides a range of placement options for students with special needs but that the focus of this committee was inclusion. It was acknowledged that the nature of inclusive programming varies with the special needs of the student. A report arising from committee work was presented to the Board in spring 2002, identifying themes and corresponding recommendations that were approved and subsequently disseminated to Central Services staff for implementation.

District staff involved in implementing recommendations were: Student Achievement Services, Leadership Services, Special Education, Recruitment and Staffing, Communications, Budget Services, Consulting Services, Resource Development and district principals and their staffs. Each Central Services decision unit implemented recommendations assigned to them and met regularly during 2002-2003 for discussion, to collaborate, coordinate and implement the recommendations.

The district produced *An Update on: Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in EPS* - February 2003(Attachment I to the Appendix) outlining district initiatives and practices in relation to inclusion of students with special needs. All principals and stakeholders including ERC, AACL both supporters of inclusive education and Alberta Learning (Attachment II to the Appendix) received the update in February, 2003. More recent projects and initiatives are incorporated in a second update provided to principals and stakeholders (Attachment III to the Appendix).

Themes identified by the Inclusion Committee in the March 2002 report are addressed in the Appendix along with related district initiatives, projects and ongoing practices that support inclusion of students with special needs.

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APPENDIX I Themes identified by the Inclusive Education Committee Report in April 2002

THEME 1 – ADDRESS ATTITUDES

“Because attitudes are affected by actions and strategies that increase awareness, improve expertise, and provide adequate support and resources, this area needs to be addressed on a number of fronts simultaneously:”

The district has undertaken a number of initiatives, to increase awareness, enhance expertise, and provide support to principals and teaching staff.

The Superintendent addressed all principals at a spring 2002 Superintendent’s Educational Leadership Team meeting reiterating that students with special needs and their families are welcome at their community schools.

Communications reviewed all communication vehicles and stock photos to ensure messages on inclusion of students with special needs are supported. This resulted in a Centre for Education display on Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning which identifies the achievement target “Students will demonstrate a minimum of one year's growth in reading and writing or meet the goals of their IPPs.” A photo shoot of students with special needs added to the district’s inventory for projects. Photos of students with special needs have been incorporated into district communication vehicles, such as:

- Presentation folders
- Focus on Teaching and Learning display at the Centre for Education
- Registration information for parents
- The Compass – May 2003 – photograph (Attachment IV)

The March 2002 edition of the staff newsletter entitled *Blueprints for Supporting Teaching and Learning - School Stories* highlighted the cooperative work of parents and staff who successfully included a student in his community school. (Attachment V). Another article highlighting inclusion is in the June 2003 staff newsletter entitled *Compass* (Attachment VI). An Inclusive Education segment was added to Special Education Programs section of the annual newspaper insert outlining programs in the district (Attachment VII).

The annual District Recognition Awards honour contributions of parents, community members, district staff and students based on nominations by community members, advocacy groups, and district staff. Advocacy groups such as the ERC have been informed that they are welcome to make such nominations. When the district is notified that staff have been honored by an advocacy group, this is highlighted in the Superintendent’s Memo. Recipients of the ERC’s awards in 2002 were acknowledged in this way.

Three article summaries focused on research related to successful inclusion strategies at elementary and high school levels are targeted for the Focus website. These initial summaries focus on evidence based practical strategies that support district staff in their efforts to include all learners. Article summaries are highlighted in the Superintendent’s Memo as they are posted.

Student Achievement Services provide training for the Focus on Teaching and Learning work to Principal and Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT). Student Achievement Services works with Consulting Services, senior administration, Student Assessment, and Personnel to

improve achievement of all students, including those with special needs. The April and May training around the Focus – Expectation #6 Engaging Families included over 200 parents, including those of students with special needs who attended to discuss strategies for families and schools to work together supporting each other in the work of student achievement.

Guided School Visits have taken place at about 50 district schools including Talmud Torah and W.P. Wagner Schools where students have been supported in inclusive placements. Many teachers and consultants participating in Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning training sessions reinforce the perspective of students with special needs in Focus work at the district and school level. This work will continue in 2003-2004. An ERC presentation to the Student Achievement team will be facilitated.

District staff are compiling a registry of parent speakers, articles, websites and resources regarding inclusion of students with special needs. A registry of schools where successful inclusion has occurred is currently being created as a resource allowing principals to share ideas. At the district's request AACL and ERC provided suggested resources and parent speakers for the registry. A parent from both organizations has presented to district staff in 2003. District staff visited the AACL library to review and borrow resources and materials. These resources and references will provide a wide range of models of successful inclusion practices for district staff.

Consulting Services and Leadership Services provide Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning inservices that support achievement of all students including those with special needs in inclusive settings. Consulting Services provides a variety of inservices that support students in inclusive settings (Attachment VIII). They also work with school staff on site to provide assessment and consultation for an individual student in an inclusive setting.

The topic of inclusion of students with special needs was presented and discussed at:

- Principal Education & Development Program - a program for staff who are interested in and preparing for appointment to the principalship.
- Leadership Education & Development Program – a program for teachers seeking their first position of leadership or for staff members (department heads, curriculum coordinators, assistant principals, or consultants) who are into the early stages of their leadership experience.
- Development and Support for First Year Principals - a series of sessions designed to provide first year principals with timely information to assist them with their work in the principalship.
- Teacher Advisory Group – regular meetings with the superintendent and teacher representative from each school to maintain ongoing communication between the superintendent and teachers regarding district plans.
- Senior High Coordinators – regular meetings for the teacher designated from each high school who is the contact person and coordinator of the many aspects of programming required to meet the needs of students with special needs.

The Early Education Outreach pilot project was initiated in 2002 – 2003 at Waverly School and Scott Robertson School. Early Education staff provided expertise and support services to children with severe special needs in inclusive kindergarten programs in their community schools. A wide range of staff with expertise in working with children with severe special needs supported the student, parents and staff in the inclusive placement. Services provided included:

- on site teacher assistant
- teacher support
- speech therapy
- occupational therapy
- psychology
- behaviour expertise
- physiotherapy
- in-home specialist

In the first year of the pilot, Scott Robertson and Waverly staff have worked with community schools to support over 60 children with severe special needs in inclusive placements. Feedback from community school principals has been overwhelmingly positive.

Special Education, Leadership Services, and Consulting Services provide information regarding the district, inclusive education and district centre program options to Early Childhood Services (ECS) operators. In early spring 2003 all ECS operators were invited to an information session at the Centre for Education regarding procedures and suggestions to promote a smooth transition for parents of children with severe special needs. Feedback from ECS operators was extremely positive and supported an annual meeting provided by the district. Based on the feedback, the district will continue to meet with ECS Operators.

In April 2003, Special Education, Leadership Services, Consulting Services and Alberta Learning collaborated to provide information promoting a smooth transition to the district for parents of children with severe special needs currently attend ECS programs. Topics included inclusive placements and district centre programs, information that parents can provide to principals, suggested topics for discussion, support services and working with schools. Principals have the district document *Transition Process for Students with Severe Special Needs* that outlines the same recommended practices to coordinate a smooth transition for students and their parents.

THEME 2 – COMMITMENT

Inclusive Education Contact: “This proposal involves the designation, on an ongoing basis, of a staff member in Leadership Services to carry out a number of functions. The individual would require knowledge and training in the area of inclusive education.”

Leadership Services staff Danette Andersen and Neil Robblee are lead contacts for inclusion for principals and stakeholder groups. Staff from Community Options, which is closely affiliated with the ERC, Getting Ready for Today (GRIT), and Family Linkages were informed of the designation in June 2002. These individuals were identified in *An Update on: Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in EPS*, distributed to all principals, the Inclusion Committee, which was expanded to include a parent from the Key Communicators and the

Edmonton Student Health Partnership (ESHIP), and stakeholder groups. All Leadership Services staff are available to assist principals and parents.

Leadership Services provides ongoing support to the Superintendent on issues and solutions around inclusion. They provide dedicated support to principals and parents and in some cases work with schools to identify and support unique placements to meet student needs. The team tracks issues and follows-up on calls from principals and parents. In some cases, Leadership Services staff follow-up with a school visit or meeting with school staff and parents. They summarize information for review by the Superintendent.

Leadership Services staff wrote an article for the Edmonton Autism Society's newsletter in spring 2003 regarding program options with inclusion as the first option considered and services for students with autism in the district (Attachment IX). In early spring, 2003, staff provided information about the district to a parent meeting of Community Options, which includes many of the parents in ERC.

THEME 3 – FUNDING

The district reviewed the basis of allocation to schools for Learning Disabilities and Guaranteed Enrollment.

Learning Disability allocation:

Students with learning disabilities demonstrate average to above average learning potential with significant delays due to unique processes for learning. Students in the Strategies program demonstrate a range of particular learning strengths and challenges, but have not been successful in the mainstream classroom. When these students understand their particular learning profile and work to master specific strategies through diagnostic programming and interventions they become successful learners. The Strategies program is intended to be a short-term program. More than half of students return to a mainstream classroom within two to three years and achieve at grade level.

Schools offering the Strategies program receive a Level 5 allocation, which brings an additive per pupil allocation of \$3 560. This additional allocation is to provide short-term intensive program in a small class setting. Students who met criteria for the Strategies program but are not attending a Strategies program receive a level 1 allocation.

The Basis of Allocation committee that makes recommendations to the Superintendent upheld the present practice of differentiated allocation based on the following tenets:

- the level 5 allocation provides students who have been unsuccessful in a mainstream program with an alternative short term small class placement and teachers with specialized training to support their unique learning needs,
- the focus of the Strategies Program is to teach students about their learning profile and the requisite skills to be successful facilitating their return to the mainstream classroom.

Guaranteed Enrollment:

The district offers a range of special programs to meet the learning needs of students. Program Distribution monitors demand for new centres and establishes new classes based on a set of approved planning principles. Principals of all district centres determine the

maximum number of students accommodated in any school year, based on student learning needs. In some cases, the number of students enrolled in a designated district class on September 30th may not generate sufficient allocations to support the necessary staff and resources for programming. To ensure that district classes can provide staff and programming at the beginning of the school year, Budget Services provides a minimum number of allocations, or guaranteed enrolments, for all designated special needs classes.

The implementation of the Special Needs Assisted Placement (SNAP) software program, beginning in 2001-2002, highlights information on the location of district centre programs, the type of program available, staffing, and class size. SNAP also assists principals making on-line placement requests in district special needs programs. After September 30th, SNAP identifies those classes with guaranteed enrolments and ensures that if any special needs district program within a specified transportation zone has a school with a guaranteed enrolment; any new placements for that program are channeled only to that school, until the guarantee has been met. In this way, new student placements are meshed with spaces that have already been allocated resources. It is the expectation that the program will accept any additional age appropriate students who meet special needs eligibility criteria until the guarantee has been met. Only after new student placements have filled in the class(es) with guaranteed enrolments, can other schools in the zone accept additional new students.

The Basis of Allocation Committee reviewed guaranteed enrolments in relation to the new SNAP program which ensures new placements are made where resources have already been allocated. The committee upheld the current practice and supported the SNAP program's capability to reduce the number of guaranteed enrolments required in the district. The committee supported this concept to ensure that district special needs classes have resources to provide alternate options for students.

THEME 4 – COLLABORATION

Inclusive Education Brochure:

In fall 2001, a series of parent brochures outlining district centre programs for students with special needs such as the *Individual Support Program* (Attachment X) were created and distributed to schools. The purpose of the brochures was to provide consistent and accurate information to staff and parents about alternate district centre programs. As the entry point for all students, community school principals discuss community school placement but may provide a brochure to parents. This fulfills Board Policy HA.BP and Alberta Learning's *Standards for Special Education* whereby principals are responsible to inform parents of options. This information assists parents to make informed decisions about alternate programs offered by the district.

Brochures incorporate the Focus on Teaching and Learning beliefs;

“Superb Results from all Kids, All students will reach their potential as successful learners and as participating members of classrooms within community schools*, through the partnership of home and school. Each Edmonton Public School has a clearly identified Instructional Focus. Every student works towards achievement in the focus area, including students with special needs.”

*Some brochures such as *Programs for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing* cite “school communities” because one of the programs, the Alberta School for the Deaf, is a congregated program.

All brochures state that annual goals on Individual Program Plans are “identified by staff, student and parents” and each brochure includes a section “How can parents help?” outlining strategies to support their child and promote success and achievement. All brochures emphasize that student success is maximized when school and parents work together as partners, and opportunities for integration are identified in district centre programs.

Inclusion in Community Schools (Attachment XI) is another brochure in this series. It informs parents on how to proceed if they choose inclusive education for their child. The Inclusion Committee expanded to include representatives from Key Communicators and Edmonton Student Health Initiative Partnership (ESHIP) provided initial input to the brochure in December 2002. This input formed the basis for the draft version of the brochure, which was provided to the expanded Inclusion Committee and district principals. A district committee reviewed all feedback and refined the brochure.

The *Inclusion in Community Schools* brochure states:

“All students will reach their potential as successful learners and as participating members of typical classrooms within community schools through the partnership of home and school.”

The district clarifies that statement by adding:

“The district supports inclusion of students with special needs with age appropriate non-disabled peers in community schools and offers a variety of supports within the resources available to the school.”

In addition, the brochure provides a definition of an inclusive school as identified by Alberta Learning in the *Standards in Special Education* document. It states;

“inclusion by definition refers not merely to setting but to specifically designed instruction and support for students with special needs in regular classrooms and neighbourhood schools.”

The *Inclusion in Community Schools* brochure identifies:

- the process to register a student at the community school,
- information that may be helpful at the transition meeting with the principal,
- suggested topics that parents may clarify with the principal,
- the elements of the Individual Program Plan (IPP),
- strategies to support their child in their education, and
- the process to access transportation to and from school.

All brochures will be available to parents in hard copy or on the district website in June 2003.

THEME 5 – STAFF

“Preservice and inservice training of teachers and other staff:”

The district provides post-secondary institutions such as the University of Alberta and Grant McEwan College with information and feedback regarding pre-service training of their students. Training students to work with a variety of student needs and abilities in a classroom is a message which is routinely emphasized to the post secondary institutions.

An ongoing focus of the district is to support school staff working with a range of student needs. The following initiatives and practices were part of the work of 2002 and 2003.

The topic of inclusion was presented at the Superintendent's Council meeting early in 2003 and at Principal Vertical meetings which include all district principals. Principal groups presented questions regarding inclusion to which Central Services staff responded, clarifying district policy, regulations and practices.

Leadership Services work with a Principal Committee in which inclusion is a regular agenda item. Two representatives from the ERC addressed this committee regarding their beliefs and views on inclusion at the May 2003 meeting.

Leadership Services has developed and is providing to principals an Educational Inclusion Planning Guide of ideas to support students in inclusive settings. The guide provides a format for information gathering and program planning for the broad range of students with special needs. Items such as staff support, equipment and technology needs, and instructional accommodations are included in the planning guide. A collection of articles, best practices, websites and resources that support inclusion are being gathered as a resource for principals and parents.

New and beginning teachers participate in a 3 or 4 day New and Beginning Teacher Induction Program. The purpose of the institute is help new district staff develop an awareness of the district's culture, philosophy and vision, in the context of supporting teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers acquire and build a repertoire to support the diversity of special needs in various classroom settings at the elementary, junior high and high school levels. How we meet the diversity of Special Needs in an inclusionary class setting is continually addressed throughout the institute days. The following messages are emphasized.

- We are all teachers of all children.
- Every child can learn and be successful.
- Every class has children with a variety of needs and we need to recognize this, program for them, teach and assess to meet the wide range of needs.
- The district has a number of staff and services to support teaching and learning in the classroom and teachers can access these supports.

Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning staff development opportunities in 2003- 2004 will be focused in a number of inservice and coaching initiatives where teachers are able to gain information and strategies to meet a range of student needs. The training sessions incorporate accommodations and modifications for students with special needs.

The district has developed four Critical Learning resources for students requiring extensive modifications in their program. The resources identify Alberta Learning curriculum skills and appropriate functional skills for students in inclusive or district programs. The resources provide teachers with a guide for appropriate student programming. The documents also serve as a communication tool for teachers, students and parents. Critical Learning resources are not prescriptive and are used to guide the teacher when programming for the unique strengths and needs of the student.

Consulting Services staff speak to University of Alberta Education classes annually discussing inclusion of students with special needs. District staff have had discussions with the University of Alberta Rehabilitation Medicine faculty regarding inclusive practices and needs of students in schools. The *Position Paper on School-Based Practice for ESHIP Occupational and Physical Therapists* written by ESHIP staff in the district and in the Capital Health Authority outlines inclusive best practices for rehabilitation services in schools. This document has been shared with the faculty.

Consulting Services provides ongoing inservices and consultation to support students with special needs in inclusive placements. District staff have sponsored conferences highlighting inclusion of students with special needs, such as, “A Day with Norman Kunc” (Attachment XII) and “Teaching Students with Autism” (Attachment XIII).

Leadership Services provided two sessions for principals of junior and senior high schools at the Greater Edmonton Teacher’s Convention in February 2003 on inclusion of students with special needs

Non-profit community groups have been informed that announcements of upcoming inservices or conferences can be distributed to district staff through the district’s Mail Bag. Organizations that support the philosophy of inclusion use this service, including GRIT, AACL and the ERC.

“To increase the pool of qualified teacher assistants and sign language interpreters”, Recruitment and Staffing met with the Grant MacEwan College (GMC), Health and Community Studies Division Program Chairs which includes the:

- Child and Youth Care Program
- Teacher Assistant Program
- Sign Language Studies Program
- Therapist Assistant Program.

As a result of discussions, Recruitment and Staffing will speak to the GMC classes regarding district employment opportunities. The College invited district representatives to attend career fairs for programs listed above. District staff encouraged the Chairs to have second year students apply with the district while completing their studies. The result is an increased number of supply teacher assistants available on a day-to-day basis. Recruitment and Staffing advised the Chair of the Teacher Assistant Program that a greater emphasis on working with students with special needs is recommended to fulfill the increasing demands from schools.

THEME 6 – INFORMATION FOR DECISION MAKERS

The district identified placements of students with moderate to severe special needs who have a code identifying a special need. In 2002 - 2003 the information was gathered through a principal survey. In future years, this information will be accessed through the district on-line Student Information System - Individual Program Plan (SIS-IPP).

All district principals were asked to identify the number of students with moderate and severe special needs (level 5 to 8) who are in congregated, integrated and inclusive placements. The definitions provided to principals are as follows:

Congregated – students are in programs that have minimal or no interaction with age-appropriate non-disabled peers during the period of a normal week

Included - 85% to 100% of the student's program is with age appropriate non-disabled peers during the period of a normal week

Partially Integrated –

- 50% to 84% of the student's program is with age appropriate non-disabled peers during the period of a normal week. The student may be registered in a district centre program but receive the majority of their program in a typical classroom, or be registered in a typical classroom with up to half of the program in an alternate setting such as a resource room.
- Up to 49% of the student's program is with age appropriate non-disabled peers during the period of a normal week. The majority of the student's program occurs in a district centre classroom with some opportunities for integration.

Inclusion can be at a:

- School level – i.e. recess/break, assemblies, dances, community based service/recreation, school celebrations, lunch
- Class level – where a district centre class is paired with an inclusive class for ongoing programming for a specific subject(s), i.e. physical education, science, computers, math, art.
- Individual level – any student who leaves the district centre class for ongoing programming for 1 or more subjects with age-appropriate non-disabled peers.

The results from all schools on the 2003 survey are as follows;

- 44.72% of students with special needs are in congregated settings
- 55.28% of students with special needs have interaction with age appropriate typical peers within a period of a normal week
 - 21.72% of students with special needs have 85% to 100% of their program in inclusive settings
 - 29.20% of students with special needs have 50% or more of their program in inclusive settings

Included in the data are schools such as the Alberta School for the Deaf (ASD), and Woodside, that provide highly specialized programming for a sector of students who choose or require a congregated setting. The Deaf community has been very supportive of ASD for decades prior to the school entering the district. Woodside provides academic and behaviour programming to students who require a highly structured program to ensure the safety of students in the district. When these programs are deleted from the data the percentage of students who are in various placements within the 203 district community schools would reflect the following:

- 36.26% of students with special needs are in congregated settings
- 63.74% of students with special needs have interaction with age appropriate typical peers within a period of a normal week
 - 25.36% % of students with special needs have 85% to 100% of their program in inclusive settings
 - 33.98% of students with special needs have 50% or more of their program in inclusive settings

Students with moderate to severe special needs are included in mainstream classrooms in 201 out of 203 community schools in the district. The district provides for a range of placement options to support the needs of all students with special needs.

Alberta Learning provides to school jurisdictions information on all students who write the Provincial Achievement Tests and data on the total number of students with special needs that wrote. This data is not broken down by special needs category. Data for those students with special needs who wrote the Highest Level of Achievement Tests is gathered for information to report to the Board and staff. Principals may use this data in relation to students in their school.

Future Steps

The district will meet with the ERC regularly to share information, and to consider ways to work together. The District, ERC and AACL will monitor a pilot project initiated by the Calgary Board of Education to work with an external agency in the area of inclusive communities. The district will explore opportunities for a similar project.

Summary

The district has focused on inclusion of students with special needs by incorporating a range of initiatives and projects into district practice. Students in the district have been included successfully for a number of years, therefore processes to share ongoing best practices have been implemented. The district has focused this work to support students in inclusive placements providing for one option for students within the range of programs offered by the district.

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ATTACHMENT I	<i>An Update On: Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in Edmonton Public Schools, February 2003</i>
ATTACHMENT II	Letter from Alberta Learning
ATTACHMENT III	<i>An Update On: Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in Edmonton Public Schools, June 2003</i>
ATTACHMENT IV	<i>Compass Photograph, May 2003</i>
ATTACHMENT V	<i>Blueprints for Supporting Teaching and Learning – School Stories, March 2002</i>

APPENDIX I

ATTACHMENT VI	<i>Compass</i> Article, June 2003
ATTACHMENT VII	Newspaper Insert – Special Education Programs
ATTACHMENT VIII	Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services Inservices
ATTACHMENT IX	Edmonton Autism Society’s newsletter, Spring 2003
ATTACHMENT X	<i>Individual Support Program, Services for Students with Special Needs in District Centres</i> brochure
ATTACHMENT XI	<i>Inclusion in Community Schools, Services for Students in Community Schools</i> brochure
ATTACHMENT XII	A Day with Norman Kunc,
ATTACHMENT XIII	Teaching Students with Autism