

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 22, 2001

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dosedall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to the Delegation from the Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education

ORIGINATOR: M. de Man, Department Head Designate

RESOURCE
STAFF: Karen Bardy, Donna Barrett, Rick Bell, Jim Davies, Sheri-Lee Langlois, Pat Mills, Barbara Morgan McDermid, Linda Wiens,

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the request by the Edmonton Regional Coalition to create a new policy to support inclusion for all students with special needs be denied.
2. That a committee be struck of parents with children with special needs including representation from the Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education, community partners and district staff to review obstacles and best practices of inclusion.
3. That the administration ensures services to staff in schools facilitates inclusion as a viable option for parents and their children.
4. That the Board request the Alberta School Boards Association examine issues and options for students with special needs at it's Urban Board Caucus meeting in June 2001.

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Background

At the board meeting of May 8, 2001, the Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education addressed the issue of inclusion of students with special needs in Edmonton Public Schools.

The delegation requested that:

- the board develop a new policy, which supports inclusion for all students with special needs with the rare exception of some students
- a working group of parents and educators who support inclusive education, develop a new policy, identify an implementation plan, create timelines to ensure the policy is implemented
- the working group of parents and educators develop written procedures to ensure the policy's implementation in the context of training and hiring of support staff, assessment of students and implementation practices
- regular professional development, resources and consultants be available to district staff to support students with special needs
- the current funding model be reviewed
- a repatriation pilot project of students currently in a district site be established.

Policy

Edmonton Public Schools is a district of choice for all students and thereby provides placement options for students with special needs and for students choosing alternate programs. The board recognizes the range of student needs and the right of the parent to advocate for the best placement for their child. With that basic belief in mind, the board offers a wide range of program choices for all students.

The board policy, HA.BP, (**Attachment II**) regarding placement of students with special needs is in line with Alberta Learning policy (**Attachment I**). The province cites that 'regular classrooms in the neighbourhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards'. The board has identified the community school as the entry point for all students and therefore principals work with parents to identify options and to determine the best placement in which to provide appropriate programming to the student. Inclusion in the community school is a choice within many options that are offered to families.

Programs of Choice

In the past six years, the student enrollment of Edmonton Public Schools has continued to grow. This growth trend is exceptional within Alberta, and is in part due to the wide range of programming options offered to students.

Inclusion in the community school is a choice, which has been growing in the past three years. The number of students with special needs who are in schools with a district site program has decreased from 66% in 1998 to 57% in 2000. Although there is a growing trend toward inclusion, there is a significant number of students in district sites.

Parents of students in inclusive settings and district sites provide feedback on the District Parent Attitude Surveys. The majority of students with special needs were in a district site at the time of the 1997 and 1999 surveys. The majority of parents who were surveyed responded favourably when asked about their satisfaction of program/course information available, opportunities for involvement in school decisions, the welcome parent's receive at the school and the preparation of students to become responsible citizens. Parents of students

with severe disabilities responded positively to the survey with responses ranging from 82% to 92% in 1997 and 86% to 95% in 1999. Parents of students with mild and moderate disabilities also responded favourably with responses ranging from 90% to 96% in 1997 and from 87% to 93% in 1999 (**Appendix III**). The 2001 District Parent Attitude Surveys are currently underway and will be available mid-August.

During the 2000 - 2001 year, some names of district sites for students with special needs were changed. This was undertaken to reflect the programming the students receive rather than the student's disability. The district site may include students with various disabilities but with similar programming needs. Programming based on student needs occurs regardless of their placement.

Funding

Funding is allocated on a per pupil allocation basis using set criteria regardless of placement, with two exceptions, the Strategies Program (students with learning disabilities) and Literacy Program (students with delayed reading and writing skills) These district sites receive an allocation which is not available to students who receive programming in their community school.

Prior to district sites, parents of students with learning disabilities partnered with the Learning Disabilities Association requesting district sites be established for their children. It was determined that these students' educational delays were significant and parents felt that their child's needs could best be addressed in a specialized setting with staff trained in learning disabilities and a small staff to student ratio. District sites were established to accommodate grade 1-9 students who require extensive supports. Due to the number of students with learning disabilities who reside in most senior high schools' attendance areas, sufficient numbers exist to provide appropriate programming for them in each high school regardless of whether they are a district site or not. In this case, funding is provided to each senior high school according to the number of students, with this eligibility, who are enrolled.

The Literacy sites provide programming for students who are several grades below age peers in reading and written language despite average ability, adequate behaviour, attendance, and English fluency. These students receive significantly more time than a typical classroom to learn literacy and numeracy skills. Specialized staff and small staff to student ratios provide the support to increase student achievement.

Guaranteed enrollment funding enable schools with district sites for students with special needs to plan for program delivery. In the past when the enrolment in the district site was low, the school with the site often needed to subsidize the cost of the program. It is believed that the operation of a site on behalf of the district should not place a financial demand on a school that it would otherwise not experience. Guaranteed enrollment funding allows placements in district sites to be available to students mid year rather than waiting until the next school year. A school will not receive the additional allocation generated by students new to that site until the number of students exceeds the number, which is guaranteed.

Staff Training and Professional Development

Alberta Learning and Edmonton Public Schools' policy regarding placement and programming for students with special needs as well as the practices and resources to support the policy, is communicated to district leadership staff through ongoing professional development. In the past five years, these topics have been presented to 423 staff in the Principal Education and Development program, the Leadership Development program and/or the Professional Development program for First Year Principals.

Teachers in district sites have a wide range of experiences including teaching in a typical classroom. There is approximately a two to one ratio of teachers who have previous experience outside of a district site classroom as compared to new graduates in the programs. The exception may occur in the Behaviour and Learning Assistance program for students with severe behavioural concerns and the Individual Support program for students who are dependently handicapped, where the number of experienced teachers is approximately equal to new graduates. Teachers regularly move from the district site programs into typical classrooms in community schools. New teachers from the University of Alberta are required to student teach in a typical classroom as part of the requirements to graduate from the program.

Consulting Services employs 83 staff with specialized training to assist teachers in programming for students with special needs. Staff include specialist teachers who have training and experience working with children who are, for example, deaf, blind, autistic, behaviour disordered, developmentally delayed or have emotional disorders. Communication disorder specialists, reading specialists, psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists are also available through Consulting Services to provide advice and assistance to teachers who have students with special needs regardless of the student's placement.

The Professional Development Calendar includes numerous workshops, in which a wide variety of strategies and resources to support teachers and principals are presented. They range from strategies for a specific group of children, i.e. 'Positive Programming for Students with Autism' to 'Encouraging the Reluctant Reader'. A host of in-services are also available, which provide effective strategies to implement the curriculum for all students, including those with special needs.

The Curriculum, Programs, and Planning unit is currently developing a document, with district staff input, which outlines the critical learning outcomes for students with special needs after year 3, 6, 9, and 12. The Alberta Learning curriculum is the basis for the identified skills in the document.

The administration is currently developing an Administrators Handbook for Special Education Programs in Edmonton Public Schools for distribution to all principals in September 2001. Information about inclusion in community schools will be incorporated into this resource.

Supporting District Practices

If concerns arise between a parent and a school related to the implementation of district policy, either party may phone Leadership Services to seek assistance in resolving the issue. Staff in Leadership Services have expertise in the area of special needs and provide information and advice to the parent and the principal in attempting resolve an issue. If there is no resolution at the school level, the parent may appeal in writing to the superintendent.

Summary

It is the administration's belief that;

- Edmonton Public Schools' policy for student placement is in line with Alberta Learning policy
- The Principal Education and Development program, the Leadership Development course and the Professional Development program for first year principals will ensure leadership staff are knowledgeable of the district's policy and of available supports
- district staff are provided with ample opportunities for training and support to work with students with special needs
- current funding practices allocate in a manner, which maximizes benefits for the majority of students while working within budgetary constraints
- the majority of parents are satisfied with programming for their children with special needs
- the trend for inclusion of students in their community school will continue and will be supported by district staff
- a structure and process is in place to address parent concerns
- the district supports partnering with parents and will continue to seek resolution to issues with parents.

The board recognizes that parents in partnership with district staff make the best placement decisions when the unique strengths and needs of the student are considered and therefore it is recommended that the board continue to offer a wide range of program choices for all students.

BMM/cv

- Appendix I - Edmonton Public Policy HA.BP and IB.AR
- Appendix II - Alberta Learning Policy 1.6.1,
- Appendix 11I - District Parent Attitude Survey, Data from Parents of Students with Severe and Mild Moderate Needs