

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 24, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

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

SUBJECT: Special Needs Task Force: Interim Information Report

ORIGINATOR: T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

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

INFORMATION

On November 26, 2010, the recommendation “That the Board establish a task force to review and make recommendations on special needs education in order to enhance the education and outcomes for all special needs students” was approved by the Board. On January 25, 2011, the Board approved the Terms of Reference (Appendix I) for the Task Force.

Task Force members reviewed District work related to the “Setting The Direction” consultation, as a starting place. Subsequently, the Task Force formed an Advisory Committee and met with the committee on four occasions to inform the work of the Task Force. A list of members of the Advisory Committee is contained in Appendix II. As a group, Task Force members visited four district schools, and visited additional schools on an individual basis. Task Force members were particularly careful to hear the voice of students during these visits. Students were also provided the opportunity to respond to an on-line survey. Six consultation sessions were held - two with parents and community members (160 people attended), two with district staff (144 people attended), one with district consultants (approximately 170 people attended) and one with principals (40 people attended). Following the focus groups, an on-line survey allowed an additional opportunity for parents/community members and staff to provide input. Summaries of the feedback from each of the groups are contained in Appendices III – VII.

In addition, the Task Force met with staff representatives from government and multi-cultural health brokers.

The Task Force is grateful to the staff representatives from Alberta Education for sharing their “Setting The Direction” journey. What started as a review of special education has become something much larger. The goal is to establish one inclusive education system, where school districts welcome and accept responsibility for all students, including those with diverse learning or special education needs. The focus with this work at Alberta Education has moved to all students. Alberta Education’s implementation plan has three distinct stages, as outline in Appendix VIII. The three stages are Common Understanding, Capacity Building

and System Redesign. Like other school districts across the province, schools within Edmonton Public Schools are at various stages of implementation. The Task Force believes that the recommendations in its final report need to align to Alberta Education's work, and support a cultural shift within Edmonton Public Schools.

Additional time is required to review the information that has been gathered. The Task Force will make recommendations to the Board in November 2011.

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|---------------|---|
| APPENDIX I | Terms of Reference |
| APPENDIX II | Advisory Committee Members |
| APPENDIX III | Student Survey Summary |
| APPENDIX IV | Parent/Community Summary |
| APPENDIX V | Staff Summary |
| APPENDIX VI | Consulting Services Focus Group Summary |
| APPENDIX VII | Principal Focus Group Summary |
| APPENDIX VIII | Overview of Implementation Plan |

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS SPECIAL NEEDS TASK FORCE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Composition

The Special Needs Task Force consists of three Trustees approved at the January 11, 2011 Board Meeting.

The Superintendent of Schools has assigned appropriate staff to support the work of the Special Needs Task Force.

Parameters

All recommendations from the Task Force will be presented to the Conference Committee for recommendation to the Board of Trustees at a public board meeting.

The Task Force will support but not duplicate the administration's work with partners in improving the achievement of students with special education needs.

The Task Force will not duplicate work already completed through *Setting The Direction*; rather, it will build on that work to help the vision become a reality.

Purpose

To support the implementation of an inclusive education system¹, as envisioned in the '*Setting the Direction Framework*', in Edmonton Public Schools and ensure greater consistency in serving the needs of students across the district.

Deliverables

The Task Force will recommend actions to the Board that will move the District significantly forward toward the vision of an inclusive education system.

¹Inclusive education system is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice. (*Setting The Direction Framework*, Government of Alberta, June, 2009, page 9)

Process

1. Review the work that has already occurred.
2. Establish an advisory committee consisting of district staff and parent/community partners.
3. Attend Professional Learning Day called “*INCLUSION: Every Child is Successful*” with Dave Edyburn.
4. Gather information related to deliverables outlined above through two focus group conversations for parents/community members and two focus groups for staff members.
5. Observe three types of classrooms:
 - a. classrooms with students with special needs and educational assistants
 - b. classrooms with students with special needs without educational assistants support
 - c. classrooms where all students have special needs
6. Synthesize information and prioritize through an electronic survey with participants from focus groups.
7. Adjust process as required.
8. Review information and determine recommendations.

Amendments to the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference may be amended upon recommendation of the Special Needs Task Force and approval of the Board of Trustees.

Financial Resources

A maximum of \$25,000 will be provided to support the work of the Task Force.

January 25, 2011

**SPECIAL NEEDS TASK FORCE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

| First Name | Last Name | Title |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Danette | Anderson | Supervisor |
| Sandra | Bassett | Supervisor |
| Maha | Berjaoui | Parent |
| Chantelle | Beuerlein | Parent |
| Deborah | Brandell | Supervisor |
| Kathryn | Burke | Parent |
| Ed | Butler | ATA Local |
| Marj | Carter | Assistant Principal |
| Trustee Leslie | Clearly | Task Force Member |
| John | Edey | Managing Director |
| Lori | Fankanel | Parent |
| Sandra | Gluth | Consultant |
| Val | Guiltner | Glenrose Hospital |
| Anita | Homan | Consultant |
| Trustee Cheryl | Johner | Task Force Chair |
| Venta | Kabzems | Principal |
| Tracey | Kalke | Consultant |
| Aruna | Kalra | Consultant |
| Dave | Kinders | Parent |
| Rosemarie | Kostiuk | CUPE 3550 |
| Don | Kwas | Parent |
| Susan | Lamb | Parent |
| Aaron | Lee | Parent |
| Sheila | MacKenzie | Parent |
| Eileen | Marthiensen | Consultant |
| Dr. David | Mason | Community Member |
| Shyla | Masse | Parent |
| Joan | McAnally | Community Member |
| Colleen | McClure | Acting Director |
| Dianne | McConnell | Alberta Education |
| Bruce | Miller | Principal |
| Leona | Morrison | Principal |
| Barbara | Onyschuk | Parent |
| Lorne | Parker | Managing Director |
| Heather | Raymond | Principal |
| Barb | Reid | GRIT |
| Tonya | Roberts | Parent |
| Wendy | Sauve | Parent |
| Farha | Shariff | Parent |
| David | Skakoon | Consultant |
| Dr. Veronica | Smith | University of Alberta |
| Trustee Christopher | Spencer | Task Force Member |
| Irv | Willier | Parent |

STUDENT SURVEY SUMMARY

QUESTION 1 – WHAT DO YOU NEED TO HELP YOU LEARN?

1. Classroom environment
 - Quiet learning environment – opportunity to sit at the front
 - Acceptable behavior from other students
 - Smaller classes
 - Freedom to move every 30 minutes to regulate my nervous system
 - The ability to make program choices for my future

2. Extra help
 - Tutors /tutorials
 - Access to material from home using internet
 - Extra help readily available for no cost. (tutors)
 - Help to stay on task
 - Scribing because I can't print fast and typing is very hard
 - people who understand me because I have a hard time explaining things
 - Help improving my English so I can improve my writing and speaking
 - Help with homework from my teachers and parents
 - Educational assistants – more one on one and small group help

3. Teacher instruction
 - flexible classes
 - hands on learning
 - broken down lessons that address student learning styles and help me learn
 - more / less computer work, access to smartboards and laptops
 - More instruction time, better explanations when things don't make sense
 - Student engagement – students can't learn when they are bored
 - Caring teachers and staff that don't quit on me
 - Clear guidelines and instructions
 - A reward system

4. Resources
 - Access to material from home using internet
 - Textbooks that are new and not written on
 - More computer related projects
 - More field trips
 - Hearing aids, working FM, interpreters
 - More supplies, computers and textbooks
 - Extra work

QUESTION 2 – WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT SCHOOL?

- Learning new things and gaining knowledge
- Setting and reaching goals
- Atmosphere and pace adapted to my needs
- Socializing with friends and meeting new people

- Flexible classroom schedules – opportunity to attend gym and option classes with other students and remain in smaller classes in subjects where I need it
- Friendly, welcoming teachers and staff who like me, help me and inspire me
- Options like band, drama, and physical education
- Access to technology and the internet
- Access to books
- Extra-curricular activities

QUESTION 3 – IF YOU COULD CHANGE SOMETHING ABOUT SCHOOL TO HELP YOU LEARN BETTER, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

- More respect from teachers and other students
- More choice in programming - art, drama, physical education, health
- Better discipline and fewer disruptions
- Later start time – shorter days – modified schedules
- More help when students need it, teacher assistants, time to do homework built into the timetable
- Change the way diplomas are granted to make it more fair
- Smaller classes
- Teachers who can connect with kids on a personal level and make school interesting
- Skills appraisal for students to determine needs
- Access to technology, laptops and resources - freedom to choose books from the library
- Skylights to make the classrooms bright
- Teach skills we will use after we are finished school
- Personal success
- Better pace of the school learning curriculum – student input to the government
- More focus on literacy for regular students and English Language Learners
- More field trips for hands on experiences
- Better personal health so I can improve my attendance
- Learning with other students my age
- Bigger lockers

PARENT/COMMUNITY SUMMARY

QUESTION 1 - HOW CAN EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENSURE THAT FAMILIES ARE WELCOMED, SUPPORTED AND RESPECTED IN THEIR CHOICE OF PROGRAMMING FOR THEIR CHILD WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LEARNING NEEDS?

1. **Enforce a consistent culture of an inclusive education system in the district**
 - Establish a district authority, such as an Ombudsman, who advocates for and supports families with students with special needs. This individual must have the authority to make others accountable.
 - If parents want their child accommodated at their local school, ensure that principals and staff accept and respect that choice. Make it difficult for principals to refuse to accommodate or redirect a student – require permission from the superintendent.
 - Help principals understand that inclusion is inevitable and must be supported in their schools. Direct schools to not reference funding in their discussions with parents.
 - Include students in all activities – don't encourage them to “stay home” on exam days to manipulate achievement results.

2. **Facilitate access, at all district levels, to programming for students and services for parents**
 - Provide a central panel/board to help parents navigate through the programs and services available in the district – parents should not have to visit a bunch of schools making their case for support and programming. Offer information about the availability of all possible supports; medical, educational, financial, etc. Facilitator must be able to open boundaries so all students are able to find the “right fit”.
 - Provide a special needs coordinator and/or guidance counsellor at each school to assist parents and coordinate services with specialists and health professionals.
 - Implement a consistent transition plan with clear expectations, regardless of parent choice.
 - Assign a nurse to each school similar to the nurse facilitators provided by Capital Health
 - Focus on providing extra support to parents during periods of transition (divisions and facilities)

3. **Clearly communicate to the public the various programming options available as well as the process for accessing these programs**
 - Create a centralized support line/resource room for parents including a “dictionary” of terms. Offer parents the opportunity to observe various classroom settings to make an informed choice.
 - Articulate how choices affect high school outcomes and employability.
 - Ensure information is readily available through a variety of mediums, and in multiple languages
 - Communicate eligibility criteria and timelines for all programs

- Conduct and advertise information nights for parents rich in programming options and details. Engage “newcomer” parents.
4. **Provide adequate funding to schools for specialized resources and programming**
- If schools have sufficient resources, staff will feel confident in their ability to accommodate students with special needs. Funds are required to provide manageable class sizes, access to specialized resources, release time to adapt curriculum and professional support.
 - Hire well-qualified educational assistants and provide ongoing professional learning
 - Provide specific funding for Strategies FIM students once they enter mainstream and in junior high
 - Extend PUF funding past kindergarten
 - Provide transportation that is safe and accessible. More accommodation of students in their community schools could reduce overall transportation costs.
 - Support “non-coded” students with support and resources so they don’t “fall through the cracks”
 - Assess children early in their school career
 - Reduce the wait time for testing and programming
 - Track progress of deaf students to ensure they are achieving at par with their hearing peers.
 - Provide qualified interpreters for Deaf and Hard of Hearing parents and students.
 - Make schools more accessible; wheelchair accessibility in transportation, sporting and theatre events.
 - Consider alternative curriculum; e.g. Visualization & Verbalization by Lindamood Bell.
5. **Enhance Staff Knowledge of Student Needs and Programming Options Available**
- Provide compulsory training for all school administrators using “How to Create Inclusive Schools”
 - Improve staff attitudes through the provision of ongoing information on the benefits of inclusion for all students
 - Educate teachers to recognize the need for early intervention
 - Provide principals, teachers and aides with the skill set and resources they need to work together effectively.
 - Communicate information regularly to principals about available district programming
 - Coach school staff to respect, honor and celebrate individual student strengths, differences and cultural diversity
 - Train school staff in university to better diagnose and respond to special needs and how to modify curriculum for students with special needs
6. **Conduct ongoing, meaningful collaboration with parents and families**
- Embrace parents as active partners early in their child’s education – listen to them, see their perspective and invite / encourage ongoing involvement
 - Respond to parent concerns and suggestions with action but don’t make promises you can’t keep

- Speak positively and focus on student strengths
 - Conduct regular, meaningful reviews of student progress. Create IPPs with measurable, realistic goals.
 - When parent voice is not heard and responded to, resentment and bitterness is the result.
 - Help parents process and change their own definitions of success and what is important learning in the 21st century; e.g. map versus GPS
 - Solicit feedback from all families with special needs students, not just the ones who attend these focus groups.
 - Work with parents to develop home strategies that support student learning.
 - Ensure school staff can empathize, support and reassure parents and students.
 - Focus on Family-Centred Care Practice
7. **Create communities of support for families and students**
- Stagger entrance into a new classroom or division so that children, families and teachers get to know each other gradually.
 - Learn about your families and foster family buddies, networks and support groups.
 - Work with governments at all levels to educate the general public on the benefits of inclusion and equity in all aspects of society. Regard children not as a source of funding but rather, an active member of the community now and in the future.
 - Educate students and parents to celebrate individual differences. Encourage student interaction with children in regular programs. Model respect and acceptance. Deal directly with inappropriate behavior.
 - Encourage collaboration with community organizations and other professionals so schools can benefit from their knowledge and expertise.
 - Develop stronger relationships with community partners that support and educate students with special needs. Encourage the use of community facilities such as pools. Improve awareness of services available.
 - Consider a special needs fund independent of the school.

QUESTION #2 – WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND TO IMPROVE WRAPAROUND, COORDINATED SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS?

1. **Provide adequate funding to meet the programming and support needs of all students**
- Eliminate funding as a factor in inclusion. Request adequate funding to meet the needs of all students; e.g. accessibility modifications to the school, age appropriate resources, educational and assistive technology for all.
 - Follow up to ensure special funding is spent as intended.
 - Establish standards for assessment and accountability. Ensure consistency in programming from school to school.
 - Promote sponsorships with businesses and private donors.
 - Make kindergarten mandatory and close the gap in services from kindergarten to grade 1. Continue support as long as it is needed and

increase support during transition. Where needed, allow students to stay in school beyond the age of 18.

- Hire enough EA's to meet student needs and hire based on skill not seniority.
- If students need to be relocated, ensure transportation is provided.
- Prepare students for employment through long term, transitional planning.
- Re-evaluate "coding" as a method of allocating funds. Many children who are not coded still need special help.
- Provide speech "consultation" to the teacher and speech "therapy" to the child.
- Provide nutritional food for lunches and snacks via vending machines and special event.
- Introduce the ideas in Integrated Supports for Children, Youth and Families: A Literature Review of the Wraparound Research Project.

2. **Build and maintain 2-way relationships between families and school/community professionals**

- Plans to accommodate a special needs student should always begin with understanding the parents' goals and vision for the child. Demonstrate an open door policy and begin conversations early.
- Enforce the use of SchoolZone for senior high.
- Improve continuity and accountability by providing a consistent team of professionals and specialists to support students. Dedicate the team to a designated group of schools to improve service and reduce duplication of assessments.
- In situations where external professionals are already working with a child, allow those relationships to continue.
- Coordinate support at school and support at home. Educate parents to follow through at home on strategies recommended by the team. Inform students and parents of resources available and help them access those resources. Encourage parent input to resolve issues at school. Use agendas and other forms of 2 way communication.
- Schedule timely, regular meetings with all members of the school's learning team (teachers, consultants, specialists, parents, Children's Services, Health Services) to monitor student progress and adjust IPPs as needed. Record and follow up on recommendations and next steps.

3. **Hire more "doers" and reduce the burden on classroom teachers**

- Hire more professionals such as OT, PT and SLP who actually provide services to students not just talk and write reports. Coach teachers on the effective use of parent volunteers.
- Once consultants provide suggestions and strategies, monitor and follow up on the results
- Reduce response time for service. It is unreasonable to wait 7 months for an OT or SLP.
- Provide more teacher support for material preparation and curriculum adaptation assistance.

4. **Ensure teachers and EA's have the skills to maximize learning for students**
 - Conduct workshops for staff on specific disabilities and differentiation strategies.
 - Use cultural brokers to support teachers and students.
 - Require all new hires to be educated in special needs and differentiation
 - Provide facilitator-led, online learning opportunities
 - Motivate schools and teachers to do a better job through performance incentives
 - Encourage schools with similar populations to share best practices
 - Don't let collective agreements and "bumping" interfere with what is best for the child.
 - Offer strategies for learning disabilities for all LD children not just those that come with extra funding.
 - Get tough on staffing: Hire only those teachers who graduate with a special education degree and take on the ATA to replace burned out teachers with fresh ones.

5. **Establish district processes to bridge the gap between school and community professional services**
 - Simplify the structure of services for students; ERECS, ESHIP, KIDS, etc.
 - Permit other agencies and professionals to coordinate service through access to student records
 - Build relationships with local businesses and retired professionals to help implement support
 - Invite disabled adults to speak to students about their experiences
 - Appoint a special needs coordinator in each school responsible for connecting students and families with services – ensure this service is available in multiple languages
 - Establish a process for "quality assurance" such as a designated case worker, special needs hotline, resource centre or ombudsman through which parents and staff can access information on available supports in the district and the broader community. This service should provide an appeal mechanism for parents when promised services are not provided.
 - Provide more opportunities and access points between professionals from education, health and child services. Utilize services such as KIDS throughout a child's school career.
 - Tighten up the parent release form process to expedite access to service.
 - Recognize psychological testing and coding done in other school districts
 - Audit and monitor IPPs. Consider an independent IPP review panel to ensure goals are set and achieved.
 - Inform the aging medical community of available supports for these students.

QUESTION #3 – WHAT SHOULD THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS IN THE AREA OF EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS?

1. **Conduct ongoing action research to evaluate satisfaction and adapt practice**
 - Conduct regular parent and student satisfaction surveys. Frame questions around inclusive educational practices (physical, curricular and social inclusion) as well as access to universal design for learning. Conduct central audits and interviews with a sampling of special needs students and parents.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of segregated and inclusive settings. Identify trends and share best practices.
 - Establish a special needs parent association to review school budgets. Are funds targeted for special needs being spent as intended; part time EA when a full time was promised?
 - Pilot an alternative delivery model where the teacher stays with students for a period of years but students can float between classes.
 - Continue to monitor and evaluate current programs such as the Transition Centre
 - Review all the experience, evidence and research about inclusionary practices that already exists.
 - Consider the research from Temple Grandin that says every “bad” behavior stems from the environment

2. **Establish and maintain timely, two-way communication between parents and the school learning team.**
 - Establish and document specific, measurable learning goals and achievable expectations based on the parent’s vision for their child. Use the IPP as a living, learning document. Encourage excellence and be prepared to demonstrate student growth.
 - Communicate in various ways; meetings, email, online (schoolzone, blog), facilitated drop-ins and parent evenings.
 - Review student goals and progress as a learning team and agree on next steps. Include teachers, EAs, parents and all professionals in the learning team. Discuss research and best practices.
 - Don’t fixate on labels or diagnosis. Identify supports based strictly on student needs.
 - Allow parents to demonstrate strategies that work for their child and reversely, encourage parents to reinforce learning strategies at home.
 - Improve liaison with yellow bus transportation providers.
 - Establish a series of communication checklists to ensure all parties receive assessment and progress reports as well as programming recommendations.
 - Introduce daily attendance check-ins using various forms of communication.
 - Encourage parents and teachers speak freely about the challenges and support they need
 - Improve communication between home and school through schoolzone, IPPs, phone calls and meetings.

3. **Demonstrate leadership by advocating for “parent choice” and enforcing accountability**

- Advocate with the Alberta Government for funding for education to ensure all schools have equal access to appropriate supports for all students.
- Develop consistent standards, eligibility criteria, program delivery and best practices and communicate these consistently across the district.
- Review principal and teacher performance regularly to ensure they are delivering on their promises and responsibilities. Reward excellence or take punitive action. Rate teachers on how well they teach rather than on test results. Recruit teachers who believe in inclusion. Record (audio/visual) incidences of “hands-on” intervention in all classrooms to offer non-biased documentation.
- Appoint an independent Ombudsman with authority to review school compliance and reverse principal decisions.
- Involve private specialists as agents of change; e.g. the Glenrose “ICan” Centre.
- Identify a special needs coordinator or learning coach at each school to liaise with and support staff and parents.
- Educate “regular” students and their families on various special needs and the pros and cons of an inclusive setting.
- Provide mandatory PD for principals, teachers, and support staff to raise awareness of inclusion strategies and implement best practices.
- Foster support and cooperation between schools. Eliminate competitiveness and share best practices.
- Offer incentives to encourage school to welcome students with special needs.
- Reduce student/ teacher ratios and provide extra preparation time for teachers.
- Audit school budgets to ensure targeted funding is spent as intended. Survey school staff to determine whether they are being provided the resources they need.
- Require regular reports to public board on services to special need students (access, student progress, coordination and wraparound services, short and long term direction)
- Once inclusion is chosen, ensure it is provided without question for the entirety of the student’s education.
- Ensure that funding targets the child and doesn’t just go in the general school budget.

QUESTION #4 – WHAT OTHER ACTIONS SHOULD THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND THAT HAVE NOT SURFACED DURING DISCUSSION OF THE FIRST THREE QUESTIONS?

1. **Celebrate successes and honour/share what works**

- Recognize and honour schools and staff members that do a good job of inclusion
- Keep community schools open. The media attention to school closure scares families.
- Empower the Inclusion Working Group that has existed for 10 years to take action.

- Some students cannot succeed in a regular classroom situation. Retain opportunity, strategies and behavior classrooms.
 - In some instances, door to door transportation to and from a district site is better for a child than the “band-aid” option available at the community school.
 - Inclusion doesn’t necessarily mean accommodating special needs students in a regular classroom. According to Alberta Education, inclusion means providing equal opportunities for all students.
 - Access expertise available from other districts; i.e. Yellowhead and Aspen
 - Encourage more parent involvement and support at existing district sites.
 - Read parent testimonials concerning the ASD and Tevie Miller programs and apply.
 - Provide free testing and assessments for students who are home schooled.
 - Modify funding criteria to allow flexibility; e.g. part time in school and part time home schooled.
 - Become familiar with the benefits of homeschooling and recognize it as a legitimate educational option.
2. **Empower staff to improve services to students with special needs**
- Provide centralized access to resources and strategies for teachers to relieve the burden of adapting curriculum and “reinventing the wheel”.
 - Provide an advocate or mediator, other than the classroom teacher, for students whose parents are struggling to survive and who can’t or won’t advocate for their child.
 - Ensure principals and teachers have completed inclusive coursework before being placed in inclusive settings.
 - Collaborate with non-educational professionals to customize the school environment. Be open to non-traditional strategies. Utilize community expertise such as AACL, U. Of A. ERC.
 - Allow staff to choose the learning they need based on the students they serve e.g. Asperger’s and autism. School-wide PD may not be efficient or sufficient in an inclusive setting.
 - Fund after-school tutor programs in areas of high need.
 - Consider eliminating non-essential courses to focus on core subjects.
 - Stimulate an increase in the number of deaf teachers; i.e. through a reduction in tuition fees
 - Modify the “challenge” program to meet the needs of students who are truly bright.
 - Remove coded students from PAT results.
 - Provide schools with dedicated time to modify curriculum to meet student needs.
 - Facilitate “job shadowing” between new and experienced teachers of students with special needs
3. **Protect the rights of special needs students in an inclusive environment**
- Prevent bullying and teasing especially in junior and senior high schools
 - Address the deficiency of instructional time offered to special needs students in high school because of diploma exams

- Modify the school calendar through shorter days or weeks or year-round schooling.
 - Be aware of self-esteem issues if and when students with special needs fall behind.
 - Hold the board accountable. Innovations are directed at student achievement not cost cutting.
 - Lessen the pressure on students at test-taking time. Let them choose where to take the exam.
 - Teach students with special needs how to make friends without having to be class clowns or bullies.
 - Segregate students who exhibit abusive behavior for their own safety and the safety of others.
 - Apologize to students who were abused in the name of “behavior modification” and other past mistakes.
4. **Vision and Long-Term Commitment to Students with Special Needs**
- Make sure there is a consistent understanding of what inclusion means in Edmonton Public Schools. Continue to review “Action on Inclusive Education”. Continue doing research and seeking input.
 - Develop a long-term vision for students with special needs to help them discover their interests and strengths and prepare for adulthood.
 - Advocate with Alberta Education for a curriculum that develops responsible citizens, inquisitive, life-long learners and supportive members of an inter-generational community. Incorporate Universal Design for Learning in all curriculum.
 - Identify one week each year as Inclusive Education Week.
 - Teach the interconnectivity of humanity and all other living things.
 - Eliminate the coding system altogether. Provide more information on provincial plans in this regard.
 - Conduct research into the cause of learning challenges and disabilities as well as the rate of teenage pregnancies related to learning disabilities.

STAFF SUMMARY

QUESTION #1 – WHAT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES WILL YOU NEED TO BUILD YOUR CAPACITY TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

Clearly articulated district vision and framework

- Align what we say with what we believe and what we do. Demonstrate that an inclusive setting is not optional for principals and schools by addressing inconsistencies with consequence. Encourage a climate of acceptance with incentives.
- Provide mandatory, district-wide messaging and role and responsibility training. Share examples of success and provide specific ideas and strategies so schools have a concrete understanding of the vision and how to make it happen.
- Communicate programming options available in the district and how to access them proactively. Implement universal standards district wide; i.e. a basic minimum for accessibility and environment.
- A streamlined paperwork process when dealing with Budget Services and Student Transportation.
- A centralize registration for all English Language Learners.
- Funding based on functional observations by the school learning team rather than formal assessments by consultants.
- Acknowledge that sites for behavior, opportunity and cultural alternative programs must remain as viable options for parents.
- Demonstrate that accommodating special needs students in the regular classroom is good for all students.
- Foster inclusion by publishing resources that include images of inclusive settings, bring in visitors, presenters and speakers with special needs.
- Maintain choice for parents and students; district site or community school or a blending of either.

Support for teachers to refine their instructional practice

- Provide appropriately-trained educational assistants, with specialized skills, to facilitate small-group activities, 1-on-1 support, and student breaks.
- Provide release time to teachers to research student needs, adapt curriculum, identify resources and prepare to differentiate instruction and report progress.
- Reduce class sizes and eliminate combined grades so teachers can accommodate a broader range of student needs.
- Provide ready access to a shared library of research-based and specialized resources, manipulatives and technology to adapt instruction and learning to a variety of student abilities.

Ongoing professional learning and collaborative team building opportunities

- Provide meaningful professional learning opportunities in the areas of differentiation, the pyramid of intervention, inclusive classroom/school strategies, Universal Design for Learning, technology and assistive technology integration, conflict management, social skills. Learn from educators with experience and success.
- Provide regular collaboration opportunities within schools to identify student strengths and needs, plan/develop IPPs, implement strategies and reflect on student progress.

- Initiate regular interschool “sharing times” to share expertise, best practices, problem solve and develop creative solutions. Encourage teachers to participate in active, practical research.
- Dedicate school professional learning to common challenges and in-school coaching.
- Provide staff with training in non-violent crisis intervention and public relations.
- Initiate a year-round volunteer program involving post secondary students in health and community studies.

Timely access to external supports

- Implement coordinated school visits by a multi-disciplinary team (OT, PT, Speech Language Support, ELL specialist, Psychologist, Adaptive PE, medical doctor, educator/facilitator, community mentor, parents) to build capacity, identify student strengths, goals and expectations, and recommend interventions. Focus on the consistency of team members, observation and follow through.
- Ensure consultants and specialists become part of the school team by participating in open houses and meet the teacher events.
- Provide prompt, centrally-funded testing and assessment.
- Facilitate knowledge of and collaborative access to services from other ministries; health, judicial, social services.
- Provide all schools with a special needs coordinator/facilitator/learning resource teacher to support and oversee special education.

QUESTION #2 – HOW CAN EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENSURE THAT FAMILIES ARE WELCOMED, SUPPORTED AND RESPECTED IN THEIR CHOICE OF PROGRAMMING FOR THEIR CHILD WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LEARNING NEEDS?

Remove barriers that inhibit a welcoming attitude

- Advocate with various levels of government for adequate funding and enhanced coordination of services.
- Empower local schools to be the first choice by guaranteeing adequate staffing and resources.
- Provide equal and prompt access to trained specialists (OT, SLP, Medical)
- De-emphasize standardized testing and allow schools to focus on student strengths rather than deficiencies.
- Provide inservicing for teachers so they feel equipped to differentiate instruction before a special needs student is accepted and throughout as needed.
- Educate students and families of “regular” students to foster tolerance and understanding.
- Open boundaries and provide free transportation.
- Extend PUF funding beyond the early grades.
- Allow schools to operate a “pull out” program for students with targeted needs. Introduce creative timetabling to facilitate effective learning environments.
- Renovate facilities to accommodate students with special needs; provide handicapped, non-gender bathrooms on all floors, wide hallways, mats for physio in the gymnasium for PE, age-appropriate chairs and desks
- Eliminate entrance requirements. The concept is in direct opposition to inclusion.

Deliver clear and consistent communication and protocol to schools and parents

- Provide trustees and senior administration with opportunities to observe and experience inclusive and non-inclusive settings. Involve the Catholic School district to ensure consistency of service within communities.
- Articulate the board's policy and administrative regulations to schools and hold principals accountable for their language and practice.
- Establish a registration protocol and appeal process that respects and protects staff as well as families.
- Reinforce that Edmonton Public Schools is a district of choice. Educate staff and parents on the benefits of inclusion and programming available.
- Advertise available programming and supports to the public in a culturally respectful, clear and easy to understand format.
- De-mystify the process by providing knowledgeable key contacts centrally and at the school level. Assign a case manager or "navigator" to greet families and close the communication gap and ease the burden for students with special needs and their families.
- Offer orientation assistance to families new to Canada. Translate forms and information into various languages and provide access to translators.
- Establish benchmarks, other than PATs and diploma marks that include realistic and more elaborate reporting measures.
- Eliminate the practice of categorizing students through coding.

Build and maintain parent partnerships and meaningful relationships

- Develop standards of behavior and communication with parents and guardians. Demonstrate what welcoming environments look and sound like. Enforce adherence to those standards. Ensure equal voice for students with guardians or parents unable to advocate.
- Establish a schedule of regular meeting times/agendas throughout the year, involving parents, teachers, EAs and a consistent group of specialists. Offer home visits as an option. Listen and respond to parent concerns and ideas with innovation and flexibility. Acknowledge that they know their child best.
- Educate parents as to the realistic benefits/drawbacks of community schools then set achievable expectations based on parent "vision" for their child.
- Hold open houses at various times of the day and evening to facilitate parent involvement and understanding of program offerings. Reinforce an "open door" policy.
- Communicate in variety of languages – provide translators.
- Provide information sharing sessions for student and parent councils. Encourage family mentorships and support groups.
- Set up a network of support for particular special needs. Emphasize the value of the process as a resource for teachers, parents and students.
- Use the services of a "navigator" to help families understand their options as well as their respective benefits and drawbacks. Make connections with community partners such as the Mennonite Centre, cultural brokers and other community agencies.
- Offer language development classes for families so they can communicate with their children. Offer parents help to develop home strategies that support learning.

QUESTION #3 – WHAT ARE SOME HIGH-LEVERAGE UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS THAT EDUCATORS CAN USE AT THE BOTTOM LAYER OF THE PYRAMID OF INTERVENTION THAT WOULD NOT ONLY SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS, BUT ALSO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR ALL STUDENTS?

Teacher effectiveness: differentiated learning and assessment strategies

- Visual , auditory and hands on supports; illustrations, examples, demonstrations, video, manipulatives, schedules, cues, verbal instructions
- Flexible groupings and timetabling to allow for movement of students between classrooms.
- Cooperative, project-based learning
- Universal Design for Learning
- Direct teaching, repetition, goal setting, and constructive feedback
- Chunking, pacing, scaffolding and time for students to reflect and process information
- SRSI – self-regulated strategy instruction
- Tiered homework to foster independence.
- Organized classroom environment – teach students how to organize themselves, schedule assignments, complete projects and write exams. Reduce distractions such as noise, temperature, flickering lights, etc.
- Predictable routines and self/group-monitoring with intrinsic rewards
- Research-based assessment practices; variety of methods to demonstrate learning, comments only on K-4 report cards, early childhood diplomas, familiarity with baseline behavior, continuums to assist with goal development (IPPs). All demonstrations of learning are equally valuable.
- Clear and consistent expectations, positive reinforcement, consequences and restitution
- Encourage character education or TRIBES approach to create social skills, leadership, global citizenship, compassion, tolerance and empathy.
- Brain strategies; movement breaks, chewing gum, standing to print, thinking skills, music, art, drama, conversation, real life experiences
- Encourage second language instruction for all students.
- Increase the emphasis on oral language and eliminate PATs in Div 1.
- Provide a space/place for students to go when they need quiet, especially students with personal care needs.
- Provide sensory items in classrooms such as sensory wedges, vest, etc.
- Review the IPP system.

Improve adult/student ratios

- More EAs to support transition and facilitate small group, 1 on 1 intervention
- Standardize and cap classroom size based on the ratio of special needs to regular students
- Create an Academic Success Room to get additional help, write a missed assignment or quiet time. Supervise students with EAs, teachers or qualified volunteers.
- More than one teacher in the classroom for literacy and numeracy instruction
- Provide multiple teachers in the classroom – not just more adults, more teachers.

Hold staff accountable for their professional learning and performance

- Recruit teachers with background in differentiation, inclusion, strength-based philosophy.

- Provide ongoing professional learning in instructional practice, special needs strategies, classroom management, cultural differences and curriculum so all staff can hone their practice.
- Provide effective supervision, mentorship and monitoring of performance
- Create professional learning communities; share best practices, dedicate time to teacher collaboration, school/classroom visits and observations
- Focus on training for junior and senior high school teachers.

Utilize technology to improve student engagement

- Provide sustained access to reliable hardware; e.g. computers, laptops, ipads, smartboards, netbooks
- Access to multiple platforms; e.g. windows and Mac
- Individual computer time for all subject areas
- Technology for UDL
- Assistive technology; Read and Write Gold, text to speech
- FM amplification systems in classrooms

Provide adapted curriculum and resources to support differentiation

- Identify province-wide universal supports. Incorporate in TQS.
- Teach using strategies that are transferrable across subject areas and situations
- Demand that curriculum and resource developers create differentiated curriculum and resources within grade levels; e.g. wheels and levers for students with grade one or grade 2 reading levels

Focus on literacy intervention

- Teach literacy in all the content areas.
- Balanced Literacy, Reading Recovery, Middle Years Literacy Intervention, Leveled Literacy instruction at all schools.
- Focus on early intervention – if students are given more time in Division I, they may be able to make up deficits and never be labeled as special needs.
- Use guided reading and literature circles
- Provide a comfortable library corner in classrooms with stability balls, weighted items for reading, thinking, headphones, natural light
- Better understand literacy development at the high school level

Provide adequate wraparound support for all students

- Ensure basic student needs are met so they are ready to learn; i.e. food, physical and mental health support, a healthy family environment
- Ensure prompt access to specialists to support programming needs
- Optimize home and school communication with agenda, newsnotes, phone calls, parent/teacher meetings and interpreters for ELL parents
- Student Learning Services should assume responsibility for special needs funding and provide supports to best meet student needs.

Build positive relationships with students and staff and develop a sense of community

- Provide warm, nurturing, and safe school/classroom environments. Staff should identify student strengths, respect cultural differences and nurture positive, welcoming relationships. Struggling students should be encouraged to check-in at lunch and after school.

- Identify student strengths, needs and interests first, before reading assessment reports
- Celebrate accomplishments and focus on individual worth - provide opportunities for students to share their successes in class and celebrate the successes of others.
- Make connections with post secondary institutions such as Grant MacEwan to initiate a student aid program similar to the student teacher program.
- Demonstrate the valuable role of educational assistants by providing competitive compensation, job stability and choice of positions.

QUESTION #4 – WHAT OTHER ACTIONS SHOULD THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND THAT HAVE NOT SURFACED DURING DISCUSSION OF THE FIRST THREE QUESTIONS?

Develop a realistic implementation strategy that respects staff, students and the public

- Trustees should dedicate time to observing a variety of program settings with a diverse grouping of students to familiarize themselves with students and the challenges faced by teachers. Research successful models in other districts and countries; e.g. Finland
- Acknowledge that change takes time and patience. Educate and involve all stakeholders before taking any further steps. Establish SMART goals and reevaluate sustainability on an ongoing basis. Develop a language and culture of strengths and abilities over time.
- Develop a system for tracking the success of special needs students in either setting particularly during periods of transition.
- Continue to offer the proven specialized programs that parents choose for their children; e.g. literacy, strategies, opportunity, behavior disorder.
- Develop a specific strategy for behavior disorder and developmentally delayed students in junior and senior high. Dedicate SLP, OT and PT time and track progress through senior high.
- At budget and results review, compensate schools with multiple special needs programs.
- Ensure there is an equity of programs and access to those programs throughout all geographic sectors of the district and for all students, L.Y. Cairns, Alberta School for the Deaf
- Focus on consistent service delivery through senior high rather than transferring support from AHS to KIDS to AHS, Consulting Services, etc. Extra support needed for transition.
- Remove grade by age and move to grouping students by their strengths and readiness.
- Decrease the number of simultaneous district initiatives; e.g. Math4 All, AISI, etc.

Lobby for commitment from all provincial ministries and society at large in the vision and implementation of an inclusive setting for education

- Recommend that the provincial government provide funding and then, mandate that Education and Health work in partnership to meet the needs of students. Do not proceed without a commitment to sustainable funding from the province.
- Recognize that accountability is difficult in an inclusive environment and the cost may be prohibitive to the taxpayer.

- Lobby against standardized assessment in a system that emphasizes differentiation. It is time to get rid of HLATs, PATs and Diploma exams and redirect the funds to smaller class size and other inclusionary supports.
- Average and above average students are integral to society. Those students and families need a voice and guarantee of their rights.
- English language learners are also special needs.
- Educate all parents to cope with transition to a more inclusive setting. Parents must be able to provide assistance and support at home to their children to reinforce what is happening in schools.
- Foster resiliency as a response to increasing levels of depression in school-age children.
- Teachers may have to negotiate shorter instructional days/weeks and year-long schooling. Alberta Education may need to reduce curriculum outcomes to essential outcomes only.
- Compassion and empathy must become a guiding principle because there is a real risk of disrespect, bullying and violence in an inclusive setting.
- Encourage universities to offer teacher training programs that recognize special needs as a major or secondary program of studies

CONSULTING SERVICES SUMMARY

QUESTION 1 – WHAT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES WILL YOU NEED TO BUILD YOUR CAPACITY TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

Clear district mandate and framework for an inclusive education system

- Clearly communicated goals, objectives and measures of success
- Systematic approach to implementation with consistent baseline of universal supports and consistent access to resources
- Key messages/scripts for consultants to use in school / parent consultations
- Leadership staff with strong advocacy skills and a clear understanding of the intent of an inclusive setting
- Clear policies and guidelines on high school acceptance/diplomas/credits, etc for students with special needs
- Efficient intake process for referrals that prioritize demands for service and ensure a fair distribution across the district of a finite service
- Less focus on individual diagnosis in funding model
- Online knowledgebase of universal interventions
- District performance standards to support teacher judgments and model authentic assessment
- Clearly defined roles, responsibilities and expectations for principals and consultants

Action research on inclusion versus segregated settings

- Establish a process to collect meaningful data
- Track student success – beyond high school
- Look for trends and hotspots of success

Freedom from cost recovery

Additional resources

- Collection of diverse, meaningful case studies
- Online library of transdisciplinary links related to diagnosis and student needs
- Time, in addition to formal testing, to observe students in program and recreational settings
- Additional Education Behaviour staff to satisfy an increase in referrals
- Increased support from administrative support staff so consultants can focus on diagnosis and follow-up
- Resources on strength-based assessments
- Online library of curriculum lessons to help teachers differentiate
- Resources on Understanding by Design strategies
- Adequate funding for equipment and building modifications to meet accessibility demands of special needs students
- More educational assistants and learning coaches in schools
- Access to specialized resources to address specific needs and support students/teachers; e.g. resources for the deaf and hard of hearing

Time to complete a meaningful consultation process at the school

- Review student files

- Develop rapport and consistency of practice thereby establishing effective relationships with school staff/family/students
- Observe teacher and student interaction and establish outcomes and goals
- Follow-up with classroom teachers to implement recommendations and initiate change in practice/environment

Stronger relationships with staff and community partners

- Meaningful collaboration time to develop multi-disciplinary service teams, that serve a dedicated group of schools, and build flexible, meaningful relationships
- Team meetings to discuss expectations, assess student needs, conduct case conferences and debrief/reflect with a view to improving the quality, consistency and effectiveness of service
- Enhance communication with central service departments: District Records, Student Information, Budget Services, District Technology and Student Assessment

Ongoing professional learning in the following areas:

- Self inventory of strengths and skills
- Coaching and facilitation
- Effective strategies in an inclusive setting
- Universal Design for Learning
- Differentiation and Strength-based strategies
- Becoming an Advocate and Agent for Change
- K-12 Curriculum Outcomes
- Educational Technology - Assistive Technology; e.g. speech generated devices
- Research-based strategies for students with special needs; e.g. autism
- Placement options available in the district
- In-depth assessment practices
- Language Development
- Behaviour Supports
- FM, CI and hearing aids
- “Green” strategies

QUESTION 2 – HOW CAN EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENSURE THAT FAMILIES ARE WELCOMED, SUPPORTED AND RESPECTED IN THEIR CHOICE OF PROGRAMMING FOR THEIR CHILD WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LEARNING NEEDS?

Improve district communication to parents and schools about programming and services

- Establish a clear district vision and policy on inclusion
- Articulate what inclusion means and looks like and include a clear definition of special needs
- Publish messages and scripts for school administration and teaching staff that support district vision and policy
- Incorporate on district registration forms, a guiding statement that reflects a district of choice
- Modify district “language” and terminology to reduce the emphasis on terms such as excellence. Increase the use of terms such as “progress of all” toward “achievement of goals”

- Advise teachers and consultants to express student evaluations and assessments in positive and strength-based language
- Initiate a publicity campaign regarding parent right to choose and the options available in programming across the district. Include information about services and supports available regardless of parent choice. Distribute posters of students with special needs to post in schools that communicate visual messages for parents
- Share successes and failure stories with parents to ensure openness, honesty
- Publish information for parents in other languages, provide cultural and linguistic support to families
- Promote to schools and parents, that a broad range of services and support exist to support special needs students as well as the high influx of multilingual students; e.g. ERECS and ELLSC
- Publish parent handbook, in all languages, which includes registration procedures, assessment practices, programming options, appeal process and government links
- Develop parent-friendly website for collection of feedback; e.g. tab on schoolzone

Eliminate the negative financial impact of inclusion on schools

- Move to a centralized budgeting model for special needs students
- Reduce class sizes to accommodate special needs students
- Equalize accessibility to resources and supports such as transdisciplinary consultant teams, well-trained educational assistants, wheelchair accessibility and other facility modifications
- Provide adequate professional learning to teachers and other school staff to instill confidence and a willingness to support inclusion, through the provision of ELL consultants, ERECS, field team specialists. Offer specialized training to help admin assistants perform their front-line role

Implement a central intake and orientation centre

- Establish a central intake and orientation centre for families new to the district and/or with special needs students
- Explain programming options to parents from a district perspective
- Maintain centralized inventory of programming available
- Offer frequent orientation and information sessions including school and site visits
- Conduct ongoing parent satisfaction surveys
- Identify key contacts for parents who can share information and resources including psychology, reading and social work options
- Continue to recommend segregated placements where appropriate; i.e. CIS, ISP and Interactions
- Create a new position of parent liaison/advocate to serve as an ombudsman for parents

Change district practices to reflect the vision and culture of diversity

- Survey parents with students in segregated settings to determine if they were offered inclusion – followup with principals and hold them accountable
- Train principals to accept, internalize and demonstrate the new direction. Give them a limited period of time to get on board and become active participants in working with parents to make inclusion work.
- Publish a code of conduct for principals (in various languages) and enforce it.
- Punish schools that don't operate in accordance with the district policy

- Require documentation from principals when a student is transferred that indicates the supports and strategies offered to try to accommodate the student in their neighbourhood school
- Teacher induction program to include information on special education supports and the importance of a welcoming culture
- Train school staff on the barriers to student achievement; poverty, mental health, addiction, family violence, trauma
- Collect data at the classroom, school and district level to assess the effectiveness of documents such as IPP's

Strengthen partnerships with parents at school

- Provide ongoing and frequent welcoming opportunities for parents – open houses, celebrations of learning, opportunities to meet with the whole learning team including external agencies and specialized staff
- Conduct regular parent/family learning workshops and parent info nights where school, student and family expectations are discussed and outlined.
- Build relationships with parents - take time to listen – ensure parents understand all options available – in their own language
- Involve parents early in the assessment process – conduct intake meetings and remain flexible about choice
- Provide ongoing vehicles for parent feedback on student/parent experiences
- Build supports for the student to be part of the school community by educating the other students and their families
- Anticipate diversity in the student population and be prepared with a connected circle of support: community/family/school
- Principals should focus their efforts on making their school a welcome place for all students and their families – dedicate time to ongoing communication with families of students with special needs
- Ensure that the cost of programming is not mentioned as a factor in programming
- Involve all staff in the school to foster and model a learning community
- Nurture a supportive student body – teach community oriented tolerance and global citizenship
- Identify key contact for parents at the school that is well informed and positive about inclusion
- Promote “district of choice” on school brochures and school signage
- Focus PD days on developing a positive attitude and learning how to welcome all families and treat them with respect
- Write IPPs in collaboration with parents and provide ongoing updates.

QUESTION #3. WHAT ARE SOME HIGH-LEVERAGE UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS THAT EDUCATORS CAN USE AT THE BOTTOM LAYER OF THE PYRAMID OF INTERVENTION, THAT WOULD NOT ONLY SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS, BUT ALSO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR ALL STUDENTS?

Classroom environment that supports and promotes learning

- Smaller class sizes
- Comfortable learning environment: chairs, tables, etc.
- FM system to amplify sound
- Well organized and uncluttered room and work spaces

- Seating arrangements that promote learning
- Implement recess ideas that support physical activities
- Introduce incentives for students and encouragement to do their best

Teacher effectiveness

- Use quality research-based teaching practices (pace of speech, pause time, repetition, chunk material offering time to construct learning, oral language discussion time)
- Provide a range of multi-modality supports (visual, tactile and auditory supports to instruction; e.g. calendars, signs, international symbols, graphic organizers, schedules, manipulatives, rules, movement breaks, word walls.
- Differentiated Instruction – offer a variety of means of presentation and resources at each instructional level that address a variety of learning styles
- Employ strategies for learning – study and organizational skills, homework planners
- Schedule time for focused literacy instruction in all subject areas.
- Integrate “real world” applications (Literacy Guiding document)
- Teach consistent printing strategies – teaching “printing” in a consistent curriculum that is developmentally based
- Use Universal Design for Learning and Understanding by Design
- Use guided reading and balanced literacy for all teachers
- Well defined and reinforced structures and routines
- Cooperative learning in multiple formats – less emphasis on “delivery” and more on “inquiry” and critical thinking skills
- Teach for student strengths – long term individualized programming

Behavior support techniques

- Communicate clear, consistent behavioral strategies for all
- Program during peak hours for sports and socialization (3:30 – 5:30 pm)
- Recess activities that support inclusive social connections and reduce bullying
- School-wide character education, empathy building, social conscience
- Teach emotional intelligence relating to others
- Communicate and adhere to the importance of regular, punctual attendance
- Social-emotional education – teach language to express ourselves, resolve conflicts- help students become responsible citizens
- Prevention programs – bullying, substance abuse
- Positive classroom discipline – catch them “being good”
- Use strategies to maintain attention and concentration (student engagement)
- Reward and incentive programs
- Social learning stories developed by whole class using flipcams to demonstrate positive behaviour

Assessment practices

- Strong understanding and implementation of assessment practices, assessment FOR, OF and AS learning
- Align assessment with programming and student strengths
- Reduce “testing”. Model and accept all types and levels of student response allowing students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of means appropriate for them (text, picture, oral)

- Technology for learning
- Provide equal and consistent access to software, hardware and assistive technology for all schools and students
- Provide adequate technical support to ensure systems are up and running
- Conduct a Central review and recommend hardware and software so schools don't have to do the research themselves – easy access through a central data bank
- Smartboards, neos, ipads (Dave Edyburn approach), digital resources, UDL
- Mainstream software, Boardmaker, Read and Write Gold, Kidspiration/Inspiration

Support external to the classroom

- Provide equal access to resources to support all students
- Increase access to well-trained Educational Assistants and offer them monthly PD focused on specific student needs
- Ensure EA's have time built in to work with teachers on lesson preparation
- Increase teacher prep time to a level where they can make a difference for all
- Provide learning coaches for all teachers
- Early intervention and support is key to student success
- Cluster school-assigned consultants and representatives from external agencies with expertise in specific areas to share expertise with teachers

Peer tutoring and teams

- Encourage students supporting students in collaborative learning models that increase group identity and cooperation; working peer groups and student-led care teams
- Provide opportunities to work in horizontal and vertical teams to better support learners
- Flexible, creative and responsive local school environment
- Strength based asset building: assessments and programs
- Employ a learning team approach: school-based learning coaches and teacher collaboration/team teaching
- Make available a solid list of best practices to utilize
- Invite volunteers (grandma brigade, high school students)
- Ensure parents and students feel welcome and respected – community of learners
- Share community support info with parents/teachers
- Ensure there is informed consent for assessment, especially given influx of ELL
- Initiate parent support groups, parent orientation sessions and ongoing involvement in student learning
- Offer cultural orientation and information for teachers, parents and students
- Offer a central, formalized intake process for parents with a school representative who can provide connections to students and families
- Principals spend more time in the classroom promoting positive attitudes to learning
- More intentional placement of staff – strong staff with highest skills in neediest classroom but leverage all teachers' skill sets
- Build strong staff to support an emphasis on creativity and innovation; i.e. fine arts
- Create flexible and parallel scheduling for classes and staff

Teacher/student relationship building

- Students need to know their teachers care and have clear expectations

- Teachers need to be well organized, know their students, their strengths and their families
- Classrooms must be a safe place to learn
- Strength-based approach to teaching and learning
- Work daily on developing meaningful relationships and empathy with students

QUESTION #4 – WHAT OTHER ACTIONS SHOULD THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND THAT HAVE NOT SURFACED DURING DISCUSSION OF THE FIRST THREE QUESTIONS?

Strengthen existing relationships with community partners

- Initiate greater collaboration with Children’s Services and Alberta Health to ensure all rehabilitation disciplines share the same messages and goals.
- Consider combining into one building, a K-9 school, an early intervention daycare and a senior or extended care facility
- Conduct regular vision/hearing and PUF screening for students, not only at kindergarten
- Engage with communities to involve them more in the life of the school to facilitate increased “wraparound” support for students; e.g. Breakfast programs, after school activities

Celebrate existing programs and services and honor our staff and our students

- Consider students individually – not all students will be served by an inclusion model
- Continue to offer district sites and choice for parents
- Educate parents of “regular” students about the benefits of inclusion for all students not just those with special needs
- Offer more opportunities for enriched and gifted such as enhanced programming, targeted advance placement, challenging activities
- PLAN, PLAN - acknowledge our successes in the area of special needs and phase in changes – start small and build expertise at a deep level then broaden the plan
- Identify key transition times for students – switch from intervention to prevention
- Prioritize wellness supports for staff to “sharpen their saws”
- Consider extra support for teachers at the high school level for curriculum adaptation, differentiation strategies and assessment
- Link teachers new to special education with a mentor “master” teacher to help with transition
- Provide incentives to staff who demonstrate effective teaching in an inclusive model

Customize the concept of service delivery teams and wrap-around services

- Ensure service teams include a social worker (for attendance), audiologist, paediatric ophthalmologist and speech-language pathologist
- Hire a psychologist in Budget Services and include a psychologist on the Trustee advisory committee

Advocate with Alberta Education for adequate funding and resources

- Recommend the elimination of government practices that are working against inclusion
- Review / eliminate standardized testing such as the diploma and PAT exams
- Appeal the decision to reduce funding for refugee students and request special funding for students living in poverty – smaller learning groups is essential

- Work with post secondary institutions to ensure they understand the new direction as well as the make-up of inclusive classrooms. The university education programs must offer more training in meeting the needs of special education students.

Collaborate with other school districts

- Extend the concept of “Collaborative Team Project” involving Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert schools
- Visit other school jurisdictions where inclusion is working well; e.g. rural districts and those using SMART Inclusion.

PRINCIPAL FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

QUESTION 1 – WHAT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES WILL YOU NEED TO BUILD YOUR CAPACITY TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

Professional Learning for School Staff:

- Ongoing professional learning for teachers in the areas of differentiation, literacy supports, assistive technology, universal strategies design, special needs and evidence-based strategies.
- Share examples of what inclusive education should look in a school. Develop a commitment amongst staff through a clear articulation of district policy and expectations.
- Train staff to evaluate programming, assess changes in expectations and measured outcomes.
- Provide support to principals on how to balance the budget without sacrificing too much in the school.

Opportunity to Collaborate and Share Expertise

- Provide time for regularly scheduled staff and team meetings to implement a coaching /team approach to dealing with student needs
- Provide opportunities to observe other successful inclusive settings. Initiate mentorships and ongoing sharing of resources; i.e. organize school cohorts

Access to Specialized Support from Central Services

- Provide timely, dedicated support from a multidisciplinary team of consultants in areas such as:
- violent student behavior, assistive technology, academic assessment, strength-based perspectives, inclusive education policy, strategic planning, transition, supports for special need, OT, PT and SLP (wrap around model)
- Assign learning coaches to school cohorts
- Assign an assessment team to provide in-depth programming recommendations from a strength-based perspective
- Ensure that TLSS and ERECS consultants are able to build their capacity in the areas of Universal Design for Learning, inclusive education, the content areas, universal targeted and specialized supports.

Improved Processes and Communication

- Clearly articulated guidelines, standards and best practices for students with special needs including assessment
- Clarity of district language; i.e. acronyms and high school K & E (why “hide” these programs and not just say what they are)
- Common, consistent district-level key messages to alleviate fear of change, inform and enlighten staff; e.g. today’s video
- Increased awareness amongst staff, students and parents of what it means to be in an inclusive setting.
- Removal of policies and barriers that inhibit inclusion; e.g. coding practices, transportation, freedom to inquire and political support for results of the inquiry
- Follow through and accountability when families are not welcomed
- Collaboration between HR, ATA to support 21st century learners

- Programming outcomes that are broad enough to measure the success of all students
- Strong communication channels so that teachers quickly understand the needs of their students
- Improved system for schools to access services – models of effective central services supports
- Brochures to educate parents about options for their children
- Working partnerships with outside agencies

Adequate School Resources

- Funds to acquire technology, staffing, facilities modifications and resources for students with special needs
- Time for teachers to create meaningful IPP's and collaborate with the learning team
- Reasonable class sizes that reflect the needs of students; more diversity requires smaller classes or higher adult/student ratio
- Access to staff who are philosophically aligned to support students with special needs
- Full time, well-trained educational assistants with the skills necessary to work in partnership with teachers and develop meaningful relationships with students; e.g. diploma Grant MacEwan; OT aide, SLP aide, sign language, NVCI, PT aide

QUESTION 2: HOW CAN EPSB ENSURE THAT FAMILIES ARE WELCOME, SUPPORTED AND RESPECTED IN THEIR CHOICE OF PROGRAMMING FOR THEIR CHILD WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LEARNING NEEDS?

Communicate and Administer District Policy Clearly and Consistently

- Provide consistent, ongoing messaging that the community school is the first option
- Develop a common language for inclusion, special needs and program offerings.
- Clarify what inclusion looks like, what a welcoming school looks like and identify the balance between choice and realism. Explain what inclusion means for the other students in the classroom.
- Incorporate messages and philosophy in school plans.
- Develop and distribute a common protocol for initial contact with parents and families.
- Create standards of support and include best practices defined by schools and stakeholder groups.
- Review existing practices and placements. Where appropriate, counsel students out of programs of choice.
- Foster respect whether parents choose inclusion or a segregated setting.
- Advertise in public media the supports available to students and families in our schools
- Make all schools accountable for welcoming and supporting families.
- Enforce from the top down – follow up with actions not just words.
- Support families and reinforce principals who abide by the policy.
- Develop a system-wide registration process to support schools and families
- Develop standards and timelines for the process.
- Establish a well-led team dedicated to accommodating students with diverse learning needs
- Provide the services of a “broker” to liaise with families, share information and navigate through the process.
- Limit major district initiatives to one or two instead of implementing several initiatives at the same time
- Identify and eliminate barriers to inclusion

- Provide schools with equal access to resources, technology, staff and expertise
- Modify the funding model to support accommodation in the community school
- Permit purposeful mobility across the district to meet student needs
- Modify school start and end times to match the rest of the student population

Educate and Support Staff to Change Practice

- Work with the principals and staffs to accept responsibility for all students. Help principals develop confidence in their ability to support students with special needs.
- Build staff capacity to honor choice and deal with difficult people.
- Coach staff to express their schools' strengths and present a demeanor of trust and confidence
- Demonstrate that support and expertise is available when needed
- Provide ready access to resources and best practices
- Arrange visits to and ongoing collaboration with schools where inclusion is successful.
- Encourage staff to focus on student strengths and abilities. Follow up with parents to confirm their understanding

Enable families to make informed decisions regarding the best choice for the child

- Inform parents and families about the range of programming options and alternatives available so they can make informed choices. Be open and honest about what you can and can't do at your school. Ensure programming choices are transparent and defensible.
- Include parents in meetings with the school learning team. Develop understanding and collaboration between students, families and the school to enhance the learning experience. Reinforce that the neighborhood school is first choice.
- Communicate the importance of effective transition for students.

QUESTION 3: WHAT MODEL OF DISTRIBUTION OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES WOULD BEST SERVE OUR STUDENTS?

Principal-Managed, Formula-Based Model

- Use an allocation formula based on the number and severity of special education students in the school – Fair Share Approach
- Use the fair share ERECS model – when funding is gone, it is gone
- Develop a formula that acknowledges the strengths and needs of the student, as well as the dynamics of the school staff and facility.
- Empower principals to hire/transfer teachers based on their expertise/interest in special needs
- Allocate funds to the schools first and trust school personnel to do the right thing.
- Maintain a budgetary line for special needs for each school
- The severe (level 7 & 8) still have target # or a school would get more support financially. Equal support for all level 5 & 6 students. Each school gets a specific amount.

Principal-Managed Base Allocation + Formula-Based Allocation Dedicated to Special Needs

- Ratio based on sampling of students reviewed periodically
- When student needs exceed funds in the school budget, additional funds are accessible from central.

- School size is base driver. All funds for moderate to severe students are kept centrally and distributed based on individual needs.
- Hold principals accountable, but eliminate the financial burden of accommodating special needs students.
- Special needs funding allocated based on teacher -conducted assessment.

Principal-Managed Base Allocation + Wrap-Around Service Team for Special Needs

- Funding for special needs would be allocated to cross-ministry teams that in a wrap-around service model. The team would serve a cohort of schools and students using the Pyramid of Intervention.
- Educational assistants would be shared between schools.
- Resources would be flexible and benefit from economies of scale.

Centrally Funded and Managed

- Research-based best practices for special needs students should be provided by the district centrally to eliminate financial stress on schools and ensure success for all students. Centralized funding would build staff capacity in the areas of Reading Recovery, MYLI, LLI, Assistive Technology, and Balanced Literacy.
- Phase in centralized, effective, efficient distribution of financial resources to ensure all necessary supports are made available – core services model as per central review.
- Budget services should distribute both district and provincial resources.

Considerations:

- Allocation model must be transparent, flexible and clearly defined.
- Why do two similar classes have different staffing needs (one with aide, one without)?
- Ensure special needs funding is dedicated to the student and not on a new roof.
- Funds must be sufficient to support staff development, adequate staffing, physical supports for the students and SES.
- Enrolment numbers alone should NOT determine programming available for student success
- Change coding to Assessment for Success or Response to Intervention
- Distinguish between “necessary” service and “attractive” service.
- Explore successful inclusion settings in our schools – how does the budget work in those schools?
- Flexible funding model required that enables district sites to continue while we are on a path toward inclusion
- Equitable is not the same equal.

Possible Alternatives:

- Fund backwards – submit costs at the end of the year and fund appropriately (make schools accountable for student success)
- Align resources to support district-wide 3 pillars:
- Effective Behavior Supports
- Response to Intervention
- Universal Design for Learning
- Reduce financial resource wasted on assessment and shift funding to providing support
- Funding should be directed towards programming (functionality in a classroom) and less into testing for funding.
- Assessment for programming and placement purposes (ie. KIDS model)

QUESTION 4: WHAT OTHER ACTIONS SHOULD THE TASK FORCE CONSIDER THAT HAVE NOT SURFACED DURING DISCUSSION OF THE FIRST THREE QUESTIONS?

Educate advocacy groups to respect ALL stakeholders in education

- Special needs parents are strong advocates for their children. The “regular” students in every classroom need a voice.
- Communicate and understand that fair isn’t always equal but equal IS fair
- Work with parents to set reasonable expectations for their children

Build staff capacity in the areas of:

- Universal Design for Learning/Response to Intervention/Assessment for Learning
- Interventions for primary and early learners
- Enacting a major, CONSISTENT shift in district culture; e.g. (exemplars of effective scenarios required)
- Consistent high level leadership in accommodating students with diverse learning needs
- The principal’s role in determining programming for students (School Act)

Conduct More Research

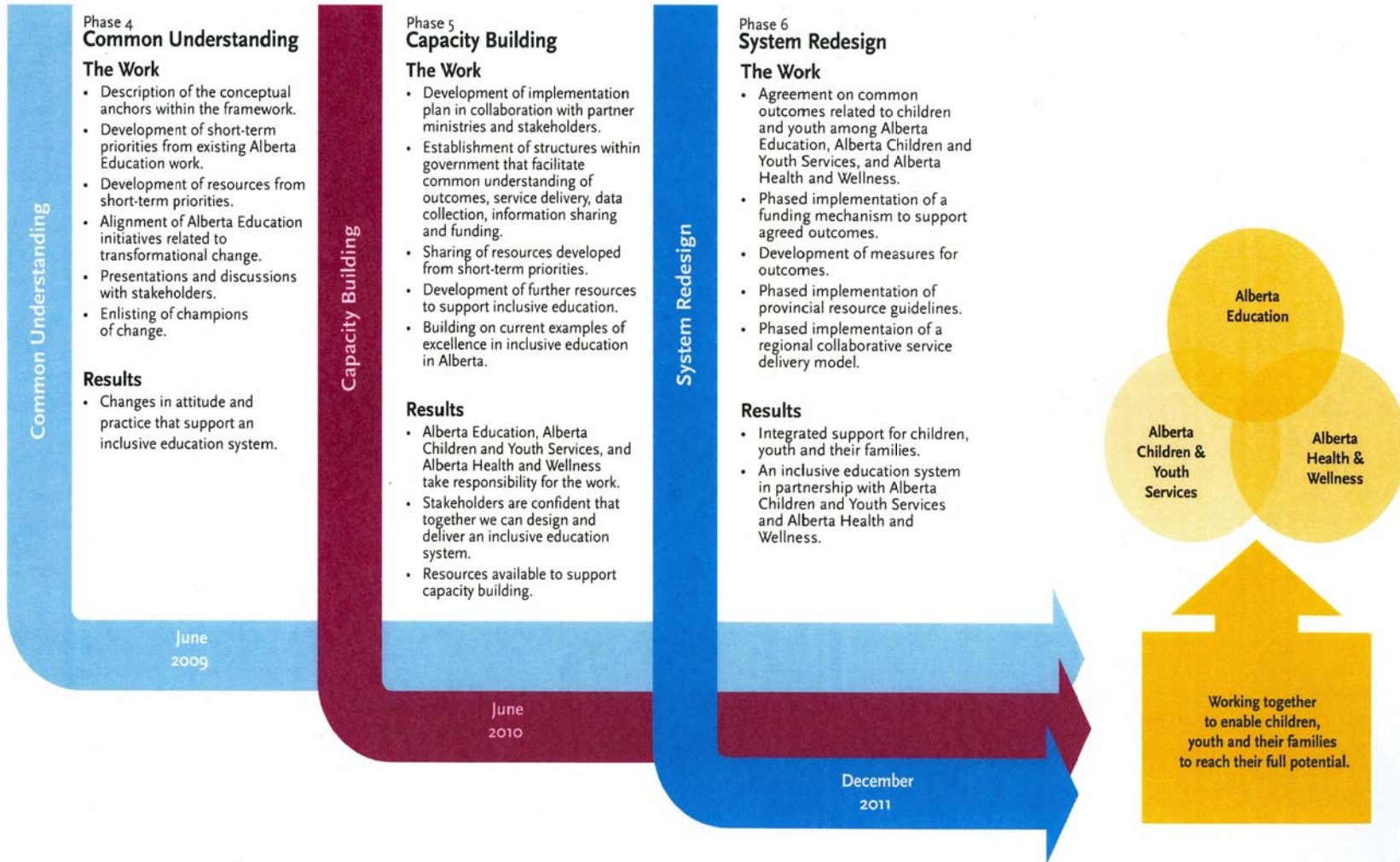
- Identify what is working in this district and other districts.
- Base decisions on research not “beliefs”. Study research related to “all” students with diverse learning needs.
- Define “special needs” and “student success” to identify the reasonable constraints to inclusion.
- Assess the overall impact of inclusion on the district; e.g.
- Charter/private schools may become more attractive
- Impact on current level of staff stress and existing alternative programs and programs of choice: e.g. Old Scona, Cogito, ASD
- Deterioration of facilities with no increase in funding.
- Updating of support staff position descriptions may be necessary.
- Need for an increase in parent and volunteer involvement in schools.

More focus on the multi-agency approach

- Nurture partnerships with Alberta Health, Capital Health and other agencies
- Link parents to other agencies for additional service

Overview of Implementation Plan

SETTING THE DIRECTION



Phase 1 of the *Setting the Direction* Initiative began September 2008 with public consultation about a vision for special education. Phases 2 and 3 continued to engage Albertans in public consultation leading to the development of the *Setting the Direction Framework*, which was presented to Minister Hancock on June 8/9, 2009.

