

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 26, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees  
FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools  
SUBJECT: Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs  
ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent  
RESOURCE  
STAFF: Deborah Brandell, Gloria Chalmers, Belina Pasula

### INFORMATION

#### **Introduction**

In 2001, a collaborative initiative between the District and community stakeholders was established in support of provincial and district policy related to inclusive placements for students in their community school. This report provides a historical background and an update of actions taken to provide information and support to students, parents and district staff on inclusion. The updates in this report focus on the 2008-2009 school year.

#### **Background/History**

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

On November 24, 2004 principal support groups participated in focused conversations on the topic of inclusion, which was recorded and compiled by Special Education staff. Information was categorized into four themes: Policy, Rationale, Supports, and Strategies and Funding. Principals also requested whole-district initiatives to underpin inclusion work in schools. This discussion guided the work of the Inclusion Working Group and led to the development of two documents: *Suggested Best Practices: Welcoming Parents of Students with Special Needs in Community Schools* (2005) and *How to Create Inclusive School Communities - Administrator's Handbook* (2009).

#### **Inclusion in the District**

An important aspect of the work around inclusive education has involved working collaboratively with community stakeholders in addition to several central decision units.

Inclusion Working Group: This group identifies issues and discusses opportunities to support inclusion. The Inclusion Working Group continues to meet regularly with district staff.

- Facilitated four meetings annually with plans to continue for 2009-2010.
- Provided input and feedback on the revision of *How to Create Inclusive School Communities - Administrative Handbook*. (To be published June 2009.)

- Disseminated information supporting inclusion through the District's *Mailbag, Need to Know News and Bulletin Board* (i.e. AACL's Family Conference which was attended by 39 Edmonton Public School Board educators).
- Presented on inclusion to first year principals, the Special Education Principal Committee, as well as new and beginning teachers.
- Provided opportunities for open discussions with Superintendent Edgar Schmidt and representatives from Consulting Services, Transportation and the Inclusion Pilot.

Special Education Inter-Departmental Committee (SEID): Representatives from several decision units meet approximately every two months to share information and work collaboratively to support inclusive practices in the District. During 2008-2009:

- Planning – reviewed district centre designation for Strategies at the high school level. This designation will be removed from Eastglen, Jasper Place, and Strathcona schools for September 2009.
- Consulting Services – developed inservices to support inclusive programming. Consultants are also available for coaching and support of inclusive practices.
- Leadership Services – functioned as key-contacts for administrative and parent inquiries regarding inclusion. Presented to Principal and Leadership Education Development Programs (PED and LED) on district policy and practices concerning inclusive education.
- Student Achievement Services – funded a 0.5 FTE consultant position to coordinate the Inclusion Pilot Project as well as \$20,000 budget for resources, purchasing time from Consulting Services, professional learning opportunities and meeting costs.
- Transportation – reviewed bussing and collaborated with school bus service providers to ensure all students' busses are scheduled to arrive 10 minutes before and 10 minutes after school start and end times for the upcoming school year.

Community Partnerships: Programs consultants continue to liaise with a variety of community partners on a regular basis. Two highlights of the 2008-2009 year are:

- University of Alberta (U of A) – collaborated with U of A, Special Education Programs and Research Support Services to explore research on programming best practices for students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
- Edmonton Preschool Association Pilot Project – networked with Lakewood Playschool and also began to develop relationships with the preschools in Rutherford, Sweetgrass, Malmo and McKee.

Inclusive Education Pilot: The first year of the pilot has been a successful start. The objectives of the Supporting Success for Students with Special Needs in Community School project are: to assist the District to implement inclusive practice, to build capacity to support all students, and support school staff to meet increasingly diverse needs of their student population. Six schools have been participating in the project this year. Recommendations have gone forward to expand the project for next year.

Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services (KIDS): KIDS North and South, formerly Early Education Outreach Services, continued to support children with severe and mild/moderate disabilities receiving programming in inclusive kindergartens. A specialized team of consultants and therapists provided information and programming support to staff and parents. KIDS North and South also provided targeted professional development for full day kindergarten staff including information on special needs, English language learners and

Aboriginal students. KIDS North and South will become one unit under the principalship of Dr. Heather Raymond for the upcoming school year.

Inclusion Awards: ERC inclusive education teacher awards were awarded to Garneau, Millwoods Christian and Hardisty schools. McArthur Elementary and École Richard Second schools received AACL national inclusive education awards.

### **Summary**

The District continues to work in collaboration with AACL, ERC, other community stakeholders, parents and staff to ensure students with special education needs are supported in inclusive settings in community schools. We continue to promote awareness, expand knowledge and build expertise on inclusive practices through targeted support documents, professional development and pilot projects. Our goal is to promote and support inclusive communities, making inclusion a viable choice for all students and parents in Edmonton Public Schools. In the 2009-2010 school year this work will be broadened and incorporated as part of the District plan for students with special education needs.