

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 9, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Inclusion of Students with Special Needs

ORIGINATOR: Bob Holt, Executive Director

RESOURCE STAFF: Danette Andersen, Mary-Ellen Deising, Jane Farrell,
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INFORMATION

Background

The focus on inclusion of students with special needs was initiated in spring 2001 and work continues to expand into 2004 - 05. Since 2002 the district has instigated 50 projects and initiatives to provide information and support to students, parents and district staff in inclusive classrooms at community schools. In addition to projects carried forward from 2002-03, 15 new projects were initiated by central services and district schools in 2003 - 04. This report provides an update to the Board report of June 2003.

Recognition by community partners

- In May 2004, the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) & Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) presented the Board with national and provincial awards for work supporting inclusion of students with special needs in typical classrooms in district community schools.
- The Edmonton Regional Coalition (ERC) identified district staff that provided exemplary support to students in inclusive settings. Staff were recognized in the Superintendent's Memo.

Working with stakeholders

Alberta Association for Community Living and Edmonton Regional Coalition

- **The Inclusion Working Group:** Parent representatives from the ERC and AACL met regularly with district staff in 2003 - 04. The group's purpose is to 'identify issues and discuss opportunities that support inclusion of students with special needs as a genuine option in the district'. Understanding that the district provides a range of placement options for students with special needs, the committee focused on inclusion as a

placement option. Three meetings were held in 2003 - 04, and four sessions are planned for 2004 – 05. The first meeting of 2004 - 05 was held in late September.

The Inclusion Working Group provided feedback which formed the basis for the “Working with Parents” section of the newly released district *IPP Guidebook*.

- **ERC’s ‘Parent to Parent Series’** invited district staff to present a session entitled *Individual Program Plans in an Inclusive Setting* at a parent information evening.
- **AACL & ERC** were invited to present information about inclusion to the following staff groups:
 - Special Education Principal Committee
 - Leadership Services Principal Committee
 - Student Achievement Services Team
 - Leadership Training and Development Program
- **AACL & ERC** used the district’s Mailbag to disseminate information announcing upcoming events.

University of Alberta

- *Building Capacity for Diversity in Canadian Schools* was a series of 11 lectures on a range of inclusive topics presented collaboratively by the Universities of Alberta, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and Calgary. District staff provided information about the series to schools and attended lectures.
- Consulting Services staff spoke to fourth year Education students about inclusion of students with special needs in community schools.

Private Early Childhood Services (ECS) operators

- **An Information Session** for ECS operators highlighted procedures and suggestions to promote a smooth transition for children with mild/moderate and severe special needs and their parents. Based on positive feedback from this spring session, the district will continue to meet with ECS operators in 2005.
- **Edmonton Student Health Initiative Partnership (ESHIP) ECS Transition Facilitator** worked with private ECS operators, parents and district staff to ease the transition of a child with mild/moderate or severe special needs from private ECS programs into district inclusive community schools.

Supporting Parents and Students

- **District Information Sessions for Parents:** The district provided parents of children with mild/moderate and severe special needs in external ECS programs with information about the services and procedures in the district. Topics included: inclusive placements and district centre programs, information parents can provide to principals, suggested topics for discussion, support services and working with schools.
- **District contacts for Parents:** Leadership Services staff Danette Andersen and Kevin Stevenson served as lead contacts for parents and principals seeking information or assistance regarding inclusion.

- **Early Education Outreach Program:** Early Education provides programming to children 2 ½ years to six years of age who have severe disabilities or delays. In 2002 – 03, the Early Education Outreach Program at Scott Robertson and Waverley initiated support to community schools where children with severe disabilities attended inclusive kindergarten classes. A specialized team of special education teacher, teaching assistant, Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, behavioural consultant, and in-home specialist traveled to community schools and children’s homes to provide information and programming support to parents and staff. The number of children with severe special needs served at their community school has increased significantly. Seventy-five percent of the children included in their community school kindergarten in 2003 - 04 through the Outreach program continue to receive programming in an inclusive classroom at their community school.

Number of:	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Students	0	60	218
Schools	0	30	75

Working with Staff

- Consulting Services consultants in Programming for Student Differences and Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services provided inservices and on site consultation to support teachers who work with students in inclusive placements.
- ESHIP Transition Support Team developed an initiative to support successful transition of students with severe disabilities moving from one inclusive placement to another by a multi-disciplinary team. Full implementation occurs in 2004 - 05.
- Professional Development Modules
 - Developmental work began in 2003 - 04 to imbed differentiation/ inclusion into curriculum based modules and inservices for 2004 - 05
 - Inservice opportunities for teachers and teacher assistants identify strategies to support best practices in inclusion.
 - Schools used the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) funds for professional development in inclusive best practices.
- Beginning Teachers Institute promoted an inclusive philosophy by outlining strategies to meet diverse special needs in an inclusive classroom throughout the six days of inservice and discussion. A parent of a student with special needs in an inclusive classroom spoke to the teachers.
- Developmental work for the new district IPP Guidebook began in 2003 - 04. It outlines required elements and a supportive process including input and ongoing communication with parents of students with special needs.
- Student Information System (SIS) created a placement button in the online SIS Individual Program Plan (IPP) program to assist the district in monitoring placement of students with special needs. Implementation began in fall 2004. Teachers identify student placements as inclusive, integrated or congregated.

- A District Inclusion Committee comprised of staff from eight central services departments met to share information and discuss strategies to support inclusion of students with special needs.

Support Registry and Library

- Leadership Services continued to develop a library of articles, websites and books for staff interested in inclusion.
- A list of parent volunteers who speak to staff about inclusion was created and updated.
- The ERC, AACL and district staff add to a registry of schools where successful inclusion has occurred. This assists staff to share positive strategies.

Conferences

- The AACL, Families, the Heart of Community Conference was advertised through the district's Mailbag and had central and school based staff attend.
- University of Alberta, Inclusion or Illusion Conference was supported by district staff who participated on the organizing committee. A district principal, teacher and parent presented their team approach to include a student with autism.

Communications

Communications continued to review communication vehicles and photos to ensure that inclusion of students with special needs was visible. Photos of students with special needs continued to be incorporated into district communications.

- The March 2004 Compass highlighted work of *Supporting Teaching and Learning* that includes all district students, including those with special needs.
- A section on Inclusive Education was added to the district's February 2004 Edmonton Journal newspaper supplement, *Many choices. Endless possibilities.*
- A district brochure, *Inclusion in Community Schools* was provided on the district website to inform districts schools and parents on how to proceed when they choose inclusive education for their child.

Supporting Teaching and Learning

- School visits at approximately 50 district schools have included work with students in inclusive placements.
- Consultants leading *Supporting Teaching and Learning* training sessions convey the importance of inclusion of students with special needs in 'the work' at schools.

Summary

A focus on inclusion initiated in spring 2001 continues to expand in 2004-05. The district continues to work with AACL and ERC, stakeholders, parents and staff to ensure that inclusion of students with special needs in their community school is a genuine option.

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