

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

September 26, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: L. Thomson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Executive Director

RESOURCE

STAFF: Deborah Brandell, Tana Donald, Barb Milne

### 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 with special education needs in their community school. Each year this report provides an update of actions that have been taken to provide information and support to students, parents and district staff on inclusion of students with special education needs. This current report focuses on highlights related to the 2005 – 06 school year.

#### **Process of Collaboration**

Collaboration with stakeholders, both within and outside the district, is a process that is essential for meaningful inclusion to occur. Collaborative processes are evident where stakeholders develop shared meaning and understanding of collective goals. Together, participants create a plan that address student programming needs and then, in a cooperative way, set out to implement that plan. Collaboration requires both positive interactions and clear, effective communication. The efforts of all involved results in programs that better meet individual student needs within the context of an inclusive environment.

#### **Work with Community Stakeholders**

An important part of this work has involved collaboration with a number of community stakeholders. Actions taken with these groups are listed below.

- Inclusion Working Group: Parent and community representatives from the Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) and Edmonton Regional Coalition (ERC) continued to meet regularly with district staff in 2005-06. The group's purpose is to identify issues and discuss opportunities to support inclusion of students with special education needs as a genuine option in the district, understanding that the district provides for students in a variety of ways.
  - Five meetings were held in 2005-06, with plans for sessions to continue for 2006-07.
  - The Inclusion Working Group provided input into the development of a document for principals and teachers designed to support inclusive practices in community schools.

This document is being created in collaboration with the Working Group and the Special Education Interdepartmental Inclusion Committee.

- ‘Parent to Parent Series’: Edmonton Regional Coalition (ERC) offered evening sessions to assist parents by providing information related to services available to students with special education needs. Special Education Support Team (SEST) provided a session on “An Overview of Trans-disciplinary School-Based Services and Supports”, and Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS) provided a session on “Services to Support Inclusion”.
- AACL & ERC used the district’s *Mailbag* to disseminate information announcing upcoming professional development events sponsored by their agencies.
- AACL & ERC presented information about inclusion to the following district staff groups:
  - Special Education Principal Committee
  - Beginning and New Teachers Institute
  - Leadership Training and Development Programs
- AACL Conference - Families the Heart of Communities: Deborah Brandell, Supervisor of Special Education presented with Wendy McDonald from AACL on “Partnerships”
- Post Secondary Inclusion: AACL arranged for staff from Special Education to meet with staff at Grant MacEwan College and NAIT to discuss inclusion practices at the post secondary level.
- Private Early Childhood Services (ECS) Operators
  - Information sessions were provided for private ECS operators, highlighting procedures and suggestions to promote a smooth transition for children with special education needs into an inclusive setting.
  - An ECS Transition Facilitator from Edmonton Student Health Initiative Partnership (ESHIP) worked with private ECS operators, parents and district staff to ease the transition of a child with special education needs from private ECS programs into district inclusive community schools.
  - The response to service provided was very positive. Many kindergarten teachers reported that they have a good picture of the needs of students transitioning from Head Start Programs and other private ECS operators, as reports and transitional strategies accompanied the child upon registration in EPS schools.
- Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT): Special Education staff met with board members from GRIT to discuss collaborative ways to support students in their community school kindergartens.

### **District Support**

Representatives from the following departments meet every six weeks to share information and work collaboratively to support inclusion of students with special needs. The following is a list of key initiatives:

- Special Education Programs:
  - Liaised with community partners from AACL and ERC to support inclusive practices in community schools
  - Facilitated an Interdepartmental Inclusion Committee, comprised of staff from central services departments.
  - Updated a list of parent volunteers available to present to staff about inclusion
  - Attended the ATA Special Education Conference, participating in sessions offered on the topic of Inclusive Education.
  - Principal Reference Guide and Handbook: New this past year, was insertion of a section for information related to inclusion, which contains documents that support principals in implementing strategies for inclusion, such as “Welcoming Parents”, created collaboratively with the Working Group.
  - Presentation for Leadership Staff: In conjunction with the AACL, *Families, The heart of community* conference held in March 2006, key note speakers Norman Kunc and Emma Van der Klift presented a session titled: “New Students: New Questions: Supporting the Classroom Teacher in an Inclusive School.”
  - Inclusion Document – facilitated a collaborative effort between the Inclusion Working Group and Interdepartmental Inclusion Committee to develop a document that provides information, support and direction for principals in programming for students in inclusive settings. While still in development, a draft version of this document is targeted for distribution to district staff in fall, 2007.
  
- Budget Services:
  - Undertook a process to review the site specific restriction on the allocation of per pupil funds based on students coded Literacy and Strategies.
  - Reviewed the criteria for students with moderate hearing or visual disabilities and changed the allocation period from one year to three consecutive years to support programming for students with moderate sensory disabilities in inclusive settings.
  - Worked with senior high schools to create an Intervention Grant to provide school based interventions intended to support students deemed to be at risk.
  - Managed the contracts between the district and private ECS operators to facilitate the placement of children with severe disabilities in inclusive kindergarten settings in their community schools.
  
- Communications:
  - Incorporated photos of students with special needs into district communications. Communications staff also continued to review communication vehicles and update photos to ensure that inclusion of students with special needs is ongoing.
  - Highlighted the Lymburn Elementary School Handbell Choir in an article in *Compass*, focusing on how students with special education needs are included, encouraged and experience success in the community school.
  
- Consulting Services:
  - Worked to implement Assessment Practice Standards, and developed inservices to support inclusive education. A handout was developed to demonstrate ways to align assessment practices with classroom programming to meet diverse learning needs of students.

- Supported staff through The Beginning and New Teachers Institute, providing effective strategies and a philosophy for inclusive programming based on the needs of the student.
- Provided inservices and on site consultation support for teachers who work with students in inclusive classrooms. Teachers and teacher assistants learned about strategies to support best practices and implementation of Individualized Program Plans (IPP). Participants learned how to differentiate curriculum expectations to meet the needs of students. There were also opportunities to share success stories about students in inclusive settings at elementary, junior high, and high school.
- Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS):
  - Provided a parent information session on the topic of “Services to Support Inclusion”.
  - Presented to fourth year education students at the University of Alberta and Concordia University College about “Inclusion of students with special education needs in community schools”.
  - Shared information on inclusive practices, such as rationale, supports and strategies with district staff and schools throughout North Central Alberta
- Special Education Support Team (SEST):
  - Provided a parent information evening on the topic “An Overview of Trans-disciplinary School Based Services and Supports”
  - Participated in proactive transition planning with junior high school staff, to successfully include and prepare for a student with severe disabilities
  - Collaborated with high school staff to organize a successful parent information evening, regarding transition planning for leaving school and moving to post-secondary involvements. The event was opened up to all high school staff and families, and supported students with severe special needs. This successful event will again be hosted in February 2007.
  - Supported families as their children moved from one inclusive classroom to another. Information on inclusive practices, such as rationale, supports and strategies were shared with district staff and parents. The Transition Facilitator on team focused on supporting successful family transitions from the Early Childhood Service Operators into Edmonton Public Schools.
- Early Education Outreach Services: Early Education provides programming to children 2 ½ years to six years of age who have disabilities or delays. Early Education Outreach Services offered through Scott Robertson and Waverley provided support to community schools where children with severe and mild/moderate disabilities attended kindergarten classes. A specialized team of consulting therapists traveled to community schools and children’s homes to provide information and programming support to parents and staff. Support was provided to schools and families in an ongoing way throughout the school year.
- Leadership Services:
  - Served as key-contacts for both school and parent inquiries regarding inclusion, where mediation as well as assistance with school placement was required.
  - Presented on inclusion to the Leadership Education Development (LED), Principal Education Development (PED), and first year principals group.

- Personnel Services:
  - Conducted interviews that included specific questions related to district policy on Inclusion.
- Planning:
  - Distributed district programs in a manner that supported the inclusion of students with special education needs, supporting students' access to choice and responding to enrolment demand.
  - Continued to work towards a more balanced distribution of special education district centre programs across all district schools, providing those students choosing a district centre program, with enhanced opportunities for choice of location, and for attending the same school as the majority of their peers. A more balanced distribution may also support these students' opportunities for inclusion within their school community.
- Research Support Services:
  - Collaborated with various district groups to identify, examine and share current research related to the inclusion of students with special education needs.
- Resource Development Services:
  - Infused Universal Design/Differentiation into Teaching Resources being developed.
- Student Achievement Team:
  - Continued to work within the Teaching and Learning Framework to focus on Superb Results from All Students. District professional development sessions for leadership staff, funded through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS), focused on teacher collaboration as a means to share effective strategies, successes, and challenges in improving achievement. Conveying the importance of inclusion to support success for all students was a critical element of Student Achievement Services' work.
  - For the 2006-07 year the focus will be on Deepening Literacy Instruction, Differentiated Instruction, Learning with Technology, Inter Agency Collaboration and using Assessment for Learning to enhance student achievement of all students.
- Student Assessment:
  - Reporting of student data for Provincial Achievement Tests and HLATs was done on a cohort basis, which included all students.
  - Continued to collaborate with Consulting Services, meeting monthly to deepen understanding of assessment and grading issues. Many consultants engaged with school staffs on targeted professional development around assessment for learning, resulting in teachers who are increasingly more effective in understanding and responding to diverse student needs. The impact of this work will continue to grow through the AIS project work in assessment for learning and differentiating instruction to engage all learners.
- Student Information:
  - Provided data, answered questions, and looked for trends to help provide better programming for students with special education needs. For example, the final September 30/05 report revealed that the number of ECS children in the EE Outreach program increased from 490 to 582 children for 2005-06. This is an increase of 92

children with special education needs who are programmed for in an inclusive kindergarten setting in their community school.

**Summary**

The district continues to work in collaboration with AACL and ERC, other community stakeholders, parents and staff to ensure that students with special education needs are supported in inclusive settings in community schools. We continue to promote awareness, expand knowledge and build expertise in inclusion through targeted supports and professional development, in order to make inclusion a viable choice for parents and students.

DB:km