

### 3. Policies, Services Delivery, Practices and Reviews of Special Education in the rest of Canada

- (a) Gather and present current research and documents on the delivery of special education or inclusive education

**1. Optimal knowledge and skill sets for teachers, teacher assistants, and other school staff.**

The persons who work with students with special needs must be adequately trained. That includes compulsory training for all teachers in the area of special education, ongoing professional development for teachers in the areas of teaching practices and special education, professional development for administrators in the area of special education, training and qualifications for paraprofessionals, and reinstatement of minimum qualifications for resource teachers.

#### **Training for principals**

Research clearly shows that the school principal plays a fundamental role in the delivery of programs and services for students with special needs. Establishment of the collaboration and the problem-solving approach necessary to meet the students' varied needs is dependent on the school principal. That does not mean the principal is the sole person responsible for the change, but he/she is the one who provides the vision and the direction. Studies have clearly demonstrated that inclusive programming will not succeed unless the principal plays an active, positive role in the process.

#### *Concept of adapted leadership*

Leadership at the school and district levels reinforces teaching and learning. It provides a sense of direction, energy, consistency, and coordination in relation to the actions taken. Social changes and the increasing diversity of the school population have broadened and diversified the role of schools.

Today's schools require leadership characterized by adaptability, which is the ability to respond to challenges and problems. An adapted leadership approach requires new learnings, new behaviours, and new organizational structures. Such leadership recognizes and values the diversity found in schools and offers leadership opportunities to a number of persons in the educational and surrounding community. Adapted leadership is established when teachers, families, students, and community agencies work together and share responsibilities to create a supportive, respectful community of learners.

Adapted leadership is the prerequisite for the development of supportive, respectful schools. Such a leadership approach:

- collaborates and values team work;
- actively involves parents as partners in the education of their children;
- seeks the participation and involvement of students in decision making, policy development, and the improvement plan;
- promotes the professional development of staff;
- shares authority, decision making, and responsibilities;
- requires extensive problem-solving skills in a team setting;
- uses community resources and skills to enrich learning and at the same time sees the school as a resource in the community's life.

Accordingly, the New Brunswick Department of Education, in co-operation with its education partners, will have to ensure the development of training modules for administrators on effective practices for responding to the diversified needs of students.

*The Quality Learning Agenda provides for an examination of principal certification requirements so that principals are well-equipped to provide strong leadership, focused on instruction, that meets the needs of today's schools and the diversity of students that attend them. The QLA also provides for the development of a training plan for principals, in collaboration with school districts. (QLA, page 37)*

### **Pre-service Training**

Most studies on services for students with special needs conducted in recent years in different provinces in Canada are critical of the fact that classroom teachers have not had the opportunity to receive training in working with students with special needs. A workforce that is qualified to meet the needs of students with special needs is fundamental in achieving the objectives of inclusive schools.

The different studies recommend that post-secondary institutions guarantee that all new teachers successfully complete courses on program adaptation and modification, the preparation of special education plans, the establishment of appropriate teaching practices and strategies, and collaboration with professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents.

For example, in a report entitled *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds*, Alberta's Commission on Learning recommends that pre-service programs offer new teachers the following skills.

New teachers should be able to:

- develop and implement individual program plans for children with special needs;
- work with teaching assistants assigned to children with special needs
  - by assisting them in furthering their knowledge and skills
  - by working with them on implementing and adjusting individual education plans
  - by selecting effective teaching and learning aids
  - by helping them become effective and active members of the learning team;
- communicate effectively with parents in developing and implementing individual program plans and engaging them in the process;
- communicate with parents on students' progress and actions that will be taken to improve student performance;
- collaborate with other professionals.

These skills will enable new teachers to include students with special needs in their classroom while offering sound programming to the other students.

A study done in British Columbia mentions that programs of initial teacher preparation should equip beginning teachers with assessment and intervention skills appropriate for working with students with special needs and the ability to supervise paraprofessionals. All new teachers should possess knowledge of how students develop reading, writing, mathematical problem-solving, social, and behavioural skills. Lastly, new teachers should be introduced to students with special needs during their training practica. The study also recommends that faculties of education, as part of their initial teacher education, should provide instruction in the preparation of individual education plans and parental participation in the process.

In a document entitled *Standards for Special Education*, amended in June 2004, the Alberta Ministry of Education stipulates that programs and services intended for students with special needs must be designed around their needs and provided by qualified, knowledgeable staff.

It specifies that school boards must:

- ensure teacher practice is in keeping with the Teaching Quality Standard;
- ensure teachers know and apply the knowledge, skills and attributes to accommodate individual differences for students with special education needs;
- support teachers' ability to monitor the effectiveness of their practices and adjust practices as necessary.

It also proposes that teacher training programs place the emphasis on themes such as behaviour management, collaboration, use of technology, the changing role of resource teachers, and above all, offer practical experiences.

The New Brunswick Department of Education developed a working document on the knowledge and skills required for the management of differences within a regular classroom. That knowledge and those skills could easily be incorporated into the courses currently offered to education students by the different education faculties.

N.B. Department of Education. *Knowledge and Skills Required to Manage Differences in a Regular Classroom*. Working document.

*The Quality Learning Agenda provides that teacher training institutions will provide teachers with the knowledge, skills and competencies required to successfully teach students with diverse learning needs within their classroom. (QLA, page 35)*

*The Quality Learning Agenda provides that all elementary teachers will have received specialized training to teach reading. (QLA, page 27)*

### **Training of Specialist Teachers**

The role of specialist teachers has changed considerably since the inclusion of students with special needs. In addition to possessing specialized knowledge to meet students' diverse needs, they must now take on a new role of consultation in relation to classroom teachers. Their pre-service and in-service training must reflect this change.

As a result, post-secondary institutions and education partners have to re-evaluate pre-service training and the in-service training opportunities offered to specialist teachers to ensure that they receive the necessary training to fulfil their new role. Knowledge and skills in the areas of consultation, collaboration, and team work have become essential.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in the United States has developed a list of the basic knowledge and skills necessary for special education teachers. That list, the CEC *Knowledge and Skill Base for All Beginning Special Education Teachers of Students in Individualized General Curriculums*, can be consulted at the following Internet address:  
<http://www.cec.sped.org/ps/gencurriculum.doc>

*The Quality Learning Agenda provides that, within three years, new provincial certification standards will be developed for resource and methods teachers. (QLA, page 35)*

### **Training of Paraprofessionals**

Paraprofessionals/teacher assistants contribute to the establishment of conditions conducive to learning. Their role is to support teachers in carrying out certain non-professional functions and to guide students in their learnings.

The different studies conducted in the provinces report that the number of paraprofessionals/teacher assistants has grown constantly in recent years. They also mention that these employees are often called upon to play a role for which they have not received any training.

Most provinces recommend that the role of teacher assistants be spelled out, that they receive pre-service training in the areas of differentiation and collaboration, and that they benefit from in-service training.

The New Brunswick Department of Education has developed a document defining and specifying the role and responsibilities of paraprofessionals. It would be a good idea for the Department to continue that work and develop a policy in that regard.

Department of Education. *School Paraprofessionals*. Working document. September 2001.

Ministère de l'Éducation du N.-B. *Le paraprofessionnel en milieu scolaire*. Document de travail. Septembre 2001.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in the United States has developed a list of knowledge and skills that all paraprofessionals should possess to work with students with special needs.

Council for Exceptional Children. *Parability: The CEC Paraeducator Standards Workbook*. 2004.

Council for Exceptional Children. *Knowledge and Skill Base of All Beginning Special Education Paraeducators*.

To deal with the problem of bumping of teacher assistants caused by seniority, British Columbia passed Bill 28, the *Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act*, which allows the Minister to make provisions to ensure that a teacher assistant is assigned to a given student for a full school year and will not be bumped owing to seniority issues.

**2. Strategies used by other jurisdictions to provide their school personnel with the required knowledge and skill sets (e.g., pre- and in-service training)**

Pre- and in-service training for different professionals working with students with special needs have been addressed in most provincial studies carried out in this field. It is essential that the pre- and in-service training programs offer the type of preparation and support that teachers need to function in today's classrooms.

### **Pre-service training**

Post-secondary institutions will have to find new ways to make their courses accessible, and the Department of Education will have to continue the development of online courses in special education so that teachers working far away from the post-secondary institutions can take those courses in their own community.

### **In-service training**

Research suggests that effective professional development must occur on an ongoing basis, target a school's specific problems, and engage teachers in a continuing improvement process.

Professional development cannot be confined to training workshops and conferences. School-based activities as part of a plan promote the development of collaboration, problem solving, and mentorship. The literature describes different forms of professional development and different ways of providing it.

The most common forms of professional development include:

- Training sessions
  - conferences
  - workshops
  - symposiums
  - seminars
  - demonstrations
  - observation
  - simulations
- Sponsorship
- Study group
- Action research
- Mentorship model

Different ways of providing professional development:

- Distance education (online)
- Use of local mentors
- Flexible hours
- Off-campus courses
- Evening courses.

In 2003, the Professional Development/In-service Review Committee on Prince Edward Island submitted a report entitled *Findings of the Professional Development/In-service Review Committee*. In this report, the authors present

the principles that guided their work and that could serve as a guide in connection with this study. According to the report:

- the ultimate goal of professional development is to improve student learning;
- professional development can occur in many ways;
- effective professional development is based on principles of adult learning;
- high-quality workshops have their place but require intensive follow-up and support;
- the focus needs to be on collaboration and the development of learning communities;
- professional development must be evaluated;
- on-site professional development and job-embedded learning must be emphasized. Job-embedded learning is learning by doing, reflecting on the experience and then generating and sharing new insights with oneself and others.

The same report points out that professional development, like many aspects of education, is a very complex phenomenon that does not lend itself to quick fixes. However, it is useful to consider the ideas gathered during the committee's consultations:

- Collaboration has at its core the belief that together, we can achieve more than any of us could ever achieve alone.
- Collaboration is an approach to effective planning, decision making, and problem solving.
- Communication, co-operation, and coordination are crucial aspects of effective collaboration.
- Collaborative partners do not seek to blame but rather accept the current reality and work together to continuously improve for the common good.
- Collaborative efforts eliminate the "they" and strengthen the capabilities of the "we".
- Collaboration is a way of working in which power struggles are regarded as detrimental to the team goals.

Alberta's Commission on Learning mentions that, given the importance of professional development, schools and school boards should be required to report annually on their professional development plans, including the objectives set, the time allocated, actions taken, resources provided, and the results achieved.

Ongoing professional development activities planned at the school level should provide opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals to work together in planning programs and assessing the results.

In the area of action research, the Quebec education department's Program to Support Research and Development in Special Education is an exemplary

practice that should be taken into consideration. It encourages innovation and the implementation of practices to bring about more effective intervention on behalf of students with handicaps or disabilities. The objectives are as follows:

- support the schools in their renewal of educational practices;
- facilitate the development of new approaches or practices in special education;
- foster collaboration among educators, the research community or other partners to devise, carry out and evaluate projects.

According to research, schools should devote at least 10% of their budget, excluding salaries and benefits, to professional development and commit 25% of the working time of teachers to learning and collaboration between colleagues. Informal professional development practices can include regular collaboration with other teachers, joint planning of lessons, peer training, and team review of student assignments.

The ultimate goal of professional development is the improvement of student learning.

In order for schools and districts to be able to implement an ongoing professional development plan for their staff, the Department of Education will have to make provision for appropriate financial allocations.

*The Quality Learning Agenda provides that all educators will have increased access to professional development in a number of areas through online training. (QLA, page 35)*

### **3. Accountability measures/practices for measuring individual progress as well as the effectiveness of educational programming**

The different accountability measures must emphasize outcomes and the progress of students with special needs, rather than compliance with the assessment and planning process and procedures.

School boards must establish procedures for monitoring the progress of all students, including those with special needs, on a regular basis throughout the year.

The Department of Education must analyze the performance of students receiving special education services in comparison with that of students who have not been identified as having special needs.

As a follow-up to its study, Manitoba is proposing that individual education plans and school and district plans become the basis of the accountability



system. Each of these plans must be results-oriented and include a description of the needs, goals, actions, and planned assessment methods.

Several Canadian provinces are working to develop indicators as an accountability method. Indicators could include information about students' results, such as their academic performance, and information on the quality of teaching and the number of students per class. In an effective accountability system, the information provided by the indicators is used to monitor the health of the school system, report to the appropriate agencies and the public, and ensure compliance.

The *Western and Northern Canadian Protocol*, a consortium of provinces taking in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and the Yukon, is participating in a research project on special education indicators. In 2003, the Ontario Ministry of Education tabled a discussion paper on standards. In that document, a standard is defined as a clear reference point for understanding what is expected and how one will be evaluated. The document proposes the establishment of standards in the following areas:

- assessment
- program planning
- program interventions
- levels of service
- standards for instruction
- reporting to parents
- qualifications of staff.

In a follow-up to its study of services for students with special needs, the Manitoba Department of Education mentions that an **individual education plan** mandated in policy should be the basis for accountability. The plan's effectiveness would be enhanced through expectations for student and parental involvement and annual evaluation. The plan should complement the accountability processes that apply to all students, such as the regular reporting of student progress.

Nova Scotia's Special Education Implementation Review Committee made a few interesting recommendations in relation to accountability.

- School boards should monitor individual program plans to ensure that the outcomes developed and implemented are appropriate and measurable. In addition, a system should be developed to track, monitor, and report to parents student progress.
- The Minister should monitor pre-service teacher education programs and propose policy changes.

- The Department of Education should define or adopt competencies and professional qualifications for persons responsible for providing special education services.
- School boards should monitor resource teacher allocations in schools to ensure appropriate utilization.
- The Department of Education, in consultation with school boards, should identify core competencies for teacher assistants to be included in training programs; these competencies should be required at the time of hiring.

#### Documents for consultation

Saskatchewan Education. *Saskatchewan Education Indicators – Kindergarten to Grade 12*. 2000.

Noonan, Brian. *Promising Practices in Special Education Accountability*. August 2003.

Noonan, Brian. *A Template for Special Education Indicators*. February 2002.

Noonan, Brian. *A Proposal to Assess Special Education Outcomes Using Goal Attainment Scaling*. August 2002.

Ontario Ministry of Education. *A Standards-Based Approach for Special Education Programs and Services*. Discussion paper (2003).

Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (EPRRI). *Creating Performance Goals and Indicators in Special Education*. University of Maryland. January 2002.

Alberta Learning. *Standards for Special Education*. (Amended June 2004),

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. *School Information and Reporting for Parents and the Community*. 2004.

*Objective V of the Quality Learning Agenda deals with accountability throughout the education system. (QLA, page 44)*

#### **4. Service options for rural areas and small schools**

In 2003, British Columbia's Task Force on Rural Education submitted its report entitled *Enhancing Rural Learning*. The report's authors recommended the following actions:

- Recognize the contribution of rural schools.

- Create the provincial vision for rural education by focusing on how to foster equitable student achievement in all areas of the province.
- Invest in the professional development of rural educators.
- Work with education partners to build a network of rural educators and leaders.
- Encourage partnerships and coordination across social service agencies to support students in communities undergoing economic hardship. (See *section 6 for more details on integrated services.*)
- Enable creative solutions to reduce operating costs.
- Use shared services among school districts, in regions, and within small communities.
- Review the funding of rural schools.
- Increase learning options for rural students and educators through technological solutions (online courses).
- Deliver services to rural special needs students by developing partnerships and creative solutions.

Saskatchewan Education. *The Shared Service Policy & Guidelines (2001): Enhancing the Capacity of Rural, Northern and Fransaskois School Divisions to Provide Supports for the Diverse Needs of Students.* April 2001.

The concept of shared services in Saskatchewan increases the ability of school boards in rural areas to offer specialized services that they could not offer on their own. Partnerships with other school boards and with community organizations such as hospital corporations and regional social services offices enable rural school boards to provide a range of services to support the learning of students with special needs and their families.

## **5. Solutions to classroom composition issues**

In 2002, Manitoba's Commission on Class Size and Composition submitted its final report. The consultations and briefs indicated that class composition is of equal, if not greater, importance than class size, and responding to composition concerns is more difficult than meeting class size needs.

Class composition is a more significant factor than class size in influencing student learning and teacher working conditions. Decision making regarding class size and composition should remain at the local level taking into account the need to meet the students' educational needs.

However, research studies on class size show that academic improvements occur when small class sizes are introduced at the primary (K-4) levels. The benefits are particularly evident in areas with many at-risk students and those with high special education needs.

Alberta's Commission on Learning. *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds* – Final Report, October 2003.

Rainforth, Beverly. *Related Services Supporting Inclusion: Congruence of Best Practices in Special Education and School Reform*. 1996.

While the province of New Brunswick continues to debate this issue, British Columbia has passed Bill 28, the *Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act*, which removes the right to determine classroom composition from the collective agreement. As of July 1, 2002, the inclusion of students with special needs no longer requires an automatic reduction in class size.

*To address issues associated with classroom composition, the Quality Learning Agenda mentions that the Department of Education will provide school districts with assistance to explore different various flexible scheduling models. With regard to class size, the Department will maintain reduced class sizes in the early grades and lower class sizes strategically, when and where appropriate. (QLA, page 30)*

## **6. Levels of service and organization of non-educational services/resources required to support the learning of students with exceptional needs**

All of the studies on services for exceptional students recognize that the school alone cannot meet all of the students' needs. The complexity of the problems experienced by many students and the complex solutions they require mean that the school must definitely open up to the organizations and other institutions in its community. The co-operation of stakeholders from these various organizations and institutions and the coordination of their actions are essential to the well-being of the children.

In addition, limitations in terms of human and financial resources and the increased demands in all the systems should prompt the governments to integrate services.

The Department of Education should work with the other departments to develop a system that guarantees that students with special needs will have available a continuum of services that begins at childhood, continues from kindergarten through the end of high school, and leads to their transition to post-secondary studies and the job market. In such a context, might the individual program plan become the mechanism used to implement a joint service plan reflecting the integration of services for students with special needs?

Each province has programs to promote interdepartmental collaboration in the delivery of services for exceptional students. Newfoundland and Labrador's

*Model for Coordination of Service to Children and Youth, Nova Scotia's Child and Youth Action Committee – (CAYAC), New Brunswick's Support Services to Education program, and British Columbia's Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Schools* are all positive initiatives. However, the province of Saskatchewan probably has one of the best-developed programs. **School<sup>PLUS</sup>**, or in French, **l'École<sup>PLUS</sup>**, should be considered as part of this study.

In its final report, the Saskatchewan Task Force on the Role of the School recognizes that the needs of today's children and young people cannot be met by schools alone. It therefore presents a vision in which schools are dedicated to excellence in education while working together with the PLUS – i.e., families, communities, and the different human services agencies – to create a new institution dedicated to the needs of children and young people.

School<sup>PLUS</sup> is a term coined by the Task Force on the Role of the School. The term describes a new vision of schools as centres of learning, support and community for the children, youth and families they service. The School<sup>PLUS</sup> concept stresses learning excellence for all students and calls for active involvement with families and support from human service providers and community members. It calls for all schools to adopt the philosophy and practices of community education.

(Saskatchewan Learning. *Caring and Respectful Schools*. 2004, page 2)

The Task Force even suggests that the concept of integrated school-linked services, which is a response to the growing number of children and youth who come to school with complex problems, be merged with that of School<sup>PLUS</sup>.

School<sup>PLUS</sup> is based on the following premise: community agencies and schools that work together are in the best position to meet the needs of at-risk students and their families.

Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School. *School<sup>PLUS</sup> – A Vision for Children and Youth*. 2001.

Saskatchewan Learning. *Caring and Respectful Schools – Toward School<sup>PLUS</sup> – Ensuring Student Well-Being and Educational Success*. 2004

It is increasingly evident that, in order to meet the different needs of students, governments must develop schools as service centres for children and communities. As mentioned by the Quebec education department, the school is a gateway to the diverse services offered by health and social services institutions, community groups, youth employment exchanges, etc. These outside services provide invaluable support for both students and teachers, in

continuity and complementarity with the services of the school. School administrations should ensure the integration and coordination of those services.

According to Saskatchewan, the areas in the education sector where inter-agency collaboration is most important are early childhood, cultural diversity, health problems, and social, emotional, and behaviour problems.

All stakeholders party must engage in the lives of children from birth. Better coordination and collaboration among service providers are necessary to ensure that children and their families receive the services they need. The persons involved must work together to support students with special needs. Coordination and collaboration must also be present at the school and district level.

Alberta's document on standards for special education (2003) states that, in connection with coordinated services, school boards must:

- take the necessary measures to provide students with access to the coordinated support services (particularly in the area of health) they need to achieve the goals and objectives of the programs;
- develop, keep current, and implement written local policy and procedures regarding access to coordinated services for students with special education needs;
- obtain written consent from parents to provide coordinated services to students, when required, and as identified in students' individualized program plans;
- establish collaborative partnerships between parents, teachers, and service providers;
- have written procedures for medical interventions, such as collecting medical information and storing and administering medications;
- provide training in connection with health-related support services by using qualified professionals or other individuals with expertise.

Another program that deserves our attention is the one established by the Government of Alberta in 1999 to improve access to and enhance the provision of health services to students with special health needs so that they can participate in their education programs and be successful.

The *Student Health Initiative (SHI)* is a partnership between Alberta Learning, Health and Wellness, Children's Services, and the Alberta Mental Health Board. The program is intended for children with physical disabilities, developmental disabilities, neurological disorders, sensory impairments, medical conditions, and/or emotional/behavioural disabilities who are registered in school programs from Early Childhood Services through Grade 12. Services eligible for funding include rehabilitation, nursing, and emotional/behavioural supports. Funding is accessed through partnerships between school authorities, regional health authorities, and child and family services authorities, which set priorities, develop

collaborative strategies for delivering services, and share accountability for results.

Government of Alberta. *Student Health Initiative – Service Plan Guidelines for 2004-2005*. June 2004.

For any shared services program to be functional, the government must prepare legislation, policies, protocols, and financial arrangements among the departments with a social vocation. Children's services must be offered in an integrated and holistic manner, with schools as the focal point. Each social services agency requires a clear and flexible mandate.

School districts, regional health offices, social services, and other agencies must take the initiative in promoting and improving the integrated services concept. Priority areas should include early childhood education, health problems, and social, emotional, and behavioural problems.

Integrated services are services that are part of a coherent, coordinated, and harmonious system with shared objectives that everyone works collaboratively to attain. Collaboration demands that territorial and corporate struggles be put aside and that a shared vision and common goals be adopted.

In evaluating services, evaluation should focus on the extent to which the results sought for students have been attained and on the means used to attain them. Lastly, an analysis of the needs to be met and ways of meeting them is the basis for the choice of priorities to be pursued and services to be provided.

*The Quality Learning Agenda states that the effectiveness of professional support services provided to the school population will be re-examined over the next two years, in co-operation with the departments of Health and Wellness and Family and Community Services. (QLA, page 35)*

## **7. Role of the public education system in relation to preschool children who are at risk of entering school with educational delays**

Learning begins at birth. The development of the brain sets the base of competence and coping skills for later stages of life. Parents are their children's first teachers and can instill a love of learning in their children at a very young age. Families, communities, and governments can support parents in this goal. The earlier that support is provided, the greater the benefits for the child.

The efficacy of early intervention programs for children with disabilities and children living in vulnerable situations has been well established. Research clearly shows that early intervention in the first years of life represents a solid investment in a child's development and may prevent high-cost interventions

later in life. The benefits of early intervention may include improved social skills, improved health, heightened self-esteem, growth in development in language and cognitive abilities, and increased school readiness.

With that in mind, education departments must develop and implement a policy to guarantee early identification and intervention for children with special needs and monitor the progress of that policy. Such a program requires an interdepartmental (interagency) commitment, since early childhood education does not come under the responsibility of the Department of Education and the needs of these children are often related to social and health problems.

The government must develop a system that guarantees that students with special needs have access to a continuum of services that begins in childhood, continues from kindergarten through Grade 12, and leads to their transition to post-secondary studies or the job market. Such a system entails the implementation of coordinated services between the different departments and agencies responsible for child and family services.

Saskatchewan Learning. *Children's Services Policy Framework*. Supporting Student Diversity. 2002.

*The Quality Learning Agenda provides for several initiatives regarding early childhood development, including the establishment of standards for preschool development, the establishment of transition to school programs, and school-readiness screening. (QLA, pages 25 and 26)*

## **8. Transition planning for exceptional students**

The transition of students with special needs occurs during the passage from one grade to the next, a change in school or district, and the passage from public school to post-secondary studies or the workplace. The transition plan must be part of the student's individual education plan.

Successful education programs prepare for the transition of students during their academic career and at the end of high school. To ensure that everything works smoothly, a uniform model is essential. All the service providers must have input in the development of the transition plan and approve it. Parents should know the program that their child will be taking the next year before the end of the school year.

The transition from early childhood programs to kindergarten is often difficult because the programs and the funding change, and services from other agencies may be reduced or even disappear.



The ideal would be for the Department of Education, in co-operation with the other departments, the other education partners, to develop a transition planning policy to guarantee a continuum of services from birth to the workplace or to post-secondary education.

Even better, the government, as the central agency responsible for the different departments, should develop a system that guarantees that students with special needs have access to a continuum of services that begins in childhood, continues from kindergarten through Grade 12, and leads to their transition to the workplace or to post-secondary studies. Such a system implies the establishment of coordinated services between the different departments and agencies responsible for child and family services.

(b) In particular, survey the various practices across Canada with a view to identifying best practices and major challenges.

One of the main challenges of Canada's public education system is the increase in behaviour problems in the classrooms. These problems are often caused by the social or emotional problems experienced by certain students. Schools are often ill-equipped to respond to those situations, which disrupt the learning process.

The New Brunswick Department of Education adopted a positive learning environment policy a few years ago. As part of that policy, schools and school districts have to prepare a positive learning environment plan each year. The Department of Education and the school districts have offered training to the different stakeholders in areas such as quality schools and non-violent crisis intervention and established different strategies to better respond to the needs of students with behaviour problems.

Following the example of other provinces, the New Brunswick Department of Education, in consultation with its partners and the departments responsible for social services, should develop a common policy on the needs of students with social, emotional, and behavioural problems. Services for these students should be addressed through integrated services. In addition, the Department should continue to provide training for school staff and make additional resources available to them.

In the report *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds*, Alberta's Commission on Learning suggests that schools become service centres for children and families. The services themselves would not need to be run by the schools or districts, but the schools could be considered the single entry point for a range of essential services for children.

For the Quebec education department, the school is a gateway to the diverse services offered by health and social services institutions, community groups,

youth employment exchanges, etc. These outside services provide invaluable support for both students and teachers, in continuity and complementarity with the services of the school. School administrations should ensure the integration and coordination of those services.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. *Two Networks, One Objective: the Development of Youth*. Agreement for the complementarity of services between the health and social services network and the education network. 2003.

### **Role of Parents**

The important role played by parents in the education of children with special needs has been recognized. That is why the different studies on services for students with special needs recommend that departments of education develop guides for parents informing them about policies and procedures for accessing services and appealing decisions, about special education and transition plans, and about ways to work with the school and service providers. Following a review of special education services, the Alberta Ministry of Education revised its handbook for parents. The document in question, *The Learning Team*, is a good reference on the subject.

Alberta Learning. *The Learning Team – A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs*, 2003.

#### (c) Gather and present research on curriculum and pedagogical innovation.

School staff must keep up with information on the latest theories concerning the learning process. They must also be aware of the role played by students' motivation on the quality of their learning and the role played by teachers when it comes to motivating students.

A collaborative culture has to exist among all school staff so as to create an environment conducive to quality learning. In such an environment, everyone contributes to attaining their school's education plan and plans developed for students with special needs.

Teachers have to build their pedagogical model by drawing from various theories (humanist, behaviourist, cognitivist, constructivist) and choose instructional approaches consistent with what is known about the learning process. Instructional approaches define the interactions between students, learning activities, and the teaching staff. Beyond the ultimate goal of ensuring quality learning, two criteria must guide the choice of instructional approaches: pedagogical consistency and differentiated instruction.

Instructional approaches must therefore take the school's aims into account and convey values of mutual help and sharing, social and intellectual autonomy, and respect for oneself and others. They reflect a certain philosophy of education of which all school personnel must be cognizant.

Differentiated instruction is based on the notion that all students can learn. Teachers who practise differentiated instruction seek to evaluate student learning processes and their outcomes, knowing that all students learn in their own way and have their own particular abilities and challenges. Such an approach provides insight into individual strengths and weaknesses and makes it possible to intervene accordingly. It is not individualized instruction but rather personalized instruction designed to ensure that each student's learning needs can be met and that all students can grow in a variety of ways. A number of instructional approaches are thus used to create a range of stimulating learning conditions.

Furthermore, even when differentiated instruction is used, it will sometimes be necessary to enrich or modify curricular outcomes for a small number of students with specific cognitive strengths and challenges.

Since new curricula developed at the provincial level tend to present a limited number of learning outcomes, is it conceivable that they might lend themselves better to accommodations to meet the requirements of students with special needs?

### *Responsive Curriculum and Instruction*

Responsive curriculum and instruction is flexible and adapts to the needs of the learner. It provides all students with a variety of developmental and learning experiences plus the supports they need to maximize their learning potential. Responsive curriculum and instruction is influenced by:

- the learning environment (that is, the classroom and school climate);
- curriculum topics and materials;
- instruction;
- the quality of relationships among and between teachers, students, parents, and community members; and
- the values and needs of the community.

(Saskatchewan Learning. *Caring and Respectful Schools*, 2004, p. 20)

It is imperative that the Department of Education clearly define the terms accommodation, modification, and individualization. These terms are often defined differently between provinces and are often misinterpreted by education professionals. For example, the definition of "adaptation" as it is used in Nova Scotia is equivalent to the definition of "accommodation" in New Brunswick. When it comes to a modified curriculum, is it possible to determine at which point a student is no longer pursuing the same expectations?

Ongoing assessments often reveal the need for diversified instruction, i.e., different instructional approaches. The teacher thus makes changes to his or her instruction to benefit students, doing away with the use of formal evaluations. Learning difficulties must be identified in the classroom through informal assessments conducted by the teacher.

***Success for All Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction***, a support document released by Manitoba Education and Youth in 1996. This document is available for purchase from the [Manitoba Text Book Bureau](#).

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(d) Gather and present research on funding models for special education across the country.

Funding for special education programs and services is a complex and oft-discussed issue. In Canada, there are two types of funding for services for special needs students: enrolment-based funding and funding by student category.

Enrolment-based funding is calculated on the basis of the total number of students enrolled in a school district. The chief advantages of this funding model are its ease of administration and the leeway school districts have in applying it. It is also the preferred funding model under the inclusive schools concept. However, it does not take student characteristics or those of a given region into account. Enrolment-based funding is the model currently in use in New Brunswick.

The current budget for the education of exceptional students in New Brunswick results from the combination, back in 1987, of the monies used to operate auxiliary classrooms, funding for the Comprehensive Plan for Services to Students with Learning Disabilities, and funding for the different programs offered by the districts at the time. The initial budget was established on the basis of the monies available in 1987, not according to the requirements of students with special needs.

Under the funding by student category model, monies are allocated to school districts on the basis of their circumstances. The formula can be relatively straightforward by simply considering specific situations or take students' particular characteristics into account. However, this funding model requires clear identification of the students and considerable administrative work. Additionally, it limits the freedom of action of school administrations and goes against the principles of inclusion.

How can the real cost of special education programs and services be assessed without having to identify the students concerned? The province will have to determine whether current funding can actually meet students' needs. The Department of Education will subsequently have to plan for a transitional funding system between the current approach and the new one.

The funding formula chosen will have to be aligned with current needs and support the philosophy of inclusion. It will also have to support:

- school services that support children and youth

- shared consultation services at the regional level
- recognition of students with a variety of intensive needs
- a program for at-risk students
- recognition of prevention and early intervention needs.

Instead of being determined by categories concerned with student deficits, the funding formula should be based on students' needs and support the implementation of services identified by a team of people working together. The funding formula should be flexible in order to take local conditions and priorities into account. It should also be predictable so that school boards can undertake long-term planning.

Human resources should be deployed in accordance with program goals and needs. That presupposes, for instance, that teacher assistants support the program's goals instead of being seen as the sole support for students with special needs.

The funding models used by the departments and ministries of education in Ontario, Alberta, and Quebec should be examined by the New Brunswick Department of Education. A two-tiered funding formula could prove effective during the transition from the current funding system to a new one.

Initially, the school districts could receive funding:

- based on enrolment for services and programs for **at-risk students** (students with difficulties that could lead to failure, learning delays, emotional problems, behavioural problems, developmental delays, or mild intellectual deficits);
- based on needs for services and programs for students with serious impairments as regards behaviour, learning, health, communication, and cognitive skills.

Once the cost of the services needed by each region has been determined, the switch could then be made to an enrolment-based model for all students with special needs.

The level of students' needs despite their impairments can vary and affect the cost of services. Alberta and Quebec use the same approach to ascertain the amount of funding required for special education. Codes are determined on the basis of students' needs, not their disabilities.

For example, Peter has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair to get around. He may be considered exceptional or non-exceptional from the special education standpoint. Considerations may include the following:

- If Peter is completely independent in terms of both his academic and personal skills and has no mobility problems because his school is accessible, the school could classify him as a regular student.
- If Peter needs help for educational activities on a continuing basis, the school could use the code for physical or medical disability.
- If Peter is dependent on others for most activities of daily living such as getting dressed, going to the bathroom, eating, and getting around in school and requires a technical aid to function academically, the school could use the code for severe physical or medical disability.

Western and Northern Canadian Protocol. *Funding Students with Special Needs: A Review of Pan-Canadian Practices*, November 2004.

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<http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/funding/Manual2003-2004/>

- (e) Any other relevant research, models, or initiatives in the rest of Canada.

### **Role of Assessment (Formal and Informal Assessments)**

The assessment and identification of students are crucial elements in determining the requirements of students with special needs. Assessment begins in the classroom (informal) and is a process that is inherent in the duties of teachers. Learning assessment is an educational function that, together with learning and instruction, is part of an indissociable trio. The Alberta Ministry of Education document entitled *Assessment and Identification of Students with Special Needs – Grades 1-12* is a very helpful model and is based on the following beliefs:

- Special education needs are determined first and foremost by the student's ability to function and learn in the classroom.
- The severity of special needs is dependent on the services and modifications required for the student to succeed.
- Education decisions are based on assessment data identifying student functioning in different settings using a variety of measures.
- Assessment data and decisions based on those data are recorded in the student's file.
- Persons who assess students with special needs must have expertise and experience in assessment and education programming.

Alberta Learning. *Assessment and Identification of Students with Special Needs – Grades 1-12*, 2004.

- (f) Present a summary and analysis of Reviews of Inclusive Education done in Canada (by province and territory).

**See appended table.**

- (g) Present a summary and analysis of all other research uncovered under this section.

Components of a policy statement on inclusion by the Government of New Brunswick

### **Definition of Inclusion**

New Brunswick has to develop and disseminate its philosophy of inclusion, which must be understood by all stakeholders, parents, students, teachers, and administrators. Here are a few statements that could prove helpful:

For Manitoba, inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. It is seen as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer life for all of us.

The philosophy of inclusion goes beyond the idea of physical location and incorporates basic values and a belief system that promotes participation, belonging, and interaction.

The focus in inclusion must be on the education of all students enrolled in regular classrooms, not placement. Student needs and the type of services to be provided should determine student placement. The best interests of each child should be the deciding factor in determining his or her placement. The program and the placement offered should depend first and foremost on what is best for the child and what will give the child the chance to learn and succeed.

Making changes (policies, accountability, and funding) for special needs students alone would serve to highlight their differences. Changes must apply to



the education of all students. However, it is important to recognize that some students have greater needs than others.

### **Special Education Policies**

Policies on special education, like those in other areas, should not be too detailed or too numerous (as in Ontario). To be effective, a policy must provide a framework for action that allows for creativity and personalized decisions.

For example, Manitoba Education, in its 2001 document, proposes a policy that connects legislation to practice. The components of the new policy framework include the following:

- a legislated commitment to appropriate education for all students;
- regulations for developing written Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students, including meaningful parent and student involvement, annual evaluation, and the creation of a resolution process where there is disagreement about placement or programming;
- minimum service standards for supporting students with special needs and their parents;
- clearer guidelines for contentious issues such as instructional placement and the use of discipline procedures with students with disabilities.

Manitoba – Bill 13 *Appropriate Educational Programming* (June 10, 2004)

### **A Vision and Values in Special Education**

Schools must be places where excellence is the hallmark – where teams of principals, teachers, school staff, parents, and students work together to ensure continuous improvement in students' achievements and results.

Professional learning communities have one primary objective – the continuous improvement of students' results. Teachers and administrators continuously seek and share information and act on what they have learned. And all of their efforts are concentrated on improving their practice so that students can achieve the best possible results.

### **Levels of Service**

Saskatchewan has a policy on special education personnel qualifications, which stipulates that special education teachers and professional support staff who are responsible for individual assessments, program planning, and program delivery must possess qualifications acceptable to the Minister, and another on professional development, which states that the Department of Learning assists

school districts to develop and implement professional growth opportunities for staff.

### **Clear and Fair Definitions of Terms Used in Special Education**

#### ➤ Students with special needs

How to recognize and meet the special needs of children and youth without focussing on deficits and labels?

The authors of the Alberta study on special education services recommend that Alberta Learning take the necessary steps to ensure school authorities have the information and assistance necessary to identify all students with special needs:

- Clarify and develop standard definitions based on the programming and learning needs of students with special needs.
- Assist school authorities to identify students with special needs for educational programming.

#### Clearer definitions of terms used:

Students with special/particular needs

Students with diverse needs

Students with exceptionalities, etc.

“Special needs” is a much more inclusive term that refers to any learner need that is not adequately supported by standard delivery of the provincial curriculum. The term “special needs” includes students who are identified as gifted and talented, as “at risk” or “struggling” learners, or as having educationally relevant disabilities.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth. *Follow-up to the Manitoba Special Education Review – Proposals for a Policy, Accountability and Funding Framework*, September 2001 – figure on page 7.

Figure entitled *The Two Instructional Continuums in Curriculum* on page 7.

In this model, the majority of students benefit from the provincial curriculum with regular classroom content and varied instructional approaches that include differentiated instruction. At any given point, however, there are students have special needs – some on a continuous basis, some from time to time, and almost everyone at some point in his or her academic career. The continuum of services helps educators to think in terms of what instructional methods or content a student needs.

<b><i>Students with Special Needs and Individual Program Plans</i></b>	
<p>Adaptation / Accommodation</p> <p><i>For students whose learning outcomes are the same as those of the prescribed curricula.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Instructional and assessment methods and materials are adapted and identified in individual program plans.</li> </ul>	<p>Modification / Individualized / Special education program</p> <p><i>For students whose learning outcomes are different from those of the prescribed curricula.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Individualized or personalized goals and objectives are developed and identified in individual program plans.</li> </ul>

- Terms: Accommodation, adaptation, modification, individualization, special education program

The Anglophone sector of the Department of Education uses three different terms, namely Accommodation, Modification, and Individualization. As defined, the term “modification” is confusing.

The Francophone sector uses only two terms: “*Accommodation*” and “*Programme d’adaptation scolaire*”.

- Least pejorative term:

Individual program plan  
 Special education plan  
 Personal program plan

- Continuum of Services

A range of education placements and program supports provided for students with diverse needs to maximize their integration.

- Accountability

Processes by which schools and educators demonstrate that their services are meeting planned outcomes for student learning and support.

## Conclusion

The recommendations made by the various studies on special education services address the same issues more or less: development of clear policies on special education, emphasis on identification and early intervention, pre- and in-service training for various stakeholders, sharing of responsibilities between the various organizations and departments responsible for child and family services, increased funding to meet student needs, and an accountability mechanism for parents and the community.

New Brunswick's Quality Learning Agenda contains a number of elements designed to enhance learning for all students and comply with the philosophy of inclusion. Staff at the Department of Education have been working in that direction for a few years now, and progress can already be noted in some areas.

It is important for the current study to take into account the work begun by the Department of Education and the school districts under the Quality Learning Agenda and to make recommendations designed to complement the work already undertaken.

## Pre-service Training Programs Offered at French-language Universities

Note: The titles of courses and programs have been translated solely to facilitate understanding among English-language readers.

### **Université de Moncton – Faculty of Education**

#### ***Undergraduate***

In a five-year Bachelor of Education program, student teachers must take 9 compulsory special education credits (3 courses). In the Bachelor program for teaching at the Elementary level, student teachers must take the following courses: Educational Psychology (Children) (3 credits), Students with Difficulties (3 credits), and Remediation and Enrichment (3 credits). Students planning on teaching at the High School level must take the following courses: Educational Psychology (Adolescents) (3 credits), Students with Difficulties (3 credits), and Differentiated Instruction (3 credits).

#### ***Graduate***

Master of Education (resource teaching)  
Master of Arts in Education (resource teaching)  
Graduate Certificate in Teaching Hearing-Impaired Students  
Graduate Certificate in Teaching Vision-Impaired Students.

The Université de Moncton, in cooperation with the Francophone sector of the New Brunswick Department of Education, is working to establish a Minor in Special Education (High School) (24 credits) and a Certificate in Special Education (Elementary) (18 credits). The work should be complete in three years.

### **Université de Sherbrooke – Faculty of Education**

#### ***Undergraduate***

[Bachelor of special education and social adjustment\\*](#)  
[Bachelor of psychoeducation](#)

#### ***Graduate***

[Master of special education and social adjustment](#)  
[Master of psychoeducation](#)

[Graduate diploma in special education and social adjustment](#)  
[Graduate microprogram in orthopedagogy applied to mathematics](#)  
[Graduate microprogram in orthodidactics of the written language](#)  
[Doctorate in education](#)

**\* Revised Bachelor of special education and social adjustment program**

The new Bachelor of special education and social adjustment is focused on training designed to prepare teachers to work with at-risk students at the elementary level in French and mathematics. A variety of psychoeducation courses are offered to further develop skills needed to provide quality instruction. Following this three-year common curriculum, students in fourth year may enrich their theoretical knowledge and enhance their practical skills in one of three areas to bolster their expertise in:

- Orthopedagogy for at-risk students (instructional support);
- Special education and social adjustment for students with severe behavioural disorders
- Special education and social adjustment for students with learning difficulties so as to facilitate the transition from elementary to high school.

The final year may also be seen as a springboard from a bachelor's program to continuous learning or graduate studies.

**At-risk students** are students who require special support measures because they:

- experience difficulties that may lead to failure;
- exhibit learning delays;
- have emotional disorders;
- have behavioural disorders;
- have a developmental delay or a mild intellectual impairment (MEQ, 1999a).

## **Université du Québec – Faculty of Education**

### ***Undergraduate***

Bachelor of special education and social adjustment (UQAM, UQAC, UQAR)

Bachelor of special education and social adjustment (elementary) (UQTR)

Bachelor of special education and social adjustment (high school) (UQTR)

Bachelor of special education (UQTR)

Bachelor of special education (elementary) (UQO)

### ***Graduate***

No Master of special education

## **Université Laval – Faculty of Education**

### ***Undergraduate***

No Bachelor of special education

### ***Graduate***

Master of psychopedagogy (special education)

Graduate diploma in educational intervention, special education option, which can be completed in two sessions on a full-time basis. The program consists of

two compulsory courses, a wide range of optional courses, and two internships. The courses offered deal mainly with:

- learning difficulties in reading, writing, and mathematics;
- conduct and behavioural disorders;
- integration of students with difficulties;
- cognitive strategies.

### **Université de Montréal – Faculty of Education**

#### ***Undergraduate***

Bachelor of Education (special education)

#### ***Graduate***

Master of Education in educational intervention

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