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Directive

This document, “Final Report of Findings on Inclusive Practice” is in response to a resolution dated February 14, 2017:

Resolved that the Avon Maitland District School Board ask SEAC to provide the board with processes and strategies for carrying out a review that consists of the following:

1. Describe the vision in AMDSB for inclusive education, and in particular for those students with developmental disabilities;
2. Outline the current practices throughout the District with feedback on their effectiveness through input from all stakeholders including but not limited to: students, parents, teachers, EAs, and Administration;
3. Identify best practices and opportunities for growth, and as appropriate, provide recommendations to ensure that the vision for inclusive education is realized throughout out District.
4. And that a progress report on strategies/processes be brought forward following the April SEAC meeting.
5. Literature review of relevant published articles

Definitions of Inclusive Education and Benefits

According to the SEAC approved definition from April 2017, “Inclusive education in the Avon Maitland District School Board values the individual, social and academic contributions of every learner. Inclusive education acknowledges that every student has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs that are enriched in a common learning environment through student-centered pedagogy. Inclusive education embraces diversity, to create rich learning communities where all students are supported to learn and grow together in general education settings regardless of difference.”

A similar definition is offered from the Ministry of Education (2009), “Inclusive education is education that is based on the principles of acceptable and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.”

The benefits of inclusive education for students with exceptionalities include two sub-themes: academic and social. In regards to academic achievement, a meta-analysis of 24 studies cites that 76.6% of students in inclusive settings outperformed those individuals in less inclusive settings (Oh-Young & Filler, 2015). Inclusion allows students to work with and alongside their peers with exceptionalities; evidence has shown that this contact is likely to increase communication and behavioral skills (Katz & Mirenda, 2002). It is important to note that the benefits of inclusion not only impact students with exceptionalities, but also their peers without. There are social benefits around heightened empathy, tolerance and compassion as a function of fully inclusive learning environments (Maikowski & Podlesh, 2009; Siperstein, Norins, & Mohler, 2007).

Current Practices and Context

Currently, most students with disabilities attending schools in Avon Maitland District School Board are included in the regular classroom with their same age peers at their neighbourhood schools. The following table illustrates the breakdown of class placement for students in elementary and secondary schools.

Placements/Credits	Number of Students
Self-Contained Classes – Elementary	0
Self-Contained Classes – Secondary	Full time = 4 Partial = 7
Elementary students with DD or MID included in regular classrooms	DD = 68 MID = 54
Secondary students with DD or MID included in regular classrooms	DD = 61 MID = 71
High School Credits accumulated in 9 secondary schools from 2013-2016	DD = 460

Avon Maitland District School Board has implemented and supported the following roles for 2017/2018 school year: 11.5 Learning for All Coaches (3.8 Secondary; 7.7 Elementary).

Efforts to re-culture the role of the Resource Teacher continues as the inclusive model of in-class support evolves. There are currently 3 groups consisting of 44 resource teachers who have received various professional learning and training, working toward building capacity in their schools as to how to support students within the inclusive classroom and within the curriculum. An ongoing area of focus and learning for the Resource Teacher Working Groups includes using as mentor texts: *Three Block Model of UDL* (Katz); *What Really Works in Inclusive and Special Education* (Mitchell); *Models of UDL* (Moore). Each secondary school will now have 4 transition sections to support students.

For classroom teachers, professional learning opportunities have focused on Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction within the curricular areas of Mathematics and Literacy.

Research Methodology

Based on the Directive (see above), planning for this phase of research began with discussions between the researchers and Avon Maitland District School Board on April 12, 2017. Plans and budget were finalized on May 3, 2017. The interview protocols were developed by researchers over the summer and sent to the school board for ethical review. All research protocols were confirmed on August 28, 2017. Then a research modification was sent to the Research Ethics Board at Brock University on September 15, 2017 and clearance was granted on September 27, 2017. On November 7, 2017 participant recruitment began with researchers randomly selecting participants. The researchers emailed administrators, teachers and educational assistants and sent a list of the selected students, parent and community member participants for an employee of Avon Maitland

District School Board to contact directly. For this first round, 22 participants agreed to partake in the research. Over the next six months, an additional eight rounds of invitations were sent to potential participants in an attempt to meet the target participant numbers. Additionally, to meet the targets, the Avon Maitland District School Board also sent potential participants an email to promote and endorse the research; this yielded an additional two participants.

Data collection officially began November 21, 2017, when the first interview was conducted. Over the next six months, interviews were scheduled and conducted at the participants' convenience with the option of a phone or an in-person interview. Researchers made three overnight trips to the school board to conduct in-person interviews with students, parents and other participants who preferred this method. The first trip took place January 15, 2018 where two researchers conducted 15 interviews with students, teachers and administrators. Next, on March 22 and 23, 2018, a researcher completed 10 interviews with students, teachers and an educational assistant. Thirdly, on April 24 and 25, 2018, a researcher made a final trip to Avon Maitland, with the focus on reaching parents for interviews: 14 interviews were completed (10 with parents and 4 with students; 2 of which also included a parent's perspective). Phone interviews were conducted at varying times over the six months by four members of the Brock research team.

For a summary of the data collection process, refer to Appendix A.

The following table is a breakdown of the final participant count for each group as well as proposed target numbers.

Participant Group	Final Count	Proposed Target
Administrators (Principals)	10	10
Teachers	21	25
Parents	12	19
Students with Intellectual Disabilities	14	19
Educational Assistants	6	7
Community Members	6	6

Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

Data were collected through interviews conducted either over the phone or in person. The interview prompts were developed in consultation with the Avon Maitland District School Board and the research team in order to capture the essence of each respective group's experience within the inclusion framework of the school board's overall goals. The following interview prompts were used by the researchers when completing the interviews.

Students' Interview Prompts

Would you call your school a positive/safe place? Why? – Describe/use examples of positive and safe

What subjects do you enjoy in school? Why?

Thinking about the whole school, what do you like the most? What do you like the least? Tell us something you would like to change about school – prompts: subject/activities e.g. Extra-curricular

Are the students in this school nice to each other? Give an example.

Who helps you at school?

Do you have friends? What makes them a good friend?

Is there anything additional that we haven't covered in the questions that you would like to share with us?

Parents' Interview Prompts

What is about your child's school that makes it a safe and positive space?

What do you consider successful inclusion to mean? Can you give us an example of what that looks like in your experience?

What is the most important factor that you attribute to the success of your child in an inclusive school?

Now that your child is in an inclusive setting, what are some challenges they continue to face?

Do you feel as if you have been supported? What has worked well? What improvements would you like to see?

Is there anything additional that we haven't covered in the questions that you would like to share with us?

Teachers' and Educational Assistants' Interview Prompts

What is it about your school that makes it a positive and safe place?

What do you consider successful inclusion to mean? Can you give us an example of what that looks like in your experience?

What is the most important factor you would attribute to the success of the inclusive practices? For staff? For students?

What would you identify as the most significant challenges you face in including DD students?

What administrative supports are necessary to facilitate inclusion?

From your experience, what types of resources, including human, contribute to inclusion? Describe.

Option: How do you contribute to building school culture in relation to inclusion? Prompts: academically, socially, relationships

Is there anything additional that we haven't covered in the questions that you would like to share with us?

Administrators' Interview Prompts

What is it about your school that makes it a positive and safe place?

What do you consider successful inclusion to mean? Can you give us an example of what that looks like in your experience?

What is the most important factor you would attribute to the success of the inclusive practices? For staff? For students?

What are three of the most significant challenges you face in your role as an administrator in including students with exceptionalities?

From your experience, what types of resources, including human, contribute to inclusion? Describe

As an administrator, what is your role in your school culture in relation to inclusion?

Is there anything additional that we haven't covered in the questions that you would like to share with us?

Community Members' Interview Prompts

How is your community a safe and positive place for all individuals, including those that your organization supports?

What do you consider successful inclusion to mean?

What are the most important factors that need to be in place for successful inclusion?

What do you consider to be the most significant challenges with regard to inclusion?

What, if any, are the parallels you perceive between inclusion at the school aged level and your ability to deliver services through your agency? (Practical or philosophical)

How has inclusive education in the AMDSB impacted the services you provide?

Is there anything additional that we haven't covered in the questions that you would like to share with us?

All audio recorded interviews were transcribed and then coded by the researchers for re-occurring phrases and ideas. These phrases and ideas were then summarized and representative quotes were taken from the transcriptions to illustrate these statements. All quotes are anonymous and unedited.

Participants' Perspectives: School/Community, Inclusion, Examples of Inclusive Practices, Barriers, What is Needed

The following section is a presentation of the findings from the analysis of the data collected from the students, parents, teachers, educational assistants, administrators and community members. In accordance with the Directive (see above), each of these stakeholders is presented separately with respect to: best practices (examples of inclusive practices); feedback on the effectiveness of inclusion (barriers to inclusion); and opportunities for growth (what is needed). The participants' perspectives each begin with a synopsis on what their definitions of school (or community) and inclusion are. Relevant literature is cited throughout; for a comprehensive literature review refer to Appendix B.

Students' Perspectives

School is...

Students who were interviewed responded positively when asked whether they felt that their school was a safe and welcoming place. When asked the question, students across both elementary and secondary reported a positive response. A majority said "yes" others nodded affirmatively. Participants stated they felt "*safe at school*". As noted by one participant they "*liked coming to school*" and that they had "*lots of friends*". Other participants, a majority, also acknowledge that they enjoyed having friends and spending time with them. For the students interviewed, school was place where they felt welcomed and supported and where they had access to learning and social interaction. Indeed, educators and parents have cited that there are benefits of inclusion to all students: greater awareness and tolerance, enhanced empathy and compassion, learning while helping others and acquiring new skills (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007).

Inclusion is...

Students noted that they enjoyed different subjects and learning activities over others. Interestingly, there was a wide variety of favoured subjects, however, overall students mentioned science, tech, English, art, physical education, history and working in the computer lab, with books and drawing. One student expressed that they liked English because the teacher "*talks about the news*", another mentioned that they really liked gym except when they had to get a needle. Another stated that they like physical education because they "*knew the moves in volleyball*" and because they were "*on the team*." This student also expressed a dislike for the health part of the physical education program because "*he could be in the gym*." Another student expressed that his favourite part of school was during computer time because he was able to work on his particular interest related to the snowy owl. This student was able to share much information and express much enthusiasm on the topic. An interest in science was expressed by a student who said that they liked "*experiments*" "*chemicals*" and "*test tubes*". Another student noted that he enjoyed art "*I like doing drawing, painting, that kind of stuff*".

The importance of friendships was emphasized, the majority of the students stated that they had friends. A number of students named friends specifically and mentioned activities such as "*hockey*" and playing "*Halo*" with friends. The students came into contact with peers within multiple ways: through curriculum engagement, unstructured time, and related school activities. It was noted that recess and after school there were opportunities to interact: "*She walks with me, she comes to my house*," "*All my friends are coming to my house*." In general, when talking about school time, students noted that their friends helped them and were fun to be around: "*They play with me*", "*friends talk nice*". Friends were defined as, "*helping each other*." Friends were nice to each other and they talked nicely about each other, "*They are always there for you when you need them*". Inclusion allows

students to work with and alongside their peers with exceptionalities; evidence has shown that this contact is likely to increase communication and behavioral skills (Katz & Mirenda, 2002).

Students also talked about favourite teachers and educational assistants noting that these individuals helped them. When asked do your educational assistant and teacher help, most students responded positively.

Barriers to Inclusion

When asked about what might be better in schools students did not provide suggestions. Some showed a preference for some subjects over another but it was not mentioned frequently. Some students, when probed did note that they did not always have a connection with peers that went beyond school. This is consistent with research done with students with intellectual disabilities from a fully inclusive school board as they unanimously stated that they liked school, and each student revealed that they had friends, discerning the difference between school friends and best friends, who they saw outside of class and school (Bennett, Gallagher, Shuttleworth, Somma, & White, 2017).

Parents' Perspectives

School is ...

Parents who participated in this research project communicated that school was a place where they felt that their children were safe and that school provided a positive environment. A majority of the parents felt that the teachers, the educational assistant and the school were very much “there” for their child and “supportive” of them.

At our school he is incredibly welcomed

The school itself has been quite supportive.

She is happy and content there and they seem to have an eye on her.

For some, there were obstacles along the way that needed to be addressed to find a positive solution.

In terms of the safety, there may have been a time where I didn't feel to safe for him at the school, I don't feel that way now. So that was a huge change, she didn't feel comfortable at the start, but she does now.

Teachers and educational assistants were seen as part of the creation of a safe and supportive space for students. Some parents stated feeling more secure about their child's experience at school when there was an educational assistant with them.

He has, one of his EAs from public school ended up coming with him to high school, which made it a very safe environment for him because he does not like change very much

I feel like it is safe because of the EA. She wants to go to school. She says “mommy I want to go to school”. She comes home mostly every day with a good day.

The teachers really try hard to make her feel welcome and she's participating as well.

I do, I think the current makeup of his class, of his teacher and his EA is very good right now.

His current teacher has taken a real interest.

She made an effort to really include him.

His teacher has been great; his EA has also been very good in his development.

The parents also noted that other students in the school play an important role in making sure that children feel that school is a positive and safe space. And that part of the feeling safe and welcomed was related to friendships. These friends were sometimes long-term and some new as the child experienced more access to larger groups of students.

He is making friends, which is nice too.

So for emotional wellbeing, it's safe because there are kids that know him well from his previous classes such as in public school.

The kids have been really great, the kids at the school have been really good with him and you know, they seem to, he's always, even though he has difficulty communicating or maybe people don't quite understand what he's saying all the time, there's a lot of kids that want to sort of understand him and they help out and there's always some kids maybe make more of an effort than others, but they all are aware of his challenges and things like that.

So it's a good environment that way, they are, we've always had really good classes, a good group of kids for support that way.

It was also clear that parents were appreciative of good communication and being able to connect about their children. Keeping informed, in particular when their child had communication difficulties, seemed an especially key element for success.

They call me if there's any problem.

It's happy and content there and they seem to have an eye on her and I'm getting more communication from them finally about how she is participating.

Oh yes, we've had great communication with the school right from day one.

They [the teachers] went out of their way to make sure the communication line was open and that they had lots of support, you know, sometimes I would even get the phone call saying they've had a really good day.

For parents, school was described as a place where learning happens and opportunities for learning and growth are encouraged and programming is adapted to enhance student engagement.

Before grade 2, he wasn't really participating in circle time, he would just kind of sit and not pay attention and kind of just wander but with her intervention, he participates more in social things like they'll be sitting in a circle, he's got his own little pillow that he sits with that keeps him from distracting himself.

He seems to have come out of his shell in the last few years and I think the school has facilitated that for him in allowing him to express himself where maybe previously he didn't feel comfortable doing that. That in itself has been the teacher from elementary and his teachers now in high school have picked that up and carried it along, which is great.

Inclusion is...

For parents, inclusion was characterized by collaboration and connection. Once again, communication was seen as it would allow for opportunities to improve learning and make inclusion easier. Successful inclusion was described as the student being a full-fledged member of an age appropriate class.

Successful inclusion would mean that he would be part of all the activities, but I do know that is not always easy. They would be part of the classroom; they need to be in the classroom, their own age range.

Parents described the importance school staff and the students being partners, with the parents as active partners in the endeavor of inclusion. Inclusion was understood to be successful when the students were a part of the functioning and culture of the whole school.

I think it's important that he is integrating with other children because that's just the makeup of life, you know, to talk and communicate and gravitate. It doesn't seem to me to be much of an argument, I understand that he does need more specialized care and training, I guess you could say, but I don't see why he would be removed from a classroom like that. I think he can still kind of grasp ideas and thought and things like that that he needs to.

Teachers worked really hard to make her feel welcome.

I guess the teacher probably and depending on the year, sometimes the teacher will have his year be very successful because of their belief in inclusion and then sometimes, there is some teachers, this is my own perception though, I believe sometimes the teacher feels [student 1] is beyond and therefore, I'm not going to say not worthy, but they don't have the time to spend and have him included. There's a lot of extra work that goes through, let's say you're planning a lesson for history, there's a lot of extra work that goes through to have [student 1] included in that history lesson and I sometimes have felt over the years, and I'm not a teacher, but that the teacher doesn't step up to that. So I guess the teacher makes it successful for that.

One parent notes a stark difference in what they saw as the levels of acceptance in an inclusive setting and what was experienced when they were not in a setting that shared the same types of practice and values.

It is very important and again, at our school, he is incredibly welcome, the kids help him, they speak to him, all that sort of thing and we notice it when we go to a function out of our school and out of our board and especially out of our school board, we don't get the same sort of reception. We have children that are staring and they are laughing, I had a little fellow laughing at [student 1] the other day when we were out at the mall. So things like that where the children are not inclusive, our school board is inclusive, but the other ones around us are not. So we do notice that, at our school, they've very friendly with him and always want to talk and be with him.

The importance of having friends and being a friend was noted by parents. Being accepted, socializing, and having the opportunity to be among other kids to grow social connection was important.

I think where there's maybe the peer group would have a strong understanding that he's different, that his expectations are different and that that's not a bad thing.

She just wants friends and wants to feel included in it all.

Successful inclusion would look like he is accepted among his peers.

Parents also acknowledge that inclusion took effort and that that effort needed to be sustained. Some parents defined successful inclusion as the disappearance of difference and the notion that all students received the support needed without having to identify inclusion as an initiative.

They all learned to accept them

Successful inclusion would really just be, I guess more of a concerted effort to really, you know, when you're planning something or doing an activity, how can you include [student 2], what can you do, what sort of activities would be more helpful?

For some parents, inclusion that was a positive for areas such engagement and growth, while others expressed concern that for some core areas of learning that segregating students in more similar peer groupings might be a better option.

See I struggle with that, successful inclusion, I think to me what I would prefer for it to look successful would be where some classes, like [student 3] would be with the whole group for certain activities like physical education and art and all that kind of stuff, but I think when it comes to more of the academic level, I think he would need his own peer group for that.

Examples of Inclusive Practice

When discussing what inclusion looked like in terms of practical everyday experience, parents communicated that inclusion was a concerted effort on the part of school staff to plan and implement learning and social opportunities.

Successful inclusion looks like reading partners, buddies, adapting teaching, proper support, pupil education, understanding the disability and how it works and why a child may react the way they do.

So it's really good to have a teacher who will take him into their class and make an effort on a daily basis to integrate him and I know his teacher does that. She really looks for different activities and things, and she does that for the entire class really and again, so I think that's really the most important this is to have the buy in from really those two crucial parties [the teacher and EA] and when the EA can work well with the teacher.

She [the teacher] encouraged all her students to spend time with him. So if they were finished their work and he was finished his work, so every single student in that class, male or female, grade 7 or grade 8, all spent time with him after they were done their work. So they all learned to accept him, which has just continued on to the high school because he's now at high school with these students and they just embraced him.

His current teacher has implemented things to help him out and be more a part of the class. She has made a concerted effort to include him.

In terms of curriculum, more engagement and more variety in learning opportunities were seen as positives goals. Educators and schools are showing flexibility and creativity in terms of how curriculum and social opportunities are conceptualized and delivered which allows for more access for students and encourages engagement.

He's really enjoying lots of the classes that weren't available in elementary such as tech and auto shop and things like that.

Okay, just recently actually, there was speeches in his class and that whole thing is overwhelming for him, standing up in front of a class and speaking. So they allowed him to memorize a poem, which I believe he did and they recorded him and then showed, just one-on-one the teacher recorded him saying it and then played it for the class. So they still got to hear him doing his speech, but it wasn't as overwhelming for him.

There's communication between the two of them to work toward his development and I can say 'maybe you can try this game or that sort of thing, if you need something to kind of work to stimulate his interests, that might help him with something, maybe if you refer to this particular TV show that he likes'.

He likes to be in drama, he is not totally understanding what they are doing, but he likes to be in the room. It is more relaxing. In drama, they are always doing something interesting. He likes to watch the plays and he has participated in in some.

Parents communicated that sometimes it was an individual teacher who could make a difference in the experiences of their child and the whole class.

I firmly believe it needs to start with that teacher and that willingness to learn, but that teacher also needs to adapt their programming

Mostly due to that teacher, nobody could get away with bullying. It has carried over to the high school. All the kids know him. So the school and the teacher can make all the difference. I 100 percent believe that it starts with the teacher.

Once again, communication was seen as an important factor; in particular when it came to planning for student goals. For parents it was important to be informed and feel as though they were part of the planning.

There has always been good communication right from day one

My daughter is having a super year this year. First semester of grade nine was a bit of a struggle and second semester was better, now this year is great. I think it is what we set up through her IPRC. It is those things that we plan, looking at the overall and going forward. There is good communication when it comes to those meetings

The independent education plan I think has been good, it seems like the parent, the kid and the teachers are all on the same page with regards to expectations and where to push and where to lay off a little bit, I think that's been really good.

It was also clear that inclusion, in practice, extended beyond the curriculum and was part of all aspects of school especially as it related to social engagement. Parents emphasized the importance of friends and the pivotal role that a teacher can play in the development of inclusion.

The social challenges are interesting with integration but I mean that's, those challenges wouldn't exist if we didn't have them I guess, they need to be social, people need to be social with [student 2], he needs to be a part of everything and you can't do that if you segregate them from people.

I think it very much starts with that teacher with an open-mindedness to learn about the student and then to model it for her students and create that environment where it's safe for those students to be accepting of a special needs student, or a developmentally delayed student, or whatever the correct word is for it now, because if it doesn't start with that one person, it's not going to flow.

She's that far behind, she's not finding the kids her age, they're so far advanced that she's feeling left behind. So they have given her the opportunity to be lunch helper for the kindergartens and she loves it, absolutely loves it, so that's awesome.

Really for him, the biggest challenge has been the social interaction. So really kind of getting kids to interact with him on a daily basis, sit with him, work with him on different things, they've been really good. I think that's important, especially the other kids, they do take an interest in him and worry about him.

One parent noted that this social engagement and acceptance was linked to information and understanding and suggested that taking an active role in promoting this was important.

Making them [classmates] be aware of what was going on and what it's like and that he will be different and he will act different. He will talk different, in his case, he doesn't speak, but he may talk differently. I think that was huge because right off the bat you get into that school and I think we had an assembly for grade 3 and down and at that assembly, we discussed Down syndrome and how it affects his life and his family and his surroundings

Barriers to Inclusion

When asked to consider what barriers might exist in terms of inclusion for their child's experiences, parents were able to articulate informative and insightful information. One parent noted that there needed to be more clarity in the message in terms of what was expected.

Everybody needs to be told, this is how it's going to work from now on, you're going to have kids in your class, you're going to have to write up IEPs, this is the nature of the classroom from here on out and people just need to be a bit more prepared and have things in place to help that happen.

Some parents expressed frustration at what was sometimes poor or inconsistent communication. There was a sentiment expressed that, at times, parents did not feel as though they were being listened to or that the school was their partner in problem solving.

This teacher this year, she's not very good at being in contact for instance, last year's teacher was amazing. So you go from that, very high, very low.

I don't think they're working with me at all. Anytime I go in there, they just sit there and agree with me and then nothing is done about it.

When I first saw problems arising and it took almost to the end of the school year to get it addressed, which is too late.

A number of parents discussed the feeling that the school was relying on them to solve problems, which they did not feel they had the expertise to do.

They kept calling me every time [student 6] had a problem, I'm like guys, I cannot solve this for you when I don't have those issues at home. When you're at a school and he's having a meltdown, there's a reason he's having a meltdown

The support there, I've reached out in times I knew there was support I needed, and I went in almost on a monthly basis saying this is going on, we have to get to the bottom of this, she was starting to miss school, and I was like okay, I don't want her to miss school, what is going on here? I shouldn't have to threaten to contact the board to get support from a staff member or the school.

Parents expressed worry over current and future support staff issues. They raised concerns with regard to the teacher's ability to provide programming for large numbers of students with multiple needs

I mean I've seen what happens when he doesn't have the right support in place and his safety is in jeopardy, those types of things are going to happen no matter how quiet or congenial or unobtrusive [student 2] is, because he's not one of those kids who is screaming for attention, but he will sneak away on you if given half a chance and that can be just as bad and the thing is you can't control that with any kid who has a disability. You have to be aware of those situations.

I think they've been pretty much weaning him off his EA, so I don't think he's getting support. I mean, I do, I've heard horror stories of other parents, so I feel he's probably better off than some and to be honest with you, he's got really great teachers, like good hearted teachers, but they're only human and they need the help and I think he needs the help.

In terms of successful inclusion, I would really like to see more support, more EAs in the classrooms support the teachers because the teachers aren't, they can sort of set up the IEPs, implement what needs to be implemented but have the help to do that because the teacher alone in the classroom with 20 kids is not going to be able to do the work for one individual with special needs

What is Needed to make Inclusion Work...

While some parents stated that their child's experience with inclusion was working well and had no suggestions; others were able to articulate a number of suggestions that could prove to be helpful in moving forward.

A minority of parents discussed the need to more life skills focused training.

He needs more life skills to learn to take care of himself

Trying to teach her more stuff along the lines of being able to use her hands so eventually when she's done with school she is going to be able to do stuff with her hands to get her through.

She needs more one-on-one attention and life skills.

There was also concern expressed that their child being in a large group might be overwhelming and that full inclusion might be unrealistic. One parent noted that traditional life skills were important and that her child "needs a daycare atmosphere to be entertained".

It was also expressed by more than one parent that they were worried that their child was a potential disruption to the other students in the regular class. While there was some desire to return to more traditional types of class placements, there were also parents who saw the need to move away from tasks such as laundry, but perhaps still have program that focused on practical skills.

I wish there could be more of a happy medium but he is not unhappy. We shouldn't go back to laundry, but more practical stuff.

I've always said I need you to teach you the ABCs not how to brush his teeth. So they've taken from what I want from his classroom time, which has been great.

A number of parents noted they would like to see more support personnel in the classrooms.

My biggest concern is really that he continues and he moves forward and that the teachers take a real interest in his education, that he has support.

I think what needs improvement is the support staff. If they expect kids to be included, they need the support staff.

I would like to see that I don't have to worry about having a regular, permanent EA for him.

Well I would say more support that would help them enjoy school better because right now my daughter is on the verge of just saying no.

I would like to see more support in the classroom and that would probably mean more bodies, more adults, even working not just with [student x] but with other kids and the support for the teacher is really important.

Parents also suggested that there be more clarity for transitioning, from grade to grade and from elementary school to secondary.

The transferring of information between one grade to another, I'm not sure how well that worked from grade one to two, and then from grade two to three, I know that his teacher that he still has, that would be something that would be nice to see, a better understanding of where he was at the year prior and really developing a plan for him.

There almost needs to be a separate package [for the transition from elementary to secondary] just for people, kids that are coming in that are special needs, it can be as generic as possible.

Well I know with my boys, they did special trips to the [secondary] school, they did it with both of them, and me as well, we went for a special tour, met the teachers, you know, and yeah they're really great for getting to the next step kind of thing.

That's right and that's a big part of the planning, to transition to high school is to take some students that he's familiar with and perhaps try to pair them up in those classrooms with him because he's had a couple of friends for the past four or five years that have been really on board with him and really helpful with him. So those kids, they're going to try and keep them together.

Parents noted that communication could be a problem, as it changed year to year, depending on the teacher and the administration in the school. They suggested a more consistent form of communication would be helpful, even if it was just "a note in his planner".

I think more, if she is lacking in areas, or any kid lacking in areas, it should be brought up sooner to a parent than later in parent-teacher interviews. If they see something at school, they should approach the parents and if the parent sees problems, they should approach them and immediate steps taken to improve and make that inclusion a little bit easier.

I think with a child, like [student 1], you need to know more about what's going on in his day and sometimes his teachers are very lax in that, depending on who they are. I'll have a teacher that I don't hear from all year, just never hear from them ever, and then I'll have teachers call me at night and say you know what, 'there was a little bit of an incident' or just those types of things that maybe aren't a big deal, but maybe I should know about. So I guess what I would like to see, with a child, like [student 1], it wouldn't be every child because I don't need to know about my daughter's day every day, but with a child like him, a teacher who is a little more in communication with a parent like myself, even if it's a note in his planner.

The parents' perspectives resonate to some extent with a very recent report from Ontario (Reid, Bennett, Specht, et al., 2018) that has documented the educational experience of students with intellectual disabilities. There are some persistent needs in service delivery for this population of learners including consistent access to the appropriate curriculum and the proper academic accommodations. Parents express the desire to be involved in the development of their child's Individual Education Plan and hope that their students fully participate in extracurricular school activities.

Teachers' Perspectives

School is...

When teachers are questioned about their school community as a whole with respect to its character, common descriptors include that it is a safe, welcoming, open and accepting place where the focus is on relationship building. Many state that the school is invested in the success of all students through activities that build community and engagement.

We have a lot of really good teachers here I guess, you know, that are invested in the success of the students, regardless of race, age, religion, whatever, is what I would say.

Elementary schools note being aware of the importance of a positive, growth mindset and self-regulation for both the students and the teachers.

There's always, somethings there's a cancer that comes and there's that one person who's just [laughs] but for the most part, it just is. I think that having a principal that's on board with those sorts of things as well and appreciating bringing us the information about growth mindset and so on, encouraging us to collaborate is good. So yeah, I don't know, just since I've been here, we've always just been like that.

They note that it all starts with the principal and his/her ability to identify the teacher who is an attitudinal outlier and support this teacher with a growth mindset. Overall, school is a place where the staff are supportive of each other and cohesive. There was a difference here as three secondary teachers noted that staff morale is low. This degree of teacher dissatisfaction in the high schools has been occurring over the last 15 years. However, at the secondary level, the school is a place where students come early in the morning because it is a better place to be than home. It was stated that in one secondary school, in a small town, where people know each other well, there is an intimacy of contact between the school and the community.

Inclusion is...

Teachers were asked to define what inclusion is and this question yielded a variety of phrases demonstrating the varied interpretations of the construct. Some representative definitions include sentiments that reflect how others feel: everyone feels included, valued and moves forward in whatever skills they need in academics and social skills.

I know it would be successful inclusion if everybody's feeling included, every individual is feeling valued and productive and also that they're moving forward in whatever skill they need to move forward in, academics, social, whatever.

Other definitions are dispositional: inclusion is when we stop seeing differences; including everyone in the class regardless of their abilities and whether the disabilities are visible or not. Some definitions related to classroom practices: inclusion is making resources available to ALL learners to access if

they need them and whenever they need them; including students in ALL activities regardless of the curriculum area to give them exposure and to include them in their social group.

So I think successful inclusion too is making sure that the students are including them in different activities. So if they're painting, everybody's painting, if a group is working on a math problem, the student who may not be able to fully participate is sitting and listening to that talk as well because exposure to the different talk, number concepts and different language topics as well, I think that's really important for them to have exposure to that, even if they may not be using that necessarily, it gets them into the social group with their peers and understand what that's supposed to look like.

Children need to experience inclusion at a young age as a series of formative experiences that will imprint on their understanding of what an inclusive school community looks like.

Definitions for some of the secondary teachers were nuanced: inclusion is the right place and the right environment for all students to learn how to live life after high school. Three secondary level teachers, stated that inclusion is not a one size fits all as some students need consistency in placements and others are more flexible.

Successful inclusion means that each and every student is given the opportunity to work to the best of their ability and it means more, that's more what I believe it to mean than a place. Inclusion isn't about where you learn or the space in which you learn, inclusion means everyone has that opportunity.

Not thinking that a one size fits all is it, because it's not. Each child needs to be looked at on an individual basis and with their family needs to be decided how can we help this child be the most successful? One size doesn't fit all. So you can't put, you can't decide that every kid is in a regular classroom, some kids need more individual specific attention to be the best that they can be.

Inclusion is not just for academic reasons, and it has to include age-appropriate opportunities for everyone to work to the best of their abilities.

Where a student might come into my class and maybe I have a grade 10 academic French class and a student might be coming in not necessarily for all of the academic reasons, but maybe for a little bit of social, a little bit of, some if it maybe, it depends.

For example, one high school teacher illustrated this by describing how a student with Down syndrome is able to learn how to gather resources and begin a task independently – she enjoys her self-determination.

I have an example of a girl who has downs syndrome and other issues, who has now become comfortable enough in my class that she can come in and get some materials and know how to, you know, put those materials away and do some of the work with some direction and enjoy it and learn from it.

Other secondary teachers defined inclusion in relation to affective and social descriptors: it is keeping students engaged, happy and learning how to respond and behave.

Some people are trying to go 'I'll do something from the curriculum with them' and my question is why? First of all, we don't need to do that, but what can we do to keep them engaged and happy and maybe possibly learning like yes or no, you know, thank you or please or not to throw something for behavioural things. You know what I mean?

It is choosing who you want to be with be that like-minded peers or not. If the goal is to have students become more empathetic by having students included, then it's working.

So if, if the goal is for us to become or students to become more empathetic by having the inclusion kids in our classes, yes that's working and yes, they're fine in some classes.

One high school teacher expressed, that students are naturally not as judgmental as adults are and often see themselves as like-minded.

There were dissenting views of inclusion expressed by three teachers (one elementary and two secondary). The elementary teacher expressed frustration in trying to teach students about tolerance for others who have violent outbursts and mental health issues. This teacher feels that this is at the expense of other students' needs not being met. This teacher feels that this is an unrealistic notion of what it means to live in a community that includes all individuals with exceptionalities. A secondary teacher held the view that inclusion in classrooms should be partial and based on a student's skills and abilities. This teacher is basing these views on experiences with high schools students exhibiting aggression when placed in an inappropriate setting with unrealistic goals. This teacher also contends that curriculum be alternative for some students as this will better serve their needs. Finally, a second secondary level teacher lacks confidence in the current model of inclusion to prepare students for life post-secondary school. This teacher finds it unrealistic to include students with exceptionalities in classroom-based and non-academic activities as there are few tangible outcomes for all students. This teacher believes that students at this high school do not have empathy for or acceptance of individuals with exceptionalities. Further this teacher believes that the other staff are resentful of including all learners in their classes as they are not trained to teach as significantly lower achievement levels.

When teachers experience authentic participation with students who have exceptionalities and reflect upon their practice, their perceptions about inclusion can be altered positively (Somma, 2017). For educators to successfully meet the needs of all learners, they need knowledge through skills and training, as well as favourable attitudes towards inclusion (Berry, 2011; Male, 2011; Ivey & Reinke, 2002). When school boards and administration provide teachers with opportunities to reflect and challenge their practice and beliefs, the outcome can be changes in both rationale and behaviour around inclusive practice (Chrysostomou & Symeonidou, 2017; Cunningham, Hutching, Forgyat & Graf, 2017; Pyhältö, Pietarinen & Soini, 2012). An emphasis on continuing professional development and teacher growth results in a belief instilled in teachers that they will continue to improve their practice and create more successful inclusive practices (McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014; Berry, 2011; Male, 2011, Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Examples of Inclusive Practice

Teachers expressed what they are doing to include learners with exceptionalities. An elementary teacher was surprised that there is not as much extra planning as teachers think that that is. Once you understand how to make learning and resources accessible to all, then there is no planning. Inclusion can be built into the programming and planning to encourage peers to be inclusive.

So that's the thing, to help build that culture, you have to do the planning, do the programming, so that the students are embracing the opportunity to do something different and hopefully understand the importance of being empathetic and a good person. But it's a challenge because we're working with teenagers, right? So, who are very egocentric, so it's tough to address that and have them understand, so yeah, I don't know, it's tough.

Students need to participate in their own IEP planning out of respect for their own agency.

People tend to underestimate kids, we tend to underestimate them, kids aren't stupid, they know what they want, they know what they need. I find it just as easy to sit down with the kids, like I go through their IEPs with them, I sit down with them every term and say 'okay, your parents are getting this IEP, what do you think about this?'

It is important to give students time and 'training' to include all of their peers in activities in different settings and then reduce the scaffolds to allow them to do this organically.

If they have the least amount of balls on their side, they'll make sure [student name] has a ball, even though like he'll have it and he throws it and he loves it and the same with all the students with special needs. Just making sure to remind them to include them and then eventually, they don't need reminding anymore.

Children need to experience inclusion at a young age as a series of formative experiences that will imprint on their understanding of what an inclusive school community looks like.

The kids are a lot more accepting, it's not as scary for them, I find, especially when you start when they're little and they've got the kids coming into their classrooms. If you've got a kid in a wheelchair and you're a little kid in grade 4 and you've never encountered anyone in a wheelchair, you know what this is really, you've seen it before and it's in your psyche, but you don't really know what it's for.

Once you get older, in the older grades, they're just kind of like [grunting noise] and back off, they don't want to know because that might not look cool or whatever their attitude is, but especially the younger ones, when you get them when they're younger, then it's kind of curious and you can explain things. So I just find educating and being involved are the two probably key factors. Maybe adults with open minds.

Teachers need to model inclusive interactions. In an elementary class, a student with a physical disability is a natural part of the community where her peers are including her in all aspects of the school day.

Okay, alright, so for example, [student name], the kids are so inclusive with her, they're so good at spending time with her and helping her and wanting to be with her because she gives great eye contact, like you can tell [student's name] really wants to have peer friends because the way she engages with them, she like looks at them and that to me tells me that she wants to be part of the social group because she's able to engage them that way, even though she can't speak and say full sentences that are clear sometimes about what her needs are and the kids are really great at including her. So I think that it's when everyone in the whole classroom feels a part of the community and that no one is really centred out or standing out as being different, but they are different at the same time.

There are also examples of what social capital looks like at the elementary level with a girl with autism being invited to a birthday party.

I had a young girl with autism in here and the kids were so good with her, oh my god, they were so good. It was fantastic, she had an EA with her as well, but the EA and I could work as a team and often, if we were doing groups or anything like that, I would turn, she would back away and let the young girl be with her peers and the peers would kind of guide her more so than us adults, right? So yeah, it was really good to see and they came to her first birthday

party, it was very exciting for her and for her mom because they just moved here too and hadn't been here very long. So the success is seeing everybody involved and included and not afraid.

At the elementary level, students with developmental disabilities don't feel excluded at all.

I guess it's like this year the kids with developmental disabilities don't really have a problem with being excluded, this year they're on a modified curriculum, so they don't do the same activities as everyone else, but I don't get a sense from the kids who have developmental disabilities that it's identified, that they feel excluded from certain activities. I have other students on IEPs that maybe feel that I have heard suggestion that they want to be doing something age-level, but those aren't kids with developmental disabilities.

It was noted that teachers and EA's have to work together as a team and the whole staff have to be invested in the vision of inclusion; SERT's assisting with IEP writing is appreciated.

To me, you should be a team and you're all on the same level because this EA knows just as much about this child as I do, they're not any better or any worse and I've always included them when I do my report cards, IEPs, saying 'hey what do you think about this?' I would rather work as a team and it makes it easier for the kid too because there's no conflict, you can see it working, you know what I mean?

Inclusion is best facilitated by teachers who have experiences with it already and they appreciate that learning is not always about the curriculum and report cards – it is about growth and accomplishments as a learner.

In secondary schools, there are examples of inclusion among peers in the hallways and students being accepting of their peers' outbursts and behaviours and they are dealing with them.

It looks like he doesn't communicate and he's in a wheelchair and yet I see a lot of students walking with him and talking to him, interacting with him and those are not the students who would normally be in the self-contained classes, these are the students from the classes he's been in. So it's really nice to see that as well.

I think the social aspect is important, I think it's important for the other students as well and I noted that, I've had students before who wouldn't normally be in a self-contained classroom, but with these students who are dealing with other, like for examples, those with high anxiety, pulling at their skin, to the extreme, and yet when something happens, the students around them because they've been working with these students throughout, they're very accepting of that student. They don't make a big fuss about it, it's interesting, they don't ignore the person, they interact with the person positively. So I think that, it's not that that student had always been included, it's good to see students that are okay and open to that and understand that person needs a little bit, where I don't have to say 'guys, this is what my expectations are', they just naturally seem to.

I have one student who is significantly delayed, has major mobility challenges and he is now coming to, when I have a coverage in the library, he's coming in to not talk to me, but he's brought in there, other students are seeing him in the library. So he's accepted for who he is, they know his name, they say hello, they don't shy away from him as was seen in the past. Another thing I've had with this particular student was he's in a wheelchair and I have, every day we have something that is handed out and that was his job to hand out those things and I encouraged students say good morning to hi. At first, people would shy away, some would just

grab it and go, by the end of the semester, they were all talking to him, interacting with him, he couldn't verbally interact, but they could see it in his eyes, they could see his smile, those types of things. So I think my roles have been to help others feel comfortable and be accepting of students who do have challenges and to alleviate those fears and give them opportunities to get to know those students and not be afraid of them or shy away from them."

Students at high school dances are acknowledging each other.

One of the things I notice too, the students who used to be in DD, they go to the dances and it's not that others are totally interacting with them, but they do say hi to them and I've watched them from afar as I'm watching the dance and they're dancing and blending in a bit more than they might have.

One teacher noted that inclusion can be seamless in the secondary classroom when students have hands-on experiences in curricular areas such as the arts – this is affirming and builds self-esteem.

Yeah they fit in with everyone else, they tend to be able to do the same work. So that is great, actually I was just talking to our music teacher this morning and what we have for our grade 9s is, we do, we split it up to a music section, a drama section and a visual art section. So she was just relaying some really cool stories this morning, she's had three students who were identified and probably don't often have that much academic success, who are not only good at music, but top of the class. They excel and it really worked and I think it's so nice to have them, you know, be the student that everyone looks to as being 'oh you're really good at this'. So that's a really successful story there. So I guess in the arts especially, there's just no, you don't see the difference whereas in an academic class, you probably are going to see more of a difference between them. I would say, I'm thinking that it works really well for a lot of hands-on classes, shop, phys-ed and the arts of course. I don't think it always works for the academic classes and I think, what worries me or what I feel has sort of happened, it's become a one size fits all, where expected to make this work for all classes and it doesn't really work that way and also it doesn't always even work for all students.

In secondary physical education, there is opportunity for social inclusion but not physical exercise – a student is able to reach modified goals from his IEP but not be at the same physical endurance level of his peers.

I think we're doing a great disservice to these students putting them into mainstream physical education classes because I can do a lot of social inclusion and it's been very successful, I've had students in this semester and I would say, for the most part, both the other students in class and the student have been getting a lot of positive social inclusion out of it, but he is getting very, very little of his physical exercise.

When there is an EA present and they can do an activity orally with a student, there is much success.

The EA was able to have all the conversations with the student, rather than write it and by the time we were discussing it with the class, he could actually contribute because he had already been discussing it, you know what I mean? Because it's giving the time to go through it the way the other students have, just in the way that works for him, which is orally. And so on, so having that person there allowed him to feel real success when it was time to contribute to the large group.

In the secondary school, technology for communication is essential for students and teachers need the training and support on this. This is something that has been addressed by the Learning for All

Coaches and it takes a number of years to acquire comfort and effect with this. Inclusion coaches often provide one-on-one support but this is not sustainable and teachers need ways to fill in the gaps of support. As well, in the secondary school, having a student in more than one semester is helpful to understand his/her needs for programming.

Often I have to write those expectations within three weeks of getting to know this student. It's like what does a level three look like? I have no idea so I use my professional judgement.

Inclusion is hard work and the teachers are expressing their great efforts. In regard to inclusive education, classroom teachers must adjust their teaching styles to meet the diversity of needs and abilities in their classroom, including how they program for, plan for, and execute curriculum (Reiser & Secretariat, 2012).

Barriers to Inclusion

As teachers reflected on the effectiveness of inclusion, practical barriers came to mind. Beginning with the barrier of teachers who do not have progressive thinking or a growth mindset or do not believe that all learners have potential and are close-minded.

They're all coming to me, which is fine, but you can give as many suggestions as you want and if they're not going to do it, it's like banging your head against the wall. So if you're closed-minded, and I find the adults are more closed-minded than the kids, so that makes it hard, I'm not going to lie.

One teacher expressed a generational barrier in that some teachers don't know how to teach a student with special needs because he/she has never had a schooling experience (as a student) with a teacher teaching someone with significant learning needs. Similarly, teachers note that they need time to work with students who have a closed mindset about interacting with all their peers. Next, was the administrator's philosophy which can be a barrier to inclusion if he/she believes that students are best served when withdrawn.

The majority of the barriers to inclusion were expressed by the secondary level teachers. This begins with a systemic barrier: there is the belief that some high schools are there to educate the majority of students that are fully included and this has created a notion that these schools are not as valued in the system.

I have a huge inclusion, number of students that are included into our courses, that's who we are. We also have a very good tech school and that's who we are. Let's embrace that, but I think other schools need to realize that's not a bad thing.

On a classroom level, disruptions in the classroom can be barriers. When students in a high school classroom are distracted by others around them, they need to be able to remove themselves from the classroom to concentrate. Some students who are included have difficulty dealing with the transitions and structures in secondary classrooms and they act out. Sometimes a student is tired at the end of a day and needs time to destress, which impacts programming.

Behaviour sometimes is the result of frustration on the student, so if we're putting this student into a full day of inclusion, when I get them in fourth or fifth period, they've maybe had it, you know. They're in a quiet room trying to destress. So here I've gone to all this work to do this, I'm responsible for assessing them on that and reporting on a report card for that and I maybe only see them six times through the semester because they can't do a full day.

In secondary classrooms, appropriate inclusive classroom placements are essential which includes subject areas and course emphases that are engaging to the student who is included (e.g., drama class that is activity based vs. text and theoretically based).

Our staff would be more embracing if, if the safety issue was addressed better and sometimes the students too are inappropriately placed, I feel they are inappropriately placed and I think others of my colleagues do as well.

At secondary level, some teachers don't know how to modify the curriculum or change their pedagogy and they hold the belief that learning is exclusively about the curriculum at a secondary level.

Some of them don't want to deal with them at all and I've had high school teachers in here saying [teacher name] what do I do with this kid? Like they're so fixated on the curriculum, teaching is never about the curriculum, it's about the kids. The curriculum is secondary honey, that just kind of falls into place when you know the kids. If they like you and respect you, they'll do anything for you, that's when you do the curriculum, right? So that's not, anyway, they're so focused on just the curriculum because they only have the kids for so long, they have to do this and this and this and I think okay, whatever. So yeah probably the biggest challenge would be adults.

It's not that, as I said, these students can't learn, it's that they can't necessarily learn in in the way we're used to teaching and so I'm fortunate enough in my subject area that I don't necessarily have skills that build from one grade to another grade to another grade, like say math where you need to have your grade nine math in order to understand the concepts and key ideas in grade 10 math and so on.

Secondary teachers view themselves as subject area specialists and not specialists in special education – they feel inadequately trained in this area. Assessment of learning is difficult when the student is non-verbal and teachers need strategies for doing this. The issue is that teachers do not know how to respond to all the students' needs at the same time – how do teachers respond to all the students in the class that need assistance?

So I think one of the biggest issues right now is that idea of, I don't want to call it workload, I want to call it how you respond to that many needs all at once. The other issue is the idea of selecting expectations and getting a clear idea of what is it that I should be doing with this student in the class?

There is the sentiment that time is dedicated to including all learners and other learners (e.g., at grade level or with minor challenges) are not getting the attention that they need.

In secondary classrooms, students need learning skills and the teacher might not have time to address these so the EA needs to.

I see students who have the cognitive ability to do things, but they don't have perhaps the organization skills or the time management skills, so there's a lot of those learning skills that impede their cognitive learning and that's where the EAs come in. even though they've got technology, it's not always enough, they need that human factor and I don't think we can make light of that either.

However, teachers note that there are fewer EA's in high schools and teachers are dealing with students that have high level physical needs. On a pragmatic note, for students to be included on field trips, the cost of accessible transportation is prohibitive and often EA's are not permitted to go on

these field trips so this makes the management difficult. In the secondary school classrooms that have shops, safety of students and staff is especially an issue and teachers are looking for training for when behaviours might pose a risk in a shop classroom setting. Simply, when students are aggressive, safety is an issue.

What is Needed

Attitude and Voice

- Teachers need the mindset that what you are looking for in students is their assets not their deficits
- Teachers need a forum to express their challenges on and get support from colleagues and Inclusion Coaches; they would like open dialogue with senior administration about what their challenges are; teachers want to be heard

“So it takes a pretty strong person to be able to listen to it all and to say ‘I hear what you say, I hear what you’re saying, how are we going to move forward?’ but say it in such a way that’s empathetic and valuing teachers and also evaluating the board mandates because right now the topic is pretty divisive, I would say. You can’t have, there’s not room for open dialogue on this topic.”

- Teachers believe in the social benefits of inclusion but the need to be heard when it comes to supports for their professional needs to deliver academic inclusion

Professional Learning and Practices

- Teachers need strategies for dealing with students’ extreme behaviours and concerns such as how to deal with seizures
- Teachers want advance notice of students that they will be receiving so that they can prepare for them and then have training early in the school year with respect to specific student’s needs and how to program for them; having access to previous IEP’s for incoming teachers is helpful (especially at the secondary level)
- Team meetings with accountable actions plans and follow through; more time to co-plan with the SERT’s would be helpful to program appropriately

“So it’s great that the SERTs are in for a few times a week to give support and suggestions, but depending on what the needs are, if there’s a lot of high needs, giving maybe a half-day of support or throughout the year, just to really plan what that inclusion is going to look like because it is a lot of additional work for the teacher. Even when you are just kind of modifying a few things and you are trying to use universal design for learning and differentiated instruction, each child is unique with their needs. So even if they have the same exceptionality, what one child needs within that exceptionality are very different than another’s needs. So I feel time with the SERT to plan and really look into deeper what the needs are and have time to act and reflect with your school resource teacher.”

- More in-servicing on technology in the classroom to support learners with exceptionalities
- Open communication among teachers (especially at the secondary level) is necessary to express what are reasonable expectations for the student who is included and this needs to be coordinated by someone who is a constant contact

- Planning time is necessary to program for the extra supports that students who are included need – it is not a case that secondary teachers can't or won't do this planning, it is that they need the time to do it

“So that from a teacher perspective is a challenge, so sometimes the board hears our, I don't want to say criticisms, our concerns, they see it as we're against inclusion and that is not the case. We are not, we're again inclusion as it currently appears because the workload has significantly increased, but there's no increased attention to, increased kind of way for the teachers to deal with all of the extra time that's required for students that are on inclusion programs.”

Instructional Resources

- Varied assessments to help teachers understand where students are academically; create a trail of assessment data and programming that follows a student from year to year or even class to class
- In particular, prior to high school, there needs to be an assessment of abilities so that teachers, SERTs and parents understand how to set goals

“Like I think what would be of interest is each of the inclusion kid's abilities could be assessed quickly before they come into high school, for example, and understand a little bit better and more clearly what they can do and where folks, including their parents of SERT people or whatever, where they think they can get to.”

- Some students need tools for engagement and focusing their attention; others need tools for sensory stimulation
- At one secondary school, the outdoor grounds and fields are not accessible
- There need to be areas in the school designated for students to go to decompress and destress

Human Resources

- Most teachers believed that the most necessary component contributing to inclusion is human resources

“Not thinking that a one size fits all is it because it's not. Each child needs to be looked at on an individual bases with their family needs to be decided how can we help this child be the most successful? One size doesn't fit all. So you can't put, you can't decide that every kid is in a regular classroom, some kids need more individual specific attention.”

- Inclusion Coaches are needed to help understand the needs of a student. At the secondary level, it would be helpful if the Inclusion Coaches also had some subject area expertise. Coaching needs to be more than periodic. The role of the Inclusion Coach needs to be defined and they need more time with teachers co-teaching

“So they're able to invest a lot of time into inclusion, where your classroom teachers are not able to do that. So the gap keeps widening of what, the intentions are good I think, but the inclusion coach is learning more and the other teacher is still in the same spot or not being able to make their growth quite as significant in their learning because they're

doing everything else. So if you could close that gap a little bit, so either make the classroom teacher able to go and get some training and maybe the learning for all coach stays behind and takes the class for the day or vice versa, I don't know. It might be one of those things and maybe with the learning for all coaches, if their role was maybe more defined."

- EA's to offer student and teacher support; EA's are the human connection that the students need
- Re-allocate EA time to all students and not just those with visible disabilities
- EA's need to be knowledgeable about what is going on in the classroom and how to help students with specific needs in that classroom environment
- In high schools, Academic EA's are needed that have knowledge of the curriculum and help with modifications to it
- Principals need to be aware of what is going on in the classrooms and be present.
- Smaller class sizes of 25-30 in secondary schools.
- There should be supports in place for other needs such as physical with paraprofessionals (OT's, Speech Pathologists)
- In most interviews, there was a general call for more EA's and more SERTs, yet there is a secondary level teacher who feels that there is abundant support, EA's, in-servicing and flexibility in this teacher's school

"What I have appreciated is the ability to listen and the in-service that people have provided me, I've had a good deal of that, I've also had a lot of help from a learning coach that we've had here who is assigned to our school, excuse me, and we have a learning commons and study hall, where it is possible to separate people off for specific activities, sometimes so that it's possible to improvise things a little bit. So I don't think there's much more that my administrator can do for me, I love the scheduling of the EAs, we have lots of EAs and I love the sort of ancillary space and expertise that is provided."

- It would be ideal if secondary teachers had a subject area specialist with background in special education to help create a curricular resource bank with modified lessons and materials

The teachers' perspectives on what they need to make inclusion work are in line with many of those that are expressed in the literature. To begin, professional development is crucial for improving the quality of education for all students, especially in including students with exceptionalities, where educators feel they have not been adequately trained for this position (Somma, 2018; Malinen, Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Xu, Nel, Nel, Tlale, 2013; Mazurek & Winzer, 2011; Durow, 2007). There is a correlation between a highly effective, inclusive elementary school and high quality professional development opportunities translated targeted on improved inclusive classroom practices (McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014). Teachers suggest that one form of professional development that would be useful was school-board initiated professional learning communities, where they could collaborate and share useful practices, and build capacity around inclusive classrooms and curriculum (Somma, 2018). Minimally, teachers note the importance of time to meet and collaborate with team members (Troeva, 2015) and that good communication and respect among the team was key in facilitating inclusion (Giangreco, 2013; Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke, Sorenson, 2009; Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001).

Educational Assistants' Perspectives

School is...

Educational Assistants indicated that their schools are welcoming for students with disabilities and recognize that the small intimate school community is an important factor in this.

It's been inclusive for years, so the students are very, very familiar with the special needs students in the school and I feel that makes them better people. They grow.

They identify that when students are included, the other students and members of the school community develop a sense of familiarity, tolerance and helps to break down attitudinal and systemic barriers.

The more young children see how many different people are out there, the less issues they'll have when they're older, they won't think having accessibility to a building is a big deal because they are part of society and should be able to go everywhere.

They also indicated that inclusion occurring when students are young has greater implications for how they will view difference later on.

Because students have been included since kindergarten, their peers are used to them in the classroom and are more tolerant, exposure since day one takes away the social stigma.

In their role in the school community, these EAs recognized that students feel safe coming to them if they have questions or need support.

Inclusion is...

When considering what inclusion means, belonging and empowering were two common themes that emerged among the EAs. They discussed equal access to education, participation, and community.

The student is learning stuff they can use when they leave school, life skills, social skills, language, math.

With regard to access, students have appropriate academic and social accommodations in place in order to ensure that participation occurs within the classroom, school and broader community.

For me I think successful inclusion is the student that is needing some accommodations or modifications is actually getting them and building those building blocks of skills, whether that be life skills or you know, scholastic activities, being made part of the classroom and being part of the whole community.

The EAs feel that they have an important role in ensuring the inclusion is happening:

Socially, we help them on the recess yard, you try to get them included with their peers, that they'll play with them or sometimes you kind of just back away if they're able to go on their own, you just back away and watch and make sure that they're having fun and um not being bullied and that they're included with all their peers, ask them if they will play with them or include them in their games.

They also identified classroom and social opportunities could look different based on the student's academic and social needs. Two of the EAs felt that students need opportunities for life skills and targeted academic support.

A student is included in whichever type of classroom they need to be so that they can be successful in their academic, social and social needs and to me, that could be full inclusion in a regular classroom or that could be part inclusion in a regular classroom or in a spec. ed. classroom or that could also mean that they're getting individualized teaching in a setting that's appropriate for them.

It should be noted that very little research has been conducted around the efficacy of teaching life skills within the inclusive classroom. Nije, Shae and Williams (2018) report on inclusive education in Nova Scotia, and state that academic, behavioural and life skills are often treated separately in curriculum; yet, all of these fields are closely linked and need to be addressed in an integrated manner.

Examples of Inclusive Practice

According to the EAs who were interviewed, they have an important role in supporting students academically and socially, along with teachers, to develop and implement teaching strategies that are inclusive.

Well of course modifying and accommodating their class and sometimes even changing the environment, the way the desks are set up in the class, you know, and then building blocks of starting a task and repeating it.

Inclusive practice is having an understanding of the student strengths and needs in order to develop strategies paired with flexibility to adjust on an ongoing basis as needed.

Awareness of the student, knowing that something might work one day and not the next and being able to change strategies around that.

Adjust strategies and flexibility around what would help the included student and their classmates equally.

They also identified peer supports as an important factor for inclusive practice.

The teacher makes sure the student has specific buddy, buddy changes every week – 2 weeks so that everyone has a chance to get to know that student.

Kids tend to redirect her [student with exceptionalities] if EA is busy; in gym class, everyone makes sure she has a turn.

These practical applications are crucial to the success of inclusion for all students.

Barriers to Inclusion

There are six over-arching themes that have been identified as barriers among the EAs; student behaviour, time to collaborate and plan, lack of programming, lack of training, and lack of support and class size. When students experience extreme behaviour, this is seen as a barrier to their learning and the learning of the other students in the class when the focus turns away from curriculum to safety.

It can be a very difficult thing to do as an educational assistant in the classroom is making sure that everybody is being safe while addressing the specific needs of the student that we're working with if we're trying to figure out what the issue is.

The EAs felt time constraints in two ways. Firstly, they expressed a desire to collaborate with teachers and other EAs working with the same student, this was especially prevalent at secondary where one student would have 4 or more teachers and potentially the same amount of EAs.

EAs are not included as part of the education team. Allow EAs to be included in meetings about particular child that they work with.

I am in six different classes in one day

They also identified not having enough time to meet all the learning needs of the students they work with.

Time, there isn't enough time to do what is really needed to give them the full experience of school.

EAs feel frustrated that there are no longer specified programs for life skills and feel that sometimes students are placed in courses that are not appropriate for their learning needs.

But to me, it's not inclusive if we're not programming for them, for their individual needs and wants and we're not helping them by making them just sit quietly and not rock.

We're no longer getting those life skills, most of our kids, I mean we don't have a really high population of low functioning kids, but the ones we do have, they're not getting those life skills.

When teachers are not equipped with appropriate training they will not be able to successfully include students and poses concerns for the EAs who are supporting these students.

Providing accommodations and modifications to the programming specific to our students and whatever their needs are and it's supposed to be set out by the classroom teacher, but sometimes we need to make adjustments on the fly as we go.

The EAs are feeling there is a lack of support in schools for students with disabilities and in their role, there are not enough EAs to best support each other and the students.

Not usually enough support, EAs don't get their breaks.

Support is being spread thin, it's hard to address everyone's needs at the same time... there is not enough support to make staffing, to make inclusion work for every student.

Finally, class size was identified as a barrier by most of the EAs interviewed. They felt that large classes make including students more challenging, especially at the secondary level. Although class size was identified as a barrier, it was not expanded on.

What is Needed

The EAs mention the importance of programs and strategies being available to support what they are doing in their role but also what schools are doing as a whole. They see the benefit of having community organizations working with schools to support students and staff; perhaps, in the role of a Behaviour Specialist (ABA), Speech and Occupational Therapy, as well as outpatient facilities within the community. They feel these supports on a regular basis would support all staff and students to facilitate more inclusive environments, while at the same time meeting the academic and socio-emotional needs of the students.

Specialist support, OT, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech, our ABA specialists, our psychologists, there just doesn't seem to be enough of those people available to address the questions and the needs of the students regularly, more than once or twice a year.

The EAs also identified valuable professional development could focus on teaching strategies similar to that which teachers participate in.

If you're a teacher and I'm an EA, you have to teach the lesson, but I implement the lesson to the student I'm working with, and if I don't understand some of the philosophy, whatever we're doing, if you have special PDs for only the teachers, but not the EAs, how are we supposed to improve on how we are dealing with certain situations?

Based on the literature, the perspectives of EAs are aligned with other educators. It is important to note that not only teachers feel they would benefit from further in-service training, EAs and Coaches also believe this would help them in their role of facilitating inclusion (Moshe, 2017; Butt & Lowe, 2012; Downing, Rydnak & Clark, 2000). Findings suggest that professional development was most effective when instructional coaches were hired for job-embedded professional development with teachers and EAs who were actively engaged and reflecting on their learning, and, this professional development exceed 20 hours of support (Dunst, Bruder & Hamby, 2015; Dunst & Hamby, 2015; Dunst, Trivette & Hamby, 2010).

Administrators' Perspectives

School is...

Administrators when speaking about their school expressed that school was a very positive and welcoming place. It was clear that they, as a group, held positive views on the current practices and while there was room for growth and improvement that a great deal of progress had been made.

Administrators noted that attitudes and perspective were key factors in a positive school environment.

I find that those kids are actually quite happy and positive and that's because they know that certainly their peers and the majority of staff are not judging them, they're actually out to help them with their best interests in mind.

I mean it's just a positive school culture. We've got kind and caring adults, but they care about the kids. We have a very supportive community.

I think we work hard to make it a community where the differences of students are valued and seen as gifts as opposed to deficits and we work really hard at making sure that students have a sense of belonging and feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves, a part of the [school name].

Another factor that was discussed by administrators as being a necessary component of creating a welcoming and safe space was the commitment of staff.

It is a positive place because I think that the staff are very much interested in promoting the wellbeing of the students and working toward trying to figure out the best strategies for them.

I have a good staff, most of whom are quite welcoming.

For staff and students, this staff has a very high level of care and concern for each other as a staff that spans across teachers and EAs.

Along with appositive and supportive staff the administrators also referred to a focus on students and student needs. As noted by one administrator the kids belong to the school and as such they are the focus of the work that happens there.

That's the best way that I can describe it, everything we do with kids, we just do because they're ours.

So off of that, we have a variety of children to learn in and I think that in itself is very inclusive because we know that not every child is going to sit at a desk and learn that way. So lots of hands-on learning, it's about opportunities for children to move around and learning.

There was as well recognition that maintaining this focus and supportive environment was, at times, challenging.

I have students who want to be at school for the most part and even students I find who have specific needs and some of those can be quite challenging for them and for staff even because treating everybody's needs can be a challenge.

Also noted was the impact of the students themselves in building and maintaining this positive space.

The students are very welcoming and they have a philosophy and belief that all students should belong.

Inclusion is...

When asked to discuss what inclusion is administrators had a variety of examples. They discussed the need for acceptance and communication, not just between teachers and external partners but also between staff themselves. The administrators focused on the need for staffs to work together in order to move forward and to support each other while doing so.

Where teachers and staff support each other.

Where all the stakeholders are working to breakdown stereotypes and moving forward to overcome barriers.

It was important, as noted by one administrator that communicating and being open was essential.

Communication plays a major role. It is essential to keep conversations open.

Having a productive dialogue to ensure that there is shared understanding and moving together as a collaborative and supportive group was seen as important.

I think the dialogue is so, so important because it allows us to identify what we're doing right and where we're going wrong and if we keep that focus.

The communication and conversation were also considered to be important along multiple lines. Engaging in communication with community members and having conversations with students were seen as important in understanding and creating successful inclusion.

All people are working together, all stakeholders are working together to find ways to break down our stereotypes, our assumptions and reflect on them and try to move forward where maybe we have some identified barriers to overcome in terms of inclusion and working together to suss those out and apply some sort of a remedy to that problem.

When community members, staff, teacher and even children can be open and think differently.

Students need to be given voice and be visible.

Administrators also noted that inclusion with regard to curriculum was important, but that the focus was not just around academic skills. Inclusion also related to opportunities for students to engage with their peers socially and in meaningful ways.

Kids need to feel included, socially, physically and academically, as well as safe in their school experience and this takes work.

Successful inclusion is a building that welcomes and includes all students, staff included, community members, parents, anyone with a variety of needs, whether it's challenging needs, it could be physical needs, it could be academic needs, it could be social needs.

For staff and students having students with visibly complex needs in the mainstream class, not having that segregation is key because without that, we're not programming, we're not learning about the student in a deep and rich way and all of the differences.

Social, physical and cognitive needs are met. They have access to curriculum and social.

The provision of unstructured time where kids can build relationships is important.

Overall inclusion was seen as "broader than just special education." It was seen as part of a culture that is accepting and part of usual practice.

A community characterized by acceptance and a natural fit in terms of inclusion being part of what is done.

Where inclusion feels normal and just part of what we do in schools.

They're part of our class, they're part of who we are.

As summed up by one participant:

Successful inclusion is when the question of whether a student should or shouldn't participate isn't even brought up and we're going to automatically assume it's the standard that we include everybody and plan things that do include everybody and that would be academically, as well as socially. From a student perspective, I think true success is when they have positive peer friendships that are spontaneous as opposed to us structuring them, which we often have to start off by doing, creating circles of friends and that kind of thing, but when it becomes truly spontaneous and kids see them, the students as peers as opposed to somebody to be taken care of, I think that is really successful inclusion.

Examples of Inclusive Practice

School administrators felt that the role of school leader was an important one in setting the tone for the school, staff and community. Their voice and example were seen to be important in terms of supporting this change of service delivery as well as sustaining it.

Actually sitting down and working with all of them and working with the ones that struggle and showing that you can with patience and the right breaking down of the questions, you can have conversations and help them succeed. So I think you model it, you model it on the school yard if you see a student standing on their own, get over there and talk to them, try to bring in others to talk to them. So I think my role is to lead that.

I have to make sure that staff can access the resources that they need. I have to be an emotional support for staff, I have to be a cheerleader for staff, I have to be a redirector for staff and I have to be their protector at times too, in terms of them feeling overwhelmed. I need to be an advocate with administration at the board level, yeah, their coach, you name it, it's up to me I guess.

As part of strong leadership promoting good communication and collaboration were also seen as important. It was through working as a team that success was seen to be accomplished.

I guess its collaborative problem solving and collaborative learning together with kids around how this can look in our school.

I feel like we work very well as a team and I can see the positive changes that has, not only on our students on a modified program, but on the school community in terms of the sense of belonging.

I guess I would say that the philosophy of all individuals in the building, when students have difficult times, like I just mentioned earlier, in particular with behavioural challenges, so if a student is struggling behaviourally that more people surround the student rather than say 'I'm not quite sure what do with that student right now so I'd prefer administration take care of that' or 'I'm not sure what to do so I'm just sort of going to withdraw myself'

When asked what inclusion looked like in practical terms much of the conversation centered on the importance of providing space and opportunity for students to engage socially and academically.

Students with their same age peers doing some meaningful work, not just sitting in a classroom at the back, saying 'oh they're here' but actually being involved in the class in a meaningful way and it has to be like work, it shouldn't be something completely different. My expectation would be that there is something parallel to that with perhaps easier to work numbers, but definitely something tied to what the rest of the class is doing.

Kids no longer are clustered into, if you're in that classroom, then you are here and here and here and you're all together, kids are milling about the school and interacting with the kids with a whole bunch of different skills and abilities, which is fantastic.

We've had music nights for example, we have a student with some significant needs, learning needs, and accessibility, participating regularly in a band and participating in performances within and outside of the school.

So what does it look like, think about in the classroom, it's students collaborating together. So if we had groups of students learning and working that, again, everybody has a voice and everybody feels included. So if the students are picking their own groups, we don't have a child that's left out. Everybody learns what's valuable about each other.

Now we have students in the cafeteria together, that wouldn't have happened before. So I think that the actual classroom setting and making that come to life and it's still with its challenges but that to me is fundamental.

They're not making fun of those types of kids and they do see the difference and understand that there's a difference and they tend to be more accepting of that.

It was also noted that students can often take the lead when it comes to inclusive practice.

He could get really aggressive and really misread social situations. So he looked and talked like everyone else, very high functioning, but when it came to the social stuff, he struggled and the kids could diffuse him better than any adults I've ever seen and it's the training, it's all of the background work that went into working with that group of kids, help them help him and they didn't bat an eye and it never put them out, it never put them at odds with him, or a we don't include this little boy to play.

So he doesn't communicate as other children do, he has a different learning style and when I walk in the classroom, I see other children checking in to make sure he's okay and on the yard, they're inviting him to play.

Administrators also articulated that the skill of staff and the supports from within and outside of the school were important in building capacity for inclusive practice.

The individual teachers know how to program, know how to provide the accommodations, are very adept and fluid with those accommodations, create multiple entry points for students and are again, highly adept at differentiating instruction and universal design for learning and that that's the norm for the students in the class as well. That they recognize that that's how the class flows and functions and that there is a place for everyone in the classroom.

So a lot of that support for students is what makes it a good, positive space for kids and it's a lot of team work.

I think that made it successful is there were supports put in place and not just supports for the students, but the support put into place for the staff because the learning PD, I think we have seen a change in staff, the staff understanding and knowledge of a whole variety of disabilities and they just see that as what we do as opposed to oh I have now one more thing I have to learn about.

In terms of administrators description of inclusive practice it was clear that they were witness to a shifting perspective when it came to the delivery of educational services for students in their school setting.

There isn't ever any talk of 'this kid has severe needs so they should be elsewhere'.

I believe it became successful and we probably went faster than was first anticipated because as we did meet with successes.

I mean one of the steps toward inclusion is just not having those rooms.

We thought we were doing what was right but I can see now that this is the better move. These students deserve to be around the same age peers and doing what everyone else is doing and quite frankly, we can learn a lot from anybody who is having to work through that and seeing the gains they make as well.”

So we have had students who typically in the past would have been placed in a special classroom for students with developmental disabilities, where students are in regular classes with more, like an increase in peer to peer engagement and students, which has also led to them being more independent within the school

Barriers to Inclusion

When asked what the barriers were that currently exist within the system in terms of inclusive practice administrators noted that one barrier was in part the lack of usage of the additional personnel available, in addition to general sense that more resource support and time would be helpful.

We are short human resources in the schools; our special education resource teacher time is pretty limited.

Learning for all coaches are there for our staff that need it the most, aren't accessing it.

Administrators noted specific concerns with regard to the current capacity or staff to deal with mental health and behavioural issues. It was clear that more support and resources would assist.

In schools, working with kids on mental health issues because there in lies our biggest obstacle to inclusion from my perspective.

The biggest challenge with students with exceptionalities is anytime that their behaviours that either scares other students or posse like a physical risk to other students that seems to be the biggest hiccup in staff and other parents.

I have never had any pushback about anybody who has an intellectual disability or a physical disability, it's always been around behavioural disabilities. The other challenge is probably just lack of staff to support kids, like the EA support and not just whoever, trained EA support.

Resources, personnel and physical, support need to evolve. There was a clear message that the area of “mental health” was important in terms of the need for resources and capacity building for staff.

Communication with the larger community was seen as an issue in terms of the need for more conversation and more consistent messaging to parents.

Then it's also what parents want and hope for their children and they don't have consensus. One parent doesn't agree with the other [With regard to type of placement]

One would be a parent group, the challenge that we have is parent's fear or concern that because they're accustomed to a different model of a more segregated environment that they're fearful" have lots of parents that have called and said 'why are those children at this school?' so it's about informing them and that's parent council work, we talk a lot there too.

One of the largest barriers to inclusive practice was articulated in terms of mindset and attitudes. It was noted that educators and community members had been practicing in and encouraging a very different model of service delivery for students for many years. This history of service delivery and practice has created a particular mindset that had proven difficult to overcome. As stated by one participant "compliance is easy, genuine buy-in is not so easy".

Inclusion sounds great because it is but you forget that it's a lot of work. Inclusion means often working with our more challenging students, it took me advocating for them and then supporting staff in helping them understand why these needs aren't met and why they are in our schools, in our classrooms instead of in another school or another classroom where it's just them.

It's tough because even as a principal, when we started out we were selling the SCC classes when I started out, calling the family and telling them this is the best thing and you do better when you know better. And now I'm like, I can't believe that I was selling that to a parent, but we thought it was it at the time.

Another challenge we face is mindset of course, like I mentioned earlier, some adults grew up with a different way of education and we all know education is changing and so you hear it in the community from parents, you hear it from students and you hear it from teachers

It's in the surrounding conservative community who are having trouble with kids who are having difficulties with behaviours, that one was a real problem for us because this school typically didn't have a lot of kids who were visibly different and in terms of behaviour... that are frightening for I think a lot of our parents.

Getting staff to understand that can be challenging sometimes, we have lots of staff that understand it but I have some that don't because they can't seem to see.

In keeping with earlier sections of this report, it would seem that these types of changes are often more readily accepted by students.

Students are the easy part, kids, I mean they are accepting for the most part, really accepting, it's the adults working with the staff that don't want to accept them into their class, who still see the self-contained classrooms for a fix to what they see as a problem and convincing people to change their thinking

What is Needed

Similar themes were generated in terms of barriers and solutions. Those areas of need for the most part align with suggestions for what is needed. Administrators clearly identified that their leadership in the school played a pivotal role. It was important for them to be consistent in their messaging and to be a role model for good practice.

I feel that I have to take a leading role in making sure that we have unrelenting standards of what it means for kids to feel included in our school and the buck stops with me.

If the philosophy isn't coming from you and doing the hard work and recognizing the hard work that's being done, then it's not going to take root. If I didn't believe in it or I even showed any little chink in the armour that would be I think a significant setback.

Discussing the need for resources administrators noted that while the focus was often on differentiating for students that there needed to be a recognition that different staff members would also benefit from differentiated approaches and support.

If we're differentiating for the kids, we should be differentiating for the adults as well.

When considering the role of the inclusion coaches the feedback from participants was positive. They were clear that the role was important and helpful.

Learning for all coach. She's in the building today and she is over the top fabulous. So she mainly works with the teachers and she is in the classrooms, getting a sense of what's going on and then meets with the teacher and they do some, you know, some design of instructions with differentiated instruction and they just, they talk about what technology they could use with the students.

The supports in terms of the learning for all coach, incredibly valuable in this school, in the last school, I was at [school name] for two years and for one year there was a learning coach there, the relationships that are formed, the deep learning that happens for the teachers that work with that coach.

I think we're making progress towards that as a board and I think the inclusion coaches do a good job.

Along with this positive feedback were some interesting ideas with regard to how the role might be developed moving forward.

I would want to see that learning for all coach for a more intensive time period, not a once a week drop in because I find that space in between is too much. I haven't see sustained change in practice.

So now at least with the coaching role, our resource teacher is coach, which is what we're trying to establish, at least they're going in and working intensively with one or two teachers and maybe building some capacity so that, not that work is done here.

In addition to the involvement of the coaches there was a clear expression of need to ongoing opportunities for collaboration and learning on the part of school personnel.

That's been a school-based decision so that we could do some focused learning around inclusive education and modification of programs so that we can build teacher confidence and then therefore competence and then teacher belief in themselves.

What we'd ideally like to see more of is some universal design, which I think is new to a lot of high schools and it's understanding the difference, truly understanding the difference between universal design and differentiation and to add on to that, I also think there's more work to do around truly understanding what it means to have a learning disability rather than cognitive delay.

I think professional development definitely helps teachers feel more comfortable in understanding why they do the work that they do. They feel more confident to do it, but also just encouraging teachers and students to get to know each other better, on all levels.

I think we have to help staff understand what they need to know, some because they would be able to say specifically 'I don't know how to program for this student', in other cases it might take working with them and digging deeper into the students they're working with, the particular exceptionality, working from their point of 'this is what I need.

The focus of additional training was characterized by one administrator as having a gradual release over time.

So that it is the teacher who is doing the planning and the working with the student, bringing experts to begin with and then gradually releasing that over the year or two so you don't create that dependence but you have to give the support up front because otherwise they're just going to throw up their hands and somebody else is going to do it.

When discussing what was needed, administrators posited the notion that shared orientations towards inclusive practice combined with working as a team would enhance the success of inclusive practice.

Positive messaging, helping people see the good in all, helping people see the advantages to inclusion, promoting it in our community, with our parent community, with the students.

It has meant an in-school alignment of philosophies and approaches from a learning for all document with program, like growing success and curriculum design and so on and aligning that so they don't fit separately and that has brought teachers to a more clear understanding about how we can differentiate our instruction and our programs to better serve our students in an inclusive environment.

It is working tightly and closely with the teacher supports who are central, so learning for all coaches for example and my SERTs and transition teachers, bringing those people together and aligning that work.

In keeping with other sections of this report, the importance of mindset is once again highlighted. Having positive experiences and maintaining consistent messaging with regard to inclusion were seen as priorities.

Teachers really need to have a positive experience and when they have a positive experience, it's like the light goes on and then they recognize I can do this.

You've had an administrative team in this building who believe in inclusive education and who will hold true to that vision and in holding true to that vision, we have put specific supports and expectations in place that help to adjust our practice and belief.

One administrator noted the significance of this move towards inclusive practice. This transition has resulted in a sea change of significant proportions and in many ways has the potential to reshape generations of students

I would say in elementary, the gains that we have made in inclusion in the past, I'm trying to think of when we started this initiative, it was last than 10 years or so, have been monumental. I can't say, think of anything I've been doing, I've been in this job for over 25 years, I can't think of any shifts that we've had in our board in 25 years that have been so significant and has changed the lives of kids. It really has changed the thinking of staff and truly it's not just toeing the party line, they truly have changed their thinking and I think that is pretty significant.

A recent report indicates that students who have an intellectual disability and their families were often dependent on the style, belief systems and interpretation of service delivery of school leadership

(Reid, Bennett, Specht, White, Somma, Li, Lattanzio, Gavan, Kyle, Porter, & Patel, 2018). Research literature cites that to build cohesive, inclusive education capacity, it is important that each role is carefully defined and each member of the education team understands their role in the classroom and in building school culture, as well as the roles of other members of the team (Moshe, 2017; Troeva, 2015; Wlodarczyk, Somma, Bennett & Gallagher, 2015; Saddler, 2014; Giangreco, 2013; Farrell, Alborz, Howes & Pearson, 2010; Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001). The defining of these roles is best communicated through the school administrators (Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2012).

Community Members' Perspectives

Our Community is....

The community at large where this school board is situated is a community predisposed to inclusion:

So if you've got a culture of folks that care, genuinely care about people, it matters. If you've got a culture where you don't have folks who are concerned with more than themselves, then you build a different culture.

This is a rural jurisdiction with small, close-knit towns where community members have an affiliation and people seem to know each other:

As well as the individuals for employment, knowing the individuals personally, welcoming them, inclusion. Our community is very small, so they know a lot of individuals on a first name basis, so I feel our community is very welcoming.

This longevity of its members contributes to a safe, stable and open community ethos:

So when you've got folks who have been around that long, they've known the people we support for that many years. So it's more like family than business.

Inherently, people in the community support each other which includes supporting individuals with exceptionalities.

So I think {our community} is one of those areas with a tightknit culture and neighbours look out for neighbours and people, our folks are known in the community because they're very interested in the community. So we have people working at different restaurants or different places and at each of these places they're known and cared for in a different way.

There is a sense of community custody for all that are in need of support. This sense has been developed over time and it is a generational tradition; this has taken time:

Employers hire people with disabilities, people are involved in social activities, the schools have gone to the integrated, inclusive system.

The community agencies are also a reflection of this predisposition to inclusion as the employees and administration are also community members themselves.

Inclusion is....

To encapsulate a definition of inclusion, a parsimonious phrase would be that for Community Members, it is about all individuals belonging and feeling empowered. Supports within the community and workplace are natural and organic – everyone seems to help out when agency supports such as job coaches are not always on site. There is a sense of 'buy-in' from all members in the community.

This contributes to a sense of independence as well as the workplace and employees are there to support all:

Our job is to enable people to be successful, not us to be successful. When they're successful, we're successful, when somebody gets a job, they want to go 'oh my god, I got a job!' not 'you got me a job'. So I think that empowerment is a sense of ownership and responsibility to a job, when you feel that it's yours.

Inclusion has a degree of self-determination as members can live in the community in the manner in which they desire and are not treated differently. Community agencies are there to support but also facilitate inclusive interactions.

Successful inclusion to me is when individuals are participating in activities that they choose to participate in with community members doing what they want to do. Goals or achievements, desires, whether they're big or small goals, just participating... We would hopefully give the skills to people that they could do their inclusion on their own and establish their own life cycle or however you want to say it so they could do those independently and build those steps on their own.

There was also a sentiment that inclusion has to encapsulate the notion of cultivating social capital to live within the community with others. This includes the ability to build and sustain meaningful relationships:

Successful inclusion, a couple of things. Let me put it this way, what I worry the most about the people we support is loneliness and isolation. So successful inclusion is the opposite... it's the same thing you and I need, relationships. It's no different.

I would consider it to be where people are feeling like they belong and are accepted to participate in whatever they can do at whatever level they would like to and that people are accepting of that.

Community Members hold high expectations for others and for the individuals that they support. They value their work and focus on balancing the needs of the individual and community – there is a defined person-centered approach to inclusion:

Successful inclusion is that place where people's specific needs are met but the community is also held in that. So I think sometimes we get caught in the perception of individualized culture is inclusion, but it has to be a balance between both the individual's needs and the community's needs and when those two come together, that's when you really see inclusion shine... So a community that gives and receives people in ways where their gifts can shine too.

Barriers to Inclusion

The barriers to inclusion are largely erected by dispositions. There is a sense of a generational effect as younger persons have grown up in an inclusive world and older generations were not exposed to inclusion as often individuals with disabilities were segregated and institutionalized. With this ignorance there is fear of what diversity is like. There still exist an attitudinal barrier based on history.

The lack of knowledge, fear, so it's that fear of the unknown from people who have not been exposed or around people who are different, they don't know how to act.

I would say history. I think fear is also a factor, people failing fear or a false sense that people are more protected and safe and secure in a secluded environment as opposed to an included environment.

There are pragmatic barriers to inclusion which include funding for support staff, however, there is a human dimension to staffing for supports and that is valuing the individuals:

It's very difficult to get qualified staff that are able to you know, totally understand the implications of what they're doing and the value of it... sometimes what they are able to pay a support worker is minimal and sometimes that can undermine people's sense of this is a valuable role.

Another barrier is the lack of communication among community agencies and the school board and the families. This is essential to streamline services at particular transition points:

The Ministry has sort of taken that off the radar for us to be able to be closely linked with the schools and I think that's missing something in terms of people understanding what the impact of what passport funding can be for them... so we need to nab them while they're still in school with information for families... I think the contact with the families is critical because it can be a pretty daunting world and now that students, when they're 18, if they've had special services at home, they're losing those funds.

This is the paramount disconnect, two different ministries that deal with age groups, when people are transitioning from school aged, high school to adult services, there's a complete disconnect.

I think it would be great if more transition plans became available earlier on for individuals that are coming out in our community, not only so they can be aware of our agency and what their options are but also just to let them know, you know, postsecondary what's available.

I think that they have expectations but unfortunately when they leave school, there's often a huge gap. So families are just making do by getting by of trying to figure out how to survive each day.

There's that gap period, where when people transition from youth services to adult services. So one of the greatest challenges that I've heard from families coming out of that environment where there's resources and support and kids are connected is suddenly high school's done and there's nothing.

Other community members acknowledged the lag in some educators to embrace inclusion as a barrier and more attention needs to be devoted to how educational resources are allocated:

Some of the folks who have been very adamant about the inclusive education trend, not wanting it, teachers right? I'm experiencing that a lot, teachers just don't want it, but then like I say, I think that's a big barrier... when they've had some positive experiences, they slowly become believers and I think it's the whole thing about actions speak volumes and I think that's been probably my experience.

Many teachers don't know how to interact with parents or share information with parents around your child has a disability and so I think it's also normalizing the process... we're in an environment where behaviours are normalized, where parents are still fearful of them, or uncertain or not sure how to process them. So I think that's something that we can grow in a little bit and teach others to grow in terms of that embracing behaviours as a normal part of a disability.

As we make shifts, as we close more segregated classrooms, is how do we adequately shift the resources to be able to give people the support they need to in the general stream of the school system.

Examples of Inclusive Practices

Community Members described their programs and strategies for including individuals in the community. They described the types of on-site supports that they offer and pre-employment preparation during secondary school. There are good examples of successful transitions from the school to the community workplace. One Community Member described how their agency worked closely with Avon Maitland District School Board to make this transition work:

I think it was 47 kids, the last time I counted, were connected to employment before they left school and that's because the school board let us go in the last year or two the kids were in school, help them develop comfort level around the concept of employment, help them do pre-employment skills and then actually let them go to work during school hours, just a couple times a week so that the transition was very easy for them... They have made it much easier for us to connect with young people once they leave school.

More credit and self-determination needs to be given to the community based employers for the work that they do to include all individuals as staff members:

I think we have to give employers more credit, that they can figure out for themselves how to train all people, all of their employees and not expect that you need agency people there all the time to make it work, like just stand back and let the natural stuff kind of happen and people take care of each other.

A successful model of a supportive program is secondary school co-operative education. Community agencies intend to emulate this model:

For example, we have young people who have had a great co-op experience but they finish high school but they can't continue because they do need some extra supports in order for them to be successful. So that's something that we would love to mirror in the schools going forward but if there are people on a waitlist.

I think the cooperative programs that they're doing with individuals are definitely a positive outcome for people because they're thinking more so of doing other things when they graduate.

There is a shift in the nature of service delivery at the community level as the individuals that are coming out of schools are accustomed to inclusive environments; this is dictating their needs:

Now we're welcoming people who are coming who have been integrated into the school system, have had choices as they were growing up, have goals about working, different things than some of our original people wouldn't have had that type of capacity and opportunity offered to them. So we're having to shift how we actually, how we not, we're working alongside families now, so we're not just welcoming individuals, we're welcoming families now.

Recommendations: Opportunities For Growth

The following is in response to the Directive (see above) for a summary of the opportunities for growth and recommendations to ensure that the vision for inclusive education is realized throughout Avon Maitland District School Board. It is important to note that these future recommendations are authentic and informed from the participants' perspectives – these are not from the perspective of the researchers.

From the Students:

- Opportunities to engage both socially and academically - school is more than just curriculum
- Find broad opportunities for students to engage with students
- Listen to and give voice to all students to encourage their self-determination

From the Parents:

- Consideration for both social and academic goals for their students
- Good communication among staff, parents and students
- Have collaborative conversations with parents about staff support especially as it relates to behaviour and capacity building

From the Teachers:

- Open dialogue with senior administration about what their challenges are
- Communication about students' needs and time to co-plan and collaborate with other teachers
- In-servicing on assessment of students' needs and transfer of information as students move through the grades
- Regular support from Learning for All Coaches
- Support from knowledgeable, trained EA's

From the Educational Assistants:

- Time for Teachers and EAs to collaborate, plan and discuss students in which they support
- Opportunities to share best practices for including students and supporting teachers
- Training around instructional strategies for their evolving role (perhaps by exemplary EAs)
- Ideas on how to incorporate life skills into curriculum
- Support and connections with outside agencies for consultation purposes

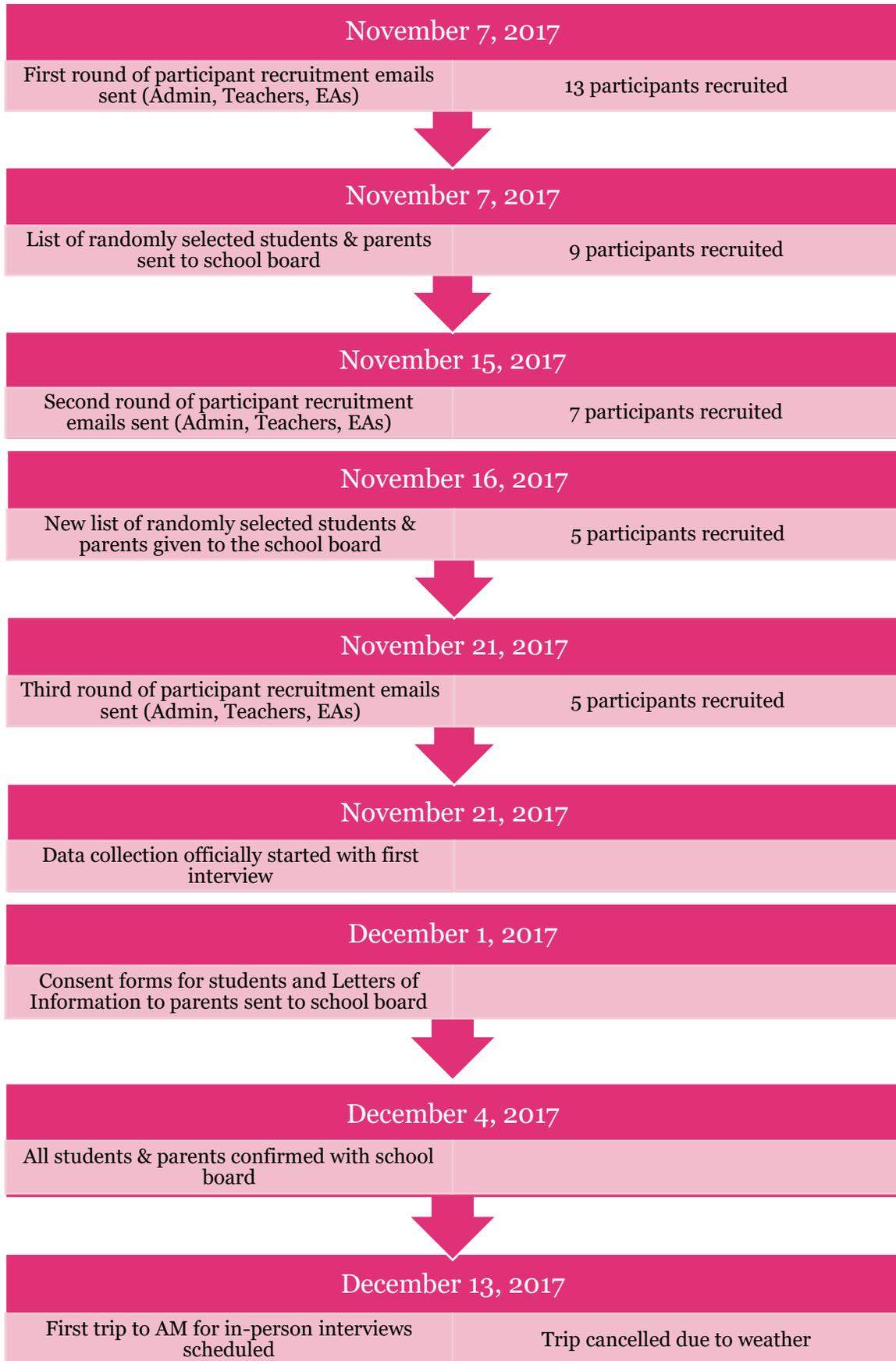
From the Administrators:

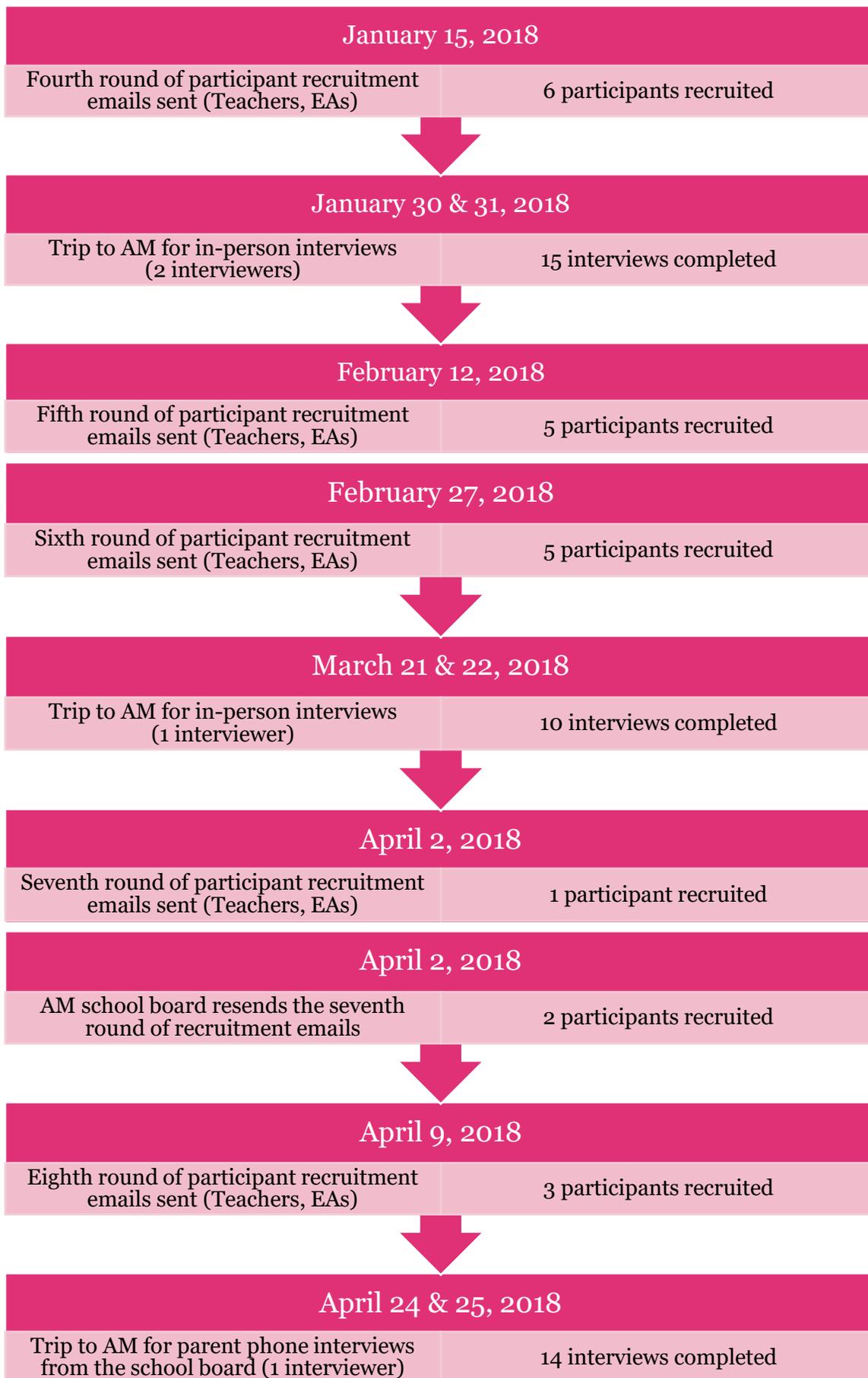
- More attention and support for training and resources
- Discussions regarding the evolution of the coaching role and how they are utilized
- Continued support for working on mindset
- Clear messaging, leadership, community engagement

From the Community Members:

- Continued work to shift attitudinal barriers in the community
- Enhanced communication among community agencies, school board, and families
- Early transition planning for students to coordinate services

Appendix A Data Collection Timeline 2017-2018





Appendix B - Literature Review

An Update on Inclusive Practice in Education

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education published a report that defined inclusive education as “education that is based on the principles of acceptable and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (Ministry of Education). This report and definition have subsequently been referenced Ministry of Education reports up until 2017. Porter (2010) notes that inclusive schools provide both, support to students with disabilities, and, for educators to accomplish individual, meaningful goals for students. Inclusion involves organization of the school system so that all individuals can participate fully and effectively, and for this to happen, an accessible, barrier free, social, and physical environment must be created (Rioux & Pinto, 2010). The benefits of inclusive education for students with exceptionalities include two sub-themes: academic and social. It is important to note that the benefits of inclusion not only impact students with exceptionalities, but also their peers without.

Inclusion: Academic Benefits

Oh-Young and Filler (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 24 studies around the effects of placement on students with exceptionalities. In regard to academic achievement, the authors noted 76.6% of participants in more integrated/inclusive settings outperformed those individuals in less inclusive settings (Oh-Young & Filler, 2015). This is consistent with the literature that students with exceptionalities make more academic gains in inclusive settings (Szumski, Smogorzewska & Karwowski, 2017; Sermier Dessemontet & Bless, 2013; Sermier Dessemontet, Bless & Morin, 2012) and that more time inclusive settings relates to higher scores on standardized tests (Cosier, Causton-Theoharris & Theoharris, 2013).

Additionally, from the perspective of classrooms teachers, educators also believe that an inclusion model provides more opportunities for students with exceptionalities to achieve academically (Somma, 2017). A recent report indicates that secondary students in inclusive classes are more likely to be working for credits than their peers in segregated settings (Reid, Bennett, Specht, White, Somma, Li, Lattanzio, Gavan, Kyle, Porter, & Patel, 2018).

Inclusion: Social Benefits

Fields and colleagues (2018) recently conducted a study where they evaluated and compared several scenarios of inclusion and support, considering academic and social gains for students with disabilities. The results indicated that students with moderate disabilities showed the most progress socially when placed in an inclusive classroom with peer intervention, they developed independence and sought success in class whereas students with moderate disabilities in the self-contained class with peer supports developed social skills and did not self-monitor their academic performance (Fields et al., 2018).

Somma (2017) surveyed a population of educators, asking if their students with and without exceptionalities had benefited socially from an inclusive model, each participant selected ‘very much’ for the social growth of each population, and noted that inclusion had provided more opportunities for them to achieve socially. Inclusion allows students to work with and alongside their peers with

exceptionalities; evidence has shown that this contact is likely to increase communication and behavioral skills (Katz & Mirenda, 2002).

From a student perspective, participants with intellectual disabilities interviewed in a fully inclusive school board unanimously stated that they liked school, and each student revealed that they had friends, discerning the difference between school friends and best friends, who they saw outside of class and school (Bennett, Gallagher, Shuttleworth, Somma, & White, 2017).

Inclusion: Peers' Benefits

Several studies have been conducted on the impact of inclusion on peers without exceptionalities, most find neutral and no adverse effect on academic achievement, across several factors including exam grades, standard tests and observation (Ruijs, 2017; Sermier Dessemontet & Bless, 2013; Demeris, Childs, Jordan, 2007). Interestingly, in classrooms where resources are available and inclusive education is highly subsidized, there are no differential effects depending on the different type of special education need, including behavioural effects (Ruijs, 2017).

Further, some reports showed not only neutral findings, but additional benefits for peers through inclusion. Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson and Kaplan (2007) conducted a literature review of 26 studies around including students with exceptionalities in mainstream schools and the impact this had on the achievement of their peers, in regard to academic achievement, 12 studies reported neutral findings and three reported positive academic outcomes, none reported negative outcomes. In their study, Downing and Peckham-Hardin (2007) found that, despite not directly asking about this, 65% of teachers, 44% of parents and 77% of paraeducators (EAs) felt that there were benefits to the peers as well, citing: greater awareness and tolerance, enhanced empathy and compassion, learning while helping others and acquiring new skills (e.g., sign language). The notion of social benefits around heightened empathy, tolerance and compassion was a common finding in these types of studies (Maikowski & Podlesh, 2009; Siperstein, Norins, & Mohler, 2007).

Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

There is very recent research in Ontario (Reid, Bennett, Specht, et al., 2018) that has documented the educational experience of students with intellectual disabilities in the report, *"If Inclusion Means Everyone, Why Not Me?"* Data were compiled from survey results of 280 parents or guardians of students who have an intellectual disability who were enrolled in Ontario's public education system or who had graduated in the last five years. As well, interviews were conducted to gain a greater understanding of the students' experiences in school, including academic, social and extracurricular opportunities, as well as various aspects of their relationships with the school. The findings point to distinct and persistent needs in service delivery for this population of learners:

- **Academic and social barriers:** 67% of parents or guardians reported that students often did not have access to the appropriate curriculum; 53% said students did not have the proper academic accommodations to make the curriculum accessible to them; 63% said students often did not participate in extracurricular school activities.
- **Exclusion:** 45% of students who have an intellectual disability were excluded from school or the classroom for disability-related reasons.
- **Conflict:** 74% of parents or caregivers reported high levels of conflict with schools or school boards and 56% indicated they had very limited recourse to appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms.

- **Planning and communication:** 32% of parents reported they did not feel they had been involved in the development of their child's Individual Education Plan.
- **Leadership:** Students who have an intellectual disability and their families were often dependent on the style, belief systems and interpretation of service delivery of school leadership.

The findings from the parent interviews highlighted the significant additional hardships that exclusion exerted on families and students and how parents were equally dissatisfied with many aspects of their children's education, in both inclusive and segregated placements. Notable benefits that accrued to students in more inclusive settings were that students were far more likely to be included in extracurricular and unstructured school activities, meaning that they had a much greater opportunity to socialize with their peers outside of the traditional classroom. It was also evident that students in an inclusive high school setting were far more likely to be enrolled in for-credit courses, allowing them to more fully reap the benefits of our education system.

Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusive Practices

Professional development is crucial for improving the quality of education for all students, especially in including students with exceptionalities, where educators feel they have not been adequately trained for this position (Somma, 2018; Malienen, Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Xu, Nel, Nel, Tlale, 2013; Mazurek & Winzer, 2011; Durow, 2007). Professional development can include workshops, conferences, courses, interactive learning, etc. Bayar (2014) suggests effective professional development activities consist of alignment of their needs and the school context, teacher involvement of the planning of the activity, active participation and highly-qualified instructors.

McLeskey, Waldron and Redd (2014) note in their case study of a highly effective, inclusive elementary school that high quality professional development opportunities translated into improved inclusive classroom practice. This research noted the fundamental qualities of professional development include: identified needs are consistent from teacher to school/board policies, limited use of expert-centred forms of professional development, active learning embedded in classrooms and supported by coaching, long-term support that is job embedded and collective participation of teachers within a learning community (McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014). Teachers suggested that one form of professional development that would be useful was school-board initiated professional learning communities, where they could collaborate and share useful practices, and build capacity around inclusive classrooms and curriculum (Somma, 2018).

Findings suggest that professional development was most effective when instructional coaches were hired for job-embedded professional development with teachers who were actively engaged and reflecting on their learning, and, this professional development exceed 20 hours of support (Dunst, Bruder & Hamby, 2015; Dunst & Hamby, 2015; Dunst, Trivette & Hamby, 2010). It is important to note that not only teachers feel they would benefit from further in-service training, EAs and Coaches also believe this would help them in their role of facilitating inclusion (Moshe, 2017; Butt & Lowe, 2012; Downing, Rydnak & Clark, 2000).

In regard to inclusive education, classroom teachers must adjust their teaching styles to meet the diversity of needs and abilities in their classroom, including how they program for, plan for, and execute curriculum (Reiser & Secretariat, 2012). For educators to successfully meet these needs, educators require knowledge, through skills and training, as well as favourable attitudes towards inclusion (Berry, 2011; Male, 2011; Ivey & Reinke, 2002). When school boards and administration

provide teachers with opportunities to reflect and challenge their practice and beliefs, the outcome can be changes in both rationale and behaviour around inclusive practice (Chrysostomou & Symeonidou, 2017; Cunningham, Hutching, Forgy & Graf, 2017; Pyhältö, Pietarinen & Soini, 2012). An emphasis on continuing professional development and teacher growth results in a belief instilled in teachers that they will continue to improve their practice and create more successful inclusive practices (McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014; Berry, 2011; Male, 2011, Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Building Capacity for Inclusion

Based on the premise of rights-based inclusion, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure each student has the supports needed for their school success, including equipment, personnel support, technology, etc. It is the responsibility of the teachers to ensure that each student has access to a program derived from the curriculum that meets the needs of the student and correlates to what other students in the class are doing. To build cohesive capacity, it is important that each role is carefully defined and each member of the education team understands their role in the classroom and in building school culture, as well as the roles of other members of the team (Moshe, 2017; Troeva, 2015; Włodarczyk, Somma, Bennett & Gallagher, 2015; Saddler, 2014; Giangreco, 2013; Farrell, Alborz, Howes & Pearson, 2010; Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001). The defining of these roles is best communicated through the school administrators (Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2012).

Research also suggests for teaching staff to have positive changes and perceptions about inclusion, it is necessary for them to have opportunities to actively engage and experience success in using inclusive practices in their classrooms (Porter & Towell, 2017; Somma, 2017; Porter, 2010). When teachers experience this authentic participation with students who have exceptionalities and reflect upon their practice, their perceptions about inclusion can be altered positively (Somma, 2017).

As noted above, professional development is also an important factor in not only helping to understand each role in inclusion, but can also help create an overall shift in attitude towards inclusion by providing educators with opportunities to learn and collaborate (Male, 2011; Leyser, Zeiger & Romi, 2011). Additionally, teachers noted the importance of time to meet and collaborate with team members (Troeva, 2015) and that good communication and respect among the team was key in facilitating inclusion (Giangreco, 2013; Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke, Sorenson, 2009; Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001). Current research on the attitudes of teachers with respect to teaching students with autism compared secondary English, science, social studies, and mathematics teachers with special education teachers with respect to their experience in teaching children with autism. Teachers were selected from 13 high schools in a large school district. The findings showed no statistically significant difference in the overall attitudes and logistical concerns toward inclusion of children with autism (Bosch, 2016).

Building an inclusive school culture encompasses all of the above-mentioned aspects and is important for promoting cohesive capacity among the school team. As noted by Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson and Kaplan (2007), inclusion does not happen in a vacuum, it requires all stakeholders, including teachers, parents and students must be fully committed to inclusion, programs must be reviewed and support staff must be hired.

Inclusion within Modified Courses

Secondary teachers of courses that are streamed were recently surveyed by Vlah, Grguric, and Baftiri (2017). These researchers looked at the beliefs of vocational secondary teachers towards inclusion of students with intellectual disability, specific learning disabilities, behavioral problems and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Teachers expressed the need for professional learning in achieving inclusion, some self-perceived competence in achieving educational inclusion in their modified courses, and problems in collaborating with parents.

One study (Casale-Giannola, 2012) did compare the strengths and weaknesses of inclusion in academic classrooms and vocational classrooms. Based on findings, recommendations to support inclusion in secondary school classrooms include: (a) increasing active learning in traditional academic classrooms; (b) providing basic skills support in all content areas; (c) increasing teachers' repertoire of strategies and modifications that support the performance of students with disabilities; (d) understanding special education laws, issues, and students; (e) enhancing co-teaching and collaboration among teachers; and (f) improving behavior management and community building.

Life skills are often noted as an important part of schooling for individuals with exceptionalities (Chiag, Ni & Lee, 2017; Brouck, 2010). Nije, Shae and Williams (2018) note in their report on inclusive education in Nova Scotia, that academic, behavioural and life skills are often treated separately in curriculum; yet, all of these fields are closely linked and need to be addressed in an integrated manner. Very little research has been conducted around the efficacy of teaching life skills within the inclusive classroom.

Curricular Modifications for Inclusion

There are three types of support for students with exceptionalities that individualize their instruction and maximize their opportunity to learn (Fisher & Frey, 2016): personal, curriculum, and technology. Students with communication exceptionalities that impact their literacy skills need significant modifications to curriculum resources that are used in secondary level courses. Essential literacy skills must be targeted for students to engage with the content of the course but more importantly, for their development as literate adults. Shared reading or structured read-alouds using adapted books can improve text comprehension of students with significant disabilities (Hudson & Test, 2011). When students with significant disabilities use adapted texts in general education classes, they have the opportunity to experience the full range of academic content that is presented to students without disabilities as well as instruction by content-area experts and peer models (Browder, Trela, & Jimenez, 2007). In planning for instruction in secondary level classrooms, finding adaptive texts is essential but daunting (Kliewer & Biklen, 2001). The following are suggestions (Apitz, Ruppert, Roessler & Pickett, 2017) for preparing adapted literature so that students with significant disabilities can participate and benefit from high school general education curriculum:

1. Outline the Story - summarize the text.
2. Identify the Key Themes of the Book- identify plot points at which each theme should be emphasized.
3. Choose Key Vocabulary to Target for Instruction- choose vocabulary that the students do not already know that will be useful in everyday contexts.
4. Identify Key Events in the Story-identify the most important events in the story.
5. Write the Adapted Text- format an adapted book.
6. Choose Pictures - add important information to supplement the text.

To teach using adapted text, consider systematic instructional procedures, such as prompting strategies to enhance literacy engagement, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Structured peer interactions are key to successful inclusion. Students should be taught to generalize the skills targeted in the adapted text lesson.

Teachers of math and science have noteworthy considerations for the curricular modifications and instructional accommodations that they need to make in inclusive classrooms. In a study of math and science teachers' practices for their students with autism (Moore-Abdool, 2012), teachers reported providing instructional accommodations for all of their students, not just those with IEPs. Specifically, over half of the instructional accommodations for the students with autism were either noted in classroom observations or discussed in participant interviews as being generally applied in their inclusive classrooms – consistent with principle of Universal Design for Learning, all learners benefited from these accommodations.

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