



## Media Release

For Immediate Release

April 30, 2008

### Disability Advocates Alarmed and Distressed by Proposed Changes to the Education Act

**Saskatoon, SK**— The Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL) calls on the Government of Saskatchewan to act immediately to stop proclamation of section 178 of the proposed changes to the Education Act and amend it to ensure that students with disabilities are protected, included in regular classrooms and entitled to the same rights as their peers.

“Section 178 of Bill 29 is regressive, shocking and simply unacceptable,” says Laurie Larson, President of SACL. It certainly does not support inclusion and it could take us back to the time when we had to fight just to get our kids with intellectual disabilities through the door of the school. The description of students with “intensive needs” comes from a place of stereotype and discrimination, suggesting that the presence of a disability indicates hardship for the school. It doesn’t speak of what children with intellectual disabilities can contribute, learn and what they give to their peers, their school and their community.”

SACL has not been consulted by the Ministry of Education since August 2007, prior to the election. Despite a formal written and repeated verbal requests to the Ministry of Education for meetings and information about the changes prior to the tabling of Bill 29, SACL was denied participation in this process.

Faith Bodnar, Executive Director of SACL explains. “What SACL has asked for in briefs to the government and in conversations with the Ministry of Education is to enshrine inclusion and quality education as a right for students with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion means that all children are welcomed in their neighbourhood school and educated with their same-age peers in regular classrooms. We know from our experiences with families that the education of students with intellectual disabilities is often second-rate or an afterthought. We see students denied appropriate, respectful supports and effectively denied their education. Inclusive education is already fragile, and Section 178 will make the situation far worse.”

“The last draft of changes that we were provided in August did not support the full inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities, and we were disappointed at the time and gave our feedback.” says Larson. “The rights of students with disabilities are threatened by section 178 of Bill 29. It puts all the power in the hands of the school board to decide who is included and who is excluded, who is too disabled for a classroom, whose medical needs are too high, who is too expensive to educate and what their education will look like. It hearkens back to the old language and practices that we rejected thirty years ago such labelling students as ‘uneducable’ or ‘trainable’ and congregating them into segregated ‘special’ classrooms and schools. There are no standards and no protection for those who don’t fit the ‘norm,’ and the school decides who does not fit.”



Diversity includes.

#### Saskatchewan Association for Community Living: Mission Statement

*Through advocacy, education and community-building, we work to create a world where all people with intellectual disabilities are full citizens*

3031 Louise Street Saskatoon, SK S7J 3L1 Tel: (306) 955-3344 Website: [www.sacl.org](http://www.sacl.org)

“Section 178 is all about excluding kids, not empowering the school board to support and teach all children,” says Bodnar. “And this has a far-reaching impact. Schools express the foundational beliefs of society. If students with disabilities are not welcome in school for who they are, they will not be welcome in their communities. We know this because it is our history for the past 35 years.”

“Inclusion is good for all students, and segregation is damaging to all students, both with and without disabilities,” says Larson. “We must stop compartmentalizing and dehumanizing children and begin to recognize, celebrate and accommodate diversity as the norm. In a society that provides a public education to all, it is our obligation to ensure that every student learns and benefits. We have contacted the Minister’s office to suggest how we might amend Section 178 so that will lead to a quality inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities.”

To read Bill 29, Section 178 please follow this link:  
<http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/bills/PDFs/Bill-29.pdf>

**For interview opportunities, please contact:**

**Faith Bodnar, Executive Director of SACL at (306) 955-3344 or (306) 222-3326**  
**Laurie Larson, President of SACL, Vice President of CACL (306) 948-2113**