

# Moving Ahead on Inclusive Education in Ontario

*Building community-government-education partnerships, knowledge for inclusion, and effective strategies to move our agenda forward*

October 17 and 18, 2003

## Report of Discussions

This document contains a summary of the discussions held at the *Moving Ahead on Inclusive Education in Ontario* forum held October 17-18, 2003, hosted by Community Living Ontario and the Canadian Association for Community Living and with the support of the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education. 59 people participated in the 2-day event.

Our struggle for inclusive education has been difficult in recent years and we have seen little progress. There is no reason that we cannot be doing better as a society to include all children in their neighbourhood schools. Out of this forum, we hope to re-identify our issues and messages to assist us in developing strategies for working with the new provincial government.

This forum was planned as the first of two provincial forums; the second to take place next winter or spring. The second forum will aim to bring together a group which includes people from the education system (teachers, principals, trustees, etc.) and government along with people from the disability sector to discuss the evolution of an inclusive school culture. As a result of our discussions on October 17-18, we have reaffirmed a commitment to this second provincial forum and will also consider the potential of holding some regional education forums to include those who might not be able to attend a provincial gathering.

The Canadian Association for Community Living is planning a *National Summit on Inclusive Education* to take place November 24 – 26, 2004 in Ottawa to move the national agenda on education. The information from our October 17-18 forum and the planned follow up forums will be used to inform our discussions at the National Summit.

### ***A Summary of Discussions***

#### **Where do we want to be in 5 years with respect to inclusive education in Ontario?**

The following is a description developed by participants of some of the characteristics of an ideal education system in the future:

- Smaller classes – no special education
- Teachers receive a more thorough education in how to teach all children

- ❑ There are an adequate number of Educational Assistants and they are used to support the teacher and the classroom, not as a substitute teacher for children with disabilities
- ❑ Transition periods are well planned and functional
- ❑ Current obsession with funding has ended and focus is on creating an inclusive environment
- ❑ Centralized testing is eliminated
- ❑ All the people supporting students have the same information
- ❑ Planning is based on a team approach that includes all parents in a meaningful way - parents are true partners
- ❑ IEPs focus on strengths and what a student needs, not what they can't do
- ❑ Zero tolerance rules are gone
- ❑ Abuse of children has stopped
- ❑ It is recognized that all children may not be "equal" going into school, but should have the supports provided to give them an equal opportunity
- ❑ Attitudes have changed about the inclusion of children on the part of parents that, in the past, have not wanted kids with disabilities in their children's classes because of a fear that they will take away resources
- ❑ Children are included in their neighbourhood school
- ❑ Children with disabilities are not seen as a burden
- ❑ Schools are accountable
- ❑ All teachers are receiving training in program modification as a requirement of their teaching certificate
- ❑ Ministry of Education has a policy on inclusion that it enforces
- ❑ Schools are true communities that value people and their contributions
- ❑ All children are welcome
- ❑ Everyone has a sense of belonging
- ❑ Supports are part of the infrastructure
- ❑ Values recognize inclusion
- ❑ ISA is gone

## ***What Needs to Change?***

During a discussion on creating change in our schools the following issues were discussed.

### **Elimination of Standardized Testing**

- ❑ There was a very quick process used to implement testing
- ❑ It has been used as a way of attacking teachers
- ❑ Teachers will likely be allies if we take on the elimination of testing – faculties of education would likely be on side as well
- ❑ Testing pushes students further apart, it is not an inclusive practice
- ❑ It is not just the testing that we are concerned about, but the impact it is having on curriculum
- ❑ It is discriminatory since some students are not allowed to write the tests
- ❑ Tests do not accurately measure the education system since it measures only some of the students
- ❑ We should not wait for the tests to go away to demand inclusion. You can have the test and still have inclusion, or, you can eliminate the tests and still have segregation
- ❑ Tests interfere with programming because teachers are teaching to the tests
- ❑ Pursuing this issue would be useful because you could build some alliances to address it, but it does not have a direct influence on inclusion.

### **Enforcing the Law we already have**

- ❑ There are laws and regulations in place that support inclusion but there is little commitment to them by government and school boards.
- ❑ Parents get worn down because they know that the law is on their side but the school boards fight them
- ❑ Some parents and educators do not know what the rules/laws are
- ❑ We need to find some way for parents to successfully challenge school boards
- ❑ We need to help families know where there have been successful individual interventions with schools so that families can learn what works

- ❑ We could learn from the union movement by having negotiating teams trained to advocate for families.

### **Abuse of Children and Family Rights - Issues of restraints used in schools**

- ❑ Need to challenge school boards with respect to their right to use restraints
- ❑ Teachers take intervention training but do not necessarily use what they have learned
- ❑ Some teachers and schools are very defensive - strong advocacy by parents can often result in a very defensive response - networking and education can be an effective mechanism.
- ❑ Teamwork and collaboration is needed to address this issue

### **Stopping ISA documentation**

- ❑ We should call for a wrap up of the collection of data for ISA
- ❑ Ministry should use what exists as a baseline and stop the process
- ❑ Students do not have to go through ISA – if you refuse the psychological assessment it makes ISA impossible to complete
- ❑ Support to the student is not linked to ISA
- ❑ There is no benefit for children to participate
- ❑ Need to tell stories – share our successes in order to get others to value inclusion
- ❑ Parents are in a state of fear

### **Teacher Training**

- ❑ Teachers need to be trained to teach all students
- ❑ We understand the meaning of inclusion – there are parents in this province who advocate for exclusion (learning disabled, gifted)
- ❑ We should look at the effect that segregation has had on people – show the devastation that has occurred
- ❑ We need to get the message out that we do care about academics – this is not only about making friends

- ❑ Acting out occurs more often in segregated classrooms – it is easier for students to learn appropriate behaviours when there is appropriate modeling of behaviour and correction by other students

### **Education Assistants**

- ❑ Need to be a focus on providing resources to make the class work better – not a focus on the EA taking responsibility for the special needs students

### **Smaller Class Sizes**

- ❑ Would give teachers more time with each student
- ❑ Smaller classes also may mean less types of interactions between student and could result in diminished opportunities for students
- ❑ Schools with lots of segregated classes use a lot of rooms
- ❑ Could build alliances with teachers around this issue

### **Other Issues Discussed**

- ❑ Curriculum Training for EAs
- ❑ Definition of Inclusion Education
- ❑ Information and training for educators, families communities (learning together)
- ❑ Parents as partners
- ❑ Education teams as problem-solving resources – people called upon by educators to ensure inclusion
- ❑ Teacher training – professional development

## ***What Can We Do To Bring About Change?***

### **Building partnerships for dialogue**

- ❑ Many schools, rather than accepting inclusion, feel threatened - the more isolated they are the less likely they are to want people in, even if they are there to help
- ❑ We need to stress diversity as strengths – connect with other diversity groups – share stories

- ❑ Create networks so that more engaged parents have a responsibility to communicate with other parents that are not engaged
- ❑ Municipal governments – parks and recreation departments do not include children with disabilities. We should be represented on their committees and planning groups. Stress diversity as a strength.

#### Barriers

- ❑ Busy lifestyles – fatigue
- ❑ Groups and peoples have different agendas
- ❑ Competition for resources – there are some strong disability groups that do not share our vision of inclusion.

#### Opportunities

- ❑ New government might open the door to positive change
- ❑ There are opportunities to engage in dialogue through parent information events
- ❑ Trustees election
- ❑ Reaching teachers – one strategies is through the federations – create some liaison people that can “put a bug in the ear” of those in the federations. Our voices need to be heard. Provide people to speak at provincial meetings of the federations
- ❑ SEAC – might be a fresh opportunity under the new government
- ❑ Use existing networks to connect to other diversity groups
- ❑ Use technology to centralize information that is of value to parents and educators
- ❑ Developing and managing information
- ❑ Share Stories and provide information to assist families to know what their rights are, what schools must provide
- ❑ Demonstrate leadership so that families can feel brave enough to take action
- ❑ Work one person at a time and one story at a time.

### **Training and Developing Capacities**

#### Opportunities

- ❑ Engage parents, teachers, faculties, etc.
- ❑ Talk to faculties of education so that teaching takes place when teachers are first trained

- ❑ Talk to unions
- ❑ Provide information to doctors so that parents have positive information from day one when the child is born
- ❑ Local ACL's find ways to ensure that they provide support to young families

#### Barriers

- ❑ Principals can create barriers
- ❑ There is a great deal of fear about inclusion
- ❑ There may be cultural barriers to inclusion such as language

#### Legal Strategies

- ❑ Who has to be engaged – families, Community Living Ontario to disseminate information, local associations for support
- ❑ Should make contact with new Minister as soon as possible
- ❑ Waiting to see what the Human Rights Commission has when it releases its consultation report on Oct 27
- ❑ ODA Committee website is quite extensive and could be a model for how we might disseminate information.
- ❑ Community Living Ontario asking local Associations to provide more direct support, i.e. accompaniment to IPRC, support to legal challenges.
- ❑ Opportunities for approaching SEAC's – do this during the inclusive education week help families capture their stories for various uses
- ❑ Campaign – ask each person to tell a friend about the issues
- ❑ Find a way to post tribunal decisions – Community Living Ontario web site
- ❑ Create an education section on the Community Living Ontario web site
- ❑ Develop a strategy for helping families capture their stories
- ❑ Community Living Ontario to provide families with perspectives on policy and law

#### Barriers

- ❑ Privacy issues are a barrier to getting stories out
- ❑ Not everyone has web access
- ❑ Training
- ❑ Competition for resources
- ❑ Not being ready not being mobilized

## ***NEXT STEPS***

A broad discussion of next steps produced the following suggestions:

- ❑ Over the Next Year – building momentum to a national summit
- ❑ Next phase provincial forum – an opportunity to build momentum towards the national summit - provincial forum could develop information to take forward to the national summit
- ❑ New opportunity to support and use SEAC's
- ❑ Liberal party has stated a commitment to compulsory morals course – we should influence it to include a principle of “diversity as strength”
- ❑ Duplicate the 4 elements of the CACL national strategy at the provincial level, legal rights, advocacy, etc.
- ❑ Use community living week in Ontario as a way to talk about education
- ❑ New government has a lot of stuff being thrown at them that they will have to deal with. Perhaps we could convince them to provide resources for some projects to address some issues and get them off their plates
- ❑ Need to move away from the negativity that surrounds the idea of advocacy at present – need to build relationships
- ❑ Key networks that need to be involved. People for Education, Community Living Ontario, Coalition for Inclusive Education, Family Alliance, Children's Mental Health, Family networks, younger parents, day care associations and coalitions, doctors, Community Care Access Centres, Community Resource Centres, Ontario home and school, provincial parent council, provincial SEAC
- ❑ Plan local events to share stories, provide support
- ❑ Develop a communication s strategy

### **Specific Action to be taken:**

- ❑ Next 3 – 4 months organize a number of local events, building towards a provincial event in the late winter or spring
- ❑ Form a provincial level steering committee to work towards a national summit. Community Living Ontario, the Coalition for Inclusive Education and ARCH to begin this process – committee to be appointed over the next month with a 12-18 months life span
- ❑ Work to create links to some of the unions and others that we want involved in provincial forum and National Summit