

Ensuring Excellence in Ontario's Education System A Roundtable Discussion

*On building community-government-education partnerships,
knowledge, and effective strategies for responding to the unique needs of students
with disabilities*

Report of the Discussion

April 2004

Introduction

On April 16, 2004, the Ensuring Excellence in Ontario's Education System Roundtable Discussion was held in Toronto. Participants in the event included more than 50 individuals from a variety of backgrounds and considerable expertise in the field of education. Participants included teachers, teacher's aids, school administrators, school board representatives, SEAC representatives, parents, community service providers, individuals with disabilities and others. The discussion was hosted by Community Living Ontario, the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education, ARCH a legal resource centre for persons with disabilities and the Canadian Association for Community Living.

The purpose of the day was to discuss approaches to education that would ensure excellence in education for students who have a disability. In particular, the discussion focused on strategies for ensuring the effective inclusion of students in all areas of education, the approaches and supports that would need to be in place to ensure a high quality of education for these students and the resources and supports that teachers and schools would require.

The roundtable did not aim to be conclusive in its deliberation, but rather to explore issues and consider areas for future cooperation between the diverse groups of experts gathered at the event. During the event, representatives from the Canadian Association for Community Living reported on plans for its National Summit on Inclusive Education scheduled to take place in Ottawa November 24 – 26. The April 16 roundtable discussion was seen as one means of preparing participants from Ontario to participate effectively in the summit. We hope that the content of this report will be useful to this end.

This report contains an outline of the key points, largely in bullet form, discussed during the roundtable discussion. The points are not ranked in any particular order.

What are the Issues?

The first area of discussion was an identification of key issues that must be considered when answering the question, how do we include students with disabilities effectively in our education system. The following points are grouped into a variety of categories, identifying the issues from various perspectives.

Leadership

- Boards continue to offer “choice” of segregated classes
- Principal is key to inclusion through demonstrated leadership
- Ministry has regulation calling for integration as the first option, but there is no enforcement by the provincial government
- There is a need for a clear statement of policy direction from government – who decides
- There is no pan-Canadian vision of education – no idea of where we want to go
- Fundamental belief in inclusion not driven from above

Systemic Issues

- Conflict exists re: appeals, tribunals
 - Where is the enforcement
 - Individual rights vs. collective rights
- Challenges regarding allocation of resources in schools
- EQAO, etc. takes resources away from children (which they may even need for that testing)
- Conflicting attitudes e.g. “business mentality” vs. flexibility (not just a pass/fail mentality)
- Government perceives that community likes testing but testing has identified a great need for support for kids with disabilities
- Declining enrollment – drives decisions because of money
- need models of shared-decision making in schools
- There should be links within system and coordination of services
- Direction/push towards early childhood development, parenting, with new Ministry of Children creating greater opportunities
- human Rights Tribunal – process needs to provide direction
- Grade 9 “credentialing”/standards – gets in the way of flexibility – too rigid
- Special Ed dollars are being used for non Special Ed purposes
- There is no mechanism to ensure accountability for IEP
- need clarity of policy e.g. Safe Schools Act
- Majority of issues that are reported to “office” have some connection to “Spec. Ed” e.g. behaviour, safe schools etc.

Cultural Issues

- Peer supports work well but are not always valued by families and schools sometimes reject parents' suggestions for peer support
- Backwards – segregated classes even in progressive boards
- Segregation being created in the name of choice
- No focus on including all kids in classroom - “you send them down the hallway”
- Institutions in province still exist so schools continue to prepare students for institutions
- Schools fund files instead of individual students
- IEPs – most students don't get individualized programs
- Curriculum – should be focused on student learning, too much focus on testing
- Schools seen isolated - need to see school as part of the larger spectrum of life/ school/work/community – look at school more holistically -What is role of school?
- We're teaching our kids to focus only on grades, rather than on the learning
- Struggle to have educators see whole child – strengths , “can do” not needs
- Some schools do have an inclusive culture

Teachers and Principals

- Feel overloaded
- For teachers there is not enough training and mentoring
- Teachers and Principals have to have experience with exclusionary practices
- Many more complexities in classrooms e.g. diversity, curriculum, # of IEPs
- Want more professional development
- New teachers are high achievers, University Grads
- Pre-service is inadequate (less time than before)
- New teachers “green” – were academic achievers, do not understand the struggle
- Teacher training/mindset will effect outcomes for students
- EA's – better training and expectations needed
- All principals should have Spec. Ed as part of qualifications

Attitudes

- IPRC process – must look at supports and services
- “Range of placement” means you don't believe in inclusion
- Inclusion- best model for all students
- Some parents don't want inclusion
- Funding not used to support kids to be included in classrooms
- Funding individualized but supports not
- “Highest needs” get funded but not necessarily supported
- Safety – expulsions/exclusion result from:
 - Inappropriate accommodation
 - Insufficient funding and training

Issues Related to Families

- Increased transition process important for future lives of students to improve “life plans”, life long goals
- All parents need to be knowledgeable about issues of diversity and improving education for all
- Inclusive practices vary across Ontario and even school to school - No uniformity; families’ wants and needs vary too
- Parents – apprehensive, defensive (expect problems) or meet defensiveness with respect to inclusion
- Parents often meet principals who reject student but some may just want to be better prepared (resources)
- Parents know more than educators re: disability
- Parental choice – parents choose the situation where their kids get the most/best support

An Exploration of Questions

Participants were asked to consider a number of questions central to the issue of ensuring excellence in education for students with disabilities. Following are the questions and the responses.

Question #1: What alternative funding formula would you suggest to replace the current Intensive Support Amount (ISA) funding formula?

- Funding by population Statistics with adjustments for local/individual circumstances
- Scrap it – reward successes and not failures/deficits
- Use the IEP as the funding initiative
- ISA “one” works
- Features of a formula: demystify cost of accommodation, individual strengths
- Block funding with adjustments (less paper work)
- SEPPA type for schools to assess students needs
- If they go to a SEPPA model then it needs to be based on the incident rate as determined by ISA process

Question #2: How can we ensure that the IPRC always considers regular class first in accordance with Reg. 181/98 regardless of the age or the current placement of the student?

- Ministry shall direct each Board to ensure that regular class placement is first option and that parents and principal sign off and that rationale - written be provided for decision.
- No standard IPRC documentation (e.g. document rationale) exists. But if there was, perhaps EDU could review IPRC protocol/practice.
- Governments are closed institutions therefore get rid of the option of segregated education, especially those (few remaining) segregated schools
- Educate parents so they know that there are other options
- Recognize harm of residential schools
 - e.g. abuse and First Nations
 - proven low literacy levels in schools for deaf and blind students
 - don't take our most vulnerable children away from neighborhoods, families etc.
- Must have consistent enforcement
- IPRC must include a recognized inclusion advocate
- Proper supports need to be available for successes to be achieved in a regular classroom through the IEP
- Ensure there is someone or a body to enforce

Question 3: How can we help/support teachers to better include students of all abilities (including students with intellectual disabilities) in the regular classroom – both academically and socially?

- Compensatory in-services and pre-service training and education
 - Consider inviting outside services into classroom for practical supports
 - Education on curriculum modification
- Partnership at community services /families/ classroom (students)/ teacher education/ advice
- Use other teachers (who believe/been successful) as an ongoing mentor – financially reward the mentor
- Re-assign ISA paper pushers to problem solvers
- Encourage learning experiences for teachers by people with disabilities
- Inclusion facilitators – University of New Hampshire degree in Inclusive Facilitation – “outside” advice/strategies on strategies for inclusion, and then they stay in the classroom to help with implementation
- Peer (student) support – how to utilize group dynamics
- Teach teachers Human Rights
- Smaller classes
- Inclusion needs to be an expectation supported in a classroom where diversity is the norm
- Hands on Administrators who are problem solvers
- Problem-solving teams – parents, students, teachers, admin etc.
- Linking P.D to learning outcomes for kids’
- More and better trained Special Ed Coordinators in School Boards

Question 4: What needs to change in faculties of education around teacher training (pre-service) and promoting inclusive education?

- Explicitly teach thinking skills
- Practical education training in accredited inclusive settings with consistent hours of training and expectations for all pre-service programs.
- Make Spec. Ed “un-special”
- Compulsory training
- More undergraduate degrees (2 yr B Ed or M. Ed initially)
- Learn to be researchers as well as teachers, it should be OK and mandatory to constantly evaluate your effectiveness in terms of student learning
- Teach them Human Rights
- A philosophical grounding of inclusive education that is supported by technological links and practical resources and application
- Including speakers – People First teach in Universities – People First and parents to learn future communication
- More Special Ed training in pre-service program
- High school curriculum to include Human Rights
- Professors who are capable in this area leading

Question 5: What are essential knowledge and skills that school leaders need to make inclusion work well?

- Respect of Human Rights
- All kids belong – school leaders must recognize and support diverse needs
 - E.g. dealing with students whose disabilities may manifest in disruptive behaviour (i.e. safe school issues)
- Creative thinking – statement of philosophy that school boards support inclusion into neighborhood schools and in regular class
- Leaders to include student leaders – know the legislation and best practices and are effective team leaders
- Hard core commitment of leaders
- Pedagogical strategies demonstrated and encouraged among staff
- School boards recognize leaders in integration
- Vision statements
- Patience – need to be prepared to stick their necks out – have courage
- See their role as facilitators – their job is to help everyone else do their job – “helping all students use their skills and learn”
- Values training and expectation of follow through (commitment)
- Administrators also need to recognize when it is not working
- Listeners needed – action, problem solvers – sets the environment; hires right staff
- A background in Special ED
- Current, real, authentic experience and skills in inclusion – learning with exemplary and effective practitioners
- Co-operative learning/collaborative school culture

Question 6: What is the best way to in-service all staff to be more inclusive?

- School visits
- Speakers from People First
- Ask staff what services they need about inclusion
- Communication with students themselves and their families
- Listen to parents about what they want for their children in their future
- Consensus team building
- Include parents and SEAC in all in-service
- Must be a system-based goal for all staff (teaching/non)
- Listen to their current attitudes
- Model effective inclusion
- Be there to help with practice over time
- Bring the information to teachers
- Show teachers and all staff, admin “working” models
- Share the success stories
- Listen to stories of People First
- Make sure teachers learn from their students – kids know what works (even re; curriculum adaptation) and kids see the strengths
- Training standards fro EA’s/accreditation
- Workshops put on by local Associations for Community Living

Question 7: What skills do Educational Assistants need to support students in regular classroom?

- Minimum formal standard of Education Training – practices of inclusion
- How to apply and use basic knowledge (i.e. cooperative learning)
- Background knowledge
- Acceptance of diversity
- Better training (initial training) – value training, team building
- Communication skills
- Behavioural skills
- Social skills
- In-service
- Ability to facilitate student’s integration and development of informal supports (e.g. through student’s peers)
- Dedicated post-secondary EA preparation that includes value based training
- Skills for future planning with the individuals
- Need to know: Charter of Rights supercede Labour Law
- Take direction from well-trained classroom teachers for programming
- 2-year EA certification program to “Facilitate” inclusion in classroom by “stepping back” from the student and being a resource to the class
- Help kids get to know each other and learn – as friends – and then get out of their way
- Need to know what not to do
- See the child 1st not the disability

Question 8: How can the Ministry for Education promote inclusion of all students in regular classrooms?

- Better resource, materials for teachers
- Include in training for P/VP, teachers (appropriate ministry)
- Make/define it as the only policy, then support it with the training, resources and leadership
- Message to taxpayers that it is a good thing
- Sign off sheets for parents saying regular classroom placement was offered
- School council should have someone sensitive to the issue
- Best practices shared and require implementation
- Eliminate factory model
- Don’t “promote” but implement and monitor the implementation
- Fund and promote partnership projects to share effective inclusive practices – like “Building Inclusive Schools”
- Help promote learning collectively
- Policy development and support
- Eliminate Special ED and promote Excellent Ed
- Make it policy (just do it!)
- Enforce existing legislation
- Incentives for funding must “include” children

Question#9 : What change need to be made to the Safe Schools Act/policy – and how can they happen?

- Distribute resources similar to highlights of Reg. 181 outlining rights
- Require principals (anyone exercising this power) to consult board equity office as well as safe schools office
- Immediate memorandum to boards, principals, to cease regulatory exclusion
- Clear direction on “Mitigating Circumstances” so principals will start utilizing this area of the “Safe Schools Act”
- Ministry to document how many principals are utilizing this clause
- Ministry to STOP school boards from developing their own interpretations of this clause
- Repeal it and start over
- Ensure that students are assessed individually that they are receiving appropriate accommodation before being disciplined – develop a mechanism to ensure it happens!
- Bring back “real” Monograph #5
- No change that will negatively affect the safety of any staff/student
- Judicial reviews
- Can we discuss and find ways to ensure that students/staff etc. are in school and also safe (this is a clear environment for any learning to occur)
- Eliminate “voluntary withdrawals” due to unaccountability
- Dress code should be out of safe school policies
- Eliminate suspicions and expulsions as consequences – find alternatives

Question #10: How do we educate the general parent education about the benefits of inclusive education?

- Develop a national slogan and print it on multi-media (e.g. milk cartoons)
- Communication strategies towards parents and general public
- Presentations by People First; kids doing the talking
- Examples that work
- Show that schools must ensure that ALL kids learn better
- Show that good education for all means full employment, which saves tax money and is better for our futures
- Obtain parent involvement with their local agencies
- Teach/practice acceptance of all
- Staff and Ministry have to buy in and believe that there is a benefit
- “Just DO It” (inclusion) – if there is no choice then school will take ownership and parents will “see” and learn of benefits
- Create good inclusive settings: the students will transmit positive experiences to their parents
- Have children teach parents
- Show data from some current studies (US) that test scores have not decreased but have actually improved in inclusive schools (and also produced better citizens)

Priorities for Action

Broad discussion throughout the day led to the development of a specific list of priority issues for action that the group concluded need to be addressed to ensure excellence in education for students with disabilities. They are as follows:

1. Inclusive Education Policy
 - a. Needs to be based on a clear vision of full community, social, economic inclusion for all students
 - i. Students with disabilities not just special education responsibility
 - ii. All students need support for success
 - b. Based on principles that
 - i. Students should come first
 1. Not on adults or professionals
 - ii. School needs to be more rewarding experience for students
 - iii. School should prepares for real skills and real jobs and real pay
 - c. Should be based on good practices
 - d. Should be guided by and contribute to strengths of
 - i. Students
 - ii. Parents
 - iii. Teachers
 - iv. Principals
 - e. Shouldn't be left to the discretion of a teacher
 - f. Must address the policy vacuum
 - g. Needs to focus on lifelong education – from birth
 - h. Need for an impartial body to monitor implementation
 - i. Differing, conflicting, mis-directed policy
 - i. E.g ODA plans focused on accessibility for school board or Ministry personnel rather than students
 - ii. Literacy test as discriminatory
 - iii. Education Act and Human Rights Act contradictory
 - iv. Labour Codes pose barriers
 - j. Mandate of schools
 - i. Should not be about business – about producing products to meet standards
 - ii. Should focus on 'invitational education'
 - k. ISA Funding model
 - i. Needs to be changed
 - ii. Needs to fund for success instead of being based on a deficit model
 - l. Need a process to set policy
2. Developing Leadership and Partnerships for Inclusive Education
 - a. Need strong political leadership
 - b. Leaders needs to listen to those in the field

- c. How to develop a common voice for inclusive education – e.g. in the midst of parent groups calling for segregated education, ‘back to basics’, etc.
 - d. Need a communication strategy for ongoing dialogue, developing understanding across different perspectives and partners
 - e. Children and youth need to be at the table
 - f. Developing connections to parents, youth, families
3. Role of School Boards
- a. Need to commit to Inclusion
 - b. Need a school-board wide approach rather than a school-by-school approach
 - c. Boards not yet advocating – keep admiring the problem, rather than finding solutions
4. Training and Professional Development for teachers, principals, educational assistants, support staff – All should be trained:
- a. To understand and accommodate diverse needs, contributions, developmental paths, learning styles, etc.
5. Effective Dispute Resolution
- a. Cannot appeal lack of accommodations
 - b. No mechanism address discrimination in education
6. Accountability
- a. Too focused on financial and administrative accountability, “accountant-driven policy” rather than successful outcomes
 - b. Current outcome standards are exclusive
 - c. Need outcome measures that are individually-based, that respect student’s individual learning styles and paths
 - d. Accountability for IEPs needs to be enforced

Areas for Additional Work

Discussion concluded with a consideration of areas of additional work that participants could do to advance the identified items for *priority action* either independently, through their organizations, or through some continuing cooperation of the participants in the roundtable discussion.

Accountability

- Keep track of numbers of kids labeled in regular classrooms
- Also need to track numbers included and not identified
- Publish number of kids segregated vs. integrated; ratios
- Accountability to ISA and IEP development and not to the positive outcomes of students
- Need accountability to society for Safe School Policy
 - Need for democratic process for determining action, including the student
 - Include consulting with equity office (human rights)
- Importance of personal accountability and inclusion responsibility the responsibility of all
 - School – school councils
 - Board – SEAC on policy committees
 - Government – establish success-oriented goals
 - Parent – participate, listen, respect, walk the walk

Lobbying

- Education of those who make policy changes – MPPs, policy advisors
- School Councils – inclusion on “agenda” at meetings
- Tell good stories about models
- Have to achieve a provincial policy that segregation is not an option
- Need to connect good practices
- Education of Minister of Education
- Marketing – Benefits to society “mainstream”, “normalize”
 - Diversity includes disability – ideas
- Effective (best) practices
- Need to work toward cross Ministry cooperation – MCSS, MCYS, MCTU, MOH
- Basic Human Rights to be included
- As the question, What do we value?
- Efforts must seek to get rid of “range of placements”
- Rights to education
- Difficult to support all options
- Why do we still allow parents to “choose” segregation?
- We should not allow negotiations for basic human rights (to be included)

Training and Professional Development

- Make sure educators etc. have opportunity to learn from people with disabilities
- Compulsory in-service and pre-service training
- Teaching teachers the process of teaching
- Classroom management is key
- Connect with other individuals and organizations outside of schools e.g. community org. and services
- Teaching different learning styles
- Ongoing and sustained support/mentorship for teachers
- School team learning

Effective Dispute Resolution

- Pre – role clarification, chain of command
- Mediation body at School Board level
- Resolution
- Advocacy at school level
- Broaden SET jurisdiction

Developing Leadership and Partnerships for Inclusive Education

- The Ministry of Education needs to be at National Summit – ask to provide address on Inclusive Education
- Minister of Children and Youth and Citizenship should also be invited to the National Summit
- Identify and invite key strategic journalists to the summit (francophone too)
- Invite the supervisory officers and directors of education association to discussion about inclusive education
- Need to connect with the right individual who would be connected to “special education” (superintendents)
- Think “long-term”

Role of School Boards

- Senior staff and trustees (province should develop this)
- There should be only one definition of INCLUSION in Ontario – it is not open for discussion and local interpretation and all boards should publicly state policies and priorities
- All kids should be considered in determining “outcome measures” i.e. school board “success”
- Financial incentives for regular class placement and improvements in educational outcomes
- Stop I.S.A. funding formula

- Measure success in terms of achievement of IEP objectives, thus IEP objectives would be better, measurable, real etc.
- Get help to classroom teachers sooner, faster...
 - Resource teachers should not be involved in paper work (ISA etc.), but are curriculum specialists (inspire confidence of classroom teachers especially at secondary)
 - Proportion of resource teachers is based on school population (proactive assistance)
- Literacy outcomes for all students

Future cooperation between Roundtable Participants

The final discussion considered how participants in the event might continue to talk about and cooperate on issues. There was a consensus that such cooperation would be of considerable value. A number of strategies were suggested to facilitate continuing cooperation and some specific commitments were made for action.

The recommendations were:

- Continued networking by e-mail – Community Living Ontario committed to setting up an email listserve to connect the participants of the roundtable and others to allow continuing discussion. The listserve should be active in mid to late June.
- Partnerships – projects
- Relay info from today back to organizations – (This report was viewed as a means of providing participants information to share with their organizations and is being provided to all participants and others that request it.)
- More debates with people who hold varying views (and opportunity to influence)
- Assemble best practices info, resources
- Invite Ministers and Deputy Minister to National Summit on Education Summit in November
- Identify groups that aren't here to spread message to them
- Identify individuals from group to draft response to the ISA – and consider how to work together on this and other specific issues? – A small group volunteered to meet to undertake this recommendation.
- Coordinate a similar roundtable event for the fall of 2004 to continue discussions.
- Consider ways of using the expertise in the group to address the question of education policy, to coordinate a possible lobbying effort and to draft recommendations for policy change.
- Form a working group to create a one page policy statement?

Participants in Roundtable Discussion

Ensuring Excellence in Ontario's Education System – Roundtable Discussion

April 16, 2004

Participant's List

Name	Organization	Title
Denyse Newton	Durham Down Syndrome Association	SEAC Rep
Larry Palmer	Community Living Newmarket/Aurora	Executive Director
Terry Gland	London District Catholic School Board	Superintendent of Education
Joanne Languay	Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario	Executive Staff
Martha Foster	Ontario Principals' Council	Past President
Jackie Bajus	Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board Ontario Council for Exceptional Children	Superintendent of Education, Executive of OCEC
Todd Cunninngham	OISE - University of Toronto	Student
Linda Bernofsky	Down Syndrome Association of Ontario	
Diane Galambos	Sheridan College	
Sharon Watt	Community Living Toronto	Educational Support Liaison
William Reith	Ont. Secondary School Teachers Association	Executive Assistant
Beth Ward	Community Living Huntsville	Executive Director
Jim Triantafilou	Brampton Caledon Community Living	
Cherie Robertson	Ontario Human Rights Commission	
Ann Smith	Community Living Ontario	
Gordon Kyle	Community Living Ontario	
Gordon Porter	Canadian Association for Community Living	
Denise Silverstone	Canadian Association for Community Living/OISE	

Michael Bach	Canadian Association for Community Living	
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Marty Graf	Community Living Tillsonburg	
Allison Morse	Community Living Tillsonburg	SEAC Rep Thames Valley DSB
Dean McKennitt	People First Ontario, Ont. Coalition for Inclusive Education	President People First Owen Sound
Marilyn Dolmage	Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education	
Patty Gillis	Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education	
Paul Melcher	Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley	Executive Director
Chris Beesley	Community Living Toronto	V.P
Sandy Palinski	Ministry of Education	Strategic Policy and Coordinated Services Unit, Special Education Policy and Programs Branch
Bill Wyman	Ministry of Education	Senior Policy Advisor, Program Policy Unit, Special Education Policy and Programs Branch
Helen Sanderson	Play Therapy International	Play therapist, Educator
Anna Germain	Millennium Inclusion for the Developmentally Challenged	President
Andre Ceci	Niagara Catholic District School Board	Programme Officer – Student Su
Cindy Scandrett	Autism Society of Ontario	Educational Advocate, Parent, Workshop Speaker
Carla Baudot	Community Living Toronto, Toronto Family Network	
Bill Holder	ARCH	
Petra Asfaw	Community Living Toronto	Family Support Coordinator

Lisa D'Amore	Integration Action For Inclusion	Board Member, SEAC Rep
David Croome	ABC Ontario	SEAC Co-ordinator
Allan Shaw	National Federation of the Blind, Advocates for Equality	National Coordinator, Compliance Officer
Kathie Brooks	Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education, ARCH, Extend-A-Family	Member/consultant, board member, coordinator
Brenda Kerny	Halton District School Board	Superintendent of Special Education
Anne Hill	Fanshawe College	
Clayton Eaton	Ministry of Education, Integration Action Group, W. Ross MacDonald School	Vision Resource Consultant
Jean-Baptiste Arhanchiague	Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)	Teacher
Susan Kellsey	Early Childhood Resouce Teacher Network of Ontario	President
Louise Wilhelm	Durham District School Board	Special Education Facilitator
Dave Rowan	Toronto District School Board	Executive Superintendent
Robert Lattanzio	ARCH	
Charlotte Dingwall	Community Living St. Marys	
Joan MacCallum	Ministry of Education	Senior Policy Advisor
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