

Discussion Results

Consultation on The Status of Inclusive Education In Prince Edward Island

September 11, 2004

**University of Prince Edward Island
Charlottetown, PEI**



Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living

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Background

Schooling in inclusive classrooms is a vital factor in preparing students with intellectual disabilities for a life in their community. That is why the PEI Association for Community Living has made inclusive education one of its primary objectives. The association held a preliminary meeting on Saturday, September 11, 2004 to bring various stakeholders together to discuss the progress that has been made toward developing inclusive education in our province. In this report we will summarize the discussion of the participants and highlight some of the issues that were identified. We trust this report will serve as a useful basis for discussion of the issues at subsequent meetings. Indeed PEI ACL is scheduling a meeting to do just that on Wednesday, May 11, 2005.

The Participants:

Participants at the September 11 session included parents, teachers, officials from the Education Ministry, Health and Social Services Ministry, Holland College, the University of PEI and representatives from other community agencies. A list of participants is contained in Appendix A.

What is inclusive education?

The participants first addressed the question of what defines “inclusive education” for a child in the context of PEI schools. The discussion was vigorous and informative with many aspects considered. The consensus arrived at after discussion was as follows:

1. *Students attend the same school that his/her siblings attend with accessibility and accommodation for individuals needs.*
2. *Students learn to their full potential in regular classrooms with age appropriate peer group.*
3. *Schools and classrooms achieve appropriate fusion of inclusion and meeting the needs of ALL students.*
4. *School culture, classroom practice and staff collaboration to support inclusion.*
5. *Community, family, school, and government leadership and support for inclusive schools.*

While other factors were discussed, participants agreed that those noted above bring the most relevant points forward in a short statement.

How well are we doing in PEI?

We next asked participants to reflect on how well they think we are doing in PEI with the implementation and operation of inclusive education. We asked each person to think about how well they personally were contributing to the effort as well as how they would assess the success of the provincial school system as a whole and finally their local elementary school – the one in their community or neighbourhood that they know best.

The results are quite consistent from person to person. Most thought the local elementary school – the one they know best - was doing relatively well with inclusion. There were several exceptions, but there seemed to be a general feeling that elementary schools were doing a good job.

The education system as a whole was viewed with somewhat less satisfaction. There were feelings that more leadership and support need to be seen throughout the schools in PEI. This attitude was held toward both the Education Department and the school districts.

Most individuals felt they were doing the best they could on an individual basis but that much more could be done if groups and advocates worked together.

Some points of discussion:

- The consensus was that:
 - We are doing very well with early childhood education;
 - Elementary schools are generally doing exceptionally well;
 - Intermediate schools are doing o.k. – but much could be improved;
 - High schools are still challenged when it comes to inclusion and there are only pockets of good inclusive practice;
 - At the post-secondary level, Holland College is moving forward with inclusive education with an enrolment of approximately 7 students and UPEI is doing well with the ACES Program - we currently have university professors requesting students with special needs to be in their classes.
- PEI teachers for the most part believe in inclusion and support it. They just need the know-how of how to do it effectively in their classrooms. Moving to create a more inclusive philosophy in Junior and Senior High schools is needed.
- Leadership throughout the system was noted as a major concern. Principals and vice principals need more systemic training; districts need leaders who clearly articulate a vision and commitment for inclusion; and finally officials in the Ministry of Education need to provide leadership at both the administrative and political level so the commitment of citizens of PEI to inclusion is made clear.

- Teachers and Teacher Assistants can always improve and more sustained effort needs to be put into professional development activities focused on inclusion. Teachers need to learn how to adapt/modify curriculum **before** they have to use this skill. There is a need to assure thoroughness and consistency in training and support.
- PEI ACL has hired transitional workers to assist the resource teachers in the high schools with the school-to-community transition of students.
- The high school levels of Academic, General and Practical in PEI need to be reviewed to better prepare students with intellectual disabilities for transition to post secondary education programs.
- Teacher certification for teachers working as Resource Teachers need to be reviewed; they need specific training appropriate to the unique function of the position.
- There is a perceived gap between policy and actual practice with inclusive education. Lack of collaboration between various service providers and government departments was noted. It was suggested that PEI ACL consult with disability groups, government and other community agencies to identify critical gaps and bring them forward to the Ministry of Education and the Minister of Health and Social Services.
- Class sizes are considered to be too large. The ratio of special needs students in a class needs to be reviewed and assurance that it fits what is required for the inclusion of all students.
- Promote and understanding that tie inclusion practices to overall school improvement; partnerships between ACL and other parent groups – particularly the Home and School Association.
- Suggested that the following five areas summarize what is needed:
 - *Leadership*
 - *Partnership*
 - *Skill development*
 - *Transitions*
 - *Collaboration*
- Dr. Timmons noted that we need to recognize the positives progress that has been made with inclusive education and remember that it is not all black and white.

What can PEI ACL do?

- More meetings with key stakeholders to sustain effort toward progress and the discussion of best practices.
- Promote and celebrate “good news” stories, including those that focus on inclusion principles and best practices.
- Look for ways to promote more training for inclusion among PEI educators with focus on teachers and principals.
- Seek ways to influence more support from the Ministry of Education for inclusion.
- Promote stakeholders to develop action plans to help promote inclusion.

Appendix A

List of Participants

1. Vianne Timmons, UPEI
2. Bridget Cairns, PEI Association for Community Living (PEI ACL)
3. John Shanahan, PEI ACL and PEI Down Syndrome Family Support Group
4. Winnifred McInnis, Department of Education Teresa Aitken, PEI Autism Society
5. Goldie MacArthur, PEI ACL Community Inclusion Transition Worker in the West
6. Missy Whitehead, PEI ACL
7. Peter Meggs, Resource Teacher, Bluefield High School
8. Twilah Stone, Holland College
9. Velda Crane, Holland College
10. Jill Wakelin, Ministry of Health and Social Services – Social Policy
11. Janice Ployer, Ministry of Health and Social Services – Children’s Secretariat
12. Wendy Holm – Primary Care – Summerside
13. Julie Potvin, Special Education Consultant French School Board
14. Michelle Pineau, PEI ACL and PEI Autism Society
15. Mae Shaw, Independent early childcare business owner
16. Myles Noye, Transportation
17. Diane Outlette, UPEI and Literacy mentor
18. Cheryl Perry, HEAR
19. Darlene Dunn, Tourette Family Support Group
20. Gordon Porter, The Roeher Institute, Woodstock, NB

Appendix B

How well are we doing in PEI?

We asked participants to consider how well we are doing with the implementation of inclusive education in PEI. We asked each person to do so considering a personal perspective as well as the school system as a whole, and finally, how each considered their local elementary school was doing. The results are below.

(A denomination between 1-10, 10 being the highest)

Name	You (Personal Efforts)	The System	Your Community School
A	7.5-8	8	8
B	7	6	8
C	7-8	7	7
D	8.5	7.5	8.5
E	8.5	-	7.8
F	10	6	8
G	6	7	8
H	9	8	5
I	6	6	8
J	-	7.5	8
K	6	6.5	10
L	9-10	-	5
M	7	5	9
N	9	4	8
O	8	7-7.5	8.5
P	7	7	6
Q	5	7	7
R	8	7.5-8.5	8.5-9