



# **Inclusive Education in Canada – Key Issues and Directions for the Future**

**(Report based on the Canadian  
Association for Community Living's  
National Summit on Inclusive Education  
of  
November 2004)**

**L'Institut Roehar Institute**

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2005**



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## **I. Overview**

This paper provides a discussion of the present state of inclusive education in Canada. It draws from the National Summit on Inclusive Education, which was convened and hosted by the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) in Ottawa, November 25 – 26, 2004.

### **A. National Summit on Inclusive Education**

Participants at the National Summit were regular classroom teachers, special educators, teacher assistants, parents and youth. As well, participants included representatives from the Canadian Teachers' Federation, nine provincial teachers' federations, government officials and volunteers and staff from various NGOs (national, provincial/territorial and local), including Associations for Community Living and other NGOs. In all, about 350 people took part in the Summit.

General aims of the Summit were to: develop a common understanding of the present state of inclusive education in Canada; identify key challenges to the wider implementation of inclusive practices; find common ground among partners for advancing the principles of inclusion, accommodation and support; and to detail specific measures that are needed for wider implementation.

The focus of the Summit was on supporting teachers so that inclusive, quality education can be made more widely available to all learners. The conference was highly interactive. In addition to numerous plenary sessions and speakers, it involved twenty-seven breakout discussion groups on the following themes:

- General situation of inclusive education in participants' home communities, provinces and territories;
- Supports needed by teachers, parents and students;
- Pre-service training and professional development;
- Leadership in education and society;

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- Effective instructional strategies;
  - Fulfilling the social contract in public education; and
  - Key directions that need to be pursued for wider implementation of inclusive practices.

## **B. Structure of and Sources for the Present Report**

The following sections of this report look at:

- The context, that is, the importance of education and of inclusive education in particular, CACL's interest in inclusion and today's reality;
- Addressing the issues through supports for teachers, parents and students;
- Implications for training and professional development;
- Implications for leadership in education and society;
- Future directions; and
- Conclusion.

Several broad themes surfaced across the discussions. These included: the need for shared vision; effective instructional practices; partnership, teamwork and collaboration among stakeholders; and advocacy.

Other themes that arose in particular discussions were the need for:

- Legislation, policy and guidelines;
- Effective resource allocation and use;
- Professional development;
- Public awareness and discourse;
- Knowledge base for effective practices;
- Measures for linking policy to practice; and
- Leadership.

These themes are similar to those presented by Crawford and Porter (2004) in *Supporting Teachers: A Foundation for Advancing Inclusive Education*,

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a discussion document that was used to inform participants' discussions at the Summit.

The main sources for the information presented in the present report were notes taken at the breakout discussions that took place at the Summit. In addition, Section III of the report draws from Statistics Canada's National Population Health Survey (NPHS) of 1998, the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) of 2001 and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) of 1994-98. These are large surveys that provide a range of information on people with and without disabilities. Other sources are cited in context.

### **C. Note on 'Special Needs'**

The term 'special needs' is sometimes used in this report. The Roeher Institute's would not normally use that term because, on the one hand, there is nothing particularly 'special' about disability. Disability is actually quite commonplace and the needs of students with disabilities would ideally be addressed in stride rather than as out of the ordinary concessions. On the other hand, *all* students are in some sense 'special' and education services would ideally be responsive to the needs of all students.

However, the term has been retained for the sake of fidelity to Summit participants' own wording. It has also been used once in the body of the report to underscore a general point about educational arrangements that are commonly described as pertaining to 'special needs students'.

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## **II. Context**

### **A. Education Matters**

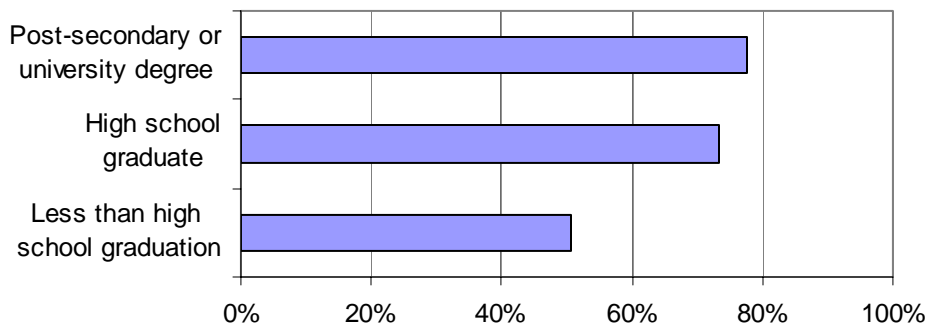
Education is a cornerstone of responsible citizenship in robust and stable democracies. Since the Confederation of Canada, governments and ordinary citizens have recognized the importance education and have made public provision for its universal availability to children and youth at the elementary and high school levels.

Presently Canada spends 3.3% of GDP on public elementary and secondary education – \$39.6 billion in 2002-03 (Nault, 2004, pp. 12 and 25).

With increases in the level of education attained, the chances increase that people will be integrated within the paid labour force, will enjoy economic security, will participate in a range of community activities and will enjoy better health and wellness overall (Figures 1 – 5).

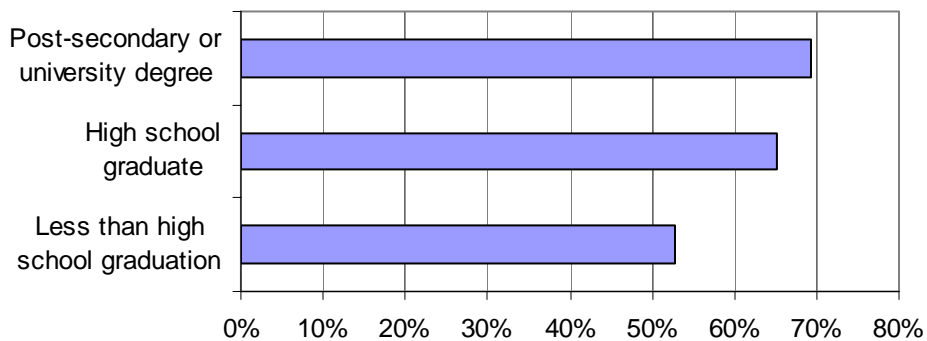
**Figure 1. Percentage of working-age people (15-64 years) employed in 1998, by level of education**

Source: National Population Health Survey 1998



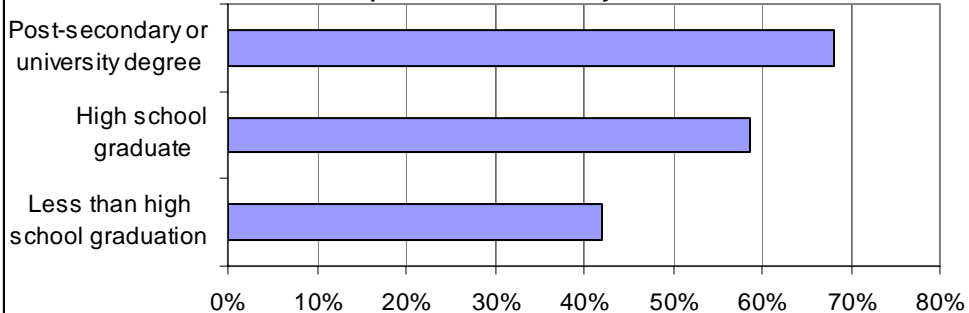
**Figure 2. Percentage of Canadians (15 yrs +) in excellent or very good health, by level of education**

Source: National Population Health Survey, 1998

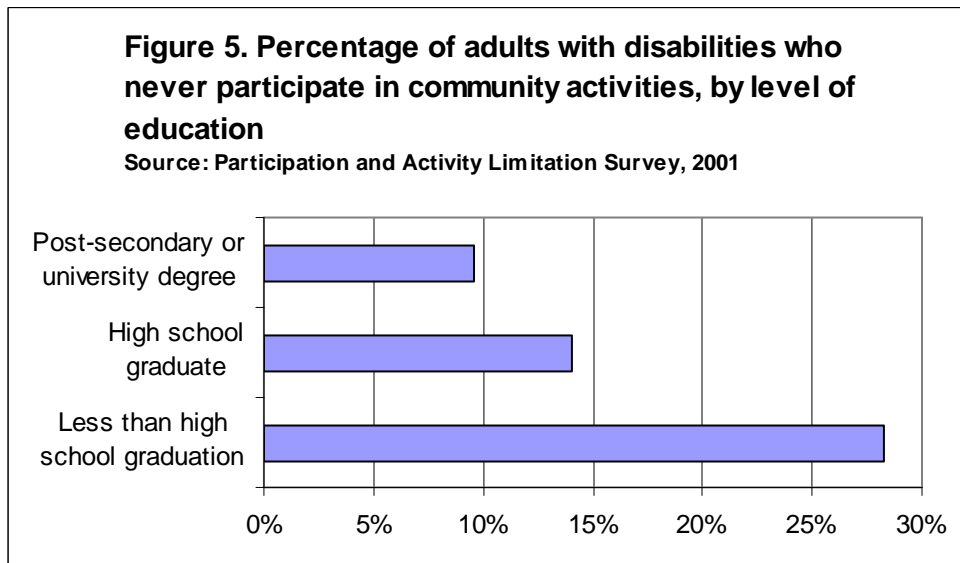
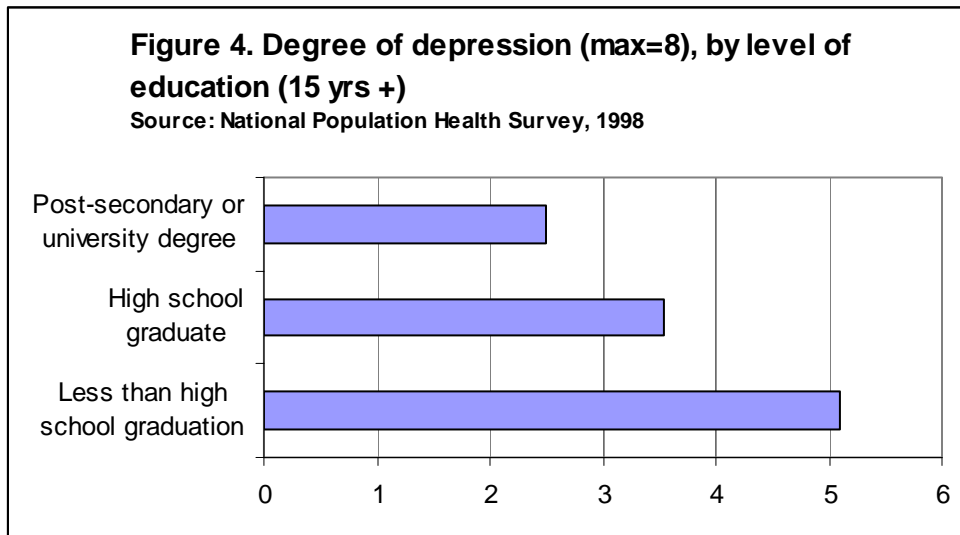


**Figure 3. Percentage of Canadians (15 yrs +) with incomes in the highest two quintiles, by level of education**

Source: National Population Health Survey 1998



\*A quintile is defined as one-fifth of the total population.



\*Community activities are defined as ones that involve people other than immediate family or friends, such as volunteering, doing hobbies outside the home, attending sporting or cultural events (e.g., plays, movies), taking personal interest courses, visiting museums, libraries, or national or provincial parks. Shopping, physical activities and travel for business or personal reasons have not been included.

## B. Defining Inclusive Education

For the purpose of the National Summit, inclusive education was defined as arrangements that ensure that teachers have the instructional and other supports to:

- welcome and include all learners, in all of their diversity and exceptionalities, in the regular classroom, in the neighbourhood school with their age peers:

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- foster the participation and fullest possible development of all learners' human potential; and
  - foster the participation of all learners in socially valuing relationships with diverse peers and adults.

Where a student, regardless of disability, needs individualized attention and support from their teacher to address difficulties with the curriculum on any given day, it should be for as brief a period of time as possible with an active plan to reintegrate the student back into the regular classroom as soon as possible with appropriate supports for the teacher and student.

### **C. Inclusive Education Matters**

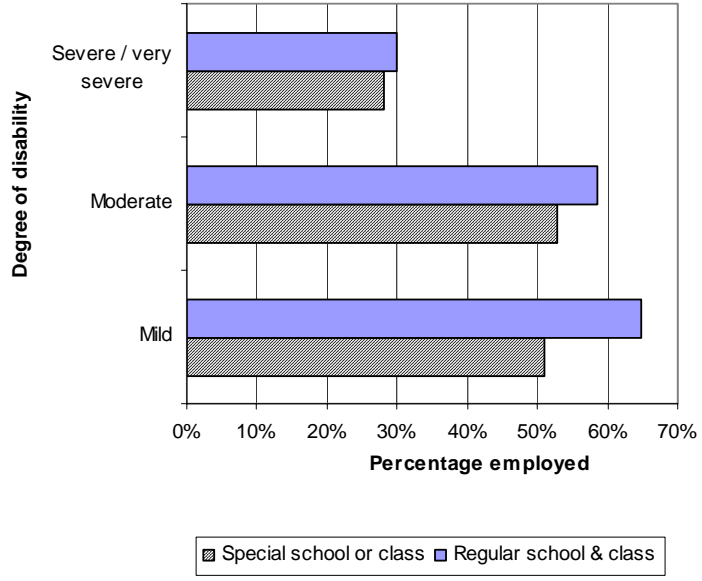
It matters whether education is inclusive. People disabled before completing their schooling, and who have been educated in regular rather than special education programs, are more likely to be involved in the paid labour force later in life. The trend generally holds up regardless of the nature or severity of disability (Figures 6 – 7).<sup>1</sup>

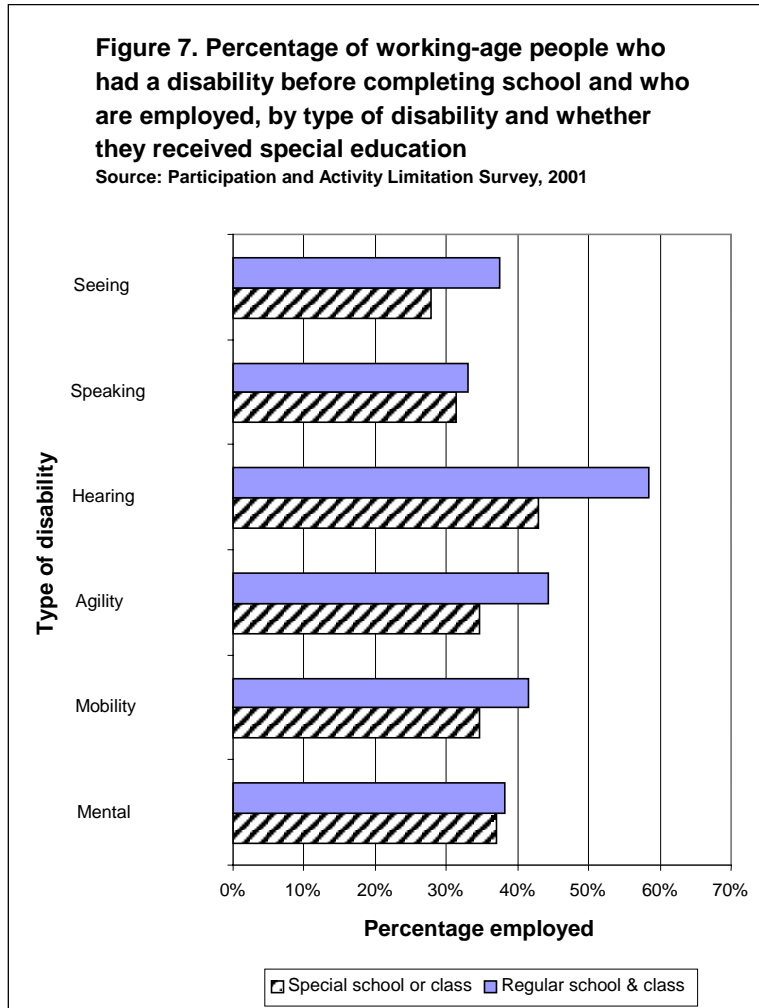
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<sup>1</sup> Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) data are similar to findings based on the Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS) of 1991.

**Figure 6. Percentage of working-age people who had a disability before completing school and who are employed, by degree of disability and whether they received special education**

Source: Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001





#### D. CACL’s Interest in Inclusive Education

CACL has made inclusive education a key priority because CACL considers it to be a matter of rights, to contribute to healthy child development and to be a necessary condition for favourable outcomes later in life (income, higher education, employment, relationships).

CACL has advocated for inclusive education since the early 1980’s in part because traditional special education for ‘special needs students’ has not met the goals that family members in the CACL federation have for their children. As well, inclusion is a key value more generally, particularly in a country of immigrants like Canada, a country that is increasingly a ‘diverse and inclusive community’.

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CACL sees the inclusion of all children, including those with intellectual disabilities and other 'exceptionalities', in the local school in regular classes with their peers is an essential component for securing a nurturing and fulfilling life in the family and the community. Accordingly, a goal is to foster neighbourhood schools with the capacity and commitment to successfully educate all the children who live in the community.

To further inclusive education, CACL has undertaken a range of national and regional Initiatives. For instance, in 2000 it established a Joint Working Group on Inclusive Education with The Roeher Institute. It held a national conference in 2002 that focused on inclusive education. It has participated as a regional partner in various regional/provincial forums, including:

- Atlantic Forum – January 2002
- Western Canada Forum on Teacher Education – March 2003
- National Forum on Research into Inclusive Education – March 2003
- Saskatchewan Forum – November 2003
- Northern Forum (Whitehorse) – March 2004
- Ontario Forums – October 2003 and April 2004
- PEI Forum – September 2004
- Manitoba Forum – October 2004

CACL has also engaged with the following national partners on inclusive education:

- Canadian Educational Association
- Council of Ministers of Education
- Canadian Home and School Federation
- Canadian Association of Deans of Education
- Canadian Teachers' Federation

CACL has been supporting The Roeher Institute's development of statistical and other indicators of inclusion and the development of a Canadian research network on inclusive education, co-led by The Roeher Institute and the

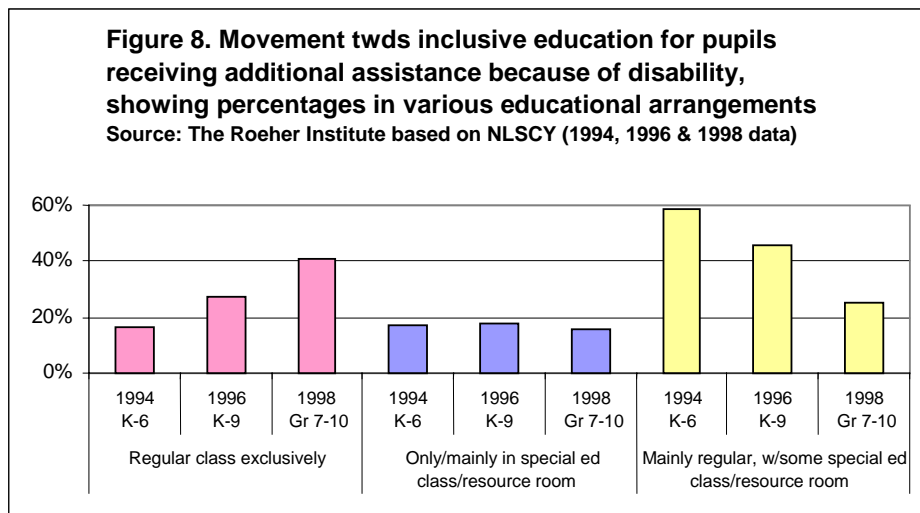
Vice President – Academic at the University of Prince Edward Island. CACL has also been developing a national inclusive education strategy and has promoted summer institutes on the issue.

### E. Today’s Reality

Participants at the National Summit discussed the general situation of inclusive education in Canada and issues for students, families and teachers. They addressed many of the same themes that were identified in a recent review of the Canadian research literature (Crawford, 2005).

#### General situation

In recent years there does seem to have been progress in the extent to which children and youth are educated in regular versus special class placements (Figure 8).



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While inclusion is increasingly accepted as the preferred approach for educating all learners, multiple approaches to education continue in many areas of the country. Implementation of inclusive practices is inconsistent from province to province, community to community, between school systems (e.g., English, French, Public, Catholic) and even between schools in the same community and system. The inconsistency of approach has resulted in confusion and uncertainty among parents and teachers. In response parents, educators and government officials are searching for greater coherence and consistency of approach in the interests of ensuring high quality, inclusive education for all learners.

*“There is a lot of inconsistency in the kinds of opportunities that students with disabilities get in secondary school.”*

*“The devolution of the system has resulted in a ‘nobody can fix this!’ situation.”*

*“There’s much disparity across provinces around what the standards are – very confusing and unfair.”*

– Participants at the National Summit

The special education policy and philosophical context that prevails in most jurisdictions fails to assure the commitment of teachers and principals to inclusion. In many parts of the country, inclusive education is considered an ‘add on’ so it remains vulnerable in many faculties of education and school systems and may not be a priority at all. Participants at the National Summit identified that it is difficult for people committed to inclusion to practice it in the special education policy and program context.

The special education model continues to prevail in part because the positive contributions that inclusive practices can make to efforts at general school improvement have not been widely recognized.

As well, in the field of education, inclusion is only one among many issues vying for the attention of political leaders, government officials and leaders at the school district and individual school levels.

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Effective strategies are not widely in place to foster transitions from early childhood programming to school, from elementary to high school and from high school to employment or to other post-secondary options. For many students who do graduate from high school, there is no clear recognition of skills gained or academics learned as conditions for gaining access to post-secondary programs.

Accountability regimes have been characterized as “accounting regimes” because they seem in many cases to be preoccupied with funding and to bear little relation to good educational practice and student outcomes.

### **Issues for students and families**

Young people with intellectual and other disabilities continue to be denied access to regular education in many cases. ‘Zero tolerance’ and other behavioural policies are resulting in the exclusion of students, especially those who express frustration and other difficulties through ‘challenging behaviours’.

Procedures for student assessment and labelling create administrative burdens for teachers while creating stigma for students.

Procedures for gaining access to disability-specific supports (e.g., attendants, speech specialists, assistive technologies) and other resources needed for success in regular classrooms are typically restrictive and not available on an equitable basis; students with similar needs often receive very different levels of support in the educational system, if any support at all. There are serious concerns in many parts of the country about the inadequacy and inflexibility of the supports that are available and about the long delays in securing the supports that may eventually come on stream. Similarly, alternative student testing and other accommodations for students are not assured.

Parents have a key role to play as supporters of their children and as collaborators with teachers in the educational process. However, concerns have been raised about parents’ lack of substantive involvement. In many cases the education system relegates parents to a ‘token’ role.

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## Issues for teachers

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are burdensome for many teachers and teachers typically have only limited background in this area. The practical usefulness of IEPs is highly questionable where they do not inform and guide instructional practices, which in many cases they do not.

There is confusion among teachers and educational assistants about their respective roles and responsibilities. Teachers often leave the prime responsibility for educating students with significant disabilities to teacher assistants. However, assistants should be playing a supplementary, not a lead, role.

*“At the university level, roles and responsibilities of TA’s [teacher assistants] need to be addressed. There are TA’s now who are doing full programs for students with disabilities. There are teachers who leave university and enter teaching without ever having contact with a TA.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

Pre-service and in-service professional development on issues of inclusion is by no means assured; teachers need more and better professional development, incentives for undertaking the professional development and recognition for having done so.

Instructional supports for teachers on inclusion (e.g., learning resources, sample lesson plans, etc.) are also needed. Yet concerns have been expressed about the lack of availability and even inappropriateness of such supports.

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### III. Addressing the Issues

In order to address these and other issues, teachers, parents and students need various supports. The following discussion brings into the foreground some of the key supports that participants at the National Summit identified.

#### A. Supports for Teachers

##### Vision

Model schools need to be created that are communities of learners and that ask all children to become contributing citizens. There needs to be system-level commitment to meeting all the values and diversities that are present in the regular classroom. There is also a need for system commitment to meeting diverse pedagogical challenges (e.g., children with autism, Tourette Syndrome, etc.)

*“Neighbourhood schools are key in larger jurisdictions so the numbers of ‘special needs’ students don’t pool into an overwhelming ‘burden’ or ‘segregated’ population.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

##### Legislation, policy and guidelines

Legislation and ministry level policy can create a political mandate to make inclusion work and can generate political support for teachers from the provincial and district levels. Governing structures need to be ‘teacher friendly’ and should deal with issues such as student– teacher ratios. Ministries and

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school districts should also provide teachers with practical assistance in meeting the expectations of the curriculum and other government standards.

### **Resource allocation and use**

Adequate resources are needed to keep class sizes manageable and to ensure the availability of teacher assistants, other supportive professionals, classroom equipment, etc. Approaches to securing resources shouldn't require student labelling or competition among schools.

### **Best practices for classroom instruction**

Various measures are needed to foster 'best practices', such as:

- Examples of effective peer relationships in the classroom.
- Model frameworks for successful inclusion.
- Time away from teaching duties for IEP development and instructional planning.
- Provision to enable teachers to develop shared approaches to meeting the instructional challenges they are facing.
- Creation of school-based problem solving teams that involve administrators, teachers, resource teachers, teacher assistants, parents and, where applicable, siblings.
- Teachers' use of differentiated instruction, multi-level instruction and cooperative learning and teacher-access to the professional development needed to ensure proficiency in these instructional approaches.

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- Transition strategies to familiarize the new teacher with the incoming class.
  - Arrangements to enable the regular classroom teacher to occasionally co-teach with the resource teacher.

As well, there is a need for teacher-to-teacher mentoring support (especially for recent graduates), the sharing of ideas and successes between schools, examples of 'out of the box' thinking and planning, and teacher assistants who are trained, skilled and available to support rather than supplant the regular teacher.

### **Professional Development**

In support of teachers, professional development is needed that is integrated into the regular teacher-training curriculum. There is a need for more and ongoing in-service training. Such training should include teacher assistants and substitute teachers.

As well, teachers would benefit from opportunities to see successful models of inclusion in practice and to meet with and listen to adults with disabilities who are leading successful lives.

### **Partnership, teamwork and collaboration**

System measures and local schools should provide support and encouragement for team teaching approaches, collaborative problem solving, weekly team meetings, etc. Such approaches and meetings should involve parents and other professionals.

Intentional measures are required to foster collegial relationships between teachers and families. As well, teachers should be encouraged and expected to welcome the expertise of students (e.g., those with disabilities; their schoolmates) and of external consultants with particular expertise.

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Inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral collaboration is also necessary (e.g., between ministries and people responsible for programming in the areas of health, social services, labour and education).

*"I'm not sure there is a sector you **don't** need to be involved with".*

– A participant at the National Summit

### **Public awareness and discourse**

To support the efforts of teachers, there is a need for other stakeholders in education to help cultivate positive public perceptions about the value of inclusion, especially among parents of children and youth without disabilities.

Community awareness and practical support also needs to be increased concerning transitional issues for young people moving from school into work, into post-secondary education or into other options after completing high school.

### **Knowledge base for effective practices**

Politicians need background on successful inclusive practice so they can manage from 'best case' rather than 'worst case' scenarios.

Parents can share in-depth knowledge with teachers about the particular strengths, needs and support issues concerning their children.

Teacher candidates need exposure to diverse learning styles and instructional strategies. Teachers more generally need educational leave for research and knowledge development.

Universities should be conducting research on inclusive practices and making it available in ways that are accessible to teachers.

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## **Linking policy to practice**

Flexibility of curriculum and testing is needed so teachers can adapt these to the needs, interests and abilities of diverse learners. Instead of relying solely on standardized tests, recognition of parallel/alternative learning outcomes is necessary. Procedures for grading and certification should make it possible for teachers to enable students to move onto post-secondary education and other opportunities after leaving school.

However, while flexibility is needed, 'real teaching' is needed for 'real learning' instead of, in the words of one Summit participant, "just field trips" and similar activities.

## **Advocacy**

Instead of competing or being at odds with one another, teachers and parents need to be more mutually supportive of one another. Parents can continue do their part to advocate for quality, inclusive programs for their children while also advocating for the supports teachers need in order to ensure success for their children.

## **Leadership**

There was general agreement at the National Summit that teachers need the support of political and other leaders such as district and school administrators. Said one participant, "You're not going to get anything you need as a teacher if there is no political support or will."

As well, other students can be given responsibility to be leaders within the class and school, a point that several young people stressed at the Summit.

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## **B. Supports for Parents**

### **Vision**

The general point was made that parents need to be supported in order to “see how and to say how” their children can develop in their learning and academic potential.

### **Legislation, policy and guidelines**

Parents often lack information regarding policies, programs and politics. Schools can provide this information.

As well, provincial policy could establish parental involvement and collaboration as the practice norm and expect schools to facilitate such involvement.

### **Partnership, teamwork and collaboration**

Teachers and school leaders need to do their part to create a climate of trust, open communication, friendliness and supportive listening with parents and should provide accurate information to parents.

As a general tack, educators could start off with positive feedback for parents about their children before trying to address issues that aren't going so well. Teachers should deal with difficult issues in a timely way and not wait until they escalate into major issues.

Teachers can help build peer support and solidarity among students so parents can ‘pull back’ a little and count on students to provide some assistance and other inputs.

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## Advocacy

While parents need to be realistic – teachers are usually dealing with more than 30 students in a class – they also need to have high expectations and to expect that their children will be nurtured and safe. Parents may benefit from regular contact with other parents and support from agencies for advocacy.

A classmate may step forward to demonstrate that he/she has the strength and energy to become an advocate. Parents should be attentive to this potential support.

*“Nothing about us without us [parents]. There is a lot of programming and professional development that goes on without parents. As a parent, if I want to be in the group, then I should be – in the planning, discussion and implementation. Don’t do things around me.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

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## C. Supports for Students

### Vision

To support students with disabilities, school leaders should foster school communities of acceptance, belonging and understanding and should model and foster positive attitudes towards all students.

*“The ideal is that everyone has the right to be educated. The expectations are that children will be citizens and able to take part, [will have] friends, good relationships, respect for their needs. She will be listened to, be heard [and be] able to participate in whatever way she can. Education should not be about generating ‘the best’ through competition.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

### Resource allocation and use

Adequate financial and human resources are needed to ensure the availability of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other supportive professionals who can assist in furthering the child’s independence. Timely supports are needed so students can participate effectively. Financial assistance should be available for children/ families where needed to offset the costs of supports.

*“Cost-sharing between ministries can work but ... needs to be clearly defined.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

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## Best practices for classroom instruction

Ideally, teachers would be doing a range of things in support of students with disabilities. These include:

- Establishing supportive, creative, flexible learning environments. Teachers should be attentive to their students' distinct learning styles, their interests and their passions.
- Engaging students in active, meaningful participation, making education fun and enjoyable.
- Taking 'ownership' for student outcomes and for delivering on the expectations of parents and school administrators.

*“Effective strategies that work best for our students with special needs will work effectively with all students...Every child in the classroom has unique learning needs and will benefit from the expertise developed by the classroom teacher in diverse teaching methods. Multi-level teaching, differentiated instruction and a knowledge of different learning styles will best achieve the highest potential for all students.”*

*“We need templates or units that are built for them [teachers]. Something from the Ministries – models ... to help them.”*

– Participants at the National Summit

For their part, parents need to feel that it's 'okay' to let their children make mistakes and find their own way (e.g., the 'dignity of failure' as an important way to learn).

As with teachers, parents should have more opportunities to see best practices and good models of inclusion in action.

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## **Partnership, teamwork and collaboration**

Especially in high school, students should be actively engaged in developing their own Individual Education Plan. Others involved in the process should show respect for and make efforts to accommodate students' needs and strengths, including acknowledgement of behaviour-as-communication.

To foster a general climate of teamwork and support for students, teachers can allow for / facilitate peer support. They should also draw upon the expertise and insight of other professionals and paraprofessionals as required.

## **Public awareness and discourse**

Ideally, measures would be in place at the community level to tackle ignorance about disability and to address discrimination. Measures would also be in place address public attitudes that favour separate education for students with disabilities. Specific community concerns and myths need to be addressed that may find their way into the school environment, such as that students with disabilities will “get all the money”.

Other students should have good information about disability and chances for open dialogue and to ask questions.

## **Linking policy to practice**

Where students need individualized approaches, any individualized planning should drive instructional practice. The IEP should serve as a real guide; more than ‘lip service’ to individual planning is needed.

*“IEPs need to ‘grow’ with the child; all staff need to be aware of the plan for the specific child. Keep everyone in school aware of IEP and keep it meaningful over time and age appropriate.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

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## Advocacy

Teachers and parents should try to facilitate access to advocates who can help students and should respect and foster student self-advocacy.

*“The use of peers in schools is hugely under-utilized. They can be excellent advocates for students with special needs.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

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## **IV. Implications for Training and Professional Development**

### **A. Pre-service**

Participants at the National Summit flagged several general challenges in education that are having a bearing on teacher preparation and professional practice. These include the swing back to the '3-Rs', accountability frameworks, academic achievement-focus in education, the ranking of school achievement and increased interest in Charter schools and private schools. Participants noted that getting parents involved is challenging in some cases. Also challenging is changing general attitudes and instilling or reinforcing the perception that inclusion need not take away from the education of other pupils.

Positive developments and opportunities concerning pre-service training are the emerging awareness that inclusive education strategies are excellent teaching strategies that can meet all children's needs. Assessments are placing increased emphasis on student strengths instead of focusing primarily on limitations and labels. Many teacher candidates have come through an inclusive elementary and secondary system and so are more familiar than earlier generations of teachers with young people with disabilities. As well, there is a growing recognition that something has to change in teacher education – improvements are needed to address diversity in the classroom.

Among those improvements, teacher candidates in pre-service training need to learn strategies for dealing with students with diverse abilities and needs rather than teaching to a label. Mentoring of beginning teachers in this area is valuable.

As collaboration is important for inclusion, teacher candidates need to learn about this in pre-service training.

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The role of the educational assistant has to be addressed in pre-service programs for future teachers and assistants. Both need to understand one another's roles and responsibilities and how to work effectively together.

Strong leadership at universities is needed to make changes in pre-service curricula.

*“Rather than teaching teachers all about different labels, we need to teach teachers how to respond to educationally-driven needs. For example, many of the strategies helpful for identified children such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Autism are helpful for most if not all students.”*

*“If teachers don't have those skills [for inclusive practice], and many of them don't, they need to find those skills from other teachers, mentors, consultants....”*

– Participants at the National Summit

## **B. Ongoing professional development**

Realistically, pre-service training alone cannot fully prepare teacher candidates for the student diversity and pedagogical challenges they will face in the classroom. Ongoing professional development on inclusion is needed.

Generally speaking, professional development is valued in education. School-based professional development initiatives have been successful in many instances and should be expanded and profiled.

There are examples where parents' and other family members' knowledge has been well-utilized and appreciated in the professional development process. Teachers' unions, universities and government departments have also worked well together as a team in promoting inclusive education.

While there have been positive developments in ongoing professional development on inclusive education, one Summit participant pointed out that 'one-shot' professional development is not as effective as professional development offered over time. For that, sustained funding is needed.

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Teacher attitudes need to be brought into line to more fully appreciate and value the importance of ongoing professional development. In order to achieve this, measures may be needed to alleviate teacher stress. Where collective agreements create real or imagined disincentives for teachers to take part in professional development, those features of the agreements need to be addressed. Encouragement and practical commitment to ongoing professional development needs to be fostered at all levels – province/territory, district and school.

For professional development to be effective, parents should be included in the professional development team. Parents themselves may need access to development so that lessons in the classroom can be enforced at home.

As well, parents may need other development so they can think creatively about their children’s futures and how education can further those futures.

Sharing of effective models of inclusion and best practices is a key dimension of professional development.

There is a need for teachers to be trained over the long term on how to effectively use the teaching assistant / educational assistant. The point was made at the Summit that the capabilities of these assistants are not being fully tapped.

*“Not everyone hears the same information; there are communication issues around the availability and usefulness of PD [professional development].”*

– A participant at the National Summit

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## V. Implications for Leadership in Education and Society

One of the participants at the Summit made the point that the single most important feature of an inclusive school is the attitude of the school leader or supervisor. Said another participant at the National Summit, “In my work as a family support worker in the Early Childhood field, parents will try to get to a school where they know that the principal’s mind is open to inclusion.”

Conference participants also noted that leadership is not only about individuals operating in isolation. Said one participant, “The talents of the people with you are also a part of the leadership – parents, school board, teachers.” Said another, “Welcoming happens with a collaborating team that brainstorms and problem solves.”

*“In my work as a family support worker in the Early Childhood field, parents will try to get to a school where they know that the principal’s mind is open to inclusion.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

Participants flagged the need for leadership at multiple levels. For example, young people with disabilities should be encouraged to take up leadership roles in self-advocacy. Other students can be encouraged in their advocacy and supportive efforts for students with disabilities. Some participants pointed to the need for leadership in faculties of education and one participant pointed to the impetus that the provincial Premier had given to inclusion in New Brunswick. Ideally, leadership at senior political and professional levels would be more common.

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*“If the Dean of Education is not on board, nothing will happen”.*

*“We need strong leadership in School Trustees ...[and] Human Rights Commissions.”*

*“We need leadership at a higher level – in the governments – not just the [School] Board.”*

– Participants at the National Summit

While leaders will set a positive tone, clarify expectations and require accountability, leadership is not simply a matter of telling others what to do. It involves working with others, providing encouragement and rewarding progress.

*“Accountability – not in terms of testing and scores, but talking about and making sure that, if governments say, ‘This is the policy’, then schools have the ability to carry out what needs to be done – setting expectations, celebrating successes...actively dialoguing about what is working. It’s not real expensive to the government to make the changes. [Governments should] move ahead...[if] not quickly, at least forward.*

*“We have a [provincial] framework of inclusiveness. In School Divisions, we have contracts with someone to put processes and policies in place, working with Divisions on where they need to go – not telling them what to do. [We] reward approximations. Boards are trying and doing little bits – good actions, best practices. There should be incentives, some mechanism to reward good work.”*

– Participants at the National Summit

Despite the fact that education is within the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, some participants at the Summit called for ‘national standards’ and other measures that seemed to call for the direct involvement of the federal government in education. Other participants indicated that, while a pan-Canadian approach is needed, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada might be a

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more suitable place to vest overall leadership responsibilities. Others saw an ancillary funding and leadership role for the federal government.

*“The federal government could take the lead in definition [of inclusive education] and policy.”*

*“The idea of a national policy has to be cautioned because education is in the area of provincial legislation. The federal government could provide funds to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.”*

*“Concentrate on what’s ‘out there’. For example the Early Years [initiative] built a federal responsibility and became inclusive. Can we not move there with public education as well?”*

*“This should begin with the Council of Ministers – a first step.”*

– Participants at the National Summit

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## **VI. Future Directions**

Throughout the National Summit, participants generated many ideas for future directions. There were concerns that the message and reality of inclusion is likely to be ‘watered down’ in face of the many other pressing issues that need to be addressed in education. Despite this concern, on the last day of the Summit participants brought forward what they considered to be key priorities, many of which require near-term attention.

Owing to time constraints the issue of ‘who does what?’ was not tackled in detail at the Summit. Generally, however, Summit participants acknowledged that a range of stakeholders have their own roles to play yet also need to find ways of working together (e.g., parents, students, teachers, principals, other supportive professionals, government officials, teacher and parent organizations, etc.) Individually and together stakeholders could pursue the following:

### **A. Public Awareness-Raising**

- Broadly disseminate ‘success stories’ about inclusive education to raise public awareness. Publicly acknowledge successes as a means of encouraging more of the same.
- Utilize a social marketing approach to increase public awareness of inclusion using T.V. vignettes, ads, etc.
- Use plain language in communicating about inclusive education.
- Revive and foster greater awareness of events such as the ‘National Inclusive Education Week’.

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## **B. Professional and Broader Capacity Development**

- Develop and disseminate a compendium that provides practical examples of good practice.
- Increase the number of professional development days for teachers.
- Foster professional development that involves the sharing of success stories and best practices. This could include inviting speakers to professional development initiatives and conferences and convening panels to show how inclusion is working at the district level.
- Include self-advocates as speakers in professional development who can speak about issues of institutionalization and schooling.
- Raise parental awareness about the need for professional development for teachers.
- Include parents as valued equals in professional development.
- Provide professional development that keeps stakeholders coming back to the basic issue of what the child needs and what the teacher needs to effectively support that child to learn.
- Generally speaking, develop, manage, share and apply information on inclusive education.

## **C. Networking and Alliances**

- Develop a 'Sharing Network' to keep the momentum going that was established at the National Summit.

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- Create more opportunities for stakeholders to meet and discuss as they did at the National Summit.
  - Bring stakeholders on board (groups and individuals) who may not feel an immediate personal stake in inclusive education but who must be made aware of the benefits of inclusion in order to advance this agenda.

*"We are ... a small voice; we have to talk with as much unity as possible."*

*"Build a 'big coalition' where all groups in society are talking about inclusion for all types of people – learning disabilities, community living, race relations..."*

*"[There] have to be many more youth involved in the inclusion movement."*

*"Greater linkages with family networks."*

*"We need to bring in other ethnicities. Parents from different ethnic backgrounds in BC do not understand inclusion and we don't have their input."*

– Participants at the National Summit

#### **D. Leadership**

- Foster and support 'champions of inclusion'.

*"If you do not have a [supportive] Board, or an administrator does not buy into inclusive education, it doesn't happen. We've done a lot with very little."*

*"Engage Members of Parliament and members of provincial legislatures on issues of inclusive education and disability. See the 'Adopt an MLA/MP' program from Saskatchewan but include all political parties. Work to ensure that inclusive education is a plank in all parties' platforms."*

*"...reaffirmation from federal and provincial governments that inclusion is what we expect. We have gotten away from that."*

– Participants at the National Summit

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## E. Collaboration

- Show how parents and teacher bargainers can work together to develop contractual guarantees for the provision of quality, inclusive education services for all children.
- Create more opportunities for stakeholders to strategize on inclusive education.

*“... Teachers work in isolation – they need opportunities to be involved in conversations such as we are having at this Summit.”*

– A participant at the National Summit

## F. Role Definitions

- Develop a model job description for a registered ‘special educational assistant / nurse practitioner’ to do work that crosses job lines.
- Develop a role model that includes specialist non-enrolling teachers<sup>2</sup> who have responsibility for promoting the inclusion of children.
- Work towards developing a national standard for the training of teacher assistants.

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., teacher-librarians, resource room teachers, English as Second Language (ESL) teachers, counsellors, learning assistance teachers.

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## G. Resource Allocation

- Find ways of safeguarding targeted funds for inclusion without stigmatizing students or overburdening teachers in the process.

*“Teachers often fear losing their TA’s. Without having the extra help, the students with disabilities would not be in the regular classroom.”*

*“We need the recognition of the supports that are required to bring life to the existing documents [IEPs], so teachers have adequate time to meet with the people they need to meet with, otherwise it ends up on teachers’ own time.”*

*“Getting principals on board through financial incentives. In [name of a community] the school could use the funds to support the rest of the school. The support worker is tied to the classroom teacher not the child, so that extra professional helps all students...As long as the needs of the child [with a disability] are met, principals need to see how it is going to benefit the entire school.”*

– Participants at the National Summit

## H. Fostering Human Rights, Citizenship and Inclusion

- Work toward the creation of a national education authority that would develop a national vision of education based on the rights of the child, an inclusion philosophy and the critical role of public education, that is, an authority based on the principle that inclusive public education plays an important role in building civil society.
- Encourage all provinces/territories to adopt and act upon the *UN Convention of the Rights of the Child*.
- Use a ‘human rights’ framework for advancing inclusive education.

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*“Having a national framework and a common an understanding of the basic premises of inclusion is necessary.”*

*“Basically we need all students to have an entitlement to a good education in a regular classroom, with the supports needed to make that happen successfully.”*

*“Until things are mandated, nothing changes. Sometimes we need legislation before social change can happen.”*

*“Promote a human rights framework for moving forward with inclusive education....”*

*“78% of kids expelled have special needs. We need to work on changing ‘zero tolerance’ policies and the discriminatory effect of applying the policy to students with disabilities (e.g.. students with autism). We need education around making reasonable accommodations for students and to use the research on positive behaviour supports and intervention.”*

– Participants at the National Summit

## **I. Legal Strategy**

- Mount an education rights legal strategy to support individual cases and build a stronger legal foundation for inclusive education.

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## VII. Conclusion

Participants at the National Summit on Inclusive Education spent an intensive few days together. They provided many insights into the present state of practice in Canada and generated ideas for moving an agenda forward in support of teachers, so that all pupils can learn in regular schools and classrooms.

As in any event of this size, participants had both negative and positive things to say. For instance, some were disappointed that self-advocates were not more prominent as presenters. Others felt that youth, visible minorities and people responsible for post-secondary programs were under-represented. Some were upset that ideas in support of 'special education' were expressed as these were outside the mould of what is usually expected of people who come together for an event on inclusion.

Even those concerns, however, pointed to the need for self-advocates, youth, people from visible minorities and other people who may not be regularly engaged with one another to become engaged in the public discourse and in moving forward an agenda of quality education that will support teachers to include all learners.

An encouraging sign was that many participants wanted to re-connect in a year or two to survey progress and to continue the collaboration.

Recurring themes at the Summit were the need for a common vision, more and better resources on best practices for classroom instruction, partnership and collaboration, and mutually reinforcing advocacy by various stakeholders. Other themes that strongly emerged were the need for better and more regular professional development on inclusion, better public awareness and support and stronger leadership at multiple levels.

Together such measures would help to address some of the gaps and inconsistencies in present education arrangements. Those measures would help move the system towards greater coherency in support of teachers and students.

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Such a system would be grounded on a strong base of values consistent with principles of full social inclusion, citizenship, mutual respect and human rights.

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## VIII. References

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