



Backgrounder

The Alberta Teachers' Association

Backgrounder to ATA news release dated 2014 09 10

BACKGROUND

Prompted by ongoing concerns about the state of inclusion in Alberta schools, the 2013 Annual Representative Assembly of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) passed a resolution to strike the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools in order to provide an arm's-length investigation and subsequent report on this topic of critical importance.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To review data on the current state of inclusion in Alberta schools, specifically the implementation of the *Setting the Direction Framework* and the *Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response*.
2. To recommend action to ensure that inclusion occurs in contexts that are consistent with Association policies on the education of students with special needs.
3. To report findings to Provincial Executive Council at its meeting of May 8 and 9, 2014.

BLUE RIBBON PANEL MEMBERS

Marc C Arnal (chair), former dean, Campus Saint-Jean, University of Alberta
Dorothy B Arts, school administrator, Edmonton Public Teachers Local No 37
Nancy C Grigg, Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge
Lori A Hogue, special education teacher, Calgary Public Teachers Local No 38
Carrie J Luckwell, classroom teacher, Red Deer City Local No 60
Kathy Olmstead, central office administrator, Livingstone Range School Division No 68
Carol D Henderson, past president, Alberta Teachers' Association
Joni A Turville (secretary), executive staff officer, Alberta Teachers' Association

For further information contact Laura Harris
11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5N 2R1
T 780-447-9400 or 1-800-232-7208
F 780-455-6481
www.teachers.ab.ca

PROCESS

This arm's-length panel held four face-to-face meetings and one teleconference during the 2013/14 school year to review current information on inclusion in Alberta schools. Panel members represented a broad range of perspectives in the education system, including various roles and organizations; rural, urban and suburban locations; and a range of experience. In-depth research was conducted by the University of Alberta in late 2013 and early 2014. The panel used this data to identify major themes and to recommend actions to ensure that teachers have the supports they need to create effective learning environments and that students are successful in an inclusive system.

CONTEXT

Alberta Education published the *Setting the Direction Framework* in 2009 and the *Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response* in 2010. The government accepted the 12 recommendations outlined in the *Setting the Direction Framework* and indicated that it would “develop detailed implementation and transition plans for the short, medium and longer term . . . in the context of available resources and in consultation with partners and stakeholders.”

Since that time, teachers have seen little improvement at the classroom level for students with exceptional needs, and in some cases supports have actually been reduced. Teachers are concerned that students who have special needs may be falling through the cracks. It is important that the necessary steps be taken to ensure that teachers have the supports and resources required to make inclusion meaningful and successful for all students.

The 2013/14 school year marked the second time the Association has convened a blue ribbon panel on this topic. In 1997, the report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Special Education was published. This panel identified recommendations in the areas of leadership, governance, funding and interdepartmental/interagency coordination. Although there have been shifts in the system since then, many of the concerns identified in 1997 remain today, and many new concerns have emerged.

HIGHLIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish stakeholder advisory committees at the provincial, school board and school level to develop implementation plans, guide implementation activities and reflect on evidence gathered about implementation. (Recommendations 1, 5 and 6)

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Create clear, multilevel, consistent and transparent communication regarding inclusive education. (Recommendation 3)

Provide immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding for school jurisdictions' inclusion implementation plans in cycles of five to seven years to provide the staff, resources and supports necessary to build and sustain capacity in the system. (Recommendation 8)

Provide ongoing professional development and collaboration time during the school day to allow teachers to learn about, share and develop strategies to support student learning and inclusive practices. (Recommendations 28 and 35)

Establish partnerships with postsecondary institutions with pre-service teacher education programs to conduct regular research in Alberta classrooms, determine the effectiveness of inclusion and advance this field of study. (Recommendation 17)