

# The State of Inclusion in Alberta Schools





## The Alberta Teachers' Association

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## Foreword

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So often, as teachers, we reiterate the statement that “all children can learn and achieve given time and proper supports.” I have no doubt that we believe this statement. But I would like to encourage deep reflection on what this statement means, and, more importantly, what we will do differently to enable students to be more successful.

Permit me to congratulate the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) for its attention to inclusive education here. *The State of Inclusion in Alberta Schools* is an outstanding study that will serve as a model internationally. I commend the Association for carrying on its rich tradition of excellence and leadership in education through its creation of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools. The Blue Ribbon Panel’s findings, outlined in this report, are very important and the focus on inclusion is timely.

All across the globe, teachers, politicians, community members and parents are striving to ensure that education lives up to its promise of creating a more just and harmonious society. They recognize the complexities associated with inclusion, but want more inclusive practices to prevent their children and grandchildren from falling through the cracks. In the same vein, Albertans want the best for the province’s children and youth, but will not be able to confidently say that the education system is successful until the bar is raised and achievement gaps are closed. A commitment to inclusive practices will greatly enhance the quality of education in the province.

Education is the ultimate tool of empowerment. It requires both will and skill to help students fulfill their potential. Alberta teachers fully realize this. They know that they must continue in their relentless quest to achieve excellence through equity. They want the best for their students. But there is also a broader goal. We live in one of the greatest countries in the world—one that promotes democracy, fairness and justice. We cannot afford to forget that democracy and education are inextricably intertwined: democracy is strongest where education is strongest, and publicly-funded education is the hallmark of democracy.

To my mind, this study’s focus on inclusion and its findings represent a clarion call to action. Reaching the goals and successfully implementing the strategies outlined here require a shared purpose and mission. Alberta teachers—who work with students every day and are committed to student success—have the will, skills and attitude to make it happen.

The children deserve no less.

Avis Glaze  
International Education Consultant  
Edu-quest International Inc

## Preface

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The topic of inclusion has been at the forefront for Alberta teachers for many years. In addition to offering numerous supports and services, the ATA has undertaken many research efforts over the years, including the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Special Education* (ATA 1997), a research report entitled *Success for All: The Teaching Profession's Views on the Future of Special Education in Alberta* (ATA 2009) and, most recently, the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools* (ATA 2014).

This report offers an analysis of the research done in conjunction with the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools. It builds on the panel's examination of the current context, as well as on recent Alberta studies, particularly the ATA's (2012) *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta*, which describes a comprehensive framework for educational transformation in Alberta.

The work of the panel, including this research report, is timely, as jurisdictions around the world grapple with challenges with respect to inclusion. Successful inclusion requires shifts in the system, which will take a concerted plan and sustained support. Inclusion—with its potential to create a great school for all—deserves the time, attention and resources necessary for its success.

As with all ATA research publications, this report represents a collaborative effort. Joni Turville, an executive staff officer with the ATA, who was a member of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools, was instrumental in the creation of this report. The data collection for this research activity, as well as the subsequent analysis that constitutes this report, was led by an evaluative research team, from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension, directed by Jason Daniels and Stanley Varnhagen. Working with the researchers to define the data collection instruments were members of the panel: Marc Arnal (chair), Dorothy Arts, Nancy Grigg, Lori Hogue, Carrie Luckwell, Kathy Olmstead and Carol Henderson. J-C Couture, who oversees the ATA's research projects, and administrative officer Lindsay Yakimyshyn supported the production of the final publication.

I extend a final note of thanks to the many teachers who contributed their voices to this research on inclusion. The Association will listen to these voices, and continue to inquire into and advocate for the best conditions of professional practice in Alberta schools to ensure that there is a great school for all.

Gordon R Thomas  
Executive Secretary

## Background

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Alberta's classrooms have changed dramatically, with an increasing magnitude of diversity. The education system has attempted to respond to the growing diversity by creating inclusive classroom environments that meet all students' needs. To what extent, though, has inclusive education been effectively implemented in Alberta?

### THE BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

Alberta teachers have been consistently and insistently describing the conditions of inclusion as being one of their biggest areas of concern. Responding to this concern, the ATA's 2013 Annual Representative Assembly passed a resolution to strike a Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools, which would facilitate an arm's-length investigation and report on this topic of critical importance. The panel was charged with reviewing the data on the current state of education in Alberta and making recommendations that would ensure that inclusion occurs in ways that support all learners.

### THE RESEARCH

The panel's work included a literature review focused on inclusive education, which highlighted the need for more research on inclusion in Alberta. Given the limited extant research, the panel deemed it necessary to undertake a research project on the subject in order to create relevant and effective recommendations.

In collaboration with researchers from the University of Alberta, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools conducted a study focused on better understanding the current state of inclusion in Alberta schools by gathering information from teachers and administrators. Researchers used the data collected to assist the panel in recommending ways to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

## Method

Researchers from Evaluation and Research Services at the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, were contracted to conduct a study to capture the experiences of Alberta teachers and administrators. The study, which used a mixed-methods research approach, included the following:

1. Two identical online submission tools—one for which participants were randomly selected from the active ATA membership, and one open to all ATA members who self-selected their participation. (See Appendix A.)
2. Two focus groups that took place in person—each focus group included participants with a range of teaching assignments and represented urban, suburban and rural environments. (See Appendix B.)
3. Four telephone interviews with superintendents—the interviewees were from four different areas in the province and, again, represented urban, suburban and rural environments. (See Appendix C.)

The self-selected survey link was advertised through the ATA and garnered 1,125 responses. The randomly selected sample consisted of 295 participants, for a total of 1,420 surveys completed by Alberta teachers and administrators.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and survey participants were free to skip questions or withdraw at any time until they clicked the submit button. The survey comprised a number of scale questions, in addition to several qualitative questions intended to gather more in-depth comments from respondents. Participation in the interviews and focus groups was also voluntary.

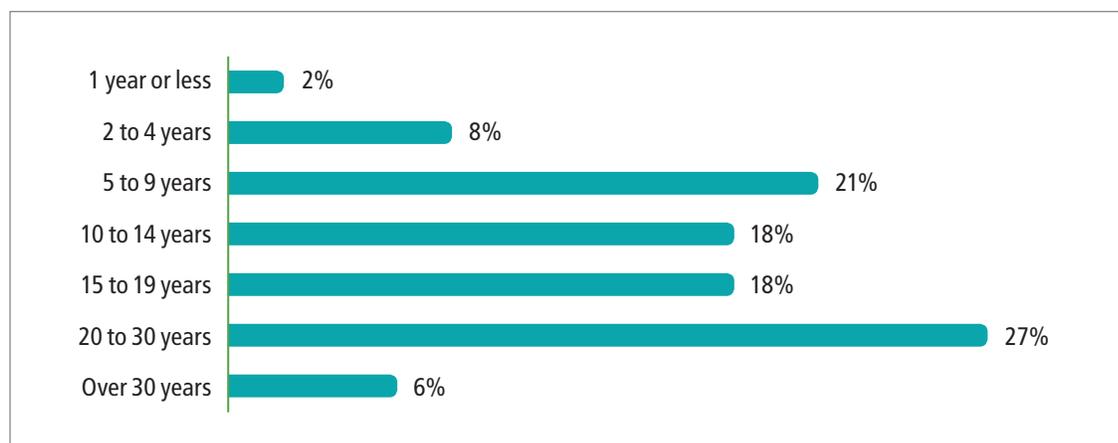
The researchers collected and analyzed the data. Descriptive statistics for all scale questions were computed, and t-tests and chi-square tests at an alpha level of 0.05 were conducted, where applicable, to test whether the differences between respondents from the randomly selected and open tools reflected statistical significance, and whether opinions from respondents from different types of schools differed statistically.

Additionally, a thematic qualitative analysis was performed on the open-ended responses. Where appropriate, comparisons were made between the ATA's 2007 Survey on the Teaching and Learning Conditions of Students with Special Needs and the results from the 2014 study. This became productive for analysis, as some of the questions from 2007 were duplicated in 2014, so, taken together, the studies' results provide information on trends over time.

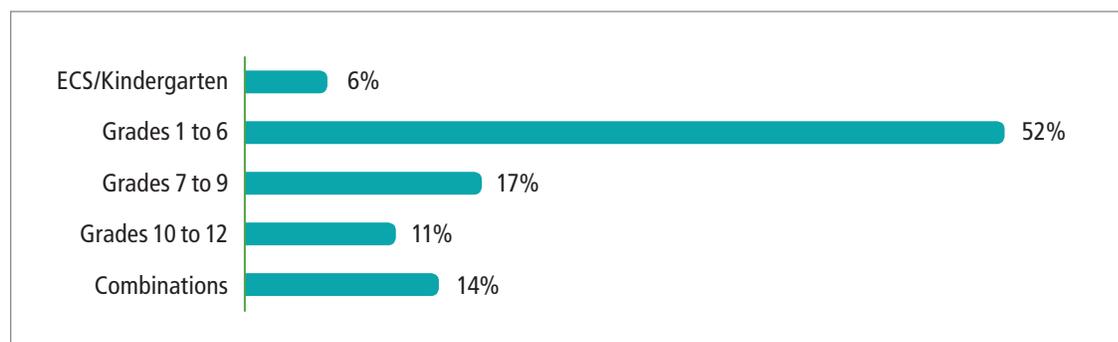
### Study Sample

The 2014 study participants represented a broad range of experiences and contexts. Only a few (10 per cent) of the participants had been teaching for less than five years, and more than half (51 per cent) had fifteen years or more of teaching experience (Figure 1). About half (52 per cent) of the teachers who completed the survey taught Grades 1–6 (Figure 2), and more than four-fifths (81 per cent) of the respondents were classroom teachers, as opposed to administrators, consultants or those with other designations. Most participants (80 per cent) were female, reflecting the teaching population in Alberta, with ages ranging mostly between 26 and 55 years old. The sample was evenly distributed between large urban (38 per cent), small urban or suburban (32 per cent) and rural (24 per cent) schools (Figure 3).

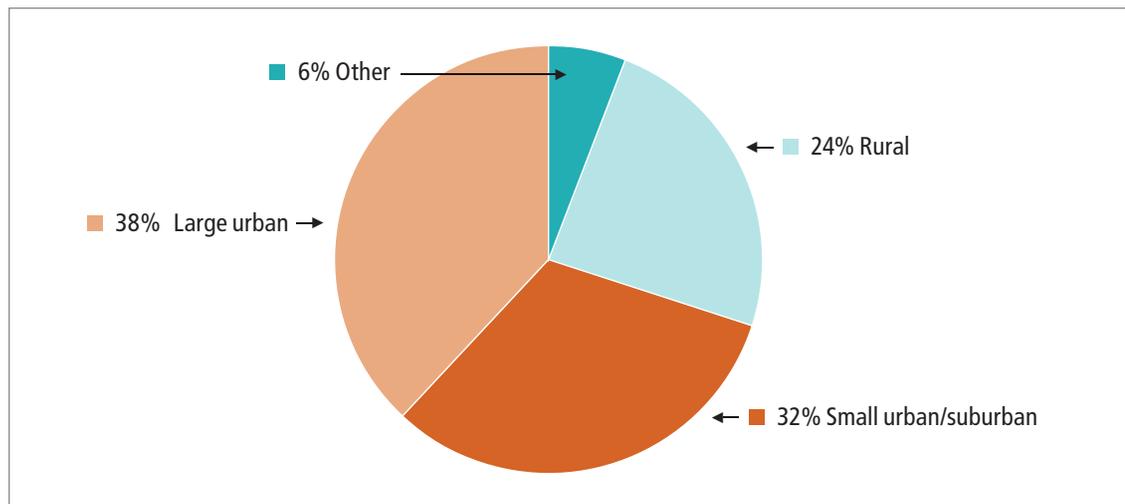
**Figure 1. Teaching experience.**



**Figure 2. Grades taught in current assignment.**



**Figure 3.** Location of schools.



### Limitations

While these findings may be helpful in setting general directions and goals, some of the specific comments may not be applicable to other contexts. The size of the survey sample was more than adequate for identifying common themes and key findings. However, because most of the respondents were self-selected, it is difficult to determine with complete certainty that the results are representative of the larger population. The similarity of responses from the random survey and from the open survey, though, increases confidence in the representativeness of the results.

### Findings

Because data from the survey and from the focus groups complement one another, the information gathered from the focus groups allowed the researchers to examine the survey findings in greater depth. Four key findings emerged from analysis of the data:

1. Classrooms are large, complex communities.
2. Supports and resources for inclusion are in decline.
3. Multiple, multifaceted supports are required.
4. Teachers value the ideals of inclusion.

The following section explores these findings in detail.

## Key Findings

### KEY FINDING 1: CLASSROOMS ARE LARGE, COMPLEX COMMUNITIES

Participants frequently described the increasing size and complexity of Alberta classrooms. The number of children with whom teachers worked varied, but the classroom size and the level and diversity of student needs clearly affect the extent to which teachers can attend to each student’s needs.

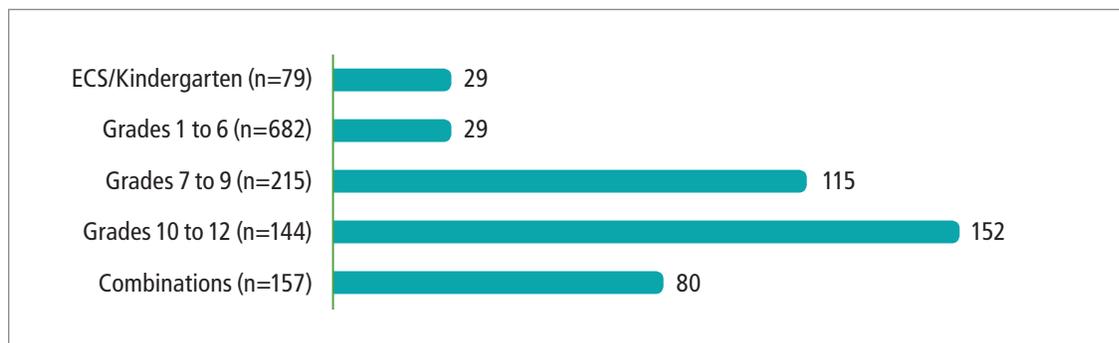
#### Class Size and Composition

Survey participants’ responses indicate large variations in class size and composition.

In Early Childhood Services (ECS) classrooms to Grade 6, participants reported teaching an average of 29 students. Those teaching Grades 7–9 worked with an average of 115 students, and those teaching Grades 10–12 worked with an average of 152 students per year (Figure 4). In addition, the 157 participants teaching in multi-age classrooms or across divisions (reflected in the Combinations category in Figure 4) reported working with an average of 80 students.

Overall, the data reveal that teachers are responsible for programming and instruction for large numbers of students each year.

**Figure 4.** Average number of students taught per year by division.

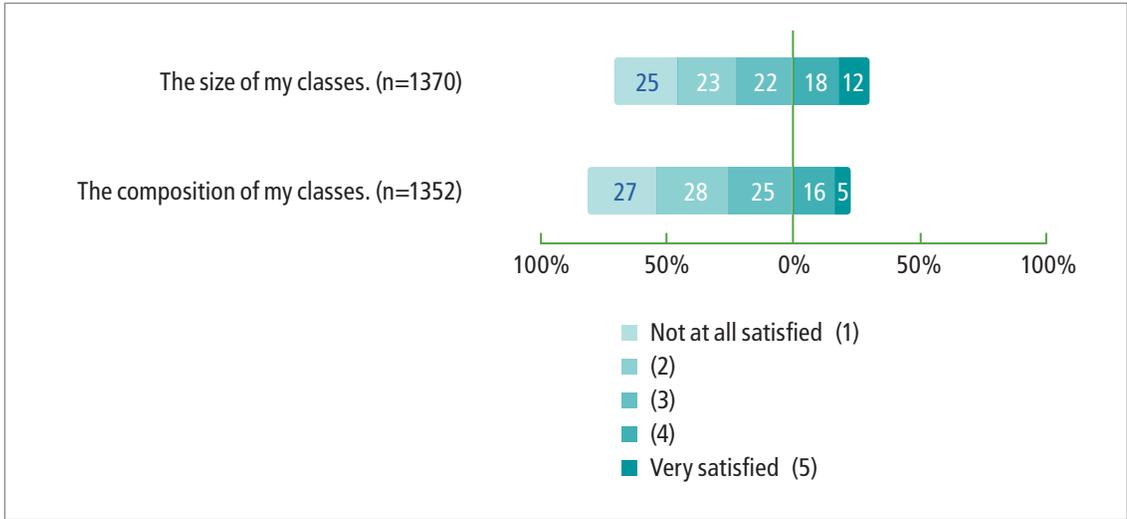


*“Classrooms right now have more students, more diverse needs, with no support, time or money. This results in teachers feeling overwhelmed, ineffective, stressed and burnt out. Many teachers are considering leaving the profession because of the current state of the education system.”*

—Study participant

In addition to class size, respondents emphasized issues associated with class composition, indicating that composition might be more problematic than size. For instance, while only 30 per cent of teachers were satisfied with class size, even fewer (21 per cent) were satisfied with classroom composition (Figure 5).

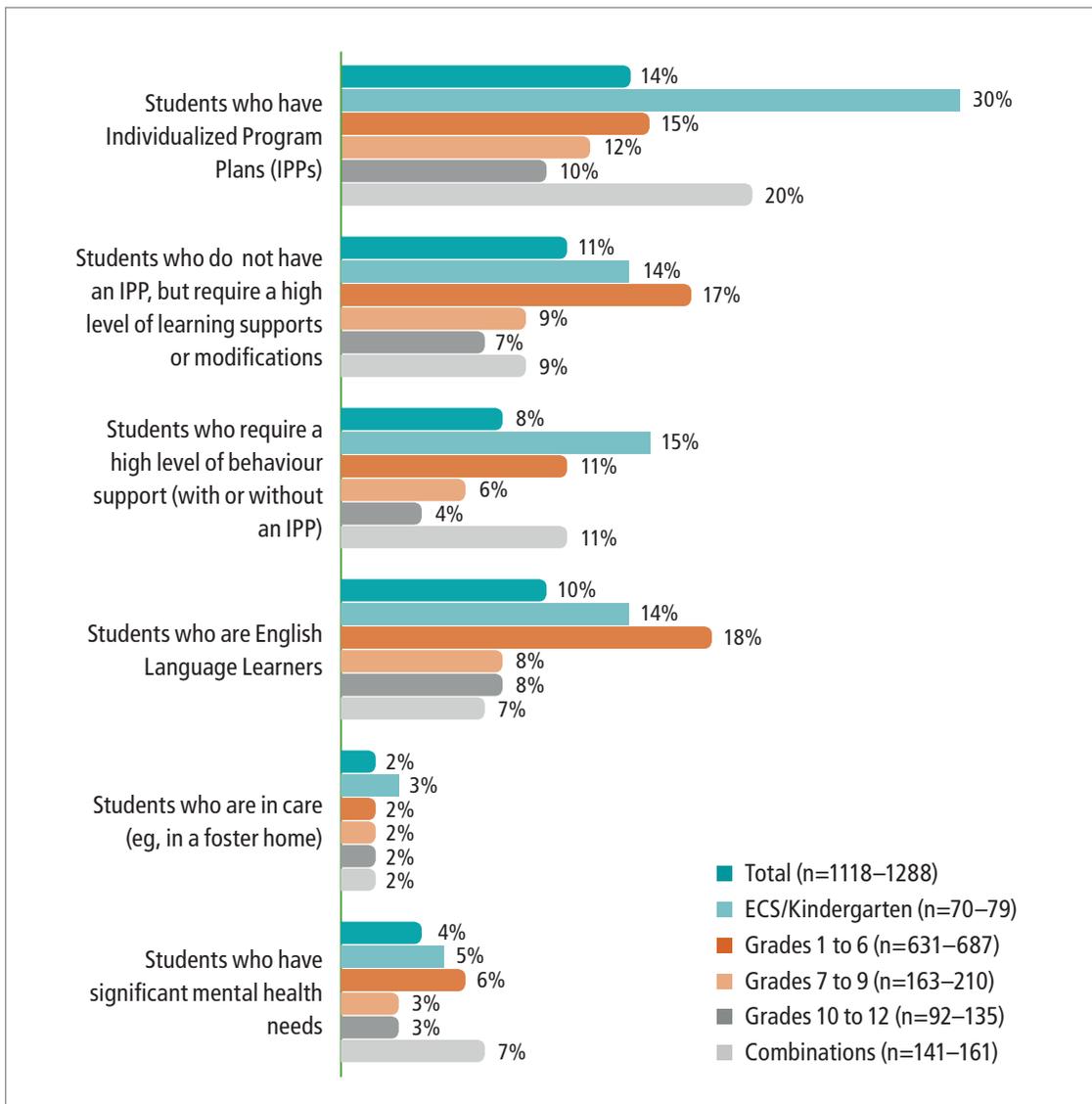
**Figure 5. Satisfaction with class size and composition.<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Five-point scale questions are reported as tornado charts, where the top two categories, representing the percentage of participants who selected responses that are considered positive, are shown on the right-hand side of the vertical axis. Participants who selected responses that are considered negative or neutral (the bottom three categories of the scale) are shown on the left-hand side.

Figure 6 indicates the complexity of Alberta classrooms, as it demonstrates the extent of students' learning needs. The numbers are also reflective of comments made in response to open-ended questions and in focus groups.

**Figure 6. Proportion of students with learning needs taught per year by division.**



The responses indicate that participants teaching ECS or kindergarten see the highest rate of students requiring support. This may be due to the integration of preschool-aged children into kindergarten through the Program Unit Funding program, as well as other factors (such as immigration and socioeconomic shifts) that are driving increased classroom complexity. The lower rates of individualized program plans (IPPs) in later grades may be due to streaming or may relate to lower high school completion rates for students with exceptional needs.

Also contributing to classroom complexity were students requiring high levels of behaviour support. Survey participants made 108 comments describing the challenges teachers face working with students with severe behaviour that disrupts learning for other students. In addition, respondents gestured to the need to support English-language learners, students in care and students with significant mental health needs. These sentiments were echoed in the focus groups.

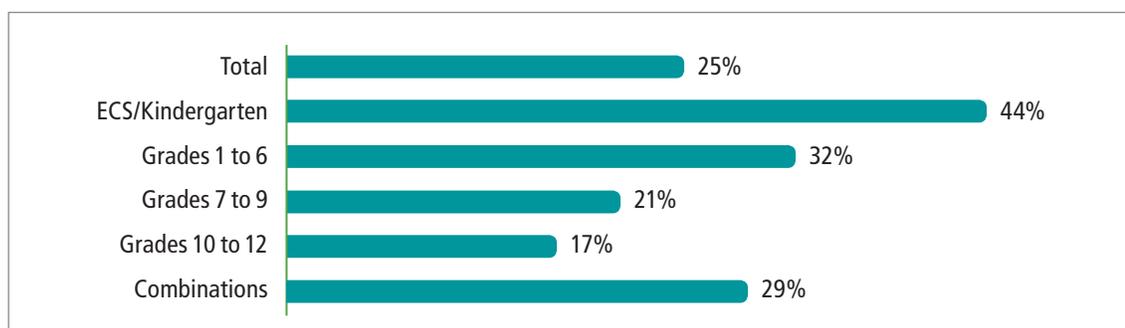
*“There are too many children in my room to provide the kind of calm and safe environment many of my students need to deal with behaviour, anxiety and learning issues they face.”*

—Study participant

### Proportion of Students with Exceptional Needs

The survey instrument asked teachers to describe how many of their students had IPPs and how many additional students required a high level of learning supports or modifications. These two values together create an important picture with regard to teachers' work to support students' needs: an average of 25 per cent of students across all grade levels—and as many as 44 per cent in ECS or kindergarten—require a high level of support (Figure 7). This translates to challenges not only for teachers but also for students.

**Figure 7.** Percentage of students requiring an IPP or a high level of learning supports or modifications.



Participants described the impacts of classroom composition, frequently linking size and complexity as they responded to open-ended questions regarding the issues associated with inclusion. Table 1 includes representative comments.

**Table 1. Exemplary comments related to class size and composition**

Category of Comment	Number of Responses	Exemplary Comments
Large class sizes	64	<p>"Class size is a huge issue. If you made my classroom have 15 students, I would be able to meet the needs of all the students with much more success, and less stress on both the teachers and students. I could take suggestions from other professionals and incorporate them into an inclusive program."</p> <p>"Too many students in one class [results in] not enough one-on-one time with the students who have more significant needs."</p> <p>"Class composition is not considered when determining class size. Twenty-five students is fine if you have no IPPs, but if you have seven IPPs that class is not manageable."</p>
Diversity of learning needs	71	<p>"If too many students with specific learning needs are in one class, there is no time to effectively program for all of them."</p> <p>"Too many needs being thrown all together into one pot. There is a lack of training. However, even with ample training, there is not enough time in the day or teachers/assistants within the class to meet the varying needs of the students in the class. Too many 'needs' are being crammed into one class and unfairly expected to be attended to."</p> <p>"The amount of diversity that already exists in a 'normal' classroom is already a challenge to meet."</p>

The size and complexity of classrooms affect teacher workload—teachers need to prepare and implement in-class supports, and complete a large amount of paperwork associated with IPPs and other modifications. Despite highlighting such challenges, participants' responses also indicate that teachers want to attend to students' diverse needs. Overall, though, the results from the survey and focus groups emphasize that classroom size and composition constitute a major factor in the capacity of schools to implement inclusion in a way that supports all learners.

*"... I would say one of our biggest challenges that we're seeing here now is the lower level of readiness. We should have 75 to 85 per cent of the kids ready to enter kindergarten in terms of reading readiness and I would say we're below 50 per cent."*

*—School Superintendent*

## KEY FINDING 2: SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES FOR INCLUSION ARE IN DECLINE

The ATA has investigated inclusive education in the past. As the government engaged in a consultation process through *Setting the Direction*, the ATA produced a research publication, *Success for All: The Teaching Profession's Views on the Future of Special Education in Alberta*, in 2009. The research consisted of focus groups and a survey (conducted in 2007) of 217 participants that investigated contemporary topics related to inclusion, including the development and implementation of IPPs and challenges with regard to the supports provided to exceptional learners. The study found that “the field of special education has been both hailed as a means of achieving equal educational opportunity and denounced as a factor contributing to injustice in education” (p 11)—this finding was one reason the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools was convened.

*“Implementation of inclusion doesn’t include the supports or spaces to make it a reality.”*

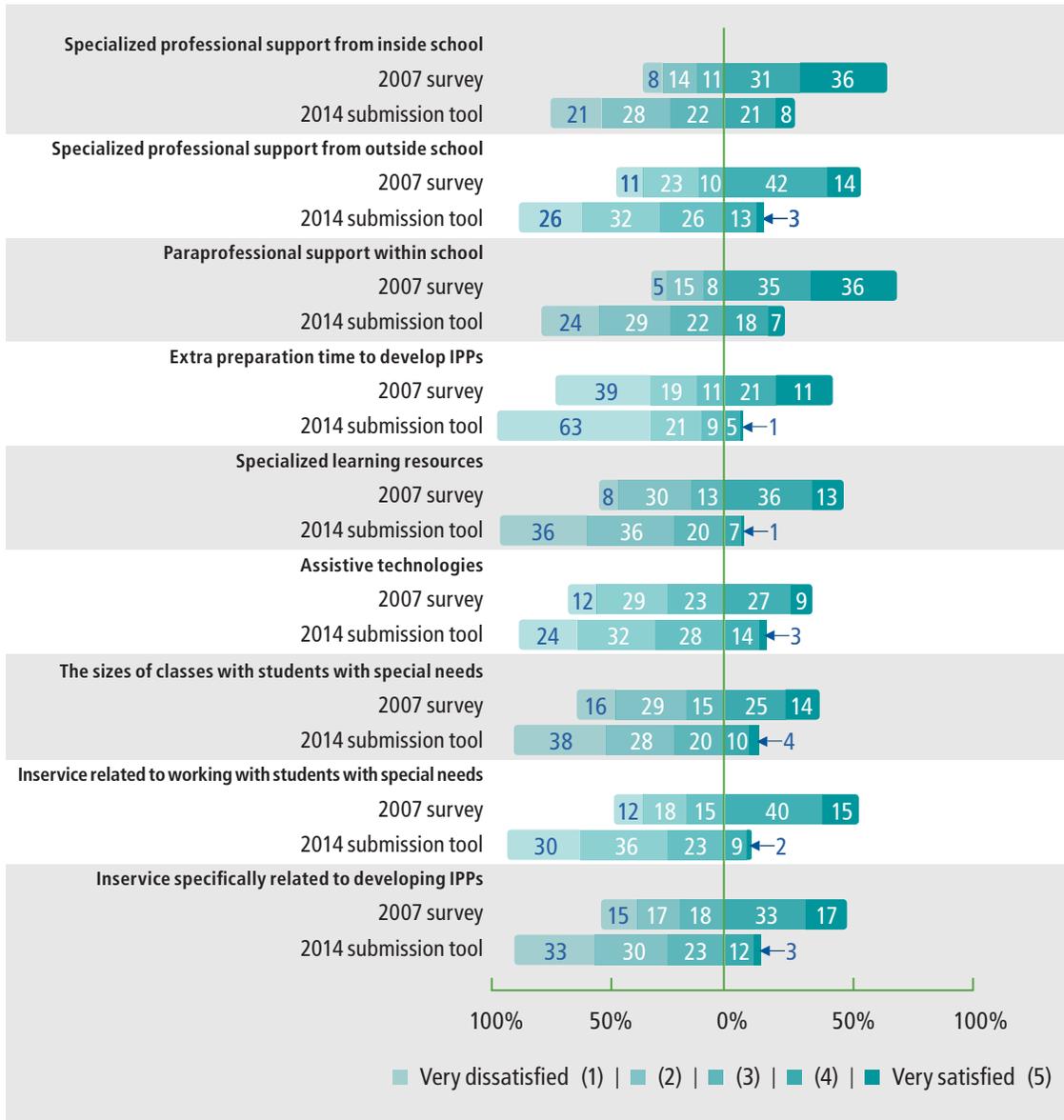
*—Study participant*

Given the little research available on inclusion in Alberta, the panel determined that it would be useful to replicate some of the questions asked in the 2007 survey and to compare the data to determine shifts or consistencies in the results. In particular, this allowed for a comparison of perceived levels of support over time. To support analysis, Figure 8 consolidates the results of questions that were included in both studies.

For each area of support, the responses in 2014 show increased dissatisfaction in comparison with the 2007 study’s responses, indicating that overall satisfaction with supports and resources is significantly declining. Reinforcing this shift toward dissatisfaction, the open-ended question responses and focus groups for the 2014 study noted decreasing satisfaction in relation to supports and resources for inclusion as a major trend.

In the face of increasing classroom complexity, teachers are noticing fewer supports since the establishment of the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education 2009).

**Figure 8. Comparison of satisfaction with supports and resources in 2007 and 2014.**



*"... it's taking the funding that we receive and trying to make that funding stretch in so many different ways."*

*—School Superintendent*

### KEY FINDING 3: MULTIPLE, MULTIFACETED SUPPORTS ARE REQUIRED

Participants suggested that the level of supports and services must increase greatly to ensure that all students receive what they need in order to learn. As might be expected with apparent declining supports and resources for inclusion, teachers' level of satisfaction with specific supports is low (Figure 9). Aside from the satisfaction levels, though, Figure 9 conveys the multiplicity of supports required for inclusion, from accessible facilities to assistive technologies to time for professional collaboration.

**Figure 9.** Satisfaction with supports and resources.

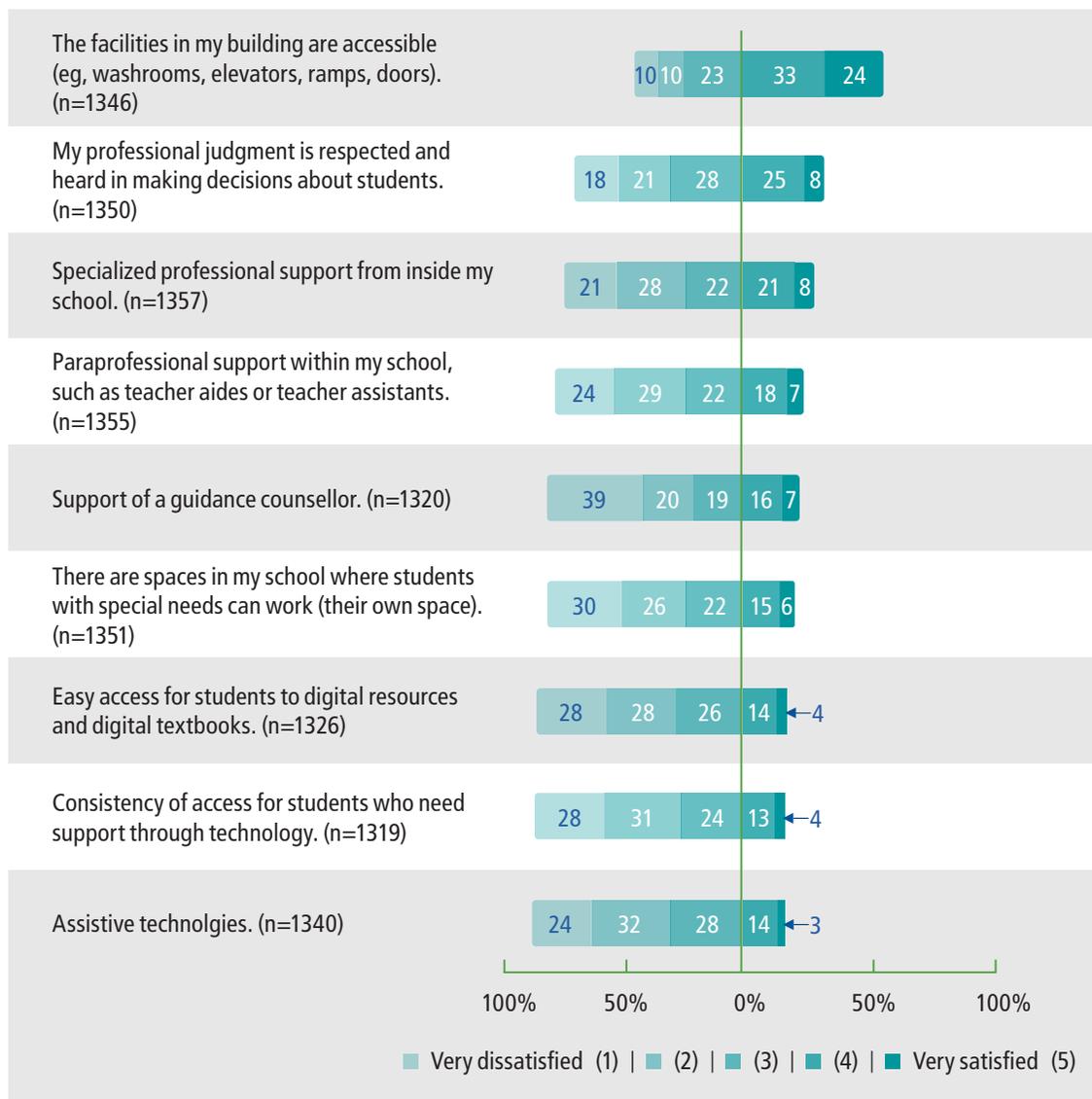
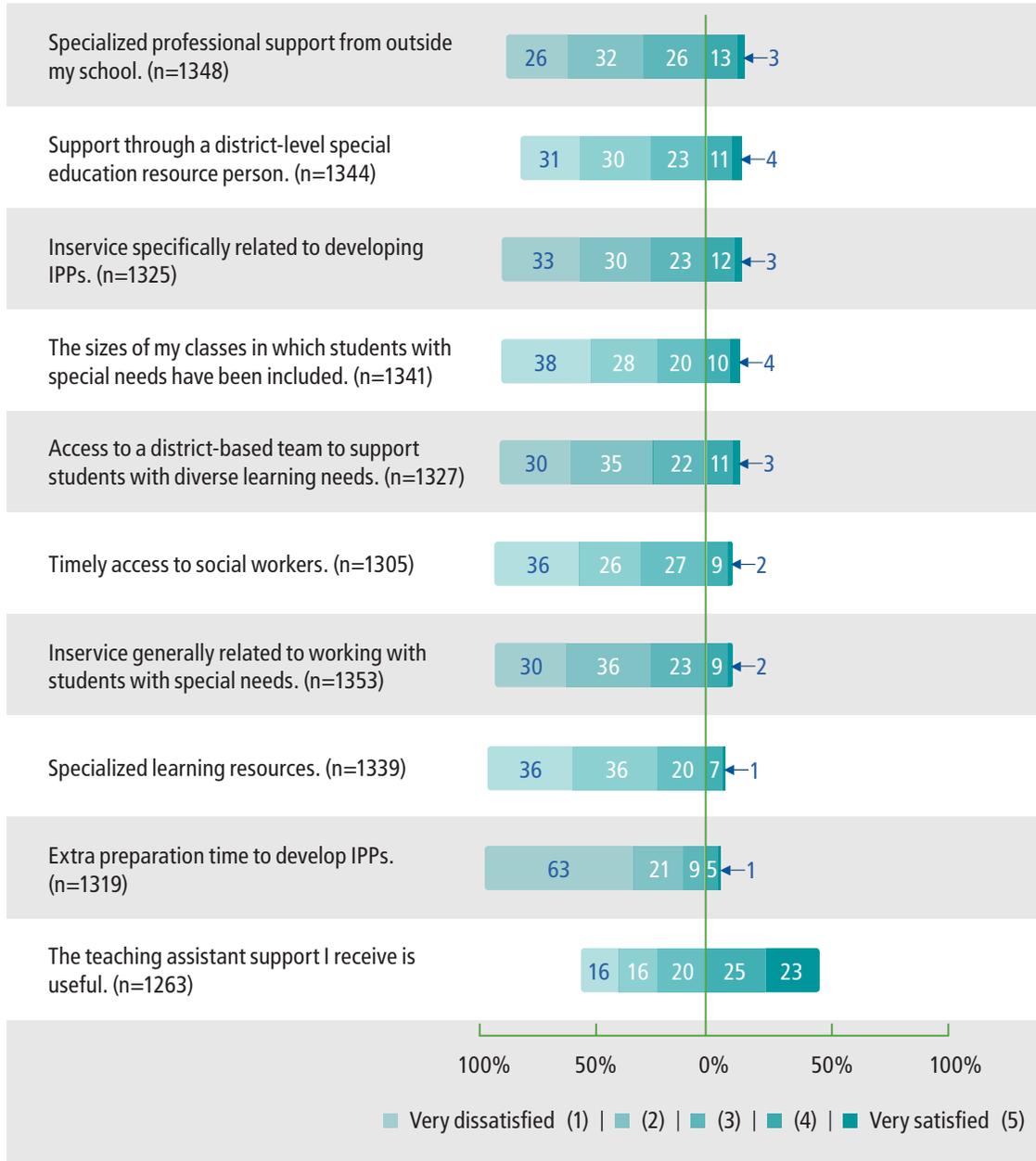
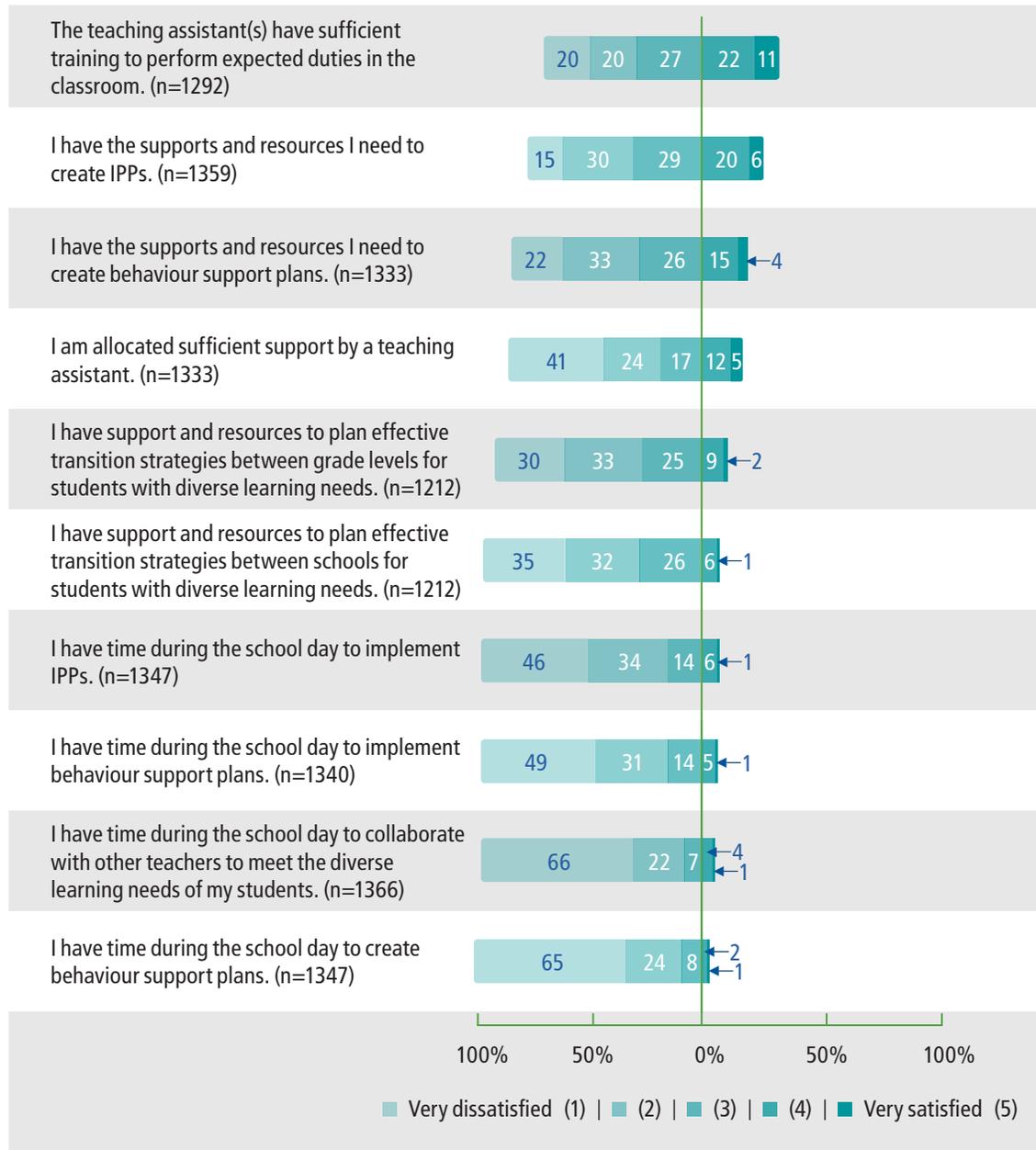


Figure 9. Satisfaction with supports and resources.—CONTINUED



**Figure 9. Satisfaction with supports and resources.—CONTINUED**



While more than half (57 per cent) of respondents indicated that they were satisfied that the facilities in their buildings were accessible and a third (33 per cent) were satisfied that their professional judgment was respected and heard, satisfaction decreased rapidly with regard to other supports and resources available. For example, timely access to social workers (11 per cent), inservices related to working with students with special needs (11 per cent), specialized learning resources (8 per cent) and extra preparation time to work on IPPs (6 per cent) showed notably low satisfaction scores.

Respondents were somewhat satisfied with the support received from teaching assistants (48 per cent), as well as with the training provided for teaching assistants to perform their expected duties (33 per cent). Satisfaction with time availability was quite low; most respondents were dissatisfied with the amount of time they have to implement IPPs (80 per cent), implement behaviour support plans (80 per cent), collaborate with other teachers to meet students' learning needs (88 per cent) and create behaviour support plans (89 per cent).

While Figure 9 indicates teachers' low levels of satisfaction with specific supports, Table 2 expands upon some of the sources teachers identified as feeding into the challenges associated with inclusion. In their comments, participants explained some of the issues that must be addressed in order to create the conditions to make classrooms work for all students.

*"I find it more and more difficult to support these students as the needs of students increase, class sizes increase and the complexity of students increase, [and] the complexity of social situations becomes more dire, [as well as] the extreme guilt I feel for not being able to reach every child's potential. Please help me do a better job for the children."*

*—Study participant*

**Table 2.** Comments regarding resources and funding

Category of Comment	Number of Responses	Exemplary Comments
Lack of adequate funding	172	"Budget cuts to schools which increase classroom sizes (fewer teachers) and decrease access to educational assistants. Insufficient access to outside services (OT, speech, etc) for all the children who need them."
Lack of proper supports and resources	141	"Many children with severe behavioural challenges require more supports than the average school can provide." "There isn't enough support for students who require more support, so they get frustrated because they can't keep up, or aren't engaged, or what we are doing isn't meaningful for them."
Lack of time	64	"Not enough time to spend with each student." "Teacher time vs prep time."
Lack of training, expertise and experience	59	"The lack of training and understanding of the variety of needs for each disorder. The lack of proper funding." "Lack of professional development time set aside to properly teach us how to make accommodations, how to write an IPP, to adjust our classroom to best serve the students."

Overall, participants' responses indicate that teachers require more supports in multiple forms—educational assistants; time for collaboration, planning and paperwork; and specialized resources and training—in order to address the learning needs of their students. Stable, adequate funding may help to address impediments to inclusion, but, as participants suggested, supports need to be multifaceted in order to address diverse needs.

*"When staffing and supports are in place ... students thrive alongside their peers."*

—Study participant

## KEY FINDING 4: TEACHERS VALUE THE IDEALS OF INCLUSION

Despite the challenges noted in the first three findings, participants expressed support for the ideals of inclusion. In particular, in response to two survey questions asking specifically about successes experienced with inclusion, teachers stressed how inclusive education promotes belonging and celebrates diversity. For instance, many participants cited students' increased acceptance of peers with diverse abilities as a key success of inclusion.

Table 3 highlights the most frequent responses with regard to the successes of inclusion.

**Table 3.** Key successes experienced with inclusion

Category of Comment	Number of Responses	Exemplary Comments
Students are more accepting of and empathetic toward students with disabilities	231	<p>"Acceptance from everyone in the class, community inclusion."</p> <p>"Students today are far more accepting of differences. They are willing to work with peers with different learning needs."</p>
Increased student socialization	73	<p>"There is significant social growth for many of these students as they are seen as included with their peer group."</p> <p>"The kids feel like they belong to the classroom. They learn some social habits from the rest of the class."</p>
Increased achievement for students with special needs	55	<p>"There are many students that have thrived and become responsible learners, which helps them to have a successful future."</p> <p>"I have seen significant progress in student achievement with focused preparation and attention. It sometimes comes after years of work—and not always does it meet the expected learning timelines."</p>
Students mentor and support other students	49	<p>"Some students who are included benefit greatly from being with other students—having them as role models."</p> <p>"Kids learn acceptance and how to collaborate."</p>
No success	22	<p>"At this point, there are none."</p> <p>"Honestly, not feeling many."</p>

In addition to identifying successes, participants provided open-ended feedback describing what they felt were the reasons for the successes they had experienced with inclusive education. Adequate supports and resources being available was the most frequently mentioned reason, followed by other students accepting students with special needs and then by schools and teachers creating an environment and culture of acceptance. Table 4 provides the number of responses and exemplary comments with regard to the reasons for successes in inclusion.

**Table 4: Reasons for successes in inclusion**

Category of Comment	Number of Responses	Exemplary Comments
Adequate supports and resources available	91	"Adequate planning for programming and support for a variety of learning experiences." "Goals with a student [that] are based on mastery of outcomes rather than pointing out that a student is below grade level."
Students accepting students with special needs	62	"Other students see them as 'equals' rather than the 'others.'" "The other students in the class are accepting and I make it a non-issue."
Schools and teachers creating an environment and culture of acceptance	54	"The school spirit and sense of community that has been built has been instrumental in these successes." "My efforts to build a community in my classroom and teach empathy in my classroom."
Collaboration with teachers and parents	44	"Strong family support is a major factor—support that encourages students to try and does not enable them to avoid tasks, nor pushes them to attempt work beyond their capabilities. A strong liaison between the teachers and the parents is another reason. Strong support from a teacher and an educational assistant that encourages the development and practice of effective individually tailored learning strategies is essential." "My own teaching, the advice of more senior teachers who have experience with students with special needs."
Caring and dedicated teachers	41	"Teachers putting in hours and hours of work on their time." "Teachers. Teachers want the best for all their students and do the best they can to facilitate this."
Teacher experience	39	"The only reason I feel comfortable making this statement is due to my experience and deep understanding of my curriculum, below, at and above my grade level."

Notably, the questions asking about successes garnered far fewer responses than those asking about sources of challenges in inclusion. Nonetheless, that many participants were able to identify successes associated with inclusion suggests its potential for creating a great learning environment for all students.

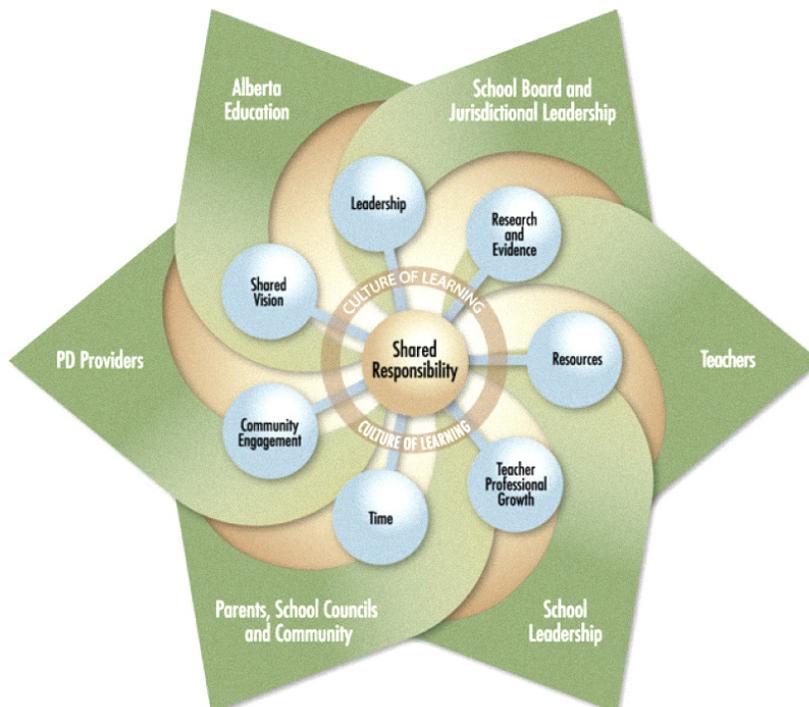
## How Can We Make Inclusion Work for All?

Inclusion is an ideal to which Alberta aspires. With the increasing complexity of classrooms and declining supports and services, effective implementation of inclusion must involve strategic planning that meaningfully involves all stakeholders, particularly those who are charged with supporting students in classrooms every day.

The key findings from the 2014 study on inclusion informed a series of recommendations, developed by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools, for making inclusion work. The panel’s recommendations are highlighted here, as they not only stem from the findings but also work to address them. For a full discussion of each recommendation, see the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools* (ATA 2014).

The recommendations, outlined below, were framed around the elements of successful implementation from *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* (Alberta’s Education Partners 2010): (1) shared vision, (2) leadership, (3) research and evidence, (4) resources, (5) teacher professional growth, (6) time and (7) community engagement (Figure 10).

**Figure 10.** Essential conditions to support implementation.



Reflecting the shared responsibility to support inclusion, the guide was developed collaboratively by the following education partners:

- Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia
- Alberta Teachers' Association
- Alberta School Boards Association
- Alberta School Councils' Association
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta
- College of Alberta School Superintendents
- Faculties of Education, Alberta Universities
- Alberta Assessment Consortium
- Alberta Education

In making its recommendations, the Blue Ribbon Panel recognized that all stakeholders have a role to play in transforming the system and, therefore, directed each recommendation to one of the education partners noted above, or to the Government of Alberta, school jurisdictions, schools, school councils, administrators or teachers.<sup>2</sup> Reaching the ideal of a great school for all can be achieved only through collaborative efforts.

In addition, creating an inclusive system that works for everyone requires an understanding of the characteristics of successful implementation, coherence among plans and priorities, and the intentional efforts of education stakeholders. The panel's recommendations, which focus on the essential conditions for effective implementation, are as follows.

<sup>2</sup> *The stakeholder to whom a recommendation is directed is noted in parentheses following each recommendation, listed on pages 26–31.*



## SHARED VISION

*Stakeholders share an understanding of and commitment to the intended outcomes.*

### Recommendations

- Establish a provincial stakeholder advisory committee of education partners to develop a provincial implementation plan, guide provincial implementation activities and meet regularly to reflect on evidence gathered about implementation. (Alberta Education)
- Create a ministry team that will work with stakeholders at all levels to build understanding and support for the vision of inclusive education. (Alberta Education)
- Create clear, multilevel, consistent and transparent communication regarding inclusive education. (Alberta Education)
- Work directly with stakeholders to build an understanding of inclusion and an understanding that an inclusive classroom setting may not be in the educational best interests of every student at all times. (Alberta Education)
- Establish a school-jurisdiction-level inclusive education advisory committee, including teachers, administrators and other stakeholders, to develop a jurisdiction implementation plan, guide implementation activities and reflect on evidence gathered about implementation. (School jurisdictions)
- Establish a school-based inclusive education advisory committee, including teachers, administrators and other stakeholders, to develop a school implementation plan, guide implementation activities and reflect on evidence gathered about implementation. (Schools)
- Provide a safe, professional environment where teachers and administrators can express their experiences as inclusion is implemented. (School jurisdictions)



## LEADERSHIP

*Leaders at all levels have the capacity to champion the shift from the current reality to the intended outcomes.*

### Recommendations

- Provide immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding for school jurisdictions' 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. (Alberta Education)
- Demonstrate commitment to and leadership for inclusive education by providing ministry staff, knowledgeable in inclusive education, who are able to provide direct, one-on-one, ongoing support to each school jurisdiction in creating and realizing its implementation plan. (Alberta Education)
- Clearly delineate stakeholders' leadership roles and responsibilities through clear policy directives and regulations. (Alberta Education)
- Consistent with the vision of Setting the Direction, eliminate the current coding system at the ministry and jurisdiction levels. (Alberta Education)
- Ensure that learner assessments required by Alberta Education create multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning. (Alberta Education)
- Ensure that learner assessments required by Alberta Education do not create barriers of access to postsecondary education or entrance to the workforce. (Alberta Education)
- Require that all curriculum documents that are developed from this point forward clearly address the full range of learners in the school system, and require that related resources developed address the wide range of student learning needs in classrooms. (Alberta Education)
- Monitor inclusive education funding provided to school jurisdictions and determine the actual costs of supporting all students effectively. (Alberta Education)
- Host a symposium on inclusive education to highlight the report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools and to collaborate with stakeholder groups. (Alberta Teachers' Association)



## RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

*Current research, evidence and lessons learned inform implementation decisions.*

### Recommendations

- With immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding from the Government of Alberta, establish partnerships with institutions with preservice teacher education programs to conduct regular research in Alberta classrooms, determine the effectiveness of inclusion and advance this field of study. (Government of Alberta and postsecondary institutions)
- As part of the immediate, targeted, substantial and sustained funding to support implementation outlined in a previous recommendation, establish an inclusive schools network, including an annual face-to-face conference, to share action research and promising practices. (Alberta Education)

*“Inclusion is the ideal, in my opinion. Students feel like part of the classroom family and we help each other out. They gain a sense of empathy and responsibility.”*

*—Study participant*



## RESOURCES

*Human resources, materials, funding and infrastructure are in place to realize the intended outcomes.*

### Recommendations

- Establish and implement structures to ensure that provincewide guidelines for average class sizes across school jurisdictions are achieved and that classroom complexity is weighted in these guidelines. (Alberta Education)
- Expand access to early intervention programs, including full-day, play-based kindergarten programs with certificated teachers, to ensure that children with diverse learning needs have the supports and programs they require before they come to school and into the early grades. (Government of Alberta)
- Provide Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) boards with direct funding, not just enhanced funding, to facilitate decision making at the RCSD leadership and governance tables. (Government of Alberta)
- Develop a provincial standard and provide targeted funding to school jurisdictions to ensure that each school has adequate access to a trained school counsellor, preferably a certificated teacher. (Alberta Education)
- Ensure that there is adequate funding to effectively support
  - students who require behaviour support,
  - English-language learners,
  - students who are gifted and talented,
  - students who live in poverty,
  - students who are new to Canada,
  - students from refugee backgrounds and
  - students who are suffering from trauma. (Alberta Education)
- Provide sufficient funding to ensure that each student has access to assistive technology to support his or her learning, including funding for related teacher professional development and adequate bandwidth, technical support and electrical systems. (Alberta Education)
- Provide adequate supports and qualified health-care professionals for medically fragile students. (Government of Alberta)
- Provide appropriate, ongoing training of educational assistants who work with students with diverse learning needs, where assistants are required. (School jurisdictions)
- Ensure that all school facilities are fully accessible and provide targeted funding to school jurisdictions with facilities not meeting this standard. (Alberta Education)



## TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

*Teacher knowledge, skills and attributes are enhanced through ongoing professional learning.*

### **Recommendations**

- Provide ongoing professional development during the school day to allow teachers to learn and share strategies to support inclusive practices. (School jurisdictions)
- Recognize that teachers in their early years of practice may need additional or different professional development and supports as they transition through the induction phase of their career, and provide this professional development and related supports. (School jurisdictions)
- Develop a provincial standard and provide funding so that schools have regular, adequate access to specialized district-based or regional teams, and school-based experts who provide specialized consultation, in-class support and support for planning effective programs. (Alberta Education and school jurisdictions)
- Create preservice teacher education programs such that the expected outcome is that each graduate has a sound working knowledge of inclusion, with related practicum experience. (Postsecondary institutions)
- Ensure that preservice teacher education programs are designed to allow undergraduate students to specialize in inclusive education. (Postsecondary institutions)
- Create a provincial scholarship program to support coursework in master's and doctoral studies focusing on inclusive education. (Alberta Education)
- Expand professional development and related supports for members in the area of inclusive education. (Alberta Teachers' Association)



## TIME

*Time is provided to support implementation.*

### Recommendations

- Provide time, during the school day, for teachers to meet in collaborative teams to develop strategies focused on supporting student learning, particularly the learning of students with exceptional needs. (School jurisdictions)
- Use streamlined individualized program plan (IPP) templates, and provide release time and support for teachers to create effective program plans and other required documents. (School jurisdictions)



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*Parents, school councils, students, community members, businesses, industry and postsecondary institutions are partners in supporting implementation.*

### Recommendations

- Establish a provincewide telephone link and a web-based annotated list of services by geographical region to provide information to teachers, parents and students who need immediate access to specialized services and advice. (Government of Alberta)
- Provide opportunities for parents to learn about inclusive education and to engage in dialogue. (Alberta Education, school jurisdictions, administrators, school councils and teachers)

## Future Research

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As is often the case with exploratory research, new questions emerged from this study on inclusion that might become the focus of future research. What are the long-term effects on students, both those with and those without exceptional needs, within an inclusive classroom? To what extent does inclusion affect teacher workload? Is inclusion being successfully implemented elsewhere?

Most important, ongoing research must follow an effective implementation plan to determine what is working and what is not working, and it must promote sharing of promising practices as a community. We will not understand inclusion fully until we engage in collaborative, systematic research in Alberta school systems.

## Conclusion

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Positive possibilities for inclusion exist, but shared vision, leadership, research and evidence, resources, teacher professional growth, time, and community engagement are necessary to facilitating effective implementation.

Hundreds of teachers participated in the study of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools, contributing narrative responses that spoke to the importance of meeting student needs. Their voices were strong and the study results are clear—the ideals of inclusion are not in question, but the conditions required to support all students in the system are inconsistent and inadequate.

Creating an equitable, inclusive society in Alberta begins with the successful implementation of an inclusive education system. To facilitate this, comprehensive short-, medium- and long-term plans to improve inclusive education must be put into place. As well, stakeholders must consider a systematic way of collecting data to evaluate the inclusive education model. We can only discern whether inclusion has been successful if stakeholders recognize a common aim and work together to reach it.

The issues surrounding inclusion are complex, but the opportunities are great and the implications are far-reaching. To stand behind the students that represent the future of our province, we must prioritize thoughtful planning and meaningful action to support inclusion.

Alberta teachers have spoken and will continue to speak until they are heard by all stakeholders who share responsibility in making inclusive education successful.

## Appendix A: Survey Instrument

### SUBMISSIONS TO THE BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

The Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Alberta, is studying the current state of inclusion in Alberta schools. The purpose of submissions is to gather information that will assist the panel in making recommendations that will improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

The tool should take 5 to 10 minutes to complete, is totally voluntary, and participants are free to skip questions. You can withdraw at any time up until you click the “Submit” button at the end.

All responses will be kept confidential and only aggregate data will be reported. No data from open-ended questions that could identify individual respondents will be used without permission. Evaluative researchers from Evaluation and Research Services (ERS) at the Faculty of Extension will analyze the data and provide a report to the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools. The results may also be presented at academic conferences or published in academic journals. ERS will securely store any information collected from you for a minimum of five years.

The second phase of the study will involve focus groups during the winter of 2014. If you would like to participate in a focus group, please follow the instructions at the end of the submission tool.

If you have any questions please contact Jason Daniels by email at [jason.daniels@ualberta.ca](mailto:jason.daniels@ualberta.ca) or by phone at 780-492-6332.

Continuing with this submission tool implies consent to participate. Once again, participation is voluntary.

#### A. CLASS SIZE AND COMPOSITION

##### A1. Currently, how satisfied are you with the following elements of inclusion?

	Not at all satisfied (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very satisfied (5)
The size of my classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The composition of my classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The funding provided for inclusive education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

##### A2. How many students in total are you teaching this year?

**A3. Of these students, how many:**

Have Individualized Program Plans (IPPs)?	<input type="text"/>
Do not have an IPP, but require a high level of learning supports or modifications?	<input type="text"/>
Require a high level of behaviour support (with or without an IPP)?	<input type="text"/>
Are English-language learners?	<input type="text"/>
Are in care (eg, in a foster home)?	<input type="text"/>
Have significant mental health needs?	<input type="text"/>

**B. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

**B1. Inclusive education can be defined as an education system where each student learns and belongs. To what degree do you support this definition of inclusive education?**

Do not support at all (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly support (5)	N/A
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C. TEACHER PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**C1. Indicate your degree of satisfaction with the following:**

	Very dissatisfied (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very satisfied (5)
Preservice education preparation to teach students with diverse learning needs	<input type="radio"/>				
Inservice generally related to working with students with special needs	<input type="radio"/>				
Inservice specifically related to developing IPPs	<input type="radio"/>				

## D. SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

D1. Indicate your degree of satisfaction with the following:

	Very dissatisfied (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very satisfied (5)
Specialized professional support from inside my school, such as a special education facilitator, learning team leader or consultant.	<input type="radio"/>				
Specialized professional support from outside my school, such as a speech pathologist, psychologist or physiotherapist.	<input type="radio"/>				
Paraprofessional support within my school, such as teacher aides or teacher assistants.	<input type="radio"/>				
Extra preparation time to develop IPPs.	<input type="radio"/>				
Specialized learning resources.	<input type="radio"/>				
Assistive technologies.	<input type="radio"/>				
The sizes of my classes in which students with special needs have been included.	<input type="radio"/>				
The facilities in my building are accessible (eg, washrooms, elevators, ramps, doors).	<input type="radio"/>				
There are spaces in my school where students with sensory, attention or behaviour challenges can work if they need their own space.	<input type="radio"/>				
Support through a district-level special education resource person.	<input type="radio"/>				
Support of a guidance counsellor.	<input type="radio"/>				
Timely access to social workers.	<input type="radio"/>				
Access to a district-based team to support students with diverse learning needs.	<input type="radio"/>				
Easy access for students to digital resources and digital textbooks.	<input type="radio"/>				
Consistency of access for students who need support through technology.	<input type="radio"/>				
My professional judgment is respected and heard in making decisions about students.	<input type="radio"/>				

	Very dissatisfied (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very satisfied (5)
Inservice generally related to working with students with special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inservice specifically related to developing IPPs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**D2. Indicate your degree of satisfaction with the following:**

	Very dissatisfied (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very satisfied (5)
I have the supports and resources I need to create IPPs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the supports and resources I need to create behaviour support plans.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have time during the school day to collaborate with other teachers to meet the diverse learning needs of my students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have time during the school day to implement IPPs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have time during the school day to create behaviour support plans.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have time during the school day to implement behaviour support plans.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am allocated sufficient support by a teaching assistant.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The teaching assistant support I receive is useful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The teaching assistant(s) have sufficient training to perform expected duties in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have support and resources to plan effective transition strategies between grade levels for students with diverse learning needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have support and resources to plan effective transition strategies between schools and to post-secondary for students with diverse learning needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**E1. What effect does the inclusion of students with special needs have on teaching and learning in your classroom?**

Very negative (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very positive (5)
<input type="radio"/>				

**E2. In your opinion, what are the key challenges that you face with inclusion?**

**E3. In your opinion, what are the sources of these challenges?**

**E4. In your opinion, what are the key successes that you experience with inclusion?**

**E5. In your opinion, what are the reasons for these successes?**

**E6. What factors are NOT currently in place that you think would help inclusion work in your school and classroom?**

**Comments:**

**Would you be willing to participate in a focus group on the topic of inclusive education if one was available in your area?**

<input type="radio"/> Yes. Please provide your email address: _____
<input type="radio"/> No.

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

### 1. Years of teaching experience including the current year:

<input type="radio"/> 1 year or less
<input type="radio"/> 2 to 4 years
<input type="radio"/> 5 to 9 years
<input type="radio"/> 10 to 14 years
<input type="radio"/> 15 to 19 years
<input type="radio"/> 20 to 30 years
<input type="radio"/> Over 30 years

### 2. Your current assignment is related exclusively or mainly to students in:

<input type="radio"/> ECS/Kindergarten
<input type="radio"/> Grades 1 to 6
<input type="radio"/> Grades 7 to 9
<input type="radio"/> Grades 10 to 12
<input type="radio"/> Combinations (specify): _____

### 3. Your current assignment:

<input type="radio"/> Classroom teacher
<input type="radio"/> Substitute teacher
<input type="radio"/> School administrator only
<input type="radio"/> Central office
<input type="radio"/> Combined classroom and administrative duties
<input type="radio"/> Other (eg, alternative school, cyber school) _____

### 4. Your gender:

<input type="radio"/> Male	<input type="radio"/> Female
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### 5. Your age:

<input type="radio"/> 25 and younger
<input type="radio"/> 26–30 years old
<input type="radio"/> 31–35 years old
<input type="radio"/> 36–40 years old
<input type="radio"/> 41–45 years old
<input type="radio"/> 46–50 years old
<input type="radio"/> 51–55 years old
<input type="radio"/> 56–60 years old
<input type="radio"/> 61–65 years old
<input type="radio"/> Over 65

### 6. Which teachers' convention do you attend?

<input type="radio"/> Calgary City
<input type="radio"/> Central Alberta
<input type="radio"/> Central East
<input type="radio"/> Greater Edmonton
<input type="radio"/> Mighty Peace
<input type="radio"/> North East
<input type="radio"/> North Central
<input type="radio"/> Palliser
<input type="radio"/> South West
<input type="radio"/> South East

### 7. In what type of school do you usually teach?

<input type="radio"/> Rural
<input type="radio"/> Small urban/suburban
<input type="radio"/> Large urban
<input type="radio"/> Other (specify): _____

## Appendix B: Focus Group Instrument

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### INTERVIEW SCRIPT

#### INTRODUCTIONS

#### TURN ON RECORDER

[CONTEXT] Provide a sense of your district.

#### Questions:

1. What are some of the challenges faced in your school system in regards to inclusion, in your experience?
2. What are the sources of these challenges?  
Any examples or stories?
3. What are the successes you have experienced in your school system in regards to inclusion?
4. What are the reasons for these successes?  
Any examples, success stories?
5. What supports are NOT currently in place that you think would help inclusion work more effectively in the school system?
6. What have you seen or experienced that has helped inclusion to work effectively?
7. What is your opinion on preservice education? Are new teachers prepared for inclusive education?
8. Inclusive education can be defined as an education system where each student learns and belongs. To what degree do you support this definition of inclusive education?
9. Other comments.

Thank you. Those are all the questions we have for you today.

## Appendix C: Superintendent Interview Instrument

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### INTERVIEW SCRIPT

#### INTRODUCTIONS

#### TURN ON RECORDER

[CONTEXT] Provide a sense of your district.

#### Questions:

1. What are some of the challenges faced in your school system in regards to inclusion, in your experience?
2. What are the sources of these challenges?  
Any examples or stories?
3. What are the successes you have experienced in your school system in regards to inclusion?
4. What are the reasons for these successes?  
Any examples, success stories?
5. What supports are NOT currently in place that you think would help inclusion work more effectively in the school system?
6. What have you seen or experienced that has helped inclusion to work effectively?
7. Other comments.

Thank you. Those are all the questions we have for you today.

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Teachers' Association