

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

Volume 9

A publication for Alberta's school administrators

Number 9



Inclusive Education in Alberta— Where Are We Now?

In 2012, the Alberta Teachers' Association completed a decennial review of special education policy and, based on this work, a position paper that articulates the policies of the Association.

Education of Students with Special Needs (2012)

The Alberta Teachers' Association has a history of involvement in special education matters. In 1997, the Association released the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Special Education*, which contained several recommendations. Association members have been engaged throughout the most recent review process, as highlighted in Association

documents such as *Success for All: The Teaching Profession's Views on the Future of Special Education in Alberta* (2009) and *Discussion Paper on Learning Coaches—Support for the Inclusive Classroom* (2011).

Special education in Alberta has undergone significant change in recent years. In 2007, the Department of Education commenced a review of special education across the province that resulted in the initiative Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta. This initiative was designed to create a renewed vision, principles, policy direction, accountability measures and a new funding distribution formula for special education. In 2009, following a consultation process, the Setting the Direction Steering Committee presented recommendations for creating an inclusive education system. The Government of Alberta, in a formal response, accepted all of the recommendations. This provided the framework for Action on Inclusion, which became the foundation for the implementation plan, which resides in various areas of the ministry and is referred to as Inclusive Education.

Definitions

Inclusion is about belonging to a community and being accepted in the many levels of community, including the classroom, the school and the broader community. It is about valuing each person and providing equitable opportunities for all. In its broadest sense, the term *inclusion* applies to the many ways students can be different from one

**Knowing is
not enough;
we must
apply.
Willing is not
enough; we
must do.**

**—Johann
Wolfgang von
Goethe**

SUCCESS FOR ALL

The teaching profession's views on
the future of special education in Alberta



The door to happiness opens outwards. —Lama Tsongkhapa

The Alberta
Teachers' Association

another, including ethnicity, language, sexual orientation and gender. The goal of inclusive education is to instill in students a sense of belonging and to help them achieve their full potential. Association policy uses the term *special needs* to refer to students who have complex or severe learning or behavioural needs—one aspect of inclusion. This precise language ensures clarity about the students to which the policy refers. The Association recognizes that *inclusion* is a broad and complex term and that in order to create effective learning environments, it is necessary to raise awareness of the specific challenges related to students with special needs.

Necessary Conditions

The Association supports the principle of inclusion of students with special needs, with the proviso that they are placed in the most enabling environments, as determined by teachers in consultation with other professionals. The learning environment must meet student needs and ensure that the following conditions are in place: (a) teachers and staff are provided with information about the individual needs of each student; (b) students with special needs and other students in the same class have been prepared for inclusion; (c) teachers are provided with ongoing professional development; (d) regular access to professional support services (such as special education consulting services and health support services) is provided; (e) appropriately trained educational assistants are provided, as required; (f) appropriate resources, including assistive technology, are provided; (g) class size is reduced to effectively meet the needs of all students; (h) regular instructional time for the teacher is reduced to allow for effective development, implementation and monitoring of documents and tools such as individual program plans; (i) learning opportunities are provided for students who are gifted and talented, through a balance of acceleration and enrichment; and (j) school boards have policies for handling emergency situations in schools that contain appropriate, specific procedures for individual students with special needs. The Association believes that the Department of Education should institute weighting factors

for all students (with special needs students recognized with higher weightings as appropriate) and should require that any class be limited to a maximum of 17 weighted students in K–3 and 20 weighted students in other grades.

Reasonable class sizes improve the quality of education for all students and assist in achieving the ideals of an inclusive education system. If a member believes that the presence of a student with special needs creates an unsafe classroom or is based on unsound educational practice, he or she should protest under Article 8 of the Code of Professional Conduct and register such protest with the Association and the employing board.

Funding

Equal and equitable inclusion requires a wide range of resources and services to respond to student diversity. If the Government of Alberta aspires to a high-quality and fully inclusive education system, there must be adequate and consistent levels of funding and support for the following: (a) ongoing inservice for teachers; (b) appropriately trained educational assistants; (c) trained transportation and support personnel; (d) assessment and program implementation services; (e) specialized transportation equipment, and other specialized equipment and materials; (f) barrier-free buildings; (g) medical and other professionals; (h) smaller classes and a student–teacher ratio that takes into account the composition and complexity of each class; (i) reduction in instructional time required to collaborate with student support teams and other professionals; (j) reduction in instructional time to assist with the process of planning for and addressing student and program needs, including the development and monitoring of documents and tools such as individual program plans, Success in School plans and the Inclusive Education Planning Tool; (k) appropriate resources, including assistive technology; and (l) non-instructional services from government departments. It is imperative that the maintenance of such programs and services does not jeopardize the educational programs of other students.

To find archived issues of *Leadership Update*, go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on **Other Publications** (under **Publications**), then go to **School Administrators**.

Feedback is welcome. Please contact Konni deGoeij, associate coordinator, administrator assistance, Member Services, at konni.degoeij@ata.ab.ca.



System Supports Required

Support for teachers who may be working with students with special needs must begin during preservice teacher education programs. Alberta's faculties of education must ensure that the preparation of all teachers includes strategies for teaching a wide range of learners, including those with special needs. The Department of Education, in cooperation with other government departments, should develop and fund programs for the early identification of and intervention for children with special needs based on medical, educational, psychological or other factors that may affect educational readiness. Programs can and should be administered before and/or after the child enters the formal education system and should include appropriate, timely and practical intervention strategies. The Department of Education should have regulations that require school boards to ensure the development of a systematic approach to special needs and should require jurisdictional policies to provide educational and support services for students with special needs. These policies should include processes and guidelines for allocating resources that support these approaches, as well as a decision-making process that ensures consultation with teachers and advice from parents on the effective use of resources.

Inclusive education is made possible through being clear about definitions and understanding the necessary conditions, including funding and system supports. When effective and consistent supports are in place, all students can learn and belong to a community.

Alberta Education Website Information

In June 2010, the Government of Alberta provided its formal response to the Setting the Direction framework in which it accepted all 12 of the recommendations, which the response identified as strategic directions for it to implement. In the fall of 2010, inclusion was identified as part of the government's Inspiring Action on Education initiative, and Setting the Direction was renamed Action on Inclusion to signal implementation of an inclusive education system.

Action on Inclusion no longer exists as a project or initiative, but the work continues as part of our collective practice to build an inclusive education system in Alberta.

A new section containing information and support for administrators on inclusive education is called Supporting Every Student and can be found at <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/supportingstudent.aspx>.



uLead Keynote Speakers

The recent Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) annual conference, which took place in Banff in April, was a powerful learning experience for Alberta's school leaders and visitors from across Canada and around the world. One speaker who had a significant impact on delegates was Simon Breakspear. We are pleased to share that Simon will return to Alberta for this fall's uLead conference. uLead is one of Canada's premier professional learning experiences for school leaders (principals and assistant principals), central office personnel, superintendents and teacher leaders. Keynote presenters this year will include Simon Breakspear, Robyn Jackson and Melissa Schlinger.

Simon Breakspear is a leading thinker on the future of learning and educational innovation. He has worked to incubate a dynamic community of emerging education thinkers and doers who are working together to radically improve student learning across Asia Pacific. He is an avid voice for EDUpreneurship—an action-oriented and solution-focused philosophy of educational leadership that seeks to break free from schooling-as-usual.

Robyn Jackson is the author of nine books, including *Never Work Harder Than Your Students* and the *Mastering the Principles of Great Teaching* series. Through her speaking and training, she inspires audiences worldwide to become master teachers, to implement more-rigorous instruction, to support struggling students and to provide effective instructional leadership.

Melissa Schlinger will share ideas related to building resilience to improve academic engagement and performance. She is a gifted presenter in this area and will share critical resiliency skills that affect student behaviour and performance in order to help participants understand the needs of the whole child and plan targeted support using research-based, proven strategies to build resiliency skills in the classroom.

This year's uLead conference will take place on October 21 and 22, with a postconference workshop day on October 23. Registration will open very soon at www.ulead.ca.





GORDON THOMAS
Executive Secretary

Q: We have been told by our district that the funding for inclusive education has been cut, and we are concerned about supporting students with special needs. Is this correct?

A: There has been confusion about inclusive education funding with the new model introduced in 2012/13. Funds are now being distributed to jurisdictions in a block, according to a formula that includes both the number of students and identified characteristics that may affect the number of students requiring extra supports. In

the past, some special education funding was included in the per-student allocation, and then extra funding was allocated to students designated with a code. In the new funding model, coding students does not trigger additional funding. The first year of the new funding model projected that some districts would receive less funding under this new model, but this was rescinded in the new budgets. No school jurisdiction will receive less funding, and all were given a 2 per cent increase in their funding for inclusive education in 2013/14. There are no regulations from Alberta Education for how districts are to allocate this funding.

Association Supports for Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education Resources in the ATA Library

The ATA library has an extensive collection of resources to support inclusive education, suitable for individual teachers, professional learning communities or staff study. Resources can be searched for and ordered online at <http://library.teachers.ab.ca/Presto/home/ATADefault.aspx>. Books are sent by mail (with return postage prepaid) and loaned for a period of *one month*. Videos are loaned for a period of *one week* and are sent by courier (a prepaid courier slip is included with the shipment).

Special Education Council

The Special Education Council comprises teachers and administrators dedicated to advocacy and professional development for teachers of students with special needs. There are active regionals across the province that organize networking opportunities and professional development. An annual conference, Celebrating the Challenges, is held each fall and attracts teachers from across the province. It features a preconference day on topics of importance and two days of sessions on a wide variety of topics of interest in inclusive education. Celebrating the Challenges 2013 will be held October 17–19 in Kananaskis Village.

ATA Workshops: The Inclusive Classrooms and Schools Series

The ATA provides workshops to schools, districts and teachers' conventions on topics that support inclusive education. Workshops in this series include the following:

- Differentiated Instruction
- Universal Design for Learning
- Addressing Learning Disabilities in the Inclusive Classroom
- Winning Strategies for Struggling Students
- Here Comes Everyone—Teaching in the Culturally Diverse Classroom

The ATA charges a nominal inclusive fee of \$100 plus GST for each session. For a complete listing and descriptions, please go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on Workshops and Presentations (under For Members).

To book a workshop, please contact Debra Augustyn, Professional Development, at 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta), 780-447-9485 (Edmonton area) or debra.augustyn@ata.ab.ca.



Teachers Herald End of Provincial Achievement Tests

ATA President Carol Henderson is applauding the provincial government for ending the Grade 3 provincial achievement testing (PAT) program. On May 9, 2013, the Alberta government announced that this spring would be the last year for Grade 3 PATs and that the Grades 6 and 9 programs would be replaced by 2017.

The ATA believes that public education should present students with opportunities to develop ingenuity, creativity, critical-thinking skills and a strong sense of citizenship. Its vision for public education is consistent with the findings of the government's Inspiring Education project, which supports "the need for diverse approaches to assess learner competencies such as innovation and critical thinking, including the use of qualitative measures."

Joint C2 Committee on Teachers' Work

In accordance with section C2 of the Framework Agreement/ Legislation, each ATA bargaining unit will form a joint committee with its school jurisdiction to design, direct and conduct internal reviews to determine which jurisdiction-initiated tasks or policies can be eliminated or modified to reduce teacher workload and improve teacher efficacy. The initial report must be completed by October 31, 2013, which is very close.

Provincial Executive Council and staff have been working to develop supports to assist you in making the most of this committee. Plans will be finalized over the next few weeks and will include inservice and ongoing support for the committees.



Teachers Dismayed by Imposed Settlements

Teachers are dismayed that the Alberta government chose to introduce legislation to impose settlements on teachers and school boards. The legislation will have the effect of imposing the premier's March 15 offer for a provincial framework agreement on all teachers and school boards in Alberta's 62 school jurisdictions. The legislation was introduced because the offer was rejected by a number of school boards and two teacher bargaining units.

"We will continue to work on improving public education by addressing teaching and learning conditions through local negotiations. We also appreciate that the premier's comfort letter is still part of the agreement as it will ensure stability for teachers as we work to improve public education," said ATA President Carol Henderson. Henderson also expressed hope that teachers in the bargaining units that rejected the offer will be able to address their concerns through the local bargaining that is still available within the provincial framework.

Edmonton

August 20 and 21

<http://www.erc.ca/>

Canmore

August 22 and 23

<http://www.carcpd.ab.ca/>

Registration now available

Summer Institute

Using Technologies to Support Literacy for All Students



About the Event...

This summer institute is an opportunity for learning coaches and school leaders to network, challenge their thinking and develop new understandings of how educational technologies can enhance literacy learning and support the success of all students. This will be a follow up to the 2011 Alberta UDL Summer Institute.

Participants will ...

1. Challenge their understanding of how reading is changing in the 21st century
2. Deepen their understanding about how flexible technologies can reduce barriers to learning
3. Identify strategies to support school-based planning and decision making around literacy and technologies

Day 1

Keynote: Success for All Students:
There is no App for that!
Dr. Dave Edyburn
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Facilitated Conversations

- How is our understanding changing about what reading means in the 21st century?
- Remediation or compensation?
How do you decide?
- Can you really level the playing field?

Technology Solutions

- Text-to-Speech
- Word Prediction
- Speech Recognition
- Visual thinking tools
- Symbol-supported text

Alberta Stories From the Field

Day 2

Keynote: Disabilities and Technology:
An emerging way to touch the future
Dr. Christopher M. Lee
University of Georgia

Getting Started – Making Change Happen

Coaching and leadership strategies for facilitating school-based planning and decision making around educational and assistive technologies.

Technology Solutions

- Text-to-Speech
- Word Prediction
- Speech Recognition
- Visual thinking tools
- Symbol-supported text

Wrap Up



Edmonton | August 26 and 27, 2013



Summer Institute

Teaching students with significant disabilities in junior/senior high

About the Event...

Students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities need fair and equitable access to quality educational opportunities. The focus of this two-day workshop will be on creating learning experiences for students that are meaningful, engaging and begin with the program of studies.

Participants will ...

1. Explore beliefs around student learning
2. Develop an understanding of principle-based planning
3. Learn more about evidence-based instructional strategies and responsive, flexible approaches that support an inclusive approach to learning.
4. Collaborate with colleagues from across Alberta.

Day 1

- Exploring the following principles for planning:
 - personal autonomy
 - personally meaningful
 - opportunities to interact with peers
 - socially relevant
 - age respectful
 - developmentally appropriate.
- Engaging and communicating with parents

Day 2

- Meaningful goals and instructional supports ... What works best for different students?
- Project-based learning that promotes engagement and participation
- Making the most of a student's learning team
- Assessment for learning and telling students' learning stories

Registration will be available soon.

For more information contact:

Mike Dreimanis, Education Manager, Inclusive Learning Supports Branch, Alberta Education at:
mike.dreimanis@gov.ab.ca or 780-422-6523

Alberta





2013 "JUST IN TIME" SUMMER INSTITUTES

Creating inclusive learning environments
for students who are Deaf or Hard of
Hearing (D/HH) & Blind or Visually
Impaired (B/VI)

D/HH: AUGUST 20TH – CALGARY
AUGUST 22ND – EDMONTON

B/VI: AUGUST 21ST – CALGARY
AUGUST 23RD – EDMONTON

About the Event:

The Summer Institute Series is focused on providing "Just in Time" support to school teams who will be working with a student who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH) or a student who is Blind or Visually Impaired (B/VI) in the upcoming school year. The one-day orientation will assist school teams in creating a more inclusive barrier-free learning environment for their student. For more information please contact mdrl@ualberta.ca.

BUILDING
CAPACITY

REMOVING
BARRIERS

BRIGHTER
FUTURES



REGISTRATION
NOW OPEN

click links below:



[B/VI Summer
Institutes](#)

[D/HH Summer
Institutes](#)