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# TURNING POINT

INTERIM REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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# Introduction

Inclusive education revolves around students - their strengths, challenges and potential as learners. Although there are different approaches to inclusive education, they share a common commitment to the participation, learning and success of all students within welcoming and supportive school communities. The key components of inclusive education, from funding and specialized supports, to teacher training and interagency collaboration, must be responsive to the diverse academic, social and behavioral needs of students. This is a major challenge given the increasing frequency, severity and complexity of student needs. When key components of inclusive education fail to keep pace with these changes, gaps emerge between student needs and the capacity of schools to meet them. This is where we find ourselves with inclusive education in Nova Scotia today: we have reached a turning point.

Several reviews have identified progress and problems with the model of inclusive education that we have had for the past two decades. The most recent review in 2014 identified widespread support for the principle of inclusive education. However, the review also found that neither students with special needs nor their peers appear to be well served by the existing model, and the implementation of this model is not working. As a result, adjustments or revisions will not suffice. Instead, we need to work together to redefine and redesign inclusive education in the best interest of all Nova Scotia students. This is our goal as a Commission.

To be clear: we are not looking backward to past practices, or standing still within existing limitations, but working toward a new model of inclusive education that meets the needs of all students in a feasible and sustainable way.

We do not yet have a complete sense of the current problems with inclusive education, but past reviews and our experiences to date have identified concerns about the well-being, learning, and outcomes of students with special needs and of their peers. While there are unquestionably countless success stories under the current model, students have had mixed experiences with inclusive education and many parents have expressed concern that their children's needs are not being satisfactorily met. In addition, educators have reported that the current system does not optimally provide them with the knowledge, skills, tools, time, instructional settings, and/or integrated services and supports that they require to address the diverse needs of all students.

In the months to come, we look forward to consulting with students, parents, educators and other Nova Scotians and hearing their suggestions for moving forward. To be clear: we are not looking backward to past practices, or standing still within existing limitations, but working toward a new model of inclusive education that meets the needs of all students in a feasible and sustainable way. The interim recommendations contained in this report are designed to create a solid evidence base to inform and guide all aspects of this important work on behalf of the children and youth of Nova Scotia.



# SECTION ONE

## Introducing the Commission on Inclusive Education

### Origins

The Commission is an arms-length body struck under the provisions of the *Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements (2017) Act*, which sets forth the composition, mandate, and timeframe of the Commission.

### Composition

The Commission is comprised of one representative appointed by the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU), one representative appointed by the Minister of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), and an independent chair jointly appointed by the Minister and the NSTU. The NSTU representative is Adela Njie, the EECD representative is Monica Williams, and the independent Chair is Dr. Sarah Shea.

### Mandate

The mandate of the Commission, as set forth in the *Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements (2017) Act*, is to:

- reform inclusive education in the Nova Scotia education system and identify creative and sustainable solutions to the challenges faced in delivering quality education for all students within an inclusive education model in which teachers feel prepared and supported and children have a sense of belonging and are helped to achieve their full potential;
- recommend reforms to current policies related to inclusive education;
- provide a research-based overview of the current practice and policy of inclusive education with respect to students in the public schools operated by each school board in the Province;
- conduct a comprehensive literature review of inclusive education;
- identify the challenges educators face in implementing inclusive education;
- identify potential areas of improvement in Provincial and school board policies related to inclusive education;
- after conducting a provincial, national and international research review, identify and recommend best practices for the implementation of inclusive education;
- provide recommendations on how the implementation of inclusive education can be improved, including recommendations respecting:
  - funding,
  - resources and resource allocation and accountability,
  - professional development,

- alignment of initiatives, and
- a mechanism for the regular review of inclusive education;
- identify areas that would benefit from further investigation;
- develop a comprehensive strategic plan that includes measurable education goals for implementing inclusive education and specific recommendations for improving teaching and learning conditions in support of the goals;
- consult with the parties, persons employed in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, school boards and any other relevant persons, including teachers, students and parents and guardians, as the Commission considers necessary;
- issue an interim report, including recommendations, to the parties on or before June 30, 2017; and
- issue a final report to the parties within one year after the appointment of the members of the Commission.

### Work of the Commission:

As described above, the work of the Commission is to thoroughly assess the current state of inclusive education, to research best practices, and to provide credible recommendations. Ultimately, our success will be determined by the level of meaningful change that is achieved for Nova Scotia students.

### Purposes of the Interim Report:

The purposes of the Interim Report are to:

- a. introduce the Commission on Inclusive Education;

- b. describe the gaps between key components of our current model of inclusive education and changing student needs;
- c. present recommendations aimed at creating an evidence base for a new model; and
- d. serve as starting point for discussion.

In the three months since the appointment of the Commission, we have barely scratched the surface of the incredibly complex issues surrounding inclusive education. This interim report is an introductory document that presents preliminary findings and interim recommendations as starting points for discussion. Our future work will concentrate on broad public consultation and research aimed at resolving these problems in a collaborative way and creating a new provincial definition, policy and model for inclusive education.

### Terms of Reference:

#### 1. Guiding Principles

- a. **The best interest of every student:** fair and equitable participation in and benefit from inclusive education for every Nova Scotia student.
- b. **Evidence-based practice:** grounded in a comprehensive information base of research, professional literature, public input, and the experiences of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other partners in inclusive education.
- c. **Feasibility and sustainability in the real-world contexts of classrooms, schools, and school systems:** authentic to the realities and complexities of public education in Nova Scotia.



## 2. Core Values


- a. **Equality:** the right of every student to appropriate and effective education.
- b. **Equity:** the differentiation of educational programs and services in response to individual strengths and challenges.
- c. **Fairness:** reasonable and just treatment in response to personal circumstances.

In order to achieve equity and fairness in education, some students require differing shares of resources and supports. Therefore, differences in student resources and supports are sometimes necessary to support equality, equity and fairness in education.

## 3. Collaborative Consultation

The Commission has just begun the task of consulting with the many stakeholders involved in inclusive education and a great deal more consultation is planned. All interested parties will have opportunities to give input, and no final conclusions will be reached until that process is complete. We welcome the opportunity to engage with Nova Scotians in frank and student-centered dialogue regarding the future of inclusive education in our province. The Commission is committed to conducting public consultations that are:

- a. Inclusive and accessible;
- b. Collaborative and mutually respectful;
- c. Student-centered and progressive; and
- d. Action-oriented and evidence-based.



Our future work will concentrate on broad public consultation and research aimed at resolving these problems in a collaborative way and creating a new provincial definition, policy and model for inclusive education.

# SECTION TWO

## The Current Model of Inclusive Education

### 1. Provincial Special Education Policy and Inclusive Education

Two decades ago, the first provincial policy for special education in Nova Scotia was introduced (*Special Education Policy Manual, 1997*). This policy mandated the implementation of inclusive education in Nova Scotia schools centered on a collaborative program planning process that welcomed parental involvement. Although the provincial policy was updated in 2008 (*Special Education Policy, 2008*), the model of inclusive education remained intact and includes:

- Students' rights to an appropriate, quality, inclusive education provided by licensed and qualified teachers;
- Designated roles, rights and/or responsibilities of students, parents, teachers, school administrators, school boards, the EECD and other partners in inclusive education;
- A provincial funding formula for special education;
- A collaborative, multi-step program planning process; and
- Guidelines for student assessment, transition planning, and interagency partnerships.

Over the years, the terms 'special education', 'inclusion', 'inclusive schooling', and 'inclusive education' have been used interchangeably. In Nova Scotia, the provincial special education

policy describes our model of inclusive education and supports its implementation such that the two are closely intertwined. For clarity and consistency in this document, 'special education' refers to the provincial special education policy and related funding, policies and guidelines. 'Inclusive education' refers to the current model of inclusive education as defined in the special education policy, i.e., public education that meets the needs of all students through a continuum of programs and services that are coordinated within the grade level/subject area classrooms of neighborhood schools, to the extent possible (*Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee, 2001; Special Education Policy, 2008*). Although the Nova Scotia definition centres on equality in student placement, other jurisdictions have defined inclusive education as equity in the provision of varied educational programs, services, and instructional settings that are tailored to individual student strengths and challenges and support the learning and success of all students.

### 2. Advances in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Since the enactment of the special education policy in the mid-1990s, significant advances have been made in the implementation of inclusive education. These gains have been described in the reports of the various teams and committees that have reviewed inclusive education over



the years (e.g., *Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee (SEIRC), 2001; Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs: Review Committee Report and Recommendations, 2007; Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotians Demand a Better Future for Every Student: Report of the Minister's Panel on Education, 2014*).

In its 2001 report, SEIRC described the progress made in: a) inclusive schooling; b) the program planning process; c) resources and supports; and d) the identification and assessment of students with special needs. The 2007 report of another provincial review team recognized progress in the areas of autism, specialized staffing, and high school programs. Several years later, the 2014 Minister's Panel on Education reported widespread support for the principle of inclusive education. They also found that the ability to identify and support students had advanced in recent years, and that inclusive education had brought a real-world reality to schools and classrooms. However, the panel concluded overall that the current model does not appear to be serving students with special needs nor their peers well, and the implementation is not working. They identified several longstanding challenges that continue at present.

### 3. Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

#### Challenges identified in the Provincial Reviews of Inclusive Education

From the outset, one of the biggest impediments to inclusive education in Nova Scotia has been the lack of clarity and consistency in implementation. Although we are a small province, we have not had a consistent provincial system for implementing inclusive education. The 1997 special education

Over the years, the terms 'special education', 'inclusion', 'inclusive schooling', and 'inclusive education' have been used interchangeably.

policy outlined a multi-step program planning process but did not include standard terminology, forms, procedures, or templates for use across the province. Instead, each school board was required to develop its own policies and procedures such that inclusive education is implemented differently from one part of the province to the next. The need for greater clarity and consistency has been identified for many years.

For example, in 2001, recommendations were made for: a) common terminology in special education; b) uniform guidelines for student assessments and referrals; c) clarified roles and responsibilities in program planning; and d) the establishment of a consistent system for tracking, monitoring and reporting student progress on Individual Program Plans (IPPs). Despite these recommendations, we continue to lack a cohesive and accountable system for implementing inclusive education today. Other identified challenges include the lack of: 1) interagency collaboration; 2) teacher training; 3) specialized staff; and 4) funding. These four key components of our existing model of inclusive education have not kept pace with changing student needs, resulting in growing gaps between the needs of our students and the capacity of public schools to meet them. Widening gaps, and the lack of a cohesive provincial system for bridging them, are two of the main barriers to inclusive education today.

## 4. Student Needs

### Complex Student Needs

Across Canada and around the world, student needs are changing in several important ways (Autism Nova Scotia, 2017; Boyle, Boulet, Schieve, Cohen, Blumberg, Marshaly, Yeargin, Visser, & Kogan, 2011; Halfon, Houtrow, Larson & Newacheck, 2012). In general, student needs are increasingly common, severe, and overlapping – trends that are reflected in a current review of the complex needs of Nova Scotia students. Although the EECD staff and school board representatives completing this review have not finalized their report, they kindly shared their findings with the Commission.

Students with complex needs are a small percentage of the school-aged population who require multiple forms of intensive support for significant challenges with behavior, mental health, learning, development, and/or communication. Although they make up a small proportion of the students on IPPs, the review has found that students with complex needs require a great deal of support at school. For example, 15% of these students require the support of two full-time teacher assistants at a time. Students with complex needs also require the services of a wide range of highly trained and specialized staff, including: learning centre teachers; school psychologists; speech-language pathologists; autism specialists; and behavior interventionists. Many of the approximately 500 Nova Scotia students with complex needs have several diagnosed areas of challenge, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1: Primary Diagnosis of Nova Scotia Students with Complex Needs

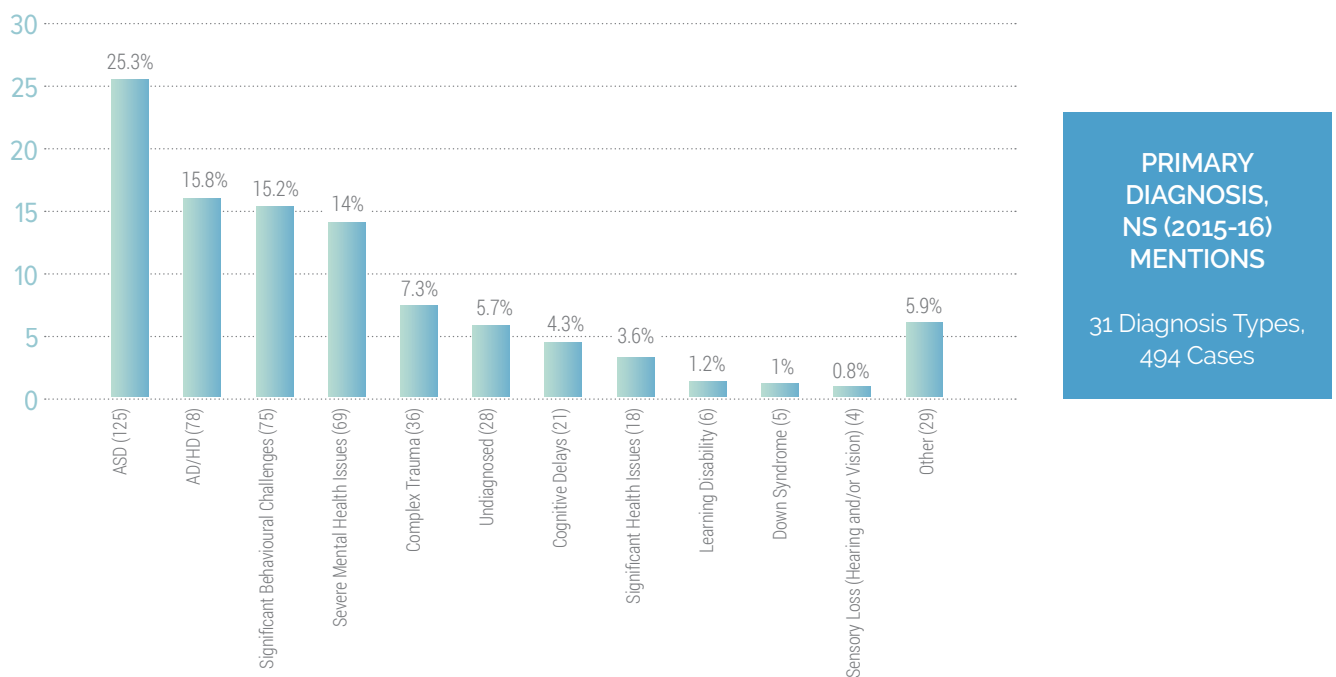
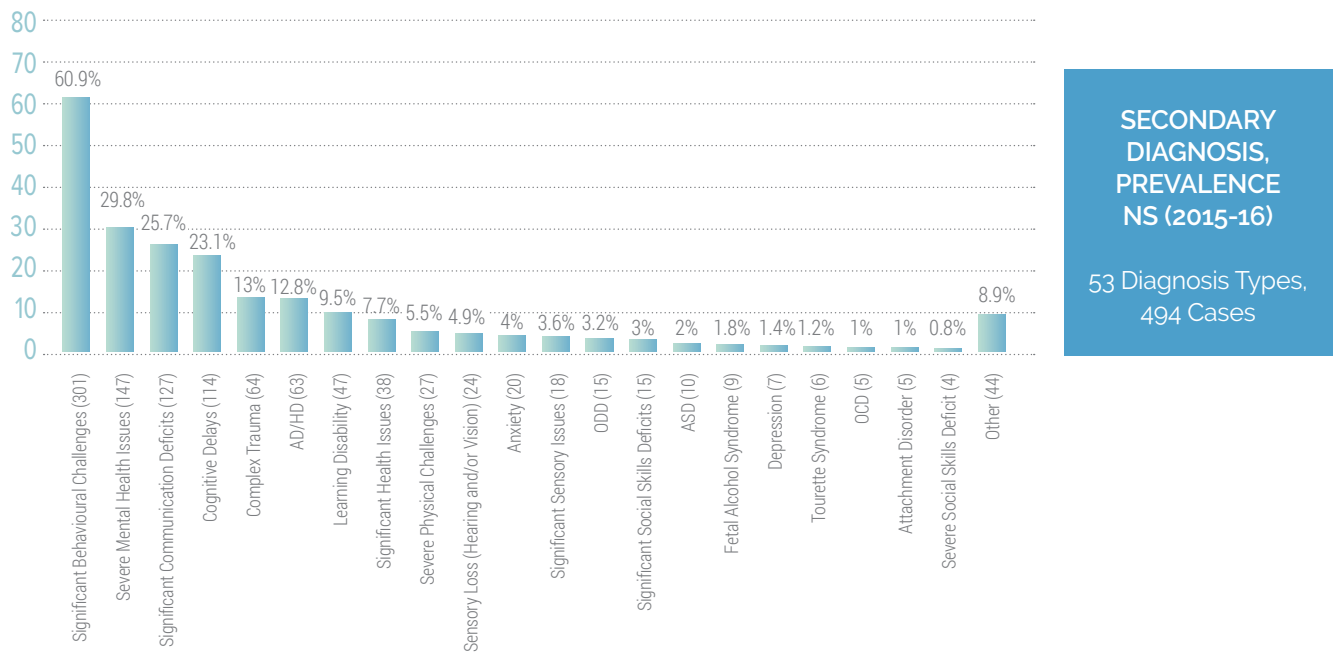




Figure 2: Secondary Diagnosis of Nova Scotia Students with Complex Needs



As shown in the above graphs, approximately one-quarter of the students with complex needs have autism as their primary diagnosis; one-quarter have a secondary diagnosis of severe communication deficits; and one-quarter have a secondary diagnosis of cognitive delays. Moreover, approximately three-quarters of the students with complex needs have severe behavioural challenges. All Nova Scotia school boards reported major difficulties in addressing severe behavioural challenges. In addition, the boards reported that, of the students with complex needs, those with severe behavioural challenges require the most attention, intervention and support from staff. The frequent cooccurrence of behavioral challenges with other conditions has been reported

elsewhere (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Behavioral issues often overlap with mental health and/or communication challenges and contribute to student discipline issues (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2017; The Alberta Teachers' Federation, 2014).

### Student Math and Literacy Needs

Many Nova Scotia students experience challenges with reading, writing and math as measured on provincial assessments (*Business Plan 2017-2018: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development*). Although the percentages vary by assessment, grade level and school year, it is often

Although the percentages vary by assessment, grade level and school year, it is often the case that roughly one-quarter of students do not meet grade-level expectations in math or literacy.

the case that roughly one-quarter of students do not meet grade-level expectations in math or literacy on provincial assessments. Students who experience challenges in these core subject areas often require the support of specialized staff, along with the timely identification of gaps in their learning, and the provision of intensive, evidence-based intervention that supports their acquisition of math and literacy skills. Thus, there is a high demand for various forms of math and literacy intervention.

### Student Medical Needs

In Nova Scotia schools today, many different healthcare services and supports are provided to meet the diverse medical needs of students. Although they are healthcare supports, school boards pay the costs of providing many medically-based services to students, such as:

- intermittent catheterization;
- tube feeding;
- occupational therapy and physiotherapy exercises;
- care for chronic medical conditions;
- diabetes monitoring and support;
- emergency medical plans, monitoring and support for severe allergies (anaphylaxis);
- mental health counselling and support services;
- emergency medical plans, monitoring and support for seizure disorders;
- training for teachers, administrators and support staff in various healthcare procedures;
- purchase, installation and maintenance of specialized healthcare equipment, materials and supplies;
- administration and monitoring of prescription medication during the school day; and
- the clinical and training services of Registered Nurses.

The EECD and the school boards have developed various policies and procedures to support the education of students with medical needs (e.g., *Guidelines*

*for Supporting Students in School who have a Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNAR) Order, 2014; Guidelines for Supporting Students with Type 1 Diabetes and Other Diabetes Requiring Insulin in Schools, 2010*). The growing complexity of student medical needs, and the responsibilities of school boards to meet them, places pressure on school personnel to provide healthcare supports that go well beyond their qualifications and duties as educators. Greater interagency collaboration is essential to providing students with the varied programs and services that they require from various government departments and agencies.

### Challenges with Interagency Collaboration

Established obstacles to interagency collaboration seriously hamper the efforts of educators and partner agencies to provide coordinated, accessible programs and services to students and their families at school. The reality is that Nova Scotia students increasingly require the direct, school-based delivery of multiple programs and services from several government departments and agencies. Educators cannot do it alone. Instead of working directly with students, professionals from outside agencies often consult with school staff to train them in how to provide additional supports to students. However, consultation does not provide students with the direct professional services that they require to succeed at school. Moreover, consultation often places added pressures on school personnel to perform duties beyond their training and expertise; adds to their already heavy workloads; and takes time away from their core duties as educators.

The need for stronger interagency collaboration has been repeatedly described in successive reviews of inclusive education. This is not a newly

identified need, nor has there been a shortage of recommendations targeting improvements. Although several recommendations have been implemented, most notably the establishment of *SchoolsPlus* programs in schools across the province, many of the past recommendations have not materialized. Instead of consultation, more integrated, interdepartmental services are needed in schools. Therefore, a formal, interagency agreement is required that:

- a. clearly delineates and mandates the responsibilities of various government departments and agencies for providing direct services to students in public schools;
- b. identifies the varied settings required for the delivery of these programs and services; and
- c. eliminates existing barriers to interagency collaboration.

### Challenges with Complex Classrooms

Research has shown that teachers, administrators and support staff in Nova Scotia and across Canada face many challenges in trying to address the needs of all learners in increasingly complex classrooms (Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, 2009; The Alberta Teachers' Federation, 2014 & 2015; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011). One of the daily dilemmas reported by teachers is the complicated balancing act of trying to teach students with diverse needs while at the

same time attending to the learning of the other students in the classroom. Another area of concern is the limited access that students and teachers have to the specialized staff and services that they require (e.g., school psychologists, social workers, speech-language pathologists). Additionally, teachers across the country have experienced growing workloads, paperwork, and time demands in increasingly complex classrooms (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011), trends that have also been identified in Nova Scotia.

The major time demands on teachers were noted by the Minister's Panel on Education in 2014, who found that "many teachers are struggling because of the complex student needs in the classroom; the demands often outpace the time available" (*Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotians Demand a Better Future for Every Student: Report of the Minister's Panel on Education, 2014, p. 24*). Mounting workload and paperwork demands have also been reported by Nova Scotia teachers, including problems with the electronic filing system for adaptations and IPPs. A team from Service Nova Scotia (SNS) recently met with teachers in schools across the province to see and hear about these problems firsthand and discuss ways of resolving them. The Commission looks forward to consulting with the SNS team on this important work and recognizes that other aspects of the program planning process merit scrutiny with the aims of reducing paperwork and freeing up more time for teachers to teach.

Although several recommendations have been implemented, most notably the establishment of *Schools Plus* programs in schools across the province, many of the past recommendations have not materialized.

## Challenges with Teacher Training (Preparation and Professional Development)

The lack of practical and accessible teacher training in how to instruct students with diverse needs is a major issue in inclusive education. Across Canada, teachers have frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the training that they receive for inclusive education and raised concerns about their lack of practical knowledge and skills in this area. Research has shown that many of them feel inadequately prepared to teach students with diverse needs (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011), including recent graduates of the five Nova Scotia Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs.

The most recent surveys of the Nova Scotia B.Ed. graduates were conducted in 2010 and 2016 (*Bachelor of Education Graduate Follow-up Survey Report: 2011; 2016 Bachelor of Education Graduate Follow-Up Survey Report*, 2016). The first survey canvassed the 2008 and 2009 B.Ed. graduates, while the second canvassed those who had graduated between 2010 and 2016. It is important to note that significant variations were found in the responses of the graduates from the different schools of education.

In 2010, 29% of the graduates who responded to the survey indicated that they did not feel confident with classroom management, and 30% indicated a lack of confidence in their ability to identify and address special learning needs. These percentages were higher in the 2016 survey: 35% of the respondents reported that they did not feel confident in their knowledge and skills in behavior management, and 53% did not feel confident in their ability to identify and address special learning needs. Furthermore, 37% of the respondents to the 2016 survey did not feel confident in their knowledge and skills in teaching strategies for literacy, 41% did not feel confident regarding teaching strategies for math, and 51% did not feel confident regarding cross-curricular math

strategies. In addition, between 80% and 92% of the 2016 survey respondents recommended that greater priority be placed on several areas in the B.Ed. programs, including, but not limited to:

- behavior management (92%)
- adaptations to meet diverse student learning needs (89%)
- classroom management (88%)
- teaching strategies for literacy (84%)
- differentiated instruction and assessment (81%)
- inclusive education practices and related policies and guidelines (80%)

These survey results indicate that a gap exists between the identified needs of Nova Scotia students and new teachers' level of preparedness to meet them. When recently canvassed, the five Nova Scotia universities that offer B.Ed. programs (Acadia; Cape Breton; Mount Saint Vincent; Saint Anne; St. Francis Xavier) all confirmed that their B.Ed. programs include coursework on inclusive education. However, the available courses and practicums for inclusive education vary from one university to the next. In 2015, a provincial Bachelor of Education Working Group was struck to work collaboratively on improvements to the B.Ed. programs offered across the province. The Working Group is comprised of representatives from the universities, EECD, school boards and the NSTU. The Commission looks forward to collaborating with the Working Group as it coordinates enhancements to teacher training for inclusive education, including addressing the demand for more highly trained and qualified teachers for specialized positions.

## Challenges with the Recruitment, Retention and Assignment of Specialized Staff

Across the province, there are ongoing challenges with the hiring and retention of specialized staff, including, but not limited to: resource teachers, learning centre teachers, behaviour interventionists, learning disabilities teachers, autism specialists,

guidance counsellors, school psychologists and speech-language pathologists. This problem has been repeatedly identified in previous reviews and reports, which have emphasized the need for:

- a. a provincial framework or forum for the consistent coordination of teacher training, specialization and assignments across Nova Scotia;
- b. an adequate supply of highly trained teachers with different specializations;
- c. incentives to attract and retain specialized staff in rural schools; and
- d. teacher assignment processes that ensure that all teachers are qualified for the positions they fill.

One of the most common specialized positions is that of Resource teacher. At present, approximately one-tenth of all public-school teachers in Nova Scotia have Resource as at least part of their teaching assignment. Some of these teachers teach Resource full time, while others teach other subjects and grades and have Resource as just one part of their assignment. We are in the process of collecting and analyzing information from the EECD to determine how Resource positions are staffed and how Resource services are provided to students across the province.

Although we have much more work to do in looking at Resource and the other specialized supports that our students receive, the information

that we have reviewed to date has raised many questions. Preliminary figures from the EECD indicate that, of the more than 900 Nova Scotia teachers who currently have Resource in their teaching assignment, many do not hold formal Resource qualifications (e.g., Bachelor of Special Education; Master's degrees in Inclusive Education, Special Education, or Educational Psychology). Approximately one-third have academic backgrounds in English and Social Studies but fewer than one-tenth hold a degree with a minor or major in mathematics, one of the core subjects in which Nova Scotia students most often require Resource intervention. Additionally, it appears that many Resource positions are split up among teachers, and school boards vary in the proportion of full-time and part-time Resource positions that they assign.

While these preliminary findings require additional investigation, the information that we have received thus far raises questions about: a) the availability of qualified Resource teachers across the province; b) the variability in the teacher assignments for Resource among school boards; c) the extent to which Resource positions are being divided up to provide flexibility in teacher assignments and/or schedules; d) the type and amount of Resource support that students are receiving, especially in mathematics; and e) school board utilization of the special education funding that is earmarked for Resource positions.

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## Challenges with Individualized Programming and Support

Many professionals provide individualized services for their clients, but they usually serve their clients one at a time. In contrast, teachers provide individualized and group instruction simultaneously to large classes of very diverse learners. In recent years, the number and percentage of Nova Scotia students receiving individualized learning supports has increased even though student enrolment has declined. Two of the main forms of individualized support are adaptations and IPPs. Adaptations are learning supports that students require to successfully complete their grade-level work, such as large-print books, extra time for writing tests, and copies of lecture notes. When grade-level work is not appropriate for a student, an IPP is developed. The purpose of an IPP is to lay out the plan for individualized instruction tailored to the student's strengths and needs. Statistics for the number and percentage of students on adaptations and IPPs vary because students may enter or exit adaptations and IPPs at any point in the school year. Although they are moving targets, several trends are evident in the statistics for adaptations and IPPs in Nova Scotia.

Between 2004 and 2014, the total student enrolment in Nova Scotia declined by 24,605 students. However, during the same timespan, the number of IPPs rose from 5,943 to 7,084 and increased from 4.1% to 5.9% of the student population, with higher percentages reported among African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal students (*Individual Program Plan (IPP) Review: Themes and Recommendations*, 2016). As shown in Table 1, the percentage of students on IPPs over the past four years peaked during the 2014-2015 school year at 6.95%, currently measures 6.38%, and varies significantly by school board. Nova Scotia has eight school boards:

1. Annapolis Valley Regional School Board (AVRSB)
2. Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board (CBVRSB)
3. Chignecto-Central Regional School Board (CCRSB)
4. Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP)
5. Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB)
6. South Shore Regional School Board (SSRSB)
7. Strait Regional School Board (SRSB)
8. Tri-county Regional School Board (TCRSB)

Table 1: Percentage of Nova Scotia Students on IPPs by School Board: 2013-2017

SCHOOL BOARD	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	OVERALL CHANGE
AVRSB	7.30%	7.58%	7.23%	6.50%	-0.8%
CBVRSB	8.59%	8.47%	8.00%	8.10%	-0.49%
CCRSB	6.19%	6.35%	6.40%	6.55%	+0.36%
CSAP	2.93%	2.91%	2.80%	2.77%	-0.16%
HRSB	6.29%	6.31%	5.89%	5.71%	-0.58%
SSRSB	6.44%	6.72%	5.51%	4.45%	-1.99%
SRSB	7.55%	7.92%	7.02%	7.28%	-0.27%
TCRSB	11.05%	11.80%	12.19%	11.96%	+0.91%
<b>Provincial Totals</b>	<b>6.85%</b>	<b>6.95%</b>	<b>6.58%</b>	<b>6.38%</b>	<b>-0.47%</b>





As shown in Table 1, the percentage of students currently on IPPs ranges from 2.77% in the CSAP to 11.96% in the TCRSB. Overall, the percentage of students on IPPs has risen from 4.1% in 2004 to 6.38% today, an increase of 2.28% over 13 years. However, the percentage of students on adaptations has increased by 2.95% within four years, with significant variation observed among school boards, as shown in Table 2. For the current school year, the percentage

of students on adaptations ranges from 20.46% in the CSAP to 32.40% in the CBVRSB. The figures presented in Tables 1 and 2 illustrate: a) the significant proportion of students receiving individualized support in our classrooms; b) school board differences in the percentages of students receiving these supports; and c) the need for flexible funding and resources that are responsive to these regional differences.

Table 2: Percentage of Nova Scotia Students on Adaptations by School Board: 2013-2017

SCHOOL BOARD	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	OVERALL CHANGE
AVRSB	23.18%	25.75%	26.27%	24.78%	+1.6%
CBVRSB	27.95%	30.78%	31.69%	32.40%	+4.45%
CCRSB	24.02%	26.79%	27.93%	29.25%	+5.23%
CSAP	16.29%	17.36%	18.86%	20.46%	+4.17%
HRSB	21.07%	22.40%	23.64%	23.57%	+2.5%
SSRSB	25.94%	27.32%	26.82%	24.83%	-1.11%
SRSB	27.10%	28.43%	31.42%	31.99%	+4.89%
TCRSB	26.60%	28.11%	28.85%	29.05%	+2.45%
<b>Provincial Totals</b>	<b>23.30%</b>	<b>25.13%</b>	<b>26.19%</b>	<b>26.25%</b>	<b>+2.95%</b>

### Challenges with Funding

One of the most persistent barriers to inclusive education is inadequate funding. Over the years, there have been repeated calls for new funding formulas that better reflect student needs, and for more money to hire additional teacher assistants, teachers and specialized staff. We recognize the need for additional funding and resources and consider it a top priority in a new model of inclusive education. Therefore, we are reviewing the current funding for special education. To build a solid

information base for financial recommendations, we have begun collecting and analyzing information regarding:

- student needs;
- class composition;
- specialized programs and services provided to students;
- underlying evidence for these supports;
- measured effectiveness of these supports; and
- school board utilization of special education funding.

Funding recommendations are not included in this report because we do not know exactly which supports our students require, which supports they are currently receiving, or how well these supports are working. We will consult with Nova Scotians to gain a thorough understanding of how the approximately \$150,000,000 in annual provincial funding for special education is currently spent and where more money and resources are needed. We will also continue to examine how the annual special education funding that school boards received is calculated, allocated, utilized and reported.

The funding allocation that each school board receives is based on its student enrolment. This enrolment-based formula does not reflect the changing needs found in Nova Scotia classrooms, nor does it address school board differences in the percentages of students receiving individualized support. School boards with identical student enrolments can vary greatly in the percentage of students receiving these supports and in their spending on special education, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: School Board Differences in Adaptations, IPPs, Funding and Expenditures

SCHOOL YEAR	SCHOOL BOARD	STUDENT ENROLMENT	% STUDENTS ON ADAPTATIONS	% STUDENTS ON IPPS	PROVINCIAL FUNDING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION	TOTAL BOARD EXPENDITURES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION	GAP BETWEEN PROVINCIAL FUNDING AND BOARD EXPENDITURES
2013-2014	A	13,395	23.18%	7.3%	\$15,862,300	\$16,727,019	(\$864,719)
	B	13,662	27.95%	8.59%	\$15,493,800	\$22,092,362	(\$6,598,562)
2014-2015	A	13,142	25.75%	7.58%	\$16,041,600	\$18,212,478	(\$2,170,878)
	B	13,278	30.78%	8.47%	\$15,676,700	\$22,857,588	(\$7,180,888)
2015-2016	A	13,041	26.27%	7.23%	\$16,041,600	\$19,229,329	(\$3,187,729)
	B	13,004	31.69%	8.00%	\$15,872,900	\$22,278,217	(\$6,405,317)

The table above illustrates the requirement for a new funding formula that addresses school board differences, reflects student needs, and provides school boards with adequate funding to address those needs. The significant shortfalls between the provincial special education funding that school boards receive and what they spend create major financial pressures, especially since school boards must balance their budgets. Often, the boards reallocate funds from other areas of their budgets to make up the difference. Instead of tweaking the existing funding formula, we need to create a new method for funding inclusive education that is feasible, flexible, sustainable and responsive to student needs.



# Summary

We are the latest in a succession of provincial committees struck to examine inclusive education and we are finding the same problems that have been reported for more than 15 years. Clearly, we need to move from describing problems to solving them. It is essential that the actions that we take are: focused on the best interest of all students; evidence-based; feasible and sustainable in schools and classrooms; and ethically, educationally and financially sound. It is also crucial that the implementation of these actions is supported by a cohesive provincial framework that promotes alignment, consistency, and accountability in inclusive education. We must take advantage of this turning point to work toward a new model of inclusive education that supports the learning and success of all students in a fair and equitable way. It is already clear to us that key components of our work will include:

- developing a single Nova Scotia provincial policy for inclusive education;
- creating a clearly defined vision of inclusive education that ensures equity and fairness for all students;
- delineating outcomes for inclusive education that are measurable; and
- using evidence to describe the optimal continuum of supports required for successful inclusive education, including access to the appropriate curricula, teaching, specialized staff, integrated services, and instructional settings.

This interim report does not contain specific proposed solutions to the problems described because solutions can only be found through research, experience, and dialogue. To arrive at evidence-based solutions, the Commission requires a comprehensive information base. We need to hear from stakeholders, review research findings, and examine models of inclusive education from across Canada and around the world. Many of the interim recommendations contained in this report target information-gathering from a variety of sources. We will also consult with Nova Scotians in a series of meetings in the fall of 2017 and provide a web-based portal through which all interested parties can submit their perspectives and suggestions. All of the information gathered will form the foundation for creating a new model of inclusive education that includes a new definition, provincial policy, cohesive framework and strategic plan. By working together and focusing on students, we will build a better future for our children and youth.

# Interim Recommendations

ISSUE(S)	IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:
Policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="560 604 1380 703">1. The Commission develop a consolidated provincial policy for inclusive education to replace existing provincial and school boards policies for special education.</li><li data-bbox="560 724 1380 829">2. The Commission create a comprehensive, multi-step strategic plan to support the phased-in implementation of the new provincial policy for inclusive education.</li></ol>
Funding, Resource Allocation and Accountability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="560 892 1429 1050">3. The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) request that the Auditor General of Nova Scotia complete an audit of the current provincial funding formula(s), resource allocation processes, and fiscal accountability measures for inclusive education and report his findings by December 15, 2017.  The Commission requests that the audit include: a) an analysis of how school boards utilize special education funding; and b) a comparison of the provincial funding that the school boards receive for special education versus their actual expenditures.</li><li data-bbox="560 1239 1429 1459">4. The Minister of Finance provide the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with the resources required to support the implementation of the interim recommendations contained in this report.  The resources will be managed by the EECD, including the allocation of resources to the other government departments and education partners named in the recommendations, on a needs basis.</li></ol>
Teacher Training (Preparation and Professional Development)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="560 1522 1429 1911">5. The provincial Bachelor of Education Working Group assist the Commission in examining:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="609 1585 1429 1648">a. current teacher preparation and professional development for inclusive education in Nova Scotia;</li><li data-bbox="609 1648 1429 1711">b. the practical knowledge and skills required by teachers and administrators to meet the changing needs of Nova Scotia students;</li><li data-bbox="609 1711 1429 1774">c. the demand for specialized teacher training to address diverse and complex student needs;</li><li data-bbox="609 1774 1429 1879">d. strategies for improving teacher preparation and professional development to better meet student needs and support teachers and administrators in implementing inclusive education; and</li><li data-bbox="609 1879 1429 1911">e. report its findings to the Commission by January 15, 2018.</li></ol></li></ol>



**ISSUE(S)**

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:**

**Specialized Staff to Support Inclusive Education**

6. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with school boards, examine and describe the current staffing ratios and caseloads of specialized staff and report its findings to the Commission by January 15, 2018.

The examination of staff caseloads shall include the exploration of general trends in: a) the number of students served; b) the types of special needs addressed; c) the various programs, services and/or interventions provided and the measures of their effectiveness; and d) the proportion of teacher time spent on direct work with students versus time spent on office work and paperwork. The specialized staff include, but are not limited to: School Psychologists, Speech-Language Pathologists, Special Education Teachers, Behaviour Interventionists, English as an Additional Language Teachers, Learning Disabilities Teachers, Autism Specialists and Guidance Counsellors.

7. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development confer with school boards and Nova Scotia universities regarding strategies and/or incentives to support the recruitment and retention of specialized staff for inclusive education, especially in rural areas of the province, and report its findings to the Commission by December 15, 2017.

The specialized staff include, but are not limited to: School Psychologists, Speech-Language Pathologists, Special Education Teachers, Behaviour Interventionists, English as an Additional Language Teachers, Learning Disabilities Teachers, Autism Specialists and Guidance Counsellors.

**Interdepartmental and Interagency Collaboration for the Provision of Direct Services to Children and Youth at School**

8. The Government of Nova Scotia strike a joint committee comprised of the Deputy Ministers of Education and Early Childhood Development, Health and Wellness, Community Services and Justice to develop an interministerial policy and supporting procedures for the school-based provision of the professional services, programs and supports that Nova Scotia students require from the four departments to fully participate in and benefit from public education, with a policy implementation date of September 1, 2018, and a written progress report provided to the Commission by January 30, 2018.

## ISSUE(S)

### Interdepartmental and Interagency Collaboration for the Provision of Direct Services to Children and Youth at School

## IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

The policy shall:

- delineate and mandate the roles and responsibilities of each department in meeting specific student needs in public schools; and
- set forth procedures to enable full interdepartmental collaboration in addressing multifaceted student needs that sometimes require the coordinated intervention of more than one government department, including, but not limited to student challenges with: school attendance; mental health; behaviour; chronic medical conditions; and/or substance abuse.

9. The joint committee of the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Health and Wellness, Community Services and Justice develop a shared model for supporting school-aged children and youth with complex needs including:
  - criteria for identifying complex needs;
  - procedures for the selection, coordination and provision of programs and services by government departments and school boards for students with complex needs; and
  - processes for determining the most appropriate setting(s) for the delivery of the programs and services.

The joint committee shall report its recommended model to the Commission by January 30, 2018.

10. The joint committee of the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Health and Wellness, Community Services and Justice review their respective department roles and responsibilities in supporting the preschool-to-school and school-to-community transitions for children and youth with special needs and report their findings to the Commission by January 30, 2018.

The review shall identify existing barriers to transitions, including disruptions in the services provided to children and youth with special needs and their families as students enter and exit the school system. These services may include, but are not limited to: occupational therapy; physiotherapy; speech-language pathology; counselling; audiology; respite; and/or autism supports. The review shall also generate specific strategies for minimizing disruptions and facilitating seamless service delivery for students and their families during the transitions to and from public schools.



## ISSUE(S)

## IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

11. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Wellness, school boards, and school administrators, examine the nursing services that the Department of Health and Wellness currently provides to public schools, and student needs for different types of nursing support, including clinical nursing services. The EECD shall report the findings of the review to the Commission no later than December 15, 2017.

12. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development confer with the Commission in the current review of the Public-School Programs of Nova Scotia with specific reference to the courses, programs and instructional settings provided for students in Grades Primary to Twelve and report to the Commission on these matters by November 30, 2017.

The consultation shall explore, but not be limited to: specialized programs and supports for students with special needs; differentiated high school graduation requirements; alternative programs; alternative schools; varied instructional settings; and the tailoring of courses, programs and instructional settings to meet diverse student strengths and needs.

## Classroom Composition

13. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with school boards, report to the Commission on Inclusive Education and the Council on Classroom Conditions no later than January 31, 2018, general trends in class composition at each grade level in Nova Scotia public schools.

The report on class composition shall describe general trends in:

- the number of students with Adaptations;
- the range and average number of Adaptations per student;
- the types of Adaptations provided to students;
- the number of students with Individual Program Plans (IPPs);
- the average number of learning outcomes per IPP;
- the various types of IPPs;
- other individualized plans, such as Behaviour Support Plans; and
- the prevalence of special needs among Nova Scotia students.

The Department shall ensure that the confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of students are protected in all phases of data collection, analysis and reporting.

## ISSUE(S)

## IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

### Program Planning Process

14. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development retain the services of another government department or outside agency to complete a workflow analysis and 'ask the user' review of the Program Planning Process, identify ways to streamline the process, and report its findings to the Commission by December 15, 2017.

The workflow analysis and 'ask the user' review shall examine:

- the effectiveness and efficiency of the process;
- the accountability of the process;
- the support for parental involvement in the process;
- the roles and responsibilities of students, parents, educators and other participants in the process;
- the time, paperwork and documentation demands associated with the process;
- the extent to which Adaptations and IPPs are implemented in the classroom;
- the criteria used for placing students on adaptations, selecting the number and type of adaptations, and determining their effectiveness;
- the criteria used to determine when students enter and exit adaptations and IPPs;
- the proportion of students who exit IPPs and adaptations;
- potential enhancements to support the participation of students, parents, educators and other partners in the program planning process; and
- methods of streamlining the process to reduce the paperwork, office work and meetings and free up instructional time for teachers in the classroom.





## ISSUE(S)

## IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

### Student Behaviour

15. By January 31, 2018, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with school boards, report to the Commission its recommendations for expanding the Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy into a *Safe and Inclusive Schools Policy* that:
  - a. protects schools and classrooms as safe and positive learning environments for all students and staff;
  - b. differentiates between generally unacceptable student behavior and unacceptable student behavior associated with special needs; and
  - c. mandates prompt, intensive, and consistent measures for addressing severely disruptive student behavior that poses a risk to the safety, wellbeing and/or learning of the student, their peers, and/or school personnel.

The policy shall:

- uphold the right of all students, teachers, administrators, support staff and members of school communities to teach, learn, work, and travel in safe and inclusive classrooms, schools and school buses;
- teach, promote and reinforce positive student behavior and social emotional learning;
- incorporate restorative practices;
- differentiate between generally unacceptable student behaviour and unacceptable student behavior associated with special needs;
- differentiate the expectations for student behaviour as students grow, develop and progress through the grades;
- differentiate the documentation, consequences, and reporting of unacceptable student behaviour in accordance with student growth and development through the grades and/or in association with special needs;
- provide clear and consistent consequences for unacceptable student behavior, and
- provide detailed and consistent procedures for addressing severely disruptive student behaviour that poses a risk to the safety, wellbeing and/or learning of the student, their peers, and/or school personnel.

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# TURNING POINT

INTERIM REPORT OF THE  
COMMISSION ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

JUNE 29, 2017