

# COMMISSION ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

PUBLIC WORKSHOP SUMMARY

December 2017



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As part of its mandate to examine the model of inclusive education in Nova Scotia, the Commission on Inclusive Education hosted a series of public workshops across the province in November 2017. The purpose of these workshops was to:

- \* Meet with Nova Scotians across the province;
- \* Listen to people's lived experiences of inclusive education;
- \* Hear about new ideas and innovations for moving forward;
- \* Learn about Nova Scotians' priorities for inclusive education.



The workshops were attended by parents, students, current and retired teachers, support workers, education administrators, elected officials, university staff, and others. There was a good turnout across the province with 70 people attending workshops in Yarmouth and Stellarton, 25 attending in Sydney and close to 300 in Halifax.

All of the workshops followed the same format, beginning with a welcome from the Commissioners: Dr. Sarah Shea, Chair; Adela Njje; and Monica Williams. The Commissioners shared some background on their work so far. The presentation from the workshops can be found at <https://www.inclusiveedns.ca/consultation>.

We then invited people to share their current experiences with inclusive education at their tables and to think about what changes they see as needed based on some of the main themes that are already clearly showing themselves in the Commissioner's initial work.



Attendees from all workshops identified areas where changes are needed in order to move the system forward to a new model of inclusive education that meets the needs of all students in a feasible and sustainable way. Broadly, these were:

### Strong Home and School Partnerships

- \* Creative, clear ways to ensure parental involvement and understanding
- \* Parents need to trust and have confidence in teachers
- \* Identify and address concerns early
- \* Stop pushing students through grade levels
- \* Ensure consistent application of policy
- \* Establish better, more consistent ways to communicate
- \* Include students in the process
- \* Need time to allow for meetings and consistent collaboration
- \* Increased training and involvement of EPA's
- \* Clear approaches and principles to inform the work

### A Continuum of Programs, Services and Settings

- \* More support and attention to transitions is needed
- \* Important to integrate social, emotional learning at all ages
- \* Need resources to ensure access to properly trained specialists
- \* Additional supports needed to offer varied materials and learning environments
- \* Draw on and work with other resources and agencies
- \* Transparent ways of making decisions
- \* Communication and collaboration with specialists
- \* Ensure availability of varied programs, materials and learning environments
- \* Create broad and clear vision for education and inclusion

- \* Review and expand TA's role and involvement
- \* Find ways for supports and documents to follow students easily
- \* Rethink elements of the curriculum
- \* Ensure smooth transitions and consistent supports for students
- \* Dedicate resources to ensure access to properly trained specialists
- \* Collaboration requires time to meet and plan
- \* Allow for different, creative solutions for different cases
- \* Ensure coordinated, full-team approach
- \* Importance of Tuition Support Program
- \* Flexible Learning Support Plan

## Practical Specialized Teacher Education

- \* Specialized education for all educators (classroom teachers, TAs, EPAs, etc.)
- \* Changes and additions to BEd Programs
- \* Training and involvement of EAs, TAs is critical
- \* Ongoing professional development for all educators
- \* Allow for more hands-on practicums and training opportunities
- \* Move beyond medical model supports
- \* Cultural competence and unconscious bias
- \* Review assessment process

## Student-focused Interagency Collaboration

- \* Ensure coordinated, full-team approach
- \* Need clarity about roles and responsibilities
- \* Ensure equity in access to services across the province
- \* Allow time for collaboration and communication
- \* Evaluate and monitor supports in the classroom
- \* Recognize the importance of SchoolPlus and other supports
- \* Identifying and assessing needs of students
- \* Collaborate with others to ensure early interventions
- \* Specialized supports needed
- \* Support family and student advocates
- \* Review process for obtaining TA support
- \* Review and reconsider approach to funding
- \* Meaningful collaboration and community supports
- \* Working with outside agencies and specialists
- \* Allow outside agencies into schools
- \* Mandate early intervention
- \* Explore opportunities for specialized schools

- \* Recognize Education as a right
- \* Review how funding is allocated
- \* Recognize and address burnout
- \* More supports through transitions
- \* Ensure first voices are heard and considered
- \* Create shared definition of inclusion
- \* Create transformative change
- \* Review curriculum and programming
- \* Alternative outreach

There was a rich sharing of perspectives at each event which can be found in detail in [Appendix A](#).

At the end of each workshop the Commissioners shared some high level areas of change and participants were invited to vote on their biggest priorities. Each participant had three votes. The following were the results:

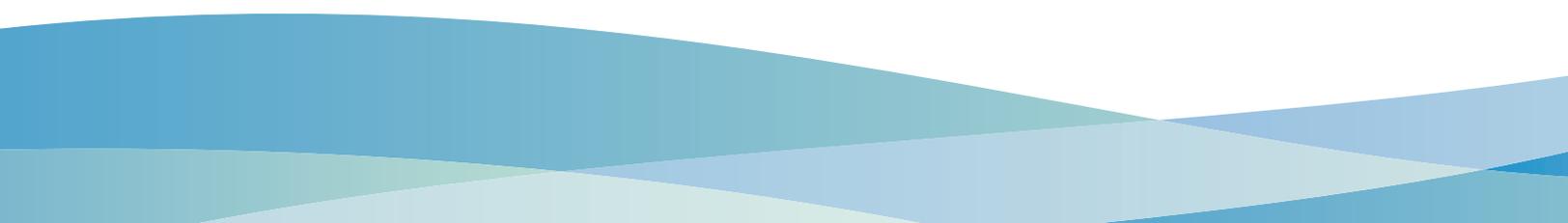
|   | Yarmouth   | Stellarton | Sydney    | Halifax    | Average    |
|---|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| <b>Strong Home &amp; School Partnerships</b>                    | 3%         | 0%         | 0%        | 4%         | 2%         |
| Welcoming, respectful, accessible information                   | 1%         | 0%         | 3%        | 3%         | 2%         |
| Engaging parents & students w/ ed team                          | 3%         | 5%         | 0%        | 2%         | 3%         |
| 3-Way info sharing with students, parents, educators            | 0%         | 0%         | 11%       | 5%         | 4%         |
| *Clear & Informative Progress Reports                           | 3%         | 0%         | 0%        | 1%         | 1%         |
| <b>A Continuum of Programs, Services, &amp; Settings</b>        | 2%         | 3%         | 0%        | 9%         | 4%         |
| For academic, cognitive, social & emotional learning            | 6%         | 7%         | 0%        | 4%         | 4%         |
| Classroom-based supports  | 4%         | 16%        | 8%        | 6%         | 9%         |
| Specialized programs & services                                 | 10%        | 6%         | 5%        | 4%         | 6%         |
| Varied instructional settings                                   | 8%         | 2%         | 13%       | 9%         | 8%         |
| <b>Practical, Specialized Teacher Education</b>                 | 11%        | 2%         | 0%        | 6%         | 5%         |
| Practical, hands-on learning on delivery of inclusive education | 14%        | 9%         | 5%        | 4%         | 8%         |
| Early & ongoing professional development                        | 22%        | 29%        | 34%       | 17%        | 26%        |
| <b>Student-focused Interagency Collaboration</b>                | 2%         | 1%         | 0%        | 9%         | 3%         |
| Clear roles & responsibilities                                  | 2%         | 1%         | 0%        | 2%         | 1%         |
| Improved access to services across the province                 | 3%         | 3%         | 5%        | 4%         | 4%         |
| Time for teachers & other professionals to work together        | 3%         | 8%         | 3%        | 4%         | 5%         |
| Supports provided at school & in classroom                      | 3%         | 8%         | 13%       | 7%         | 8%         |
| <b>Total votes</b>  | <b>121</b> | <b>126</b> | <b>38</b> | <b>314</b> | <b>599</b> |

The events ended with a plea for everyone to participate in the consultations in multiple ways: by filling out the online survey, sharing their story or sending in a submission. Most importantly, the Commissioners noted that it will take everyone's effort and attention to make change happen and invited participants to stay engaged when the final report is released in March 2018.

# Appendix A

## Commission For Inclusive Education

Public Engagement  
Workshop - Notes





## Yarmouth, November 21, 2017

What's Your Experience?

### **What's working**

- \* Students more accepting to special needs students
- \* Sense of community
- \* Early intervention is working well
- \* Knowing there are passionate people wanting youth to succeed
- \* Some parts of exploring equity have been working
- \* Relationships between students and PSA are valuable
- \* Huge progress in equality since my schooling, we're on a path

### **What's not working**

- \* The need for TRULY individualized planning
- \* So hard for teachers and parents and children and principals
- \* Not being able to know what is realistic as a parent
- \* High School teachers workload issues
- \* Miscommunication: what is real, what is not
- \* Communication to classroom teachers
- \* Open communication, limitations on PSA
- \* Many skillsets required to support a classroom
- \* Conflict between policy and implementation

- \* Interagency support required is not here, but is needed!
- \* Arbitrary policies wasting time and resources that are valuable
- \* How can teachers meet the needs of students they weren't prepared to accommodate?
- \* As teachers, we don't have the training
- \* When will it come to every single teacher?
- \* Large class sizes
- \* Program planning wasn't meant for so many students, overwhelming in itself
- \* Not a cookie cutter approach
- \* Unrealistic expectations that one curriculum supports all kinds of students
- \* Limitations but PSA doing great work
- \* Had great teachers but they didn't have the training
- \* Early intervention as wraparound, could it continue?
- \* "Teachers, we aren't all against you." - A Parent

What Changes Are Needed?

### **Strong Home and School Partnerships**

#### **Creative, clear ways to ensure parental involvement and understanding**

- \* Advocate for parents to attend meetings - isolating experience
- \* Hold community based parent-teacher meetings so parents can attend regardless of transportation needs or anxiety associated with school
- \* Help parents understand the educational process. If the parent is not a teacher they likely do not understand the challenges, process or limitations
- \* Create Professional Development opportunities for parents
- \* Create user friendly paperwork for parents that makes sense and is self-explanatory.
- \* Ensure specialist information is shared with families in a user-friendly format and language
- \* Need clear, concise IPP language and format to make it easy for parents to understand
- \* Engage parents in all discussions involving their child beyond phone calls and letters.
- \* Parents and grandparents can be excellent in school volunteer student/teacher supports. Ontario and PEI both encourage this. Teachers direct parent/grandparent assistance.

## Parents need to trust and have confidence in teachers

- \* Parents need to feel confident educators have child's best interest at heart and are not going through motions because they have to. Parents need to know they are pushing child to best of their ability not just 'babysitting' (not always the case, but a parental fear)

## Identify and address concerns early

- \* Address concerns earlier (identify concerns at the pre-primary level)
- \* Establish services in home through early interventions for all students
- \* Open schools to families from an early age so school is seen as part of the community
- \* Acknowledge the effects of generational trauma and generational poverty

## A Continuum of Programs, Services and Settings

### Important to integrate social, emotional learning at all ages

- \* Many children do not have social skills or emotional skills necessary to succeed
- \* Incorporate social, emotional learning in all lessons all the time
- \* Implement social, emotional learning programs such as "PATHS" at all age levels
- \* Need more in-depth focus on social, emotional developmental milestones from 0-5 years
- \* Focus on self-regulation and executive functioning skills for students

### Need resources to ensure access to properly trained specialists

- \* PSA support allocated for educational need not physical need
- \* More funding for rural areas
- \* Need more specialists including:
  - Behaviour support teachers
  - Mental health specialists
  - Substance abuse programs
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder specialists
  - Occupational Therapists
  - Pull out interventionist
- \* Create co-teaching arrangements within learning centres
- \* Services must be based on "what resources we have" and apply the service to "fit" the student
- \* Create incentives to draw specialists to rural Nova Scotia
- \* Provide additional people and resources to effectively implement very intense six week pull out programs

- \* Develop a blended system where students with similar cognitive deficits or situations are in a classroom together rather than in the larger classroom with support. There may be one or two specific areas such as math or literacy, which can be improved if they are pulled out

### **Additional supports needed to offer varied materials and learning environments**

- \* Ensure material, resources, space can be modified or changed depending on student needs (e.g., furniture, sensory rooms, learning centres, etc.)
- \* Create opportunities to use a life skills and sensory setting room to apply classroom learning
- \* Need more alternate high schools to allow for a more responsive approach
- \* Base students "need" to be in the classroom on their individual learning needs
- \* Expand model like Bridgeway Academy across the province. Education and Early Childhood Development to buy and expand Bridgeway Academy.

### **Draw on and work with other resources and agencies**

- \* Integrate outside agencies within schools (e.g. drug dependency programs, nurses, etc.)
- \* Educate community agencies about working with children with special needs.
- \* Support partnership with NSCC for trades (starting in Grade 2)

### **Ways of making decisions**

- \* If the student needs "something"/ "anything" the response should always be "sure" not "we don't have any right now... it's not in the budget... etc."
- \* Prioritize classroom composition when thinking about a continuum of programs, services and settings
- \* Support research-based and flexible programs and services
- \* Ensure better continuation between grades. Don't start fresh every year, build on child's strengths. Do not keep IPP in a drawer.
- \* Understand that you must meet the child where they are - do not set the bar too high. They need to achieve success.
- \* Break down barriers such as policies and mandates

## **Practical Specialized Teacher Education**

### **Specialized Training**

- \* More teachers need hands on training and mentoring in behaviour intervention
- \* Create and share bibliography of good resources, specific resources identified to teacher for incoming students
- \* Trauma informed care in education is essential

### **Changes and additions to Bachelor of Education (BEd) Programs**

- \* BEd programs need to include:
- \* Cognitive behavioural emotional development information
- \* Fewer “teachable” courses and more strategies to help students succeed
- \* More practicum time throughout the BEd program
- \* BEd entrance criteria should be based more on personal characteristics and experience rather than on academic achievement

## **Student-focused Interagency Collaboration**

### **Ensure coordinated, full-team approach**

- \* Include TA both in meetings and day to day updates
- \* TAs to write communication logs
- \* PSA needs to be a part of parent meetings
- \* Need appropriate time and resources dedicated to IPPs to ensure they work
- \* Use community resources as supports

### **Need clarity about roles and responsibilities**

- \* Definition of roles and responsibilities of all those involved in special education need to be clear and understood by all partners
- \* Each department needs to reflect on their responsibilities and be clear about their role
- \* Lack of understanding of each other's environments

### **Ensure equity in access to services across the province**

- \* Access to equal services across the province (e.g., mental health services)
- \* Focus on recruitment and retention of specialized staff in rural Nova Scotia
- \* Travel to services (for additional education, upgrading) and specialist appointments

## **Allow time for collaboration and communication**

- \* Time allotted for teachers to collaborate with other school staff (TA's, admin, psych, schools plus, SLP/SLD, etc.) and other agencies supporting students
- \* Increased communication of supports available at school for teachers, admin, students

## **Evaluate and monitor supports in the classroom**

- \* More supports at the classroom and school level
- \* Follow up and reevaluate of supports and plans implemented
- \* More resources from outside agencies to transition from grade to grade, school to community. Lack of support during those transition times
- \* Too many initiatives and some of them are not working in the school system
- \* Teachers to be able to concentrate



## Stellarton, November 22, 2017

What's Your Experience?

### **What's working**

- \* Experience is positive
- \* Respect for diversity
- \* We all have special needs
- \* Everyone together
- \* Successes are everywhere because we have dedicated teachers
- \* Money could be more effectively spent

### **What's not working**

- \* People were labeled special needs because no one wanted to teach them because of the color of their skin
- \* No blanket policy
- \* Not ready developmentally for curriculum
- \* Supports not being provided

What Changes Are Needed?

## **Strong Home and School Partnerships**

### **Creative, clear ways to ensure parental involvement and understanding**

- \* More supports for families
- \* Educate community/ parents
- \* Relationship with families to tell you what to expect
- \* Parents need to have a voice
- \* Move from informal to formal parent supports
- \* Need to better understand what the home / family wants for the child in the IPP
- \* Give parents a real look at the everyday events
- \* Allow parents to log on and see IPP

### **Stop pushing students through grade levels**

- \* Bring back fail policy
- \* Stop pushing students through, they can't catch up
- \* Hold students back at a young age to ensure they have a solid foundation

## **A Continuum of Programs, Services and Settings**

### **More support and attention to transitions is needed**

- \* More support and attention needed for the transition to school and out of school
- \* More supports for students transitioning to high school
- \* Need access of documents from year to year

### **Communication and collaboration with specialists**

- \* Need more time to collaborate with specialists
- \* Ensure more people are trained in specialized areas
- \* Honesty of what is not working
- \* Specialists are stretched too thin
- \* Need longer work day to allow time for team meetings (e.g. allow time for staff to schedule half day for meetings with team)

### **Ensure availability of varied programs, materials and environments**

- \* Schools need a place for children to go when they are upset
- \* Need less restrictive environments
- \* Learning centres need more funding and more teachers
- \* Need to partner and consider outside school supports for students and families
- \* Create individualize and flexible credits to graduate

## Need additional support from specialist

- \* Bring experts into the class
- \* Need trained Behaviour Interventionist and behaviour support at each school
- \* Provide additional program support teachers
- \* It is difficult when resource teachers are pulled to cover subs
- \* Focus on early intervention - social/emotional, math, literacy
- \* Need more supports at the high school level for students with special needs
- \* Enable teachers to spend additional time with the low average students. They often need short stints of support to allow them to succeed.

## Create broad and clear vision for education and inclusion

- \* We need to not fall into the trap of narrowing the vision of education
- \* Ensure the vision for change is the grounding feature for all priorities and subsequent policies
- \* Need a definition of inclusion. There are so many different ideas.
- \* Integration into classrooms is not inclusion

## Practical Specialized Teacher Education

### Specialized training for classroom teachers

- \* Need additional teachers who qualified and trained in special education
- \* Highly specialized training for coaches and mentors to work with teachers and teams for special needs and complex cases (e.g. need autism specialists in each board)
- \* Teachers to receive better training on: learning disabilities, mental health, Autism Spectrum Disorder, student behaviour management, special needs, classroom management, math and literacy interventions
- \* Ongoing easy to obtain training on specific needs in the classroom (e.g. if a student with needs is entering their classroom, allow time for the teacher to take steps to prepare)
- \* Make sure PD is practical to what teachers need
- \* The issue is board directed PD is often not effective

### Changes and additions to BEd Programs

- \* Include behaviour courses in BEd programs
- \* Create four year BEd program (no need for undergraduate degree)
- \* Ensure BEd program focuses on practical teaching skills (less focus on theory)

## **Training and involvement of EAs is critical**

- \* Create EA education for today's needs/ student needs
- \* Increased support
- \* Need more EA's in high schools
- \* Ensure EAs receive adequate training and education
- \* Involve EAs in meetings and plan development

## **Student-focused Interagency Collaboration**

### **Ensure coordinated, fill-team approach**

- \* Health, justice and community services need to take ownership of students and their needs
- \* Round table discussions with everyone working with the child: make specific goals and scheduled meetings to check in
- \* Establish trust among all levels (home and school and between schools)
- \* Need transition plans from outside agencies (e.g., Waterville, IWK, Justice, etc.)
- \* Union to work together with Department of Education

### **Recognize the importance of SchoolPlus and other support**

- \* More staff from SchoolsPlus to connect with agencies and services to support students in schools
- \* More resources and time for ELS, math, SchoolsPlus interventions
- \* Need more funding to allow more people to work directly with students
- \* Better support needed for students experiencing trauma
- \* Explosion of mental health needs among teenagers- they require medical expertise in a timely manner: addictions
- \* Teachers identify and refer students but personnel not available
- \* Have the experts work with the students instead of training the teacher
- \* Need Full Time positions for resource teachers, guidance, administration staff
- \* Value experience too; not just licensing

### **Identifying and assessing needs of students**

- \* Private assessments create a two-tiered, inequitable system
- \* Students who are not qualifying because they are not behaviours or medical get no help
- \* Rural communities often have no or limited access to needed services and supports
- \* Wait times are long



## Sydney, November 23, 2017

What's Your Experience?

### **What's working**

- \* IB program as an example of inclusion

### **What's not working?**

- \* Do teachers even know the readability of their material?
- \* Just because you are in the same room doesn't mean you are included
- \* Class size vs class composition
- \* Better way to teach students
- \* We are good at teaching our subject - but are we good at teaching kids?
- \* Some parents might not be comfortable sharing (intimidating meetings)
- \* More Teacher education and TA training, more communication/support between the two

What Changes Are Needed?

### **Strong Home and School Partnerships**

### **Creative, clear ways to ensure parental involvement and understanding**

- \* Parent lunch/ tea to reduce parent anxiety and build relationships
- \* Parents/ guardians must be more involved
- \* Communication with parents for what's best- parents are overwhelmed

- \* More frequent communication between home and school (communication plan)
- \* Time for teachers to communicate

### **Ensure consistent application of the policy**

- \* Consistent application of policies and accountability regardless of parental/guardian participation

### **Identify and address concerns early**

- \* Need to get foundational years right
- \* Long term future cost must be included in the conversation. Spend the money now- early intervention

## **A Continuum of Programs, Services and Settings**

### **Review and expand TA's role and involvement**

- \* Reevaluate TA job description so that it reflects the work they do
- \* Include TAs in all conversations about student
- \* Allow TAs to speak with parents or guardians
- \* Pay TAs more
- \* Involve TAs in program planning
- \* The TA model is not working. Must be taken apart and rebuilt

### **Additional supports needed to offer varied materials and learning environments**

- \* Need additional practical and meaningful options for student. One size fits all doesn't work.
- \* Varied types of learning centres
- \* Create flexible, targeted learning streams
- \* Ensure there are a variety of programs and spaces where students can thrive (e.g. life skill, math, IPP, LD, trades, post school transitions)
- \* IPP's can't meet all needs in classroom. Need learning centres for academic skills and social at elementary
- \* Small schools need additional supports because they don't have special education teachers

## **Practical Specialized Teacher Education**

### **Specialized training for classroom teachers and TAs**

- \* Mandate more training and continuing education for TA's and teachers
- \* More training for TA's - building capacity in schools
- \* Focused, targeted professional development. Must begin in BEd and continue throughout career. Must include administration, Non-Violent Crisis Intervention, Response to Intervention
- \* All classroom teachers need to understand basics of: ASD, learning disabilities or cognitive disability, mental health, behaviour, etc.
- \* Support and training on classroom management
- \* Focus on literacy and how to teach reading. Help teachers learn how to integrate reading in all subject areas

### **Changes and additions to BEd Programs**

- \* Teacher education to include opportunities to work with kids with complex lives
- \* Hands-on learning- practicum in special education classrooms
- \* Have parents lived experience be shared with teachers (pool of strategies)

## **Student-focused Interagency Collaboration**

### **Collaborate with others to ensure early interventions**

- \* We must pick up and improve the services a pre-schooler receives
- \* Early assessment and immediate intervention and coordinated and timely response among all agencies

### **Specialized supports needed**

- \* Pediatricians, Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI), Physiotherapists, Intensive Community-Based Treatment Program, Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists
- \* Encourage more students to see speech pathologists
- \* More mental health services and a continuity of support from urban and rural
- \* Collaboration must be an ongoing process- not one off.
- \* Ratio of students to special programming personnel needs to change
- \* More school psychologists and guidance

### **Need clarity about roles and responsibilities**

- \* What are the roles of the other agencies? Put age appropriate books at food banks- high poverty rates in Cape Breton

## Support family and student advocates

- \* Create family advocate agency to help navigate process
- \* Establish parent advocates/ navigators to help families access the services they need
- \* Student advocate for students throughout their schooling

## Review process for obtaining TA support

- \* What is the process for allocating TA's?
- \* The process for getting TA support is flawed.
- \* "Tell the parent to tell the child to throw a chair" and this need will get a TA as a dedicated resource
- \* Process for getting the support students need is long. Address long waitlists and slow process

## Review and reconsider approach to funding

- \* Site based funding for school
- \* Individual funding based on the needs of the students
- \* Funding to follow the child (Manitoba model)
- \* Funding based on actual needs- not on school ratio
- \* Boards need more autonomy with how money is spent
- \* More teachers- smaller class sizes



## Halifax, November 27, 2017

What's Your Experience?

### **What's Working**

- \* "Home" class builds empathy
- \* Phenomenal educators- can't undervalue them
- \* TSP program
- \* Willingness and empathy of teachers

### **What's Not Working**

- \* Under-resourced EPA Supports
- \* One size doesn't fit all
- \* Criteria for EPA support has changed
- \* Voices of EPAs haven't been heard enough
- \* Only one teacher came to ask "How can we..."
- \* Over representation of African Nova Scotians on IPP
- \* Really identify the needs
- \* Children are not "add ons"
- \* Never properly financed
- \* Guidance and steering African Nova Scotians towards trades
- \* DOE needs to collaborate with folks on the ground

- \* System that advocates even if the child doesn't have advocates
- \* Assessment is only as good as the marks used
- \* It's a fight, exhausting to get child through school

What Changes Are Needed?

## **Strong Home and School Partnerships**

### **Creative, clear ways to ensure parental involvement and understanding**

- \* Host IPP introductory session for parents
- \* Treat parents as partners - they are the experts
- \* Support advocacy - self (giving the student a voice); parents (teaching how); provide supports (cultural, language)
- \* Educate parent/ guardians on available tools and resources (programs, grants, staff supports etc.)
- \* Keep lines of communication open to maintain ownership
- \* Establish a communication plan from the start
- \* Recognition of parent/ family burn-out and being overwhelmed due to the system
- \* Create individualized family collaboration plans between homes and schools
- \* Share accessible information between home and school to help families understand what they can expect on journey through school, how and where to ask for what is needed
- \* All parents care. We need to support them
- \* Recognizing parents know their child best and have the right to full and consistent communication about their child's day to day learning and education
- \* Need more welcoming, less intimidating environments for parents
- \* Student access to services should not depend on parent advocacy. A child without parent input in IPP or to push for services. Should still get the same access and resources

### **Establish better, more consistent ways to communicate**

- \* More opportunities for fluid, honest communication with everyone who is involved with a child (including specialist Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Speech Language Pathologist, Psychologist, etc.)
- \* Need restorative conversations with all stakeholders
- \* Create communication books to share daily activities
- \* Provide simple, easy to understand communication on report cards
- \* Ensure team approach to finding solutions to problems
- \* TIENET (Technology for Improving Education Network) paperwork is not user friendly and sets up a divide with parents

- \* Ensure documents are clear and concise for families
- \* Eliminate barriers (e.g., language, lack of computers, collaboration with early years, etc.)
- \* IPP document - particularly IPP report cards - need overhaul to be parent friendly
- \* Important to consider the ways that families access (or do not access) information. In some communities, distrust of the school and school staff runs deeply. Must be creative to reach them in ways that meaningfully engage them
- \* Specialized learning teachers are expected to do all things (paperwork, manage support staff, program, teach, etc.)

### **Include students in the process**

- \* Opportunities to bring children/ students into the conversation in transition
- \* Include children in decision making
- \* Participation of students in planning process

### **Need time to allow for meetings and consistent collaboration**

- \* Mandate parent-teacher meetings at all grade levels
- \* Need more time to ensure regular, ongoing collaboration between parents and school
- \* Schools should be advocates for children and families
- \* Release time to meet so it's not always rushed. EA's travel on buses and then miss meetings. Plan meetings during the day
- \* More people and resources to help build a working alliance

### **Increased training and involvement of EPA's**

- \* EPA's need to be allowed into team meetings
- \* Trust the parent / EPA relationship
- \* Provide EPAs with the training to carry out their actual role
- \* Criteria for child to be allowed EPA support has to change
- \* Allow EPAs to be allocated based on the child's interpretation, communication, anxiety, etc.
- \* Allow EPAs to follow and progress with child if it is working
- \* Limit the number of transitions of EPA's throughout day- and throughout their school life
- \* EPAs to follow the child's lead - consistency is important
- \* EPA supports needed to be consistent

## Clear approaches and principles to inform the work

- \* Respect both ways - "all"
- \* Transparency
- \* Strengths based approach
- \* Create trust and understanding to support effective collaboration
- \* Promote family centered principles
- \* System is broken and restrictive. Teachers are helping children "in spite of" the system
- \* Acknowledge the lifespan continuum
- \* Teachers need to learn to value all students in their classroom
- \* Accountability, protocol, transparency, trust
- \* Transformative
- \* Change language - removal of functioning labels, intervention language
- \* Why do we need content outcomes, traditional tasks? Just for tradition?

## A Continuum of Programs, Services & Settings

### Find ways for supports and documents to follow students easily

- \* Files follow child eg: foster child moving differently through systems/ schools
- \* Create rules around file transfers to fall in line with student needs and movements (idea born of experience of fostering a child whose file took 8 months to get from sending and receiving schedule and revealed that she was on an IPP, something the receiving school hasn't known for 8 months)
- \* Services follow student from pre-school system into community

### Rethink elements of the curriculum

- \* Need to embed inclusion in the curriculum, not just the learning centre
- \* Teach life skills to prepare students for world outside school
- \* Re-investigate the idea of vocational trades education in high school
- \* Teaching social skills and life skills
- \* Provide deaf students with classes taught using sign language (teachers themselves are fluent in sign language)
- \* Allow additional opportunities to develop new programming

### Ensure smooth transitions and consistent supports for students

- \* Recognizing need for consistent supports. Do not pull supports when things are going well.
- \* Create Transition Coordinators like Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)
- \* Improve transition planning - between grades, schools and into the community
- \* Need adequate time, supports, resources, flexibility of class composition to effectively plan for transitions

- \* Ensure yearly transitions are smooth
- \* Support students to transition to postsecondary. Students who stay too long in high school often don't make gains.
- \* Create partnerships to support transitions (e.g., include early childhood educators in school meetings, etc.)
- \* More targeted, individualized supports for transition planning
- \* School boards are about to become largest ECE providers in NS... How does that interact with existing problems?

### **Dedicate resources to ensure access to properly trained specialists**

- \* Schools need access to a variety of specialists and specialized services (e.g. behaviour specialist, Autism Spectrum Disorder specialists, mental health staff, etc.)
- \* Ensure there are enough special education teachers
- \* Manageable caseloads for support specialists
- \* Either reduce paperwork or provide clerical support to manage paperwork
- \* Bring support from community into the school
- \* Explore the potential for community agencies to support the school and students
- \* Need FTE in student services for coordination all paperwork and meetings
- \* Hire Speech Language Pathology assistants
- \* Hire enough staff- look at European models- TA's and adjust class size based on needs- it is not a one size fits all.

### **Collaboration requires time to meet and plan**

- \* More time to meet, discuss, plan, prepare
- \* Teachers need to better understand the program planning process
- \* Allow for program planning at family of schools
- \* Teachers need adequate time to prepare for student needs

### **Additional supports needed to offer varied materials and learning environments**

- \* Ensure a diversity of learning environments and options
- \* Support a blended model that provides a variety of settings to meet the individual needs of students. Segregation is different than this. It's about creating meaningful access
- \* Need smaller class sizes
- \* Change the class environment (e.g. less distractions, flexible seating, etc.)
- \* Look at the Calgary Board of Education website "Specialized Classrooms and Unique Settings"
- \* Co-teaching for classroom teachers and learning centre teachers. Both needs this support

- \* Co-op placements for students with disabilities
- \* Open welcome centres for EAL students (learn English and Canadian cultural/system) before going in school
- \* Conduct accessibility and sensory audit of schools
- \* Support for students with special needs to eat with peers in the regular setting (EPA not provided at noon)
- \* Stop saying learning centre students

### **Allow for different, creative solutions for different cases**

- \* Different solutions for different grades
- \* Diagnosis or not, schools / teachers need to allow for differentiating "age, ability, interests, instructions"
- \* Provide different pathways, solutions, alternatives to classroom for students who need it
- \* Allow different options to graduation (e.g. 18 credits?)
- \* Flexible grouping of students with similar learning levels, also in the learning centres establishing process for students moving from 1:1 to more inclusive setting

### **Ensure coordinated, full-team approach**

- \* Include all team members (including EPA's) in meetings and communications with families
- \* Create open communication between school professionals, parents and other community professionals (e.g., psychology, Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist)
- \* All decisions (not just around inclusion) need to be made in a holistic way
- \* Use peers - especially in high school
- \* Allow for more stability in teachers positions so that student knowledge is retained from year to year
- \* Recognize the knowledge and power of community.
- \* Include community elders in the school to support students, teachers and staff
- \* Provide meaningful programming (e.g. life skills, financial skills and independence) in collaboration with specialists (e.g. guidance, Speech Language Therapist, Occupational Therapist etc.)
- \* Use non-profit agencies (e.g. Rick Hansen Foundation)
- \* Support learning centre teachers to do the complexity of the job
- \* Free up learning centre and resource teachers so they have more time for on the job teacher coaching and support and pull out specialism, rather than managing EPA's, covering breaks, assessments and crisis management

- \* Teachers need guidance, support and the opportunity to speak out- to ask for help and to support students and parents
- \* Bridge the gap between psychology and education. Recognize the importance of and connection between all developmental domains.

### **Importance of Tuition Support Program**

- \* Tuition Support Program is very important
- \* Allow Tuition Support Program to support for specialized school

### **Flexible Learning Support Plan**

- \* Create learning support plans that is more flexible, less permanent than an IPP
- \* Need to create plans for coming off IPP

### **Practical, Specialized Teacher Education**

#### **Specialized training for teachers**

- \* Ensure teachers get mental health training
- \* Do not spread resources thin. Need to ensure adequate numbers of staff with practical / specialized education.
- \* Provide and promote specialized training for all aspects of disabilities
- \* Train teachers to deliver specialized testing tools
- \* Specific training- regular for all teachers- less time devoted to data tracking- in house, in the moment
- \* Need more Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBA), Applied Behaviour Analysis
- \* Background education on child development and developmentally appropriate practice
- \* Early literacy training should be required for learning centre teachers
- \* Ensure specialize access to ongoing PD- Inclusive Ed mentors

#### **Changes and additions to BEd Programs**

- \* Inclusion of autism education in BEd programs
- \* Mandatory teacher education changes (e.g., how to teach children with special, unique, different needs)
- \* Fix disconnect between BEd supervisors and what schools are trying to do
- \* Specialized teacher education to occur at BEd level
- \* Overhaul BEd and MEd programs
- \* Certifications (equivalent to masters) for teachers in special education (look at needs - behaviour, autism, etc.)
- \* Ensure appropriate undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education.

- \* Allow for more specific streams within MEd/ BEd programs (emphasis on certain areas - childhood development, autism, behaviour, classroom management, etc.)
- \* Include IPP development in BEd/ MEd programs

### **Ongoing professional development for all educators**

- \* Ongoing, practical professional development and specialized training for all educators/ EPA's/TA's
- \* More flexibility with professional development based on classroom needs
- \* More education for school staff around safety plans and community resources
- \* Create upgrading programs like Ontario in order to help teachers gain knowledge and skills without having to complete Masters
- \* Ensuring training is sufficient to match support the expectations being placed on teachers/ EPA's
- \* Teachers need professional development beyond what the policy is/ how to fill out the paperwork
- \* Professional development ideas: sharing practical strategies, how to talk to parents, advocates, focus on specialized training needs.

### **Allow for more hands-on practicums and training opportunities**

- \* Provide opportunities for teachers to gain experience teaching students with special needs
- \* Mandatory practice teaching in resource or learning centres
- \* Provide mentorship and or practicum for special educators with experienced mentors
- \* Ensure hands on practical teaching strategies for all teaching and paraprofessional staff in all special needs

### **EPA & TA involvement and training**

- \* Address inadequacies in EPA training, certification and pay
- \* Include EPAs as part of the team
- \* Establish regulatory body for EPA's and support staff to provide best practice research, standards of practice to create accountability for those working with our most vulnerable population
- \* Increase funding to allow more EPAs in schools
- \* Ensure EPAs are trained on: emotional regulation, mental health first aid, crisis intervention, behaviour, autism, differentiated learning, applied behaviour analysis, behaviour reduction
- \* Specialized training for EPA's and include them as a part of the team- finance their pay along with their training- require it

- \* More EPA's, training for EPA's, better qualified EPA's, more emphasis on supporting academic outcomes for students
- \* Better utilization of EPA's- learning support, communication support for children with communication challenges, general classroom support- EPA's assigned based on the needs of the classroom as a whole
- \* More EPA involvement, allow them to attend meetings and provide input and communicate with parents
- \* Increase credentials required for EPA's to increase funding/ pay
- \* Support for learning centre teachers and EPAs. Who can be the missing link between EPA's and LC teachers? Someone to sit with students in classrooms and aid in programming.

### **Move beyond medical model supports**

- \* Leave behind the medical model of specialized program support so that children without diagnosis or with similar needs but no diagnosis do not fall through the gaps
- \* Create supports based on problem solving not medical diagnosis

### **Cultural competence and unconscious bias**

- \* Ensure culturally relevant pedagogical approach
- \* Recognize unconscious bias
- \* Interruption of systemic racism in the education system

### **Review assessment process**

- \* Less reliant on standardized assessment- more reliant on observation assessments, data collection, objective measures
- \* Need more one on one testing- where do I go from here?
- \* Parent referrals brought forward as often as professional referrals at any grades
- \* TIENET and power school need to talk

### **Student- Focused Interagency Collaboration**

#### **Meaningful collaboration and community supports**

- \* Remove bureaucratic "red tape" for meaningful interagency collaboration
- \* Justice, health, education, community services all need to "play in the same sandbox"
- \* Need interagency collaboration
- \* Ensure consistency in support staff for students (people & time)
- \* Create partnerships with health, community services and housing for students 'aging out' of school
- \* Promote societal collaboration- the schools need support
- \* Keep abilities and needs of the child as forefront of collaboration

- \* Minimize/ eliminate competition of resources. This requires systemic change.
- \* Ensure all team members know and understand each other's ability, value and overarching goal of the work
- \* Create easier access to information between student supports (e.g., social workers, health professionals, youth care settings)
- \* Collaboration is free but needs to be appreciated from both ends.
- \* More time for collaboration that is helpful; more in class specialist time
- \* Every school needs a health nurse
- \* School administration and teachers need to understand what resources are available
- \* Include more specialist (OT, PT, SW) in schools to work with teachers

### **Allow outside agencies into schools**

- \* Allow outside agencies into the school system- hiring educated individuals in behaviour (BCBA) in order to support teachers, EA, the board and most importantly the students
- \* Allow approved services to enter the schools to work with teachers and students
- \* Allow non-school board psychologists
- \* Allow SLP's and EIBI to come into school - not only school board employees

### **Working with outside agencies and specialists**

- \* Training with outside agencies to allow effective learning
- \* Other agencies providing training to school professionals
- \* IWK system needs access to TIENET
- \* Medical collaboration with students/ class (e.g. psychologists)
- \* Schools to partner with health to better support mental and physical health of students
- \* Break down barriers between school/ agencies to make access to 'therapy'/'resources' easier/ faster and more frequent
- \* Reduce wait times for mental health, ASD diagnosis, pediatricians
- \* Need Department of Community Services support for at risk families (e.g. behaviour intervention, parenting, transportation for appointments, etc.)

### **Mandate early intervention**

- \* Mandated early intervention which continues and evolves as the student matures

## What Else?

### Explore opportunities for specialized schools

- \* Inclusive education must not be the only option offered. Example: establish classes for the deaf only that way the deaf can learn from each other using both English and American sign language. Just as there are "girls only" schools, there must be deaf friendly classes available throughout NS.
- \* Allow charter schools to be publicly funded as they are in Alberta. Parents and students can design the schools that best serve them and allow them to become full-fledged citizens
- \* Private school options increased- more education for parents; students without special needs- increase awareness
- \* Priority schools are still a priority- human resources are required. Resources based on need not numbers
- \* What are schools (Bridgeway, Churchill) that offer services specific for special needs doing differently? Need varied settings for students to succeed (quiet, low- ratio).
- \* Co-schooling (how can other agencies/ supports build prerequisite skills for learning?)

### Recognize Education as a Right

- \* Education must be a right. This must be enshrined in the Education Act
- \* Comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Canada ratified the Convention a few years ago

### Review how funding is allocated

- \* Funding based on need not enrollment
- \* Education needs more funding
- \* Increased funding to support those parts of the system that work
- \* Increase funding for paraprofessionals (in house) in the early years (social work, ABA's, etc.) make our early years centres cultural hubs for families
- \* Funding formula connected to school level needs/ community needs
- \* Sustained funding over long term - not just one and done
- \* Establish proper funding model
- \* Ensure equity, transparency and adequacy in funding
- \* Flexible and thoughtful scoring rubric to tackle class composition and allocation of resources (like early intervention protocol)

### Recognize and address burn out

- \* We are all burnt out: parents, teachers, EPA's. Why do we have to fight so hard. We are all exhausted, our children included.
- \* No overloading teachers with information without support

## More supports through transitions

- \* Create Transition Coordinator positions in school
- \* Think through transferring strategies
- \* Support students in their transition to adulthood
- \* Plan for life span - starting junior and middle school
- \* Book-end transitions - transition coordinators from early childhood-primary, high school-community
- \* Transition specialists- teachers with knowledge of programs and services to be a resource for schools and parents

## Ensure First Voices are heard and considered

- \* Where are all the voices of the disability community?
- \* Listen to actually autistic adults about their feelings
- \* I am a whole person. Recognize and learn about intersectionality
- \* Require a special needs representative on the school board akin to ANS member for advocacy, accountability.

## Create shared Definition of Inclusion

- \* Build a shared definition of what inclusion really means
- \* Inclusion has to be more than acceptance of all children. It has to be rather, intentional planning for the success for all children (ie: visuals, movements, breaks, hands on learning being seen as beneficial for all children in the class not just those with special needs)
- \* Need policy for inclusion for extra-curricular activities
- \* Inclusion doesn't mean "with" has to have meaning and purpose and individual

## Create transformative change

- \* Transformative change- our current system is made for certain kids and has never been transformed. We add here and there but never change the whole system- we talk of inclusive ed as different from ed. Our approach is literally "we'll make you fit our system" but not "we'll make a system fit you"
- \* A flexible, often revisited and updated policy for inclusion

## Review curriculum and programming

- \* Programming needs to be proactive not reactive
- \* Practical specialized programming for students especially in high school
- \* Curriculum through inclusion lens
- \* More freedom with curriculum. Teach students where they are at and what they need instead of stressing to meet outcomes
- \* More diversity of programs to meet diversity of students
- \* Look at a more holistic model of curriculum ie: social skills, emotional learning, collaborative/ empathetic learning
- \* Why does streaming only exist in math? Varying programs and options needed.
- \* Review graduation requirements for IPP students (currently it is ridiculous)

## Alternative outreach

- \* Find alternatives and ways outside the box to reach and help special needs kids
- \* Independent learning opportunities

## Engagement Process

- \* Where did the themes come from? Concern that this is directing the conversation. Trust?

