

## COMMISSION ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION--Commission Wraps Up Public Engagement

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More than 5,000 parents, educators, students and other Nova Scotians participated in the Commission on Inclusive Education's public consultations, sharing their views, ideas and stories with commission members. As part of their research, commission members also visited some schools in each region, meeting with teachers, administrators and students in their communities.

"We are thrilled with the level of participation and so grateful to everyone who participated in the consultations," said Sarah Shea, commission chair. "In sharing their experiences with us, Nova Scotians described successes, challenges, frustrations and innovations within the current model of inclusive education."

A number of themes emerged as priorities, including addressing funding gaps and allocation, resources, training, and professional development.

"We met a lot of dedicated educators and found that creative solutions are being implemented, but in isolation," said Adela Njie, the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union appointee to the commission. "To improve inclusive education, we need these successful strategies and other proven programs to be available where necessary to meet the needs of students across the province."

Above all, the message of urgency was loud and clear, with participants pressing the commission to make significant changes and not just tweaks to the current model.

"Throughout all of the consultations, Nova Scotians told us not to approach this massive problem with just a few tweaks," said Monica Williams, the commission's government appointee. "It is clear that reconstruction of inclusive education is necessary.

"Parents want the best for their children, and educators want to work in a positive, supportive environment focused on student success."

The commission consulted Nova Scotians from Dec. 15 to Jan. 30, through a variety of means, including:

- youth and parent focus groups
- online surveys
- meetings with teachers, other interested groups and individuals
- public workshops
- submissions and stories

The commission's final report is due at the end of March.

