

Success of all Students Central in Inclusive Education Report

FAQ

MARCH 26, 2018

What do we have now and what will be different if all of your recommendations are accepted?

Instead of pockets of success, there will be a system that closes the gap between our ambition for student success, and the reality students face today. To close that gap between ambition and reality, we need a focused, collaborative set of student supports from top to bottom of the education system.

What makes the new model different for teachers?

What we heard from parents, teachers and students is that the results of Inclusion have led to more compassion, understanding and a greater appreciation of differences than the policies or approaches that came before. What we also heard is that access to the support students require is not consistently happening. Teachers can expect to have more access to specialist supports in and outside the classroom and more materials easily at hand to teach learners of different levels and interests. We have focused on addressing the need they identified for more student-centered professional development and help preventing and responding to behavioural challenges in the classroom.

What will be different for parents and students?

With the new model in place, students should be getting progressively more support as they are identified as needing it. The report calls for more specialists and programming options for those

who need them. Parents will also be able to access transition support specialists to assist families in navigating the system.

How many and what new positions are you recommending?

When fully implemented, our recommendations should see between 600 – 700 more funded professionals supporting student success across the system.

What will it cost to implement the plan?

This plan is based on three components of our Blueprint for Change to achieve student success – targeted funding, access to specialists, and better supports. Over five years, the incremental costs to fully fund inclusive education, including adding specialists such as speech-language pathologists, guidance counsellors, autism specialists, etc., add programs for students, professional development for teachers is approximately \$70-80 million, a 7% increase on the education budget of roughly \$1.1 billion.

Is that amount feasible or sustainable?

The investment is a wise one. Over time, educating all students, improving literacy, and keeping students in school and preparing them for their futures will save the province money. Better education translates to better employability, better health, and less risk of criminal behaviour.

Can money in the existing budget be reallocated?

It was beyond our mandate to look at all ways the education system uses resources. The planned increased time in the schools for centralized staff may provide some opportunities. Most importantly, by having teachers and teacher assistants who feel they have the skills and knowledge to be effective and by concentrating on using programs that are known to work, we can make sure we are using resources wisely.

Government announced \$15 million in the budget for Inclusive Education for 2018-19. Is that enough?

Our view is that this represents a very good start. It's about the right amount for starting this transformation in year one.

This is a massive undertaking. Do you think this can be done in five years?

We are optimists, and we believe in the power of a small group of committed people to change the world – or in this case, our education system. There is clearly a will for change. The Nova Scotia Institute for Inclusive Education (NSIIE) will provide the leadership and coordination function that ensures transparency and accountability for the implementation of the strategic plan.

How many students have severe needs?

In the spring of 2017, representatives from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the school boards reviewed the profiles of students who are experiencing the

greatest challenges at school and require the highest level of support. They identified approximately 500 students as having complex needs – students requiring several kinds of intensive support for severe and persistent challenges with learning, behaviour, development, mental health, and/or communication.

What are some examples of school facilities and equipment that we don't have consistently across the province today?

We heard from teachers and school administrators that when they are trying to provide innovative programs and services for students, the standard school layout doesn't provide the spaces they need. For example, they told us that they need more specialists in their schools, but the office space is not there to accommodate the specialists or their services. They want to offer behaviour intervention and life skills, but schools often lack the spaces and equipment necessary for these programs. In terms of equipment, they pointed to the need for more technology to assist students with learning disabilities. Also, specialized equipment is required for some students with mobility challenges, including adapted chairs, desks, and bathrooms.

Why are you adding another category to IPPs and adaptations? How does this make it easier for teachers and parents and better for students?

Nova Scotians communicated so much confusion and dissatisfaction with IPPs and adaptations that we are replacing them. Rather than trying to tweak them, we felt that a fresh start was needed with three types of individualized programming, supported by clearly defined terms, policies, procedures and templates. These new forms of individualized programming – accommodations, modifications, and IEPs – make it easier for teachers and parents because they are clear and consistent across the province.

The three types of individualized programming make it better for students because they add the additional option of modifications – alterations to the content and learning outcomes in a course or subject to assist struggling students or to provide gifted students with enrichment. We found – and heard – that enrichment for gifted students is very limited in schools today. Modifications will provide students with more opportunities for enrichment.

We are also recommending reduced paperwork and administration by cutting the steps in program planning in half and streamlining the associated paperwork and meetings. Also, parents can expect to receive progress reports on all three forms of individualized programming on their children's report cards so that they are regularly updated on how well the programming is working.

How many IPPs and adaptations are there now?

As of November, 2017, DEECD reported that approximately 27,000 students are on adaptations and approximately 5900 students are on IPPs. MTSS is a prevention model focused on the prevention, early identification and intervention for student learning challenges. We expect that the numbers will remain the same for the time being. However, because the new model of inclusive education emphasizes prevention, and early identification and intervention for learning challenges as soon as they appear, fewer students should require these supports in future years once the model is fully implemented.

Why are there are so many students needing extra supports?

That is a difficult question to answer, because there is no one reason - there are many reasons. The prevalence of some conditions, like Autism Spectrum Disorder, has increased greatly in recent years, with some researchers estimating that that about 1 in 68 students are on the spectrum. We also have a much better assessment of learning challenges today, so more students are identified as requiring supports. Other factors outside school also contribute to the number of students requiring support, especially poverty. This is a major factor in our province, with some communities having high percentages of children living in poverty.

If there is a shortage of specialists, how will we recruit, retain, and hire education specialists, especially in rural and urban Nova Scotia?

First, we need to offer more full-time positions to attract and retain specialists in our schools. Second, we need to offer more probationary contracts that lead to permanent employment in our schools. Third, we need to support teachers who are interested in training to become specialists by providing financial assistance to those who complete the training and agree to work as a specialist in Nova Scotia once they graduate. Especially in rural areas, we need to build capacity by encouraging and supporting local educators to train as specialists and return to work in their home communities. To retain specialists in rural and urban areas, the pay and benefits that they receive for working in the schools have to be competitive with what they could make working in other government departments or private practice.