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Department of Education and  
Early Childhood Development  
Responses to Interim Report  
Recommendations:  
Executive Summaries

The following executive summaries were provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in response to the Commission on Inclusive Education Interim Report Recommendations.

## **Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Responses to Interim Report Recommendations: Executive Summaries**

### **Recommendation 3: Audit of Resources for Inclusive Education**

Recommendation 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) comparison of the provincial funding that the school boards receive for special education versus their actual expenditures.

### **Executive Summary**

Funding and resource allocation are complex issues. The structure of the education system, which has individual boards administering and tracking funds differently, makes it even more challenging to have clear, consistent, and equitable approaches across the province. The OAG did not complete the audit as described by the Commission given the resource requirements, timelines, and varied information. The Commission was instead provided detailed information on the funding received by school boards and actual expenditures made. Although the information was not subject to an OAG audit, the special education expenditures are captured in school board annual financial statement audits. The Department is looking forward to the final recommendations from the Commission.

### **Recommendation 5: Teacher Training**

Recommendation 5: The provincial Bachelor of Education Working Group [now Steering Committee] assists the Commission in examining:

- a. current teacher preparation and professional development for inclusive education in Nova Scotia;
- b. the practical knowledge and skills required by teachers and administrators to meet the changing needs of Nova Scotia students;
- c. the demand for specialized teacher training to address diverse and complex student needs;
- d. strategies for improving teacher preparation and professional development to better meet student needs and support teachers and administrators in implementing inclusive education;

and

e. report its findings to the Commission by January 15, 2018.

## **Executive Summary**

The Bachelor of Education (BEd) Steering Committee is a multi-partner group responsible for recommending and implementing revisions to the pre-service and in-service teacher education programs that meet the new Teaching Standards for Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2016). The Steering Committee also supports excellence in teaching, learning, and student success. Turning Point: Interim Report of the Commission on Inclusive Education recommended that the BEd Steering Committee assist the Commission on Inclusive Education in examining teacher training and professional development in areas specific to the Commission's mandate.

The Steering Committee's work is intended to ensure that pre-service teacher education in Nova Scotia prepares new teachers to recognize and support the learning needs of all students. Through both primary and secondary research efforts, the Steering Committee has identified inclusive education (or inclusion) as an area that should be specifically addressed in teacher education. Each of the five Nova Scotia universities that offer pre-service teacher education (BEd) programs include courses that focus on inclusive education and practicum experiences in Nova Scotia schools. However, surveys of recent BEd graduates, focus groups with current Nova Scotia teachers and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) staff, and findings reflected in a literature review consistently identify as necessary further education in areas related to inclusive education. These areas include adapting to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs, behaviour management, inclusive education practices, and related policies and guidelines.

To address the identified gaps in pre-service teacher preparation, the Steering Committee has developed new standards of learning encompassed in an umbrella curriculum for BEd programs across Nova Scotia. While this curriculum is broad in scope, it includes outcomes specific to inclusive education. In addition, an accreditation process for BEd programs is also being developed. Accreditation is a mechanism to ensure BEd programs evolve to meet the learning needs of pre-service teachers and maintain a high standard of education.

The Steering Committee's work to redesign Nova Scotia's BEd programs includes improving teacher preparation in several areas. Inclusive education is one priority that needs a defined focus and emphasis.

### **Recommendation 6: Staffing Ratios and Caseloads of Specialized Staff**

Recommendation 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.

### **Executive Summary**

Most services have remained stable over the last five years in terms of staffing and students served, with slight increases in speech language pathology and school psychology services. There were also slight increases in numbers of students served by learning centres, behaviour intervention support, severe learning disability and teacher assistant support, and homebound tutoring. The single largest increase in the number of students served is in resource programming (7.7% to 16.9%).

Overall there has been an increase in the number of professionals offering specialized services, which has contributed to the steady growth in the number of students accessing services between 2013–2017. Each school board uses services differently and has different options to choose from. This needs to be interpreted with caution in the context of understanding local school board differences. In addition, some services have both direct and indirect consultative services included in the same statistic (e.g., APSEA) because these are very different types of services for students (ranging from 1–2 times per year to daily service). This needs to be taken into account.

### **Recommendation 7: Recruitment and Retention of Specialized Staff**

Recommendation 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
- guidance counsellors

### **Executive Summary**

As set out in the Commission's interim report, Nova Scotia School Boards are continuing to experience challenges in the recruitment and retention of specialized professional staff (both teachers and individuals able to be certified as teachers - i.e. Speech Language Pathologists, School Psychologists and Social Workers) as well as para-professional staff such as Teacher Assistants (also referred to in some Boards as Educational Assistants and Education Program Assistants). The challenge is vast. It is not isolated to a school board or even our province. It is not limited to urban or rural geographic areas. There is no single solution, nor one correct approach to addressing the issues. Potential strategies to

address the issues could include more closely linking professional development to operational needs, more supports for teaching assistants, engaging with our partners to identify and remove barriers to interprovincial movement, looking at how services may be offered (e.g. fee for service), reviewing position allocations and financial incentives to attract specialists to rural areas. As well, working with our post-secondary partners to ensure graduates have the skills necessary to be successful in school-based roles will also be of key importance.

### **Recommendation 8: Public School Programs**

Recommendation 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.

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

### **Executive Summary**

Recommendation 8 from the Commission provides a foundation for interdepartmental and interagency collaboration required by children and youth, their families, and the community. The departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Health and Wellness, Community Services, and Justice must work together differently to effectively address the current needs of students. The need for change is recognized by the departments and this response represents the beginning of that change. This progress report shows the initial steps being taken to change the way the departments work together and the way children, youth and their families will be supported.

A **joint committee** with representation from the requested departments was tasked with the development of the required material.

A proposed **mandate** has been developed by participating departments to provide the directive required to enable and formalize their commitment to working together and the intentions of the joint committee.

A proposed **policy statement** has been approved to communicate the direction required to enact change and service children and youth collaboratively.

**Information sharing** is a key component of delivering interdepartmental and interagency services. The province will leverage and expand the SchoolsPlus protocol, a successful example already in use, to support the future transformation of service delivery.

The majority of this response is dedicated to a new potential roles and responsibilities grid for the four departments, the NSHA, and the IWK. There is agreement that change is required to more effectively provide services to children and youth in the school setting. Each department recognizes the need to delineate the roles and responsibilities and align them with departmental mandates. The grid included below represents a first iteration of how services could be provided. It is important to note that implementing this will require sufficient policy, financial, and human resources, which are not currently in place.

This response to Recommendation 8 is closely related to Recommendation 9.

### **Recommendation 9: Joint Committee to Address Complex Needs**

Recommendation 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 appropriate setting(s) for the delivery of programs and services.

### **Executive Summary**

This document acts as the Government of Nova Scotia's response to Recommendation 9 from the Commission on Inclusive Education's interim report, Turning Point. A joint committee of the departments of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), Health and Wellness (DHW), Community Services (DCS), and Justice (DOJ) worked to develop a potential shared approach for supporting school-aged children and youth with complex needs and their families. While it was not possible, because of the tight timeline, to create a fully-developed, detailed model complete with criteria for identifying complex needs, the proposed approach illustrates how the criteria could be developed; how the departments could work together to better identify children and youth in need of support, select, coordinate and provide the services and programs needed, and determine the most appropriate settings for these children and youth.

The proposed approach would have a phased implementation that would enable system learning and adaptation in response to the needs of the children, youth, and families it is supporting, as well as the communities they live in and outcomes. It also allows for an assessment of supports that currently exist, policy and system gaps, and the financial resources required.

The goal of this new integrated approach to service delivery is responsive, effective, and provides seamless access to the supports and services children and youth with complex needs require.

### **Recommendation 10: Preschool-to-School and School-to-Community Transitions for Children and Youth with Special Needs**

Recommendation 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.

### **Executive Summary**

A transition is defined as the passage from one stage to another and is an ongoing, lifelong process. Transition planning for students with special needs requires intentional focus to ensure the best possible outcomes for students.

Formal transition planning is most effective when: participants systematically use collaborative principles for decision making, carefully document to ensure due process, and thoroughly analyze resources and services available. Resources, finances, and programs are often shared among a variety of departments and agencies and require a collaborative team approach to coordinate services effectively (Transition Planning for Students with Special Needs: The Early Years through Adult Life, 2005).

The 2016 Provincial IPP Review found inconsistencies in transition planning most apparent in school-school and school-to-community transitions. It was determined that community-to-school transitions were working better but still had room for improvement (Individual Program Plan (IPP) Review 2016).

These findings are consistent with the broad scan completed in response to this recommendation. representatives from the departments comprising the joint committee all identified barriers in the universal and seamless access to programming and services during key transition points which was compounded by inconsistent collaborative policies, guidelines, and practices.

Specific transition barriers are identified along with proposed strategies for minimizing disruptions and facilitating a seamless service delivery model. It is important to note that transition planning does not happen in isolation and to be truly effective it must be an integral component of any provincial policy initiative designed to support an inclusive public education system.

### **Recommendation 11: Nursing Services**

Recommendation 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.

### **Executive Summary**

This document is the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (EECD) response to Recommendation 11 from the Commission on Inclusive Education. The response was prepared in the fall of 2017 and leverages complementary research and analysis performed in advance of the Commission's recommendation. The response is based on consultations with EECD, the Department of Health and

Wellness (DHW), school boards, and school administrators.

The examination of nursing services provided to schools is supported by the following background information:

- School boards use one of two approaches to provide nursing services to school:
  - Nurses are employed in a health education partnership (cost shared). This model is used by three school boards: AVRSB, HRSB, and SSRSB. Under this model, students receiving nursing services are documented in the TIENET section of the provincial student information system.
  - Nursing services are purchased from the VON. This model is used by five school boards: CBVRSB, CCRSB, CSAP, SRSB, and TCRSB. Under this model, the information recorded in TIENET varies.
- There are currently 138 students reported in TIENET as receiving nursing services
- Three boards, HRSB, CSAP, and TCRSB, purchase regulated health care professionals from DHW to provide specialized health care for individual students.
- 2,488 students currently have a health plan, an emergency plan, or both.
  - 793 students have a health plan. Their conditions are categorized as follows (students may have one or more conditions): seizure (188 students), asthma (326 students), diabetes (226 students), and other (819 conditions; cannot determine number of students represented).
  - 887 students have an emergency plan. Their conditions are categorized as follows (students may have one or more conditions): diabetes (191 students), anaphylaxis (811 students), and other (497 conditions; cannot determine number of students represented). 808 students have both a health and emergency plan.
- 658 students currently receive occupational therapy (OT) and/or physiotherapy (PT)

### **Recommendation 12: Public School Programs**

Recommendation 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 12 and report to the commission on these matters by November 30, 2017.

### **Executive Summary**

This is the first time in over 20 years that there has been a full review of the Public School Program (PSP). In late 2015, a research scan was conducted to collect information to support a full review of the PSP. The first formal consultation was held in February 2016 at the Association of Nova Scotia Education Administrators. Diane Racette, former Acting Superintendent of the Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP), was hired in August 2016 to continue consultations and to affirm connections with research and supporting documentation and data.

Through consultations with more than 1800 stakeholders (teachers, principals, senior staff, parents, students, business, higher education, etc.) feedback has been received that supports the direction and spirit of the draft document. The draft reflects the most recent changes that have taken place and is a strong foundational document. There is an appreciation of a need for this document to help guide and



support teachers and other stakeholders. There is anticipation within the system that further changes to the high school program to benefit students will take place and that further consultation within the public education system and with our partners in education will be integral to successful implementation.

### **Recommendation 13: General Trends in Classroom Composition**

Recommendation 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.

### **Executive Summary**

The statistics on the number of students with Adaptations demonstrates inconsistencies in individual school board interpretations and practices, particularly in relation to the Special Education Policy and stages 2 and 4 of the Program Planning Process. For example, in 2016–2017, the Strait Regional School Board, had 1349 Stage 2 and 370 Stage 4 Adaptations, while the Tri-County Regional School Board had only 87 Adaptations at Stage 2 and 1623 at Stage 4. The Program Planning Process and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies would predict a larger number at Stage 2, and if they are successful, students would not necessarily need Stage 4 Adaptations.

Visits to school boards to work on data sets indicated that professional development is needed regarding the Program Planning Process, as well as better pre-service teacher training in this area.

As seen in Figure 8, there is significant use of documented assessment strategies. Due to the high number, the question has been raised if Nova Scotia's programming for students with special needs has moved away from the philosophy of "only as special as necessary".

The number of students on Individual Program Plans (IPPs) has decreased from 6.8% to 5%, as per Figure 12. However, there is concern that the data may not be accurate due to Work to Rule in 2016–2017, as

well as the early date in the 2017–2018 school year when data was collected for the Commission.

In terms of prevalence, Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board has two outliers of note, as seen in Figure 21; Learning Disabilities (11.3% versus the provincial average of 5.7%), and Speech Impairment—Communication Disorders (8.2% versus the provincial average of 2%).

#### **Recommendation 14: Program Planning Process**

Recommendation 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.

#### **Executive Summary**

A team of researchers at Service Nova Scotia (SNS) were engaged to complete a review, using an ‘ask the user’ approach of the program planning process.

The findings in this response highlight the human impact of the implementation of well-intended policies. While they are based on individual conversations, they are comprehensive, in that they highlight significant gaps in implementation. It is the hope of the research team, that whatever changes or new policies come from the work of the Commission, that significant care and attention be paid to the focused, intentional, and ongoing re-evaluation of how any policy is implemented. Specifically, any implementation should be done in a multi-disciplinary way, with the people most affected, at the heart of the process. Implementation should also include meaningful measurement of indicators that truly reflect success, and the ability to adapt and iterate future policies or procedures. These fundamental practices are, in our experience, critical to Nova Scotia truly transforming our education system for the better.

#### **Recommendation 15: Joint Committee to Address Complex Needs**

Recommendation 15: The Department of Education, in consultation with school boards, will report to the Commission its recommendations for expanding the Provincial Code of Conduct into a Safe and Inclusive Schools Policy that:

- a. Protects schools and classrooms as safe and positive learning environments for all students of and staff
- b. Differentiates between generally unacceptable student behavior and unacceptable student behaviors 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, 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 positive student behavior and social emotional learning;
- Incorporate restorative practices;
- Differentiate between generally unacceptable behavior and unacceptable behavior associated with special needs;
- Differentiate the expectations for student behavior as students grow, develop and progress through the grades;
- Differentiate the expectations for student behaviours as students grow, develop and progress through grades;
- Differentiate the documentation, consequences, and reporting of unacceptable student behavior in accordance with student growth and development through the grades and/or in association with special needs;
- Provide clear and consistent procedures 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.

### **Executive Summary**

In consultation with school boards regarding the expansion of the Code of Conduct to a Safe and Inclusive Schools Policy, participants consistently indicated that establishing safe and inclusive school environments extended beyond the expansion of the Code of Conduct to programming needs, services, and operations within schools. While it was widely acknowledged that an overarching guiding policy is required, all school boards agreed that if adequate programs and supports were not in place, and existing services were not coordinated, a Safe and Inclusive Schools Policy on its own would be limited in its effectiveness.

As consultations were guided by Recommendation 15 of the Turning Point report, discussions were rooted in the expansion of the Code of Conduct. Several suggestions of how to expand and make the Code of Conduct more effective were offered and have been captured and outlined in the response below. Additionally, as discussions naturally gravitated towards identification of larger issues and challenges faced by schools in Nova Scotia, participants also offered suggestions related to programs, services, and school operations.

Many of the issues shared by school boards echo in part, what has been identified in previous reviews of the education system in Nova Scotia (e.g., *Disrupting the Status Quo* 2014) and the Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee (SEIRC 2001), both referenced in the Commission's interim report. These include, but are not limited to, the need to develop common terminology and understanding of special education (specifically the term special needs), clarity of roles and responsibilities, stronger interagency collaboration, changes to teacher training, and examination of current funding models.

Ultimately, consultations reinforced much of what has already been identified: that issues being faced by schools today are increasingly complex and require a multifaceted approach that is supported by a myriad of evidence-based supports, services, and strong interagency collaboration. While the Commission requested recommendations from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) for expanding the provincial school Code of Conduct into a Safe and Inclusive Schools Policy, this would require more extensive consultation and development. Time was not

available to undertake a full policy development process.

Recognizing the complexity of the issues and challenges that exist in the current school system, it is recommended that additional time and resources be dedicated to an expanded review of safe and inclusive practices, programs, and policies in relation to the wider public school system, and the existing supports offered by external agencies and organizations.