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Stakeholder Workshop: Summary

Stakeholder Engagement Workshop
Location: Mount Saint Vincent University

December 1, 2017

Stakeholder Workshop Notes

What is your vision for the next chapter of Inclusion?

Parent Voices
- Less of a focus on process/procedure <u>proving </u>your <u>needs,</u> more listening to experiences/advocacy/people <u>telling</u> you their <u>needs</u>
- Taking parents' concerns seriously when an issue is brought forward.

Skilled, Trained Professionals
- Skilled professional experts involved in program development and meetings.
- Better trained guidance counsellors
- Teacher training for any of the staff who are with children

Embrace Individuality (fairness)
- Equality and fairness are very different. Equanimity ignores individuality. Fairness embraces it.
- Responding to individual differences.

Tracking Needs and Trends
- I would like there to be a study hall in public school.
- Better tracking of student needs and learning trends.

Innovative Classrooms
- Creating training centres within school - hands on learning (All levels)
- Classes in social skills would benefit all students.
- Enhances and flexible classrooms plus training to use them.

Early Intervention
- Access to specialist in the early years in determining disabilities.
- Taking parents' concerns seriously when an issue is brought forward.

A Model of Non-Negotiable Resources
- A model of non-negotiables for every school "Every school gets this…"

Rural Resources
- An incentive program in place to bring resources (teachers, guidance, community agencies, etc.) to rural schools/students

Student Voices
- The voice of students matter - professionals need to listen when they need breaks and when they need supports. Creating mechanisms that give students a voice.
- Considering students opinions.

Equal Opportunity
- An equal opportunity to learn
- Process/policies are barriers- psycho-educational assessments are need for DSEPS but school won't do them, and families can't pay privately

Resources Meet Real Needs
- Capacity to meet the needs across the system (Students, community, home, school). Supportive resources.
- Resources reflect the needs of NS students
- TA/PSA support allocated by educational needs not physical needs
- More funding to provide resources. Turnover is a challenge then training new people is a challenge
- Resources need to be available for everyone. Currently medical needs take priority over learning/behavioural support needs.
- Commitment to the financial necessities for inclusion to succeed.
- That small classrooms are easier to concentrate
- Better teaching ratios and environment are critical to have supportive and effective learning opportunities/success.
- Staffing and support is linked to needs not numbers. Student needs are prioritized, not number of students.

Mental Support
- Mental support psychologists
- More support for students

From School to Community
● Students transition from school to "service" in community not the family couch

Motivate vs punish
● Motivator (positive motivators not punitive)

Guaranteed Income
● Guaranteed income (don't laugh, I am serious)

Recognition of Stigma
● Recognition of stigmatization

Which changes are needed?

Strong Home and School Partnerships (And Community!)

What does success look like?
● Open listening between families and schools *even when they disagree
● Parent involvement and choice (about program and supports). Includes accessibility of language and subject matter - Build Understanding
● Blame free environment
● Transparency
● Navigating is hard and complex. Need community support
● "They won't come" (re. parents, etc.) change to "How do we reach them/accommodate them?" Shift the onus.
● Build a culture at/or within the school environment that means it's not only "when there's a problem" - school is welcoming and open
● Free flowing and frequent communication (effective and timely)

What are the barriers?
● Communication
● Resources: $, personnel, (high school-credits)
● Poverty (job security; frequency of moves)
● Racism
● Literacy
● Language
● Experiential history within family (e.g. levels of achievement or background)
● Perception(s)
● Bureaucracy, rules and regulations
● Scope of practice
● Physical plant (school lockdowns)
● Community use of schools (lots of challenges)
● CRCS & VSS

- Relationships and personalities

If you were in charge, what would you do in the first 6 months?
- Prioritize-communicate more
- Creative, non-traditional partnerships (e.g. ESL and/or tutoring within schools)
- Lunch making volunteers in schools (Now is against the rules and regulations)
- Giving student more "permissive" options and choices; creativity- enhancing approaches with greater menu(s) of option and choice
- From "we can't" to "how can we?"
- Embedded in registration- how do you want (or can you) volunteer to support the school community
- Taking more of a stance of curiosity about student behaviour and circumstance to help develop and learn about the student- don't rush to judgment
- Realistic and more fulsome cost benefit (long term) (e.g. TAs)
- Give principals back "control" or "freedom" to create their school environment
- Realistic lens on backgrounds of student and family population-stop the middle-class orientation that doesn't solve challenges but "lectures" vulnerable people
- A true team approach to children's education. Parents meet with teacher to "transition" them to school ("Meet the teacher" days before school starts)
- Openness to alternate arrangements that get the kids off well/better
- Communication. Partnership. Creativity. Diffusion of solutions.

Practical, Specialized Teacher Education

What does success look like?
- Cultural pedagogy is key
- Build relationships between teachers and students for services to be provided
- Recognize, be aware of, and minimize bias.
- Need to address staffing issues and restrictions in collective agreements: match staff to student needs
- Wouldn't need as many specialists if teachers had the knowledge and skills that they require
- School admin needs to become better versed in IPPS and Adaptations-inform parents of ramifications

What are the barriers?
- Unconscious Bias: how do we tackle this in all aspects of the school system??
- ICCD/University Schools of Education
- Staffing issues: too much turnover-disruptive
- Lack of accountability and competencies in teacher continuing education
- Lack of stability due to staff transfers
- Right staff to the appropriate roles: match in a student-centered way

If you were in charge, what would you change in the first 6 months?

- Address attitudes and biases in continuing education.
- All teachers take practical courses for learning differences
- All teachers should have the Mental Health First Aid course
- Increase access, promote the course; for all students to have available
- Need to offer more permanent, full-time positions to recruit and retain the specialized staff students require
- Access parent expertise re. strategies for teaching individual students
- Give students more control over their lives. Treat them as persons. High, uniform expectations are vital, for all students
- Continuing, practical, competency-based education required for all staff - teachers, TAs, Administrators, Specialists.
- Provide choice to students re: curriculum, assignments

A Continuum of Programs, Services, and Settings

What does success look like?
- Student influenced review mechanism
- Broad range options
- Differentiation
- Integrating services (no silos)
- Less complications
- Based on needs
- Flexible requirements
- Enhanced programs
- Community based learning
- Planning for graduation
- Options
- Valuing innovations
- Credits
- Early intervention
- Effective transitions
- Open schools for service providers/not wait something to transition to
- Collaboration of community agencies
- Themed settings

What are the barriers?
- Jurisdictional barriers
- Turnover impacts relationship and services
- Policies, procedures, practices
- Fragmented
- Interpretation
- Outside agency funding
- Contract language

- Time restraints collaboration
- Impact
- Priorities
- Waiting lists

If you were in charge, what would you do in the first 6 months?
- <u>Expand programming for credits</u>
- <u>Celebrate innovations and supporting them</u>
- <u>More resources/services</u>
- Funding
- Highlight innovation
- Ongoing centre of excellence
- Year-round service
- Database of what's working
- Improve methods/need intervention

Student-focused Interagency Collaboration

What does success look like?
- Families are part of the collaboration. Family focused - as <u>true</u> partners.
- Better <u>transition</u> between services (ex: NSHA (SLP part) & School) HS & world
- Know each other's people, services
- Better recognition of the issues of <u>hearing difficulties</u> (i.e. processing) not just sensory hearing loss. Education/psychologist/SLP collaboration

What are the barriers?
- Culture of parents and children as "recipients of service" rather than <u>true</u> partners. <u>Shared</u> decision making. <u>Shared</u> planning.
- Waitlists/resources impair availability for planning/transition support.
- Part time availability of key providers (ex. social worker with teaching component) impedes communication and service. <u>Term positions</u>.
- Rurality/distance between services

If you were in charge, what would you do in first 6 months?
- Full-time permanent positions-single function
- Focus on building key relationships-time and process
- Understand roles and responsibilities
- <u>Space</u> is needed to support education- must be recognized in budget and space planning/allocations
- Noise Reduction
- Establish physical presence
- Train everyone in family centered services
- Clarify to parents/teachers, the pathways to access assessments/supports

Other

*Note that the primary participants in the "Other" breakout group were youth.
Other than "Inequities in Financing" these themes represent concerns and thoughts of the students who were present at the workshop.*

Inequities in Financing
- e.g. Department of Justice give funding to Education - preventative funding
- Cross gov't funding collaborators
- The gaps when gov't cuts programs
- How gov't decides to fund things
- All about the resources

Bullying...a big impact
- Earlier interventions
- Notice it! (Teachers)

Education is a necessity
- Necessities being adequately funded. Period.

Getting involved in non-school groups
- Ex. 4H Club
- More awareness of what's out there
- Know how to get involved

Hands on learning
- Not just sitting and looking
- Students build things for school
- Social enterprises (chicken coups, bees)

Classrooms
- More friendly classrooms
- Themed classrooms, make them less intimidating
- For younger students
- Add colour!
- Don't make schools look like prison

Motivations for being a teacher
- Carefully select teachers
- System treats them so poorly
- False decisions-what they thought/hoped it would be

- Why would you stay around?
- Is anyone doing research of # of teachers leaving?
- Do they know about the challenges?
- Training teachers to support special needs

Relationship between students and teachers
- Consider what students say
- Mutual expectations
- Would help motivate students
- Listen
- School shouldn't feel like a punishment

Teaching
- Need more male teachers
- 1 on 1 help before it's a "problem"
- Teachers and support staff
- Have teams...more of them
- More patience

NSSSA-Inclusion conference.
Schools not getting involved-no show of support.