

Letter to the Editor from the *Leader-Post*

## **Student supports threatened**

Between 2000 and 2008, the number of Saskatchewan students requiring intensive support services doubled. Nonetheless, the Education Ministry wants school divisions to scale back facility and staff resources for special needs students.

The ministry recommends these supports be provided by classroom teachers, resulting in more inclusive education. While educational assistants wholeheartedly support and work every day toward the fullest possible integration of special needs students, we are concerned about attempts to integrate students while simultaneously removing their support base.

For example, we've been told students with mild to moderate behavioral problems will no longer need supplemental structured learning spaces and staff support. The students we assist already spend as much time as possible in mainstream classrooms, so we know from experience that integration is not a seamless process. There are setbacks and times when outbursts are too intense to deal with in a classroom setting.

Will responding to these challenges be an effective use of the professional skills that teachers bring to the classroom? Educational assistants have specialized training to meet the additional physical and emotional needs of students. While we support more special needs training for teachers, we are concerned that assigning extra demands to unassisted, overburdened teachers may compromise student success.

Inclusion cannot succeed without maintaining proper support levels. Concerned parents and teachers should contact their elected school and provincial representatives to tell them that promoting inclusivity while at the same time reducing the resources needed to assist inclusivity is a grave mistake.

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