Inclusive Education

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Preface

The Ministry of Education supports the belief, attitude and approach of inclusion for meeting the needs of all individuals. Inclusive education creates environments where students feel accepted, valued, confident and safe to engage in learning and where school personnel, families, students and community agencies form collaborative teams that are committed to a shared vision to support students in reaching their full potential.

Inclusion

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education is guided by a *Student First* approach in which students' strengths, needs and interests are central to inclusive educational experiences for learning. Inclusive opportunities promote increased understanding and acceptance of diversity within the classroom, school and the community.

> *Inclusion is an attitude, a belief and an approach that supports a commitment to welcome, accept, value and educate every individual as a contributing member of the school community.*

Inclusive education provides students with an opportunity to learn with age appropriate peers within schools in their home communities. An inclusive environment is welcoming and accepting of student interests, backgrounds and life experiences.

An inclusive attitude, belief and approach are embedded in the document, *Actualizing a Needs-based Model* (2015), which outlines the following **inclusionary philosophy and beliefs**:

- **Focusing on the strengths, needs and interests of the student;**

- **Emphasizing the supports that the student requires and the elimination of barriers;**

- **Nurturing independence and interdependence by providing opportunities that promote the development of personal empowerment and self-determination;**

- **Maintaining a view that the student is an active participant within the immediate community and wider society;**

- **Embracing the belief that students are parts of an evolving society that believes all individuals belong in and are valued members of a diverse society; and,**

- **Fostering an attitude of respect, appreciation and acceptance of diversity.**

Practices of Inclusive Education

A strong commitment and shared vision are important components of successful inclusive education. The vision demonstrates that inclusive educational practices are part of the everyday work of the school community to create intentional and responsive educational experiences in classrooms.

> *Inclusive education involves "… intentional individual and collective action to facilitate and strengthen commitment to inclusion, and to support effective practices at multiple levels."*   *(Lyons, Thompson & Timmons, 2016, p. 894)*

Supporting the philosophy and beliefs of inclusion is the responsibility of all levels of leadership. Senior and school-based administrators play a critical role in creating a vision that provides a foundation of attitudes, beliefs and approaches for inclusive educational practices and experiences in schools and classrooms. The vision guides the development of environments that focus on communication, interaction and relationship building for authentic inclusive school communities.

Within a foundational vision of inclusive education, teachers are supported to create learning environments that value diversity. At times, learning experiences could involve specialized services or settings for gradual development towards inclusion. Students, parents/guardians, senior and school-based administrators, teachers, educational assistants, supporting professionals, human service agencies and community organizations form collaborative teams to support student success within inclusive settings.

Inclusive education practices include:

- **Developing a welcoming school community that promotes respect, mutual trust and friendships;**

- **Taking responsibility to model and encourage positive interactions for the development of authentic relationships;**

- **Promoting attitudes that welcome and value individual diversity, student interests, backgrounds and life experiences;**

> *"The school is welcoming to families.*
> *You have a good feeling when you walk into this school."*
>
> - Parent, Student First Engagement Discussion Guide

"I always participate in every activity there is. And I have gotten better because . . . I've come to a point where I found my confidence."

– Student, Timmons, Lyons, Thompson (2017)

- **Fostering positive self-esteem, engagement, participation and a sense of belonging in the classroom, school and community;**

- **Engaging in a collaborative team approach for positive problem solving, sharing of ideas, collegial support and parent engagement;**

- **Using high quality responsive instruction that differentiates to meet students' needs and promotes students' strengths for learning and participation;**

- **Facilitating learning opportunities that are challenging, engaging, culturally and developmentally appropriate; and,**

- **Creating an environment that provides an emotional safe space, visible cultural representation and physical adaptations to accommodate diversity.**

"The challenges some students face are extraordinary, but they are not insurmountable. Students just need to be given options and have our support."

– Principal, Student First Engagement Discussion Guide

Summary

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education encourages the creation of educational settings where students are engaged in authentic inclusive learning experiences with age appropriate peers in their home communities. Collaborative teams work together with the end goal of inclusive educational experiences for all.

"… Classrooms are the only places where all children of a community come together to make their future friends and acquaintances …"

(Bunch, G., 2015, p. 8)

" … Students who are accustomed to segregation of their peers will carry that experience throughout their lives to the detriment of their peers …" The students who were segregated often *"live lives of isolation and loneliness"* due to a lack of bonding opportunities in early life.

(Bunch, G. & Snowdon (2013) as cited in Bunch, 2015, p. 6)

References

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Thompson, S.A., Lyons, W. & Timmons, V. (2014). Inclusive education policy: what the leadership of Canadian teacher associations has to say about it. *International Journal of Inclusive Education.* 2014. DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2014.908964.

Thompson, S.A., Lyons, W. & Timmons, V. (2017). *Voices of Inclusion.*

Appendix A – Bibliography of resources for additional learning

The list of resources included here are from perspectives outside of Saskatchewan. When reviewing the philosophies, approaches and strategies suggested, please do so within the context of education in Saskatchewan. Reference your local school division and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education policies and guidelines, as well as the Saskatchewan *Education Act, 1995*, when considering how the information in these resources will support you.

Causton, J. & Theoharis, G. (2014). *The Principal's Handbook for Leading Inclusive Schools.* **Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.**
- This book provides practical information for bringing schoolwide inclusion from theory into practice. It includes guidance for accessing curriculum, making decisions for accommodations and adaptations, promoting collaboration, facilitating positive behaviour supports, creating a school culture that encourages independence and high expectations, and avoiding burn-out and managing stress.

Villa, R.A. & Thousand, J.S. (2017). *Leading an Inclusive School: Access and Success for ALL Students.* **Alexandra, VA: ASCD.**
- The authors compiled examples, advice and tools for planning, implementing and promoting inclusion. This book includes instructional practices for inclusive schools, organizational structures for differentiation and educational initiatives and best practices for the education of all students within a general education setting.

Villa, R.A. & Thousand, J.S. (2016). *The Inclusive Education Checklist: A Self-assessment of Best Practices.* **Naples, FL: DUDE Publishing.**
- An outline of best practices for inclusive education is provided along with a checklist of indicators for each best practice. The book includes mean scores for each best practice checklist to evaluate school progress. The data can assist users in creating a continuous improvement plan towards implementing best practices for inclusive education.

Friend, M. & Cook, L. (2017). *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, 8th **Edition***. New York: Pearson.**
- *Interactions* provides information on the essential skills necessary for cooperation and collaboration to create quality inclusive educational experiences for all students. There is a blend of theory and practical applications designed to help school teams, families and agencies/organizations work effectively together. Along with an overview of collaboration, the book also includes information on essential communications skills, problem solving and common collaborative applications.

Hutchinson, N.L. (2017). *Inclusion of Exceptional Learners in Canadian Schools: A Practical Handbook for Teachers*, 5th **Edition***. Toronto, Ontario: Pearson Canada Inc.**
- This resource is an introduction to inclusive education in Canada. In addition to providing positive ways to include all children in the regular classroom, there are additional Canadian resources listed to expand the user's knowledge. There are examples provided that present the voices of children, parents and teachers working together to enhance learning. This book introduces the ADAPT strategy to guide educators in creating inclusive educational experiences (See appendix B).

Appendix B

The five step **ADAPT** strategy, developed by Nancy L. Hutchinson (2017), is a systematic strategy for adapting or differentiating teaching to meet student needs in inclusive classrooms.

Accounts of students' strength and needs
- o Review student cumulative file
- o Consult with parents and previous teachers or team supports.

Identify academic (current skill level), social-emotional and behavioural (conversation skills, turn-taking, friendship skills, hyperactivity, motivation) and physical development (fine and gross motor skills, vision, hearing) strengths and needs.

Demands of the classroom on students
- o The social, emotional and behavioural demands
- o Physical and academic demands (instruction and evaluation demands)

Consider the following: Learning with whole group, small group, paired peer support or individually; modelling of positive interactions and acceptance of differences and diversity; use of routines, focused listening time; audiovisuals, books (font size and type, reading level), and technology; physical setting (floor space, desk positions) and how often classroom space is changed or rearranged; and demonstration of learning through tests (exams), written reports, oral reports, drawing or three dimensional models.

Adaptations
- o Compare student learning needs to the demands of the classroom
- o Consider the adaptive dimension (reference the adaptive dimension document)

Identify potential mismatches and identify ways to eliminate these mismatches. Adapt with bypass strategies, which work around a difficulty, such as: using a calculator, text to speech/speech to text, braille, audio books or spell check.

Perspectives and consequences
- o Reflect critically on adaptations and consider them from many perspectives (teacher, student, peers, parents)

Choose an adaptation that is a good fit, simple and effective. Consider if the adaptation will benefit one, many or all students. Ensure it is age appropriate and that it helps the student feel competent, connected or autonomous. What are the intended and unintended consequences of implementing the adaptation? Is the change positive and effective?

Teach and assess the match
- o Consider how engaged the student is due to the adaptation
- o Use a response to intervention strategy to evaluate effectiveness

Ask how well the adaptation has matched student strengths and needs to classroom demands. Allow time for the adaptation to be effective (about three or four weeks).