



NSTU Position Paper

Inclusion

April, 2009



Background

Inclusion is a philosophy based on the belief that all students are respected for their unique capabilities and that all students are integral members of the education community. Inclusion ensures equitable access to learning for those students identified with special needs and requires necessary resources to address special needs.

Research is clear that *all* students benefit both academically and socially through inclusive practice. Research also demonstrates that teachers support inclusion and that classroom teachers are a critical component of successful inclusion.

The NSTU as an organization has addressed this topic over a period of two decades. Beginning in 1987, the NSTU adopted a *Policy on Integration* followed by a *Task Force Report on Integration* in 1990. 1998 saw the organization commission a study- *Educators' Perceptions of the IPP Process*. This study's findings resulted in a *Letter of Understanding* concerning the IPP process in the *1999 Teacher Provincial Agreement*. However, members remained concerned about the paucity of resources for inclusion. Thus in 2002, a resolution was adopted at Council withdrawing the organization's support for the Department of Education's *Special Education Policy*. In 2006, allocation of designated funding for the IPP process was achieved through contract negotiations. Today, the NSTU continues to address inclusion issues through its multiple governance structures.



Guiding Principles

The following statements serve as the fundamental tenets concerning inclusion for the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

- A caring society provides education for all.
- Children with special physical, intellectual or emotional needs benefit from learning in the most enabling environment characterized by flexibility, responsiveness and support.
- While regular classroom placement may best serve many exceptional children's needs, it is recognized that learning centres and other environments may be the most appropriate short and long-term placement options for some children. The determination of placement should be based on individual student program needs.
- Ongoing, specially-designated and substantial funding should support the inclusion of special needs children. Each school board should be accountable both to the Department of Education, which has responsibility for providing the funds, and to the public it serves. Sharing of human and material resources among school regions should be encouraged.
- Funding should be based on actual audited costs, be long-term in its scope, and, most importantly, adequate to the challenge of successful inclusion.
- To allow for maximum success for teachers working with special needs in an inclusive setting, teachers should receive a continuum of support services necessary to provide a positive learning environment.
- Successful inclusion is achieved when a child's educational program and environment further his or her cognitive, physical and affective development. The process of inclusion should ensure the rights of all children to an appropriate education and an equitable distribution of resources among all students.
- Programs for some students with special needs require allocated funding for "life skills" curriculum.



Issues and Needs

Successful inclusion consists of five key elements: class size and composition; funding; professional development; resources; and, time.

1. *Issue*

Class size and composition affect the amount of attention an educator can provide to all students in the classroom, in particular, to students with special needs. The larger the total number of students in a classroom coupled with the number and nature of the special needs of students dramatically influences the time an educator can devote to each individual.

Need

A weighting formula needs to be applied when students with special needs are integrated into regular classrooms. Such a formula would cause the class size to be reduced based on the number of special needs students placed in a particular classroom.

2. *Issue*

The funding necessary to support the philosophy and practice of inclusion is significant. Without jeopardizing the education programs of other students, additional dollars must be designated for the following: barrier-free buildings; specialized equipment; medical and other health services; assistive technology; trained support personnel; teacher-student ratio stipulations; designated preparation time for planning, implementation and assessment of programs.

Need

Adequate long-term funding must be in place to support inclusion in Nova Scotia's public education system.

3. *Issue*

Research identifies six professional development topics for educators involved in working with special needs students.

Areas include program planning and implementation; curriculum modification and adaptations; team building; working with support personnel; information on special needs; and, teaching skills to support explicit teaching, remediation and compensatory strategies.

Need

Education partners must work both independently and collaboratively to provide professional development that advances the knowledge and understanding of educators working in an inclusive environment.

4. *Issue*

Access to professional resources (teaching materials, relevant policy documents, technology, personnel) is a major concern for educators. These tools are required to effectively plan and deliver *Individual Program Plans (IPP)* for special needs students.

Need

Sufficient quality resources, appropriate teaching materials, and a full range of support personnel need to be put in place for successful inclusion to be achieved.

5. *Issue*

Given the time commitment required to carry out the numerous tasks to achieve successful inclusion, and transition educational timetables must include blocks of time within the work day for educators and other IPP team members to meet and to complete the required documentation.

Need

The timetabling of team meetings and the scheduling of record-keeping activities need to be included within the work day to ensure effective implementation of inclusionary practices.



Organizational Position

Under the leadership of Provincial NSTU Committees; in particular, the *Comité de programmation acadienne*, the *Curriculum Committee*, *Member Services Committee*, the *Professional Development Committee*, the *Public Relations Committee*, and the *Teachers With Administrative Responsibilities Committee*, as well as with the assistance and guidance of the 22 *NSTU Professional Associations*, the organization is responsible for the following roles to enhance the implementation of successful inclusion in Nova Scotia's public schools.

Inclusion Advocate

As a successful inclusion advocate, the Union promotes the need for increased resources, dedicated funding, pertinent legislation, a spectrum of support services, and ongoing member and public awareness initiatives to ensure the delivery of quality education in an inclusive environment.

Inclusion Collaborator

As a successful inclusion collaborator, the Union works with education partners to develop relevant policies and guidelines, build teamwork and leadership, and provide a forum for focused discourse to plan, implement, sustain and evaluate successful inclusion.

Inclusion Provider

As a successful inclusion provider, the Union provides a wide range of professional development opportunities for members to increase their knowledge base concerning inclusion. Further, the Union through contractual negotiations continues to address the issues of class size and composition, team planning time and adequate funding to better meet the needs of both educators and students.

Reading List

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