

Government's Response to the Recommendations of:

# Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools

An Action Plan for 2012-13



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## Premier's Message

Our government believes that everyone has the right to succeed in New Brunswick. And we believe that it is important for every child to have the opportunity to succeed and reach his/her full potential.

Inclusion offers that opportunity. Inclusion starts in families and is reflected in our schools and communities.

I know from my experience that inclusion matters. It is a value that we want our children to learn and practise. My two sons, Jonathan and Ben, benefited greatly from the remarkable inclusive experience offered to all students at their schools in Woodstock. Their experience is just one example of the positive impact of inclusive education in schools across our province.

Making our schools inclusive helps us lay the foundation of success for every student in our education system.

Through inclusion, we are ensuring access to the experiences, the knowledge and the skills that will prepare our children for the future.

Our government is committed to enhancing supports for teachers and students to make a quality education in an inclusive school system a reality.

Children need supports that are personalized and flexible. The programs and actions that make up this action plan will help us do that more effectively.

Through our increased investments and initiatives in inclusion, we will improve the delivery of priority services to all children, no matter where they live in New Brunswick.

Our children are our future. When we give every child the opportunity to reach his/her full potential, we are setting New Brunswick up for success.

Our government will remain committed to enhancing inclusive positive learning environments and enhancing the quality of life for all New Brunswickers.



The Hon. David Alward  
Premier of New Brunswick

# Minister's Message

We are beginning a new era in inclusive education.

When I became Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, making improvements to our education system that allows every child to reach his/her full potential in inclusive settings, was a top priority given to me by Premier David Alward. That is why I tasked Dr. Gordon L. Porter and Dr. Angèle Aucoin to do an intensive review of current support for inclusion and provide detailed actions that are required to strengthen the inclusive positive learning environment in our schools.

Having received the comprehensive *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* report from Dr. Porter and Dr. Aucoin in December 2011, my department prepared a year-one action plan as the first step to putting the report's recommendations into place.

Supporting each of our schools to become inclusive positive learning environments, with the proper support and training, gives the ability of each student to reach his/her full potential. Inclusive positive learning environments promote social cohesion, belonging, active participation in learning, a complete school experience and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community.

An inclusive education system supports the learning of each student in inclusive settings through 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogical strategies, methods, accommodations and approaches that are effective and respectful and encourages high expectations and achievement for each.

Every child is unique. His/her different strengths, abilities and diverse learning needs must be recognized as his/her foundation for learning, and his/her learning challenges must be identified, understood and accommodated.

I thank Dr. Porter and Dr. Aucoin for their dedication and leadership. The teams of people working together provided great momentum. Their engagement of hundreds of people involved with the school system was enormous. I thank everyone for their input. It is clear to me there are great people around us who have children at heart.

The investments and initiatives which we are undertaking will support teachers, principals and, most importantly, our children as we move forward in ensuring that everyone reaches their full potential in a prosperous, healthy province.



The Hon. Jody Carr,  
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development

## *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools:*

### **What we learned; what we will do in 2012-13**

In December 2010, Minister Carr announced that part of his mandate as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) included facilitating a review of the current status of inclusive education within the province of New Brunswick as per government's platform commitment. Minister Carr appointed Dr. Gordon L. Porter to lead the review process with the assistance of Dr. Angèle AuCoin, and to make recommendations to improve our success in providing an inclusive education for all our students. The objective of the review was to "strengthen New Brunswick's public education system by developing an updated action plan for the implementation of the MacKay Report."

The review team engaged EECD, school district and school-based personnel to gain insight into the strengths and challenges associated with inclusive education. In total, the review team visited 55 schools, 33 anglophone and 22 francophone. Equally critical was input from parents, students, stakeholders and partners in education, gathered through consultation meetings. Through this comprehensive engagement process, and by listening to the multitude of voices that have provided their guidance, Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin have been able to develop recommendations for action that will assist EECD in taking the next steps for an inclusive school system.

### **Why is inclusion important?**

The New Brunswick government, with all of its stakeholders, is responsible for the education of all children. Every child must have the opportunity, as noted in the department's 2009 definition of Inclusive Education, "to reach his or her full learning potential" in a school system where "decisions are based on the individual needs of the student and founded on evidence." Every child, no matter his/her differences, has the right to learn with his/her peers to his/her potential and feel safe, secure and respected while doing so. Children and students of all backgrounds, including those new to Canada, First Nations, those with socio-economic challenges, struggling learners, those with behaviour issues, and those with disabilities benefit from inclusive, positive learning environments. Inclusion is based on values and beliefs that support each child while promoting social cohesion, belonging, active participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community.

An inclusive education system puts the individual student at its heart and nurtures and supports his/her learning through pedagogical strategies, methods, accommodations and approaches that are effective and respectful and encourages high expectations and achievement. An inclusive education system is not designed to support the few at the expense of the many; it is designed to support everyone.

While New Brunswick has been on the forefront of implementing inclusive education for 25 years, there is still much to be done if we are to truly operationalize the definition of Inclusive Education described above. Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin have provided us with a blueprint in their report, a set of comprehensive actions, which if pursued with vigour and passion, will result in a better system for all New Brunswick children.

Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin identified 12 significant themes that emerged through their school district and stakeholder engagement:

- 1. LEADERSHIP:** There is a direct link between the strength of inclusive positive learning environments in schools and the values held by its leaders. Developing and supporting principled and effective leadership within and throughout all levels of the education system is essential for the success of every student, classroom teacher and school.
- 2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** There is a need to revisit the roles and responsibilities of those who support and work with classroom teachers in New Brunswick schools. Clarity on the experience and training needed as well as role definition is a priority to make a real difference in student and teacher success.
- 3. INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING:** A solid and common understanding of the philosophy and best practices related to accommodating all students in an inclusive and diverse classroom of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is essential throughout the education system. Best practices for inclusive education need to influence decisions surrounding pedagogy, curriculum development and professional development.
- 4. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:** Professional learning for staff members is a vital element in building a successful education system. It is essential to support schools and teachers to meet the needs of an ever-more diverse student population. Professional learning goals for all staff must reflect inclusive education philosophy embedded within the school context, with a focus on collaborative teams.
- 5. STRUCTURES FOR COLLABORATION:** The composition of New Brunswick classrooms has changed during the last 25 years, reflecting a greater degree of student diversity. To better meet the needs of all students in the common learning environment, (as defined EECD's *Definition of Inclusive Education*), the classroom teacher works with a variety of professionals. Members of the school team bring his/her specific skills and knowledge to support the classroom teacher and his/her students. Every school and staff person must be open to collaboration with a well-defined process for collaboration and teamwork, internally and with parents, external agencies and stakeholders.
- 6. EQUITY:** New Brunswick provincial curricula need to be provided equitably to all students in an inclusive, common learning environment shared among age-appropriate, neighbourhood peers. All students regardless of socio-economic status, sexual orientation, culture, residence, strengths and challenges have the right to access an appropriate inclusive education with high expectations of achievement for every student.

7. **FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** A new approach needs to be developed to provide effectively for departmental-identified priorities. It is critical to assure that actual expenditures are aligned with program commitments and accountability for program outcomes for students is achieved.
8. **PERSONALIZED LEARNING PLANS:** Instructional planning for students who are experiencing obstacles to learning needs to be collaborative, evidenced-based, professional and designed such that the classroom teacher finds it meaningful for daily planning. A new electronic planning and streamlined reporting structure needs to be developed.
9. **POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** In an inclusive setting, classroom teachers help students develop and engage in socially desirable behaviours in a positive common learning environment. Strategies to anticipate and prevent discipline problems are part of an effective teacher's skills set. When the classroom teacher needs additional support to manage problem behaviours, trained personnel should collaborate with the teacher, parents and students to elaborate, implement and evaluate behavioural support plans.
10. **HIGH SCHOOLS:** Failure in high school negates even the most positive prior school experience. There needs to be an intentional, collaborative plan to meet the needs of all our students in high schools.
11. **ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION:** Alternative Education has traditionally been defined as a program for youth of high school age (grades 9 -12) who require an alternative to the standard educational programs offered in New Brunswick high schools. A program to support students considered at-risk and requiring alternative education strategies to prevent school failure must be based on clearly defined criteria focused on student needs.
12. **RESOLVING CONFLICT:** When conflict occurs over a student's learning program or the strategies utilized by the classroom teacher and other school staff, a transparent process that assures both school staff and parents of fair and respectful treatment must be available on a reliable and consistent basis.

# The Path Forward

Within each of the 12 themes described above, numerous areas for action to improve inclusive education within the New Brunswick context were recommended to government. These themes have also assisted the department in its work to reorganize school districts to improve the collective capacity of the school system to support all students in their learning. Moreover, the recommendations in the *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* report also support recommendations from the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Early Learning and Child Care and the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Positive Learning and Working Environment. They promote the current demonstration sites for Integrated Services Delivery, where several government departments are working together in two school districts to provide integrated, earlier, relevant and timely intervention services. All of this work builds upon each other and strengthens our approach within the system to deliver truly integrated and effective approaches with the child at the centre. Government is committed to improving its inclusive education system significantly during the next three to five years, using the *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* report as its blueprint. Our implementation plan will be assessed by our actions, our results, our stakeholders and most importantly, the students we serve. Most importantly, inclusion must be central to the department's Education Plan, integrated with all actions that the department will take during the next three years to support learning. To that end, the following actions address many of the themes and recommendations in the report and have been identified as priorities for year one of a multi-year action plan and will be pursued in collaboration with our newly elected district education councils, our partners and stakeholders.

## Year 1 key actions

The list below is not exhaustive of all of the actions the department will undertake in the coming year to address inclusion. All of the regular work of the department, from its early childhood services to its K-12 services, will be assessed through the lens of whether it supports or promotes the learning and success of every student in an inclusive positive learning environment. As part of its ongoing regular reporting on its implementation of the plan, all activities will be tracked and shared with the public.

### Actions at the School/Community Level

- Allocate additional teaching positions for methods and resources, guidance counselling, behaviour interventionists and other teaching supports for inclusion for the start of the 2012-13 school year.
- Design and implement professional development modules and strategies that support inclusion for all administrators, teachers, educational assistants and support personnel.

- The department will develop and begin the implementation of a long-term plan for professional development that focuses on indicators of effective inclusive practices and strategies for differentiating learning, supported with coaching for classroom and other teachers, educational assistants and administrators.
- Create a dispute resolution process so that unresolved issues between families and the school system can have their issues dealt with in a consistent, fair, equitable and timely manner.
  - With our partners and stakeholders, the department will develop a new dispute resolution process that will be in place for the fall of 2012.
- Restructuring of Students Services teams at the school level to be broader in scope and include all learning supports to students, including Literacy, Numeracy and Francization for example. These school-based teams will be renamed to “education support teams.”
  - Restructure and expand “education support teams” at the school level to include administrators, resource teachers, guidance counsellors, Numeracy and Literacy teachers, teachers en Francization (francophone sector), and others as required (e.g., educational assistants, school psychologists, support services to education social workers and rehabilitation workers, First Nations support workers and school intervention/behaviour mentors). The role of these teams will be to support classroom teachers to foster the learning of all students in inclusive positive learning environments.
- Ensure that more teachers, educational assistants and behaviour interventionists have access to training in evidence-based interventions for autism.
  - EECD will implement an integrated approach to autism training that will build internal capacity and ensure more teachers, educational assistants and other support staff have access to evidence-based interventions from certified, qualified clinical staff.
  - EECD will create an external quality standards committee made of up renowned local and international experts to ensure the approach is current and meets proven international evidence-based standards.
- Review and adapt funding model to better respond to the needs for language training for children of families who are new to Canada.
- Increase funding for francisation supports.
  - Provide professional development for Francization teachers.
- Develop strategies to increase the number of bilingual methods and resource teachers.
  - For the French Immersion program within the anglophone sector to be truly inclusive, strategies for recruiting bilingual resource and methods teachers will be developed.

- Increase funding for assistive technology for students by 20 per cent.
  - Access to the appropriate assistive technology is critical to ensure students are supported for success in an inclusive learning environment.
- Funding for community-based facilitation of inclusion within childcare facilities.
  - EECD will invest \$850,000 over three years to support the design and implementation of services to support inclusion within childcare facilities, through the hiring of facilitators who will increase the capacity of these facilities to offer inclusive services.
  - An additional \$840,000 will be invested over three years to increase the number of support workers by 50 to support the participation of children with special needs while their parents are at work.

### **Actions at the school district level**

- Create a new director of education support services position in every school district, effective July 1, 2012, in recognition of the need to serve all students and provide the sustained leadership required as part of the department's school district reorganization;
  - A new director of education support services position will be located within the office of the superintendent to provide leadership and co-ordinate programs and services that support inclusive education and intervention services in schools. This position will support and be responsible for all educational support services, programs and intervention for students. They will be responsible for implementing the integration of services between partner government departments and agencies. This position will support the department's vision on inclusion, as supported by Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin's inclusion review.
- Speech language pathologists, rehabilitation workers, social workers and other support services to Department of Education and Early Childhood Development personnel will be transferred to this department from the departments of Health and Social Development.
  - Over the coming months, EECD will work with the departments of Health and Social Development to provide a seamless transfer of personnel to ensure that children, students, families, educators and other support staff have services through a single system approach.

### **Actions at the departmental level**

- Create a capital improvements accessibility fund that will provide targeted funding for capital improvement expenses related to accessibility of school buildings for students and the community with an initial investment of \$250,000 each year.
- Develop a multi-year training program for new and existing methods and resources teachers.
  - The department will identify the criteria and competencies required to ensure

methods and resource teachers have the necessary training and education required to affect the changes required to improve inclusive support services in every school.

- Create a joint working group with CUPE 2745, implicated partners and stakeholders and the Management Board to identify the roles and responsibilities of educational assistants to improve inclusive support services.
  - The recommendations proposed by Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin require a revisit of the current roles and responsibilities of our valuable educational assistants. We will work with CUPE 2745 and our other partners to determine what changes will be required in these positions to complement the strengthened role of our methods and resource teachers.
- Continue embedding *Universal Design for Learning* strategies when developing and implementing all new curricula.
- Develop and adopt policies and guidelines to support the 2009 inclusive education definition and the recommendations included in the *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* report.
  - The 2009 EECD definition of inclusive education will serve as the umbrella for all policies and guidelines to be developed and implemented in response to Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin's report.
- Amend certification requirements for new principals to ensure they have mandatory training in leadership practices and strategies for inclusive education.
  - The department will develop and include a mandatory module on leadership practices and strategies for inclusive education for new and existing principals and other administrators. This module will be completed subsequent to the development of standards for inclusive practices for school administrators and will be introduced in the 2013-14 school year.
- Complete the evaluation of the Integrated Services Delivery demonstration sites and propose options to expand to other clusters of schools.
  - EECD, in partnership with the departments of Social Development, Health, Public Safety and Justice and Attorney General, is currently implementing an integrated services delivery approach in the Acadian Peninsula and Charlotte County with a \$1.4 million investment. The evaluation of these demonstration sites will be completed in 2013 and will provide the departments involved with a clear blueprint for how best to move forward with an integrated approach in every school that ensures every child and family requiring integrated services between two or more departments receives adequate, timely and effective support closest to their home and school.

- Create a minister's inclusive education advisory group for each linguistic sector to support the implementation of the *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* action plan.
  - One inclusive education working group for each linguistic sector will be formed with representatives of district education councils, district and departmental personnel and stakeholders to ensure adequate implementation and progress is led and monitored. The working groups will be chaired by Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin, respectively, who will build on the positive collaboration and understanding that has evolved during the review process. Dr. Porter and Dr. AuCoin will serve as special advisers to the department and school districts throughout the implementation process.
- Create two anti-bullying co-ordinator positions, one for each linguistic sector, whose responsibility will be to co-ordinate and monitor departmental, district and school reporting requirements emanating from legislative amendments and to promote anti-bullying initiatives at the school, district and provincial level.
- Develop a new funding model for Education Support Services for school districts and a support strategy for schools with a higher proportion of students from lower socio-economic households or schools not being able to access services in their language.
  - Develop additional funding criteria and model to be used for “vulnerable schools” with higher proportion of students from lower socioeconomic households, which face additional challenges in supporting a higher proportion of vulnerable children or accessing services in their language.
- Develop a high school strategy to fully embed strong, inclusive, and positive learning environments within all high schools in New Brunswick.
  - Revise graduation/diploma requirements so the high school program is more relevant and engages all learners in 21<sup>st</sup> century skill development.
  - Identify and support high school inclusion and success champions, who can serve as mentors for others within the high school system.
  - Review and revised policies and strategies related to alternative education.
- Strengthen strategies to support positive and inclusive transitions to, from and throughout the school system.
  - Support successful employment and post-secondary transitions for all high school learners
  - Partner with First Nations communities and multicultural associations to develop a comprehensive transition process for students.
  - Create a director of the office of first nations to coordinate the vision and develop and implement education services in collaboration with our First Nations partners.

# An Investment in our Future

**In total, a minimum of \$62.07 million will be invested during the next three years to support our inclusion action plan.**

## Year 1 investments

***\$18.81 million will be invested to support the action plan in 2012-13.***

### ***Highlights include:***

- **\$2.5 million** will be targeted toward programs and services to support the department's action plan, increasing the responsiveness and effectiveness of New Brunswick's inclusive public education system.
- **\$250,000** will be invested to create a new Capital Improvement Accessibility Fund in 2012-13 that will grow over time.
- **\$250,000** will be invested to support the design and implementation of services to support inclusion within childcare facilities, through the hiring of facilitators who will increase the capacity of these facilities to offer inclusive services.
- **\$1.2 million** will be invested in increased hours for Education Assistants.
- **\$750,000** for a new director of educational support services in each school district
- **\$12.46 million** will be allocated for additional teaching positions for methods and resources, guidance counseling, behaviour interventionists, and other teaching supports for inclusion for the start of the 2012-13 school year.
- **\$1.4 million** will be invested in the two Integrated Services Delivery pilot sites and their evaluation.

## Year 2 and Year 3: 2013-14 and 2014-15 investments

***\$43.26 million will be invested to support the action plan in 2013-14***

### ***and 2014-15. Highlights include:***

- **\$2.5 million in additional funding** will be added in each of the two years, totaling a cumulative **\$15 Million** to support the continued implementation of the inclusion action plan.
- **\$420,000 in new funding** will be invested in 2013-14 and continued in 2014-15, totalling \$840,000 to increase the number of early learning support workers by 50 to facilitate the participation of children with special needs while their parents are at work.
- Funding to support inclusion within childcare facilities will be increased to **\$300,000** in 2013-14 and continue in 2014-15, totalling an additional \$600,000.
- **As a minimum, another \$24.92 million** in funding to maintain the additional teaching positions to support inclusive education will be provided.
- **As a minimum, \$4.4 million** funding for the new capital improvement accessibility fund, directors of education support, and increased hours for educational assistants will continue in 2013-15.

