Moving Forward

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTING AND SUPPORTING POLICY 322, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

ADVICE TO THE DEPUTY MINISTER

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Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

New Nouveau
Brunswick

School-based survey asking respondents to list five words to describe an inclusive school (2021)

Deputy Minister George Daley
Education and Early Childhood Development
Province of New Brunswick
Fredericton, NB

I am pleased to submit this report, *Moving Forward, From Policy to Practice: Implementing and Supporting Policy 322, Inclusive Education*. This report is a reflection of the knowledge and information gained during the review process, which included the involvement of many stakeholders. It could not have happened without the voices and input of dedicated educators, students, families, community partners, stakeholders and rightsholders, who trusted us in sharing their experiences and knowledge.

The hope is that this report will be the foundation to ensuring that Policy 322 moves forward to build on its successes and continues to evolve to meet its original intent.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Korotkov

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Inclusive education within New Brunswick Education is an evolving and systemic model where children reach their full learning potential, supported by decisions that are based on the individual needs of students and founded on evidence. Over the past 35 years, since inclusive education was legislated, there has been a continuing evolution from viewing inclusive education through a disability-focused lens to viewing it as a model that focuses on all students.

In fall 2020, both the Anglophone and Francophone Deputy Ministers were provided with the mandate to carry out a review of Policy 322, Inclusive Education. Eight years after its release, there was an expectation to determine if the intent of Policy 322 had been met. It is imperative to understand that this was not a review of inclusive education. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) is strongly committed to inclusive education and therefore committed to examining how the policy was implemented, interpreted and applied within schools. The work of the review began in February 2021 and concluded with this report in September 2021. Recommendations will be put forth based on the findings of this study; some to begin implementation in fall 2021. Additionally, structures will be put in place for a performance measurement, monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure continued and ongoing assessment of Policy 322 in meeting its intent and requirements.

This report and recommendations are informed by extensive consultations with department, Anglophone district and school-based staff; students, families, partners, stakeholders and rightsholders. Over 500 individuals participated in virtual sessions. An additional 3033 surveys were completed by school-based staff, and additional submissions were received from teachers, families, and community partners.

In total, sixty-nine recommendations are provided, grouped around eleven themes that emerged through the process: policy alignment, communication, positive learning and working environment, instruction and intervention, continuum of learning supports and environments, roles and responsibilities, equity, classroom composition, funding, community and accountability.

In the time since the policy was released, there has been significant movement forward in a number of areas, including physical accessibility; sexual orientation and gender identity; Education Support Services Teams; restructuring of Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs); and commitment to a responsive teaching and learning environment. However, there are still barriers that were identified as impacting access to learning, including the communication and interpretation of Policy 322; support of challenging behaviours; the individual and systemic impacts of mental health and trauma; and a lack of qualified professionals and school resources.

Shortly after Policy 322 was released, additional positions were provided to help facilitate understanding and implementation of inclusive education and to build capacity within schools; however, the mandate for those positions was for two years only, which proved to be insufficient time for the systemic shift from a disability-focused lens to one that included all students. Professional learning mostly targeted Education Support Teachers-Resource and administrators during those initial years, but not classroom teachers. Data now shows that this was an important misstep.

Despite some shortfalls, there has been significant progress in the actualization of Policy 322. But there is still much to be done. The title of this report is *Moving Forward, From Policy to Practice: Implementing and Supporting Policy 322, Inclusive Education*. It is no longer about debating the importance of inclusive education, which had already been established by several reports prior to this. The focus now is on being transparent and intentional, building on successes and addressing barriers that remain, in order to ensure that schools are safe, welcoming and affirming environments where every student is valued and where everyone receives an inclusive, equitable and quality education.

Introduction

New Brunswick's hard-fought journey to inclusive education is one that has taken many decades and the result is an aspiration for many others around the world. New Brunswick's system is not nationally and internationally recognized because it is without challenges or has all the answers, but because we have continued to evolve in our journey and because inclusion is systemic and foundational to our education system.

In 1986, the New Brunswick Legislature passed Bill 85, amending the *Education Act* and repealing the *Auxiliary Classes Act*, formally legislating inclusive education. Since that time, several reports have been commissioned to provide overviews and updates on the state of inclusive education. The most recent report, *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools,* written by Dr. Gordon Porter and Dr. Angela AuCoin was released in 2012 and formed the initial foundation for the development of Policy 322.

In 2013, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development released its policy on inclusive education, Policy 322, for the K-12 system. The intent of the policy was to set out requirements within a human rights framework for an inclusive provincial education system in New Brunswick schools.

In fall 2020, both the Anglophone and Francophone Deputy Ministers were provided with the mandate to carry out a review of Policy 322. September 2021 marks eight years since the release of Policy 322. As we continue to support its implementation, due diligence requires that we examine Policy 322 to determine whether it is meeting its intent. Has it moved effectively from policy to practice? ***It is important to note that this project was not a review of inclusive education but a review of Policy 322 and its implementation and application.***

During winter and spring 2021, over 500 individuals took part in virtual consultations, including educators, support staff, department and district staff, students and families, community partners, stakeholders and rightsholders. An additional 3033 surveys were completed by school-based staff. This report identifies eleven significant themes that emerged from this extensive collection of data and offers a series of recommendations to move forward in ensuring Policy 322 continues to meet its intent.

Finally, this report reaffirms the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's commitment to inclusive education as the foundation of ensuring an affirming, equitable and quality education for all learners.

SCOPE

Inclusive education within the New Brunswick education system is an evolving and systemic model where all children reach their full potential through decisions that are based on the individual needs of students and founded on evidence. Over the past 35 years, since Bill 85, there has been a continuing evolution from viewing inclusive education through a disability-focused lens to viewing it as a model that is focused on all students developing the attributes needed to achieve personal fulfillment and to contribute to a productive, just and democratic society (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2019). This project reviewed the extent to which the intent of Policy 322, Inclusive Education has been met, examining the

implementation, interpretation and application of the policy during the eight years since its development and release in September 2013. This report presents high-impact recommendations along with a performance measurement, monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure continued and ongoing assessment of Policy 322 in meeting its intent and requirements.

It was important during this process to clarify what was in scope and what was out of scope for this initiative.

IN SCOPE

Several factors were determined to be within scope for this initiative:

- Policy 322 is a policy for both the Anglophone and Francophone K-12 sectors. While a similar review was occurring in the Francophone sector, this report references consultations within the Anglophone sector only. Project leads for both sectors continue to meet regularly to share information and discuss emerging themes.
- The focus of the review was on the time since the policy was developed and released up to the current year (2021). Inclusive education is foundational to New Brunswick's education system and the intent is not to debate that premise or examine inclusion prior to Policy 322. There will, however, be occasional references to earlier documents and reports to help provide context.

OUT OF SCOPE

To keep the focus on the intended objectives, several elements and topics were determined to be out of scope:

- Although the Anglophone and Francophone sectors collaborated on emerging themes, this report relies only on research from the Anglophone sector.
- Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) is referred to twice within Policy 322; however, its mandate is greater than that of EECD. Consultations did occur with the Director of ISD and several Child and Youth Team members; however, no recommendations regarding the governance or mandate of ISD are being made.
- This report does not provide recommendations for changes or updates to the policies of Early Childhood Development (ECD). Within the next year, ECD will release its own policy on inclusion to support early learning and intervention. However, it was important to consult ECD as they play an important role in the transition of children into Kindergarten and in providing support across the continuum of learning.

Methodology

The timeline for this initiative began in February 2021 and concluded in September 2021. During the early months, project goals and scope, along with the focus for consultations, were identified. A project coordinator was hired, and an initiative team was created to provide historical context and current system knowledge. The initiative team comprised individuals in various roles, including but not limited to those within the fields of education support services, curriculum, and school leadership.

CONSULTATIONS

From March 2021 to July 2021, numerous consultations took place. For reasons related to the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face consultations were not feasible. Accounting for various group sizes in each consultation session, approximately 550 individuals had the opportunity to provide input in a virtual format. Many of those participants sent along additional research or information for consideration.

Specifically, consultations occurred between March and July with the following:

- New Brunswick Teachers' Federation and Association, including the Education Support Services (ESS), administrators, the K-8 and 9-12 committees, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE 2745) and the New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBUPPE) working groups.
- Community groups, including New Brunswick Association of Community Living (NBACL), New Brunswick Disability Executive Network (NBDEN), New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (NBDHH), Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick (LDANB), Ability NB, Vision Loss and Rehabilitation, Pride in Education (PIE), New Brunswick Multicultural Council (NBMC) and Atlantic Education International (AEI).
- Government departments, including the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, Child and Youth Advocate's Office, Premier's Council on Disabilities, and the Provincial Directors Committee for Integrated Service Delivery.
- Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), including directors representing the Autism Learning Partnership, Early Childhood Development, Educational Services Division, Educational Facilities and Pupil Transportation, Integrated Service Delivery, Office of First Nation Education, and Policy and Planning.
- Consultations also occurred with learning specialists at EECD whose portfolios included: literacy, numeracy, French immersion, social studies, mental health, neurodevelopmental disorders and complex behaviour, comprehensive and developmental guidance, intervention and instructional support (including learning disabilities, advanced learners and UDL), personalized learning plans, culturally and linguistically diverse schools, and transition and career planning. Prior information had been gathered before individual and group consultations through a series of questions designed to determine awareness and experience of departmental staff with Policy 322.
- Virtual consultations took place with the senior management teams for each of the four Anglophone school districts, including superintendents and director-level staff. District staff also submitted data at the request of the project team.

- Virtual consultations occurred with ten percent of Anglophone schools. Within each school, consultations were held separately with a team composed of classroom teachers and a team composed of Education Support Teachers (EST) including EST-Resource and EST-Guidance. Opportunities were also provided for a consultation group composed of administrators within the selected representative sample from ten percent of schools. Schools were chosen by school districts ensuring a combination of urban and rural; elementary, middle, and high; small, medium, and large schools. While consideration was given to having support staff participate within the classroom and EST groups, the decision was made to have separate sessions for educational assistants and school intervention workers. This decision was made in consultation with CUPE 2745 and district staff to ensure their voices would not be lost in the bigger conversation. Districts were asked to arrange a focus group of support staff across multiple areas. Two of the four school districts were able to arrange this opportunity.
- Post-secondary institutions, including Crandall University, New Brunswick Community College, St. Thomas University, and the University of New Brunswick.
- Representation from First Nations organizations, including First Nation Education Initiative Inc. (FNEII), Three Nations Education Group Inc., the Wolastoqey Tribal Council Inc., and principals from First Nation Community-operated schools.
- Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation.
- NB Social Pediatrics, Saint John.
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) provincial supervisors for Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) and Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI).
- Integrated Service Delivery Child and Youth Team members.
- Students and families.

Participants were provided several documents prior to the formal consultations, including Policy 322, New Brunswick's five-page document defining inclusive education and a series of guiding questions. The guiding questions provided a starting point in many consultations and allowed for greater depth of discussion once the consultation was underway.

While it was not possible to consult virtually with every member of school-based staff groups, it was important to hear their voices as much as possible. To that end, an electronic survey was sent to school-based staff to gather their input. Paper copies were also provided to those staff who did not have electronic access. See Appendix A for the survey questions. A copy of the survey was provided to the New Brunswick Teachers' Association (NBTA) and CUPE 2745 for their feedback. Over a period of a week, 3033 surveys were completed and submitted either electronically or in paper format.

DATA COLLECTION

In addition to the consultations, other sources of data and information were reviewed and used to answer the original question, including but not limited to:

- Jurisdictional scans; previous reports including the 2012 Porter/AuCoin report *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* and the 2006 MacKay Report *Connecting Care and Challenge: Tapping*

our Human Potential - Inclusive Education: A Review of Programming and Services in New Brunswick; summary statistical data from EECD; scholarly research; current provincial initiatives; relevant case law and extant policy documents.

- Data from the following sources to inform analysis:
  - Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) data, including PLPs for Accommodated, Adjusted, and Individualized plans, Individualized Behaviour Support Plans (IBSP) and Partial Day Plans
  - Newcomer Support and Transition Plans (NSTP)
  - Various school-based student surveys, including NB Wellness Survey, Our School, Perception Surveys and Exit Surveys
  - District data, including but not limited to the number of suspensions K-8, number of students for whom the common learning environment is varied, the number of students for whom seclusion and restraint is used, the number of students in alternative education sites (grades 9-12) and school improvement data

Rights-based Policy: Setting the Context for Policy Review

The goal of a human rights-based approach to education is to *"ensure that every child has a quality education that respects and promotes their right to dignity and optimum development"* (UNESCO, 2007). The United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child is clear: all children have the right to quality education that supports the development of their personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (United Nations, CRPD, 2008).
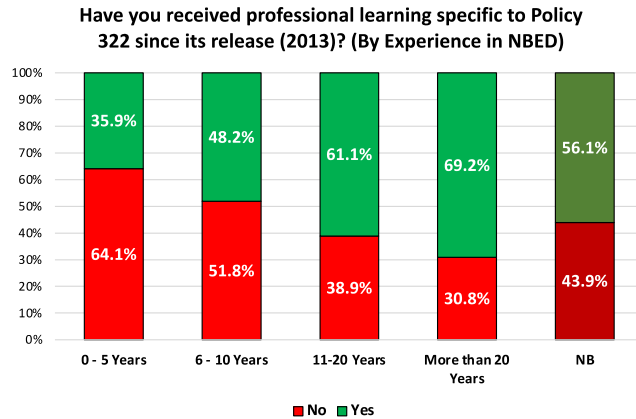
The intent of Policy 322 was to work within a human-rights based framework to establish the requirements that would ensure that New Brunswick schools are inclusive. Eight years after the policy was released, can we answer the question of whether the intent was realized? Did it produce a change? The answer to this question is not a straightforward yes or no. Instead, it is better to ask, to what degree was the intent accomplished; what has happened to close the gap between policy and practice during those eight years?

While Policy 322 is the policy for inclusive education, it does not function in isolation. It is important to note there are many other policies that support the principles of inclusion, including but not limited to: Policy for the Protection of Pupils (Policy 701); Positive Learning and Working Environment (Policy 703); Health Support Services (Policy 704); Healthier School Food Environment (Policy 711), and most recently Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Policy 713).
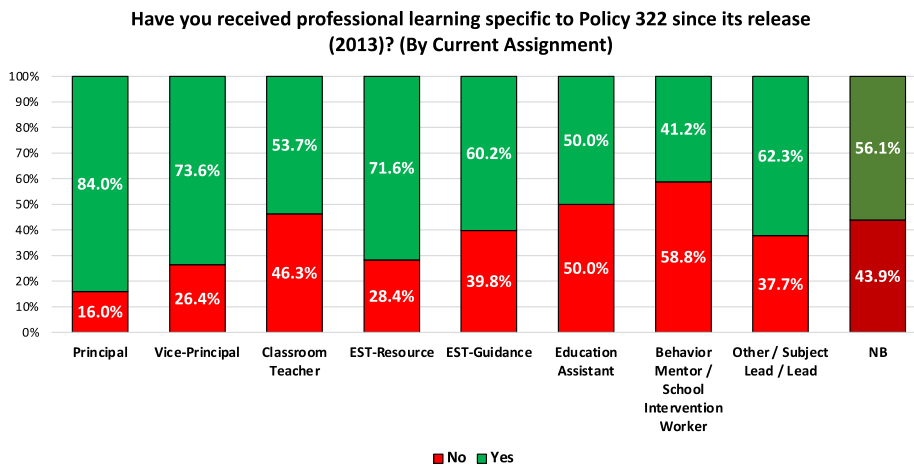
A well-written and well-developed policy that is implemented with appropriate resourcing, professional learning and evaluation structures can provide a consistent standard and clarity for a system. When policy is developed without the above-mentioned context, it can lead to ambiguity and uncertainty for some, and be forgotten by others. In a recent study of healthy and inclusive high schools in New Brunswick, most teachers were not familiar with provincial policy to the extent that they could articulate, beyond a cursory level, its purpose and impact on their schools and classrooms. They perceived a disconnect among the development, release, and implementation of provincial policy (Baker-Korotkov, 2020).

Out of the 3033 respondents who completed the school-based survey on Policy 322, 43.9 percent had not received any professional learning on the policy since its release, particularly those within the first five years of their careers. The roles impacted most were classroom teachers, educational assistants, behaviour intervention mentors and school intervention workers. The impacts of this and other data will be discussed later in the report.

Q05 - Professional Learning Specific to Policy 322 Since its Release (2013)?

Have you received professional learning specific to Policy 322 since its release (2013)? (By Experience in NBED)

	0 - 5 Years	6 - 10 Years	11-20 Years	More than 20 Years	NB
Yes	35.9%	48.2%	61.1%	69.2%	56.1%
No	64.1%	51.8%	38.9%	30.8%	43.9%

■ No ■ Yes

Q05 - Professional Learning Specific to Policy 322 Since its Release (2013)?

Have you received professional learning specific to Policy 322 since its release (2013)? (By Current Assignment)

	Principal	Vice-Principal	Classroom Teacher	EST-Resource	EST-Guidance	Education Assistant	Behavior Mentor / School Intervention Worker	Other / Subject Lead / Lead	NB
Yes	84.0%	73.6%	53.7%	71.6%	60.2%	50.0%	41.2%	62.3%	56.1%
No	16.0%	26.4%	46.3%	28.4%	39.8%	50.0%	58.8%	37.7%	43.9%

■ No ■ Yes

In Delaney's (2002) work on bridging the divide between policy and practice in education, he states that policy dissemination is often overlooked. Downey (1988, as cited in Delaney, 2002, p 45) suggests that there are four assumptions for policy implementation. The first is that policy is supposed to be future oriented and a catalyst for change; second, policies can be deemed suspect by the educators if they were not involved in its development; third, policy development and implementation tends to unfold within a context of community power and political influence, which can thwart the process; and finally, implementation of new policy calls for new commitments and extra expenditures, which are not always possible.

In their work on education policy implementation for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Viennet and Pont identified additional reasons that prevent implementation from being effective, including a lack of focus on the implementation process; a lack of recognition that the change process requires engaging people; and the fact that implementation processes need to be revised to adapt to new priorities and initiatives (2017, p. 6-13).

An understanding of effective and transparent policy development and policy implementation is crucial to the change process. Education policy development and implementation have an impact beyond the school learning environment and can be felt within families and communities. As a result, implementation must be carefully considered. It is not sufficient for policy makers to mandate policy alone.

For many policies, the work ends after the implementation stage, yet it is the evaluation stage that completes the policy cycle. It can answer the questions: Is a policy meeting its objectives? Does it provide a restrictive or reasonable measure of interpretation? What can be done to improve the impact of the policy? Those questions and others, however, cannot be answered unless there are operationally defined goals, criteria to measure success and a way to measure progress towards the goals. As such, policy makers must do due diligence to implement an evaluation plan that includes a performance management, monitoring and reporting strategy. In the case of Policy 322, the lack of an evaluation plan and the time period of eight years between its release and this review has resulted in a missed opportunity to celebrate milestones and to address areas that require clarification or adaptation.

A Summary of Findings

DISTRICT CONSULTATIONS

District consultations were held with each of the four Anglophone school districts in the spring of 2021. Across the four districts, various groups participated, including superintendents; directors of Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Development, Education Support Services and Finance; Directors of Schools; and various coordinators. All consultations were virtual and took 60-90 minutes to complete. All were semi-structured based on guiding questions. Districts were also asked to submit additional statistical information that was not accessible at the provincial level. Participants were given the opportunity to submit any additional thoughts or documentation up until the end of the school year. Several district staff took advantage of this option.

GENERAL FINDINGS: DISTRICTS

As with all of the consultations, participants were open and forthright in sharing their knowledge and experience. While each district spoke to their unique circumstances and context, there were many similarities across all four districts.

When asked to identify barriers to learning that had been eliminated or removed since the release of Policy 322, districts generally reported that there was greater acceptance of all students and a greater sense of belonging. They specifically noted significant progress that had been made in the areas of disability as well as gender identity and sexual orientation.

Progress has also been made with classroom teachers taking more responsibility for the development of Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) for their students as opposed to relying primarily on the EST-Resource role. The data-based platform ESS Connect for PLPs also received support, although it is still in the implementation stage due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This support is attributed to the long-term change management approach associated with its implementation.

Other positives included provincial initiatives for the ongoing training and programming to support learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); the online courses and supervised practicums; the focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and formative assessment; the focus on global competencies, improvements in Personalized Learning Plans (PLP); and the development of the Functional Skills for Independence Resource Guide and professional learning to support learners whose programming falls outside the prescribed provincial curriculum.

Districts also made use of supportive reference documents including the school-based teaming and collaboration document for ESS teams and various guideline documents developed in collaboration with district teams.

Each district has seen an increase in the number of newcomer families moving to their catchment areas in recent years. While all districts acknowledged the positive aspects of welcoming families from around the world, they also recognized that much work is still to be done to build instructional capacity in schools to meet the various language learning needs. While the tutoring budget to support language acquisition has

increased from one year of support to three years of support over the past four years, it is still not always sufficient. Districts were also very concerned about lack of support and expertise to help the education system meet the mental health and trauma needs of newcomer families in culturally inclusive and informed ways, particularly those from war-affected countries.

When asked to identify barriers that remain in the school system, districts discussed ongoing challenging behaviour, particularly crisis behaviour that is violent or aggressive. While students with neurodevelopmental challenges are a variable for consideration, districts identified mental health and trauma as the most relevant factor in this area. Concerns were also brought forward about the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families and schools, in terms of socioeconomics, family dynamics and the effects of isolation. All four districts have identified supporting student and staff wellness as a district priority but have concerns about meeting the increasing need with limited qualified professionals and resources.

Another identified barrier of the policy is Section 6.7 on grade retention. Districts differed on whether this section should remain with Policy 322 or be removed. While Policy 322 states that grade retention is not standard practice, it can and does happen in individual situations. However, neither retention nor promotion alone are adequate solutions to support students who are at risk. Concerns were expressed that the Policy was being used to draw a line in the sand without having a clear understanding of the exceptions and the need to have fruitful conversations with families about considerations to improve outcomes for students.

Districts identified concerns around the current staffing funding model, saying that it needed an overhaul to be more flexible in supporting vulnerable schools and communities to truly meet the needs of an inclusive system.

Several districts referenced rising costs associated with families moving from within Canada to New Brunswick during the school year specifically to access its inclusive system and socio-economic benefits. Districts also spoke to collective agreement challenges that impact the ability to provide consistent support in a timely and proactive manner. Because of these challenges, school personnel are often in a reactive mode, with little time to plan and support proactively.

With growing needs in mental health and trauma, combined with the diversity of needs across the continuum of learning, districts also felt that the staffing ratios for EST-Resource and EST-Guidance are insufficient, and districts are at a breaking point stretching those resources to meet the needs.

Other staffing concerns expressed included the vacant school psychologist positions. Despite multiple postings and attempts to recruit and retain school psychologists, districts were not seeing results. They reported that many schools no longer submit requests for psychological assessments as they have become disheartened with a 2-to-3-year waitlist. Additionally, while the current school psychologists and school social work positions are with the Integrated Service Delivery Child and Youth teams, their work is focused on providing targeted and intensive support, which means they are unable to support schools with school-wide and small-group interventions.

Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) is another area where, despite not having recruitment or retention issues, the need is so great that it is challenging to meet beyond the K-3 levels. Service continuation in middle or high school is not common practice and is based on priority. Challenges identified included access to service prior to school entry. For example, if a preschool child is receiving support from a hospital-based SLP and they then receive a diagnosis of autism and support from Autism Intervention Services, they are dropped from hospital-based services and their case is closed. Their file will be reactivated in kindergarten; however, it could be months or longer before they receive support from district-based SLPs. Adding to this dilemma is an agreement made during the transfer of SLPs from the Department of Health to EECD in 2013 which placed the responsibility for SLP service in private schools, home schools and First Nation schools onto district SLPs.

SUMMARY

While there were district-specific differences illuminated during the consultation, there was considerable alignment in their responses. Districts are supportive of inclusive education and have progressed from looking at inclusion solely through a disability lens to seeing it as an issue affecting all learners, but more work still needs to be done.

An increasingly complex barrier that impacts learning for all students is the concern of challenging behaviour. Districts acknowledged that adding more support staff is not always what is required to provide intervention and support at the right intensity; nevertheless, it is the support most often requested. The interpretation of Policy Section 6.4 on Variation of the Common Learning Environment is problematic as it is perceived as limiting options to provide personalized support for complex behaviour outside the common learning environment.

As the number of newcomers to New Brunswick continues to grow, districts have identified that additional support is needed to meet family and learner needs. Between 2013 and 2021, approximately 10,000 newcomer students entered New Brunswick's Anglophone schools. With a government commitment to bring in upwards of 10,000 newcomers per year for the next 5-7 years, it must be a top priority to support the creation of culturally and linguistically inclusive learning environments, with training and supports for teachers tasked with maintaining socially cohesive environments for all.

Districts acknowledged the financial and other support provided by EECD and the increased collaboration between both groups. Frustration was expressed at the limited time frames for which additional support is available to inclusive education, referencing the two-year mandates for inclusion facilitators as well as Diversity and Respect leads. There is, at times, a push and pull between the department and districts in terms of roles and responsibilities and priorities. There is currently an ongoing dialogue and a review of governance is underway that should help to clarify the delineation of roles and responsibilities.

SCHOOL CONSULTATIONS

The findings of the school consultations include responses from school-based staff who participated in virtual consultations as well as the results of the school-based survey. Ten percent of Anglophone schools were selected to act as a representative sample to participate in virtual sessions. Overall, fifty-two groups of

educators and support staff, ranging from three to eight individuals in each, participated in the virtual sessions. These groups included working groups within the NBTA and NBUPPE, and multiple groups within each school. Additionally, 3033 school-based staff members completed the survey and added their voices to the consultative process. Seventy-eight percent of the surveys were completed by classroom teachers and educational assistants.

GENERAL FINDINGS: SCHOOLS

The consultations with schools provided a wealth of information and insight into the actualization and real-world application of Policy 322. One of the intents of separating participants into distinct focus groups within schools was to ensure they were provided an opportunity to have their voices heard. For most sessions, this proved successful. However, there were times when administrators attended and led the classroom teacher or ESS sessions, and staff were not comfortable responding. All individual participants were given an opportunity to have follow-up conversations or submit information. Several took advantage of this option.

During the consultations and subsequent analysis of the survey results, consistent themes emerged throughout the province, though at times there were regional or grade-level differences.

When asked to describe an inclusive school, numerous words came up, including *caring, flexible, welcoming, engaging, supportive, human rights* and *accessible,* as well as *stressful, challenging, underfunded, understaffed, hard* and *exhausting*.

When asked to identify any barriers to accessing learning that had been eliminated or removed since the release of Policy 322, there were some similarities between district responses. Teachers and support staff spoke to greater acceptance of all learners among both the students and adults in schools. Interestingly, in many discussions they indicated that this change within schools was led by the student population and not necessarily the staff or the administration. Positive change was seen in the areas of physically accessible buildings, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, safe and welcoming schools, social-emotional learning and wrap-around support, including but not limited to Integrated Service Delivery.

The establishment of Education Support Services Teams (ESST) was also seen as a positive. While these teams (previously called Student Services Teams) were in existence in most areas prior to Policy 322, there are now provincial guidelines to support the development and operation of the teams. There remains, however, a lack of clarity amongst some classroom teachers as to the role of members of the ESST, particularly EST-Resource.

Although universal accommodations were established prior to the release of Policy 322, participants spoke to their use as key to shifting practices. For many students, the use of universal accommodations is sufficient, and they do not need a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) to meet identified curricular outcomes. Acceptance of universal accommodations has for the most part been adopted as practice across the province; however, high schools reported that some teachers—especially math teachers—struggle with their use.

Changes to Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), previously called Special Education Plans (SEPs), were seen as mostly positive, although there were still concerns about the degree of paperwork required to have plans

finalized at various times of the year. The new platform, ESS Connect, hosts various types of PLPs, including plans where the curriculum has been adjusted (PLP-Adjusted), plans for students whose programming is outside the prescribed curriculum (PLP-Individualized), plans to provide individual behaviour support and intervention (PLP-IBSP), and plans for partial day programming (Partial Day). Most recently, support and transition plans to address the social-emotional, literacy and language needs of some newcomer learners have been added to the platform in the form of the Newcomer Support and Transition Plan (NSTP), supported this year in 17 pilot schools by an Education Support Teacher for English as an Additional Language (EST-EAL).

Participants also supported practices associated with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation, formative assessment and Response to Intervention (RTI), but teachers expressed challenges finding the time to learn and implement them.

Many teachers spoke positively about the prioritized curriculum developed by EECD in collaboration with districts to support schools during the 2020-2021 school year. The teachers expressed being able to "catch their breath" and meet the curriculum demands in a timely and manageable manner.

The participants also spoke to the work that has been done to transition students into and out of the system. They acknowledged that a plan for transitioning out of school can take several years. The New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL) transition program was mentioned several times as a supportive element. The Essential Skills Achievement Pathway (ESAP) for high school students was seen as a success in recent years. The ESAP program provides an opportunity for students to earn a high school diploma that prepares them for a post-secondary education, apprenticeship, or the world of work in the current skills-based economy. Opportunities for greater experiential learning and community partnerships were seen as promoting motivation for all learners to transition through career-connected learning.

Along with all the positives, educators and support staff spoke to the barriers that remain, sometimes within the policy itself and sometimes in the interpretation and implementation of the policy. Key areas identified were the classroom environment, disruptive and violent behaviour, lack of consistent and qualified professionals, class sizes, lack of resources in general, lack of physical space, poor communication and staff attitudes (school and district).

In addressing the classroom environment as a barrier, several factors were discussed. Many spoke about the challenges of supporting students with complex behaviour needs on a daily basis. They cited the lack of qualified professionals to provide targeted intervention within and outside the school. While some administrators said, *"I just need another body, someone in the classroom to help"*, others said, *"we need trained, qualified people who can provide intervention, not just hover over the student"*. They spoke about the need for more staff, particularly EST-Guidance. When challenging behaviour was connected to mental health and/or trauma, schools reported feeling lost as to how to support these learners in their classrooms on a daily basis. Staff expressed that they were at times fearful for the student exhibiting the behaviour, for the other students in the class, and for themselves. School-based staff spoke about being empathetic to the adverse events occurring in the child's life but feeling unequipped and ill-prepared to respond to their social-emotional or instructional needs. Data from the school-based survey revealed that 0.7% of respondents do not agree with or support inclusive education as it is outlined on Policy 322.

It was often in these conversations where the policy section on Variation of the Common Learning Environment came up. While some teachers understood that the learning environment could be varied to meet the personalized needs of each student, others noted that the message changed depending on the principal of the school. Still others were not aware of the guidance and mentioned professional learning instances where they were told specifically that the common learning environment must not be varied. There was still a sense among some that inclusion is a *one-size-fits all* model, with everyone getting the same instruction and support and students spending 100% of the time in the classroom.

An additional factor to consider for varying the common learning environment is the lack of physical space in many schools. Some schools have little to no intervention space, even if there are qualified professionals available. Teachers also expressed a need for more support from Child and Youth team members, particularly social workers and EST-Guidance. Other professionals seen as critical were SLPs and occupational therapists (OTs), the latter of which are funded by the Department of Health. While the lack of school psychologists—who also sit on the Child and Youth teams—was brought up by several schools, it was predominantly in terms of the years-long waitlists for psycho-educational assessments. Several related that they no longer submit requests because no one is available or wait list is too long, resulting in families paying privately.

Within the system, class sizes and composition have been a topic of significance for many years. Aside from the issue of challenging behaviour, teachers spoke to the difficulty of meeting the needs of a continuum of learners, from advanced to several grade levels behind. ("Advanced learners" are the many students who can demonstrate their need for greater academic challenge.) Teachers and support staff were feeling very disheartened about their work. They reported that, as professionals, they know how to close academic gaps, but due to the sheer number of students and needs in the classrooms, it is not possible. Teachers who had reduced class sizes due to COVID-19 for the 2020-2021 school year expressed what a difference this made in their day-to-day teaching. It allowed some—for the first time in their careers—to feel that they were meeting the requirements of inclusive education.

As the number of newcomer families moving to New Brunswick has increased steadily over the past five years, schools are navigating how to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and linguistically scaffolded teaching practices. Some districts have staffed Welcome Centres and worked closely with Immigrant Settlement Agencies to support families. There was variability among groups on this topic. Some were aware of support offered by the district office for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners and aware of the resources available. Others, who perhaps had only 1-3 newcomers in their schools, were unsure of the process or who to contact.

Several teachers and support staff spoke to the negative media attention in recent years on inclusive education and on themselves as professionals and paraprofessionals. Mainstream media and social media, as well as local and provincial organizations, were singled out as undermining the education, knowledge and experience that teachers and support staff bring each day to their work.

On the subject of moving forward and evolving systemically, responses focused on improving or changing the funding model to effectively resource and support inclusive education. Participants also spoke to a need for better communication between schools and districts. Schools reported being unaware of programming

supports and resources available for learners in their schools and classrooms. When they were aware, they had limited knowledge of the process to access those supports and resources.

SUMMARY

School-based staff overall were supportive of inclusive education and Policy 322 in principle. They spoke to believing in the philosophy and the *"why"* but struggling day-to-day with the *"how"*. Some schools spoke to the collaborative relationship between classroom teachers and ESS staff to provide the right supports at the right time for students. One music teacher spoke about their positive relationship with the EST-Resource where they worked collaboratively to adjust curriculum and allow for full participation in class. Many French Immersion teachers spoke about including students in their FI classes but acknowledged that support was still required to accommodate and adjust the curriculum when needed. There were, however two French Immersion teachers in the consultation groups who clearly stated that *"if students were not able to make it in FI, then they did not belong"*.

The stress felt by school-based staff has been growing significantly, even prior to the global pandemic. The past eighteen months have seen that stress exacerbated by isolation, change and fear, not only for their students, but also for themselves, their families, and their communities. As there is a continuing focus on the mental health of children and youth, so must there be a focus on the health and wellness of educators and support staff who every day are working tirelessly to teach, support and make a difference in young lives.

FAMILIES AND STUDENTS

The consultation process gave families and students an opportunity to share their experiences with Policy 322 and their overall journey through the education system. Participants were contacted by district office and community organizations to see if they were interested in participating. A similar process was followed to obtain permission for their children to take part. Other families reached out directly to EECD, voicing a desire to participate. Several school-based staff who were both educators and parents reached out to discuss their perspectives.

GENERAL FINDINGS: FAMILIES

Consultations with families took the approach of asking them to talk about their journeys within the education system, barriers they may have experienced, successes along the way, and hopes and fears moving forward. Families were excited and appreciated being able to share their stories. Most had many positive experiences with schools and spoke of wonderful teachers and support staff who work with their children every day. All of the families had at least one child in school and were able to speak to different experiences.

One of the first topics brought up was the transition into kindergarten. Most families spoke about it as a positive process, particularly if their child had been receiving services prior to school entry. Most, however, also saw challenges begin once their children were in school. Some families readily accessed supports and intervention once concerns were identified, while others spoke of long waiting periods for assessments, and even longer for interventions.

Communication between home and school was another area identified across the group. Many spoke of regular communication with their child's teachers as being important and a key factor in their child's success. Relationships and a sense of connectedness to the school for themselves and their children was significant. When effective communication was not in place, families spoke of feeling isolated and disconnected.

Families identified several other factors that go a long way in making inclusive education a successful experience for them. These included being involved in the development of their child's learning plan, being able to connect with the classroom teacher directly (instead of the ESS team), opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities and an openness to problem-solve challenges together instead of "us" vs "them" scenarios.

Families were able to identify some barriers they had encountered that they felt impacted the ability of their children to thrive and be successful. Most frequently reported was a lack of knowledge among teachers and support staff of students with disabilities, effective strategies and targeted interventions—especially in areas of challenging behaviours. There was frustration with the length of time from identifying the first signs of difficulty until a diagnosis was made. The families consulted either waited several years for assessments or eventually paid for private assessments. There was also concern expressed about the wait list for assistive technology in some areas of the province, with one parent being told by her district that *"students with a learning disability are not a priority for assistive technology"*.

Families spoke to increasing challenges once their children entered middle or high school. They encountered a reluctance—particularly at the high school level—from classroom teachers to provide needed accommodations (e.g., photocopied notes, extra time, quiet places to write, etc.). Accommodations do not alter curricular expectations. Families often had to reach out to district office personnel to reach a resolution. Several families spoke of situations where accommodations were withheld and the response was, *"They don't look disabled; I wanted to see if they could do without it."* or *"They won't get it in college or university."* Accommodations are recognized at all levels, and just as the New Brunswick Humans Rights Commission has developed duty-to-accommodate guidelines for K-12, similar guidelines exist for post-secondary.

Families also expressed the need for a greater awareness of the presentation and impact of mental health on children at all grade levels, but especially the middle- and high-school level. Adding to this issue is the ongoing debate on inclusion in mainstream and social media. Parents were fearful of losing the right to inclusive education within their neighbourhood schools, which could result in a move back to segregated classrooms or even schools. Whenever there was an issue within education, inclusion was often portrayed as the reason. Referring to inclusive education as "the inclusion program" made it seem unstable and at risk of going away. They expressed fear of speaking out and of being bullied.

Families with one or more children who were identified as advanced learners considered their experiences from K-5 to be mostly positive. Once their child entered middle school, the student become less engaged. Some felt that with the high number of students in classrooms, there was not sufficient time for teachers to go into greater depth or provide enrichment opportunities. They also spoke about the lack of choice in course selection for grades 9 and 10.

The issue of access to French Immersion for children with disabilities or learning difficulties was also discussed. Families whose children were in French Immersion spoke of the struggle schools had in providing appropriate supports and stated that schools often recommended removing the student from the French Immersion program.

SUMMARY

Even with the breadth of experiences among families, there were commonalities across the group. The need for ongoing engagement and collaboration with the school community was critical. Almost every participant consulted named at least one (often more) remarkable teacher and/or educational assistant who made school a welcoming and successful experience for their child or children.

Moving forward, transition support should be an area of focus. Transition was on the minds of parents: transitioning across grade levels and transitioning from schools into post-secondary and/or to the world of work. While some families worried that transition planning doesn't happen early enough, there were ample examples of planning meetings, school visits and support from EST-Resource and EST-Guidance. Families also depended greatly on the support of community groups to advocate and inform, attend meetings, and help navigate multiple systems.

GENERAL FINDINGS: STUDENTS

Despite not being able to visit schools due to the global pandemic, the consultation team was very fortunate and appreciative of being able to conduct virtual consultations with a number of students across various grade levels and ability levels. Questions for these consultations were adjusted to meet the learning needs of the student. Where requested, an advocate attended with the student.

Students spoke about attending schools with their friends, especially after the school closures in March 2020. Other students spoke about ongoing bullying: *"It's just the way I am and I can't help it. Some kids don't get me and they like to make fun of me for it."* Others spoke about positive relationships within the school, a sense of belonging and how supported they were. Students expressed that were many opportunities for co-curricular and extracurricular clubs and activities. If they required help or assistance, students would go to the classroom teacher or sometimes the educational assistant. Positive relationships with school leaders was also a factor: *"Our principal makes us feel safe. He cooks us breakfast every day and makes waffles, pancakes, and omelets. I am usually too busy talking to my friends, teachers, or planning things, so I miss breakfast. That's ok, because I try to eat before I come to school, there is always lots of food around."*

Some students liked the smaller class sizes in place for the 2020-2021 school year, especially at high school during the implementation of the blended model. They reported it feeling less crowded and noisy. Others liked the opportunity and independence to learn from home and hoped it would continue in some form.

Students also spoke about the lack of opportunity to access higher level courses (e.g., a grade 9 student who has to wait to take a grade 11 course, but has achieved the grade 9—and in some cases, the grade 10—curricular outcomes.) One recent graduate was frustrated to learn that there were other options available to her, but she was not given the information to make an informed choice.

SUMMARY

Across the student consultations, there were similar threads of information. Building relationships with peers and with teachers was key to a positive schooling experience. When those relationships were not present or were fractured, students reported having nowhere to turn to deal with bullying and other issues.

Providing information and engaging with students was also identified as important for educators. Students felt it was important to be made aware of opportunities for courses, co- and extracurricular clubs and activities, and post-secondary options. All the students who took part in the consultations identified attending Post-secondary and/or getting a job as a goal(s) for the future.

PARTNERS, STAKEHOLDERS AND RIGHTSHOLDERS

During this process, virtual consultations were held with a number of partners, stakeholder and rightsholder groups, including those who are directly involved with students and schools and those with a direct interest. Some groups sent along additional information for consideration. Members of those groups included and represented employees, families, advocacy organizations, post-secondary institutions, practitioners, service providers and Educational Services Division staff with EECD.

GENERAL FINDINGS: PARTNERS, STAKEHOLDERS, AND RIGHTSHOLDERS

With the exception of one group, all participants were open and engaged during this phase of the consultation process. They spoke supportively about the dedicated and hard work that schools do every day and appreciated the opportunity to participate and share their experiences and insights.

It was important to reinforce that this project was not a review of inclusive education but an examination of the policy to see how far along it was in meeting its intent and how the system will continue to evolve and move forward.

Many groups saw the policy as a success and as one that made impactful change. Others were supportive of the principles of inclusive education but felt that it was still under-resourced. Still others expressed concern that despite wanting the policy to be about *all* learners, it was focused more on "behaviour and exceptionalities."

One of the successes realized since the release of the policy was a focus on purposeful collaboration between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and its partners. Relationships were developed to allow professional dialogue even in the midst of varying perspectives and opinions. Schools and families were reaching out to engage with community partners and they, who were becoming involved earlier with schools instead of when there was a crisis. There were, however, still some gaps identified in process and access.

Groups consulted have provided knowledge and expertise in areas such as assistive technology, adaptive equipment, sexual orientation and gender identity, culturally responsive practices, and promising practices to name a few. They have also been upfront to say when things are not working or when more is required. At all times, they have offered to walk side by side to move inclusive education forward.

In addressing access-to-learning barriers that have been reduced or even eliminated, groups spoke to the structure of school-based Education Support Services Teams (ESST), differentiation of programming and supports for students, a greater acceptance of schools for all learners, and a commitment to problem-solving and working from a strengths-based approach.

Despite progress, there were a number of barriers identified that still remain. Groups spoke to misinformation and myths that still exist and have for almost two decades, e.g., that students have to be in the common learning environment all day, every day; that children cannot have a personalized learning plan until grade 3; and that inclusion is only for students with disabilities. Clear communication around inclusive education is key and everyone needs to be at the table, not just Education Support Services.

Disruptive behaviour, regardless of the underlying cause, was brought up often by these groups and was frequently misunderstood in the broadest sense. However, all expressed that a lack of appropriate resources and supports was impacting the effective response in supporting the student and family, their class peers and the school staff. Mental health and trauma were seen as impacting the work that most groups were involved in. Delays, or in some cases refusal to provide services were causing significant strain. Several groups worried that a reactive approach to behaviour, instead of a responsive approach, would result in younger children being placed in alternative education sites.

In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on the need to address racism and discrimination in schools, workplaces, and communities. Community groups are often the first place families turn to when dealing with this issue. It was a concern stated by several of the groups who would like to see more direct action from government departments. Concerns were also expressed about the impact of inclusive education for the Deaf community. The issues are complicated and multi-layered, including deaf culture, language deprivation and social-emotional needs.

Many of the consulted groups are involved in supporting transitions: transitions into the school system, across grade levels and to post-secondary, the world of work and/or community. With a provincial focus on more effective transitioning for all, their work will become even more important to ensure equitable and inclusive workplaces.

SUMMARY

Given the large numbers of consultations with partner, stakeholder and rightsholder groups, it was not feasible to include all of the comments in this section. Please note that all input was read, re-read and considered for the recommendations which follow this section.

The need for ongoing collaboration with and within this group is significant. Clear communication and processes, and a willingness to partner, consult and collaborate will allow for stronger relationships with everyone working together to support and provide quality education for all.

Recommendations

This section presents the eleven themes identified through the consultations and a comprehensive analysis of the data collected. Within each of the eleven themes, a series of recommendations are presented.

OBSERVED THEMES

Overall, eleven themes emerged through this process. In some instances, there are similarities with previously identified themes from earlier reports. For these instances, recommendations build on the previous recommendations or take new directions. While recommendations are presented under specific themes, they do not exist in isolation from each other and can apply to more than one subject. The eleven dominant themes presented are:

1. Policy Alignment and Policy Updates
2. Communication
3. Ensuring a Positive Learning and Working Environment
4. Equity
5. Instruction and Intervention
6. Continuum of Learning Supports and Environments
7. Roles and Responsibilities
8. Classroom Composition
9. Funding
10. Community
11. Accountability

THEME 1: POLICY ALIGNMENT AND POLICY UPDATES

This section is broken down into two areas for recommendations: Policy Alignment and Policy Updates.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

Policy 322, Inclusive Education was one of the first policies on inclusive education to be developed, not just within Canada, but globally. It has received international attention and in 2016, New Brunswick received an international award for the development and implementation of Policy 322. Presented in Vienna, Austria at the United Nations headquarters as part of the Zero Project 2016, the award recognized the province's ongoing commitment and systemic approach to inclusive education. New Brunswick's inclusion policy is recognized as a leader around the world. With that recognition comes a responsibility to examine its progress and impact diligently in order to continue to grow and evolve.

The initial purpose of this project was to examine Policy 322, looking at its interpretation, implementation and application since its release to see if it has met its intent as established in 2013. In determining the scope of this initiative, it became important to examine the policy with a broader lens. Policy 322, like most EECD policies, is a corporate policy, which means it applies to the K-12 system for both the Anglophone and Francophone sectors. Careful examination of the English and French versions of Policy 322 revealed that there were a number of differences between them, several of them significant. Examples of differences include certain definitions, numbers of examples, and a proactive vs. punitive stance. Even allowing for subtle differences due to cultural context, the differences between the two versions exceeds an expected adjustment. In the end, there must be one consistent policy representing all K-12 Anglophone and Francophone districts and schools.

To ensure policy alignment, it is recommended that:

1.1 Policy 322 language be aligned to ensure compatility for both linguistic sectors, safeguarding the standards and requirements for all learners.

1.2 When policies are being developed/updated in both official languages, they are reviewed not only for linguistic compatibility, but pedagogical content alignment to ensure consistent systemic alignment.

POLICY UPDATES

It was clear during consultations that individuals recognized positive progress since Policy 322 was released in 2013. It was just as clear that there are significant barriers in place that are preventing the policy from realizing its full intent. Several of those barriers will be addressed in other recommendations; however, some are directly related to the policy and its implementation.

When the policy was released, it was shared with superintendents and key partner and stakeholder groups for dissemination. Ten Inclusion Facilitators were hired for the Anglophone sector (one per District Education Centre) for a period of two years. During those two years, their role was to develop leadership with administrators, develop and provide targeted professional learning, build a bank of best practices, develop provincial modules, assess and monitor needs of District Education Centres and their schools, and build capacity with districts on Policy 322, roles and functions of ESS teams, classroom instruction and

behaviour supports. But two years was insufficient to complete these tasks and provide ongoing monitoring and support. Such significant change would require a minimum of 3-5 years and ongoing monitoring to see growth beyond the initial diffusion of information.

It was also noted that communication of the policy and its standards was not consistent across schools and districts. Even when the language was clear, myths and misinterpretations still prevailed. For example, even though the policy clearly expresses that the learning environment can be varied and students do not have to be in the classroom 100% of the time, this is still a strong belief among many schools, families and even some district staff. The message that the policy is flexible, responsive, and individualized was not always the message that was delivered and/or received.

Participants expressed other concerns about the policy itself, including the amount of information in the policy, its length, overlap and conflict with other policies, and the focus on EST-Rs above most other roles. There were concerns that the policy is not reflective of the current context of 2021 and beyond.

It has been eight years since the release of Policy 322 and if we factor in the period that the policy was under development, it is closer to nine. During that time there have been significant changes within society and the education system. The common learning environment has expanded beyond the bricks and mortar of a school building to include online learning, learning from home and community-based experiential learning. These are not alternative learning environments for students, but ones that many students have been and will be able to experience.

Awareness and knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity have progressed in New Brunswick. This subject has become part of the provincial curriculum and a focus of province-wide professional learning. In 2020, Policy 713 was released, setting out minimum requirements for school districts and public schools to create a safe, welcoming, inclusive and affirming school environment for all students, families and allies who identify or are perceived as LGBTQI2S+

During the years since Policy 322 was released, we have seen the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action report with 94 recommendations to address the ongoing impact of residential schooling on survivors and families.

The number of newcomer families in New Brunswick has increased significantly since 2013, with approximately 1,000 students joining local schools each year, dramatically increasing the cultural and linguistic diversity of some schools.

These are just a few examples illustrating how 2021 is a very different time for New Brunswick than 2013. When policy is developed, it must be future oriented. As with any policy, 322 should be updated to reflect these and other advances.

One of the key recommendations from the 2006 Wayne MacKay report *Connecting Care and Challenge: Tapping our Human Potential* was for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to define inclusive education for New Brunswick. In 2009, EECD released a five-page document outlining its vision for inclusive education in the province. It was defined as an evolving and systemic model where all children reach their full learning potential and decisions are based on the individual needs of the student

and founded on evidence. The work of this document and of Policy 322 was to move inclusive education from a focus on disability to a model encompassing all learners.

Despite the intent, merely including all learners in the definition and policy does not make it so. During the consultations, educators and support staff still mostly saw inclusion as about learners with disabilities or learning difficulties and saw the policy as having a similar focus. Many students and families felt that they were not represented in the policy.

Policy 322 is highly focused on personalized learning plans (previously special education plans) for students. It is significantly focused on Education Support Services Teams and in particular the role of EST-Rs. Singling out one member of the ESS Team in this way caused confusion about workload and roles.

The policy includes workload descriptions and targets for EST-Rs, but participants in the consultation felt that the flexibility of the day-to-day operations for the role is not reflected. While valuable, many felt this type of information was better included in a guideline document rather than a policy.

Other students were not seen as under the umbrella of inclusion. Some school staff members reported struggling to meet the needs of certain learners; for example, advanced learners and/or newcomers. When discussing this, they reported not being able to student needs, due to students in "inclusion" or the "inclusion program." Even with the province's commitment to providing ongoing professional learning and Inclusion Facilitator positions for two years, the message of "all" has not yet become embedded in the system.

Preparing a system for such a significant change required more than merging what was traditionally seen as a special education system with a regular education system; more than merely placing one system inside of another. It required the creation of *one* system, built on New Brunswick's history of inclusive education in supporting learners with disabilities.

Today, implementation of policy or any significant initiative requires a change management plan; one that is strategic, well-developed and prepares a system for change. Over the last decade, this element has been critical to ensuring successful implementation and sustainability.

Policy 322 has produced positive changes in the education system. It has allowed many families and school communities to feel welcome, safe and included every day in their schools. To make the policy stronger and to continue to progress towards its goals, it is recommended that:

1.3   The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development invest in a change management process to continue to help the system shift from a special education model to one that is inclusive for ALL.

1.4   Section 6.11.3 be removed and the *School-based Education Support Services Teams to Support Inclusive Education* document be updated to include time allocation targets and to reflect current roles and responsibilities.

1.5   Consideration be given to removing Section 6.6 on suspension. Procedures for student suspension as permitted by the *Education Act* and Policy 703, Positive Learning and Working Environment are outlined in those documents, including the need for intervention.

1.6   A guideline document be developed to help schools and families better navigate a decision on grade retention, and the *Appeals Process* document be updated to reflect a supportive process.

1.7   An accountability framework be developed to provide criteria for success and ongoing measurement of progress towards identified goals, with the expectation that EECD, districts and schools will provide an annual data report, safeguarding the standards and requirements of all learners.

THEME 2: COMMUNICATION

The recommendations in this section are broken down into three areas: communication of Policy 322 and its interpretation to districts, schools and families; communication from EECD to districts and to schools regarding guidelines, processes, resources and best practices; and communication of inclusion initiatives that celebrate *inclusion moments* and *voices from the classroom*.

COMMUNICATION OF POLICY 322 AND ITS INTERPRETATION TO DISTRICTS, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

In the eight years since the release of Policy 322, there has been significant turnover in department, district and school-based staff. While school-based staff reported being familiar with the policy, many admitted that they had not actually read the policy, leading to confusion as to what was included and its interpretation. An initial FAQ document had been developed at the time of the policy release, but most were unfamiliar with its existence.

Over the years, sections of the policy have been highlighted as causing confusion, in particular Sections 6.4 (Variation of the Common Learning Environment) and 6.5 (Behaviour Crisis Response). During the consultations with districts and schools, participants spoke about the messaging surrounding 6.4 being mixed or inconsistent depending on the school administrator. Some still believed that inclusion means students spend 100% of time in the common learning environment and that variation was not permitted despite the policy clearly stating, "*Under specific conditions, a variation of the common learning environment may be necessary to address the needs of the student.*" (6.4.1)

The Behaviour Crisis Response section of the policy (6.5) was concerning for educators who felt it conflicted with Policy 703, Positive Learning and Working Environment. A frequent question asked was, "Does Policy 322 trump Policy 703?" Teachers reported uncertainty regarding how to support individual students in the context of *"All means All"*.

To ensure consistent communication and interpretation of Policy 322, it is recommended that:

2.1 An interpretation guide be developed to accompany Policy 322 to provide clarity on the requirements and standards by July 2022.

2.2 The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document be updated, distributed, and posted on the EECD public-facing website by December 2022.

2.3 The Leadership module on inclusive education policy and practices be updated by spring 2022.

2.4 The 30-hour online course, Disability and Inclusive Education, developed by EECD be updated and re-offered for fall 2022.

COMMUNICATION FROM EECD TO DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS REGARDING GUIDELINES, PROCESSES, RESOURCES AND BEST PRACTICES

Over the years, several guideline documents and processes have been collaboratively developed to ensure consistency and awareness of initiatives across all districts and schools in the province. However, it was evident during the consultations and data gathering that the information is not always reaching front-line staff in schools. Many teachers and administrators were unaware of existing processes for support,

including those at district office, EECD, and within their local communities. In situations where they were aware of supports, the process for accessing them was not clearly laid out.

As an example, in recent years, EECD has invested significantly in the Autism Learning Partnership (ALP) and its training program on Autism Spectrum Disorder and behavioural interventions. The ALP has a highly trained cadre of professionals who are Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBAs) and are available to consult with districts for students with complex needs. Yet only a handful of the school-based ESS Teams were aware of the process and did not know how to access support outside of their school.

Consultations with post-secondary institutions highlighted several gaps with communication. A source of divergence lies in the fact that the three Anglophone Faculties of Education within New Brunswick now require Bachelor of Education students to complete mandatory coursework related to inclusionary methods. However, some institutions still view inclusion through a disability lens rather than one that encompasses all learners, creating variability across institutions. It was also evident that inconsistent communication of policy and program changes has impacted course content delivered to pre-service educators. Incorrect terminology (e.g., SEPs instead of PLPs) and perpetuation of myths (e.g., a student cannot have a PLP until grade 3) results in student teachers and beginning teachers bringing misinformation into their practices.

Most provincially developed resources are available on a closed portal site accessible only by those educators and support staff with an NBED (New Brunswick Education) account and often restricted based on school role. To ensure transparency and clarity, it is recommended that:

2.5 Guidelines be developed and/or updated to support various sections of Policy 322 including Variation of the Common Learning Environment (6.4), Behaviour Crisis Response (6.5) and Grade Retention (6.7), and posted on the EECD public-facing website as appropriate.

2.6 Information on the *Education Act*, policy and program changes be communicated to relevant post-secondary institutions at a minimum of once per year.

COMMUNICATION OF INCLUSIONARY INITIATIVES THAT CELEBRATE *INCLUSIVE MOMENTS* AND *VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM*

Although New Brunswick has had inclusive education legislation since 1986 with the assent of Bill 85, many participants perceived that inclusion "began" in 2013 with the release of Policy 322. Follow-up questions indicated that for some, 2013 was the year the province provided a dedicated focus on inclusive education, while others were not aware of New Brunswick's 30-plus-year journey toward a systemic inclusive education system.

The *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* (2012) highlighted the need to celebrate and showcase successes from the field. Every day, school staff members support New Brunswick's diverse student population, demonstrating the "how" of inclusion. To recognize and share this work, it is recommended that:

2.7 EECD in collaboration with schools, districts, families, and community organizations create a series of resources highlighting the everyday success of New Brunswick's inclusive education system and showcasing how schools problem-solve challenges.

THEME 3: ENSURING A POSITIVE LEARNING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), districts and schools all strive to ensure learning and working environments are safe, secure spaces for all. EECD recognizes that all children are exceptional and that students engage in challenging behaviours when they lack skills to communicate their needs in another way.

This section refers to global recommendations pertaining to the learning and working environment for students and school-based staff, not only related to Policy 703. Recommendations for this section are broken down into three categories: Behaviour Data Tracking and Reporting, Duty to Inform, and Provincial Behaviour Strategy,

BEHAVIOUR DATA TRACKING AND REPORTING

Over the years and more recently through the Policy 322 consultations, the most frequent words used in association with a positive learning and working environment were "student behaviour". Challenging behaviour, however, is the presentation and resulting outcome of several underlying factors, including neurodevelopmental disorders, trauma and mental health. Often, it is an intersection of all three. But just as they can learn academic skills, students can learn new social, communication and adaptive skills when high quality instruction and evidence-based practices are implemented.

To help students navigate their environments while supporting their cognitive, emotional and physical wellness, educators need to be properly trained and supported, and they need to feel safe themselves.

During the past decade, New Brunswick schools, unions and families have reported an increasing number of incidents involving disruptive, complex, and sometimes violent behaviours. The Canadian Federation of Teachers (2019) reported that between 40% and 90% of educators have experienced violence at some point in their careers.

Section 6.5 of Policy 322 defines a behaviour crisis as "*a situation where a student's conduct or actions pose imminent danger of physical harm to self or others.*" Requirements for responding to a behaviour crisis are provided. However, there is inconsistent tracking and reporting of incidents and intervention measures, leading to inaccurate data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

During the 2020-2021 school year, 39 Behaviour Intervention Mentors (BIMs) were added to the Anglophone school districts and another 11 added for the 2021-2022 school year. The role of the BIM is broad but grounded in assisting school personnel in providing direct services to students through evidence-based interventions and strategies to accomplish the desired end. It is expected that such strategies will lead to development of social skills, communication skills and self-esteem for the students involved.

With any position (new or current), it is important to determine the impact of the position on individual student outcomes and on the school environment.

Recently, with the development and roll-out of ESS Connect, Individual Behaviour Support and Intervention Plans (PLP-IBSP) were required to be completed in the electronic system, outlining the plan and

interventions to support learners. Aggregate data from those plans can be accessed at the school, district, and provincial levels.

To effectively accomplish change and ensure a positive learning and working environment within schools, clear data standards and consistent interpretation of those standards must provide the foundation for baseline data tracking and reporting. It is recommended that:

3.1 A review be conducted on the provincial data standards for violent incident reporting in the Power School Student Information System to ensure consistency.

3.2 Districts develop a plan to provide professional learning on the data standards for violent incident reporting to ensure consistent reporting of data.

3.3 A quality assurance review of IBSPs be completed during the 2021-2022 school year to ensure greater fidelity of programs and implementation of evidenced-based interventions.

DUTY TO INFORM

In recent years, concerns were brought forward by districts, CUPE 2745 and WorkSafe NB regarding the number of refusals to work that were being filed, particularly issues involving aggressive behaviour. Specific concerns were brought forward that educational assistants were being asked to carry out and follow the recommendations within IBSPs without access to the plans or appropriate professional learning to meet the requirements.

Additional documentation was developed to require EAs and other support staff to indicate that they had seen the relevant IBSPs and were aware of the professional learning required to support them in their role. The expectation was that the professional learning would be provided in a timely manner. During consultations, EAs spoke about the variability in this process. Some reported having the opportunity to view the plan and receive the professional learning. Others indicated that they had requested professional learning but had never received it. Still others were unaware of the process. To ensure transparency around programming and planning for students, it is recommended that:

3.4 ESS Teams be made aware of the process of allowing EAs to view PLP-IBSPs for students that they support and to provide their signature indicating that this has occurred.

3.5 EAs receive the necessary training and professional learning to effectively support students as per the goals and strategies in their learning plans.

PROVINCIAL BEHAVIOUR STRATEGY

Changing the trajectory on challenging behaviour in schools requires a multi-year strategic plan with goals and targets to build a provincial community of practice. Effective strategies focus on a continuum of behaviour. Yet teachers, support staff and members of the ISD-Child and Youth teams spent the bulk of their time "putting out fires" and dealing with the most intense scenarios.

During the consultations and in the survey results, teachers reported feeling the expectation "to be experts in everything" while having reduced supports available to meet the growing mental health needs in their classrooms. While this provincial strategy would be defined within the context of education it does not mean that educators need to be doctors, crisis workers, therapists and/or counsellors. Rather, school staff

need to know how to approach students when they see they are struggling academically, behaviourally, physically and/or emotionally. Educators need to know how to respond when students are experiencing challenges. Educators need to know how to create and implement academic and behaviour plans, outlining the right supports to keep themselves and others safe.

Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS), along with other evidence-based programs and services are viewed as foundational in New Brunswick schools. These programs motivate and teach positive behaviour with the purpose of creating a positive learning and working environment. PBIS is foundational to a system-wide strategy for behaviour. EECD has invested in this approach and provided annual funding to districts for several years to support PBIS. Despite this, there are few model PBIS schools and inconsistent approaches to addressing challenging behaviours.

In collaboration with school districts, EECD developed PBIS resources and materials for schools to support behaviour intervention. While there have been pockets of success, many schools reported during the consultations that they are not aware of the resources and support available to them.

Building a strong framework to support a positive learning and working environment is multilayered. To begin this work, it is recommended that:

3.6 A provincial behaviour strategy to support a positive learning and working environment across the continuum of learning be developed for spring 2022, with implementation beginning in fall 2022.

3.7 The current EST-Guidance funding ratio begin to incrementally increase from 1:502 to 1:302.

3.8 Districts be enabled to allocate any new social work Full Time Equivalency (FTE) to district positions to provide tier 1 and tier 2 support to families and schools. With the implementation of ISD, all district social workers were allocated to the Child and Youth teams to provide intense support to children, youth, and their families. While they undoubtedly fill a critical role, schools have felt their absence in providing proactive support for students and families with less intense needs.

3.9 The provincially developed PBIS resources be updated to reflect an intentional focus on implementation in New Brunswick schools.

3.10 A positive workplace approach to staff health and wellness goals be included with the annual school improvement planning process. Supporting the health and wellness of school-based staff is critical to supporting the health and wellness of students and their families.

3.11 An interdepartmental strategic working group be created to address the pressing issue of trauma in schools, families, and communities. Trauma does not belong to one department or one profession. The only way to make significant, sustainable improvement in this area is for all departments to purposefully work together for positive action.

THEME 4: EQUITY

One of the key principles of inclusive education, also reflected in Policy 322, is that inclusive public education is *"… universal – the New Brunswick curriculum is provided equitably to students in an inclusive, common learning environment shared among age-appropriate peers, in their neighbourhood school."* This does not mean that every student needs or receives the same educational support; it means that they receive the supports and reasonable accommodations necessary to reduce or eliminate barriers, "… *in order to receive effective instruction and fully benefit from the educational service they provide"* (New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, 2017). A focus on equity ensures the valuing of the identities, backgrounds and experiences of students and staff. A focus on equity is essential to ensuring that every student can learn within their zone of proximal development academically and socio-emotionally. This is critical to ensure thriving communities and economic growth for New Brunswick. The recommendations for this section are divided into: Equity Action Plan, Accessibility and Curriculum.

EQUITY ACTION PLAN

In recent years, the world has seen increasing attention on the inequities that exist in society, particularly for those that have been historically pushed to margins (e.g., Indigenous students, students with disabilities, students of colour, members of the LGBTQI2S+ community, newcomers, language learners) and New Brunswick is not exempt. While progress has been made and there is a willingness for open dialogue, action is needed. During consultations, participants, including school staff, spoke of discrimination that they, their children and/or families experienced within schools and within their communities.

In 2014, the Office of First Nation Education (OFNE) was established within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Since that time, updates to the curriculum and resources have improved understanding of Indigenous history and customs.

Jordan's Principle is named in memory of Jordan River Anderson. The mandate of this child-first principle is to eliminate inequities and delays in provision of supports for First Nations children. Federal funding is provided to help with a wide range of health, social and educational needs. In New Brunswick, the number of approved requests increased by 79 percent from the 2018-2019 to 2019-2020 fiscal years (Indigenous Canada, 2020). During the Policy 322 consultations, it was reported that processes to access this support were unclear for schools and varied across the province, particularly when the support approved was for personnel in provincial schools.

With a provincial commitment to increasing the number of newcomers to New Brunswick, communication is key to a welcoming message. Governmental departments, politicians and communities speak of the "need" for immigrants to move to New Brunswick to maintain or grow communities. The message needs to focus on "wanting" to welcome families moving to the province. During the consultations, participants who had immigrated to the province expressed concern with the perception of "saving" New Brunswick; rather, they want to be welcomed and included for all the strengths that they bring to their communities, schools and the entire province.

School personnel working in impoverished areas spoke of the staggering poverty in their communities and the impact it has on family and student engagement, student achievement and neighbourhood crime. Many schools have taken on the added responsibility of providing food and clothing for their students.

'Calling in' is the practice of speaking up without tearing down (Learning for Justice). It involves addressing problematic speech, behaviour, policies or conditions with an inclusive approach to community and learning. By cultivating a practice of 'calling in', we can support one another as we strive to create more just and equitable learning spaces.

Although 'calling in' will often result in more collaborative steps forward, there are times when 'calling out' is necessary. When a person is harmed in our presence, we need to 'call out' the behaviour and provide the necessary support.

To ensure a commitment to equity for both students and staff in New Brunswick schools, it is recommended that:

4.1   EECD, in collaboration with districts, the NBTA, students, families and community leaders, develop an Equity Action Plan by January 2023, with an intentional focus on eliminating systemic barriers and discrimination within schools.

4.2   Within the Leadership module for inclusive education, information be added to support and inform participants on principles of equity, the duty to accommodate and reasonable accommodations.

4.3   EECD and school districts continue to support schools with the implementation of Policy 713, which sets the minimum requirements for school districts and public schools to create a safe, welcoming, inclusive and affirming school environment for all students, families and allies who identify or are perceived as LGBTQI2S+.

4.4   Policy 322 be updated to include links to new and updated policies, including Policy 711 and Policy 713.

4.5   Clear processes be articulated around Jordan's Principle resources and supports for New Brunswick schools.

With the change of government in 2013, the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Inclusive Education was deactivated. In 2019, the Anglophone sector established the Anglophone Sector: Inclusive Education Steering Committee, the purpose of which is to discuss, foster and support inclusive education. This committee is co-chaired by representatives from EECD, the NBTA, and the NBACL. The committee is composed of not more than twelve members and in addition to the co-chairs, includes representatives from various groups, including the District Education Councils, the New Brunswick Multicultural Council, school districts and the New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network. It is recommended that:

4.6   The Inclusive Education Steering Committee for the Anglophone sector continue to operate and function within its terms of reference.

4.7   A mechanism be developed to give students a voice to build understanding of multiple perspectives on inclusive education.

ACCESSIBILITY

With the release of *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools (2012)*, there was a government commitment to increase funding for Assistive Technology and Adaptive Equipment (ATAE). Additional monies were provided to allow schools to apply for an accessibility grant to improve school facilities and playgrounds. Since 2013, the ATAE budget has increased by one-third. A process improvement project revealed that there were significant time delays from the approval of assistive technology to its arrival at the schools, often due to the lack of technicians available for set up and support. The budget for ATAE is now transferred to the school districts, where they manage the approvals, ordering and delivery of devices and equipment. The budget for the accessibility grants has been rolled into the capital improvements budget and is no longer available as a stand-alone grant.

While provision of ATAE is important, so is the training required to support its intended use. This was emphasized during the 2020-2021 school year as many students shifted to learning from home, with a significant online learning component. This ongoing work is supported by department and district staff along with expertise and support from community non-profits, for example, the Neil Squire Society.

As information on returning to school during the COVID-19 pandemic was being updated regularly, it was shared with families through EECD, school districts and community groups. During this time, EECD began to have the information translated into fifteen languages, including American Sign Language (ASL), to support families. While this endeavour has been positively received by families, there is still a time lag for reviewing and translating information that changes rapidly.

Physical access to school buildings and classrooms was considered an area of progress and success by many of the schools consulted. The *Planning Guidelines for Educational Facilities* outline the accessibility specifications for new schools, with a focus on universal access and barrier-free design. Older buildings are still being retrofitted and renovated where possible to improve access, e.g., playgrounds and gender-neutral washrooms. It is recommended that:

4.8 Continued training and professional learning on integrating technology be supported to better serve all students, including, but not limited to those with learning disabilities, the Deaf and hard of hearing, newcomers, and language learners.

4.9 EECD commit to providing information for families in a timely manner, written in their own language. This work should be overseen by the Communications team at the Executive Council Office (ECO).

CURRICULUM

A linguistically inclusive environment is one in which the variety of language skills and levels in the group are recognized, respected and honoured. In a linguistically inclusive environment, educators recognize the home language(s) of students and families as strengths. They know the language skill levels of their learners and adjust the complexity of oral and/or written language accordingly.

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA), is an interprovincial cooperative agency that was established in 1975 by joint agreement of the Ministers of Education of the four Atlantic provinces. APSEA, in collaboration with partners, *"provides culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive, equitable, and accessible*

educational services and supports to children and youth who are blind or visually impaired and/or Deaf or hard of hearing and their families." (APSEA, 2021) A number of itinerant teachers and support professionals provide services to over 400 New Brunswick children and youth.

When required, APSEA provides disability-specific assistive technologies, equipment, and alternative-format materials to students to ensure optimal development and equal access to the curriculum.

The Deaf community in New Brunswick has expressed concerns about deficits in the physical environment in schools, curriculum gaps, language access and the need for professional learning for school staff. It is recommended that:

4.10 New Brunswick curriculum be reviewed to ensure cultural and linguistic inclusivity, to ensure that learning outcomes are not being adjusted unnecessarily, and to ensure that, where possible, outcomes can be met as prescribed or with accommodations.

4.11 New Brunswick develop and offer a second-language course in ASL for high-school students. Ontario recently became one of the first jurisdictions to offer this for its students.

4.12 In collaboration with the New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Inc. and APSEA, EECD develop a professional learning series for school staff and members of the ISD Child and Youth teams.

4.13 EECD explore opportunities to provide reasonable accommodations for students to support their individual development of American Sign Language (ASL) when it is identified as their first language.

THEME 5: INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Section 6.2 of Policy 322 outlines the requirements to make inclusive education a practical reality. Several of those requirements will be addressed under the theme of Instruction and Intervention, while others will be encompassed by other themes. The recommendations for this section are divided into Teaching and Learning, and French Second Language (FSL).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Section 6.2.1 requires support for "*professionals and paraprofessionals in the use of flexible instructional strategies including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation and multi-level strategies to support student learning.*" During consultations we heard from teachers who expressed frustration with the lack of time to meet the learning needs of students in their classrooms. There was also concern about meeting expectations when there were significant gaps in ability levels of students, academically and social-emotionally. One of the biggest challenges reported was the lack of resources or time to create materials and to appropriately adjust or individualize curriculum for students. Teachers asked for more professional learning in the areas of UDL, linguistic scaffolding for language learners, strengths-based practices and resources to support students in French Immersion.

An area of increasing concern is what has been seen as an erosion of intervention supports in schools. Where possible, intervention can and should occur within the common learning environment. However, there may be times when intervention can and should happen outside the common learning environment. Section 6.4 of the policy provides the conditions under which this can occur. While some teachers felt comfortable in their knowledge of when and how to vary the learning environment, others did not. Still others expressed that they were not permitted to do so. The communication and interpretation of this section of the policy has had a significant impact on the instruction and intervention support provided to students.

In addition to challenges with the interpretation of Section 6.4, participants expressed concerns about reduced professional learning on intervention approaches for both classroom and ESTs. Since 2012, EECD has invested significantly in assessment and intervention training for EST-Rs with a master's degree. Prior to the amalgamation of the school districts in 2012, over 90 percent of EST-Resource (Resource and Methods teachers) had attained a Master in Exceptionalities or equivalent. The current percentage of those with similar accreditations stands at 44 percent (2020).

For the first two years after Policy 322 was released, there was a focus on recruiting classroom teachers into the prospective role of EST-Resource. Unfortunately, funding ended at the same time as funding for the Inclusion Facilitator positions. To be an effective and skilled EST-Resource requires specific competencies supported by training. Several teachers were very emotional during the consultations about taking on the role because they were asked to by their principals but did not feel prepared or effective within the role. Placing unqualified individuals into vacant positions with little or no theoretical background and skills impacts students, classroom teachers, and not least, the individuals themselves. Doing so without a plan to support and foster the necessary skills in these individuals will have an even greater impact on future success.

District and school staff spoke positively about the support they received from Literacy and Numeracy leads particularly, when those individuals were available for direct support. There were, however, concerns expressed about the workloads of various coordinators and leads within school districts and what was seen as a lack of equity in FTE provided for positions on Curriculum teams and ESSTs. Whether real or perceived, there is a feeling that there are inequities in staffing and that there is less value and consideration for ESS workloads and portfolios.

While classroom composition was expressed as one challenge in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students along with other advanced learners, teachers were uncertain how to embed best practices into their instruction. Students consulted expressed that there was not a lot of time for enrichment, or that they were asked to complete more of the same work, or to help their peers in lieu of other enrichment activities. We also heard from groups that First Nations students and newcomer students felt that they were not included in enrichment opportunities.

Teachers spoke positively of the Global Competencies work that New Brunswick has been leading and how it supports the vision for inclusive education. The Global Competencies (GCs) include the skills, sets of knowledge and attitudes of a well-rounded person. They include collaboration; critical thinking and problem-solving; self-awareness and self-management; communication; creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship; and sustainability and citizenship (EECD, 2019). It has generated excitement and opportunities for schools to see their students and themselves reflected in those competencies.

While each person at EECD works diligently in their area of expertise, resulting in great work, it is not always clearly articulated how curriculum and resources will be updated with an intentional focus on diversity, inclusion and equity across the division.

It is recommended that:

5.1 EECD adopt the principle of curriculum design with an inclusive lens for all new and updated curriculum.

5.2 With each new and updated curriculum, resources be created to support teachers in creating quality learning plans based on learner needs, including those denoted in PLPs.

5.3 There be a renewed provincial focus on professional learning that promotes best practices for inclusion, including support for advanced learners. Current material and resources should be updated to support planning for all learners.

5.4 Indicators of inclusive education be examined as part of the regular school improvement review process.

5.5 EECD explore the model of support being piloted in Newfoundland and Labrador which provides Learning and Teaching Assistants with levels of support based on post-secondary training and qualifications.

5.6 The province adopt an intentional focus on providing professional learning to support the effective development and application of interventions and instructional supports.

FRENCH SECOND LANGUAGE (FSL)

Students learn French as a Second Language through various programs, primarily French Immersion (Grade 1, 3 and 6 entry points) or Intensive French. French Immersion and Intensive French instruction are enhanced with opportunities for experiencing French language learning and culture (e.g., student exchanges, summer programs, co- and extracurricular activities). There have been significant concerns brought forward about frequent changes to New Brunswick's French Immersion entry points, so much so that in 2019, Auditor General Kim MacPherson cited it as a source of instability for the education system.

FSL programming has created inequities in classroom composition. Teachers and principals, families and stakeholder groups were very concerned about access to French Immersion classes for students with disabilities or learning challenges. We heard from families who fought to get access, only to be encouraged to remove their child at the first sign of struggle. English Language Learners who speak multiple languages are being denied access to FSL programs in schools, because they are also learning English at the same time.

In a rich and diverse FSL environment, all students can benefit from French language education and a focus on literacy strategies. There are myths based on old assumptions that are still in circulation, years after they have been dispelled; myths such as: "Students can't be successful in an FSL classroom." and "They are struggling in French, they should be placed in English so they won't struggle anymore." and "If there are no bilingual educational assistants or bilingual EST-R, they can't be here."

French Second Language classes are not exempt from inclusion requirements. When teachers have questions or fear the unknown, support from the department and district teams should be there to guide them. It is recommended that:

5.7 EECD communicate that the Response to Intervention (RTI) model is applicable to all classes including French Immersion.

5.8 There be an impetus for ESS and French Immersion coordinators to collaboratively ensure clear direction and support for all FSL learners.

5.9 Processes and resources be developed to support English language learners in transferring literacy skills to strengthen first-language and FSL skills.

5.10 The FSL teacher be included in the development of a student's PLP.

5.11 Exemplars of success be developed and shared with all schools.

5.12 A specific session on UDL be developed for French Immersion teaching staff.

5.13 EECD continue to build on the huge success of the French Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas (FLORA) resource to provide access to rural schools in other areas.

THEME 6: CONTINUUM OF LEARNING SUPPORTS AND ENVIRONMENTS

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered model of support that is both prevention and intervention focused. Under the RTI framework, classroom teachers, in collaboration with ESTs and other educators and stakeholders, can provide supports for prevention and intervention for all students, not just those requiring a PLP. The recommendations for this theme are divided into Learning Supports and Variation of the Common Learning Environment.

LEARNING SUPPORTS

RTI is a model for providing high quality instruction and intervention and includes academic as well as behavioural instruction and interventions. It is a flexible framework that allows for student movement between tiers. It is important to note that it is the interventions and supports that are tiered, not the students. Intervention is not to replace classroom instruction, but to supplement it. Progress is monitored closely and decisions about instructional needs are based on data collected from ongoing formative assessment.

Pyramid of Interventions
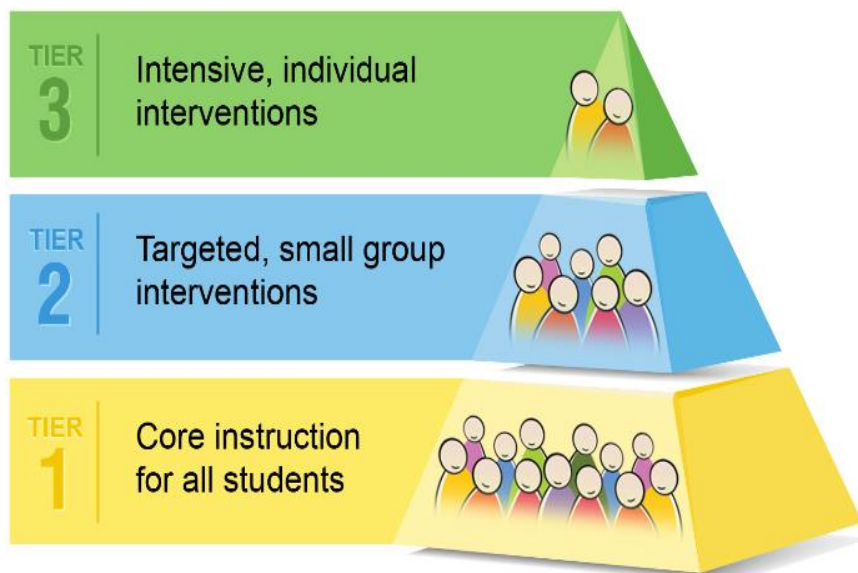
EECD and NB teachers co-constructed teaching and intervention process maps for RTI to provide guidance on processes, strategies, and intervention support available within schools. The goal of the "right support, at the right time, at the right intensity and in the right environment" is not always easily achieved. Consultative, direct or indirect support for students and staff does not always occur in a timely manner.

With the release of Policy 322 in 2013, government increased its investment in EST-Resource positions. The funded FTE ratio went from 1:220 to 1:180 in the Anglophone sector. While this investment moved the system closer to the recommended ratio of 1:120, there is still a long way to go. The number of Educational Assistants also increased during that time, with the number of funded FTEs increasing from 1584.4 in 2012-2013 to 2358 in 2020-2021. This takes into account funded-only FTE and does not include when districts use operational funding to increase FTE. Despite these increases, only 50 percent of students with PLPs are meeting 80 percent or more of their goals.

New Brunswick has long been recognized for its professional learning training program to support learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The framework provides three levels of training: Level 1: ASD and Behavioural Interventions, which includes 40 hours of online learning, Level 2: Learning for Teaching, offered over a 12-month period and including a practicum component, and Level 3: Continuing Education. To date, almost 3000 people in the Anglophone sector have completed Level 1.
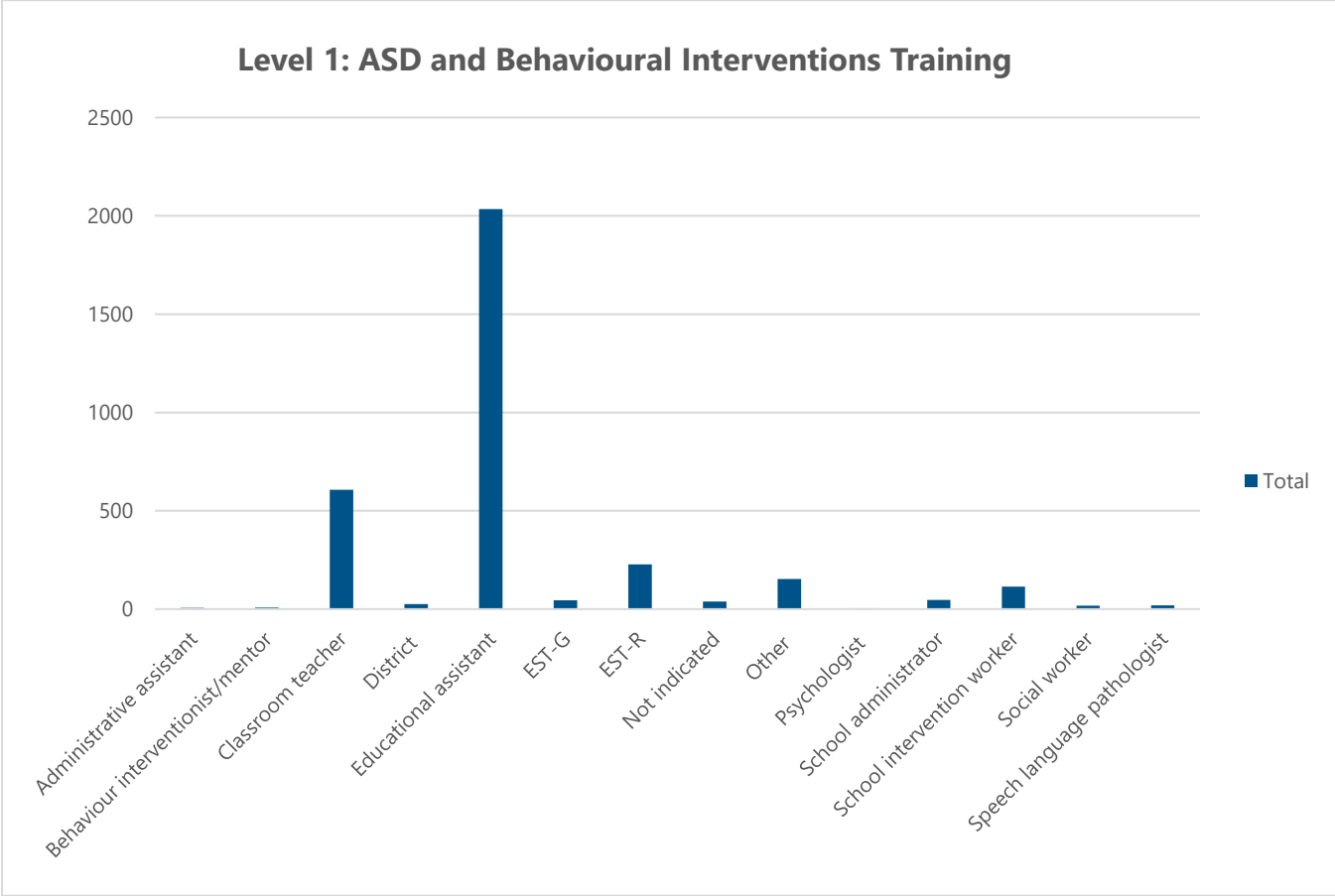

During consultations EAs spoke highly of the Level 1 training, but also noted that it was not sufficient and that more practical experience was needed. They do not have access to Level 2, which is offered to educators only. The current Level 2: Learning for Teaching training requires significant supervision and can only accommodate 39 participants each year. At that pace, it will take several years to build capacity among ESS teachers and other educators.

Meeting the current need with existing FTE is challenging, even when recruitment is not a concern. We see an example of this with Speech-Language Pathologists. These professionals have expertise to support students with physical disabilities such as speech impediments and those with developmental or learning disabilities that affect the comprehension of spoken and written language. They have specialized training in augmentative and alternative communication and can impact a student's ability to achieve outcomes and to vocalize wants and needs, thereby decreasing some behavioural concerns and facilitating access to the curriculum.

Summary data from the 2019-2020 Early Years Evaluation- Direct Assessment (EYE-DA) indicated that at least 17.9 percent of students entered Kindergarten with communication difficulties and 23.7 percent entered with cognitive needs (Anglophone Sector School-Based Speech Language Pathologists Committee, 2021). Yet SLP FTE for New Brunswick schools has not increased since they were transferred from the Department of Health to EECD

EECD has been able to track the number of PLPs since the mid-2000s. While the number of accommodated-only plans has decreased significantly, due in part to the implementation of UDL and universal accommodations, numbers of other types of plans have remained steady, and new types of plans have been required, for example, Partial Days and IBSPs. Like many jurisdictions, New Brunswick has seen an increase in children being diagnosed with ASD. The number of students with a diagnosis of ASD who require a PLP has more than doubled since 2008-2009.
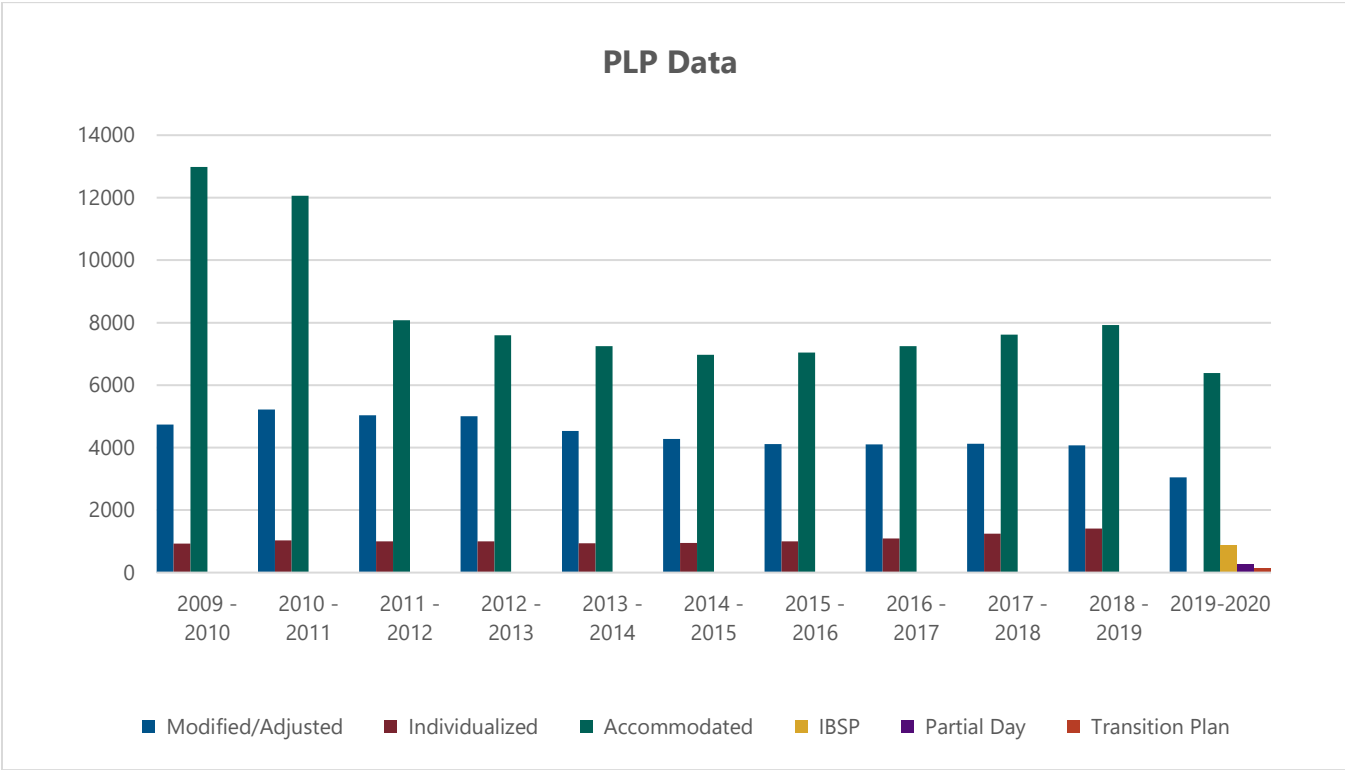
It is recommended that:

6.1 Teaching staff within their first five years receive professional learning on the continuum of learning supports available within the RTI model.

6.2 Districts set improvement targets to increase the percentage of goals being met for students with PLPs.

6.3 The current ratio of SLPs be increased from 1:1500 to 1:1200 for the 2022-2023 school year and to 1:1000 for the 2024-2025 school year.

6.4 The Autism Learning Partnership review the Level 2 training to find a way to increase capacity at a faster rate while still maintaining the integrity of the program.

6.5 The name and mandate of the Autism Learning Partnership be updated to reflect that their support and training is for more than learners with autism.

VARIATION OF THE COMMON LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In 2009, EECD coined the term "common learning environment" to acknowledge that in a school, learning occurs not just in classrooms but in common areas, on the playground, etc. It was also used with an eye to the not-so-distant future when the common learning environment could be a virtual setting, students completing online courses and/or experiential learning.

With the expansion of learning environments that all students could access came questions about when and how those environments could vary, if necessary, to address student-specific needs. Under specific conditions, a *"variation of the common learning environment may be necessary to address the needs of a student."* (6.4.1, Policy 322, Section 12 (4 a.b), *NB Education Act*).

Prior to varying the common learning environment, *"it must be clearly demonstrated that the school's capacity to meet the needs of the student, even when supported by the school district and EECD, is not sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes of the student in a more inclusive environment despite all reasonable efforts to provide support and accommodation."* (6.4.2, Policy 322).

When such situations occur, a continuum of learning supports must be explored, including personalized learning environment options. Personalized learning environments currently include alternative learning programs (9-12), variation of the common learning environment (K-12) and short-term, interdepartmental personalized therapeutic responses (K-12).

An interdepartmental personalized therapeutic response provides the supports, interventions and professional expertise needed for youth beyond what is available within the common learning environment. These youth and their families require specialized services from multiple agencies. The focus is non-curricular, although curriculum may be embedded in the intervention. The needs of the youth are such that the youth is presently unable to access the provincial curriculum and is currently excluded from the common learning environment and/or personalized learning environment within their school community. When a personalized therapeutic response is needed, individualized goals are created to develop the independence of the child/youth, support their mental wellness and safety and fulfill other relevant criteria.

When considering a personalized learning environment, the school must adhere to Policy 703, Positive Learning and Working Environment. *"When it has been determined at a case conference and approved by the Superintendent, that all available interventions (including positive behavioural supports and other*

accommodations) have been exhausted and that the behaviour-related needs of a student cannot be met in a classroom setting, alternative educational arrangements will be made. Such a case conference will involve: the student, if appropriate, parents, relevant staff and other professionals involved with the provision of service to the student" (6.6.4, Policy 703). **The goal of any alternate placement will ultimately be to return the student to the common learning environment as soon as practicable**.

With the July 2021 updates to the *Education Act*, questions were raised about the removal of "high school" from the definition of alternative education. The current definition of alternative education within Policy 322 requires updating for grades 9-12 and would not be applicable to grades K-8. Before any changes to the range of grade levels are implemented, a clear rationale, guidelines and a commitment to continuous monitoring are required.

During the consultations for the *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* report, data for alternative education sites in K-12 revealed inconsistencies of entry and exit criteria across the province. While the average placement was three months, a small number of children attended for longer periods of time. Clear parameters would be required for any change to grade levels to ensure that segregation does not occur, that placement is not punitive and that the option would fall within the upper tier of the learning supports continuum.

The 2012 Supreme Court Ruling in Moore v. British Columbia was clear that a needs-based analysis must be undertaken to assess the impact of closing or replacing alternative programming. The Tribunal found *"that prior to making the decision to close [the Diagnostic Centre], the District did not undertake a needs-based analysis, consider what might replace [the Diagnostic Centre], or assess the effect of the closure on severely learning disabled students. The District had no specific plan in place to replace the services, and the eventual plan became learning assistance, which, by definition and purpose, was ill-suited for the task."* (Moore v. British Columbia, 2012). It is unclear if, in the closing and/or replacing of K-8 alternative education in New Brunswick, a need-based analysis occurred.

To ensure any variation to the learning environment exists within a human-rights-based framework, it is recommended that:

6.6   Guidelines be developed for variation of the common learning environment as defined within Policy 322.

6.7   Guidelines be developed for personalized learning environments, including those for an interdepartmental personalized therapeutic response, following the Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) model. The term "therapeutic" must be clearly defined and viewed though a trauma-informed lens. Input should be sought from students, families, and community partners to ensure fidelity and integrity.

6.8   Districts apply a twin-track approach to personalized learning environments, that is, provide the necessary individualized supports while at the same time addressing any barriers that exist within the common learning environment, including instructional and intervention capacity within the school.

THEME 7: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Policy 322 sets out the requirements for district and school-based Education Support Services Teams, and the *School-Based Education Support Services Teams to Support Inclusive Education* document outlines the service delivery model for those teams. It defines the composition and purpose of ESSTs; outlines the roles of various members of the team, including Education Support Teachers (ESTs); and explains the supports and services within the multi-tiered RTI system.

Policy 322 refers to Integrated Service Delivery – Child and Youth teams in two sections (6.9.1 and 6.10.4). At the time the policy was released, ISD was still in its pilot phase, with one Anglophone and one Francophone demonstration site. Now that the ISD model has been fully implemented, the role of Child and Youth teams within the RTI model will need to be added to the ESS Teams' document. School social workers, school psychologists and ESTs for Resource and Guidance on Child and Youth teams will need to have their sections updated. Other additions will include Subject Coordinators, Education Support Teachers for English as an Additional Language (EST-EALs) and Behaviour Intervention Mentors (BIMs).

During consultations, concerns were expressed that Education Support Teachers-Autism, particularly those with a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA) certification, and EAL subject coordinators do not appear on the district organization charts. In some districts, the EST-Autism leads are in place for a maximum of four years, and then they return to a school. The hope is that they will take their skill set back to their classrooms and schools. But onboarding new EST-Autism leads every few years impacts service continuity and quality. Given the increasing demand for expertise to meet the needs of learners with autism and other neurodevelopmental challenges, it is important to prioritize these positions.

Similar concerns were expressed in regard to EAL subject coordinators, who ideally would work in collaboration, with fully staffed Welcome Centres (at least one Admissions Officer on staff) and at least one lead/coach (depending on numbers in the district). With immigration numbers increasing steadily in New Brunswick, combined with the need for specific knowledge and skills inherent in EAL work, consistency and continuity is necessary within these demanding portfolios.

To provide clarity and consistency of roles and responsibilities, it is recommended that:

7.1 The *School-Based Education Support Services Teams to Support Inclusive Education* document be updated to reflect current roles, responsibilities, and language.

7.2 The guidelines for the roles of educational assistants and other support staff be updated, including sections on planning and collaboration.

7.3 Consideration be given to adding district-based EST-Autism/Behaviour and EAL coordinators to the district plan of establishment.

THEME 8: CLASSROOM COMPOSITION

Thirty-one percent of respondents to the Policy 322 school-based survey reported class size and class composition as the top barriers to accessing learning in New Brunswick Anglophone schools. This was consistent with what was heard during the consultations. While challenging behaviour, academic gaps and imbalance due to French Immersion were all identified as barriers, so were the actual class sizes. Schools capped class sizes in 2009-2010, but there has been no change in numbers since then. Superintendents and school principals have flexibility to consider the composition of the class but cannot exceed the cap and must work within allocated FTE.

During the 2020-2021 school year, class numbers for K-5 were decreased to accommodate COVID-19 Public Health measures. Teachers reported in many cases that smaller class sizes allowed them to provide more responsive and individualized attention and support to all learners in their class. They felt better able to meet not only academic needs, but social-emotional needs as well. While an immediate impact may have been experienced by students and teachers, it will take longer to see if there is a detectable, long-term benefit in outcomes, particularly those in areas of literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning. It is unfortunate that the smaller class sizes could not have been maintained for an additional couple of years, in order to study the longitudinal benefits during non-pandemic times.

Class size and class composition are multi-layered and complex. There isn't just one solution, and it is not as straightforward as adding more FTE to schools. However, we must acknowledge that it is a significant concern for teachers. It is recommended that:

8.1 EECD, in collaboration with the NBTF, explore ways to reduce class sizes for grades K-5.

8.2 Any commitment to reductions in class size include added professional learning to support teachers in building personalized instruction and intervention practices.

THEME 9: FUNDING

For the 2021-2022 school year, the Government of New Brunswick has invested $228,233,000 into inclusive education to support 3288 FTE. While funding norms have been established for most teaching and non-teaching staff, funding for educational assistants is based on district allocation data from the previous year. Since 2012-2013, EECD has invested in an additional 773.6 FTE for EAs. Despite the additional positions, a gap in funding for needs-based support exists.

Section 6.4.4 of Policy 322 requires that if a student is out of school for an extended period, the student must be offered up to a maximum of twelve hours of tutoring per week, as appropriate. The cost to provide home and/or hospital tutoring to students has steadily increased, with the budget reaching $300,000 for both 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

Since 2008, EECD has been a partner in the interdepartmental protocol on complex cases. The intent of the protocol is to provide a framework for an integrated case planning approach for responding to mutual clients (children, youth and adults) with complex needs. The Provincial Complex Case Committee (PCCC) process applies to cases that Regional Complex Case Committees (RCCCs) cannot resolve on their own because the proposed solutions in the case plan extend beyond the mandate of the departments involved and require an exception to either program policy or program standards. Since 2008, the cost for EECD to support the provincial complex case protocol has increased more than 700 percent. An interdepartmental process improvement initiative is currently underway to examine gaps in processes and services.

Complex Case and Tutoring Budget
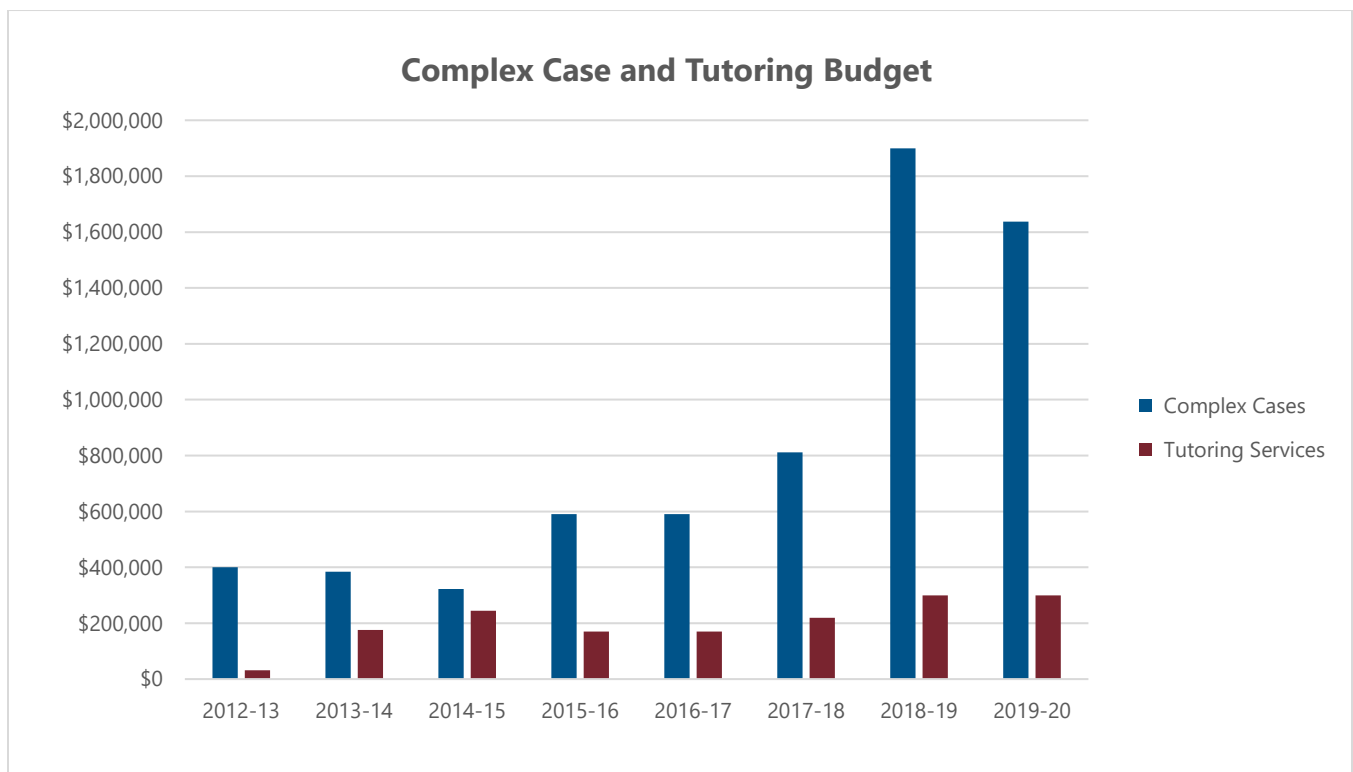
Funding is also provided to school districts to support tutoring for multilingual language learners. In 2012, a one-time $720 per student was provided to districts. In 2016, this was increased to $720 per Year 1 arrival student and $500 per student in Year 2. In 2018, it was increased again to $1000 per student in Year 1, $750 per student in Year 2 and $500 per student in Year 3. Research has been clear that social language acquisition takes approximately 2-3 years to acquire while academic language proficiency takes approximately 5-7 years to acquire. (Collier & Thomas, 1999; Roessingh, 2000)

In addition to the funding described above, approximately $900,000 is provided annually to the four Anglophone school districts to support professional learning in areas such as Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (PBIS), Violent Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA), Suicide ASIST, Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (NVCI) and others. Part of this funding is to support enhanced inclusive practices for culturally and linguistically diverse schools. These practices include trauma-informed practice and intervention for children from war-affected backgrounds, culturally responsive practices, linguistically responsive practices, anti-racism education and translation/language speaker services.

Section 6.12.4 requires that "*consideration is given to enhanced supports for individual schools to meet identified needs that are evidence-based and objectively defined*". School districts have flexibility to allocate additional FTE based on school needs, e.g., high poverty, social-emotional needs and crisis response. An objectively defined process is under development.

To ensure fiscal responsibility while providing an equitable, quality education for all learners, it is recommended that:

9.1 Districts be provided with a block funding grant for Education Support Services. Districts would have reasonable autonomy to fund positions, programs, and services, with appropriate accountability measures embedded.

9.2 EECD integrate funding allocations to districts from several designated budgets.
Note: Both funding recommendations were included within the *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* report, and have not yet been completed.

THEME 10: COMMUNITY

The final question asked at the end of each consultation was, "How do we continue to evolve, to build on the journey thus far, to ensure Policy 322, Inclusive Education continues to meet its intent? Not just for tomorrow, or next week, but for the next decade?" Key responses were to change the funding model, provide more resources and leverage community relationships and partnerships. The role of the community is not to replace the work that happens in schools, rather, it should be considered a value-added partnership that allows schools to leverage the knowledge, expertise and lived experience in a community. Connections built with partners, stakeholders and rightsholders can help to ensure that strengths-based, quality learning experiences are happening for all. Building relationships with partners in education can ensure that all are working together to achieve common goals.

Inclusive education is a collective responsibility within schools and within communities. Schools are microcosms of their communities. It is important to acknowledge and engage with community assets. Examples heard during the consultations included the Essential Skills Achievement Pathway partnership with NBCC and local communities; the NBACL Transition program; virtual co-op; strategic partnerships for experiential learning; the Imagine NB leadership accelerator for immigrant youth; and the Abilities NB equipment loan program that increases access to adaptive support and recommendations. These are just a sample of the ongoing strengths-based partnerships that impact and support inclusive education for all learners, every day.

To continue to build on a shared and collective responsibility, it is recommended that:

10.1 Opportunities be created to celebrate the positive strengths-based partnerships that exist between schools and communities.

10.2 Communication be developed to message the importance of community, partnerships, and collaborations, not from a deficit lens, but one that says, "Education is All of Us."

THEME 11: ACCOUNTABILITY

In taking on this endeavour, one of the biggest challenges in asking if Policy 322 met its intent was also to ask, "How do we know?" The policy set out the requirements for inclusive education, but without a clearly articulated performance management and monitoring strategy, it was not a straightforward question to answer.

Once the *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* report was released and its recommendations accepted, there was no formal request to report progress on an ongoing basis. A recent update indicated that 81 percent of the Anglophone recommendations were either complete or underway.

Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools Recommendation Update

- No/Not Yet Started, 19%
- Complete, 45%
- Underway, 36%
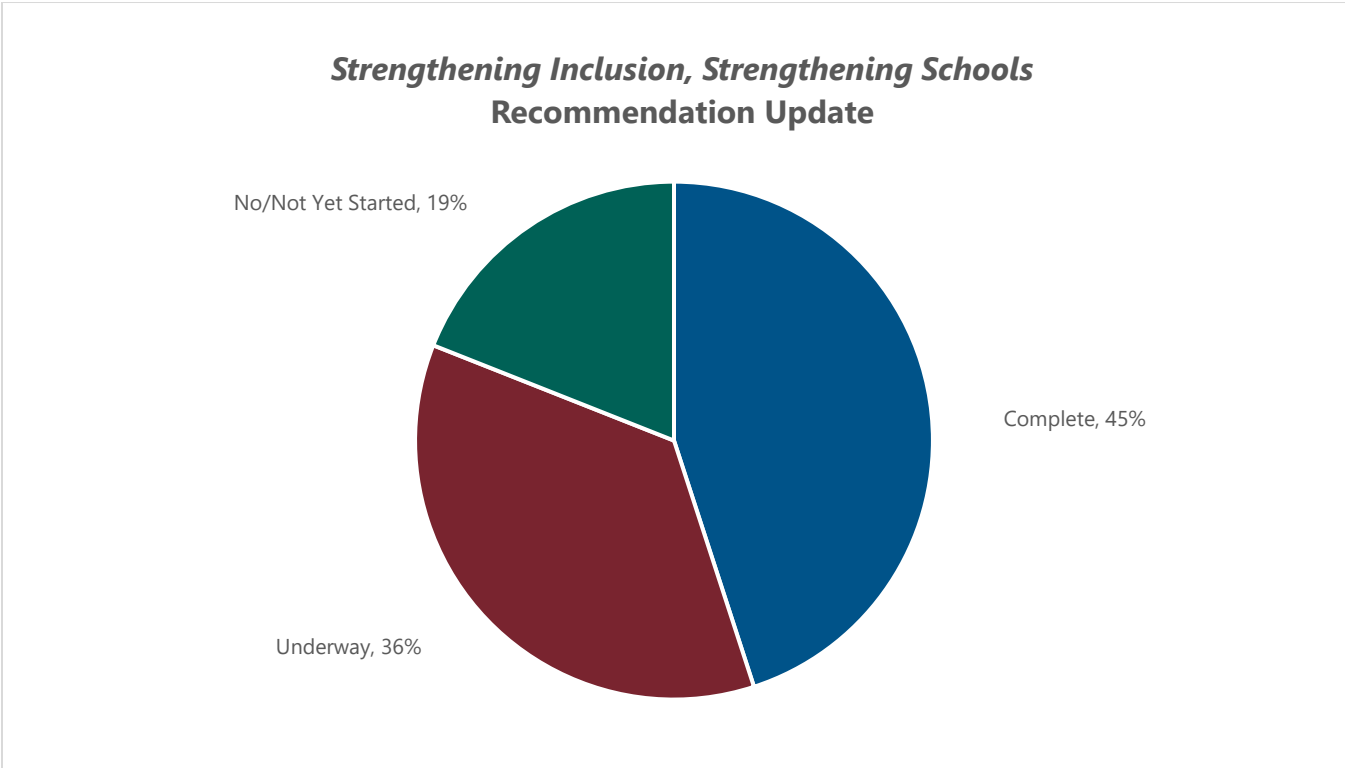
Within Policy 322 and subsequent guidelines, there are requirements for tracking and reporting on data at the school level, district level and department level. For most of those requirements, information was not received, nor was it requested from EECD. At times, data could be accessed through provincial data systems. For example, the number of PLPs could be accessed through the ESS Connect platform.

Not all districts had mechanisms in place for tracking various data related to Policy 322. During the course of data collection for this project, three of the four Anglophone districts were able to provide information on the number of students for whom there was a variation in the common learning environment, defined as when a student is removed for more than one period daily or more than 25 percent of the regular instruction time (whichever is greater). The fourth district did not track that data. Similarly, when asked for the number of students for whom seclusion and restraint procedures were carried out, three districts provided the data but the fourth had not tracked that information.

Accountability is more than good governance. Responsibilities must be clearly defined, and there is an obligation to provide an account of how responsibilities have been met.

To ensure accurate accountability for Policy 322 and its requirements, it is recommended that:

11.1 A results-based management and accountability framework (RMAF) be developed for intentional and purposeful monitoring. This framework would be completed by February 2022 and should:

    11.1.1 Be rights-based

    11.1.2 Consist of a performance management and monitoring strategy

    11.1.3 Include indicators, targets, information sources and responsibilities

    11.1.4 Include an evaluation plan

    11.1.5 Include a reporting strategy

Conclusion

This report and its recommendations within the eleven broad themes have endeavoured to chart a course forward to ensure Policy 322, Inclusive Education continues to evolve and progress in New Brunswick.

On the surface, the themes in the report may appear to be distinct; however, they are interconnected in many ways. It is not possible to discuss one theme without seeing the broader connections to the others.

It is important to celebrate the successes of inclusive education in New Brunswick. Yet, there is also a sense of urgency that we must continue to move forward and take action. The recommendations in this report are intended to forge a commitment to prepare and support the education system so that inclusion for all learners can truly become a reality.

Every day, educators in New Brunswick strive to embed the principles of inclusive education in their classrooms and schools. This is a collective responsibility; inclusion does not belong to one profession or team, one community partner or group, or even one department. It is the intersection of, and respect for, the lived perspectives and experiences of all communities that will propel New Brunswick to realize a flourishing inclusive education system.

Table of Recommendations

POLICY ALIGNMENT AND UPDATES

1.1   Policy 322 language be aligned to ensure compatibility for both linguistic sectors, safeguarding the standards and requirements for all learners.

1.2   When policies are being developed/updated in both official languages, they are reviewed not only for linguistic compatibility, but pedagogical content to ensure system alignment.

1.3   The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development invest in a change management process to continue to help the system shift from a special education model to one that is inclusive for ALL.

1.4   Section 6.11.3 be removed and the *School-based Education Support Services Teams to Support Inclusive Education* document be updated to include time allocation targets and to reflect current roles and responsibilities.

1.5   Consideration be given to removing Section 6.6 on suspension. Procedures for student suspension as permitted by the *Education Act* and Policy 703, Positive Learning and Working Environment are outlined in those documents, including the need for intervention.

1.6   A guideline document be developed to help schools and families better navigate a decision on grade retention, and the *Appeals Process* document be updated to reflect a supportive process.

1.7   An accountability framework be developed to provide criteria for success and ongoing measurement of progress towards identified goals, with the expectation that EECD, districts and schools will provide an annual data report safeguarding the standards and requirements for all learners.

COMMUNICATION

2.1   An interpretation guide be developed to accompany Policy 322 to provide clarity on the requirements and standards by July 2022.

2.2   The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) be updated, distributed, and posted on the EECD public-facing website by December 2022.

2.3   The Leadership module on inclusive education policy and practices be updated by spring 2022.

2.4   The 30-hour online course, Disability and Inclusive Education, developed by EECD be updated and re-offered for fall 2022.

2.5   Guidelines be developed and/or updated to support various sections of Policy 322 including Variation of the Common Learning Environment (6.4), Behaviour Crisis Response (6.5) and Grade Retention (6.7), and posted on the EECD public-facing website as appropriate.

2.6   Information on the *Education Act*, policy and program changes be communicated to relevant post-secondary institutions at a minimum of once per year.

2.7   EECD in collaboration with schools, districts, families, and community organizations create a series of resources highlighting the everyday success of New Brunswick's inclusive education system and showcasing how schools problem-solve challenges.

ENSURING A POSITIVE LEARNING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT

3.1   A review be conducted on the provincial data standards for violent incident reporting in the Power School Student Information System to ensure consistency.

3.2   Districts develop a plan to provide professional learning on the data standards for violent incident reporting to ensure consistent reporting of data.

3.3   A quality assurance review of IBSPs be completed during the 2021-2022 school year, the fall of 2021 to ensure greater fidelity of programs and implementation of evidenced-based interventions.

3.4   ESS Teams be made aware of the process of allowing EAs to view PLP-IBSPs for students that they support and to provide their signature indicating that this has occurred.

3.5   EAs receive the necessary training and professional learning to effectively support students as per the goals and strategies in their learning plans.

3.6   A provincial behaviour strategy to support a positive learning and working environment across the continuum of learning be developed for spring 2022, with implementation beginning in fall 2022.

3.7   The current EST-Guidance funding ratio begin to incrementally increase from 1:502 to 1:302.

3.8   Districts be enabled to allocate any new social work Full Time Equivalency (FTE) to district positions to provide tier 1 and tier 2 support to families and schools. With the implementation of ISD, all district social workers were allocated to the Child and Youth teams to provide intense support to children, youth and their families. While they undoubtedly fill a critical role, schools have felt their absence in providing proactive support for students and families with less intense needs.

3.9   The provincially developed PBIS resources be updated to reflect an intentional focus on implementation in New Brunswick schools.

3.10   A positive workplace approach to staff health and wellness goals be included with the annual school improvement planning process. Supporting the health and wellness of school-based staff is critical to supporting the health and wellness of students and their families.

3.11   An interdepartmental strategic working group be created to address the pressing issue of trauma in schools, families and communities. Trauma does not belong to one department or one profession. The only way to make significant, sustainable improvement in this area is for all departments to purposefully work together for positive action.

EQUITY

4.1   EECD, in collaboration with districts, the NBTA, students, families and community leaders, develop an Equity Action Plan by January 2023, with an intentional focus on eliminating systemic barriers and discrimination within schools.

4.2   Within the Leadership module for inclusive education, information be added to support and inform participants on principles of equity, the duty to accommodate and reasonable accommodations.

4.3   EECD and school districts continue to support schools with the implementation of Policy 713, which sets the minimum requirements for school districts and public schools to create a safe, welcoming, inclusive and affirming school environment for all students, families and allies who identify or are perceived as LGBTQI2S+.

4.4   Policy 322 be updated to include links to new and updated policies, including Policy 711 and Policy 713.

4.5 Clear processes be articulated around Jordan's Principle resources and supports for New Brunswick schools.

4.6 The Inclusive Education Steering Committee for the Anglophone sector continue to operate and function within its terms of reference.

4.7 A mechanism be developed to give students a voice to build understanding of multiple perspectives on inclusive education.

4.8 Continued training and professional learning on integrating technology be supported to better serve all students, including, but not limited to those with learning disabilities, the Deaf and hard of hearing, newcomers, and language learners.

4.9 EECD commit to providing information for families in a timely manner, written in their own language. This work should be overseen by the Communications team at the Executive Council Office (ECO).

4.10 New Brunswick curriculum be reviewed to ensure cultural and linguistic inclusivity, to ensure that learning outcomes are not being adjusted unnecessarily, and to ensure that, where possible, outcomes can be met as prescribed or with accommodations.

4.11 New Brunswick develop and offer a second-language course in ASL for high-school students. Ontario recently became one of the first jurisdictions to offer this for its students.

4.12 In collaboration with the New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Inc. and APSEA, EECD develop a professional learning series for school staff and members of the ISD Child and Youth teams.

4.13 EECD explore opportunities to provide reasonable accommodations for students to support their individual development in American Sign Language (ASL) when it is identified as their first language.

INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

5.1 EECD adopt the principle of curriculum design with an inclusive lens, for all new and updated curriculum.

5.2 With each new and updated curriculum, resources be created to support teachers in creating quality learning plans based on learner needs, including those denoted in PLPs.

5.3 There be a renewed provincial focus on professional learning that promotes best practices for inclusion, including support for advanced learners. Current material and resources should be updated to support planning for all learners.

5.4 Indicators of inclusive education be examined as part of the regular school improvement review process.

5.5 EECD explore the model of support being piloted in Newfoundland and Labrador which provides Learning and Teaching Assistants with levels of support based on post-secondary training and qualifications.

5.6 The province adopt an intentional focus on providing professional learning to support the effective development and application of interventions and instructional support.

5.7 EECD communicate that the Response to Intervention (RTI) model is applicable to all classes including French Immersion.

5.8   There be an impetus for ESS and French Immersion coordinators to collaboratively ensure clear direction and support for all FSL learners.

5.9   Processes and resources be developed to support English language learners in transferring literacy skills to strengthen first-language and FSL skills.

5.10 The FSL teacher be included in the development of a student's PLP.

5.11 Exemplars of success be developed and shared with all schools.

5.12 A specific session on UDL be developed for French Immersion teaching staff.

5.13 EECD continue to build on the huge success of the French Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas (FLORA) resource to provide access to rural schools in other areas.

CONTINUUM OF LEARNING SUPPORTS AND ENVIRONMENTS

6.1   Teaching staff within their first five years receive professional learning on the continuum of learning supports available within the RTI model.

6.2   Districts set improvement targets to increase the percentage of goals being met for students with PLPs.

6.3   The current ratio of SLPs be increased from 1:1500 to 1:1200 for the 2022-2023 school year and to 1:1000 for the 2024-2025 school year.

6.4   The Autism Learning Partnership review the Level 2 training to find a way to increase capacity at a faster rate while still maintaining the integrity of the program.

6.5   The name and mandate of the Autism Learning Partnership be updated to reflect that their support and training is for more than learners with autism.

6.6   Guidelines be developed for variation of the common learning environment as defined within Policy 322.

6.7   Guidelines be developed for personalized learning environments, including those for an interdepartmental personalized therapeutic response, following the Integrated Service Delivery (ISD). The term "therapeutic" must be clearly defined and viewed through a trauma-informed lens. Input should be sought from students, families, and community partners to ensure fidelity and integrity.

6.8   Districts apply a twin-track approach to personalized learning environments, that is, provide the necessary individualized supports while at the same time addressing any barriers that exist within the common learning environment, including instructional and intervention capacity within the school.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1   The *School-Based Education Support Services Teams to Support Inclusive Education* document be updated to reflect current roles, responsibilities, and language.

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