

# Example of 'setting the direction' framework for inclusive education in alberta a...

[Countries](#), [Canada](#)



## 'Setting the Direction' Framework for Inclusive Education in Alberta

The 'Setting the Direction' framework involves the construction of one inclusive system of education that caters for the educational needs of every student. This should be inclusive of children with various learning needs. It is a way of acting and thinking that shows universal acceptance of all students, regardless of their situations. In Alberta, it means the formulation of an approach based on values that will lead to the acceptance of responsibility for all students. Inclusive education is essential for the development of society as a whole.

The starting point for the inclusive education program should be the student's home school. The program also means that every student will have an equal opportunity of inclusion in the learning environment or in any program they choose. It also means that no student would be exempted from the greater community of the school, and would be placed in the physical setting that best suits them for that moment in time, based on the input of every party involved. Inclusion, however, does not mean that every registered student would be automatically placed in a regular classroom. Physical placement would first and foremost put the student's success in mind and would be changeable and flexible (MacKay, 2007). This applies to all school authorities, be they public, private, Francophone, separate or charter.

In Alberta, inclusive education system bears several meanings. First, it means shifting from a twofold system where there is the mainstream and special education, to a system that is responsible for all students regardless of their abilities. The focus in this system is sharing an obligation to build an

education system that is inclusive and meets the individual needs of students in a diverse student population in every school setting. Secondly, it means the replacement of emphasis on the special education program with the emphasis on achieving success for every student. This emphasis will be incorporated into the funding and accountability of the inclusive education model. Inclusive education also means developing the comprehensive services and supports systems necessary to take accountability for all students and to work in a way that would be based on outcomes (Lindsey, 2003).

Setting the direction refers to looking into a wide range of support, in which schools, classrooms, school authorities and specialist communities would be adequately prepared to enable every student to have their requirements met. This model requires a collective responsibility for each student to succeed. It requires that an approach based on strengths should be used in meeting the individual needs of students with varied learning needs. It also requires that emphasis should be placed on the abilities of the students instead of their shortcomings created by their diagnosed condition.

Shifting focus from trying to change the student to changing environment of the student is necessary in order to reduce barriers and give students all the support they need to in order to be successful. For this to work it is necessary to respect and use data gathered at every level of the system. It should include data from family, teachers, and should also be inclusive of reports from education and medical experts. This is because this data had been collected by people who are familiar with the students and can be taken as their expert opinion (Loreman, Essential Inclusive Education:

Outcomes for Alberta Preservice Teachers, 2010).

It is necessary to recognize that a successful journey through the school system begins with high quality learning and concludes with positive completion of high school, with a smooth transition out of the system.

Smooth transitions at different levels throughout the schooling journey are of extreme importance for the success of the student. All the parties involved should work together to provide the children with all the support they need. This may not necessarily be exclusively educational. The support should be delivered in a natural setting where the student will be most comfortable.

### **Strengths in the implementation of the inclusive education system**

In the special school system, responsibility for students who had special needs lied solely with the specialist or the special education teacher. The students who had special needs had educational programs based on their individual disabilities. In the inclusive education, the responsibility of all students lies with the education system and not with particular individuals. In this system, all students should be given access to meaningful opportunities for learning that have their basis on the study programs for Alberta.

In the special school system, special education had its foundations on a medical model based on the diagnosis of the student. This leads to lifelong labeling of students with learning needs as disabled, together with their parents. In the inclusive system, there is an understanding of both the strong points and needs of the student. The parents, students, teachers and specialists, work together to identify services and support systems that form the best match for the needs and strengths of the student. This inclusion of

the parents helps in appreciating the learning system. This also helps in fostering partnerships and improving relationships between parents and teachers (Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, Students Perspectives on Inclusive Education: A Survey of Grade 3-6 of Rural Alberta, Canada, 2009).

In the special school system, there was the identification of barriers to learning as well as the developments with the basic assumption being that the student needed to change in order to fit into the system. In this system, students were referred by their teachers for assessment so as to identify their special educational needs. In inclusive education, barriers to learning were identified within the learning system, and the main focus is not on changing the student, but modifying the environment to better suit and support the student. This increases the chances of the student being receptive to the teaching on offer.

In the special school system, teachers, parents and other specialists focused on the shortcomings that needed to be corrected. In this system, teachers should develop individualized plans for each student with special needs. In the inclusive system, parents, teachers and other specialists pay more attention to the strengths and abilities of the student. The teachers should be well equipped to identify areas of strength of the students and build on them. In the special school system, there is toleration of differences.

Teachers felt that they did not have the awareness or capability to support such diversities within the classroom. In the inclusive system, diversity can be valued. Teachers receive the support they need to understand the different learning needs and also provide instructions according to the needs

of these students.

In the special school system, education relied heavily on medically trained specialists and experts. Teachers would consult constantly with and refer to this medically trained specialists and experts in order to identify the needs of the students. In the inclusive system, parents, teachers and experts work together and collaborate in the identification and provision of effective support and method of instruction. In the special school system, the accountability system should be based on inputs for special education. Administrators of schools set aside resources for the identification and reporting of students with exceptionally severe disabilities. In the inclusive system, the accountability system should be based on outputs. The school authorities set aside resources and ensured that all indicators of success are measured and reported. This is very encouraging for students and increases their chances of improving in their performance.

Another advantage of the inclusive system is that it prepares students with special needs to face the world. As a result of their regular contact with other children who do not have any special needs, the students learn to socialize and, therefore, become better adjusted. They learn not to focus only on their differences, but also on their similarities. Children who underwent schooling in segregation lacked the necessary skills for social interaction (Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, Parents perspectives on inclusive education in Rural Alberta, Canada, 2009). Children with special needs who attended inclusive schools showed better socialization skills and are able to make friends easily. They also learn to interact normally, and this removes any differences between them and other students (MacKay, 2007). This

effect is long term and can be seen even in adulthood. It also encouraged independence and personal responsibility (Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, Students Perspectives on Inclusive Education: A Survey of Grade 3-6 of Rural Alberta, Canada, 2009).

These differences also form the main strengths of the inclusive educational system. Non- inclusion of students with special needs was also thought by certain people to be a form of discrimination, as grave as racism or sexism. In agreeing with the rights of children according to the Salamanca statement, inclusive education gives every child the opportunity to receive education while giving consideration to their characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and uniqueness, and offers the best opportunity for their development (Lindsey, 2003).

Another problem with the special schools system is that it does not give a clear cut distinction between students with learning disabilities and other children. When special schools were introduced, there was an evident increment in the number of children diagnosed with learning disabilities. It is possible that not all these children actually had these disabilities (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). Inclusive education serves to eliminate this problem by putting all students in a similar setting.

## **Challenges in the implementation of the inclusive education system**

Although proper and equal education opportunities are human rights, some people argue that the right to inclusion and social rights are not as straight forward or universally accepted concepts. They argue that this premise alone is not enough to advocate for inclusive education (Lindsey, 2003).

There are also parents who felt that inclusive education did not cater to the individual needs of their children, and that there was an extremely high probability of their children getting lost in the system. Some parents raised concerns about the teacher's skills in dealing with children with exceptionalities. Some of the teachers were not satisfactorily equipped to deal with students with special needs (Loreman, Essential Inclusive Education: Outcomes for Alberta Preservice Teachers, 2010). Many of the parents did not believe that the inclusive system was appropriate for older children due to the belief that the educational gap between children with educational needs and other children tended to increase. Some people feel that inclusion is not the solution, and is like fitting a square peg into a round hole. The argument is that many schools and the social system are not adequately prepared for full inclusion (MacKay, 2007).

Another factor that makes the implementation of inclusive education difficult is concerns by parents that their children may be singled out by other children in the school. Some parents held the belief that other children were going to stigmatize their children due to what they perceived to be their apparent differences. Parents of children with mild disabilities were much open to the idea of inclusion. This is probably because they did not perceive them to be remarkably different from the rest of the students. Parents who had children with severe forms of disability were not particularly open-minded and had a preference for special schools. They believed that the special schools could better cater to the educational and other needs of their children (Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, Parents perspectives on inclusive education in Rural Alberta, Canada, 2009).



## References

- Graham, J., & Jahnukainen, M. (2011). Wherefore art thou, inclusion? Analysing the development of inclusive education in New South Wales, Alberta and Finland. *Journal of Education Policy*, 26 (2), 263-288.
- Lindsey, G. (2003). Inclusive Education: A Critical Perspective. *British Journal of Special Education*, 30 (1), 3-12.
- Loreman, T. (2010). Essential Inclusive Education: Outcomes for Alberta Preservice Teachers. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 56 (2), 124-142.
- Loreman, T., McGhie-Richmond, D., Barber, J., & Lupart, J. (2009). Parents perspectives on inclusive education in Rural Alberta, Canada. *Exceptionality Education International*, 19 (2-3), 21-36.
- Loreman, T., McGhie-Richmond, D., Barber, J., & Lupart, J. (2009). Students Perspectives on Inclusive Education: A Survey of Grade 3-6 of Rural Alberta, Canada. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 5 (1), 1-12.
- Mackay, W. (2007). *The Lighthouse of Equality: A guide to Inclusive Schooling*. Alberta: Dalhousie University.