

# **New Brunswick Association for Community Living**

## **Position Statement on Inclusive Education**

### **Purpose and Goal**

To ensure that New Brunswick's education system and schools reflect and prepare students for life in inclusive communities where:

- everybody is treated with dignity and respect,
- difference is accepted, respected and celebrated,
- people are safe,
- people help each other,
- people are life-long learners,
- people are challenged to reach their full potential, and
- everyone enjoys the same freedom (with adequate and appropriate support if necessary) to choose their life's path and attain their goals.

### **Background**

For many years, flawed science and public and professional prejudice led to the widespread belief that children with intellectual disabilities did not belong in schools and could not be taught anything worth learning. Parents of these children (and other people) knew from their own experience that their children could learn and they formed associations and raised money to provide an education for them. In 1957 the provincial government recognized the efforts of these pioneering parents by passing the *Auxiliary Classes Act*. This Act wrote into law the myth that children with intellectual disabilities could not be "educated" and so did not belong in school. It did, however, provide some funding to help associations provide "training and instruction" in special classes for some – not all -- children with intellectual disabilities (and cerebral palsy) up to age twenty-one. This was the first recognition that the government had some responsibility for some of these children, and it was considered a major breakthrough at the time.

Over the next twenty-five years Auxiliary Classes were established in many parts of the province. With few exceptions they were operated by local branches of CAMR-NB – which was what NBACL was then called. But there was growing discontent. Some parents were unhappy with the non-academic "life skills" curriculum in the Auxiliary Classes and felt that their children should be allowed to go to the schools that they supported with their taxes along with their other children. Some parents felt that if their children were segregated from other children until age twenty-one they would probably be segregated and isolated for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, some parents felt their children were "safer" in the Auxiliary Classes than they would be in a real school.

Around 1980 NBACL began to call for an end to Auxiliary Classes and for children with intellectual disabilities to be “integrated” into regular classes in regular schools. One or two school boards began to take steps towards this goal, taking over the Auxiliary Classes and putting the students in regular schools – and even sometimes in regular classes. The government commissioned a report which recommended that there be free public school privileges for all children and a process for “integrating” children with intellectual disabilities into the regular school system. The government established a broadly-based *Ministerial Advisory Committee under the Auxiliary Classes Act* (with representation from NBACL) to provide advice on how this should be done.

In 1982, then-premier Hatfield made a speech to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting of NBACL in which he recognized that the *Auxiliary Classes Act* would be unconstitutional when the equality rights section of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* came into force in 1985. When 1985 came and went without government action to change the *Schools Act*, one group of parents started legal action against the government under the new *Charter*.

In 1986, the government introduced “Bill 85” to change the *Schools Act*. “Bill 85” received unanimous support from all three parties then represented in the New Brunswick Legislature. In its final form, it was remarkably progressive and put New Brunswick ahead of any other province in Canada, and among leaders in the world. The wording of it has since been copied by two European countries.

The new legislation opened school doors to students with intellectual disabilities, but also to students with a variety of other disabilities who had been kept out previously. The Auxiliary Class teachers who wanted to be were “integrated” into the regular school system but otherwise the school system was unprepared to “integrate” these new and “different” students. The regular teachers had little experience with students who were “different” and their training had not given them the professional tools with which to do the job they now had to do. Prior to and after the passage of Bill 85 there was a government commitment to training on inclusive practices. Unfortunately, this commitment faded in the early 1990s (although this commitment has recently been renewed).

The Université de Moncton set out to try to develop a teacher-training program which would prepare teachers for the new realities they would find in their New Brunswick classrooms. The Anglophone universities were less supportive of the change in public education policy (to this day their teacher-training programs do not adequately prepare teachers to teach in New Brunswick classrooms). Many teachers and administrators, relying on common sense and basic good teaching practice, did a wonderful job of “integrating” the new students into the schools and into regular classes. They learned that the presence of these new students made them adapt in ways that made them better teachers. Some balked and would not accept that certain students belonged in regular classes in regular schools. While many students with intellectual disabilities flourished in the new environment, others in certain school districts and schools found themselves surrounded by negativity and resistance.

In 1987, after a change of government, there was a review of “integration”, carried out by a legislative committee. This committee held hearings all over the province and received more submissions than any legislative committee had ever received to that time. The response, except from the teachers, was overwhelmingly positive, so “integration” continued to be government policy.

After a few years it became clear that “integration” -- making a place in an existing system for students who had previously been excluded – was not enough. “Integration” tended to retain the notion that there were two kinds of students: “regular” students, and those who were “integrated”. Schools thinking “integration” also tended to retain many of the old ways of doing things, and many of these did not work well with the more diverse student body. Schools needed to rethink their approach to education with the understanding that:

- All students have equal value;
- All students “belong” and should be made to feel they “belong” in all curricular activities and those extra-curricular activities the student may choose to participate in; and
- Good teaching practice respects each student, not as a member of a group that is defined by someone else, but as an individual.

For quality inclusive public education this requires at all levels:

- Treating each student with dignity and respect;
- Taking account of each student's learning style;
- Having high but realistic expectations for each student, based on the student's strengths and weaknesses, and
- Developing appropriate learning goals, related to those expectations that the student finds useful and interesting.

It also means that each student experiences a positive and supportive learning environment at all times and a safe, friendly and supportive school environment outside of the classroom (or other learning environment).

This is the essence of “inclusion”; more a value system than a list of requirements. A school district, a school, a principal, a teacher, a non-teaching professional, a non-professional staff member, who has these values and puts them into practice all the times is “inclusive”. “Inclusion” and “inclusive education” are not about students with intellectual disabilities but about quality education and learning for each and every student.

Research and practice in New Brunswick and elsewhere shows that inclusive education benefits ALL students. The positive climate of “belonging” and respect that it generates reduces bullying and other negative aspects of school life, and enables quicker and more effective remedial action when they do occur. Inclusive education must be a central focus of the whole public education system, not an add-on to “business-as-usual”.

In 2005, the government commissioned a major review of inclusive education that culminated in a report prepared by A. Wayne MacKay, a nationally known expert on education and a professor at Dalhousie Law School. This report contained several recommendations for improving inclusive education in New Brunswick. Significantly, this review re-affirmed the value of inclusive education and its relevance to all students throughout the public school system. This was also acknowledged by the government of New Brunswick in its 2007 Education Plan, *When Kids Come First*. This plan noted that inclusive education is a “core value” of our education systems and committed to taking sustained action to ensure that our education system is fully inclusive.

## **Position Statements**

### ***Legislation, Policy and Funding***

1. The New Brunswick *Education Act* contains a strong presumption that in an inclusive education systems ALL students attend and are welcomed into their neighbourhood schools in age appropriate regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute to and participate in all aspects of the life of the school as well as challenged to meet their intellectual, social, physical and career development goals.
2. New Brunswick must support the implementation of inclusive education throughout its public education system through clear and appropriate legislation, policies, and comprehensive “best practice” guidelines which are frequently up-dated as inclusive education practices evolve. This means taking full note of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission's *Guideline on Accommodating Students with a Disability* (2007).
3. The New Brunswick public education system must be operated and administered at all times in a manner consistent with current best practices for inclusive education.
4. Educational administrators at all levels (i.e., from the deputy ministers through school district staff to principals and vice-principals) must understand and be committed to the philosophy, theory, principles and practice of inclusive education. Educational administrators must not normally be appointed unless they have this understanding and commitment. Where educational administrators are appointed without this understanding and commitment, they must receive adequate training so that they gain them.
5. Parents (and guardians) must be treated with dignity and respect and as a valuable source of knowledge of their child. Sincere and repeated efforts must be made to involve parents (and guardians) as supportive partners in the education (in the broad sense) of their child in the New Brunswick public education system.
6. New Brunswick must ensure that funding for inclusive education is adequate and appropriate and that it is distributed in ways that promote inclusive education efficiently and effectively.

## ***Classroom and Teaching Practices***

7. In inclusive schools, diversity is recognized and celebrated. Classrooms are designed to reflect this diversity through the heterogeneous grouping of the student population. Students are not streamed or grouped on the basis of their ability or other personal characteristics.
8. Inclusive schools follow closely the principles and practices of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This means that curriculum, teaching practices and strategies, and student assessment are designed from the outset to ensure that all students can learn and actively participate in regular education programming.
9. Teachers remain responsible for the learning and education of the students assigned to them. Para-professionals or other people who may operate in the learning environment work under the guidance and direction of the teachers and are responsible to the teachers.
10. If a student finds that a particular learning environment contains factors that hinder her or his learning (e.g., lighting, noise), either the whole group moves to an environment which does not hinder the student's learning, or the first learning environment is adapted so that it no longer hinders the student's learning; the student is not moved elsewhere out of the group on his or her own.
11. No learning environment should be experienced as a prison by any student. A small number of students will find it difficult or impossible to stay or participate for an extended period in a learning environment in which there are other students. Their ability as adults to live as full citizens in their chosen community depends on the eventual success of consistent and concerted efforts to gradually enable these students to participate fully in learning environments and extra-curricular activities with other students.
12. Individual students can leave the regular classroom or other regular learning environment from time to time for specific reasons, such as receiving one-on-one assistance in a particular subject area. Some students may also need to be outside of the regular classroom for longer periods. If a student is withdrawn from the regular learning environment, the education system must provide the student with an individualized program of learning that will aim to achieve identified learning outcomes. In addition, the reasons for any withdrawal must be recorded and planning started to return the student to the learning environment as soon as possible.
13. Segregated classes that group students on the basis of personal characteristics (such as disability) are radically inconsistent with inclusive education and inclusive schools and cannot prepare the students in them or the students not in them for life in the kind of inclusive community most New Brunswickers want to live in. Segregated classes have no place in the New Brunswick public education system.

14. Segregating individual students within a regular classroom is radically inconsistent with inclusive education, inclusive schools and inclusive communities and has no place in the New Brunswick public education system.

### ***Teacher Education and Professional Development***

15. New Brunswick students at New Brunswick universities have a right to assume that on successful completion of their teacher training program they will be adequately and appropriately trained to teach in the New Brunswick public education system.

16. New Brunswick must ensure that new teachers are only licenced to teach in the New Brunswick public education system when they have been adequately and appropriately trained to teach inclusively.

17. An adequate, appropriate and effective system of mentoring must be in place for all new teachers joining the New Brunswick public education system.

18. All teachers in the New Brunswick public education system must receive regular and up-to-date in-service training in relevant aspects of inclusive education, in the supportive environment of a community of learners.

19. All teachers in the New Brunswick public education system must have available to them adequate and immediate support to enable them to solve the challenges that are an inherent part of inclusive education.

### ***Positive Learning Environments/Discipline Policies***

20. Students have a right to be supported to learn and be treated with dignity and respect in a positive and safe learning environment. There must be adequate, appropriate and effective structures to protect students when this right is infringed.

21. It is morally, educationally and legally wrong to discipline or punish a student for actions over which the student has limited or no control.

22. Staff throughout the New Brunswick public education system have a right to a safe workplace and to be treated with dignity and respect. There must be structures to protect staff when this right is infringed. These structures must provide that before action can be taken against a student, there is first an investigation to find out whether the staff had provided a positive and safe learning environment for the student and treated the student with dignity and respect.

### ***Transportation Practices***

23. All students have the right to receive transportation services in a manner that will ensure that they are able to attend school for a complete school day.

### ***Monitoring and Accountability***

24. New Brunswick must establish adequate and effective methods of monitoring and evaluating the progress of schools and all other parts of the New Brunswick public education system towards inclusive education, and making education administrations at all levels – government, school district, school – accountable for continuous improvement in the implementation of inclusive education.

25. There must be adequate, appropriate, efficient and effective ways to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all educational administrators, within the framework of an inclusive public education system.