

**Inclusive Education: A Review of Programming and Services in New Brunswick**  
**Submission by the**  
**District 8 Parent Support Group for Families of Children with Exceptionalities**

Following the Introduction, this submission outlines some of the problems we have encountered with “programming and services” in our school district under five headings, concluding with our proposed solutions.

## **Introduction**

The name of our group explains who we are; School District 8 encompasses the City of Saint John and outlying areas to the north, west and south but not to the east. We are an unincorporated, wholly volunteer group of parents of children with exceptionalities who support parents and families of children with exceptionalities through information exchange – mainly at monthly meetings – advocacy, and the mutual understanding that comes from shared experience. To us, our children are our children, loved and appreciated just as they are. To the schools they attend, our children are “medically fragile”, “multiply disabled”, etc.

We know what we want from the New Brunswick school system: a quality, inclusive education for our children with exceptionalities, equal to the education that other children – including our own children who are not considered to have exceptionalities – receive. We want no more for our children with exceptionalities than other children get but we will accept no less. We believe that is our right and our children's right.

We collaborate and share ideas with other support groups for children with exceptionalities but because of the particular complexities that we face in keeping our children alive, in school, learning and being included in school life, we find comfort in having our own organization.

## **Problems**

(a) *Discrimination on the basis of disability.*

(i) Building accessibility.

We are told that only 13 of the 37 schools in our school district are designated “accessible”. The only people who are seriously affected by this situation are those who have physical disabilities, especially those who use wheelchairs – which includes most of our children.

We recognize that many of the schools in District 8 were built, and built to last, long before accessibility was an issue. We also recognize that it is not sensible to spend the money required to make a school accessible if that school is likely to close in a few years. However, we believe that the district, knowing the situation for many years, should have (a) established a schedule which would have ensured that over the years all its schools would be made accessible; and (b) made serious efforts to provide sensible accommodations – including changing the schedule – when it knew that the neighbourhood school of a child using a wheelchair was not accessible. As far as we know, neither of these happened. It appears that nobody takes the situation seriously, nothing changes, and there is no accountability.

In an inclusive education system, students attend their neighbourhood school. Busing them to other schools (except, as at the high school level, when this is a choice) isolates them from the other

children in their neighbourhood, and is exclusionary. Inclusion at school is just a part – a very important part – of inclusion in community, especially in the elementary school years. Sending a student to another school just because the educational bureaucracy finds that simpler – which is the situation we are dealing with – is a sign of a “special education” mentality, not an inclusive mentality. We believe it is also discriminatory.

Right now, with regards to building accessibility, things are all over the place.

For example:

- (a) Students are being sent to schools outside their neighbourhood, which sometimes involves extended periods in a bus. As they see their school peers only at school and their neighbourhood peers only when not at school, they are not really included either at school or in their own neighbourhood. This must have a negative effect on their future.
- (b) Some students in wheelchairs attend non-accessible schools. Either they do not have access to the parts of the school that are not accessible, or less than appropriate attempts are made at “accommodation”. In one case, a parent arriving at such a school for a meeting saw her child being wheeled outdoors from one level to another on a cold and windy fall day, without proper clothes on. She had already warned the school that doing this would place her child's life in danger, and was banned from the school when she attempted to protest. Parents are told that having their child in an accessible school is something they have to beg for. Principals of the accessible schools do not have to accept their child and some do not.

(ii) Busing.

Not all school buses are equipped to carry students in wheelchairs, those that are, run according to schedules that have students who require special equipment in their bus arriving late at school and leaving early. Not occasionally or as a result of unexpected events, but each and every day. This means that they lose instructional time at school – many hours over the school year – and that they are seen as “different” by all the other students, who arrive and leave school at the proper times. As far as we know, no other students are denied instructional time in this way or for this reason. The bureaucracy obviously considers the education of students with exceptionalities less important than that of the other students. We believe this practice is discriminatory.

(iii) Lack of needed equipment.

Sometimes, equipment needed to enable certain students to learn effectively (for example, a “jelly switch” or an adapted computer) is not made available to the students. There have been cases where the District has sent equipment to a school, but the school did not have it put where the student needed it. At other times, the reason is bureaucratic bungling (equipment not ordered, or the wrong equipment ordered, or equipment not delivered promptly or not picked up, etc.). At other times, the cost of the equipment is given as the reason why it is not available. Meanwhile, the student's learning is put partially or wholly on hold, and this is seen as normal – even when the school has been informed in plenty of time that the equipment is required. If the student gets bored because she or he cannot learn effectively, and “acts up”, the student is punished, not the people who caused the problem in the first place. We recognize that budgets are a problem, but we believe that putting desirable extras – like a trip to a museum – before the purchase of equipment a student needs in order to learn and the lack of accountability when this occurs is wrong and discriminatory.

(iv) Inadequate access to health care professionals and Para-professionals.

Students who have been identified as requiring the services of an Occupational Therapist, a Speech/Language Pathologist, a Physiotherapist, or a Psychologist are often put on waiting lists for as long as two years. When these services are finally made available, parents may not be informed, let alone consulted. Some of our children require these services in order to be able to learn effectively, so prompt provision of the services is an accommodation to which they, and we, have a right. However,

professionals should not be seeing students in school without the knowledge or consent of the parents.

(b) *Systemic problems with staff – especially principals, teachers, and teacher assistants.*

(i) Training.

One of the members of our group was told by her child's teacher at the start of school year: "I don't have a clue how to teach your child." (Other members of our group have been told similar things. As far as we know, teachers do not say such things to parents of children who do not have disabilities.) This parent then produced a large packet of information that would help the teacher to teach her child (how the child communicated best; what approaches and activities the child responded well to; what approaches and activities the child responded negatively to; etc.). Not long afterwards the parent was summoned to the school because of her child's "negative behaviour". She soon discovered that the educators at the school had not read the information she had provided, and were doing things to the child that they should have known the child reacted negatively to. The child was being punished and the parent accused because the educators had failed. This was apparently considered normal. The district administration backed the school.

We know that teachers who go to the University of New Brunswick are not – and have never been – taught how to teach inclusively. There is a big difference between having a degree in education and knowing how to teach inclusively. We wonder why teachers are licenced to teach in a New Brunswick school system that is supposed to be inclusive, when they do not know how to do so, just because they have a degree in education. We also wonder why the school district in which they teach, knowing that they have not been taught how to teach inclusively, does not make them take in-service training so that they learn how to teach inclusively. And why there is not some effective mentoring system to make sure that they are actually using the knowledge they gain from the in-service training in the classroom? Perhaps it is because there are so few teachers in our district who have been taught how to teach inclusively (some have learned on their own; others succeed more or less by the seat of their pants). We wonder why there is not some coordinated and systematic in-service training offered throughout the school district so that all the teachers learn how to teach inclusively; and some effective monitoring system to ensure that they use their inclusionary competencies consistently in the classroom. We do not think the teachers should be paid extra to take this in-service training or that they should get time off to do it. They have a duty to make themselves competent to teach ALL the children they find in their classes. Unfortunately, neither the teachers nor the district administrators see things this way. They really don't care about our children having teachers who don't know how to teach them.

We believe it is important to draw a distinction between teachers learning how to teach inclusively and teachers learning about every syndrome and medical diagnosis in the book. Our children are not defined by their disabilities or their medical diagnoses; they are very much individuals who need to be taught in ways that recognize this individuality, not in ways that make assumptions about them on the basis of their diagnoses. Our children have learned a lot before they arrive at school and they continue to learn in the company of their families throughout their years in school. With few exceptions, families know how their children learn best. They also know from experience how best to create and maintain a positive learning environment in which their child can learn. Sometimes it will be useful for the parents to tell the school what the child's diagnosis is; sometimes it will not. Schools in which the staff understands inclusive education know how to listen to families and build on what they can learn from them to maximize the children's learning.

Principals do not seem to be trained in inclusive education or how to create an inclusive school. The ability to create an inclusive school does not seem to be considered relevant when principals are appointed, although research, experience and common sense all say that the principal is key if you want an inclusive school. A few principals in our district have managed to create inclusive schools, because they do respect and welcome ALL students and they have led their staff in that direction, but they seem to have done it on their own. There are other principals whose actions make it obvious that they don't

respect or welcome certain students – particularly students who require accommodations – and their schools are definitely not inclusive; but there are no negative consequences for them, there is no accountability; again, it seems as though nobody cares about these types of situations. As there are major problems in our district's schools with bullying and alienation (teacher as well as student), we believe that the district is foolish not to promote and encourage inclusivity in our schools, because where students feel they are respected and belong – as they do in an inclusive school – and where teachers feel supported in the classroom – as they do in an inclusive school – there is much less bullying and alienation. There are schools in our district that prove this; however, as far as we know, nothing much is done to try to make all the schools as inclusive as the good ones.

There is not enough space to say all that could usefully be said about Teacher Assistants (TAs) and Student Attendants (SAs) and their training, or lack of it. We recognize that the primary role of TAs is to help the teacher help students to learn effectively. We recognize that normally this means that the TA is assigned to a classroom to assist the teacher, and that this means that sometimes the TA watches the class at work while the teacher has one-on-one teaching time with a student who can benefit from that. (We also recognize that in practice most teachers just hand the teaching of the student(s) with exceptionalities over to the TA – the least qualified person teaching the student(s) most in need of skilled interventions – while the teacher concentrates on the “regular” students who are seen as more valuable and easier to teach.) The current structure of the TA system – from the emphasis on seniority in the collective agreement, to the bizarre “Job Opportunities Day” where TAs get to pick their jobs for the next year on the basis of this seniority, to the clash between a six-hour school day and a five-hour per day limit for most TA positions (apparently to keep their total weekly hours below the 29 which would legally qualify them as full-time; see below) – would be understandable, perhaps acceptable, if this were a complete description of what TAs do; but it is not. On the issue of “student attendants,” it is quite obvious from the past few years that the school district’s intention is to start all children with special needs off in kindergarten with a “student attendant”. A student attendant is hired *only* for physical assistance (i.e. changing, moving child throughout the school, etc). A student attendant cannot help carry out academic goals as directed by a teacher. Our children deserve this from the very first day, not when they have to fight for it. This practice of hiring untrained, lower-paid individuals, placing them in kindergarten and trying to keep them on beyond kindergarten in order to save money needs to be abolished.

Some students – including some of ours – have very individual educational and medical requirements which simply cannot be met by the majority of TAs and which are definitely not accommodated by the current TA system. If we take, for example, a child who is deaf and blind and spends much of his or her time in a wheelchair, that child has to develop a communication system using gestures. By the time he or she gets to school, this system will exist, sometimes in rudimentary form, and will be understood more or less well by the child's family. Over time, this system – the child's only way of communicating with the outside world – will develop and be refined. A “revolving-door” TA system, which may leave the child faced with three different TAs in the course of a single day, with change-arounds several times over a school year, cannot accommodate this child. A reasonable accommodation on the part of the school district would involve identifying a TA with an interest in this kind of child and, if possible, some knowledge of gestural communication, who could interact positively with the child and the family. *Seniority, extraneous “qualifications” and the rest of the things considered important in the current TA system have no place in this process.* This TA would spend the time necessary with the child and the family before school started (see below), learning what the child's communication system is. This TA would then stay with the child throughout the school day and would be an integral part of the regular communication between teacher and family that is a requirement in such situations. In an inclusive school, the child's teacher and at least some of her or his fellow students would be told how the child communicates and would be encouraged to interact with her or him; the TA should be a vehicle for enhancing the child's inclusion in the full range of school activities, not a barrier to it.

When we talk about the “training of TAs” this is what we mean.

Currently, this kind of appropriate training and accommodation only occurs in rare instances – when the district superintendent (a sympathetic and understanding person who came to one of our monthly meetings) intervenes to make sensible things happen. But she only has to intervene because the rest of the school system has failed to accommodate our children, and there are still too many instances when she is unable, because of inappropriate collective agreements or policies, or unwilling to intervene. ***The current TA system does not accommodate our children and cannot be made able to accommodate them. It has to be changed so that the interests of the children come first, not irrelevant bureaucratic foolishness.***

Some of our children could easily die without quick and knowledgeable action on the part of somebody whose job it should be to take such action – presumably a TA. The action required is not complex or intrusive – it does not need a nurse – but it is vital and the TA needs to be trained by the family in what to do before school starts. Again, the “revolving door” TA system cannot accommodate this fairly simple requirement.

There is a “delicate relationship” clause in the TAs' collective agreement (“Where a delicate relationship between an employee and a special needs student is deemed consequential to the well being of the special needs student, the employee shall not be subject to be bumped”) but it is inadequate, it is very difficult to get it invoked, and the decision-making process is seriously flawed – it doesn't even involve the student's parents or any of the non-teaching professionals and para-professionals involved in the student's life. In other words, it doesn't work properly.

We have already mentioned one example where a student was punished, and his parents criticized, because the school had failed. There are many others. Many of the “behaviour problems” that teachers and principals complain about and exclude students for are, in the case of students with exceptionalities, caused directly by the school's failure to accommodate the student. Again, nobody cares and there is no accountability for this.

## (ii) Attitude

Attitude and training are linked. Training is wasted on those with the wrong attitude and the right attitude is not enough if proper training is not provided.

Research has shown that teacher perceptions and attitudes are the best predictor of student success. This is especially true where the student has one or more exceptionalities, and if you add “principal” and “TA” to “teacher”. (One recent example. One of the many teachers in the New Brunswick school system who feels herself qualified to practice medicine told a parent to put her child on Ritalin because he had ADHD and was “hyperactive”. The parent led the teacher to believe, without actually lying, that the child had been put on Ritalin. The teacher was so impressed by the change in the child that within three months the child won a prize for the most improved student. Only there was no change in the child; he had not been put on Ritalin. Only the teacher's perception had changed.)

Attitudes to inclusive education and to students with exceptionalities vary widely in our district. In a few schools, good leadership at all levels has resulted in schools which are fully inclusive and where all students, including some with multiple exceptionalities, are welcomed, included in all parts of the life of the school, and learn effectively. In some others, there are signs of good intentions but lack of knowledge and lack of informed support at the district level have led to the schools failing certain students, mainly those with exceptionalities. In other schools, particularly secondary schools, subject teachers do not want to be bothered with students with exceptionalities (“students like that”) and do not accept their responsibilities to them, in order to focus on “regular” students. (This division of students into “regular” and “other” is a sign of out-dated teaching methods. Inclusive schools use various kinds of differentiated instruction to make learning accessible to all students and to take into account the fact that students learn differently.) Nobody cares about these inconsistencies. No real attempt is made to make non-inclusive schools follow the good example of the inclusive ones. It is not rocket science. What needs to be done is known. The problem is attitude: – principals and teachers can't be bothered to do their job the way it is supposed to be done and administrators can't be bothered

to assist them, support them and make them accountable if it does not happen.

Principals are very important to creating an inclusive school, but their attitude and knowledge cannot at present be among the criteria for their appointment as principals, otherwise we would not have some the principals we have in our district. There is no accountability when teachers have bad attitudes towards certain students or discriminate against them. If the students react against discrimination by “acting up”, *they* are held responsible and punished, not the teacher and principal whose attitudes contributed to the problem as well.

Just as there are wonderful principals and teachers in our district (along with too many of both who are far from wonderful), there are wonderful, sensitive, caring TA's; however, others also have a real attitude problem. They may ignore what parents tell them about medical matters and expose children to risk of death – and when the parent gets angry about a threat to their child's life, the parent, not the TA, is banned from the school by senior management. They may use their own seriously flawed parental habits on children they don't understand and act in ways the children experience as brutal – and again it is the child who is punished if he or she reacts against what they experience as brutality. As with everything else, the system protects everybody else before it protects the children, especially if those children are particularly vulnerable. With TAs, as with teachers and principals, nobody really cares and there is very little accountability.

(iii) Failure to listen to, or communicate properly with, parents

We have already given several examples where the school's failure to listen to parents has had serious negative effects on students, and in most cases the student or the parent or both have been blamed and punished for the school's failure. We could give more examples because this is a systemic problem.

According to the literature and the stated policy of the Department of Education, the parents are an integral part of the educational team; however, in actuality, this is occurring quite rarely and only at the constant insistence of those parents who are comfortable in advocating for their child. The parents are quite commonly left out of the equation, only being notified after school or district staff has made significant decisions regarding their child. At that point, the cooperative approach has no place; the school (or district) is trying to impose the decision it has already made and the parents may want something different, so there is a ready-made confrontation – caused by the school (or district) but blamed on the parents. There is little recourse for parents who disagree with the decisions made, or with the neglect of the staff to include the parents in the decision making process. There is nothing in the Department of Education policy that says that parents are to be consulted only when this is convenient for the staff. We don't think the convenience of school and district staff should be considered more important than proper consultation with parents and, in the end, the best educational interests of their child. We recognize that in a team situation the parents will not always get what they want, but in a real team they would be listened to respectfully as people with a more intimate knowledge of their child than anyone else, their opinions would be carefully considered, and consensus would be sought. They would not find at a “team meeting” that some of the other “team” members had had a huddle in the washroom and decided on “team” strategy and tactics ahead of time; however, everybody knows that this kind of thing goes on, yet nothing is done about it. A parent who complains quickly becomes “the parent from hell” that teachers and principals moan and laugh about in staff common rooms.

School-home communication books are recognized as a very valuable and well established tool which enables parents – especially parents of children with little or no language, with severe medical problems, or with what some call “multiple exceptionalities” – to exchange information with the school so that school and home can work together and reinforce each other's efforts to enhance the student's learning and well-being. Teachers and support staff should work together with parents to develop a user-friendly school-home communication book that will provide the home with useful information about the child's school experience, thus enabling parents to interact with their child about school, prepare them for upcoming things, explain concepts that other peers are assumed to already know (big

problem!), etc. This helps remove the isolated feeling that parents of children with exceptionalities have when they do not know what is going on with their child, and hopefully fosters an environment more conducive to parents becoming involved in working together with the school staff so that their child may achieve their full human potential. It also enables parents to tell the school if the child is, for example, experiencing a temporary flare-up of a medical problem that may influence the way he acts at school, and how the school should deal with this if it happens. Unfortunately, however, the school-home communication books, which are the best vehicle for this exchange of information about what is happening at school (with all students in general AND the child with the exceptionality) and which can and should HELP the teacher and the school, are seen in many instances as an extreme inconvenience to school staff. They also are not always honestly used by the school. Parents are too often told via the communication book that all is well (or almost) but are told when they go to a meeting at the school that things are bad and have been getting worse for weeks or months. Problems – often problems created by the school's inappropriate treatment of the child that the parent could have corrected if asked or which the parent had already specifically given advice about which the school ignored – are hidden until they are very difficult to solve, and usually it is left up to the parents to solve them. It is wrong that educators misuse useful tools in this way, and that parents are often left carrying the bag for the bad result.

The S.E.P., as a legally binding education plan, individualized for a particular student, is a vital communication document between parents and school. But parents are not always properly consulted about the accommodations contained in it and these accommodations are not always properly implemented. We don't know what to tell parents to do when this supposedly legally binding document is ignored, partly because by the time the parents find out what is going on, months have passed. There appears to be no accountability when this occurs.

School reports are not always taken seriously. In particular, they should obviously reflect the S.E.P. but often they don't. In one case, a student got a mark in his school report for a subject that the student did not attend. Is this sloppiness and “don't care” attitude only apparent when schools are dealing with students with exceptionalities, or are things equally bad for all students? Again, it appears that there is a gross lack of accountability when these things occur.

Communication with the district office is also often very frustrating. We recognize that the problems of an individual student do not always look as big to a district administrator who deals with thousands of students as they do to the student's parents; however, the district office seems intimidating to many parents and when contact is made, parents are often left feeling they are being placated, rather than taken seriously. Parents think that when things are going badly at a school, the district's job is to fix the problem. They often get the impression that the district sees its job as protecting the school's interests, not the student's. When our District Superintendent came to one of our meetings a year ago, the understanding and compassion she showed, and the immediate action she took to resolve some particular issues, made us feel much better (we also learned about some of the things which restrict her ability to act). Unfortunately, problems remain and concerted and on-going action is needed to alleviate feelings of mistrust towards the district office and to make contacting the district office less intimidating.

One thing that contributes to this mistrust is that parents have been advised of certain district “policies” that appear to be policies only when this is to be of benefit to the district, not the student. Parents of children with severe seizure disorders have been told that if their child has a seizure they are not allowed to come to the school and carry the child out themselves – this is called the “No Carrying Policy”. On the other hand, we have had students who were having difficulties in school and the parents have gone in and physically carried their child out of the school, with nobody saying a thing to them about a “No Carrying Policy”. Policies do not appear to be consistent within all schools in the district; this particular “No Carrying Policy” has not been found anywhere in writing and has never been provided to anyone in writing, even upon request.

The appeals process is another problem. Parents have reported very negative outcomes when dealing with this process and they no longer place much trust in it. In one case, parents went through

the appeals process and had the appeals committee rule in their favour, only to find out a couple of days later that the decision of the appeals committee, which is supposed to be final, was overturned by district staff. The appeals committee and district staff reconvened (without advising the parent involved) at a later date to discuss issues relating to the appeals committee decision. This type of anti-professional behaviour is not conducive to a trusting relationship.

(c) *Transitions*

This problem could belong under several headings but it is so serious that it deserves separate treatment.

Our school system does not do an adequate job with any types of transitions – into kindergarten, into school, between schools, or from school to whatever follows. It seems to think that as its responsibility is only for children's schooling, what happens before and after this schooling is someone else's problem. This has negative effects for many students but these negative effects are *much* more serious for children with little or no language, with severe medical problems, or with what some call “multiple exceptionalities” – like our children. We believe that the loss of effective learning time caused by the school system's lack of attention to transitions, and the actual danger to children like ours, may constitute another form of discrimination against children with exceptionalities like ours. This lack of attention to transitions is also another indication of the inadequacy of current policies around communication with parents, and of the fact that the “team” approach promoted in Department of Education materials is not taken seriously. We have already given examples of our parents being faced with teachers who say they have no idea how to teach our children and TAs who are not trained satisfactorily in how to keep them safe. We will not debate who bears most responsibility for this situation (why should we, as taxpayers, pay the salary of teachers who say that can't teach our children and don't think they should find out how to do the job we pay them to do?). We will say that the present situation is unacceptable. Children receiving supports like ours do are known to the family services system and to early intervention authorities. The school system must organize itself so that it finds out in due time when a child with exceptionalities will be entering the school system (unless the child comes from out of province, of course); that it assigns the child to a class and a teacher and, if required, a TA before the end of the previous school year; that the teacher and TA arrange mutually convenient times (perhaps in June, perhaps in late August) to meet with the child's parents, preferably at home (this may not always be possible), to get to know the child and to receive from the parents any information they may have on what to do to help the child learn, what the child responds well to and what the child responds badly to, etc.; and that the child and her or his parents visit the school and the classroom – with other children present or without other children present or both, depending on the child – before the start of the new school year; that similar processes be developed to smooth the transition between schools; and that the transition from school to whatever follows be planned and carried out as policy states it should be but as it is not in our district these days. If this is not done or not done right, somebody must be disciplined; our children's education and lives are too important to allow the present non-system to continue to be dysfunctional because there is no accountability.

(d) *Five-hour vs. six-hour TA*

This is another problem that could belong under several headings but is so serious that it deserves separate treatment. It is also a prime example of the underlying cause (along with poor training and attitudes of teacher and principals) of most of what is wrong with inclusive education in this district: when there is a clash between the best interests of students with exceptionalities and system convenience and systemic lack of consideration for the individual needs of the student, the system always seems to win.

Once a student who requires full time assistance during the school day reaches Grade 3, the number of hours of instruction per day increases from 5 to 6, therefore requiring the student to have Teacher Assistant support for 6 hours per day. The district has begun to eliminate 6-hour TA positions; the number of these positions seems to lessen each year. This has created a whole host of problems for



parents of students with exceptionalities, especially those who require (it is not a minor inconvenience) consistency of support.

Parents have been told that their child cannot attend school for the whole day because he/she will not have the required TA support needed to be in school; this would seem to constitute unlawful discrimination. Or the school or district makes arrangements for the student to have a designated TA for the first 5 hours of instruction per day and a different TA for the last hour per day; this is a serious problem for the student and that last hour is basically lost educationally. The student's life may also be at risk. Parents have even resorted to moving their children back to the Grade Two level in an effort to eliminate the many negatives associated with having two TA's assigned to assist the child throughout the day. Students having TA's shuffled around, an hour here or there, are losing the support consistency needed to achieve individualized goals in school. Students are affected in many ways by this shuffling, which sometimes results in their exhibiting behavioural problems that were previously non-existent. Once again, the student (and the parent) will be blamed and punished for problems created by the system's unwillingness to put the students first.

*(e) APSEA services for students with hearing and/or vision loss.*

A recent review of APSEA services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and/or blind or visually impaired was conducted; the contents of this review were extremely troubling as the parents of these students feel that the retention of these services is of the highest importance. There was absolutely *no* consultation with parents during the study and it seems as though government has already made up its' mind that it is going to go ahead with its' own cost-cutting agenda. The school psychologists, who are already swamped, under-staffed, etc, are mentioned as being fully capable of conducting the assessments previously conducted by staff who are specifically trained in hearing and vision loss and its' implications on learning. What qualifications would school psychologists have to conduct these types of assessments? This is preposterous; the APSEA center of excellence in Halifax provides a regional base for the teachers of students with hearing & vision loss in the Atlantic Provinces. It is because of this center that technology, methods, staff training and development is able to stay at the high level it is currently at. Taking the center in Halifax away and designating the full responsibility of the education of students with hearing and vision loss would be disastrous for these children. We would invite the reviewer to consult with records of Methods & Resource Teachers throughout the province and see how much time has been spent with the students who have hearing and/or vision losses with APSEA having been involved; this information would surely be useful in ascertaining available resources for these children.

## **Solutions**

Many of the required solutions are, according to written policy documents, supposed to be part of our NB educational system already; however, in reality, they simply aren't happening. The people in the system should know what is right; they just need to do it. If they don't know what is right, they should be told quickly, and held accountable if they don't do it. As parents, we realize the Department of Education has had budget cuts, and that everyone is operating with the attitude that they must try to save as much money as possible, everyone is scared of the next round of cuts, and so on; however, this does not excuse consistent failure to even try to carry out stated policy.

It should not only be the parents of children with exceptionalities or other such groups fighting for appropriate education for all students. These are everyone's problems, and everyone – including employees of the Department of Education, DEC's, school district staff, and educators and administrators in schools – should be attempting to work towards a system of education that is right, not only for children with exceptionalities, but for all children. Exceptionalities are normal; they have been part of human existence since before there was writing. Parents of children without exceptionalities – and educators and administrators at all levels – should realize that a child without an exceptionality is just a car accident, an antibiotic-resistant infection, or a slip on the stairs away from

being a child with an exceptionality; those parents might tomorrow find themselves forced into the reality of fighting for everything their child needs. We are all in this together and we should all work collaboratively with the Department of Education for an inclusionary school system that works.

**Simply put, the solutions are:**

- Stop the discrimination against students with exceptionalities;
- Train and re-train everybody in the system properly;
- Do not grant licences to teach if the individual does not know how to teach inclusively;
- Remove the licence to teach from people who refuse to learn how to teach inclusively or who do not do it after they have learned;
- Ensure that principals know how to make and keep their schools inclusive and ensure they do it;
- Ensure that district staff knows how to make and keep their school district inclusive and ensure that it is done;
- Ensure that DEC's are told clearly what an inclusive school district looks like and ensure that they understand that it is their responsibility to make sure their district is inclusive;
- Ensure that Department of Education staff has a consistent understanding of inclusive education and that this is reflected consistently in all discussions and negotiations both internally and with outside bodies such as unions, teacher training facilities, other government departments (Family and Community Services, Health and Wellness, Public Safety, etc.), and the Departments of Education in other provinces and territories;
- Create and implement consistent responsibility and accountability into the system;
- Ensure that the interests of students come first, with educational service provider convenience a distant second and bureaucratic red tape out of the picture entirely;
- Remember that, according to the *Education Act*, every teacher must create and maintain “a positive learning environment for all students”; support the teacher to do that and remove the teacher who does not in spite of good support;
- Ensure that inclusive policies are implemented sensibly throughout the public school system;
- Ensure that schools are reformed to make inclusion possible;
- Ensure, by holding people accountable, that all schools and all districts are brought up to the standards of the best ones within five years.
- Ensure that APSEA services remain as they are so that the students with hearing and/or vision loss continue to have an adequate education.

**None of this is rocket science, nor is it “undue hardship”; it just needs to be done, starting now!**

**Please feel free to contact the group for any further information or clarification regarding the issues brought forth in this document.**

**District 8 Parent Support Group for Families of Children with Exceptionalities**