Community Living Ontario's Community Inclusion Initiative Report on:

The delivery of

Education Services

For Students Who Have an Intellectual Disability in the Province Of Ontario

COMMUNITY LIVING
Ontario

The Delivery Of Education Services For Students Who Have An Intellectual Disability In The Province Of Ontario

Spring, 2012

On September 29, 1948 Mrs. Victoria B. Glover, a grandmother of an eight year old boy, wrote a letter to the editor of the Toronto Star challenging readers to contemplate the common practice of sending children with disabilities away to institutions to 'learn'. She asked:

"….If these children can be taught something at Orillia [Huronia Regional Center], why cannot a day school be put at their disposal?"

Did Mrs. Glover have any idea that the pebble she was throwing would not only start a ripple, but swell into an entire movement? Her question reached families and other like-minded allies across Ontario who would soon found what would one day be known as the Community Living Movement. By banding together, they found strength and courage with and from each other. These families, advocates, boards of directors and staff organized, mobilized and called for change. In 1980, thanks to their advocacy, Bill 82, the Education Amendment Act, was signed into law ensuring publicly funded education for all students regardless of disability in the Province of Ontario. With the Act in hand, parents disputed where, how and with whom their children should be educated. Some met with success, many met with resistance.

A great deal has changed since Mrs. Glover wrote that first letter, yet in some ways, nothing has changed. Many families still have to advocate for their child to receive an inclusive education although there is increasing support for inclusive education practices and data to support it. Community Living Associations continue to support the efforts of families, advocates and educators in the pursuit of meaningful education of all students in Ontario. In order to do that well, periodically we need to pull back the curtain and shine a spotlight on the real inclusive education practices for children with intellectual disabilities in our schools today. We do this not to be critical, but in order to ensure students are afforded their right to an inclusive education.

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Introduction

This report is a snapshot of the special education service delivery for students who have an intellectual disability in the Province of Ontario. Its aim is to provide an overview of inclusionary practices for students who have an intellectual disability. The goal of this document is not to critique current practice but rather to present facts and perspective in relation to a population of students who, in the view of Community Living Ontario and the authors, among many others, have been neglected in the movement towards inclusive practice. The recommendations in this report may be used by families, advocates and educators, to support their ongoing efforts to access resources and opportunities for persons who have an intellectual disability.

"**When I provide my point of view,** you do not seem satisfied until you are able to convince me of your own point of view. I find it difficult to challenge you due to your experience and position of authority. I feel like I am viewed simply as a parent who does not understand the needs of my own son and has unrealistic expectations for him. I do not think my expectations are unrealistic. My son has the right to participate in society and although he may require some support as an adult, I am determined to ensure that he is included in mainstream society in every way possible, where he will thrive and feel fulfilled. He has this right."

Jennifer K., parent of a student who has an Intellectual Disability

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The Ontario Educational Context

The Ministry of Education for the Province of Ontario has, over the past number of years, introduced multiple initiatives aimed at achieving its primary goals, which are listed as:

- High levels of student achievement

- Reduced gaps in student achievement

- Increased public confidence in publically funded education

Related to these goals, but specifically focused in the area of special education, the Ministry has explicitly noted a commitment to:

- Improving student achievement and well-being

- Increasing the capacity of schools to meet the needs of all learners

- Supporting the development and implementation of effective Individual Education Plans

- Enhancing collaboration among schools, families and community partners

- Improving the balance between teaching and learning and required processes and documentation

Within the context of these stated goals and the supports that have been introduced within the Province to help ensure them, this report focuses solely on the school experiences, learning environments and opportunities provided for students who have an intellectual disability within Ontario schools.

Overview of
Special Education Service Delivery in Ontario Schools

With the introduction of the Education Amendment Act (December 12, 1980) the education of students with special needs was no longer considered optional for school boards. Commonly referred to as Bill 82, the Educational Amendment Act ensured publically funded education for all students in the Province of Ontario. As a result of this, school boards, many of which had been providing services already, now had a direct mandate to ensure that all students regardless of disability would attend school. Inherent in this legislation, and in keeping with the principles of "normalization"* prevalent at the time, was a presumption that the regular classroom would be the first placement option with others being considered when needs arose.
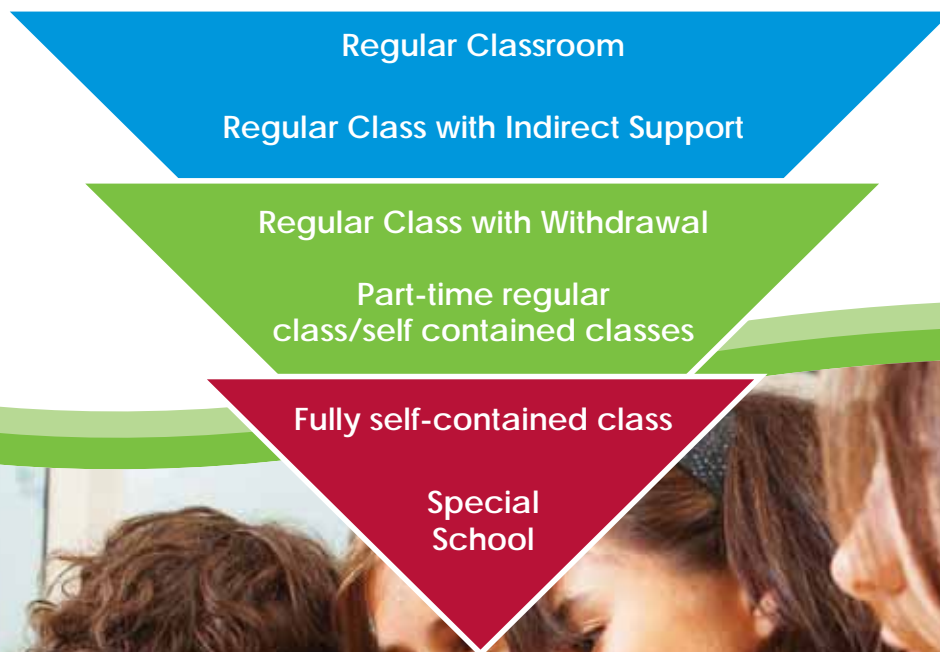
Initially, with the introduction of Bill 82 it was not uncommon for students with special education needs to be placed in special education, often far from their home school. This separation of student from their peers was premised on the notion that specialized instruction could and indeed should be delivered by personnel with specific training in supported environments that had low pupil teacher ratio. Schools and school boards often relied on the

Normalization argues against institutionalization and contends that persons with special needs should be viewed more by the points on which they are similar to others, rather than by those on which they differ. The philosophy of normalization holds that once persons with exceptionalities are integrated into mainstream society, they will take on the behaviours of the norm because they will have more normal models to follow (Bennett, Dworet and Weber, 2008)

cascade model of service delivery which outlined placement options for students along the special education spectrum. While this orientation toward service delivery could be considered in contrast to the principle of "least restrictive environment" which recommended that students be placed in as inclusive an environment as possible, schools and school boards throughout the Province, indeed throughout the country, adopted similar models of segregationist practice. Almost 30 years later many of those original settings that opted for segregationist practices have moved towards an inclusive model of schooling where students continue to receive supported instruction but are no longer separated from their peers. This move toward inclusive practice was, in part, due to the recognition that the segregation of students resulted in a violation of human rights. In such cases the decision was a moral one based on the principles of equity and respect for all. As well there was a growing recognition that the promise of "specialized education" was not bearing the academic and social results that were anticipated. Indeed the social skills and academic gains, once seen as the inevitable result of such expertise driven service, proved questionable at best and the realization that the negative results of segregation outweighed any anticipated benefits was the catalyst for this transition.

Cascade Model of Service Delivery
(Commonly used in Ontario schools)

Regular Classroom

Regular Class with Indirect Support

Regular Class with Withdrawal

Part-time regular class/self contained classes

Fully self-contained class

Special School

In the Province of Ontario, while there has been a focused effort to provide instruction for diverse groups of students within the regular classroom, the degree of segregation for students who have an intellectual disability has seen frighteningly little movement. As early as 1991 the Minister of Education declared to the Ontario legislature that the integration of pupils with exceptionalities into local community classrooms would be the norm wherever possible. This notion was reinforced in 2006 with the release of the *Special Education Transformation Document* that stated "The first consideration regarding placement would continue to be the regular classroom. A range of options would continue to be available for students whose needs could not be met within the regular classroom. These placements would be duration-specific, intervention-focused and subject to regular reviews." (Bennett and Wynne, Special Education Transformation, 2006, p.8). Currently the Ministry of Education reports that approximately 81% of students with special needs spend more than 50 percent of their day in the regular class (Bennett, Dworet and Weber, 2008). This statistic is misrepresentative when special needs populations are separated out by disability.

As per numbers reported by the Ministry of Education in 2001, at the elementary level students with an identification of intellectual disability spent 68.8% of their day in fully or partially self-contained settings. In 2010 that statistic was reported as 68.7%. At the secondary level the 2001 number for fully and partially self-contained class placement for students who have an intellectual disability was 81%, the reported 2010 number was 80%. It is irrefutable that in the movement toward more inclusive practices in schools, students who have an intellectual disability have been ignored.

Author Sonja Grover (2002) in her reexamination of the Emily Eaton* case examines the constitutionality of denying access to rights defined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She argues that the Charter, for all citizens of Canada, fundamentally presumes inclusion as a right and that:

> **No other group in a democratic society, save the disabled student, needs to meet a competency test of sorts in order to exercise a constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of association where that group poses no risk to others. Yet disabled children such as *Emily Eaton can be denied access to the mainstream in the school setting (i.e. a regular class placement) over the objections of the parents on the contention that their participation level does not meet the quantitative and qualitative standards set by the school board.**

(Grover, 2002; p. 259)

The denial of basic rights, such as the freedom of association demands close examination within school contexts in Ontario. Eating at the special needs table, using only the washroom assigned for special needs students, being confined in the school yard (at times by a chain link fence) being denied access to extra curricular activities, at times because of exclusionary criteria for such groups and at other times because of bussing convenience which takes students with special needs away early from school settings, are only some among a myriad of examples in which students who have an intellectual disability are denied access to other students. These physical exclusions pale in comparison to the types of curricular exclusions that are perpetrated daily on students whom we deem as having an "inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development" by the Ministry of Education Definition of Categories of exceptionality in Ontario.

* Eaton vs. Brant County Board of Education (1994) A decision by the supreme court of Canada that there was no Charter presumption for inclusion and that placement for students with special needs should be decided on a by-case basis.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education for the Province of Ontario released both a document entitled *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* as well as Policy/Program Memorandum 119/09: *Developing and implementing equity and inclusive education policies in Ontario*. This document and the corresponding Policy/Program Memorandum define inclusive education as that which is "based on principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students… in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected." Diversity is defined as a broad concept encompassing dimensions of "ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, languages, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and socio-economic status." Much of the document and the Policy/Program Memorandum discuss the need to respond to provincial changes related to immigration and it cites examples of cultural, language, religious and sexual orientation initiatives in schools that focus on equity in the Province. The stated goal of the Policy/Program Memorandum 110/09 was to provide a high-quality education for all as a key means of fostering social cohesion based on an inclusive society where diversity is affirmed within a framework of common values that promote the well being of all citizens including those with physical or mental disabilities. In order to meet this goal, school boards across the Province were instructed to review and/or develop, implement and monitor an equity and inclusive education policy. By the end of the 2011-2012 school year, school boards and their schools must provide students and staff with equity and inclusive education training, programs and action plans. These processes must be monitored and assessed for effectiveness.

...a ludicrous example of tokenism

While the release of a definitive statement with regard to diversity is laudable, the discussion of students with special needs is underdeveloped. The example of successful inclusive practice highlighted within the document, that describes students with disabilities being paired with students without disabilities for dance activities, is a startling example of the lack of understanding that is commonplace with regard to inclusive practice for students with special needs. The highlighting of students with disabilities dancing with those who are able-bodied, for many in the field of inclusion, would seem a ludicrous example of tokenism designed to highlight a charity-based inclusive endeavour. Real inclusion would not consider that it is in any way exceptional or worthy of note that everyone gets to dance.

Current
Research

> When I was in high school there were students somewhere in my school that had disabilities but no one ever really seemed to know who they were or what they were doing. We just didn't see them. Now I am a mom and my daughter who has a disability is in school and included in everything, I see what a loss it was to my era to not have had a chance to get to know those students. Maybe I would have learnt a few things that I could use now in my role as a mom.
>
> *Candice A., parent of a student who has an Intellectual Disability*
>
> You said, "the other kids would make fun of him". I vehemently disagreed and suggested that I thought he could handle this and in fact learn from just that type of experience. I do not want to overly protect him from the norms of society, rather I want him to learn from his experiences in more challenging social situations.
>
> *Jennifer K., parent of a student who has an Intellectual Disability*

The following portion of this report will offer a summary of the current research on beliefs and practices as they relate to students who have an intellectual disability. This review begins with background in what are still considered, **Traditional Belief Systems**, and then examines **Public and Peers' Beliefs and Attitudes**. The literature is summarized for stakeholders such as, **Educators' Beliefs and Practices** and **Families' Perspectives on Inclusion**. Finally, exemplary practices of inclusive elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools are profiled in **Facilitating Inclusion in Schools and Community.**

Traditional
Belief Systems

Traditionally, there has been a lack of voice with respect to the issues of inclusion for students who have an intellectual disability. As a result, educational institutions have tended to dismiss the views and desires of students who have an intellectual disability (Cuckle & Wilson, 2002; Davis & Watson, 2001). When offered an opportunity to voice their perspective, students who have an intellectual disability express that they are rarely involved in school activities, report feeling abandoned and without adult support at the school level, and were less hopeful about their future compared to students with other exceptionalities (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine & Marder, 2007).

...This system denies these students the possibility of learning how to be part of a large and complex world

In short, prioritizing for the needs of students who have an intellectual disability has not received due attention. Why? A sense of guardianship among education professionals is common as there is a pervasive notion that educational experiences that offer low student-to-teacher ratios, practice life skills, and provide specialized experiences and transportation, all seem to demonstrate a high level of care and support. From a human rights perspective, this belief system denies these students the possibility of learning how to be part of a large and complex world. These students are denied access to social and curricular opportunities, development of their social and adaptive skills, the right to associate with a diverse group of peers and belong within them (Abbott & McConkey, 2004; Townsend, Wilton, & Vakilirad, 1993). The net deficit of traditional belief systems: the schooling experiences of students who have an intellectual disability further contribute to their isolation and segregation.

Public and Peers'
Beliefs & Attitudes

The perceptions of the general population in Ontario toward the inclusion of students who have an intellectual disability somewhat mirrors the traditional belief systems discussed above. An opinion poll was taken (Ouellet-Kuntz, Hutchison, & Box, 2008) of 680 adults across Ontario. These adults were asked if inclusive education is appropriate for students who have an intellectual disability and only 52% agreed, while about 42% believed that education in special schools was best. To add to this, one third of these respondents held that inclusion would cause discipline problems, and make it harder for other students to learn. Almost 80% of the adults polled also believed that schools did not have the required resources to teach students who have an intellectual disability and almost 70% of the respondents did not have confidence in the preparedness of the educators to teach students who have an intellectual disability. Those respondents that had inclusive views tended to be the young participants and/or respondents who had known someone who has intellectual disability who was not a family member.

There are differences in the way that high school students view their peers who have an intellectual disability as compared to their peers with physical disabilities. A very recent Ontario study (Brown, Ouellette-Kuntz, Lysaght & Burge, 2011) of students in Grades 9 and 12 revealed that there was disparity in their feelings about participating in classroom-based and social activities with their peers with disabilities. These respondents were significantly more negative about participating with students who have an intellectual disability than with students with physical disabilities. They noted that they were often uncomfortable in the presence of their peers who have an intellectual disability and perceived dissimilarities in interests or abilities.

Elementary students (4 -10 years) were interviewed about their attitudes towards their peers who have an intellectual and/or physical disability. They had similar attitudes towards a peer who has a physical disability and a non-disabled peer; however attitudes towards a peer with an intellectual or intellectual/physical disability were negatively biased. There was also a negative association with age. It was concluded that elementary students' attitudes appear to be influenced by the type of disability and their age (Nowicki, 2006).

What contributes to changes in the attitudes and beliefs held toward students who have an intellectual disability? In a single phrase: sustained inclusion. There is clear evidence that inclusion results in students having high levels of tolerance for diversity (Bunch & Valeo, 2004; McDougal, DeWitt, Kinga, Miller, & Killips, 2004; Wiener & Tardiff, 2004). For students who have experienced inclusion, research into their peer attitudes and relationships demonstrates that in general, peers within a regular class have a positive attitude towards inclusion.

Educators'
Beliefs & Practices

Regular classroom teachers, in general, welcome the move towards inclusive classrooms (Silverman, 2007; Waldron, Mcleskey, & Pacchiano, 1999). Most teachers hold beliefs that all students can achieve in inclusive classrooms and they believe that they can make a difference in the lives of students (Silverman, 2007; Wiener, 2003). Specifically and relevant to this report, secondary teachers in Ontario strongly agree that the inclusion of students who have an intellectual disability in their classrooms assisted them to become better teachers overall (Dolmage, Young, Stuart, Specht, & Strickland, 2009).

Despite these espoused beliefs, specific arguments linger for the continued segregation of students who have an intellectual disability as well as other exceptionalities. These arguments cite barriers such as demands on teacher time, inadequate resourcing, lack of training for educators, and class sizes (Morrison & Rude, 2002). Teachers are now expected to develop Individual Education Plan for their students; this requires collaboration, assessment, monitoring, reviewing, and consensus, all of which are an investment of time (Lewis & Doorlag, 1999). There is the belief that competing initiatives keep educators constantly engaged with little time for the conceptualization of a larger fundamental issue such as the purpose of inclusion (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Experienced teachers express the feeling that they are under supported and under resourced both in terms of personnel and materials (Silverman, 2007; Slee, 2006; Wiener, 2003). Across the Province of Ontario, there are consistent calls for additional professional learning in the area of special education (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001). What is interesting is that there remains a pervasive understanding that in order to teach students with exceptionalities, one needs specialized training (Silverman, 2007; Woloshyn, Bennett, & Berrill, 2003). The need for support, knowledge, and collaboration that is exclusive to only those who teach students with exceptionalities creates an artificial divide between these students and the rest of the student population.

Finally, another important factor in the success of inclusion has been the role of the principal. It would seem that the training and experiences of the administrator have a direct impact on his/her support for inclusion (Praisner, 2003; Riehl, 2000). Specifically, a positive attitude

toward inclusion is correlated with positive experience with students with exceptionalities and inclusive professional learning opportunities. Not surprisingly, these principals are also less likely to place students with exceptionalities in segregated settings. In this way, the success of inclusive practices is inextricably linked to the environment and culture of the school (Fredrickson, Simmonds, Evans, & Soulsby, 2007). This environment must be one that values diversity and doesn't espouse deficit thinking. The administrator should ensure that there is an inclusive service delivery model in place and provide educational leadership with social justice as the foundational premise (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006). If it is the case that the principal faces resistance to some inclusionary practices, he/she must work toward building staff capacity toward advancing social justice (Theoharis, 2007).

...the inclusion of students who have an intellectual disability in their classrooms assisted them to become better teachers

...educators need to be attuned to the needs of the family

Families' Perspectives
on Inclusion

It is important for families with students with exceptionalities to be prepared for some potentially difficult schooling experiences. Parents of students with exceptionalities need to assume the role of informed advocate as well as collaborative case manager on behalf of their children (Fowler, Schwartz, & Atwater, 1991). Increasingly, parents are asserting themselves within the school systems (DiGiorgio, 2004) however, many parents may or may not be very comfortable or skilled in this role (Turnbull, Turbiville, & Turnbull, 2000). Consequently, it is not surprising that this contributes to the marked stress of parenting a child with an exceptionality (Ray, 2003) and the enduring parental concern about their child's future (Nachshen, Garcin, & Minnes, 2005). The following quote is from a student who has an intellectual disability sharing her plans for the future:

> **When I am done school I want to go to college… for acting…I'll be on TV and [in] Hollywood…[I want to] live on my own and have [my] own place…yes, live by myself... sure…soon…then I will get my license.**

Parents are the one constant factor as their child moves between school grades and they need to be active and vigilant in facilitating the exchange of information between services and schools. This begins with pre-school or early intervention services and continues through to post-secondary education. Often the transitions are not smooth as evidenced with the finding that parents of kindergarten children with exceptionalities were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with the availability of services in school and the transition into elementary school than parents of children without exceptionalities (Janus, Lefort, Cameron, & Kopechanski, 2007). It would seem that as a student with an exceptionality progresses through school challenges persist as parents of elementary-aged children with exceptionalities identify four major problems: lack of communication with the school, lack of participation in decisions about their child's education, not feeling welcome in schools, and lack of knowledge on their child's progress (Wolery, 1999).

What are key factors contributing to families' confidence in teachers? Wilgosh and Scorgie (2006) found that parents of students with exceptionalities believe that the teachers that are most likely to contribute to their child's success are those who are effective, positive, patient, approachable, flexible and well-trained. Parents of students with exceptionalities want to feel supported by their child's teacher and they want to believe that the teacher accepts their child's exceptionality (Janus et al., 2007). Parents of students with exceptionalities tend to be concerned about their child's potential social isolation and negative attitudes from their peers (Leyser & Kirk, 2004); it is essential that teachers are sensitive and responsive to supporting inclusion in the classroom.

In order for educators to foster positive interactions with families, educators need to be attuned to the needs of the family, make an effort to understand parents' perspectives and support their advocacy for their children (Hutchison, 2010). In turn, parents are more likely to collaborate with educators if the school, program and teacher respect their critical role in the education process (Rogers, 2007; Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). Ideally, parent(s), teachers, and paraprofessionals need to come together as a team to share their knowledge and collaborate on a student's assessment, goal setting, intervention and evaluation (Cloninger, 2004). It is essential that in this collaborative model, families are supported in developing attainable goals for their child's future so that educational efforts are focused on making possibilities a reality (Hutchison, 2010). Overall, it has been found (Carter, Clark, Cushing, & Kennedy, 2007) that the more extensive the collaboration between schools and families, the more successful students with exceptionalities will be.

Facilitating Inclusion
in Schools and Community

Among the most positive outcomes of inclusion of students with exceptionalities are enhanced academic performance and socialization. The academic gains of students in inclusive environments do not differ significantly from those in segregated settings (Freeman, 2000; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson & Kaplan, 2007). Within inclusive environments, students with exceptionalities experience less social difficulties than in segregated environments (Brahm & Kelly, 2004; Bunch & Valeo, 2004; Wiener & Tardiff, 2004). Specifically, early intervention for students who have an intellectual disability in inclusive classrooms demonstrates an increase in their levels of compliance, they become more engaged, and there is a decrease in stereotypical behaviours and escape attempts (Bennett & Wolery, 2011; Bialas & Boon, 2010).

Young adults who have an intellectual disability, who have been included in elementary and secondary education settings, need to also experience inclusion in the community and post-secondary education settings. A school board in Southern Ontario provides a long-standing exemplary model of a work experience program for students with disabilities (aged 16-21 years) who each have a job coach who provides on-site training and social skills development for the student and acts as a liaison between the school and the workplace (Galambos & Leo, 2010). Gradually, the job coaches phase out their support and allow the student to work independently. Student graduates of the Southern Ontario program profiled above have learned functional work related skills and enhanced their strengths and interests in the community. In addition, co-workers and the community have become aware of the potential contributions that students who have an intellectual disability can make (Galambos & Leo, 2010). The following is a quote from a high school student who has a intellectual disability commenting on her job experience as a teacher's assistant:

> … well as soon as I walk into the classroom,…I wash my hands and then I get a sticker and then I go to one of the classrooms that I help out with and as soon as I walk in, the students, they'll recognize me right away and they'll run up to me and give me a hug.

The transition from secondary school into the community and workplace is rightfully demanding more attention, resources and coordination among school boards, government, and employers. This is a challenging juncture for young adults who have an intellectual disability as there is often a lack of effective transition planning on the part of high schools, and there is a scarcity of paid employment opportunities as well as shortages in community services personnel (Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Winn & Hay, 2009). The US Department of Education (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Marder, 2007) conducted a longitudinal transition study comparing students with exceptionalities who graduated in 1985 and 2000. The report indicates that improvements in post-secondary education, employment, household circumstances and social/community involvement were noted across all exceptionality categories but for those who have an intellectual disability. Specifically, those students who have an intellectual disability are less likely to report that there is an adult in the school who cares about them, to be active participants in organized activities, to be able to deal with challenges, to enjoy life or be hopeful about the future. In the area of enrollment in post-secondary education, in 1985, there were 8% of students identified as having an intellectual disability compared to 28% in 2000 (Wagner et al., 2007). Despite this increase, students who have an intellectual dscarisability remain the least likely to attend post-secondary schooling and end up in long-term sheltered workshops and vocational training centres (Butcher & Wilton, 2008).

Closer to home in Ontario, since the year 2000, there are some post-secondary institutions that are actively providing educational opportunities for young adults who have an intellectual disability (Marsh, To, Payne-Mercer, Mercer, & Ricketts, 2010; Neubert & Moon, 2006). Some colleges that offer inclusive Community Integration through Cooperative Education (CICE) programs include Sault (Sault Ste. Marie, ON), Durham (Oshawa, ON), Lambton (Sarnia, ON), and Humber (Toronto, ON) Colleges. Students who have an intellectual disability take courses (to audit or for credit) in the regular diploma stream. Courses may be modified or accommodated and the students also receive in-class support from an educational assistant and out of class tutorials. The students also complete field placements and co-op programming and after two years, receive an Ontario College Certificate in CICE. These programs have contributed to successful employment for young adults who have an intellectual disability with an average 70% job placement rate after graduation (Marsh et al., 2010). As well, these students have gained academic and employability skills, in addition to independence, self-advocacy, and self-confidence.

For
Consideration

It is past time to pull back the curtain and shine a light on some of the embedded practices that continue to permeate educational settings across this Province. These practices, born out of an ethic of caring and protectionism, and devised in an era of expertise and curing, are horrifyingly outdated in a modern world. To reach the goal of full inclusive practice and to allow for all our students to engage in a truly diverse community we must make some seemingly radical, but long overdue decisions to stop once and for all the systematic discrimination that blatantly exists within Ontario schools for students who have an intellectual disability. The following are some considerations to begin the process of shifting beliefs and altering embedded practices for educating students who have an intellectual disability in inclusive environments.

To begin, it is essential that parents/guardians assume the role of advocacy facilitator for their children who have an intellectual disability. Often, for students who have an intellectual disability, the experiences of schooling and the opportunities for self-advocacy are limited at best. The following are some guidelines for parents/guardian and their children who have an intellectual disability who are working toward self-advocacy both in school and work placement settings. Foster a relationship with the educational professionals in your child's school. Plan to keep in touch and informed by the classroom teacher, the special education/resource teacher, and the principal on a regular basis. Don't be hesitant to ask about the use of technology and how the teacher(s) are providing Differentiated Instruction - this makes learning more accessible to everyone. When it comes to reporting periods, ensure that every time a report card is sent home, so too should the Individual Education Plan (IEP). Check the Individual Education Plan to ensure that the learning goals are still appropriate for your child. If an Identification, Placement, Review Committee (IPRC) meeting is scheduled, you may request that your child attend if you think that it would be worthwhile. On a regular basis, ensure that your child has access to the entire school such as the cafeteria, computer lab, gym and library. Similarly, your child should have the opportunity to participate in the extra-curricular activities and clubs offered at the school. If your child is in high school, enquire about transition programs, and work placement or co-op placements. Ask whether school personnel assist students to find a place to work and familiarize them with the job.

Based on an Ontario research study of how selected secondary schools effectively teach students with exceptionalities as members of regular classes, Dolmage, Young, Stuart, Specht,

& Strickland (2009) offer some considerations. As an entry point, educators and members of the public need to recognize the benefits of inclusion to the other students without exceptionalities. It is therefore incumbent upon teachers to foster an inclusive environment where all students are accepted as members of a class and fully participating. Like all students, students with exceptionalities need opportunities to build social relationships outside of typical school hours so that they can develop friendships and live as active members in the community. Finally, Dolmage et al. (2009) recommend that teachers should hold high expectations for students with exceptionalities and strive to teach them more than basic life skills. The following quote is from an interview with a student who have an intellectual disability discussing his best friend:

> I have a best friend…He is nice…He helps me…A friend is good when they [a friend] stick up for you…I have friends inside of school…they help [me] out a lot… yes, we hang out [and] play on my Play Station.

Recently, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers` Association published two reports (2006, 2008) based on the perspectives of both elementary and secondary teachers. In short, regular classroom teachers are calling for a wide range of supports and services to assist them and students with exceptionalities. Such supports include professional learning opportunities, trained personnel at the board and school level to support teachers' practices, increased instructional resources such as assistive technology, reduction in class size in relation to the number of students with exceptionalities and smaller schools to support inclusive practices.

Specifically, it is recommended that teachers continue to receive professional learning opportunities that are based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction. In particular, Universal Design for Learning provides teachers with principles for planning instruction for a varied group of students (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, Smith, & Leal, 2002), whereas Differentiated Instruction allows teachers to address students' interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn, and adapt instruction to suit these differing characteristics (Tomlinson, 2001). These evidence-based strategies, resources and activities are an effective means of responding to any student's needs in a way that addresses the student's specific strengths and challenges.

Finally, since teachers feel unprepared to teach students with exceptionalities and express the desire to acquire the skills necessary to facilitate inclusion (Edmunds, 2003), coaching models of professional learning could be considered. In this form of professional learning teachers are supported as they enhance their knowledge through reflecting on their practices and engaging in goal-directed, self-regulated learning (Butler, Lauscher, Javis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004; Taylor & Pearson, 2005; Toll, 2005). For teachers to build on their theoretical knowledge and reflect on their practices, they require opportunities for

collaboration, mentoring, support, and dialogue with colleagues (Guskey, 2003; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Such opportunities can be facilitated by coaches (Gallagher & Grierson, 2007; Walpole, Justice, & Invernizzi, 2004) – in keeping with the considerations within this report, these would be inclusion coaches who would offer teachers professional learning support toward educating students who have an intellectual disability in inclusive environments.

A concluding thought…

Recently a mother shared with the authors that her 18 year old daughter who has an intellectual disability has to be walked into her school each day and dropped off at the special needs room. Her daughter, who was fully included in elementary school has "progressed" from walking to school on her own, playing in the school yard with her friends, getting herself to class, at the age of eight, to now being escorted to class at the age of 18. Policy, protectionism, embedded practice and bureaucratic convenience are only some of the factors that have combined to create an environment in which this would be considered normal. Who else do we escort into an educational setting? What message does that send to the other students, staff and public who are in that building? What message does it give the individual being escorted? We do not stop to ask ourselves why it is ok to do these things to students who have an intellectual disability; we assume that we are doing what is best for them. We need to ask; is it best for them or best for us? Certainly the challenge of developing truly inclusive practice starts with one realization, the realization that every student in a school is entitled to opportunity and access. It requires us as educators to shift the lens of special education and examine the inherently discriminatory assumptions that drive practice.

James would like to be more involved in mainstream activities at the school. He would like to join the swim team, join a band or music group, workout with the football team after school (he has done some of this), join track, join drama groups, perform in talent shows, join student council, etc. James has a lot to offer and talents that can be enhanced…I am not questioning whether or not the staff cares about my son. They do and he feels that. I am questioning his placement and programming, based on his individual needs, not what makes sense logistically for staff and management. I am seeking change and hope that might happen collaboratively with all those concerned for his well-being.

Jennifer K., parent of a student who has an Intellectual Disability

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