INCLUSION

Symposium

From Special Needs to Special Rights:

Report from OSSTF/FEESO's Symposium on Inclusive Education

May 2023

OSSTF/FEESO

Table of Contents

Greetings,

In October 2022, approximately 150 people came together in Toronto, the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabek, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, to collectively share our goals and aspirations for building a truly inclusive public education system. OSSTF/FEESO is deeply gratified b y the insights and perspectives shared at our Inclusive Education Symposium. I hope that this report, a summary of those perspectives, helps to continue this tremendously important conversation.

Inclusion can mean many things, but in this case we were specifically concerned with ensuring that students with disabilities and their families get the support they need and deserve. This is an issue that has always been close to my heart. Indeed, in the early part of my career I was a special education and life skills teacher. It is truly amazing how much our understanding of what inclusion means has changed since that time. Equally, it is humbling to think about how far our schools and the public education system still have to go in order to achieve a vision of fully inclusive education with meaningful integration.

OSSTF/FEESO began working on hosting this symposium back in 2018. At the time, the symposium was envisioned as a response to a deeply troubling rise in the number of education workers and teachers who were experiencing significant and at times life-altering injuries through their work with students often described as having 'special needs,' but who participants in our symposium came to understand as having 'special rights.'

Back in 2018 when we began working on the symposium, we were already clear that the students themselves were not the fundamental cause of workplace injuries. OSSTF/FEESO members were always clear that the real problem was lack of support, insufficient staffing levels and training, and a culture of telling workers to just 'tough it out.' We knew this was unfair to students and staff alike.

An event like this takes significant planning and care, and just as we were ready to announce the symposium, COVID-19 disrupted everyone's plans. It will come as no surprise that the pressures and lack of support education workers and teachers felt prior to COVID-19 were significantly worsened by the pandemic and have led to exhaustion, burnout for staff, students, and families. Although much delayed, it is perhaps beneficial that the symposium happened after the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it gave all participants a renewed sense of urgency in addressing core issues related to special education and inclusive education.

OSSTF/FEESO owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to the members, researchers, community organizations, school board representatives, and family members who came together to help us move forward this vitally important conversation. We sincerely hope that this report captures the spirit, tone, and priorities of all participants. We thank the generosity and insight of readers who reviewed early drafts.

Most of all, we look forward to continuing the vital and urgent conversation on inclusive education.

Karen Littlewood
President, OSSTF/FEESO

Introduction

In 2018, OSSTF/FEESO members and leadership committed to hosting a symposium on inclusive education. As with so many things, the COVID-19 pandemic forced OSSTF/FEESO to postpone the Symposium. The pandemic has given us tough lessons about mental health, feelings of inclusion, lack of resources, stress, and how it looks when education staff are left scrambling to provide the best possible educational experiences with grossly inadequate supports. Although delayed, OSSTF/FEESO was proud to host an Inclusive Education Symposium in October 2022 and found the conversations facilitated at the Symposium continued to be as urgent and essential as they had been before the pandemic.

OSSTF/FEESO's core intention in organizing the Symposium was to provide an opportunity for people with diverse knowledges about inclusive education – people with lived experience as education workers, teachers and administrators, parents, and caregivers along with community groups, and people with academic and research backgrounds – to explore major concerns and best practices related to inclusion. OSSTF/FEESO wants to be part of those conversations and is proud to have facilitated an opportunity to explore inclusive education as a community. Indeed OSSTF/FEESO and all participants at the Symposium share a strong desire to build a public school system where every child, every student enjoys a deeply felt sense of inclusion in their education journey. As a closely linked goal, OSSTF/FEESO wants every teacher and education worker to feel respected as professionals, confident in their ability to create accessible and inclusive spaces, and to return home safe and uninjured.

This report is intended to help continue the vibrant and exciting discussions at the Symposium by reflecting on the major themes and priorities identified by participants.[1]

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[1]There is robust debate and honest disagreement between people who prefer to use person-first language to describe disability and those who prefer identity-first language. Person-first language, as in the phrase, "person with a disability," is preferred by those who want to emphasize the humanity of the person in question rather than their disability. Identity-first language, such as the phrase "disabled person" is used by those who want to emphasize that disability is a product of social structures and infrastructure rather than an attribute of specific individuals. Although identity-first language is a closer fit with the social model of disability advocated for during the Symposium and in this report, this report uses person-first language to accord with the practice of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. For discussion of person-first and identity-first language, see:

Krista L. Best et al., "Language matters! The long-standing debate between identity-first language and person first language," Assistive Technology 34, no. 2 (2022); Cara Liebowitz, "I am Disabled: On Identity-First Versus People-First Language," thebodyisnotanapology, March 20, 2015, https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/i-am-disabled-on-identity-first-versus-people-first-language/; Lisa Jo Rudy, "Person-First Vs. Identity-First Language for Discussing Disabilities," verywellfamily, February 14, 2023, https://www.verywellfamily.com/focus-on-the-person-first-is-good-etiquette-2161897.

Inclusive Education

A single definition of inclusive education is notoriously elusive, although it is generally understood as distinct from special education.[2] Where special education typically refers to segregating students identified as having 'special needs' in separate schools or classrooms, inclusive education aims to bring students of various abilities together into a single classroom. In practice, this distinction is somewhat of an oversimplification. As discussed throughout this report, inclusive education is a philosophy and a goal rather than a concrete and already-existing set of policies. It is the furthest conceptual extension of a movement toward educating all students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

"When correctly instituted, full inclusion is characterized by its virtual invisibility. Students with disabilities are not segregated but dispersed into classrooms they would normally attend if they were not disabled. They are seen as full-fledged members of, not merely visitors to, the general education classroom. Special educators provide an array of services and supports in the general education classroom alongside their general education colleagues, often using strategies such as cooperative teaching in an effort to meet the needs of the pupils."[3]

Gargiulo and Bouck note, however, that this goal is not universally accepted by professional organizations advocacy groups. Critics argue that full inclusion misses the opportunity to provide tailored, cascading supports to all students, some of which may be more appropriately provided outside of a general education classroom.[4]

At least two international statements on education have been deeply influential in the process of integrating all students into general education classrooms: the Salamanca Statement and the obligations entered into under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UNCRDP).[5] Both explicitly call on education systems to do everything possible to integrate all students within inclusive spaces.

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[2]Craig Goodall, "Inclusion is a feeling, not a place: a qualitative study exploring autistic young people's conceptualisations of inclusion," International Journal of Inclusive Education 24, no. 12 (2020/10/14 2020): 1286, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1523475.

[4]Richard M. Gargiulo and Emily C. Bouck, Special Education in Contemporary Society, 7th Edition ed. (Sage Publications, 2019), 68. https://sagepub.vitalsource.com/books/9781544373683.

[5]Gargiulo and Bouck, Special Education, 69.

OSSTF/FEESO

"… regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system." (Salamanca Statement: ix)

"The challenge confronting the inclusive school is that of developing a child-centred pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disadvantages and disabilities. The merit of such schools is not only that they are capable of providing quality education to all children; their establishment is a crucial step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes, in creating welcoming communities and in developing an inclusive society." (Salamanca Statement: 6-7)

Debates continue about how to achieve these goals and how inclusive education should look, but there is nonetheless growing consensus that inclusion is not about place or program: it is about the how students experience themselves, their peers, and their education journey. As Goodall argues: "Inclusion is being able to be oneself by being respected, valued and accepted by teachers and peers for the person who they are. It is about having relationships with others, being happy, safe and being part of the school community rather than being the outsider looking in."[6]

The goal of inclusion, therefore, is a feeling, a sense of belonging, existing alongside legal rights to access a full range of learning opportunities. Throughout the Symposium, participants emphasized the fundamental importance of making meaningful connections, of taking the student's perspective, and valuing the whole child and all of their intersecting identities, communities and strengths. In the context of crowded classrooms, under-staffing, increasingly complex mental health challenges, achieving this goal requires reflexivity, stable, predictable and sufficient funding, training, and above all, mutual support and collaboration.

OSSTF/FEESO is deeply committed to moving forward our collective ability to achieve inclusion as a felt sense of belonging for every student. The Inclusion Symposium is a preliminary contribution to this conversation, but it is one of which we are deeply proud and we are honoured by the 170 people who gave their time and energy to participate in the day. All participants shared in conversation that was at times frank and critical. It was also deeply heartfelt and full of equal parts compassion, frustration, and hope.

The symposium was structured as follows. After an introduction and welcome from OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood, participants heard a keynote address from Dr. Jean Clinton. It would be difficult to overstate the impact of Dr. Clinton's message about the importance of connection and the need to recognize how intersecting identities – race, class, and gender as much as disability – influence whether students are cognitively and neurologically prepared to learn (including, of course neurodiverse students). Dr. Clinton further emphasized the importance of developing connections, modeling emotional regulation and myriad other inclusive practices to create the conditions needed for learning.

Dr. Jean Clinton, addressing the Symposium via Zoom

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[6]Ingrid Lewis et al., "Time to stop polishing the brass on the Titanic: moving beyond 'quick-and-dirty' teacher education for inclusion, towards sustainable theories of change," International Journal of Inclusive Education (2019): 723, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1624847; Simon Finkelstein, Umesh Sharma, and Brett Furlonger, "The inclusive practices of classroom teachers: a scoping review and thematic analysis," International Journal of Inclusive Education (2019): 1, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1572232; Ellen Kakhuta Materechera, "Inclusive education: why it poses a dilemma to some teachers," International Journal of Inclusive Education 24, no. 7 (2020/06/06 2020): 771, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1492640; David Mitchell, "Inclusive Education is a Multi-Faceted Concept," Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal 5, no. 1 (2015): 12; UNESCO, The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education (Paris: UNESCO, 1994), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427; United Nations, Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (New York: United Nations, 13 December 2006), https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/61/106.

Dr. Clinton's address was followed by two panel discussions featuring:

- Panel 1: Dr. Gillian Parekh, Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Disability Studies in Education (Tier 2) within the Faculty of Education at York • Dr. Timothy Ross, Scientist, Holland Bloorview, Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. This panel explored issues related to transportation infrastructure, placement and the long-term impacts of the stigmatizing power of labels and bureaucratic hoops.
- Panel 2: Dr. Anne Marie Duncan, Superintendent Student Achievement, KPRDSB • Karen Littlewood, President OSSTF/FEESO • Dr. Deanna Swift, School Mental Health Ontario. This panel delved into considerations related to transitions and transition planning along with mental health resources for students and staff. As part of this discussion panelists emphasized the value of well-informed but flexible planning for students and their academic pathways.

Panel 1: Dr. Ross and Dr. Parekh

Panel 2: Dr. Swift, Dr. Duncan, and Karen Littlewood

OSSTF/FEESO would like to thank the panelists and acknowledge the value of their time and insights, which they shared generously. In any event such as this an effort is made to ensure all voices are heard. We acknowledge that panels did not represent all groups. OSSTF/FEESO's believes that Symposium participants were able to bring a broad cross-section of backgrounds and experiences to the discussion.

Following the panel discussion, participants were invited to engage in small-group discussions. To help facilitate discussion, participants were assigned to tables based on their role in the education system. The tables included:

- Board staff and Trustees – two tables
- Community Group representatives – two tables
- Labour Affiliates – two tables
- Teachers – eight tables
- Education workers – seven tables (five tables working in English; two tables working in French)

The keynote address and panel discussions were recorded and transcribed, while members of two OSSTF/FEESO's committees (Educational Services and Health & Safety) and Provincial Office staff took notes during the table discussions. This report represents a collective effort to analyze and describe the content of the Symposium using those records. Details about that process can be found in Appendix A: Methodology. While the Symposium was not organized around a single research question, participants were provided with guiding questions to help facilitate small-group discussions. Those questions can be found in Appendix C: Table Discussion Guiding Questions.

This report is organized as follows. First, there is a discussion of the elements of a big-picture vision for inclusive education that emerged through the Symposium, as informed by relevant scholarly and grey literature. That discussion will be followed by an examination of five major themes:

- Program Excellence
- Barriers to Inclusion
- Health and Safety
- Professional Practice
- Resources

Based on those themes, a concluding section provides a series of recommendations for consideration. OSSTF/FEESO has internal democratic processes for approving policies, so the report's recommendations do not necessarily represent commitments from the Federation. We will make our own commitments clear in a separate, forthcoming document in order to allow these recommendations to stand alone as

reflections of the Symposium itself.[7]

Throughout, this report strives to attend to the perspectives and needs of students, staff, families, the community and the public education system as a whole. It would be impossible to fully do justice to the multiple threads and lines of thought raised by participants through the Symposium. Claiming to have a full and complete vision for inclusive education would mean jumping to the end of a conversation that will be ongoing for at least the near future. Instead, this report is intended as OSSTF/FEESO's attempt to rejoin a conversation that is already happening in schools, homes and academic sites across Ontario and around the world. We take that responsibility seriously, for the sake of our members and our students.

OSSTF/FEESO's Inclusion Symposium could not have happened without the work and commitment of all the participants who attended. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge the considerable contribution of a number of individuals and organizations. These include:

Dr. Jean Clinton
Dr. Anne Marie Duncan
Dr. Gillian Parekh
Dr. Tim Ross
Dr. Deanna Swift
Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
Autism Ontario
Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators
OSSTF/FEESO Educational Services Committee
OSSTF/FEESO Health and Safety/*Workplace Safety and Insurance Act Committee*
School Mental Health Ontario
Urban Alliance on Race Relations
Ontario Federation of Labour
l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association
Ontario Teachers' Federation
The Canadian Teachers' Federation

[7]For current OSSTF/FEESO policies on inclusive education, see Appendix C.

Vision and Themes

Academic research – as well as robust anecdotal evidence from testimonies offered at the Symposium – confirms that integrating students with a wide range of abilities and characteristics into classroom settings leads to positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes for all students regardless of ability and whether they are neurodivergent.[8] As panelist Dr. Ross argued:

> "The mainstreaming in classrooms that started back in the 1960s, creating that presence of disability, allowing other children to appreciate and enjoy the diversity of disability in their classrooms, that exposure has tremendous value because that exposure can be carried forward into adulthood. It can create expectations of disability being present, and therefore in adulthood as we grow older, we question, Why the hell aren't people living with disability here? So, you know, we need that presence, it enriches our communities. When we don't have that presence, the community is at a loss. They're at a loss of diversity, they're at a loss of appreciation and understanding. That exposure is, in my opinion, necessary."[9]

However, integration and mainstreaming are the same as inclusion. Inclusion requires making concrete changes to staffing complements, pedagogy and planning, classroom set-up, school infrastructure, and above all changes in mindset about how we understand difference and diversity. Reflecting the importance of changing mindsets, Dr. Clinton recommended a shift in language that resonated very strongly with many participants. She suggested that we should move away from describing students as having 'special needs'. Instead, she urged attendees to use the term "special rights." This was not merely a rhetorical manoeuvre: it calls attention to the fact that "our precious ones having special rights, as being rights-bearing individuals."[10]

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[8]Finkelstein, Sharma, and Furlonger, "Inclusive Practices," 2; Mitchell, "Inclusive," 13.
[9]Dr. Ross, Panel 1.
[10]Dr. Clinton, Keynote.

OSSTF/FEESO

For me as -- well, just hearing you say special rights. I am here -- I'm representing an organization, but if you truly ask me who I'm representing, I'm representing my child. And when they were first diagnosed with ASD and apraxia of speech and developmental coordination disorder and my first question was, you know, when they talked about a disability, I said, So my child has special needs? And it didn't sit right with me. And when you said special rights, something in me said yes. That sounds so much better than special needs.[11]

As the conversation continued, it became obvious that as one shifts from special needs to special rights, a number of other key facets of the education journey come into focus:

○ The importance of **intersectionality**. It is deeply important that we recognize how barriers experienced due to racism, colonial relations toward First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, class and economic differences, gender identity, and/or membership in 2SLGBTQI+ communities interact with (dis) ability to create diverse and concrete barriers for students depending on their individual combination of identities and histories.

○ **Identity** itself becomes important. A key theme emphasized in this report will be the importance of connection. Building connections with students, colleagues, and families alike depends on recognizing and valuing the right of every person to have all aspects of their identity seen and affirmed. For students with special rights, this means paying attention to the specific ways in which exclusions threaten their sense of identity. In panelist Dr. Parekh's words: "I think that my first wish would be that access be a core principle in classroom, school, and pedagogical design and that school can be a place where students can develop a positive disability identity, or that identity formation can take place." Indeed, many participants spoke of the importance of not reducing a student's complex and multifaceted identity to a disability label or educational plan. The goal should be to ensure supports are in place to promote identity development alongside academic achievement.

○ As we continue to grapple with COVID-19 and the aftereffects of two years of lockdowns and isolation, many expressed a deep desire for a renewed sense of **community**. Of course, in terms of inclusive education this focused on the need to pay particular attention to how much students with special rights feel included in their school community. For many education workers, however, the need for community was also palpable. They spoke of feeling excluded practically – not being included in meetings and planning, for example – and materially, through shamefully low wages. The goal, as Dr. Clinton noted (citing the work of Barry Finlay), ought to be for everyone to work together to create "pervasive cultures of caring" in Ontario schools.

○ Finally, shifting from special needs to special rights re-emphasizes that staff, administration, School Boards, community groups, the Ministry of Education, and families all bear a **shared responsibility** to protect the feeling of inclusion and well-being that special rights-bearing students deserve and that are essential to their educational journey. Of course, all stakeholders come to the table with a different amount of power or influence. Therefore, each person in the education system has a responsibility proportionate to their power within the system to do what they can to promote full inclusion for special-rights bearing individuals.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the conceptual and practical implications of a "special rights" orientation. Instead, it reflects a few of the ways that this way of thinking appeared during the Symposium. The reader is encouraged to reflect on the implications for their own role in the education system and to share the results of those reflections with OSSTF/FEESO and allies. In the meantime, intersectionality, identity, community and responsibility provide a foundation for starting to articulate a comprehensive vision for inclusive education. Inclusion will be achieved when every student enjoys a feeling of belonging, where all parts of their identity – including those that meet intersecting forms of social and economic barriers – are welcome and celebrated. To achieve this vision, all stakeholders have a shared responsibility to build a community dedicated to the wellbeing of all students, with particular attention to those bearing special rights.

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[11]Participant.

As described in more detail in Appendix A, transcripts and notes were coded using ten initial categories, each with a number of subcategories. Themes articulated within those categories have been further distilled into the major sections of this report. However, in analyzing the data four cross-cutting themes also emerged. Each plays a role in moving us toward a vision of inclusive education that is sensitive to intersectionality, identity, community, and responsibility. Because these themes appear across all five of the report's major sections they are worth making explicit.

Ending reliance on the deficit model of disability

The shift from "special education" to "inclusive education" reflects an important shift in how disability is understood. Special education programs and discourse reflect what is called the "medical model" of disability, also referred to as a "deficit model." This framework understands disability as highly individualized and reflective of something wrong with or deficient about the individual in question. Disability advocates have demonstrated that this conceptualization is both dehumanizing and offensive. It also ignores fundamental social realities and how those systemic processes, infrastructure, and everyday practices impede some people's ability to fully participate in economic, cultural, and social life.

A preferable framework is known as the "social model" of disability. This framework draws attention to how ableist discourses, design practices and infrastructure work to exclude individuals whose minds and/or bodies operate differently than what is assumed to be normal or typical. The difference is deeply important. When difference is understood as a deficiency, then it becomes pathologized. In turn, pathologizing difference orients interventions toward curing students of disorders rather than opening pathways for full inclusion on students' own terms. Further, deficit-based responses tend to be motivated, as Colorado and Janzen argue, toward efficiency and maintaining order, at the expense of the needs and desires of those disabled by social structures, processes, and practices.[12]

As panelist Gillian Parekh, noted: "I think that when we talked earlier a little bit about how sometimes disability can be addressed or approached as a deficit within a school, like, even in terms of how we speak about students within schools, I think it becomes vulnerable to kind of colluding with or adapting or overlaying other kinds of deficit ideologies." In this way, the deficit model of disability helps structure an orientation toward order, hierarchy and bureaucracy at the expense of identity, community and intersectional understandings of exclusion.

Intersectionality

It would be hard to overstate the importance that Symposium participants placed on intersectionality, which is why it appears both as part of an overall vision for inclusive education and a major cross-cutting theme. In her keynote address, for example, Dr. Clinton pointed to the results of a bullying study in which she participated that found racialized students, students with special rights, and 2SLGBTQ+ students experienced higher rates of trauma due to bullying. Indeed, as she argued, once you have exposure to one kind of othering and exclusion, your risk of experiencing other kinds becomes much higher. Whether exclusions then manifest as trauma and all the impediments trauma creates for learning, or they manifest as barriers to needed supports, the result is the same. Intersecting forms of marginalization act in direct opposition to our shared desire to create the felt experience of inclusion for all students and staff, regardless of identity.

"Perhaps it is the resolutely special-education history of discourses around inclusive education that has encouraged us to look so doggedly at forms of pedagogy as ways of dealing with difference. It is only recently, as the focus has shifted to the intersections of a range of personal, social and cultural characteristics – disability, ethnicity, gender, class, income level, care status, and others – that we have begun to appreciate a broader context to the travails that might be encountered by children and young people at school and the need for community to be cultivated."[13]

Bureaucracy: supports and stigma

Participants noted the double-edged nature of bureaucracy. On the one hand, participation in the bureaucratic requirements for assessments and obtaining the accompanying labels can be necessary for ensuring students receive the supports they need. On the other hand, many noted the stigmatizing effects that labeling often has on students. For example, Dr. Parekh described the stigma experienced by students whose accommodations employ "special education" labels in a very literal way.

"We also talk about students who are given technology from special education, special education-funded technology, and they are excited about the promise that that accommodation can offer. But if that technology comes with a giant label on it from special education, you'll be hard-pressed to find a teenager pull it out of their backpack in English class to use it."[14]

A table discussant at one of the French-language tables called attention to the important difference between process-centred policies and child or family-focused policies. Some argued that focus on process reflects a business model and that a business orientation loses sight of the humans involved. It puts silos and procedures in the place of careful attention to the actual people involved. As a result, teachers and education workers "all too often find themselves caught between the needs of their students and the realities of educational conditions."[15] For some, this means that full inclusion without proper supports goes beyond undercutting the ability of teachers and education workers to do their job; it jeopardizes students' felt sense of belonging for the sake of belonging-on-paper.

[12]Cara Colorado and Melanie D. Janzen, "A critical discourse analysis of school-based behavioural policies: Reconceptualizing understandings of responses to student (mis)behaviours," Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy 195 (2021): 65, https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/69841.

[13]Gary Thomas and Natasha Macnab, "Intersectionality, diversity, community and inclusion: untangling the knots," International Journal of Inclusive Education (2019): 230, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1645892.

[14] Dr. Parekh, Panel 1

[15] Andrée Gacoin, The Landscape of Inclusion (Vancouver, BC: British Columbia Teachers' Federation, January 2020), 1, https://bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=56089.

Nothing about us without us

"Nothing about us without us" is an important slogan, often invoked within disability rights and disability justice movements, although it has been used by a wide range of groups. Fundamentally, "nothing about us without us" is a call to respect the democratic rights and moral autonomy of those most affected by a given policy or framework. In the case of the Symposium, the call for democratic inclusion took two tracks.

The first track affirmed that policies aimed at reducing ableist barriers and promoting inclusion should both include and centre those who are disabled by existing policies and infrastructure. This applies to board and system-level policies as well as planning for individual students. It also refers to the lack of transparency in much decision-making. This lack of transparency hinders the ability of families and staff to advocate with and on behalf of students.

The second track, which will be elaborated further in discussions of collaboration, below, affirmed the importance of including all staff in the work to create a "pervasive culture of caring." Education Assistants and Early Childhood Educators were particularly aware of being excluded from important decisions, despite the fact that they often work most closely with the student in consideration.

Summary

Before turning to the five broad themes raised at the Symposium, it is worth restating how OSSTF/FEESO sees the context for those themes and how we hope the reader will approach the rest of this report.

Fundamentally, we hope that the issues discussed will be thought of in relation to a broad vision for inclusive education. To restate:

"Inclusion will be achieved when every student enjoys a feeling of belonging, where all parts of their identity – including those that meet intersecting forms of social and economic barriers – are welcome and celebrated. To achieve this vision, all stakeholders have a shared responsibility to build a community dedicated to the wellbeing of all students, with particular attention to those bearing special rights."

That is the broad vision. We know that achieving this vision will require fully shifting to the social model of disability, attending to intersectionality, rethinking the relationship of inclusive education to bureaucratic requirements, and taking concrete steps to ensure all voices are heard.

[16]Goodall, "Inclusion," 1304.

[17]Andreas Köpfer and Edda Óskarsdóttir, "Analysing support in inclusive education systems – a comparison of inclusive school development in Iceland and Canada since the 1980s focusing on policy and in-school support," International Journal of Inclusive Education (2019): 876, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1624844.

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Program Excellence

Much of the Symposium involved moving between discussions of identifiable, concrete interventions and efforts to develop a shared, big-picture vision of inclusive education. In this report, we hope to capture both ends of that spectrum under the general category of Program Excellence. Goodall's vision for inclusive education is an excellent starting point for connecting big-picture thinking to concrete practices. She understands inclusion as: "being able to be oneself by being respected, valued and accepted by teachers and peers for the person who they are. It is about having relationships with others, being happy, safe and being part of the school community rather than being the outsider looking in."[16]

Kopfer and Oskarsdottir argue that ensuring all students are able to learn has tended to be thought of as either a technical problem or a cultural one. Viewing inclusion as a technical problem implies that there are technical solutions that may simply require making adjustments within existing structures. A cultural approach suggests that a comprehensive transformation of how schools support students might be required.[17] The cultural approach fits well with the shift from medical/deficit models of disability to the social model described earlier. However, ambivalence about technical versus cultural approaches is not a merely academic concern. To the extent that policy-makers have not achieved a full transition to the social model of disability and committed to cultural transformation, the policy documents guiding school administrators, teachers, and education workers can offer confusing and at times conflicting direction, as Colorado and Janzen found in their analysis of Manitoba's policy framework.[18]

> *"The lack of common values and approaches results in competing beliefs, fractured purposes, and inconsistent tactics for understanding students and engaging with them. The result is that important guiding values such as inclusion, civil rights, and belonging risk sounding like an after-thought to the policy guidelines. If the goal is to guide educators through policy directives that uphold common guiding principles, this commonality is absent."* (Colorado and Janzen: 72)

In keeping with a social approach to disability, researchers have begun to articulate elements of how a major transformation of school culture might look. Goodall, for example, identifies three elements that ought to be fundamental to any vision of inclusive education:

- The definition of inclusive education used should include reference to pedagogical, social and policy aims.
- There should be a clear recognition that inclusion is an ongoing process, not an end-state where we can stop looking for ways to deepen and improve inclusive practices.
- Echoing Dr. Clinton's 'special rights' framing at the Symposium, students' learning should be driven by commitments to equality, social justice, and students' rights.[19]

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[18]Colorado and Janzen, "A critical discourse analysis."
[19]Goodall, "Inclusion," 1286.

In his important article, Mitchell identifies ten areas where inclusion needs to be given particular focus. These areas are captured in Table 1.

Table 1. Ten criteria for inclusive education[2]

Facet	Criterion
Vision	"Educators at all levels of the system are committed to the underlying philosophy of inclusive education and express a vision for inclusive education in legislation, regulations and policy documents at all levels of the education system."
Placement	"All learners with special education needs are educated in age-appropriate classes in their neighbourhood schools, regardless of their ability."
Adapted Curriculum	"The standard curriculum is adapted or modified so that it suits the abilities and interests of all learners. In the case of learners with special educational needs, this means that the curriculum content is differentiated so as to be age-appropriate, but pitched at a developmentally appropriate level."
Adapted Assessment	"The content of assessment reflects any adaptations to the curriculum. In addition, the means of assessment is adapted to take account of the abilities of all learners. Assessment of learners with special educational needs results in individual educational plans."
Adapted Teaching	"As appropriate to the composition of classes and the needs of individual learners, the teaching strategies described by [What really works in special and inclusive education: Using evidence-based teaching strategies, by David Mitchell are adopted."
Acceptance	"The educational system and the school recognise the right of learners with special educational needs to be educated in general education classrooms, to receive equitable resourcing and to be accepted socially and emotionally."
Access	"Adequate physical access to and within classrooms is provided, with such features as ramps and lifts, adapted toilets, doorways that are sufficiently wide to take wheelchairs, and adequate space for wheelchairs to be manoeuvred in classrooms. In addition, the design and arrangement of furniture, acoustics, lighting, temperature and ventilation take account of individual learners' needs."
Support	"A team of professionals provides adequate and appropriate support for teachers. Ideally, this team consists of (a) a general educator, receiving advice and guidance from (b) a specialist adviser, access to (c) appropriate therapists and other professionals (e.g., psychologists, hearing advisers, social workers, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists), and (d) assistant teachers/paraprofessionals, learning support assistants or teacher aides. The composition of such teams varies according to the needs of the particular learners. Teams should receive appropriate training to carry out their responsibilities. The school should adopt a response to intervention model."
Resources	"Adequate and appropriate equipment and levels of staffing are provided."
Leadership	"Those who are in leadership positions show a strong commitment to accepting and celebrating diversity, a sensitivity to cultural issues, and set high, but realistic standards."

[20]Adapted from: Mitchell, "Inclusive." See pages: 12, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23, and 25-27.

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Participants' comments at the Symposium reflected many of the requirements posed by Goodall, Mitchell and Köpfer and Óskarsdóttir. For example, Dr. Parekh highlighted the importance of connecting a vision of inclusive education to specific practices within classrooms.

> "So that's where it comes back to. Sure, you know, inclusive practice works, but we really, really, really need to understand what we're doing in those classrooms. How are we ensuring that disability is welcomed in that space not just by the teacher but by the other students in that space. How is that community taught? How is disability represented? All of those pieces and where are opportunities for students with disabilities to be together to organize, to share, right. It doesn't necessarily mean that has to be eliminated. Inclusion should not be assimilation. It should not be that all kids come together and have to be like each other, but that those spaces are created to support and foster for each."[21]

In the table discussions, participants also emphasized the importance of a change in mindset, noting that when we put students' needs at the centre of consideration, we can envision ways to identify and reduce ableism. Others emphasized that such a mindset is part of recognizing that schools are not businesses and should not be run as such. Schools are fundamentally human institutions and ought to attend to needs on a case-by-case basis as much as possible.

Through the panels and table discussions, four main themes related to program excellence emerged: planning, stability and predictability, meaningful interventions, and inclusive practices.

Planning

More will be said about the importance of collaboration in the section on Professional Practice, starting on page 20. In relation to program development, participants emphasized the importance of attending to who is present in planning contexts. This speaks to two of the cross-cutting themes identified above: nothing about us without us and finding the proper level of bureaucratic oversight to ensure supports without stigma.

Fundamentally, participants wanted planning to be the product of a genuine team effort.

Some told us that they were skeptical of how well administrators understand the day-to-day practices of inclusive education and the realities of working with individual students. Comprehensive planning therefore ought to include education workers in discussions and decision-making rather than just leaving them to take direction after the fact. It also needs to be a transparent process so parents and advocates know who to communicate with about concerns. This is particularly relevant during student transitions as some found that schools could be dismissive of existing plans for incoming students. Above all, planning processes also need to reflect the student-centred and cultural shifts described above.

Stability and Predictability

Attending to the somewhat bigger picture, multiple participants emphasized the need for sufficient, stable and predictable funding. In her opening remarks, OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood remarked that:

> "It's invigorating to be here focussed on one of the most integral core issues in our education system. From pre-kindergarten to post-secondary, every single student in this province deserves to be successful and to have the opportunity to reach their full potential. OSSTF/FEESO is deeply committed to making this a reality for all students, and we know that we can only get there through a fully funded, inclusive public education system. … [That] means ensuring every school and campus have the resources that students need in order to be successful on an ongoing, long-term basis."

Specific attention was drawn to the importance of good management at the school level and protecting programs that are currently in place and working well. Not surprisingly, stability and predictability in funding were tied to the importance of well-staffed programs that meet core needs. Planning and supports also need to be ongoing, not just 'clicking a box.' One participant summed it up best when they noted that we need to "stop building the plane while we are flying," reflecting a view that the network of supports available needs careful planning and evaluation.

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[21] Dr. Parekh, Panel 1.

Meaningful Interventions

Thanks to Dr. Clinton's highly informative keynote, panelists and participants gave a great deal of thought to the connection between the context or setting that schools and staff create and the extent to which students' basic neurological processes are primed and available for learning. Recall the importance of identity and intersectionality as a cross-cutting theme. With reference to intersectionality and neurological readiness, Dr. Clinton emphasized that teachers and education workers need to "regulate to relate to reason." That is, education professionals need to model good emotional regulation to show students how to calm their limbic systems out of the fight, flight, or freeze response a student may experience.[22] Regulating allows for adults to relate to students, to build connection, which then allows for learning to happen.

> "But so in order to feel connection, clarity, and control, we need to be thinking also, are we creating safety? Are we creating opportunities where we feel psychologically, emotional, physically, socially safe? When we feel safe, our amygdala is quiet. Our thinking brain can be activated. When we feel safe and we also feel significant--the three great Ss. When we feel significant--so this would be a wonderful dialogue, a wonderful conversation. Significant means you feel valued and valuable. You feel loved and lovable. So, you know, there's a difference between feeling loved -- so I love you, I love you, I love you is very helpful for kids to hear. But they also very much need to feel that deep inside they have something to contribute."[23]

There are no shortcuts for this work. Like all meaningful interventions, modeling emotional regulation needs to be consistent and those doing the modeling need to be adequately supported themselves.

In relation to ensuring students feel safe, significant, and loved, Dr. Clinton also reminded the Symposium that within a classroom, the teacher sets the weather. Naturally, this applies to all of the adults in the building. Staff need to consistently model strong emotional skills despite the myriad challenges to calmness that most classrooms involve. In response, one participant noted that administrators set the weather for the whole school, pointing to the importance of a whole-building approach to creating cultures of caring.

In addition to attending to the importance of regulating and relating, a number of themes related to meaningful interventions became clear:

- Transition planning is extremely important. Plans are often made for the transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9, but many students will need them for transitions between all grades, some will need plans for transitioning from class to class and even for transitioning from activity to activity.
- Integrating students into general education classrooms cannot be allowed to come at the expense of teaching life skills. Some participants expressed concern that students are shortchanged if they are not given structured guidance on day-to-day activities.
- Maintaining high expectations is extremely important. There is significant research demonstrating the harmful power of low expectations. The goal is to uplift all students to their full potential, not to teach down to those judged to have less promise.
- All interventions need to be culturally relevant for the student. This is a part of relating and key to meeting students where they are.

To conclude this section, it is worth turning again to the major cross-cutting themes identified earlier. Issues of identity, intersectionality, bureaucracy and authority need to be thought through and worked out at all levels. This means ensuring that big-picture visions for education and concrete practices are part of an intentional shift toward a culture of caring and inclusion.

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[22] "Difficult" exists on a spectrum. Loud noises and fluorescent lights might be difficult for some but not others. Similarly, Dr. Clinton emphasized that what some experience as merely challenging, others experience as traumatic and paralyzing. This spectrum is heavily influenced by overlapping experiences of racism, sexism, ablism, homophobia, transphobia, colonialism, and other forms of exclusion.

[23] Dr. Clinton, Keynote.

Professional Practice

Considerations of professional practice return us to a number of themes already raised. Key among those is the importance of shifting away from a deficit model of disability. The value of this shift is becoming increasingly well-established in the literature on inclusive education. As noted elsewhere in this report, Colorado and Janzen argue that what gets labeled misbehaviour expresses a concern about deviance or inconvenience. A much more productive approach is to recognize misbehaviour as a form of communication, protest, learning, and/or dialogue.[24] Thomas and Macnab describe this as an attribution error. Most people default to understanding an individual's personal characteristics as fully accounting for their behaviour (called 'dispositional attributions'). Instead, we should emphasize the situation in which people find themselves as directly informing their behaviour (known as 'situational attribution').[25] To understand misbehaviour, teachers, education workers, and policy makers need to put less emphasis on the "putative within-person attributes supposed to hold individuals back, and more on relationships in a social system which might be serving to include to exclude those individuals and inhibit their progress."[26]

Throughout the Symposium, this approach to behaviour was closely linked to the importance of relationship-building. Strong relationships between staff and students, staff and administration, and schools and families was seen as essential to increasing our collective focus on social context and what students are trying to communicate through what gets labeled as misbehaviour. Colorado and Janzen recommend that, "[to] equitably support all learners, learning environments must be crafted to build on culturally competent social contracts that allow children to see purpose and value in the classroom."[27] While addressing physical accessibility and accessible infrastructure is essential for creating inclusive schools, Colorado and Janzen's culturally competent social contracts bears directly on the question of professional practices, which will be more closely examined in this section.

Following a discussion of professional judgement, this section will look specifically at the working conditions of teachers and education workers, including the barriers they face to collaboration and their training needs. Rather than include a separate section about administration, this portion of the report tries to highlight what many described as a lack of leadership in their schools. Administrators are a key part of resource distribution as well as fostering an inclusive culture in schools overall. Nonetheless, teachers and education workers at the Symposium repeatedly stressed that they feel under-supported and at times actively undermined by school administration.

[24] Colorado and Janzen, "A critical discourse analysis," 64.
[25] Thomas and Macnab, "Intersectionality," 230.
[26] Thomas and Macnab, "Intersectionality," 232.
[27] Colorado and Janzen, "A critical discourse analysis," 66-67.

Professional Judgement

Before focusing on specific challenges facing education staff, it is worth considering professional judgement more generally. In Ontario, the scope of teachers' professional judgement is established in Policy/Program Memorandum 155 (PPM 155), although that document focuses largely on assessment. A broader conception of professional judgement in relation to inclusive education (and one that is relevant to education workers as well as teachers) might focus on two key elements:

- The right of all education professionals to fully determine their practice within their profession's established scope and to be supported in doing so.
- The responsibility to engage in professional practice reflexively, which means to examine privilege, barriers, and to thoughtfully consider who is experiencing a felt sense of belonging, who is not, and why.

So we need to, you know, acknowledge that everybody has these biases, okay? So don't get up in arms thinking, I don't have that bias. I am no ableist--because that's--we do. I have been studying this for years, and I still catch myself in certain ways. But the point is, reflect on that ableism. Use it to uncover ableist arrangements in your classrooms, services, curricula, school sites, school buildings, and so on. Use it. Reflect on it. So we use--you know, reflexivity is kind of systematic reflection that we incorporate into research. I think we can incorporate reflexivity, that type of logic into many other practices where you are actually regularly and frequently carrying out these reflections, you know. Kitchen table reflexivity, having conversations about this, chat about it. Chat about the--you know, ableism is stubborn, and we need to be more stubborn because unsettling its normalcy is a remarkable challenge, so that's--you know, everybody needs to be involved.[28]

Almost all the discussion tables emphasized the centrality of respect and reflexivity in professional practice. Both are essential parts of creating cultures of caring and inclusive schools.

Being respected can take many forms, such as being involved in developing safety plans and information sharing. Showing respect can also involve providing proper supports, taking concerns about safety seriously, and reducing workloads (including by reducing class sizes). Professional practice is incompatible with overwork, belittlement, and silos.

Education Workers

Perhaps better than any other stakeholders, Education Workers are well positioned to articulate the importance of fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Several participants emphasized that Education Assistants (EAs) and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) are often the first we think of in relation to supporting students with disabilities, but all staff, including custodians, bus drivers, clerical, and cafeteria workers, are part of building a culture of caring. Ultimately, two dominant themes emerged from education worker comments. First, that education workers – Education Assistants (EAs) and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in particular– work most directly with students and therefore know those students as well or better than anyone else in the building. Second, despite working most directly with students with special rights, EAs and ECEs have the least access to consistently and predictably shared information. This makes it hard to do their jobs and can have direct impacts on worker safety.

In their analysis of recent research on education workers in schools (they use the term 'paraprofessionals'), Giangreco et al. found that schools face six key challenges in hiring and retaining staff. These are:
- Lack of respect
- Lack of training
- Lack of administrative support
- Poorly defined job descriptions
- Low pay and benefits
- Limited opportunities for advancement[29] (Giangreco et al.: 44)

Low pay is a particularly difficult reality for many education workers. Education Assistants in particular bear the highest likelihood of injury in school environments, but receive among the lowest wages.[30] As a result, many balance multiple jobs just to make ends meet.

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[28] Dr. Ross, Panel 1.

[29] Michael F. Giangreco, Jesse C. Suter, and Mary Beth Doyle, "Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Schools: A Review of Recent Research," Article, Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation 20, no. 1 (01//Jan-Mar2010 2010): 44, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=48361826&site=ehost-live.

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The Symposium also heard about problems related to scheduling and timetabling and their impacts on education workers' ability to do their job. Participants told us that:

- Scheduling should be based on the skills and abilities of the education worker and what is best for the student; too often it appears as though scheduling prioritizes filling up someone's timetable.
- Often EAs get pulled away from their primary responsibilities to help with Junior Kindergarten toileting; teachers should do what they can verbally and if something hands-on is needed there should already be a plan in place that is communicated to the whole school.
- EAs are short-staffed, so often have to double up or work with more students than is appropriate; this includes having to cover for other staff on occasion. This has a negative impact on students, but also means that EAs are not taking breaks.
- Moreover, like teachers, short-staffing and scheduling problems leave education workers feeling like they are simply having all the extra stuff downloaded onto them. One participant noted, for example, that being asked to leave the classroom to make photocopies is not a good use of their time or skills.

Throughout the Symposium education workers repeatedly emphasized their strong desire to be included in planning processes and information exchange. They told us that they need to be included in regular meetings between Administration and Special Education teachers. In addition, they feel excluded from general staff meetings, even though those are often where staff receive important updates about safety. Often the implicit hope is that these updates will simply get passed along by the teachers, which creates additional work for teachers and jeopardizes the safety of education workers.

Even when officially invited, many education workers feel a de facto exclusion from staff meetings. Often they are held on unpaid time, which shows a lack of respect for work-life boundaries generally, but for the many education workers working multiple jobs, their schedules simply do not allow them the option of staying behind for unpaid meetings. More often, though, education workers are simply not invited. In some cases, the solution might be to ensure collective agreements guarantee the inclusion of education workers on paid time. In the meantime, some noted that even having administrators check in on them occasionally would help them feel like a valued part of the team and access necessary supports.[31]

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[30] WSIB/CSPAAT Ontario, FIPP Access Request #19-173, (Toronto, ON: WSIB/CSPAAT Ontario, 2019).

[31] There is a fine line to navigate here. While participants in the Symposium noted that check-ins would be a valued indication of support and collaboration, OSSTF/FEESO also hears from members who report that overly-frequent or intrusive check-ins can undermine workers' professional identity.

Teachers[32]

A dominant theme that came through from teacher perspectives, is the tension they face between a felt desire to create and maintain inclusive classrooms, but lack of ability to do so given insufficient training, resources, and supports. At the same time, several Symposium participants blamed teachers for pushing back against destreaming.[33] As an Educational Assistant put it:

> "We've made a lot of progress over time with an inclusive program, but teachers are a problem. Because it's not inclusive. They're integrated. But the teachers aren't programmed for the kids. They're supposed to, but EAs are the ones pulling resources for them. The teacher says "I don't know how to do this" so the EA trains them."

On the one hand, teachers are often blamed for not doing more to create inclusive classrooms, and often that is an important criticism. On the other hand, though, as more and more gets downloaded onto teachers, they experience overwhelm, burnout, and guilt for not doing everything. This dynamic is well documented in research on inclusive education. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation, for example, found that although many specialist teachers come into that role out of a desire to build supportive relationships with students and develop collaborative opportunities with colleagues, high workloads prevent them from doing so.[34] Parallel to this finding, Dr. Parekh urged attendees to "look up the power continuum at who is retaining resources, who is not offering resources to make it work on the ground."

Without proper resources, inclusion stays at the level of integration: the system remains built for the 'typical' student with practices and resources that are ostensibly intended to create an actual feeling of inclusion reduced to what participants called "window dressing" or "boxes to check." Indeed, participants at the Labour Affiliates table specifically pointed to how often Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are given to teachers to implement, but with no additional time or resources to do so. Other participants noted that insufficient resources extends to physical infrastructure as well. They pointed to lack of access to the gym, the school kitchen, and quiet rooms to allow students the opportunity to calm down and restore the equilibrium that Dr. Clinton described as essential for learning.

Teachers' core needs then, as articulated by Symposium participants, include resources, training, and the space to engage meaningfully with the philosophy of inclusion, permitting a shift in mindset toward a social model of disability and a more collaborative relationship with education workers. Teachers can and should take responsibility for reflecting on their practice, but access to resources and proper training are board and system-level responsibilities. In short, to reach the shared goal of creating a pervasive culture of caring, there needs to be space to have what Gacoin calls hard conversations. For those to happen, all stakeholders need be given the space to allow for meaningful collaboration, there needs to be strong leadership that is open to having difficult discussions and, above all there needs to be time allocated to doing this work.[35]

Training, collaboration, time and resources are closely intertwined, as Lewis et al. found in their study of NGO inclusive-education training practices.

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[32] While it was not raised by participants, OSSTF/FEESO is aware that much of the discussion in this section also applies Early Childhood Educators within in the Kindergarten setting.

[33] "Streaming" refers to the practice of separating students into ostensibly parallel educational tracks based on a student's prior grades and perceived ability. Ontario is currently destreaming Grades 9 and 10 and is one of the last Canadian jurisdictions to do so. There is considerable evidence that streaming targets Black, Indigenous, and low-income students, inappropriately placing them into the 'non-academic' stream. This has serious and harmful impacts on students long-term academic and professional choices and outcomes. OSSTF/FEESO supports destreaming and calls on the provincial government to provide adequate funding and other resources to successfully deliver destreamed curricula. See:

Kaushi Attygalle et al., Timing is everything: The implementation of de-streaming in Ontario's publicly funded schools (People for Education, May 2022), https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/timing-is-everything-the-implementation-of-de-streaming-in-ontarios-publicly-funded-schools/; Tianna Follwell and Sam Andrey, How to End Streaming in Ontario Schools (Ontario: Ontario 360, May 13 2021), https://on360.ca/policy-papers/how-to-end-streaming-in-ontario-schools/.

[34] Gacoin, The Landscape of Inclusion, 5.

[35] Gacoin, The Landscape of Inclusion, 7.

OSSTF/FEESO

> "[As] we noted above, teachers are likely to push back against inclusive education if the training is poor quality, or because they need more time to adjust to changes in practice that contradict what they learned in pre-service training or experienced throughout their own education career, not because they are fundamentally unable to learn new skills or adjust their attitudes. Any apparent resistance to inclusive education among teachers needs to be taken seriously, with root causes identified and addressed, slowly and sympathetically."[36]

> *On the whole, teachers support the notion that inclusive education is a human rights requirement and that learners have the right to equal access to an inclusive education system. However, findings here reveal a strong belief among the teachers in this study that realities at school level hamper the successful implementation of inclusive education. Prominent among these realities are: time, large classes and lack of professional training focused on inclusive education.*[37]

With proper training and adequate resources, there is no doubt that a majority of teachers can and will work to enhance their professional practice to support all learners. Unfortunately, this comes at a time when teachers, students, families and all education staff are suffering from the physical and mental health toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken. Worse, it comes at a time when a government that appears hostile to the fundamental goals of a robust public education system is persistently starving the system of much-needed resources.[38] It is not the intention of this report to engage in partisan political debates, but it would be disingenuous to detach classroom struggles from the broader social and political context.

Collaboration

Although it has been referenced a number of times already in this report, the fundamental importance of collaboration is worth revisiting. Much of what the Symposium heard related to areas where collaboration falls short. Key areas that need improvement include:

- Ensuring all voices are heard. This is another example of needing to fully adopt a 'nothing about us without us' mindset. Education workers and students are often excluded from key decision-making processes when the full educational team should be involved.
- Better communication is needed between teachers and EAs. Teachers are responsible for planning what happens in classrooms, but EAs often feel like they are not kept fully apprised of the plans and are therefore working in the dark.
- Communication between administration and EAs is also currently insufficient. Better communication would involve including EAs and other education workers in staff meetings along with periodic check-ins (see above).
- Education workers also told the Symposium that they felt there is a persistent hierarchy in schools and that various job classifications do not receive an equal amount of respect. Reducing education workers to a junior partner role is contrary to the trust and openness necessary for strong collaborative practices.
- Professional development that provides specific guidance on collaboration within and between job classes would be invaluable.
- Coordination with external agencies such as social service providers could also be improved. Recognizing that intersectionality does not start and end at the school doors means recognizing the value of working with external agencies to fully support all students.

A number of participants also pointed to the ways in which bureaucratic practices do not support strong collaboration. Ontario Student Records (OSRs) are often not shared in a timely way, if at all. These records can be essential for preventing violence and injury. A related concern is the importance of documentation to support planning and safety. Many participants reported

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[36] Lewis et al., "Time to stop polishing the brass on the Titanic: moving beyond 'quick-and-dirty' teacher education for inclusion, towards sustainable theories of change," 728.

[37] Materechera, "Inclusive education," 782.

[38] Ricardo Tranjan, "Ontario pandemic school funding: A board-by-board, school-by-school analysis," The Monitor (CCPA) (2021, March 23 2021), https://monitormag.ca/articles/ontario-pandemic-school-funding-a-board-by-board-school-by-school-analysis.

being belittled when making reports and in some cases being directed to not report at all. By contrast, Dr. Duncan (Panel 2) urged participants to push for as much reporting as possible. As she noted, these reports provide invaluable data at both the individual and system level. Further, she noted the success they have had in her district by working collaboratively with the education unions to codevelop reporting tools and reinforce the importance of using them.

"you have very real expectations for the students and being able to work together to meet those expectations as a team is really important. I wanted to acknowledge that there is a whole team of educational professionals who play a role in the lives of these students, and it's not just the adults in the classroom. It's all of the adults in the building along with all of the services provided from outside as well." [39]

Conversations about collaboration were not all doom and gloom. Behind the concerns expressed about the shortcomings of existing practices lay a strong desire to see schools do better. Much of that desire was grounded in a respect for the professional roles of colleagues and a desire to be part of a mutually supportive process.

"This is what I know: Your psychology staff may have great information about how to differentiate and how that student best learns. So lean on them and work together, how might you teach those skills at a developmental level over time in different places."[40]

"I am one of the experts in our field. There's deaf staff, for example, who—and hearing allies that work with deaf staff. They are also considered experts. So as you—in your world, please reach out to us as the ones who can encourage that connection and that social connection. For deaf children, a lot of that doesn't— for deaf children that doesn't happen too often, so I really encourage you to reach out to us who are the experts in this field and to put aside your biases."[41]

[39] Karen Littlewood, Panel 2.
[40] Dr. Swift, Panel 2.
[41] Participant, Keynote.

It is also worth restating a simple observation. Collaboration takes trust and mutual respect. Much of the responsibility for that depends on staff themselves and their willingness to challenge their own biases and reflect on their current practices. However, all the reflexivity in the world cannot produce collaborative structures if there are not supports in place. These supports include resources to prevent overwork, inclusion in decision-making and planning processes, and the time to undertake difficult conversations and to figure out the concrete nuts and bolts of working as a unified, multidisciplinary and multi-perspectival team.

Training

All stakeholders in public education share a principled commitment to learning, training, and professional development. As Dr. Ross pointed out, training to create safe and inclusive schools needs to extend beyond those working in classrooms.

"I think training needs to extend to staff that aren't just in the classrooms. I believe that… people who are working in cafeterias, anybody who's present should be receiving disability training, in particular bus drivers. I mean, they are one on one with kids during these trips, sometimes for prolonged periods, and while they receive some training, it does not seem to be adequate from what I've learned from families. And there are, of course, some tricky liability concerns that I don't know how to resolve at this time in terms of kids whose positioning while travelling—you know, if their head is slumping or moves and they cannot adjust it, and it is actually an unsafe circumstance for them if they hit a bump, but drivers, you know, are informed not to touch the children. So how this gets resolved, I'm not sure just yet, but I do flag that as a pretty serious safety issue."[42]

One participant pointed out that training is so essential that it outweighs the value of having an extra person in the room if that person is untrained. Having to train colleagues on the fly is a major source of stress for many teachers and education workers and can lead to very serious problems, or as one person put it: it's a car accident waiting to happen.

A number of specific training requirements were identified. These include:
- Assistive technology
- Diabetes management (checking sugars; signs and symptoms of low blood sugar; what to do in case of fainting, etc.)
- Training related to:
  - Autism
  - ADHD
  - FASD
- Mental health
- How to plan for inclusive classrooms and classroom practices through universal design for learning and assessment
- The intersectionality of students needs to be respected through culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing.
- Explicit instruction on collaborative practices
- Workplace violence and health and safety

Finally, participants reminded us that training needs to culturally relevant and ongoing. Good professional development builds on skills, whereas multiple participants complained that the PD they receive merely repeats over and over what they have already learned. Further, good training is well integrated rather than providing siloed training to different groups. Finally, staff need to be given the time and space to integrate the multiple training sessions they may take into their everyday practice. Without allowing for that integration, training becomes an exercise in box-checking rather than real change-making. There needs to be more support from the Ministry for quality training and OSSTF/FEESO should include more professional development days as part of its bargaining priorities.

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[42] Dr. Ross, Panel 1.

Barriers to Inclusion

A running theme throughout this report is that inclusion is aspirational in nature. It is not an endpoint we can identify in advance and achieve once and for all. Finkelstein et al. capture an important aspect of this ongoing practice, arguing that inclusive education should be "concerned with all students; focusing on their presence, participation and achievement; linked to exclusion in that **barriers are made explicit and actively dismantled.**"[43] This section reports some of the barriers to inclusion identified at the Symposium.

Exclusionary Practices

Unfortunately, the Symposium also heard all too many examples of exclusion and it is important to give witness here to the reality many students and their families face.

- We heard from one parent whose daughter is excluded from physical education classes because the school did not know how to accommodate her and did not provide a sighted guide to assist with activities.

- To work around lack of accessible parking, some families have arranged to drop students off 15 minutes late or pick them up 15 minutes early. This adds up to 75 minutes of missed instructional time every week.
- Schools are not designed to support sensory issues or neurodivergence. Florescent lights, for example, can create a sensory overload for some students. Many schools lack calming spaces where students can go to re-regulate following overstimulation.
- One parent described a survey sent home with her child. The survey asked whether her daughter liked to spend time with people with disabilities. "And I kept thinking about, Imagine being a child with a disability and being asked that question in class, whether or not you like to spend time with people with disabilities and wondering what your peers—or how your peers may have responded?"[44]

It would not be too difficult to find countless more stories like these. They demonstrate how far we need to go to reach the goals of inclusive education.

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[43] Finkelstein, Sharma, and Furlonger, "Inclusive Practices," 3. Emphasis added.
[44] Participant.

Intersecting Identities

Again, an important theme in the Symposium and therefore in this report is the intersecting ways in which systems of race, colonialism, homophobia, transphobia and income exacerbate exclusions based on ableism. Dr. Parekh provided to research from the United States that shows how racialized students are constructed as "disabled." Because private schools – including semi-private charter schools – find inventive ways to exclude students with disabilities, racism and ableism intersecting to increase overall segregation.[45] In addition, Dr. Parekh shared results from her own research, showing that white students are twice as likely as Black students to be perceived as having excellent learning skills even when their EQAO results are the same.

Multiple participants pointed to the financial barriers that many students with disabilities face in trying to fill the gaps where schools do not provide sufficient accommodation. Dr. Ross provided an additional dimension to this concern by drawing attention to the fact that many families with students with disabilities are also 'time poor.'

"They are undertaking work out--school is just one piece of the work that they're undertaking. They may be getting up at 5 a.m. to do tube feedings. They are coordinating with bus drivers, coordinating appointments. The amount of access work that they are carrying out in many cases is really quite substantial. So if you, as educators and administrators, can be mindful of that time and communicate and be flexible with them, I think that's a tremendous--it's extremely meaningful."[46]

In these examples – the intersection of racism and ableism and the intersection of income, time poverty and ableism – schools and staff were urged to do more to think concretely about these barriers and how they can be eliminated.

Lack of Advocates/Advocacy

The importance of advocacy becomes clear if we return to one of the cross-cutting themes identified in the introduction, namely the tension between the need to participate in bureaucratic processes to gain supports for students and the stigmatizing and frustrating nature those processes can often have. The stakes in this struggle are very real. One teacher shared the story of twin brothers with needs for significant physical and cognitive supports. The school board wanted to supply one EA for both and it took considerable advocacy to get each brother their own EA support.

Importantly, unequal access to advocates and/or advocacy skills constitutes an additional barrier. Discussants at the Labour Affiliates table noted the correlation between income and advocacy skills, or as they called it, 'social capital.' This inequity gives some parents the ability to fight for their students, while others fall through the cracks. One of the teacher tables linked lack of advocacy back to what Dr. Ross had noted about the time poverty experienced by many families. A participant at one of the education worker tables told the Symposium that parents and caregivers are overburdened by paperwork and that this can be especially challenging for families that are new to Canada and for whom neither official language is the primary language spoken at home.

An important question, then, becomes who should be taking on an advocacy role given the burden it places on parents. Some participants saw advocacy as part of their day-to-day lives as professionals, while others simply emphasized the importance of finding someone who can connect with families and advocate on their behalf. There was consensus, though, on the importance of supporting advocacy to ensure all students are connected to the supports they need. At the community group tables, we were told that when advocacy is not sufficient within schools, school and district leaders need to be more open to external parent advocates, including those working with community groups.

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[45] On charter schools' exclusionary practices, see: Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, The U.S. Charter School Experience: A Cautionary Tale (Toronto: OSSTF/FEESO, December 2018), https://www.osstf.on.ca/-/media/Provincial/Documents/Public-Education/no-cuts-to-education/the-threats-of-privatization/us-charter-school-experience-a-cautionary-tale.ashx; Wagma Mommandi and Kevin Welner, "How charter schools control access and shape enrollment," (10 September 2021), https://www.tcpress.com/blog/charter-schools-control-access-shape-enrollment/.

[46] Dr. Ross, Panel 1.

Transportation

Transportation emerged as a major barrier facing many students and their families. Concerns about transportation took two major forms. First, parking lot infrastructure and access to accessible parking spots is often woefully inadequate. Often, buses impede access to accessible parking spaces precisely when that access is needed most. This is frustrating for families with and without children with disabilities, as the lack of adequate parking infrastructure leads to bottlenecks and additional labour for all involved. As always, the heaviest burden caused by these frustrations is borne by those already undertaking added labour related to transportation, advocacy, and medical care requirements. As noted elsewhere in this report, it can also lead to sub-optimal accommodation strategies where students arrive to class late or leave early. This results in a loss of learning time for students who are already being marginalized by the school's infrastructure.

A second set of concerns revolved around transportation by bus. If bus drivers are not properly trained, the ride can be dangerously bumpy for people with medical conditions such as osteogenesis imperfecta, which causes abnormal levels of bone fragility. Drivers also tend not to receive adequate training on how to manage challenging behaviours. This criticism did not seem intended to call out bus drivers per se, given how much training and knowledge Symposium participants agreed that other staff (including teachers) need and the nuanced approaches to modeling regulation described by Dr. Clinton. At the policy level, participants also described

frustrating rules that prevent siblings from riding the same bus in order to reduce both siblings' overall anxiety. Once again, bureaucracy and policy simultaneously provides support while also leaving other challenges in place.

In addition, participants pointed to lack of access to transportation generally. Some of this was attributed to driver shortages, while others pointed to the fact that some students need to travel to schools outside their neighbourhood in order to receive the accommodations they need. Others noted that busses booked for special events are not always accessible, which forces some students to stay behind.

The lesson to be emphasized is that accessibility does not start and end at the classroom door or even the school door. Inaccessible transportation – from parking lots to field trips – exacerbates barriers related to time poverty, additional labour, and lack of access to advocacy.

Language

This report has already described Dr. Clinton's call for using the phrase "special rights" instead of "special needs" and how well that shift was received. Participants at multiple tables emphasized the importance of being cautious about language in general. Obviously, all staff and stakeholders need to be attentive to the use of ableist language, avoiding using it themselves and appropriately intervening when others use

it. As importantly, language around disability generally needs to shift from a medical or deficit model of disability to a social model. To reiterate what was discussed earlier, the deficit model locates disability squarely on the individual. This individualizes and pathologizes students and constructs them as a problem to be solved or as having something wrong with them that needs to be cured. It is stigmatizing and dehumanizing. The social model, by contrast, emphasizes the value of diversity, recognizes ability as existing on multiple spectrums, and calls attention to how social practices and physical infrastructure act to exclude people based on perceived abilities. In the social model, individuals are not disabled by their own supposed shortcomings, but by society's unwillingness to adjust practices to ensure full inclusion. The language used in schools and in policy needs to reflect a social understanding of disability.

Dr. Parekh also called attention to more subtle, less obvious ways that students pick up on the language used by the adults around them.

"And I also think it is important for us to think about the codes that we use to describe smartness or ability or inability. We might think we are being really ambiguous or vague, but kids are so clued into that, and they'll know. I'm really convinced that when we create hierarchies of ability, students really, really do feel it. And our research team, again, works a lot with students, and they will tell us what the "not measuring up" means to them."[47]

Finally, we can link together themes related to advocacy, bureaucracy and language by noting how exclusive special education language can be. Again, Dr. Parekh is worth quoting on this idea.

"I think when we do work with families, one of the ways that I think would build trust is thinking about our language that we use when we talk about special education, we talk about disability in schools. For the most part, families do not understand their children in the same way that schools will be perceiving their children. There's sometimes a conflict there. And I think that we also have become very used to kind of insider language when it comes to special education. You know, the first time I talk about special education with my--in the faculty of education to new candidate

teachers, they're like, Slow down on the acronyms. I have no idea what you're talking about. Like, where -- what is this ISP, HSP, IPRC, IEP, right? I mean, it's a whole language unto itself that families are excluded from because they don't often--I mean, I'm sure if there are folks in here who have children navigating the system, that you're well on it. But for other families, it is really challenging, and it can make them feel excluded from the process and excluded from decision-making."

To emphasize, attention to language, transportation, lack of advocacy, and intersectionality will not fully eliminate the barriers experienced by students and families. Within the context of the Symposium, however, participants raised these themes repeatedly. Lack of access to proper funding, lack of collaborative practices within schools and other concerns addressed elsewhere in this report are also properly understood as barriers and will be examined in due course.

Violence

OSSTF/FEESO's decision to organize an Inclusion Symposium was initially in response to members' need for an opportunity to talk about and address their experiences of violence in classrooms. Conversations and considerations over the course of organizing the event led the Symposium to have a somewhat broader scope. This was a good thing as any discussion of inclusive education needs to include consideration of best practices for building connections with students, reducing barriers to access, grappling with bureaucratic realities and hearing from as many voices as possible. It would be a fundamental error to see those issues as separate from the realities of violence and workplace injuries. Indeed, constructing incidences as violent is challenging on its own terms.

"I think many of us struggle with terms like 'violence' [which] suggests intent to harm. Many behaviours we deal with are violent in nature, however, the students themselves are not violent in nature – they don't have the ability to express themselves in a safe/expected manner (e.g., poor communication or self-regulation skills)."[48]

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47 Dr. Parekh, Panel 1

48 Chris Bruckert, Darcy A. Santor, and Brittany Mario, In harm's way: The epidemic of violence against education sector workers in Ontario (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa, November 2021), 4, https://www.educatorviolence.ca/publications.

On the one hand, it is important to name violence *as violence* in order to acknowledge the serious impacts that violence has on the physical and mental health of education workers and teachers. On the other hand, from Dr. Clinton to table discussants, Symposium participants emphasized that misbehaviour is generally not intentional or malicious, but an attempt to communicate distress.[49] Our task is to find ways to support students while ensuring all staff have what they need to return home safely at the end of the day.

Echoing what we have heard from OSSTF/FEESO members, two related studies document the extent of the problem in Ontario and Canada. Focusing on education workers in Ontario, Bruckert at al. found that in the 2018-2019 school year 89% of their survey participants experienced violence (an act of violence, an attempted act or the threat of violence). Reflecting other forms of oppression, women, racialized people, people identifying as having a disability and members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community experienced a higher level of risk in a number of ways.

- Racialized participants were more likely to experience reprisals for reporting instances of harassment or violence. The violence they experienced included racial slurs, microaggressions and the targeting of religious and cultural symbols.
- People identifying as having a disability were disproportionately more likely to report harassment from colleagues and administrators alongside a higher likelihood of receiving a reprisal for reporting violence.
- Women reported higher levels of violence compared to their male counterparts.
- Women also reported higher levels of harassment compared to their male counterparts.
- Discouragingly, over 80% of education workers (both classroom-based and support staff such as clerical and custodial staff) reported that levels of harassment and violence have increased in the past ten years.[50]

While education workers bear the brunt of violence, a similar study found that elementary teachers are similarly at risk. In their study, Santor et al. found that 54% of participating elementary teachers experienced violence in the form of physical force, and 72% experienced harassment in the 2018-2019 school year.[51]

OSSTF/FEESO and participants at the Symposium also want to address another problem identified by Bruckert et al.: EAs and ECEs reported that workplace violence is highly normalized in their schools and that administrators generally accept that violence is just 'part of the job.' This leads to injuries to mental and physical health being minimized and participants being blamed for their experiences of violence.[52]

The problem of violence in classrooms – even if understood as unintentional and without malice on the part of students – is complex and will not be solved through quick-fixes. Nonetheless, participants at the Symposium highlighted a number of key areas for attention.

- **Reporting.** At the very least, reporting processes need to be strengthened. Multiple participants told the Symposium that workers are often discouraged from making reports with some accounts of teachers being disciplined for doing so.
- **Cooling off time.** Violent encounters are often accompanied by high levels of stress, anger, frustration, hurt, and other challenging emotions (for all involved). Having a space and time to cool off before resuming the school day would be helpful in many cases.
- **Debriefs.** Participants at one of the Labour Affiliates tables noted the importance of Principals having the skills needed to do a proper debrief after an incidence of violence. This would entail validating people's feelings and experiences and looking for solutions and supports. By contrast, participants reported being discouraged from filling out reports, which diminishes the impact of violent experiences.
- **Improve communication and collaboration.** As explored in more detail below, a collaborative work environment where information and resources are widely shared is essential to reducing violent incidences.

Although not specifically noted by participants, OSSTF/FEESO also believes there should be appropriate training on paid time to prevent violent behaviours and mitigate their impacts when they occur to better protect workers.

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[49] See also: Colorado and Janzen, "A critical discourse analysis," 64.

[50] Bruckert, Santor, and Mario, In harm's way, 23-28.

[51] Darcy A. Santor, Chris Bruckert, and Kyle McBride, "Prevalence and impact of harassment and violence against educators in Canada," Journal of School Violence 20, no. 3 (2021), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15388220.2021.1879097

[52] Bruckert, Santor, and Mario, In harm's way, 2.

OSSTF/FEESO

> *"My members need to bring an issue to their administrator first and these people are not approachable. My people also realize in the short term of trying to address it with them or getting me (the Bargaining Unit President) involved, there will be consequences and targeting and belittling in a lot of ways. They accept their fate and their role as the punching bag for a student."*

Safety Plans

Notwithstanding the important interventions listed above, participants spoke strongly of the value of properly crafted, shared, implemented, and modified safety plans. A good safety plan does not eliminate the need to pay attention to histories of trauma, intersecting forms of inclusion, and so on. On the contrary, those factors should be incorporated into each student's safety plan, as applicable.

- Echoing the cross-cutting theme of 'nothing about us without us', participants at teacher, educational assistant and education worker tables all emphasized the importance of having student voices and perspectives reflected in safety plans.
- Collaborative approaches to safety plans are also essential. Education workers in particular reported being excluded from the development of safety plans despite having a close familiarity with relevant factors such as emotional and behavioural triggers.
- A close relative to collaboration is the importance of sharing the details of plans. Participants recognized the importance of students' privacy, but want that balanced with having enough information to keep themselves safe.
- Supporting plan development and modifications through various forms of data collection. Progressive discipline, workplace violence forms, and other forms of documentation are important, as panelist Dr. Duncan put it, "not in judgement but how best to support the student and the staff who are supporting them."

Throughout discussions related to safety, participants emphasized the roles and responsibilities of Principals and other administrators. We heard too many comments such as, "clear processes are needed to address aggressive issues as well for when Administration has 'swept them aside.'" Or, similarly, "Principals currently… don't involve all that should be included and are simply dictating the plan." As emphasized elsewhere, good communication, collaborative development, reporting, and thorough post-incident debriefing are all essential parts of mitigating the potential for violence-related injuries.

Mental Health

Symposium participants were also eager to develop nuanced awareness of mental health beyond the impacts of violence. Again, the discussions focused on the importance of cultivating good mental health practices for both students and staff. In relation to students, participants were eager to explore Dr. Clinton's observations about the relationship between trauma, mental health, and learning. As is becoming more commonly understood, trauma can take many forms and an experience that one student brushes off quickly can leave another deeply affected. It was important for participants at the Community Stakeholders table for the Symposium to acknowledge trauma can also be intergenerational, adding to its complexity. They also reminded us that schools and District buildings themselves can be sites of trauma for students and families, adding to the importance of building trust over time.

The effects of trauma vary greatly, but a common one is to begin living in a state of constant or near-constant vigilance. This makes learning extremely difficult.

> But, you know, let me give you another reality that I'm aware of, and that is how you feel affects how you think affects how you act. So if you are in--you are in a state of high alert or high alarm because you've been hit so many times, of course it's going to affect how you think. Of course it's going to affect how you act. So I just want to recognize here, absolutely, the work that you do is so, so tough, trying to figure out what is it that this child--this child's behaviour is telling me. Every behaviour has a reason. Every behaviour has a reason and occurs in a context.[53]

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[53] Dr. Clinton, Keynote.

As reported elsewhere, this means school staff need to be highly attentive to their own emotional state. They need to model emotional regulation and constructive expressions of anger and frustration. This means "putting on your own oxygen mask first." At the same time, conditions in many schools work against teachers' and education workers' mental health. High workloads and in some cases working multiple jobs to make ends meet are not good for mental health. Panelists shared information about a wealth of resources that can kind both student and staff mental health toward improved mental health practices. Several emphasized that these do indeed need to become practices and students need to be both explicitly taught about good mental health hygiene and have consistent practice modelled to them. Use of these teaching supports require time and support from administration. Unfortunately, several participants told the Symposium that this kind of support was not forthcoming. Often, the only mental health supports staff receive are performative gestures such as posters hung in staff rooms.

"We really have to look after ourselves because at the end of the day, we're just numbers to our districts. Once we take care of ourselves, we can definitely take care of our students." [54]

Ultimately, participants linked the mental health of students and staff alike to issues that have been raised in other contexts. Those education workers who are working multiple jobs to make ends meet, in addition to experiencing very demanding workloads and lack of inclusion in planning processes and decision-making, find themselves in a near-constant state of mental and physical exhaustion. Indeed, participants at several tables pointed to overwork and a general lack of resources as having highly detrimental impacts on their resilience and, as a result, their mental health.

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[54] Participant.

Resources

The shortage of resources has been referred to so often in this report already that it hardly needs repeating. Nonetheless, OSSTF/FEESO will continue calling for stable, predictable, and sufficient funding for all aspects of public education of which inclusive education is a cornerstone. Adequate resources are essential to meet the needs of each of the cross-cutting themes identified in the opening section of this report: shifting from a deficit to a social model of disability, attending to the specific needs of students and staff facing intersecting forms of exclusion, navigating bureaucratic pitfalls and ensuring that planning and decisions include the voices of all stakeholders. Even where financial resources are not the direct answer, time can be an essential resource and necessary for building strong collaborative practices. As discussed below, infrastructure resources are also a key component to a fully inclusive education system.

OSSTF/FEESO is deeply committed to making [inclusive education] a reality for all students, and we know that we can only get there through a fully funded, inclusive public education system.[55]

Funding

There was a very clear consensus that more funding is needed. That is an issue that starts at the top with the Ministry and the provincial government. It will require concerted advocacy efforts from all stakeholders. OSSTF/FEESO is strongly committed to being part of that advocacy through public communications campaigns and at the bargaining table. In part, that means drawing attention to government initiatives that appear to provide support, but ultimately weaken the public system. Most recently, the Ministry committed to providing payments of $200 to $250 per child for families to pay for tutoring and other post-pandemic catch-up supports. The policy does not require any supportive documents or provide oversight for how families spend the money. Worse, individualized payments such as these bring significantly less value to the education system than direct funding to Boards would do. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has estimated that the program's $365 million price tag could be spent on:

- Improving the classroom consultant ratio from 0:41 to 1:4 for every 1,000 students. That would increase support in each classroom to 60 minutes each week, from the current 17 minutes.
- Increasing the ratio of EAs to students from 0:2 to 1:4 for every 1,000 students. This would increase EA time in classrooms from eight minutes to 60 minutes per week.
- Allowing for one teacher-librarian for every 700 students, approximately one for every two schools.

In fact, CCPA argues, just $110 million of the total $365 would ensure all ECEs earn at least $25 per hour.[56]

The need for funding for mental health programming, staff retention, long-term planning, is urgent. The public system does not need one-time payouts to parents, it needs stable, predictable and sufficient financial commitments.

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[55] Karen Littlewood, Panel 2.

[56] @ccpa, "To assist in learning recovery, the Ontario government is handing out $200 per child to parents. That's a total of $365 million. There's a better way for that money to support kids and schools across the province. Check out how @CCPA_Ont #onpoli @ricardo_tranjan," (Twitter, 31 October 2022), Tweet. https://twitter.com/ccpa/status/1587122438554492933.

Staffing

As the CCPA analyses show, increased funding has the potential for major impacts on staffing levels. Participants repeatedly told us about being overworked, doing multiple tasks at the same time, feeling constantly pulled in multiple directions, and experiencing strong feelings of guilt over never being able to do enough. Even those who were proud of the inclusive models used by their boards affirmed that the models cannot be implemented without sufficient staff.

- The Junior Kindergarten/Senior Kindergarten classrooms are pulling EAs away when students in Junior Kindergarten need help with toileting.
- Deaf and hard-of-hearing students miss out on experiences due to a lack of interpreters.
- Staff cannot attend relevant events and training because there are insufficient resources.
- Mental health clinicians are overrun with referrals and cannot keep up.
- Specialized personnel are desperately needed.
- Class sizes are too large to allow for individualized attention and supports.
- Staff recruitment and retention problems (often related to low wages) create a lack of continuity for students with special rights because staff are pulled away from their core tasks to plug holes elsewhere.

All of these realities leave staff feeling exhausted and discouraged. Promoting community, building relationships, undertaking professional reflexivity and all the other components to inclusive education that participants envisioned at the Symposium cannot be achieved when staff are running on empty.

Infrastructure

As important as staff resources are, so too are improvements to physical infrastructure to promote accessibility. This report has already described some of the challenges families face in relation to transportation infrastructure, particularly accessible parking, but naturally the needs go much further beyond parking. Key issues that Symposium participants identified include the following.

- The presence of florescent lights and other school infrastructure than can lead to sensory overload for students who are neurodivergent.
- Playgrounds need to be improved to create opportunities for inclusive play (removal of pea gravel, for example).
- Assistive technology such as laptops that come with labels identifying them as 'special education' accommodations are experienced as highly stigmatizing by students. Universal

design for learning principals recommend ensuring all students have access to such devices without labels so as to not single out students with special rights who require the supports.

- Many schools lack basic accessibility features such as ramps, accessible washrooms, automatic doors and accessible outdoor play spaces.
- Many schools lack basic heating and air conditioning infrastructure.
- There is a lack of calming rooms in most schools.

Once again, these resource requirements depend upon stable and predictable funding along with a clear plan for identifying infrastructure needs and identifying the best way to achieve high-quality accessibility as quickly as possible.

Conclusions

This report has sought to reflect to the reader the frank and robust set of conversations OSSTF/FEESO was pleased to host at our first Inclusion Symposium. The event marks a departure for OSSTF/FEESO and we hope that community groups, scholars, and OSSTF/FEESO members will continue to participate in these types of events in the future. We are deeply committed to connecting rigorous academic research to the nuanced insights that come from the lived experiences of education workers, teachers, students, and families.

Through the observations of Symposium participants, we have formulated an initial vision of inclusive education. Such a vision should attend to intersectionality, identity, community and shared responsibility as essential components to inclusive education. Each of these is relevant to the five areas on which this report focuses:

- Program Excellence
- Professional Practice
- Barriers
- Health and Safety
- Resources

Of course, it would be false to treat these areas as separate concerns. Indeed, analysis of the transcripts and discussion notes from the Symposium found five cross-cutting themes that consistently linked these areas. Those five themes are:

- The importance of continuing to transition from a deficit model of disability to a social model of disability.
- The urgent need to acknowledge and address the complexities of intersecting forms of exclusion and oppression.
- The difficulties of navigating the tension between bureaucracy as the pathway to obtaining resources and bureaucracy as a source of stigma and frustration.
- The value of renewing a commitment to a 'nothing about us without us' philosophy of collaboration.

Parents, advocates, community groups, academics and of course teachers and education workers have been working tirelessly to promote inclusive education for decades. This work is not new. This conversation is not new. It is OSSTF/FEESO's sincere hope that the Inclusion Symposium was a positive contribution to this work. The recommendations laid out below are intended to reflect the insights and priorities of Symposium participants and we look forward to continuing our own advocacy work in support of a well-funded and inclusive public education system.

Recommendations
Vision and Themes

1. Commit to a vision of inclusive education where every student enjoys a feeling of belonging, where all parts of their identity – including those that meet intersecting forms of social and economic barriers – are welcome and celebrated.
2. Recognize that to achieve this vision, all stakeholders must take on a shared responsibility to build a community dedicated to the wellbeing of all students, with particular attention to those bearing special rights.

Program Excellence

3. Ensure planning – including systems-level planning and student-level planning – includes students along with all relevant staff, family, and community providers.
4. Ensure sufficient, stable, and predictable funding for a fully inclusive public education system.
5. Provide training and supports to help all staff consistently practice a "regulate to relate to learn" approach to creating optimal learning conditions.

Barriers

6. Identify and eliminate exclusive practices and barriers throughout the system.
7. In doing the work to make barriers explicit and dismantle them, pay particular attention to intersecting forms of exclusion.
8. Ensure advocacy resources are part of the system-level supports offered to families to help them navigate educational bureaucracy.
9. Ensure all schools have adequate parking lot infrastructure and provide sufficient availability of accessible parking areas.
10. Provide training to bus operators on the best, trauma-informed practices to accommodate all students with disabilities.
11. Normalize the use of inclusive language and actively intervene to eliminate ableist language, including language that reflects a deficit approach to disability.

Health and Safety

12. Understand that misbehaviour – even violent misbehaviour – is generally not malicious and reflects an attempt at communication or protest.
13. Reject and speak out against normalization of violence. Name violence as such and protect education staff without stigmatizing students. Be particularly cognizant of the likelihood that racialized students tend to receive harsher discipline for misbehaviour than white students and respond to misbehaviour accordingly.
14. Cultivate a culture of reporting, documentation, and information sharing. This requires conscious collaboration and finding the right balance between a student's right to privacy and a worker's right to safety.

15. Build trauma-informed mental health practices into classroom dynamics and curriculum.
16. Recognize the toll that overwork has on mental health. From education workers working multiple jobs to make ends meet to teachers having more and more work downloaded onto them, workers are suffering the mental health outcomes of a resource-starved system.

Professional Practice

17. Foster awareness of and respect for the dual nature of professional judgement: the right to fully determine practice within the scope of one's profession and the responsibility to engage in professional practice reflexively to examine how privilege and exclusions shape the potential to experience a felt sense of belonging.
18. Provide teachers, education workers and all staff in schools and District buildings with the resources, time, training and opportunities for collaboration necessary to facilitate hard conversations about improving inclusion in schools.
19. Include Education Workers – particularly Educational Assistants – in planning and information-sharing. This includes ensuring they are part of student-specific meetings as well as general staff meetings.
20. Recognize the harmful impact that low wages for education workers has on their physical and mental wellbeing.
21. Provide robust, trauma-informed, culturally relevant training to all education staff. This training should include collaborative practices, specific medical and mental health interventions, and professional reflexivity.

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Resources

22. End one-off payments to parents and invest those dollars directly into the system to leverage economies of scale into equitable supports for all students.
23. Enhance system-level funding to increase the number of teachers and education workers in schools. This is essential for reducing burnout and exhaustion and for creating the time and space for improved collaboration and inclusive practices.
24. Provide adequate funding to attend to the range of infrastructure shortcomings that currently create barriers for many students and families. This includes infrastructure within schools as well as transportation (parking) infrastructure.

Appendices
Appendix A: Methodology

Production of this report was a collaborative effort involving many people. OSSTF/FEESO Provincial Executive and staff worked closely with presenters and community partners to structure the Symposium Itself. At the Symposium, President Karen Littlewood's opening remarks, Dr. Clinton's Keynote address and the two panel discussions were recorded and subsequently transcribed. During the table discussions, OSSTF/FEESO staff and members of the Educational Services Committee facilitated discussions and took notes.

Led by the OSSTF/FEESO Policy Analyst/Researcher, the Educational Services Department at OSSTF/FEESO used a combination of theoretically informed and in vivo code generating to develop a qualitative analysis codebook. The OSSTF/FEESO research technician coded all transcripts and table discussion notes using this codebook and MAXQDA coding software. Codes were then sorted and re-organized thematically to produce this report. Although the analysis and reporting is informed by current scholarly and grey literature on inclusive education, the report is not intended to make a theoretical contribution. Instead, every effort has been made to capture and reflect the dominant themes from the day's discussion.

The primary author of the report itself is OSSTF/FEESO's Policy Analyst/Research working out of Provincial Office. The author has an extensive background in qualitative analysis, particularly as it relates to Bourdieusian social theory, identity, social movement and labour movement politics, and policy analysis. He has made every effort to bring those skills and knowledges to the project of reflecting the priorities of Participants at the Inclusion Symposium.

At the same time, the primary author is not a subject expert on inclusive education and recognizes the partiality of his perspective as a white, able-bodied, cis-gender, queer man. Recognizing potential limitations in terms of subject knowledge and positionality, the author took steps to offset those limitations. First, the report's primary author reviewed recent literature on inclusive education to help contextualize and understand the issues discussed at the Symposium. No claim is made to having achieved expertise in the field, so the report remains intentionally free of theorization. Instead, every effort was made to distill and reflect the major ideas and priorities of Symposium participants. Second, the report was put through two review processes. First, members of OSSTF/FEESO's in-house equity team reviewed the report specifically looking to ensure it reflects current consensus about language and conceptualization. Next, the report was graciously reviewed by external experts with a deeper understanding of the issues at stake. OSSTF/FEESO greatly appreciates the consideration of all involved in the review process and recognizes that any remaining errors and omissions are our own.

Appendix B: Keynote and Panelist Biographies

Jean M Clinton BMus MD FRCP(C) Clinical Professor McMaster University Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences

Dr. Jean Clinton is a Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster, division of Child Psychiatry. She is on staff at McMaster Children's Hospital with cross appointments in Pediatrics and Family Medicine, and an Associate in the Department of Child Psychiatry at Sick Children's Hospital. She is a member on the MindUP Scientific Advisory Board as well as a MindUP for Families Advisor. She was a Fellow of the Child Trauma Academy and is a Zero to Three Academy Fellow since 2013. She has been a consultant to children and youth mental health programs, child

welfare, and primary care for over 30 years. Dr. Clinton was appointed as an education advisor to the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Education 2014 - 2018.

Dr. Clinton is renowned nationally and internationally as an advocate for children's issues. Her special interest lies in brain development, and the crucial role relationships and connectedness play. Jean champions the development of a national, comprehensive child well-being strategy including a system of early learning and care for all young children and their families. She is equally committed to ensuring that children's and youths' needs and voices are heard and respected.

Dr. Clinton has also authored her first book, Love Builds Brains which can be ordered online through Tall Pines Press, on Amazon and in bookstores everywhere.

Dr. Gillian Parekh Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair Disability Studies in Education (Tier 2) Faculty of Education at York University

Dr. Gillian Parekh is an Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Disability Studies in Education (Tier 2) within the Faculty of Education at York University. Gillian is cross-appointed with York's graduate program in Critical Disability Studies. As a previous teacher in special education and research coordinator with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Gillian has conducted extensive system and school-based research in Toronto in the areas of structural equity, special education, and academic streaming. In particular, her work explores how schools construct and respond to disability as well as how students are organized across programs and systems. Her latest book, Ableism in Education: Rethinking School Practices and Policies, examines how the structure and organisation of schooling can be deeply influenced by ableism and offers strategies on how to think through inclusive pedagogy and design. For an interactive critical reflective practice guide addressing human rights and equity in special education, please check a collaborative project with both academics and practitioners, offering resources for educators and system leaders: https://www.criticalreflectivepractice.com/

Tim Ross PhD, RPP, MCIP Scientist and Director of the Engagement and Planning for Inclusive Communities Lab Bloorview Research Institute at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

Tim Ross, PhD, RPP, MCIP, is a Scientist and Director of the Engagement and Planning for Inclusive Communities Lab (i.e., EPIC Lab) within the Bloorview Research Institute at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. He is also an Assistant Professor (Status) in the Department of Geography & Planning and the Rehabilitation Sciences Institute at the University of Toronto. Tim's research is focused on understanding the experiences and critical perspectives of families

living with childhood disability and using their input to help advance more diverse and inclusive communities. His research examines a range of topics, including access to education, access to pediatric health care, transportation and mobility, inclusive play, housing, and institutional ableism. Questions about experiences of disability, the normalcy of ableism, and how they relate to the planning and design of our built environments, services, and systems are central to Tim's research. Tim holds a PhD in Planning from the University of Toronto and is a Registered Professional Planner with private sector consulting experience in land use planning and international master planning.

Karen Littlewood President (Chief Executive Officer) OSSTF/FEESO

Karen Littlewood is a special education teacher from Barrie and is the president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO).

Karen was born in Barrie and received her Bachelor of Science in Languages at Laurentian University, and completed her Bachelor of Education with Nipissing University. She started her career as an elementary teacher in York Region before moving back to Simcoe County in 2000. In 2007, Karen became a secondary teacher for the Simcoe County District School Board, where she taught Life Skills and Special Education.

Karen became the president of both the District and the Teacher Bargaining Unit for District 17, Simcoe, and held a number of other roles both locally and provincially, including Vice Chair of Provincial Council, and Chair of the Communications and Political Action Committee. In addition, Karen was a member of the Barrie and District Labour Council. Karen was elected to the Provincial Executive as an Executive Officer in 2017, and then as vice-president in 2019.

Karen is an advocate of clear and open communications within OSSTF/FEESO, as well as with the public when it comes to education issues. She is committed to working with the Provincial Executive to enact the Action Plan to Support Equity and Anti-Oppression as well as addressing systemic barriers within the Federation. She is a strong promoter of equity issues within OSSTF/FEESO and beyond and believes in the importance of building coalitions to affect positive change at all levels of education and in the labour movement.

As only the eleventh female president of OSSTF/FEESO in its history, Karen recognizes the important role she is taking on and seeks to be a strong role model for women and for others in the organization who do not see themselves reflected in our leadership.

Dr. Deanna Swift, Psychologist (she/her) Implementation Coach |Special Education Lead School Mental Health Ontario

Dr. Deanna Swift (she/her) is a school and child clinical psychologist with 30 years of clinical experience in hospital, private practice, and school board settings. For the past two years Deanna has served as an Implementation Coach and the lead for the Special Education and Mental Health portfolio for School Mental Health Ontario. She has worked in Special Education for the past 15 years and served as the clinical manager of the school of psychology, social work and speech-language professionals. Deanna is currently the Executive Officer of Mental Health and Wellness at the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board.

Anne Marie Duncan, PhD (she/her) Superintendent of Education: Student Achievement Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board

Anne Marie started her career a long time ago as a secondary teacher of French and Math. She has been grateful for the opportunities to learn in the roles of Curriculum Consultant, Vice Principal and Principal at both the elementary and secondary panels before becoming a Superintendent of Education, holding portfolios of Safe Schools, Learning Technology, Curriculum and, for the past six years, Special Education, Mental Health and Well-being. Anne Marie has been fortunate to work in three different school boards, both urban and rural. Mid-career, she took a leave of absence from being a principal to serve as the Associate Director, Leadership and Professional Development, with the Canadian Medical Association, which was an incredible learning experience. Anne Marie has a PhD in Holistic and Aesthetic Education from OISE at the University of Toronto. She thrives on finding collaborative, creative solutions to ensure each student has the opportunity to reach their potential. Anne Marie is married with two teenagers and lives in Peterborough, Ontario.

Appendix C: Table Discussion Guiding Questions

Following panel discussions, Symposium participants sat at role-specific tables to discuss what they had heard so far and how they understand inclusive education based on their own experiences and expertise. Each table was given a tailored set of questions to help guide the discussion. OSSTF/FEESO volunteers and staff facilitated discussions and took notes.

Education Workers and Teachers

1. In your role, discuss the best practices in reducing or mitigating violence (verbal/physical/near misses) at school that you have experienced.
2. Considering the issues brought forward today in the panel discussions and based on your personal experience, what suggestions could you make to improve the education environment for students and staff with respect to inclusive education?
3. Keeping issues of inclusion in your workplace in mind, what should decision makers consider regarding the needs of both students and staff moving forward?
4. In your role, discuss the best restorative practices and/or collaborative approaches for all those involved when a violent incident does take place.
5. What kind of barriers have you experienced when working with students who have special needs?
6. Share any resources and recommendations (books, articles, websites, etc.) that you may have.

Community Groups

1. As a community organization and/or stakeholder, what are the best practices in reducing or mitigating violence (verbal/physical/near misses) during activities and events that you have experienced?
2. As a community organization/stakeholder, discuss the best restorative practices and/or collaborative approaches for all those involved when a violent incident does take place.
3. Considering the issues brought forward today in the panel discussions and based on your personal experience, what suggestions could you make to improve the education environment for students and staff with respect to inclusive education?
4. Keeping issues of inclusion in your workplace in mind within your organization, what should decision makers consider regarding the needs of students, staff, families and community stakeholders moving forward?
5. What kind of barriers have you experienced when working with students who have special needs?
6. Share any resources and recommendations (books, articles, websites, etc.) that you may have.

Researchers

1. In your role, discuss the best practices in reducing or mitigating violence (verbal/physical/near misses) at school that you have experienced.
2. Keeping your research in mind, what should decision makers consider regarding the needs of both students and staff moving forward?
3. What are the barriers to full inclusion that you have found in your research when children are accessing learning, co-curricular activities and in other public spaces like busing, playgrounds or community hubs like libraries?
4. Provide suggestions for educational teams to consider in how to access, share and put current research into practice in their worksites?

Unions

1. As a labour unionist, what are the best practices in reducing or mitigating violence (verbal/physical/near misses) during activities and events that you have experienced and/or your Members have reported?
2. Considering the issues brought forward today in the panel discussions and based on your personal experience, what suggestions could you make to improve the education environment for students and staff with respect to inclusive education?
3. Keeping issues of inclusion in your workplace in mind within your organization, what should decision makers consider regarding the needs of students, staff, families and community stakeholders moving forward?
4. As a labour unionist, discuss the best restorative practices and/or collaborative approaches for all those involved when a violent incident does take place.
5. What barriers have your members encountered in your union working with students with special needs?
6. Share any resources and recommendations (books, articles, websites, etc.) that you may have.

Appendix D: OSSTF/FEESO Inclusive Education Policies

OSSTF/FEESO External Policies

Highlighted are some of our external policies relating to special education; we think of them as our wish list and reflecting our values of the organization based on things we cannot control. There are many policies that intersect with these ones based on students' intersecting identities as well. These are not in any particular order, just pulled them in order as they are printed in the documents.

Timetabling:
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the additional preparation, workload, and time requirements necessary for the preparation of documents related to Special Education, Student Success and/or students at risk and individual education plans (IEPs) should be formally recognized in teachers' and educational workers' collective agreements.

Guidance:
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that all necessary assessments and interventions required to identify and/or assist in programming for exceptional students, other than those required of qualified medical personnel, should be provided by qualified school board personnel.

Assaults and Harassment:
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that all student suspensions resulting from Complaints or acts or threats of violence or harassment towards any educational worker should be external suspensions in order to protect the safety and well -being of all educational workers, pending further investigation by school administration and/ or authorities.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that in addition to expulsion and suspension, strategies for dealing with violence should include the provision of alternative programs staffed by unionized school board personnel who shall not be assigned to work alone.

Health and Safety Working Conditions:
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that employers should take every precaution reasonable to protect workers as required by the OHSA.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that every member should have the right to a psychologically safe work environment and that every employer of OSSTF/FEESO members should establish and maintain a psychologically safe workplace which should include, but not be limited to, the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

Education Finance:
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry of Education should ensure that there will be adequate sustained funding to support curriculum programs for public school education.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that there should be dedicated and protected funding to maintain sufficient levels of support staff in schools, offices, libraries, and information technology department.

Rating Capacity of School:
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that publicly funded school boards should be encouraged to seek immediate revisions of the current Ministry secondary school capacity formula such that these revisions reflect the realities of the current curriculum, adult education, special education, collective agreements and other conditions that may prevail.

Curriculum Review and Development:
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the teacher federations, should establish and maintain long-range planning policies and procedures for evidence - based curriculum development, implementation and review.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry should ensure that curriculum is inclusive (rather than exclusive) and that it emphasizes the lived experiences and histories of marginalized people, empowering students to think critically and challenge injustices, promoting respectful relationships and holding high expectations for all of its students.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry of Education should create curriculum that is evidence -based, that is free from bias and discrimination, that promotes equity and inclusivity and is developed through partnership with teachers and education workers at every stage of the development process.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry of Education should create specific programming to serve and support student needs.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that any new

curriculum developed for destreaming should provide clear assessment benchmarks and guidance for teachers and education workers, created in consultation with equity-seeking educators.

Implementation and Delivery:

- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that Members should be free to pursue the goals and objectives of courses being taught, in an atmosphere of openness and sensitivity, and in accordance with their professional judgment.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry of Education should provide, along with curriculum policy, appropriate course profiles, adequate funding for texts and other learning resources in both official languages, and appropriate professional development well in advance of the date of implementation.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that all public boards of education should provide full-time, fully -funded early learning and care programs, including full-day, fully-funded junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that special education should be administered through a departmental structure complete with positions of responsibility.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that integration of an exceptional student into regular classes should be a flexible goal which means to the greatest degree possible; the degree of integration should change as the child's needs change.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that full -day junior and senior kindergarten programs should be provided within the context of a full system of early learning and care guided by the following principles:
  - programming and curriculum should be child -centred, developmentally appropriate and should support growth in all developmental domains
  - programs should be built on an integrated model that makes professional student services personnel and other supports available for children and families
  - programs should provide a high quality and well-resourced learning and care environment with qualified, well-paid and well-supported staff
  - programs should offer a universal

entitlement to children and their families
  - programs should be fully-public and non-profit
  - programs should be founded on the principles of equity and inclusion
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs should be staffed by an early learning team, including a minimum of a certified teacher and a certified early childhood educator in every classroom.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the employer should ensure that all students have access to the technology required to fulfill the expectations of all curriculum programs in such a way that neither students nor OSSTF/FEESO members are disadvantaged.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that there should be communication and consultation between the Ministry of Education, OSSTF/FEESO, the school boards and Black, Indigenous, racialized students, as well as students living with disabilities in all matters related to destreaming.

Learning Resources

- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that adequate funding should be provided for learning resources in all grades, levels and subject areas.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the approval, and costs associated with the approval, of texts and other learning resources should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that adequate funding of school library information centres should be provided to allow for a rich diversity of resources to meet the requirements of all curricular areas and the diverse reading and information needs of students.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that no "Bring Your Own Device" policy should limit or disadvantage any student's full participation in an education program.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that members should have access to necessary support services provided by professional school board personnel to best meet student needs.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that any protocols created or adopted by any employer should respect, acknowledge, and include the lived experiences and input from the parents,

students, educators and community members from racialized, marginalized, and historically oppressed groups.

Student and Parent Rights and Responsibilities:

- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that all publicly funded educational institutions should make available to students a variety of programs provided by the institution's personnel, to suit special needs.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that students should be entitled to an education in an environment free of violence, harassment and bullying in any of its variant forms.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that policies, programs, curriculum and learning resources should be in place to ensure that all students have an opportunity to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that there should be no implementation of alternative or substitute Ontario Secondary School Diplomas.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that all Ontario employers who are covered by the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and who hire student employees on a part-time or casual basis should exercise their duty to provide information, instruction and supervision to protect the health and safety of those employees in the same manner as if they were regular full-time employees.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that all Ontario students should have access to gender neutral washrooms in their places of learning.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that Ontario students should have the right to use washrooms that co-relate with their identity and/or expression.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that residents of Ontario without legal immigration status should have full access to public education.

Special Education:

- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ontario Ministry of Education should provide provincial standards, curriculum guides and curriculum resources for all special education self-contained or partially self-contained classes.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that integration of an exceptional student into regular classes should be recognized as a "process" to allow exceptional students to reach their fullest potential and not just as a matter of placement.

Anti-racism and Anti-discrimination

- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the use of school team names, clubs, logos, and mascots that are considered offensive, especially but not limited to Indigenous people, should be prohibited.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry of Education should provide the resources required to create a robust and comprehensive protocol guiding all police-student interactions that occur in or on school property, or in relation to events that occur in schools.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that employers should properly train and educate all teachers and education workers so that they have the confidence, sensitivity, and knowledge to accurately and respectfully provide anti-racism education to students in Ontario.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the Ministry of Education should update the content, pedagogy, and development of anti-racism and anti-oppression education in Ontario.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that any research that fails to take an anti-oppression approach, should not be considered credible or relevant for new or revised publicly-funded school/ board policy, procedure, and/or program that involves the use of police.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that any and all policies and programs that have discriminatory effects on racialized students, particularly Black, Indigenous, racialized, marginalized students as well as students living with disabilities and those of the LGBTQ2SI communities should be rescinded and not be permitted in any Ontario school or board of education.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that all School Resource Officer (SRO) or other similar programs and related policies that have led to the securitization and surveillance paradigm in Ontario schools should end immediately.

Early Learning and Care Programs

- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that the governments of Canada and Ontario should provide and fully fund universally accessible, non-profit, publicly-delivered, and high quality programs of early learning and care for children aged 0 to 12.
- It is the policy of OSSTF/FEESO that full-time, fully-funded early learning and care programs for children aged 0 to 12 should be provided as part of the public education.

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