

**Inclusion in TDSB**  
**Toronto Family Network Presentation to SEAC**  
**November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Inclusion should not be a vision. Inclusion should automatically be a fact based on just being. Inclusion is not a matter of degree. One is either included or not. One either has an inclusive education system or one does not.

The question is how can this be achieved within the Toronto District School Board? We believe that there are seven basic steps required.

The Toronto Family Network would recommend that the TDSB implement the following:

1. The Board shall provide a comprehensive definition of inclusive education that everyone understands and uses.

The current definition in the TDSB Special Education Plan states that inclusion is “an attitude toward the need and right to belong to one’s community”.

Yes, inclusion can be considered an attitude based on the belief system that each and every individual has value and dignity no matter the individual’s colour, race, religion, sexual orientation or ability. But inclusion is not merely an attitude.

For this reason, the Toronto Family Network proposes that the TDSB revise its definition by adopting one of the following two definitions or combining them.

The first is from the Canadian Association of Community Living. Inclusive education is:

*When ALL students attend and are welcomed into their neighbourhood schools in age appropriate regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute to and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. As well, all students are challenged to meet their unique intellectual, social, physical and career development goals.*

The second definition comes from Disability is Natural:

*Inclusion is children with disabilities being educated in the school they would attend if they didn't have disabilities, in age-appropriate regular education classrooms, where services and supports are provided in those classrooms for both the students and their teachers, and where students with disabilities are fully participating members of their school communities in academic and extracurricular activities.*

These definitions clearly show that inclusion is not the same as “mainstreaming” or “integration.” Inclusion is belonging -- not visiting.

If one is truly included, one does not need to be integrated. To have to be integrated, one has to have already been excluded. Inclusion does not allow for separating, ignoring, neglecting, marginalizing and/or alienating. Inclusion does not allow for stigmas, stereotypes, myths, and/or perceptions based on ableism and/or paternalistic attitudes of pity or charity.

2. The Board shall ensure that people first language is utilized constantly and continually in policies, procedures and practices.

The language that we use is powerful. We must remember, as Kathie Snow of Disability is Natural states, that words can “perpetuate negative stereotypes and reinforce...attitudinal barriers.” Everyone needs to understand and accept that terms such as “autistic kids”, “the learning disabled”, “D.D. classes” and “Physical disability classes” undermine the value of the person and puts the disability first rather than the child.

3. The Board shall combine the TDSB Special Education Department with the Teaching and Learning Department.

This would be in keeping with the principles of universal design and with the promotion of the belief that best practices in teaching and learning are best practices for all students. This would be consistent with a unified educational system which was proposed by the **Council of Administrators of Special Education in 1993** and is currently implemented in other educational jurisdictions in Canada, such as New Brunswick.

4. The Board shall review and recognize that the Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan may be antithetical to the creation of an inclusive system.

Equity is inherent in the concept of inclusion but inclusion may not necessarily be inherent in the concept of equity. What this means is that equity may be used as an excuse to maintain special education schools and promote the status quo regarding special education class settings and the myth of special education.

Based on section 14 of the Ontario Human Rights Code, the only grounds by which a system can institute and maintain “special programs” is if these programs are designed: 1) to relieve hardship or disadvantage 2) to help the disadvantaged group to achieve or try to achieve opportunities and 3) to help eliminate discrimination. Based on the research by the TDSB and external sources, the special education schools and classes that currently exist within TDSB may be determined not to meet these criteria. For the Board to use equity of educational opportunities and education to maintain these special education schools and classes would appear to undermine the whole concept of inclusion.

5. The Board shall ensure all students receive their education within their community schools.

Students will begin their schooling in kindergarten or any other grade with their same-age peers. This would mean it would no longer be necessary to hold Special Education Program Recommendation Committee. The SEPRC is not a legal requirement and by removing it, the TDSB could be considered to actually demonstrate a commitment to inclusion for each and every student.

Students would begin their educational career in what is currently referred to as a regular class “with appropriate special education services” and the same age peers would be considered their “community of learners”. This is truly a natural learning environment. Students will have recesses and lunches together in the same place and at the same time. Students will use the same parts of the school and will not be confined to a separated and specific area. Student support is not based on label or type of class but based on individual need.

The Canadian Inclusive Education Knowledge Exchange Initiative (found in the resource list you have been provided), makes it clear that students with additional or differing needs in regular class placement showed greater improvement in language, academic performance, social and emotional development and later in employment status. It was noted that there were no adverse effects to other students and that the transition of these students to postsecondary institutions and adult life in the community was more positive and productive.

It must be remembered that inclusion is a basic human right and a legal right. This is clearly stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and Regulation 181/98 of the Education Act of Ontario.

We have included Regulation 181 because at IPRCs, placement choice is either “Regular Class with appropriate special education services” or Special Education.

The fact that Reg. 181 includes the wording “with appropriate special education services” after the words “Regular Class” indicates that the law requires that students are entitled to and shall receive the supports that they require within their neighbourhood or community school with their same-age peers.

6. The Board shall remove the Intensive Support Program designation and the Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 service delivery model currently used in the TDSB.

This designation and model have resulted in a denial of access to support services to students in need. The students affected were either in the regular class or were not considered to be a “priority” to decision-makers although their needs were known and by law had to be addressed.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, if a need has been identified, the support accommodations must be provided and in a timely manner and to the point of undue hardship.

The Ministry of Education Memorandum to Directors of Education, dated December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, clearly states that any child with a need is “entitled” to have his or her needs met.

7. To achieve inclusion, the Board shall close all segregated schools and the students currently enrolled in these separated and different environments will be returned to their community schools with the necessary supports.

To do so, the TDSB would be debunking the myth of special education as something different, additional and special. To do so would be to destroy the cultural legacy and allow for a cultural shift to achieving inclusive attitudes and environments. By doing so, TDSB will be demonstrating a clear commitment to authentic inclusion.

In closing, we do not think that there is one person in this room that would not agree with the fact that what happened to Aboriginal children in the residential schools was wrong and that what happened to children, youth and adults with disabilities in the residential institutions was wrong. So we would ask: Why would we accept the continued use of segregation in the Toronto public school system?

Each and every one of these exclusionary institutional settings is based on the same premise that individuals who are different are an anomaly to normalcy and do not belong nor are accepted in the mini-society we call school.