



SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Leading the Way to Inclusive Schools



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Research and practice tell us that school principals play a key role in promoting and supporting an inclusive school culture. Through their values, knowledge, skills, and commitment, principals lead the way in fostering inclusion for all students. Effective principal leadership is foundational to commitments in meeting the educational needs of an increasingly diverse student population. This brochure outlines areas for principals and other system leaders to consider while meeting this challenge.



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Guiding Principles for Inclusion:

The provision of inclusive public education is based on three complementary principles:



1. Public education is universal

The provincial curriculum is provided equitably to all students and this provision is done in an inclusive, common learning environment shared amongst same-age, neighbourhood peers;



2. Public education is individualized

The success of each student depends on the degree to which education aims to address students' best interests and responds to their strengths and needs; and



3. Leaders are required to be flexible and responsive to change

Leaders are required to be flexible and responsive to change in order to support educational staff to best meet the needs of all students.

P-A-S

THE PATH TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: PHYSICAL, ACADEMIC, AND SOCIAL



Physical

- Provides access to learning environments that are conducive to meeting the learning needs of all students in their neighbourhood schools.
- Provides access to instruction for all students within the common learning environment - the inclusive classroom.
- Provides access to safe and supportive learning environments where experience and learning are valued for all students.



Academic

- Provides access to curriculum, instruction, and learning activities that are meaningful, differentiated, and challenging for all students.
- Provides access to collaborative, comprehensive, and responsive supports and services.



Social

- All students are contributing members of their classrooms and schools.
- All students belong and are valued members of their school community in which everyone is accepted and supported by all members of the school community.

Policy and Inclusive Education:

Canada's Ministries of Education provide policies and guidelines for inclusive education. Canadian and International statutes shape policies and mandates. These include:

- **Education Acts**
- **The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**
- **Provincial Human Rights Legislation**
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

Research Tells Us:



- ◆ **The role of the school principal is pivotal in creating and promoting inclusive school cultures** (Sider & Maich, 2022; McGhie-Richmond & Haider, 2020)
- ◆ **The environment and culture of the school setting can have a direct impact on acceptance of all students** (Bennett et al., 2021)
- ◆ **Teaching strategies such as Universal Design for Learning** (Katz, Sokal, & Wu, 2021; Katz, 2015) **and Differentiated Instruction** (Goddard, Goddard, Bailes, and Nichols, 2019; Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008) **support the academic and social inclusion of all students.**
- ◆ **Social benefits accrue for all students in inclusive classrooms, such as increased understanding, advocacy, and positive attitudes towards diversity** (DeMatthews & Mueller, 2021)

For Further Reading:



[THE JOURNEY TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING: Advancing School Transformation From Within](#)



[Every child matters: What principals need to effectively lead inclusive schools](#)



[ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Keys to transformational change in public education systems](#)



[If Inclusion Means Everyone, Why Not me?](#)



[OPC The Register - Fall 2019 Issue](#)



[LEAD TO INCLUDE: Supporting Principals and other School Leaders as they Develop Inclusive School Environments](#)

IMPLEMENTATION

The Inclusive School Leader



A **PRINCIPAL**

leads the movement towards a truly inclusive school - asks:

- Where do I begin?
- What do I need to consider?
- What do I need to learn?
- How do I embed inclusion in all aspects of the school's culture and operations?

1

BEGIN BY ASKING YOURSELF:

- ❓ What is my own understanding of inclusive schools?
- ❓ What skills, knowledge, values, and commitments do I have?
- ❓ What experiences have I had which inform decisions and directions?
- ❓ What do I have yet to learn?



CONSIDER:

- 💡 Learn more about inclusive education
- 💡 Identify exemplars of inclusive practice
- 💡 Identify resources: people, information, research, websites, model schools, and more
- 💡 Understand that inclusive practices and effective school practices are one and the same
- 💡 Develop a research- and evidence-based context for school improvement focused on inclusion

2

THEN FOCUS ON "CHANGE":

- ❓ What do I know about the change process?
- ❓ Do I understand how to support complex change in a school?
- ❓ What do I have yet to learn?
- ❓ Who can I look to for collaborative support?



CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- 💡 Uncovering and defining collective purpose
- 💡 Articulating purpose and building commitment
- 💡 Creating safe environments for risk-taking
- 💡 Ensuring that changes are authentic and not performative
- 💡 Supporting comprehensive paradigm shifts
- 💡 Building collective learning into the process
- 💡 Upholding the principles of inclusion while addressing practical issues
- 💡 Creating a culture that encourages "learning by doing"

CREATE A COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM FOR SUCCESS

**It takes a TEAM. The principal enables change efforts ...
... but it is a TEAM that makes it happen**

It takes a **TEAM**. The principal enables change efforts, but it is a **team** that makes it happen. A critical stage for nurturing inclusive schools is establishing collaborative leadership **teams** within your school. Using principles of inclusion, these **teams** can help shape inclusive learning environments. These collaborative leadership **teams** are vital in assisting school leaders to embed inclusive practices in the school culture and operations as well as ensuring sustainability and collective accountability. **Teams** ensure that critical decisions that involve complex factors are never made alone.

In the following section the terminology used for roles and processes may vary among jurisdictions.

Identify champions of inclusion and invest in their professional learning

Who are your key Champions?

- ★ A teacher or teachers?
- ★ A student or student leaders?
- ★ A support/resource teacher?
- ★ An educational assistant?
- ★ A professional service support person?
- ★ A parent/guardian or group of caregivers?
- ★ Someone from your community, school board/district, or another school?

Establish Collaborative Leadership Teams that will collaborate and work with students, families, teachers, and other educators to align principles of inclusion and effective practices with current structures and policies

Collaborative Leadership Teams can include:

- ★ Administrative Team
- ★ School Improvement Team
- ★ Student Services Team which can include:
 - ★ Administrator(s); support/resource teacher(s); guidance counsellor(s) and child/youth workers; other professionals; district staff; other staff, as appropriate
 - ★ Community partners
 - ★ Parents/families



CLARIFICATION OF SUPPORTING ROLES

SCHOOL-BASED STUDENT SERVICES TEAM

The school-based Student Service Team establishes a positive, supportive, and welcoming climate for all students. They:

- Establish effective partnerships with parents/families
- Support professional learning opportunities for teachers and other educators
- Establish mutual support among teachers and other educators by creating organizational climate and work routines that focus on teamwork and collaboration
- Ensure effective use of resources
- Focus teacher attention on inclusive instructional strategies
- Ensure classrooms are organized and equipped for quality instruction



EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT

Support the classroom teacher and provide direct support to students based on their needs.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Develop school-wide initiatives to improve instructional outcomes for ALL students linking school improvement and inclusion.

SUPPORT/RESOURCE TEACHER

Supports the classroom teacher to develop inclusive instructional strategies as a partner, coach, co-teacher, and collaborator. Facilitate sharing among teachers to address challenges and dilemmas. Coordinate with family members to identify effective ways to support student success. Liaise with the principal and educational specialists to ensure that all students' needs are being fully met. Provide specific instruction to individual students and groups of students when considered necessary.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT SUPPORT STAFF

Contribute specific knowledge and skill for meeting student needs based on professional skills and experiences. This includes specialists in critical areas such as literacy, behaviour, autism, visual and hearing impairment. It also includes school psychologists, speech language therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, and others.

IDENTIFY: WHAT STRUCTURES DO I BUILD?

- Protocols for actions
- Approaches to solving challenges

ASSESS WHAT YOUR SCHOOL NEEDS:

Ensure your decisions are based on accurate data and not assumptions – possible instruments to use:

- Provincial perception data
- School reviews
- Self-reflection tools
- School audits

IDENTIFY: WITH WHOM DO I COMMUNICATE?

Intentional communication with:

- Community
- School and district staff
- Parents – as individuals
- Students

1. Understanding the value of inclusive schools
2. Reminding about alignment/purpose in our practice and decision-making
3. Informing about personalized goal setting and programming
4. Teaching about value in inclusive communities

INCLUSIVE SCHOOL INDICATORS

"What to look for ..."

Many of the things you will observe in an inclusive school include:

- Teacher training
- Effective problem solving
- Collective commitment to inclusion – well communicated
- Integrated leadership models
- School-based student services team
- Sense of belonging by students and staff
- Sense of collective responsibility towards all students
- Focus on Response to Intervention, Tiered Supports, Pyramid of Intervention
- Personal Behaviour Intervention Plan; Positive Behaviour Intervention Plan
- Common Learning Environments
- Safe Learning Environments
- Differentiated Instruction
- Personalized Learning and Planning
- Comprehensive Transition Planning
- Evidence of Achievement
- Resource teacher (learning support teacher) as coach or co-teacher
- Flexible and fluid groupings of students
- Spectrum of educators providing “wrap-around” support to the students
- Common Planning Time
- Involvement & Support from community agencies

LEVELS OF SUPPORT

WHO DO I SUPPORT?



- Classroom teachers and their instructional practices are the primary focus of principals' support
- Members of the school team to ensure effective instructional programs for all students are implemented and successful
- Teachers and other school staff to ensure the development and use of inclusive educational practices, such as Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction, Cooperative Learning, Co-Teaching, Collaborative Practice, Individualized instruction.

Principals play a key role in supporting students and their families and ensuring student success in the classroom.

IDENTIFY: WHAT COMPETENCIES DO I REQUIRE?

SKILLS

Specific Competencies:

- **Communication:** Communicate consistently and comprehensively with teachers, system leaders, other educators, students, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Provide instructional leadership for teachers in differentiated pedagogical practices.
- **Professional Learning:** Identify problems of practice and implement professional learning opportunities for oneself, for teachers, and for the staff as a whole to target areas of need.
- **Advocacy and Program Development:** Lobby to system leaders and community organizations for programs, services, and supports that will enhance student success.
- **Collaboration:** Engage educators in collaborative communities of practice to strategically develop and implement programs contributing to student success.
- **Problem-solving:** Ability to frame, re-frame, and examine challenges leading to effective implementation of solutions.
- **Human Resources:** Hire, train, support, and retain staff committed to the inclusion of students with special education needs.

KNOWLEDGE

Specific Competencies:

- **Policies and Procedures :** Awareness of and ability to navigate school jurisdiction identification, placement, review, staffing, and funding issues.

LEVELS OF SUPPORT

- **Legal Requirements:** Knowledge related to provincial or state regulations for inclusion and special education.
- **Lived Experience of Students with Special Education Needs:** Awareness of the experiences of students with special education needs and insight into the potential barriers they experience and the opportunities to overcome these barriers.
- **Differentiated Leadership:** Knowledge of flexible class and school-wide approaches to students' strengths and needs and models the way.
- **Contextual Knowledge:** Awareness of the specific contextual factors for students and their families, individuals within the school, community (e.g., champions of inclusion, toxic naysayers) as well as knowledge of the overall school climate and of the neighbouring community.

ATTITUDES

Specific Competencies:

- **Values Inclusion:** Actively communicates and models a belief that all students should be included in their neighbourhood schools.
- **Agency:** Actively engages students, their family members, teachers, and others in the educational environment to work from an asset-based perspective, focusing on strengths and opportunities as opposed to only focusing on the challenges and needs.
- **Fosters Relationships:** Recognizes that relationships are fundamentally important to the successes of all students and actively works to foster professional relationships that model acceptance and inclusion.
- **Embodies Professional Standards:** Holds up ethical standards such as trust, respect, integrity, and care in their work to support all students.

Adapted from ©Sider & Maich, 2022

Inclusive Education Resources for Principals

- Inclusive Education Canada website: www.inclusiveeducation.ca
- Lead to Include: www.leadtoinclude.org
- Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education: www.inclusiveeducationresearch.ca
- Inclusion Canada: www.inclusioncanada.ca
- Ontario College of Teachers (2018). [Exploring leadership practices through case inquiry: Supporting inclusive schools.](#)
- Sider, S., & Maich, K. (2022). [Leadership for Inclusive Schools: Cases from Principals for Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs.](#) Rowman & Littlefield.

Provincial & Territorial Inclusive Education Policies and Resources

Explore the following for more information on inclusive education policies in various Canadian jurisdictions:

- British Columbia: [Key Issues - Discrimination](#)
- Alberta: [Inclusive Education](#)
- Saskatchewan: [Supporting Students with Additional Needs](#)
- Manitoba: [Education and Early Childhood Learning](#)
- ON: [The Ontario Leadership Framework](#)
- Quebec : [Policy on Educational Success A Love of LEarning, A Chanve to Succeed](#)
- Nova Scotia: [Inclusive Education](#)
- New Brunswick: [Education and Early Childhood Development: Respect – Diversity – Inclusion](#)
- Prince Edward Island: [Special Educational Needs](#)
- Newfoundland: [Inclusive schools](#)
- Northwest Territories: [Inclusive Learning](#)
- Yukon:
 - [Inclusive education](#)
 - [Reimagining inclusive and special education in the Yukon](#)

More About Inclusive Education Canada

Inclusive Education Canada (IEC) promotes a Canadian vision for inclusive education. It is a meeting place for parents, family members, teachers, education officials and community members committed to making inclusive education a reality.

IEC provides leadership to parents, families, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders in the education system. We maintain a Network of Associates who support our work and activities that focus on strengthening inclusion in Canadian schools.

Inclusive Education Canada is an initiative **Inclusion Canada**, a national federation working to advance the full inclusion and human rights of people with an intellectual disability.

