

Progress Towards Inclusion:

Parent Perspectives on Inclusive Education in Manitoba

A summary of the results from a 2011 online survey of parents and caregivers of Manitoba students with disabilities

Community Living-Manitoba



Diversity Includes.

Overview

From May to December 2011, Community Living Manitoba collected data through an online survey on inclusive education from parents of students with a wide variety of exceptional learning needs and disabilities. There were 84 respondents from 24 school divisions across all grade levels from Nursery to Grade 12. While 92% of respondents agreed with Manitoba's Philosophy of Inclusion, 49% agreed that they had experienced significant stress due to the lack of appropriate supports and services for their son/daughter in the school setting. As a result, 27% indicated that they had taken a leave of absence from their employment to cope with the challenges associated with advocating for the appropriate education of their son/ daughter.

When asked about perceived barriers to realizing the vision of inclusive and appropriate educational programming for their son/daughter, 51% reported challenges with the classroom teacher, 41% with educational assistants, 35% with resource teachers, 33% with school principals and 30% with student services administrators. These challenges could include lack of knowledge of how to differentiate the curriculum, or lack of understanding of how an exceptional learning need may impact a student in their classroom.

While the majority of students with exceptional learning needs/disabilities are placed in their neighbourhood school with same aged peers for at least 50% of the school day the remaining 40% experienced some level of segregation. Attendance at a designated school within the school division, or placement in programs that sequester the student from their same aged peers for greater than 50% of the school day were the primary examples of segregation. This occurred across all age ranges and disability profiles, but was most evident in the high school setting.

The results of this survey support the findings in the recent Auditor General's report on Special Needs Education, especially when questions of accountability regarding individual planning, its implementation and monitoring were addressed.

Further to this, while parents reported that they generally felt welcomed and supported by school and school division staff, 48% responded that their son or daughter had been the target of bullying, while 49% indicated that the lack of supports and services at school had lead to significant stress or anxiety for their son or daughter.

Another area of concern is the transition to adulthood. While 53% of parents surveyed indicated that their sons/daughters were between the ages of 14 and 21 y, only 47% knew of the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol introduced in 2008.

Suggested ways to address the challenges that are currently being experienced within Manitoba schools, include more professional development opportunities and capacity building among staff, ranging from the classroom teacher, educational assistant to the school and school division leadership. Over 50% of respondents indicated that better communication between home and school about how appropriate educational programming will be provided to a student with or without student-specific funding was also supported as a way to help address these challenges.

Other ideas that were supported included:

- Increased teacher to student ratios in the regular classroom
- Providing classroom teachers with more resources to support inclusion
- More efficient and effective provision of clinical supports to students
- Greater opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in extracurricular activities of the school
- Encouraging practices that target changing attitudes – inclusion is not just a place, disabilities are one facet of the diversity that exists within Manitoba's schools and workplaces.

Introduction

Inclusive education is an ideal that promotes the social value of all Manitoba students in the public education system. It is our responsibility to ensure that our students are educated in their neighbourhood schools with their same aged peers because of the diversity that they bring to the classroom and school. The first provision of the amendment to the Public Schools Act: Appropriate Educational Programming, 2005, is this placement. The second is the teaching of the provincial curriculum. Any changes to either of these provisions must be documented and decided upon in a collaborative manner with the school team. Along with the classroom and resource teachers, representation from school administration, and in-school clinical support, this team includes the parents/caregivers and as much as possible, the student who has the disability. In 2009, an initial survey¹ was done to measure parent perspectives on the progress towards inclusive education in Manitoba schools. That survey was followed by a parent survey directed at the transition to adulthood process in 2010² in response to the 2008 release of the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol. Both of these surveys indicated that there were areas of need in moving the inclusive education agenda forward. Recommendations that came out of these reports included:

- A better orientation of the general public regarding the advantages of having diverse classrooms,
- More and better staff in-servicing regarding specific disability related information, as well as,
- More support in the learning and implementation of general techniques for differentiating instruction and addressing the multi-level, multiple learner profiles of today's classrooms.

Parents many times expressed a feeling of being “out of the loop” when it came to knowing what to expect from the school/school division in terms of supports and programming for their sons and daughters with disabilities. Another major recommendation was to increase effective home-school communication.

In order to monitor what is happening in our public school system, in the spring of 2011, another parent/caregiver survey on the state of inclusive education in Manitoba was drafted, using many of the previous questions as well as some new ones to get another “snapshot” of how our province is progressing on this agenda. The survey was created to be an online instrument (www.kwiksurveys.com) and data was collected from May to December 2011. Parent/caregiver input was gathered in a number of domains that included:

- Demographic information
 - Where they resided
 - Family status
 - Employment status
 - School division
 - Grade level range of student with disability (primary, elementary, middle, high, graduate)
- Any connection to Children's disAbility Services or Child and Family Services
- Diagnostic profiles of students with disabilities in our schools
- Provision of educational programming
 - Placement

¹ http://www.aclmb.ca/Inclusive_Education/InclEducation_FinalReport_Jul2009.pdf

² http://www.aclmb.ca/TransToAdulthood/Transitioning_to_Adulthood_report_2010.pdf

- Student specific funding, if any
- Individual education plan (IEP)
- Clinical services
- Challenges faced by parents/caregivers within the education system
- Challenges faced by students within the education system
 - Relationships with peers and adults in the school setting
 - Bullying
 - Suspension/expulsion
- Transition to adulthood planning
- Recommendations to make the educational experiences better for student and their families.

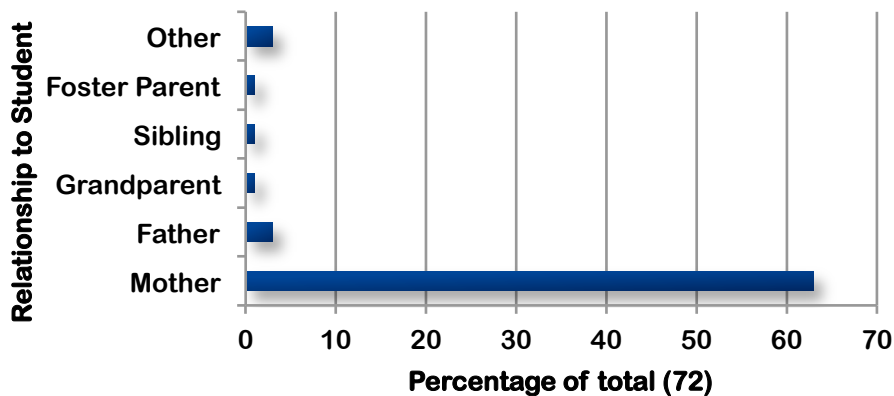
The survey instrument used allowed for the tracking of IP addresses and a question asking for the postal code of all survey respondents further verified the uniqueness of each completed survey.

Results

Demographic information about survey respondents:

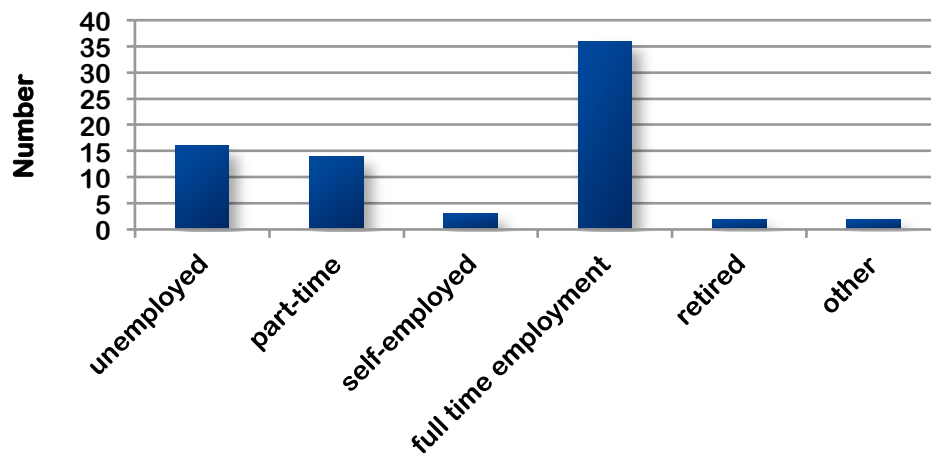
There were a total of 84 responses received, with 8 designated “incomplete” as they did not provide sufficient data to be included with the remaining 72. The majority of those who responded were the mothers of students, with a few fathers, grandparents, self-advocates (high school aged or older) and foster parents. Over 70% of those who responded had completed some level of post-secondary education, with 12% indicating that they had incomplete post-secondary education, 13% indicated that they had completed high school and 5 % indicating that they had partial secondary (high) school education.

Relationship of Survey Respondent to Student



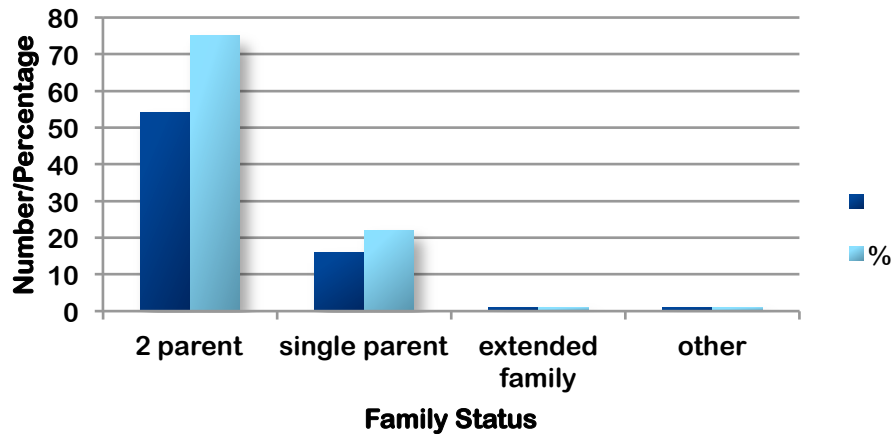
The 2006 Participation and Active Living Survey (PALS) of people with disabilities in Canada, it was reported that many parents of children with disabilities experience changes in their employment status as a result of the increased demands associated with parenting a child with extra needs. Responses to the survey indicated that just over half of respondents were able to work fulltime, with the remaining 50% unemployed, part-time or self-employed. Many parents reported that they had to assume casual positions because of their son or daughter’s “conditions” or that they were on leave from full time employment to be home with their children. At least two parents indicated that because they opted to home school their children, their ability to work outside of the home was limited.

Employment Status of Respondent



Family status is another area affected by the presence of a child with a disability. Many parents, when faced with the additional stress that may be associated with parenting a child with a disability, end up with marriage breakdown and one parent assuming primary caregiver status for the child. PALS data suggests that this is a common experience and our survey reported that the majority of respondents (over 70%) were from two parent families, with just over 20% of respondents were single parents. These numbers are higher than expected and may reflect better supports available to families leading to greater success in marital relationship or that the type of respondent to this kind of online survey tend to be those with internet access and perhaps greater stability in the home life.

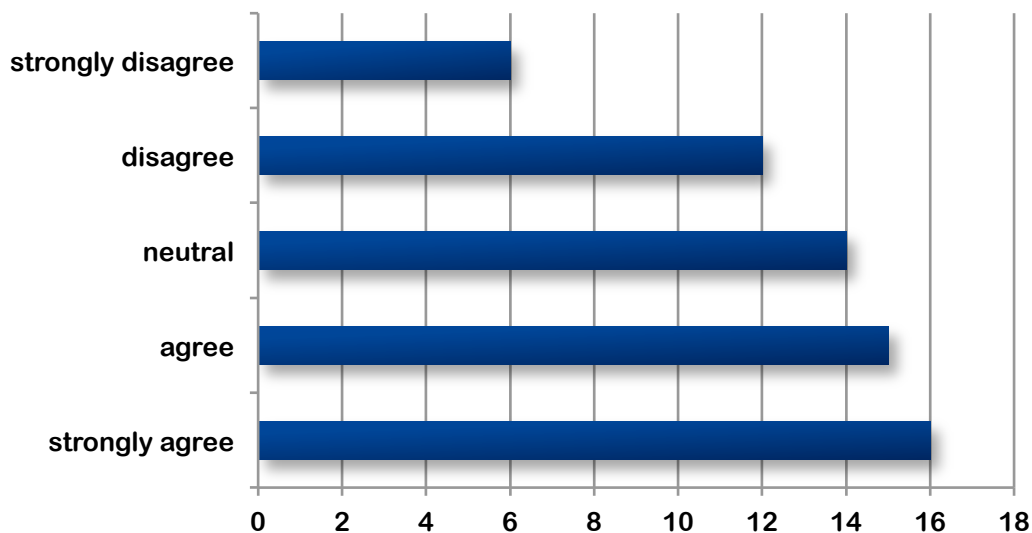
Family Status of Respondents



The challenges of supporting a child with a disability, while advocating for supports and services, can lead to additional stress on the family unit. Parents/caregivers were asked if they had experienced significant stress in their lives due to a lack of supports and services in the school setting. Approximately 49% indicated that they had (agreed or strongly agreed) while 28% indicated that they hadn't (disagreed or strongly disagreed) and 22% were neutral. This was across all disability areas and grade levels for the students in question.

As a result of this stress, 27% of parents/caregivers indicated that they had taken a leave of absence from their employment.

Experience of Significant Stress due to lack of services and supports in school setting (%)

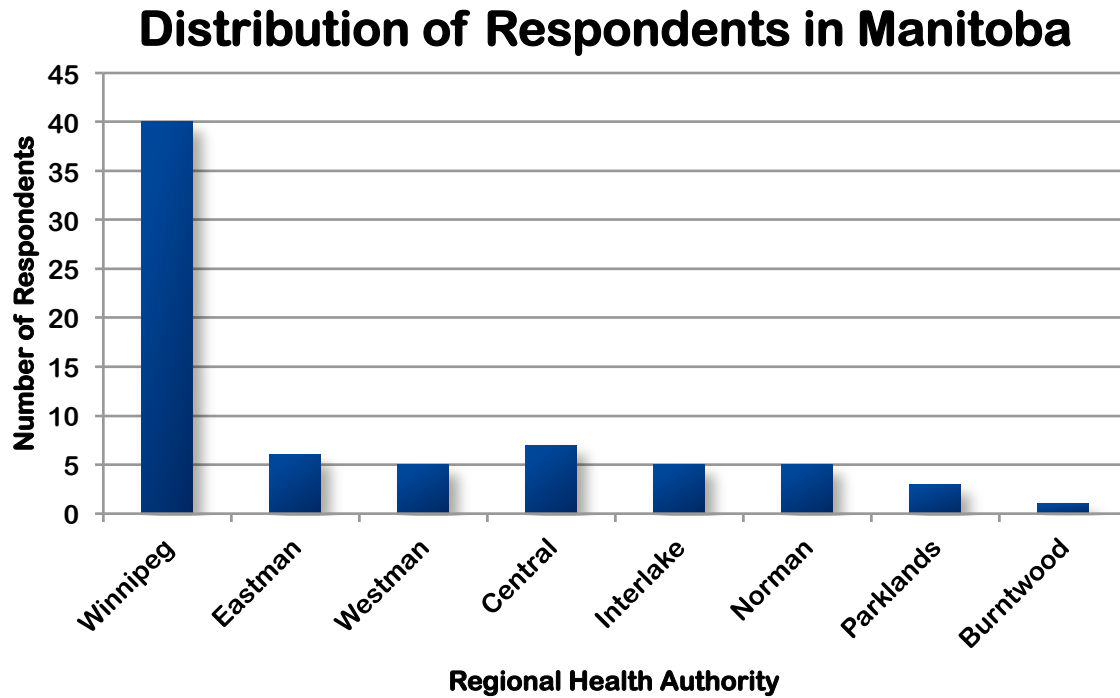


Respondents were also asked if they were receiving any support services through Children’s disAbility Services and/or Child and Family Services.

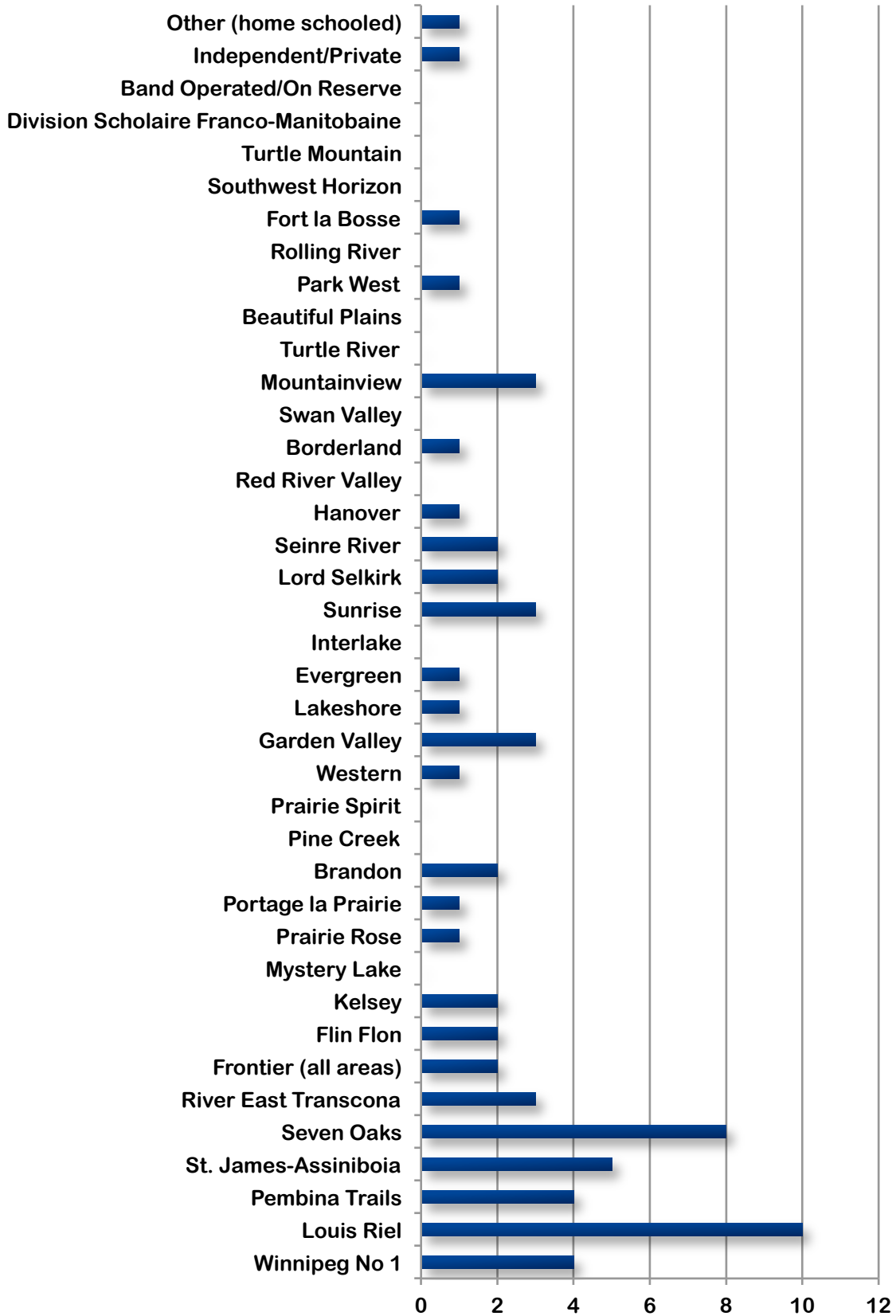
- Only 40% reported that they were receiving supports through CdAS, with
- 35% reporting that they are receiving supports through CFS.

There was some overlap between these two service agencies, but at least one respondent indicated that they were unaware of what these services were and how to access them.

It is important to see whether location within the province plays a role in how parent/caregiver perceptions of inclusive education are reported. Regional distribution was assessed using both health authority and school division as indicators.

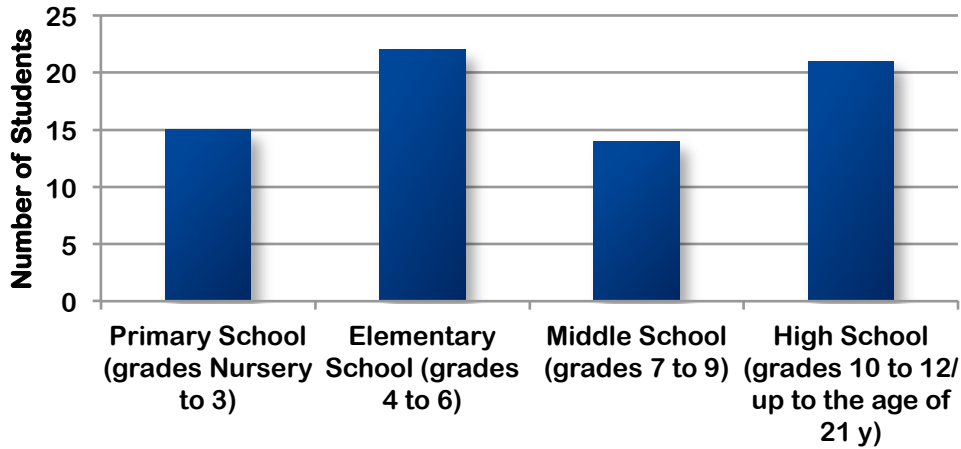


Number of Students per School Division



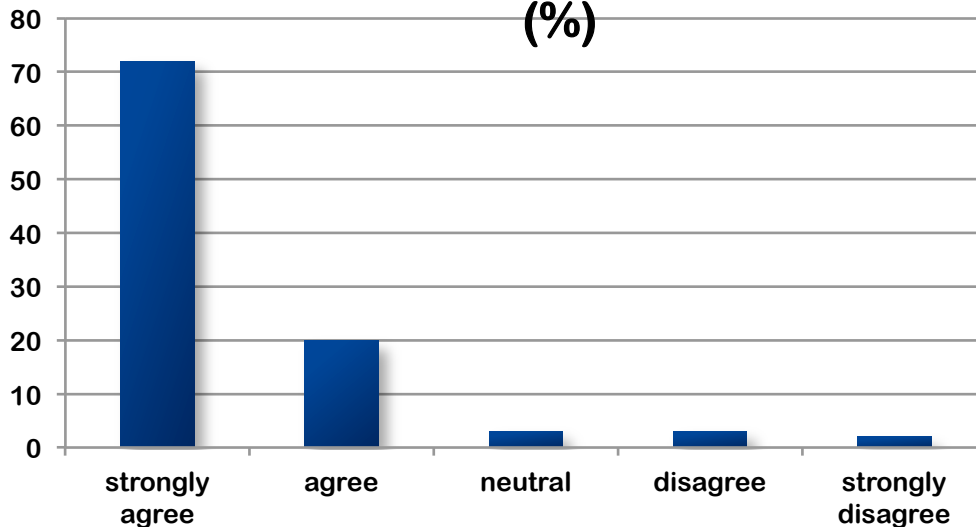
The grade level of students whose parents/caregivers responded to the survey were well distributed across the grade range and in some cases, results across grade levels are compared. There is a common conception that inclusive education is easier to achieve at lower grade levels and much more difficult to recognize at the high school level.

Student Distribution by Grade Level



Those who responded to the survey were asked how they viewed Manitoba’s Philosophy of Inclusion, at least on a theoretical level. Approximately 92% of respondents agreed with this philosophy with some commenting that they wished “that it was more than words.”

Manitoba's Philosophy of Inclusion (%)



When asked whether they thought that this philosophy guided the work of the school, 50% of respondents agreed, while 15% disagreed. Respondents were then asked what barriers they experienced in seeing this vision realized for their children. These barriers included challenges that they reported with various personnel in the school as follows:

School Personnel	Challenges Reported (%)
Classroom Teacher	51
Teaching Assistant/Educational Assistant	41
Resource Teacher	35
School Principal	33
Student Services Administrator	30

While there were a number of positive comments that were reported with these responses,
 “I am fortunate to have such wonderful educators at my son’s school,”
 “Our school has been wonderful for m son and are always willing to do what they can.”

These comments were also joined with others that included:
 “They need a lot more training on how to support kids with autism/Asperger’s,”
 “TA’s/EA’s have been inconsistent, they are not allowed to talk with parents on an ongoing basis...information is always delivered third party and with bias.”

Other respondents commented:
 “We have experienced a new resource teacher each year for the past four years, along with a different educational assistant each of those years.”

Another parent responded that a teacher told her that
 “It was a waste of time” to teach her daughter.

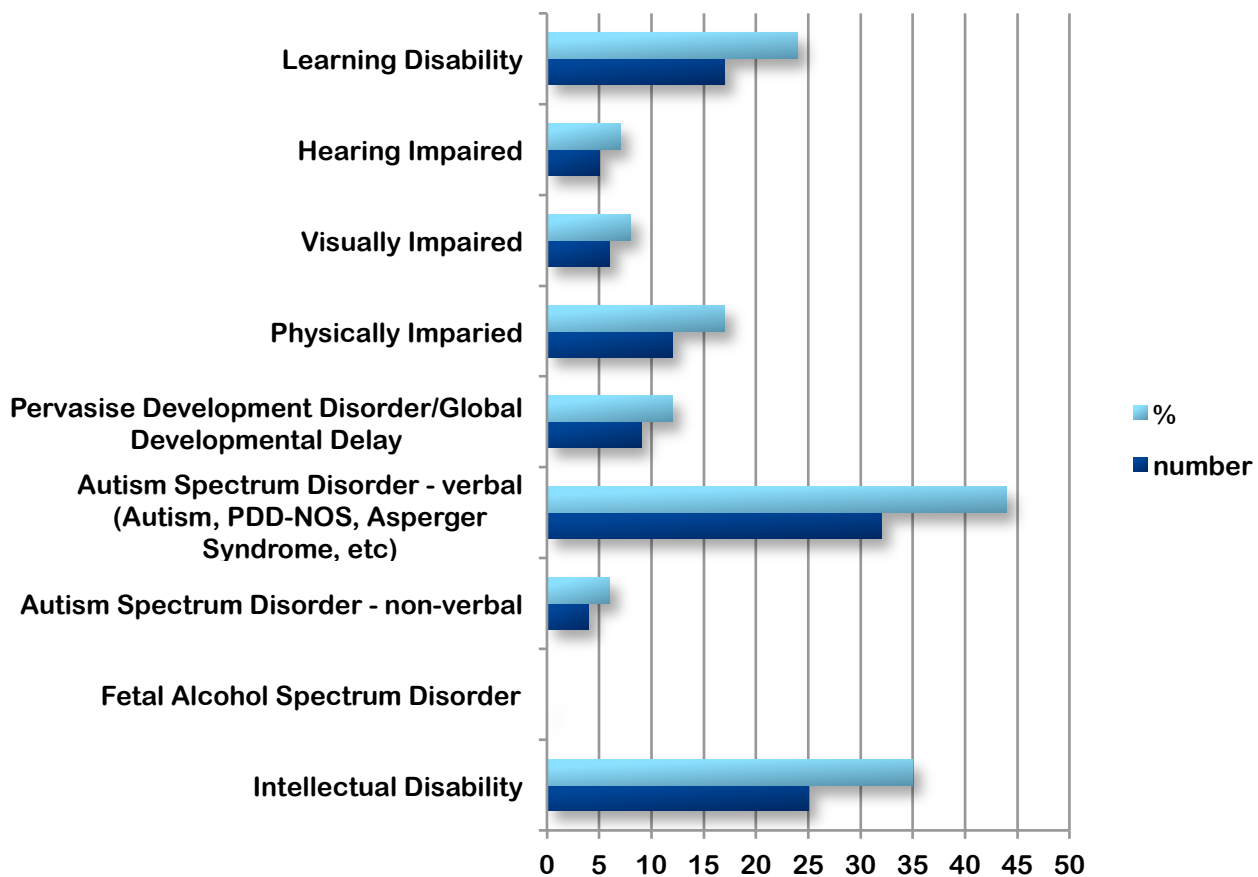
Still others, while indicating that the primary and elementary years went well, expressed concern for how things will change in the high school setting, having been sent messages that “Inclusion is fine for the “little ones” but won’t work in higher grades and will be a detriment to the regular kids.”

One parent wisely commented that:
 “All the good statutes, policies and resources are ineffective if the classroom teacher is unwilling, or unable (untrained) to socially and academically include students with special needs. Classroom teachers play a huge role. A classroom teacher committed to inclusion can do it...with very little resources. It takes a willingness and openness – to try, to fail, and to try again. It takes an open mind to know that ALL kids can make considerable progress if someone expects them to, pushed them to.”

Another preconception about inclusive education is that those with “milder” disabilities are easier to include, compared to those with more complex disabilities. Therefore, the disability profile of students was also tracked in this survey. A recent report on Canadians with disabilities pointed out that males with disabilities had more unmet needs than females and so the gender of the students was also surveyed. Results indicated 65% were male and 35% were female.

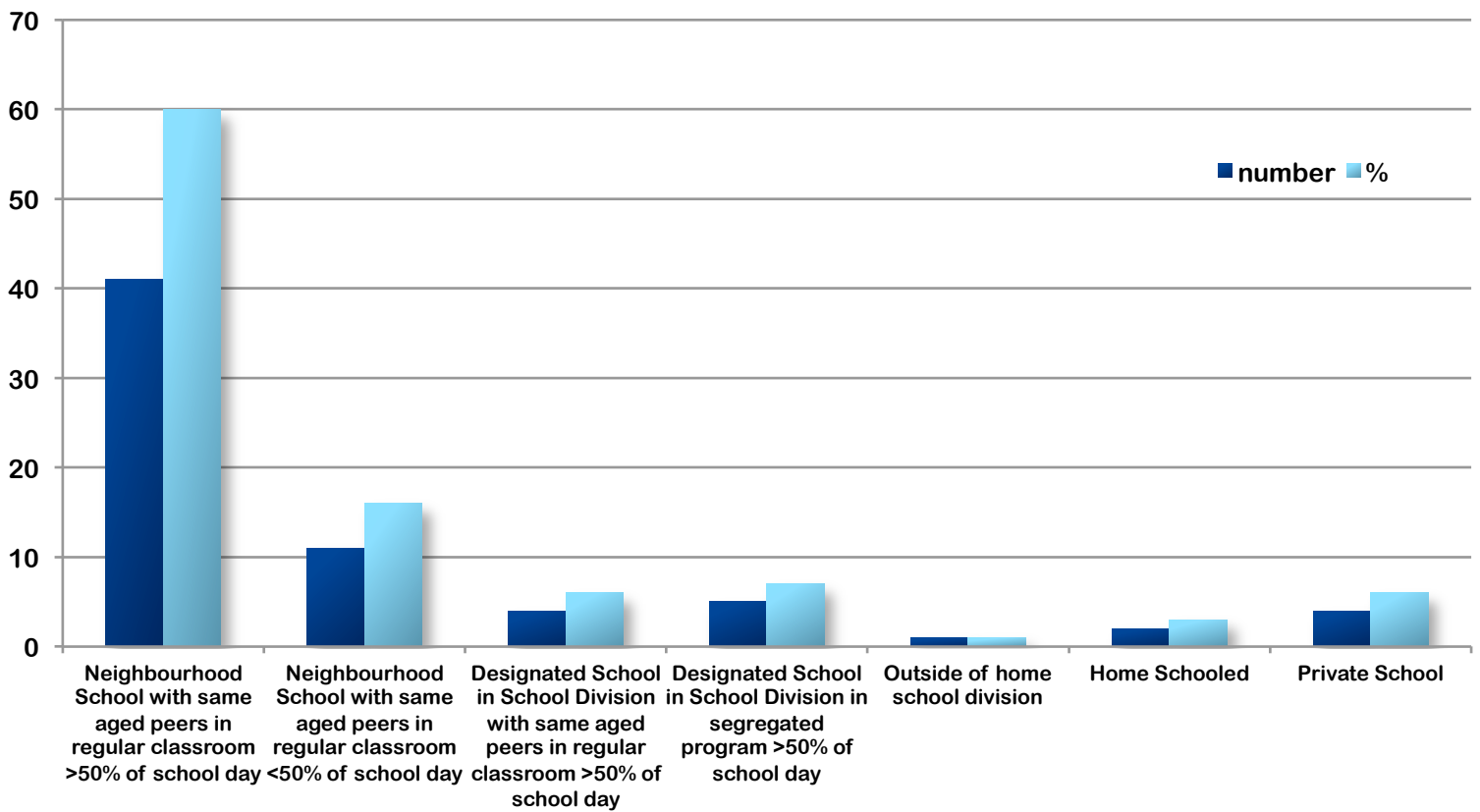
The majority of students profiled were found to have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder with verbal abilities (44%), while 35% were diagnosed with intellectual disabilities, 6% non-verbal autism, 12% with global developmental delay, 17% physically impaired, 8% visually impaired, 7% hearing impaired and 24% living with a learning disability. The term “learning disability” included Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, Non-Verbal Learning Disability, etc. Some of the students had more than one disability, but percentages were calculated from the total number of students and not the total number of diagnoses recorded in the survey.

Profile of Disability Experienced by Students



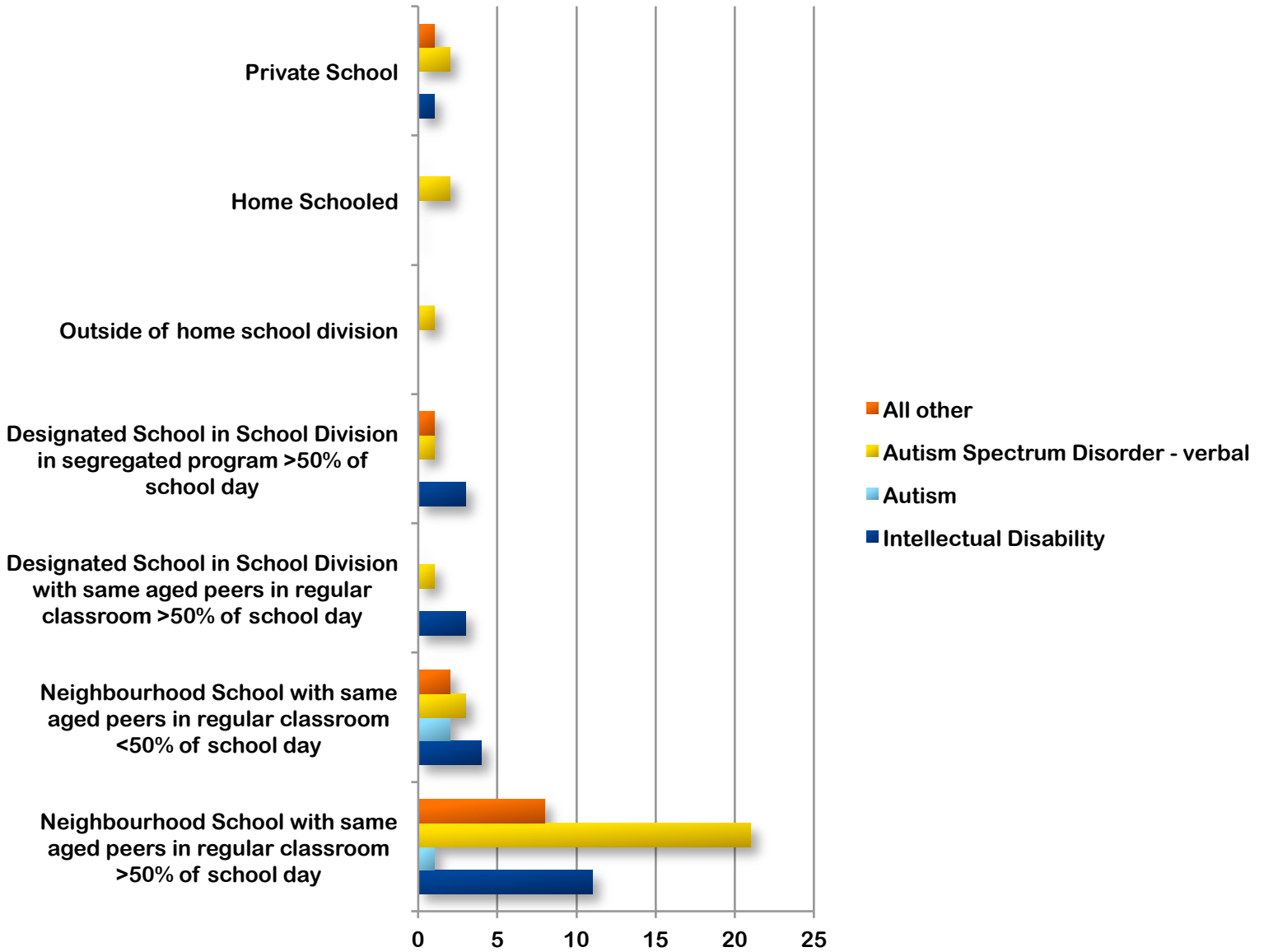
The majority of students (60%) experience their education in an inclusive setting, at the neighbourhood school with same aged peers in a regular classroom for greater than 50% of the school day. The remainder of students experienced segregation with programming outside of the regular classroom for greater than 50% of the school day (16% at their neighbourhood school and 7% at a designated school). Some students experience inclusive education within a designated school (6%) while others are found outside of their home school division, home schooled or within a private school setting (10%).

Provision of Educational Programming - Placement



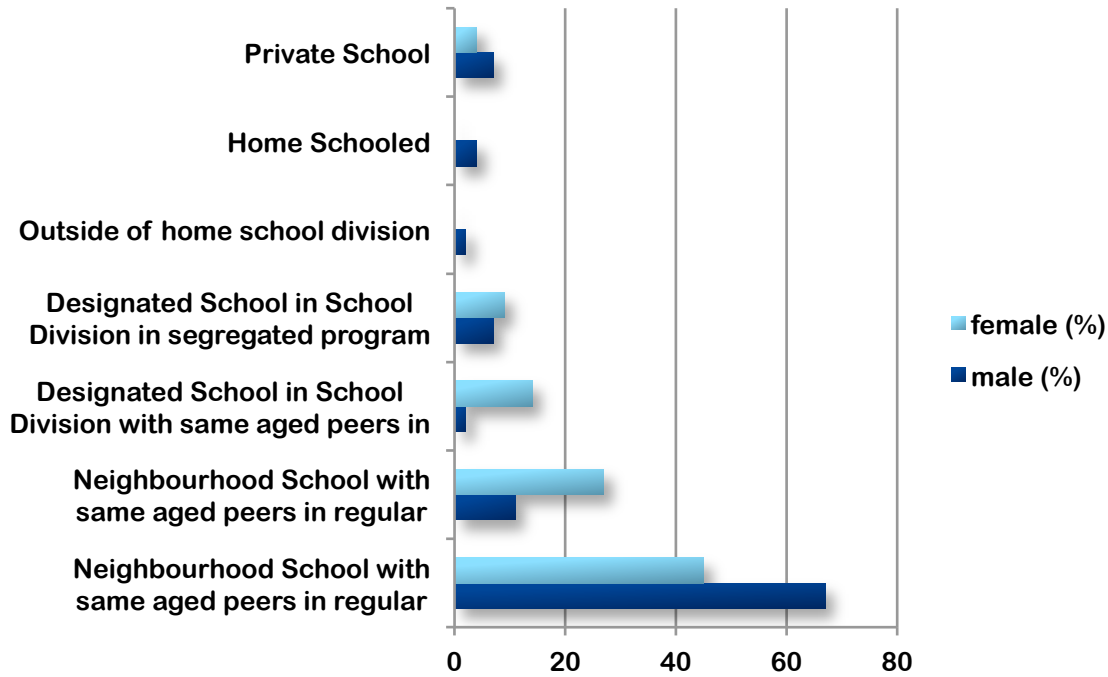
Placement in each of the settings that were surveyed seemed to be unrelated to the kind of disability that a student may experience with the exception of non-verbal autism where students were more likely to be placed within a segregated setting in their neighbourhood school.

Placement versus Disability



When student placement was compared across genders, over 65% of males were found in inclusive settings while more females (55%) were found in segregated settings at their neighbourhood schools, in an inclusive setting at a designated school or within a segregated setting at a designated school.

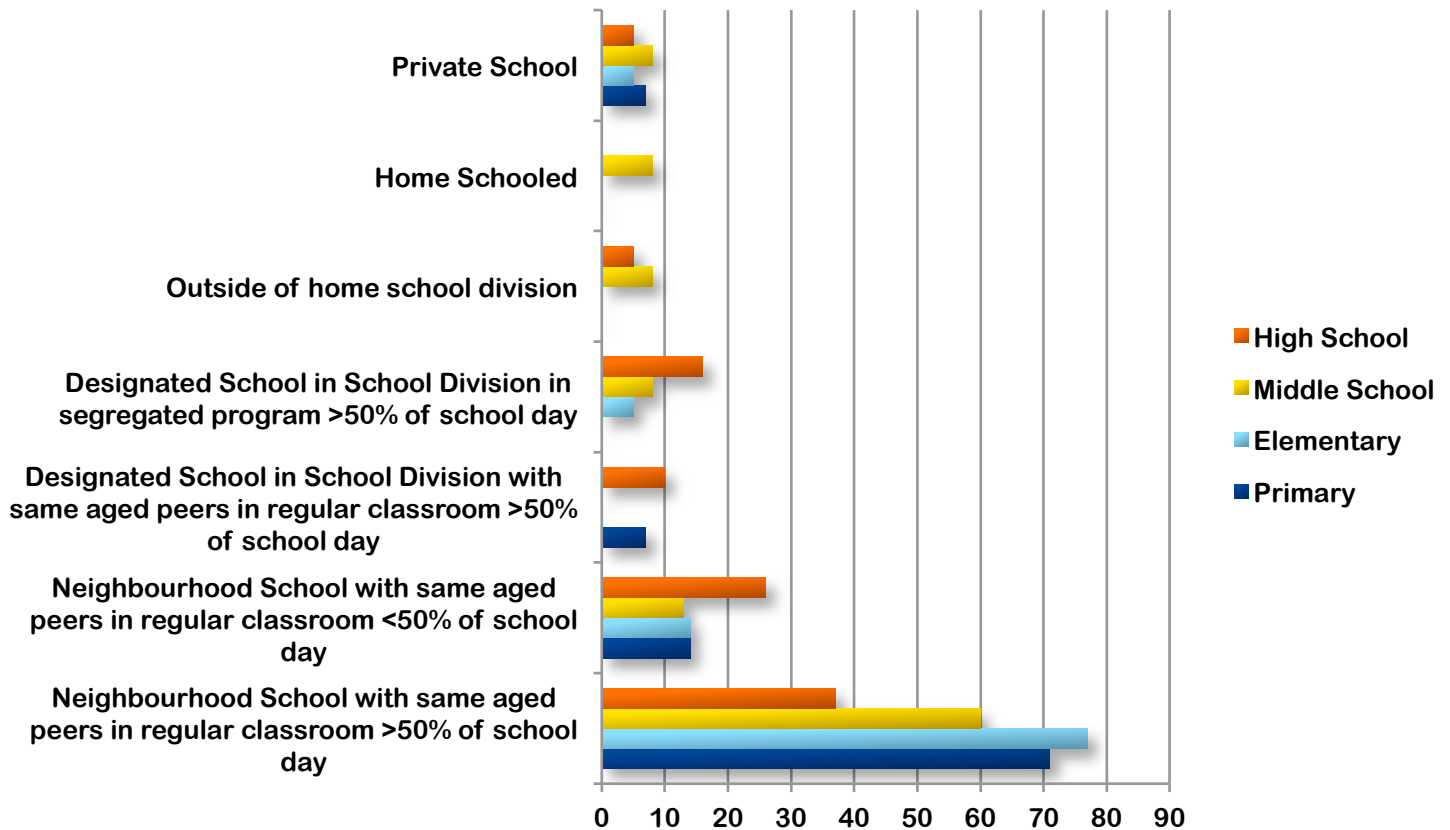
Placement versus Student Gender (% for each gender)



When student placement was sorted according to grade level, it was seen that the majority of students at all grade levels were found in inclusive settings. However, percentage inclusion ranged from 71% at primary, 77% at elementary, 60% at middle school, to 37% at the high school level. More high school students were found in segregated settings than the other grade levels, except for those who were placed outside of their school division: 26% of high school students were placed in their neighbourhood school in a segregated setting, 10% of students at a designated school in an inclusive setting and 16% of high school students in a segregated setting at a designated school.

When this data was compared to that gathered in the spring 2009, almost 65% of elementary school aged students were placed in their neighbourhood schools with same aged peers greater than 50% of the school day. However, at the middle and high school levels, we saw almost 65% of students placed in these inclusive settings in 2009 compared to the substantially lower levels that we see with the present data, especially in high school. When statistical analyses were done on this date, however, no significant difference was detected, due to the small sample size.

Placement versus Grade (%)



The student specific funding process is often confusing and demeaning for parents of and students with disabilities. While it is supposed to be a needs-based system of allocating funding to help offset increased costs associated with educating and supporting a student with significant, severe or profound needs within the school setting, many parents report that within the application process they have to portray their children in the worst light. They also are not clear on how the funding applications are handled at the school, school division and Department of Education levels.

Questions were asked in the survey regarding parent/caregiver experiences with the student-specific funding process. Results indicated that 14% of parents/caregivers were not involved in any process to secure additional funding for their son or daughter. Another 10% reported that attempts had been made to secure student specific funding by the school, but that these requests had been denied either at the school division level or by the Department of Education.

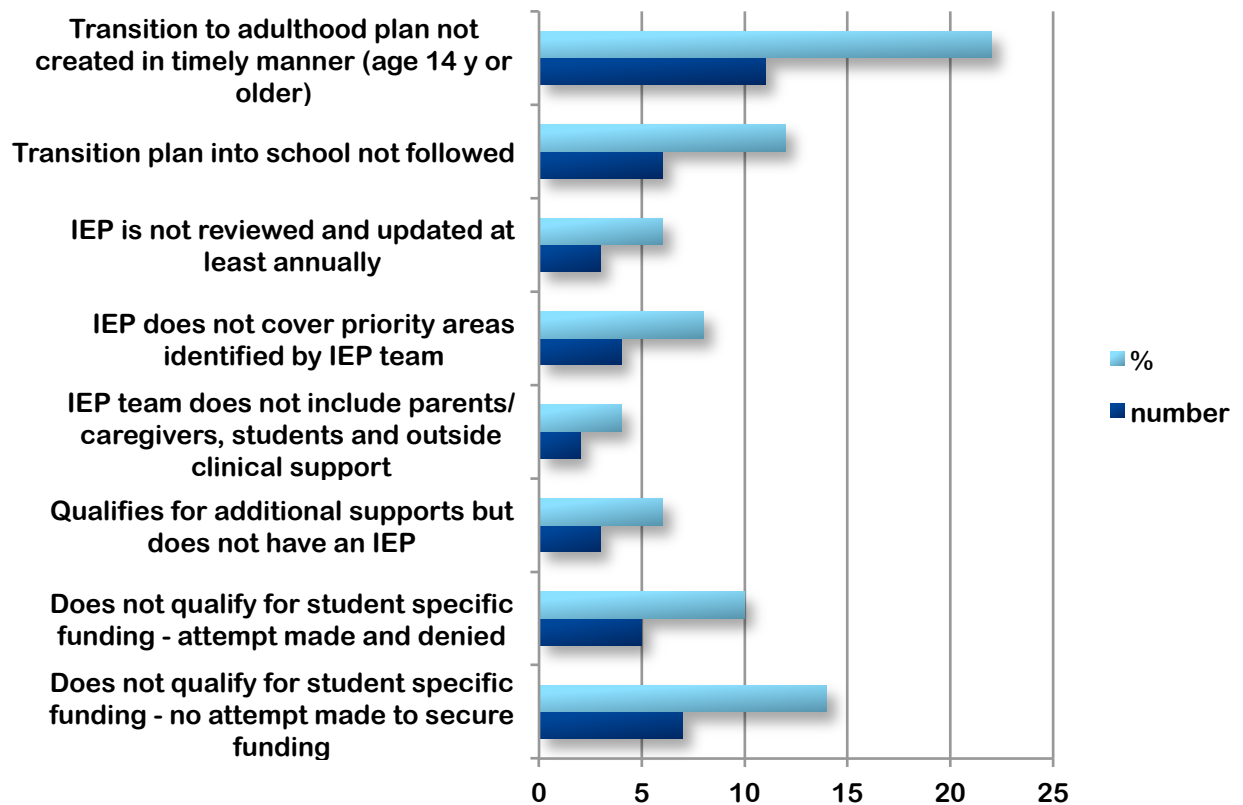
Regardless of whether student specific funding was secured, approximately 79% of students were reported to have IEPs in place, with 21% receiving their educational programming without an IEP.

When parents/caregivers were asked whether they were active members of the planning team, 88% indicated that they were, while 12% indicated that they were not.

Of the parents/caregivers whose children did qualify for student specific funding, 6% reported that there was no Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place for their son or daughter, while 4% reported that the education planning team did not include them. A further 4% indicated that the IEP did not cover priority areas set out by the IEP team, and 6% indicated that the IEP was not reviewed at least once a year.

Transition into and out of school is an important process for students with disabilities and 12% of parents/caregivers indicated that the plan put into place to aid in transitioning into school was not followed. Approximately 22% of parents/caregivers of students aged 14 y or older indicated that there was no transition plan in place for the transition to adulthood. This question was followed up with further questions about the transition to adulthood process later in the survey where results showed that far more students did not have an active transition plan in place.

Provision of Educational Programming - Student-Specific Funding and Planning



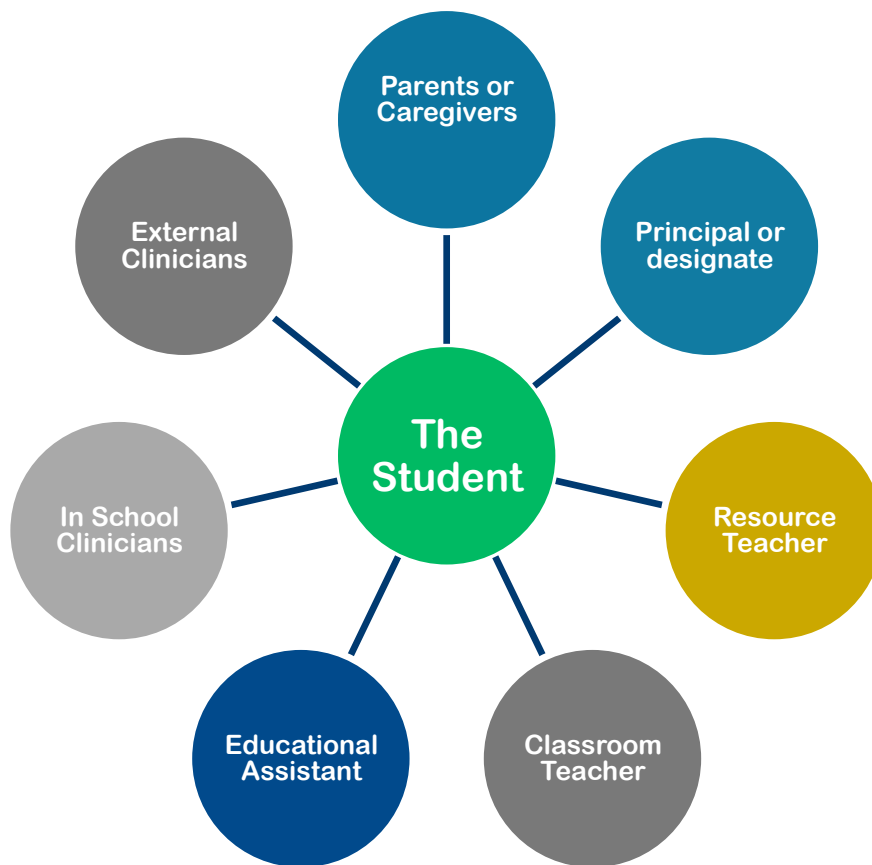
An Individual Education Plan (IEP) can be put in place for a student with a disability for a variety of reasons including the following:

1. The student qualifies for student specific funding,
2. The school, in consultation with the student’s parents, put a plan into place to aid in the educational programming for that student (for example, the plan outlines some educational goals outside of the curriculum, or there are adaptations or modifications in the classroom that will be put into place for that student).

For further information on Student Specific Planning and the IEP process as described by Manitoba Education, visit www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/.

The IEP planning process is described as a collaborative one involving a “school team.” That team must work together to create an effective process for recognizing student progress, goal setting, and supporting the student as he or she work towards their various prioritized goals. Members of the team include parents, and whenever possible, the student and it is also recommended that parents sign off on the plan as an indication of their agreement with what has been described/outlined through the collaborative process.

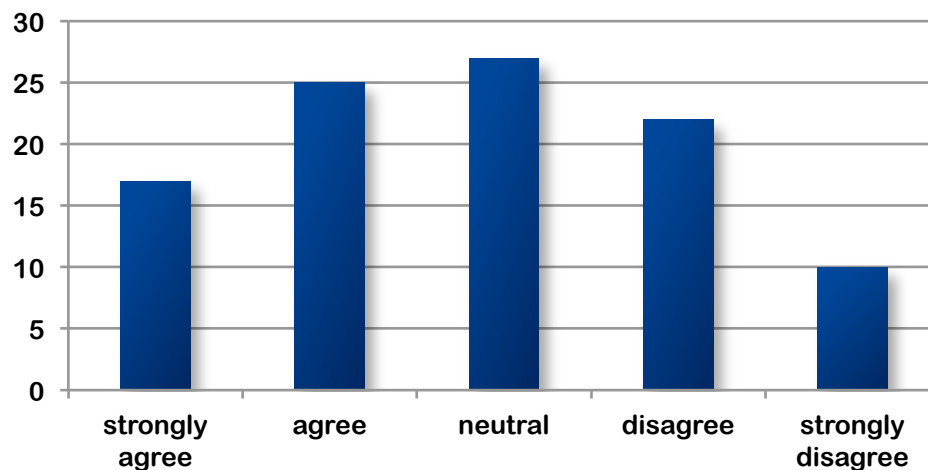
The IEP Team



When asked whether they felt comfortable and informed during the IEP process, 54% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were, while 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed and the remaining 21% were neutral. However, when asked whether they found the process of developing an IEP effective, only 42% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, leaving 32% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and 27% neutral. A common response recorded with these answers included:

“IEP formed and looks and sounds good but never enacted.”

Has the IEP process been effective? (%)

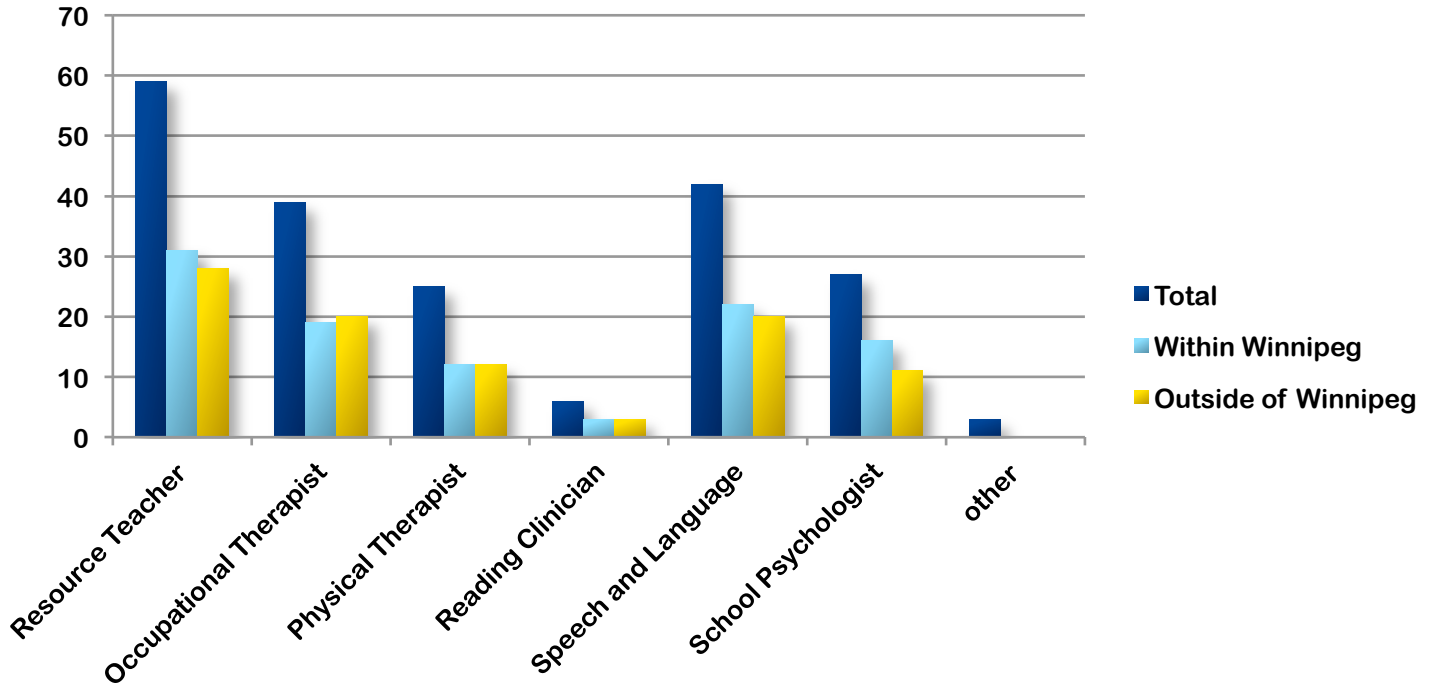


Regardless of whether a student is eligible for student specific funding or has an IEP in place, there are a number of supports and services that may be available to them. Sometimes there is a perception that there may be fewer resources available to students outside of the Winnipeg area. Questions were asked about the different services that students were able to access at school. Of the 72 respondents,

- 82% indicated that the resource teacher was part of the student’s school life,
- 54% indicated that Occupational Therapy was open to them,
- 35% had access to physiotherapy, 8% to a reading clinician,
- 58% to speech language pathologist, and
- 38% to school psychology.

Other therapies that may have been available included music therapy and programming through service agencies like the CNIB.

Services Accessed within the School



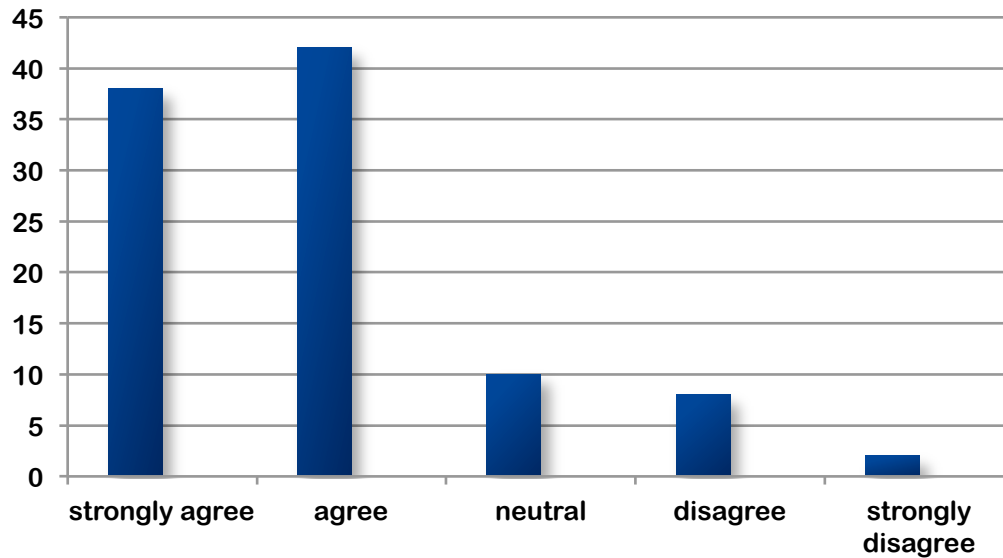
In most cases, the availability of access to each of these services appeared to be no different if parent/caregivers/students resided within Winnipeg or outside of the city. The actual amount of time that students did have with any of these specialists may have varied significantly but it may be difficult for parents/caregivers to know what those numbers might look like and this was not asked of them for the purposes of this survey.

In some cases, parents are asked to keep their son or daughter at home in the event of a class field trip or because certain support staff may not be available on a given school day. When asked whether their son or daughter had been denied access to school for part of a day or more during the school year (apart from what might have been agreed upon in an Individual Education Plan) 8 respondents reported that they had. Some parents also reported that their child was not allowed to stay for lunch program:

“While not an academic issue, my son was not “allowed” to stay for lunch because there were not enough lunch supervisors to cover all the rooms. Because he was the only child left out of crucial social interactions over lunch hour, he was further isolated from his classmates and also felt humiliated and like there was something “wrong” with him. It had a significant impact on his self-esteem, his ability to feel included in the school day, and his social connections suffered.”

To be effective members of the school team for their children, it is important the parents/caregivers feel safe and welcomed at the student's school. The survey indicated that 80% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 10% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining 10% were neutral and did not disagree or agree with this statement.

Parents feel safe and welcome at student's school (%)



Often, parents of students with disabilities become involved in the life of the school because they have opted to stay home with their children and are able to do so, or because they benefit from learning how the school system works by getting more involved. For the school, parents of children with disabilities can be a dedicated reserve of volunteers. When parents/caregivers were asked about their connection to the school community, the following was reported:

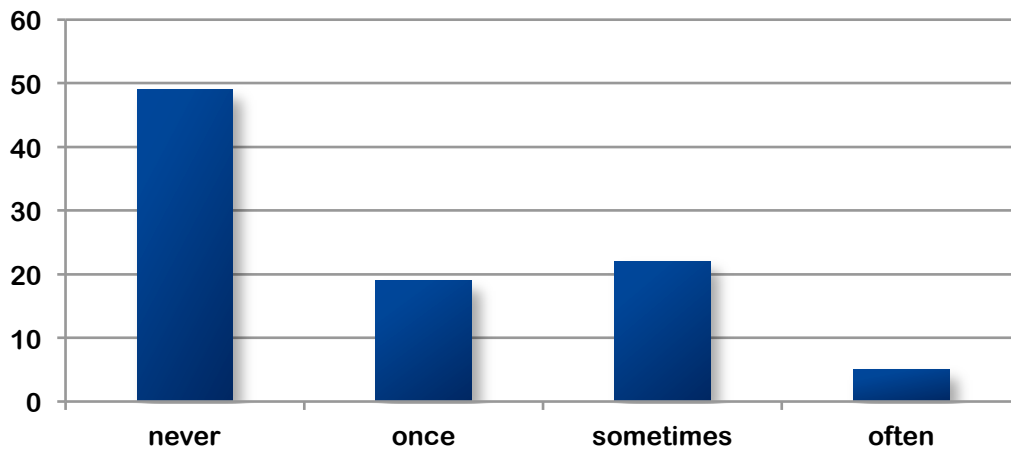
- 87% indicated that they know their child's teachers, educational assistants, etc.,
- 90% indicated that they attended parent/teacher interviews and student conferences,
- 65% attend school events,
- 84% regularly communicate with the school,
- 49% volunteer for field trips and classroom activities,
- 16% regularly volunteer in the classroom, and
- 14% volunteer on parent council.

When we consider the number of students with disabilities in any given school, it is important that their voices are heard not only on student councils, but also on parent councils that oversee various school activities and fundraising.

Respondents were asked whether their son or daughter receives extra help when needed at school. Approximately 28% agreed that this always happened, 34% that it often happens, 30% that it sometimes happens and 2% that it never happens. A further 7% indicated that they did not know.

Sometimes, parents experience unprofessional conduct by school staff, either during meetings that discuss student progress as well as staff and/or parent/caregiver concerns, or in the school hallways when picking up or dropping off their children during the school day. Parents/caregivers were asked whether they had experienced this unprofessional conduct and 46% indicated they had at least once, and 5% indicated that this type of conduct happens often. Approximately 49% reported that they had never experienced unprofessional conduct.

Parent perception of unprofessional conduct by school staff (%)



With the amendment to the public education act: Appropriate Educational Programming standards and regulations, there were changes to how discipline policies of schools and school divisions were to be used with students who have disabilities. Differences in their ability to understand and respond to discipline are to be taken into account and so a question was asked of parent/caregivers concerning rules related to conduct and behavior and their application to their sons and daughters. The results are as follows:

- 69% of respondents agreed that these rules are applied fairly at most of the time or always, while
- 16% reported that they are sometimes applied fairly. No one reported that they were never applied fairly, and
- 15% of those surveyed did not know.

Given the many different facets of inclusive education and appropriate educational programming in Manitoba, parents/caregivers were asked where they saw a need for improvement in the current situation that they were experiencing. Results indicated the following:

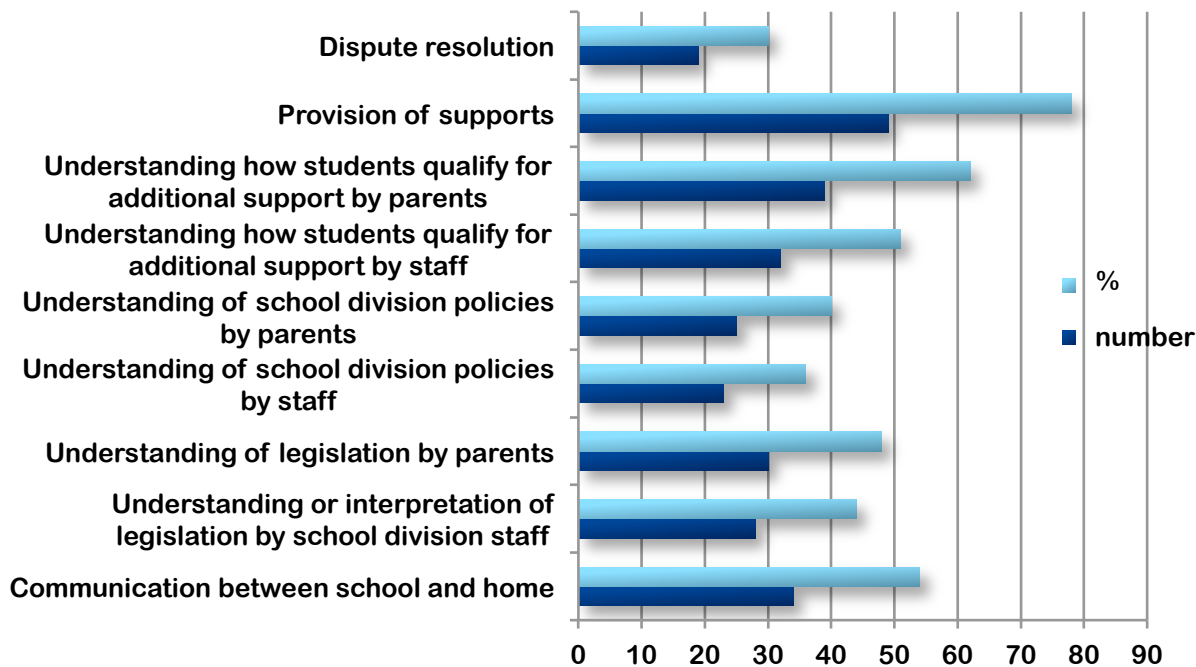
- 54% saw a need to improve communication between school and home,
- 44% saw a need to clarify the understanding/interpretation of education legislation,
- 48% saw a need to improve their own understanding of legislation,
- 36% saw a need for staff to have a better understanding of school division policies, while
- 40% saw a need to improve their own understanding of those policies.

There is much confusion around how students qualify for additional supports and 51% parents/caregivers reported that they saw a need for staff to have a better understanding of this process, while 62% reported that they needed a better understanding of this process.

Common concerns about additional supports that may be provided by schools and school divisions include not knowing how to access them or what might be available to their sons and daughters. Approximately 78% of survey responders reported that this was an area that needed improvement.

The process of resolving disputes within the school, school division, and at the departmental level can sometimes be difficult to understand and 30% of survey responders indicated that their understanding of this was an area that needed improvement.

Needs for Improvement in Current School Setting



Parents/caregivers were asked whether they thought that there were barriers that stand in the way of their son or daughter's learning at school. Twenty-seven respondents indicated that they agreed (43%), with 25% indicated that they did not, and 32% not sure. Some of the comments from those 27 who agreed included the following:

- 5 cited challenges with how the educational assistants interacted with their children and their lack of knowledge about specific disabilities and strategies to help with the learning process;
- 8 noted challenges associate with resource and classroom teachers and their abilities to adapt and modify curricula;
- 3 indicated what they felt were inappropriate programming decisions that underestimated the academic abilities of the students and placed them in strictly life skills programming.
- Other barriers listed included physical and social ones and three respondents pointed out that specialized equipment that would aid in communication both to and from the student was not in place or not appropriately supported.

Parent Perception of Support in the School System

An important aspect of successful program planning for a student with a disability is the existence of a truly collaborative team that includes the parents/caregivers for that student as well as the student themselves. This is especially true as the student transitions into high school and beyond. Sometimes, parents find that it helps to have someone within the school system who they can talk frankly about misunderstandings or a need for further clarification. When parents/caregivers were asked if they felt supported by someone or a group of people within the educational system, 75% indicated that they did, while 25% did not feel supported.

Further, when a parent/caregiver needs help in negotiating challenges within the school system, the support of an advocate can be very important in ensuring better outcomes. Survey respondents were asked if they had access to an advocate, either through the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils or through associations or agencies that may provide disability-specific support or services. Only 38% of parents/caregivers indicated that they were aware that this kind of support might be available to them.

Respondents were asked about areas where they saw a need for greater improvement in order to move the inclusive education agenda further forward and support Manitoba's philosophy of inclusion, replies indicated that 72% saw a need for teachers to be provided with more resources to support successful inclusion. Further,

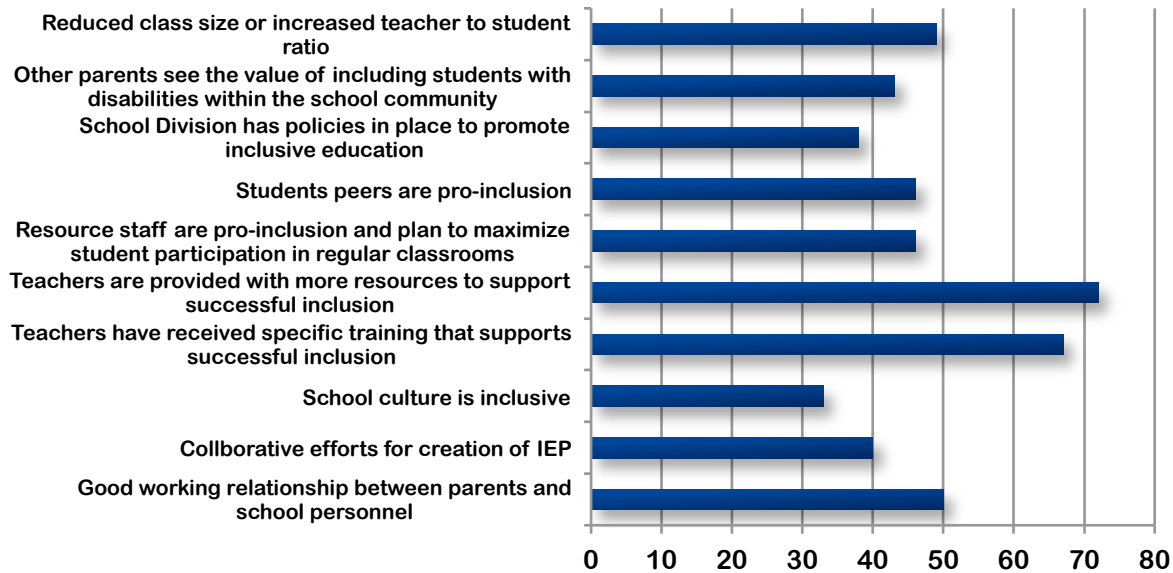
- 67% of respondents agreed that teachers should have specific training that supports successful inclusion.
- Half of those who responded saw a need for greater focus on good working relationships between parents and school personnel, while 49% thought that reduced class size or increased teacher to student ratio would be helpful.

Other responses stressed the importance of:

- Ensuring that student peers and resource staff are pro-inclusion (46% each),
- Reaching out to other parents so that they can see the value of inclusion (43%),
- Focusing on collaborative efforts for the creation of IEPs (40%),
- Ensuring that school divisions have policies in place to promote inclusive education (38%).

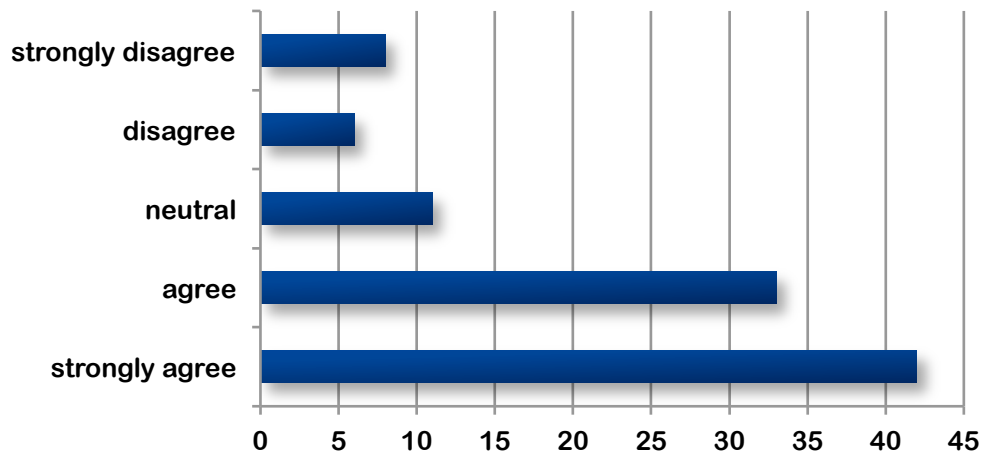
- Promoting a school culture that is inclusive (33%) was also seen as a way of moving this agenda forward.

Need for Greater Progress in Support of Inclusive Education (%)



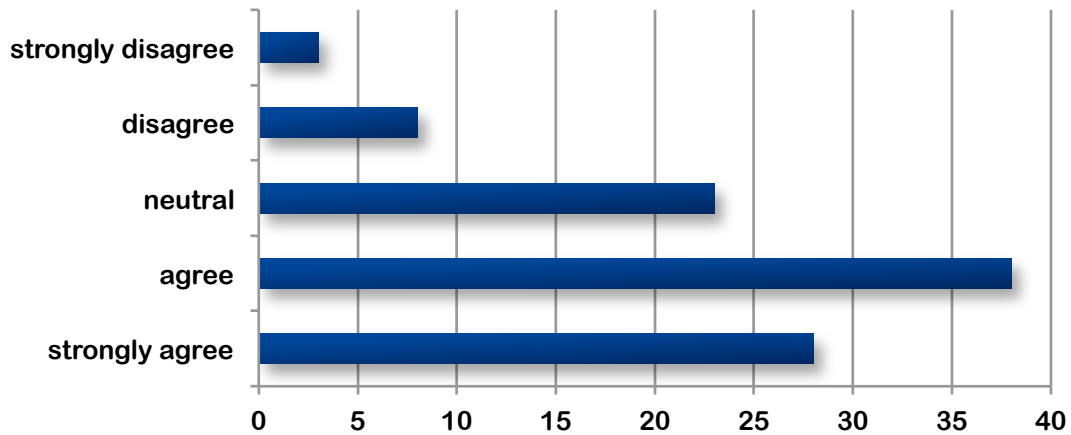
Understanding the effects of placement and programming on the students is an important part of inclusive education. Respondents were asked whether their sons/daughters felt safe and secure at school. Approximately 75% reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 14% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. A further 11% were neutral about this statement.

Student Perspective - Do you feel safe and secure at school? (%)



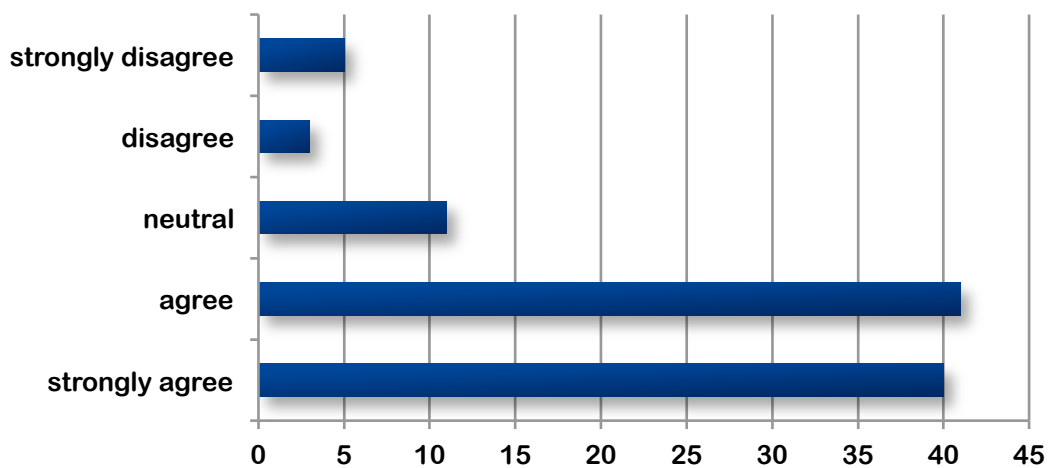
When asked whether their sons/daughters felt accepted by other students at school, 66% reported that they agreed or strongly agreed, while 11% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This left 23% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement.

Do you feel accepted by other students? (%)



Approximately 81% agreed that their sons/daughters felt accepted by the adults at school, while 8% disagreed with this and 11% remained neutral.

Do you feel accepted by adults at school? (%)



Despite being recognized for their ability, and good relationships with peers and adults within the school environment, anxiety and stress can be a real factor for students with disabilities, especially if they perceive themselves to be different from others and have needs that are not being met. When asked if their son or daughter had experienced significant stress or anxiety due to a lack of services or supports in the school setting, 49% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 22% remained neutral and would not commit either way.

Other areas related to the inclusive education of students with disabilities in Manitoba Schools that were polled in this survey:

Suspension and Expulsion:

Only a few of the respondents reported that their son or daughter had been suspended within the past 5 years (7) and one student had been expelled. All of the reported suspensions were for violent behavior as a result of a “meltdown.” Two respondents indicated that plans were put into place to aid the school in meeting the student’s needs as well as to aid in the transition back into the school setting.

Schools of Choice:

In some cases, parents/caregivers may want to consider changing the schools that their son or daughter attends, either as a fresh start, because they hear good things about the alternate setting, or because the alternate setting may offer programming that is not available at their neighbourhood school. When asked whether they had attempted to change schools or school divisions because their son or daughter was not been successfully educated in an inclusive environment, 13 of the 66 responses indicated that they had (23%). Of these 13 respondents, 8 were successful in finding those alternate placements.

Extracurricular activities:

School-related extracurricular activities can play a big role in solidifying and reinforcing social relationships as well as reinforcing learning of educational outcomes. When asked whether their children participated in extracurricular activities, 49% indicated that they did. When asked whether there were extracurricular activities or clubs that they felt were not available to their son or daughter because of their disability, 38% indicated that there were. Anecdotal responses included the need to have extra support personnel to allow for their participation (either due to health or behavior challenges) or the need for a wider variety of programming so that their son or daughter could find a place in the extracurricular programming of the school.

Bullying:

There are many anti-bullying initiatives in place in Manitoba schools to help ward off this very real threat to the wellbeing of students of all ranges of abilities, race, religion, sexual orientation etc. When asked whether their son or daughter had been the victim of bullying while at school, 48% agreed. 66% of those were on the Autism Spectrum with verbal ability, 28% had an intellectual disability or were non-verbal with Autism, and 7% had another disability.

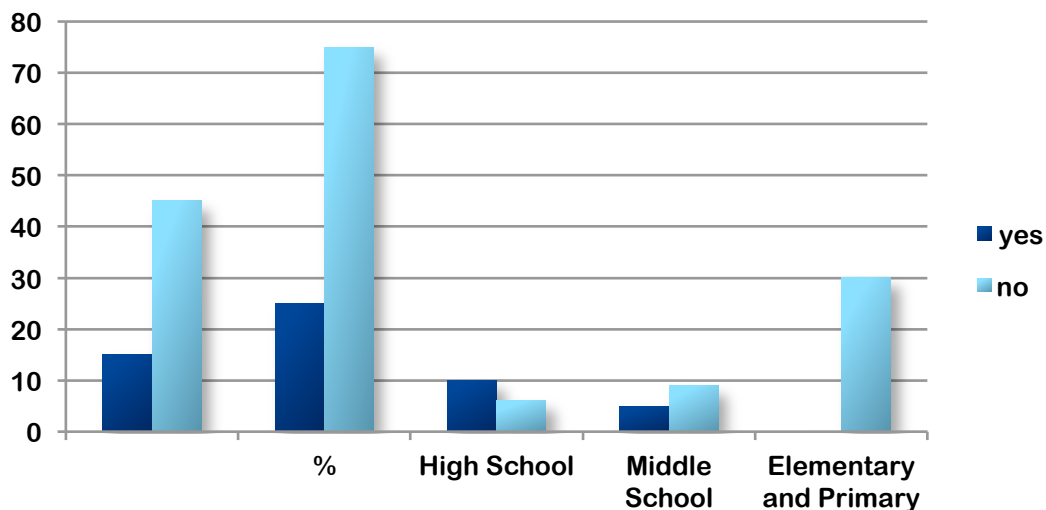
Respondents were asked if these incidents had been reported to the school and 86% had. With or without the reporting to school, 48% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school handled the bullying effectively while 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 21% remained neutral.

In some cases, students will avoid going to school when they are experiencing or have experienced bullying. When asked whether their son or daughter had stayed at home to avoid being bullied, 19% indicated that they had, while 81% indicated that they had not.

Student Participation in Planning and School Programming:

An important skill that students must learn as they grow older is self-advocacy and this can at least begin or be reinforced by their participation in the IEP and transition planning process at school. This can be in person or through a surrogate who reports to the team on behalf of the student and visa versa. In answer to the question about student participation in these processes, only 25% of parents indicated that their sons/daughters participated in school planning meetings. When that 25% was broken down according to grade level, there was no student participation reported at the primary and elementary school level range, while only 5% of middle year students participated and only 10% of high school students participated.

Student Participation in IEP and Transition Planning Meetings



Transitioning to Adulthood:

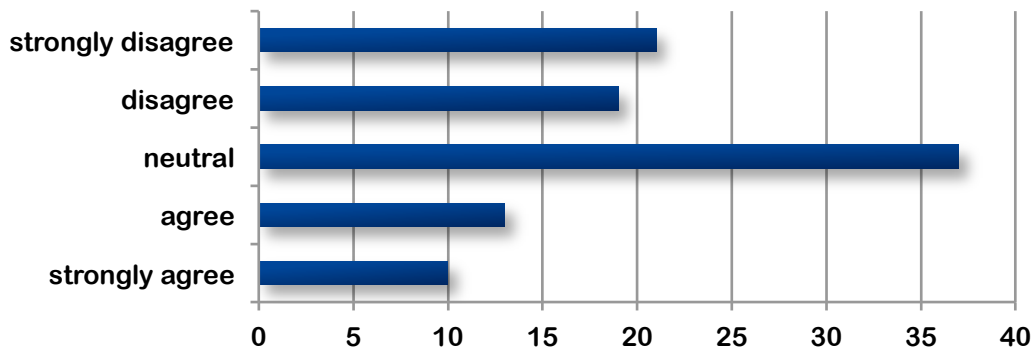
As students age out of the education system and the education team, including them, considers post-secondary options, it is important to become more aware of what might be available to them in the community. Just like other students, those with disabilities need to have hopes and dreams, role models that they can look up to and see a place for themselves in their city, town, municipality, on the farm, etc.

When parent/caregivers of students older than 14 y were asked if they and their sons/daughters were aware of post-secondary options, the following was reported:

- 23% reported agreed or strongly agreed that they were aware of some options,
- 37% were neutral, and
- 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

There are many options available, including supported employment, vocational training, post-secondary education, volunteerism, etc. Clearly, more work needs to be done in informing parents and students about the many options that are available to them.

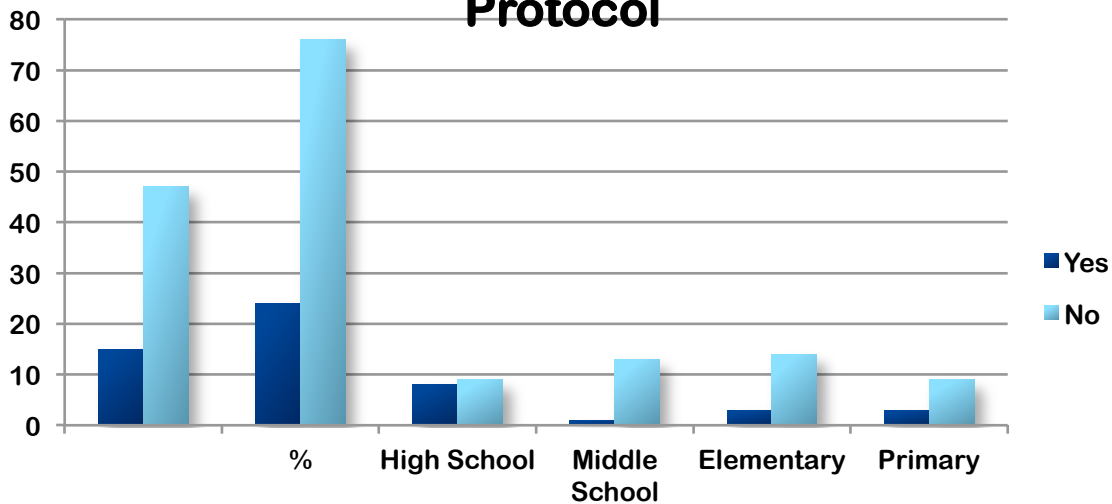
Awareness of opportunities for post-secondary education, training, employment (%)



The Bridging to Adulthood protocol was revised and rolled out in the province in 2008. At that time, representatives from Manitoba Education and Community Living Manitoba toured 19 communities in the province to introduce this interdepartmental protocol and work with the many different stakeholders involved in planning for this important life transition time with students and their families. In October 2010, a report on Transitioning to Adulthood indicated that 53% of parents who had sons/daughters between the ages of 14 and 21 y had knowledge of the protocol. The present survey has found that 47% of parents of high school age knew of the protocol, and when all parents were included in the survey results, only 24% knew about this protocol.

An important theme in the revised protocol is the need for person-centered planning. When asked whether a person-centered plan had been developed for their son or daughter, 6 out of the 17 high school aged students had this kind of plan developed for them, while 11 did not.

Awareness of Bridging to Adulthood Protocol



Within the Bridging to Adulthood protocol, a number of services and supports that may be available to students with disabilities are outlined. Further, a recent website created by the Government of Manitoba that promotes information for Manitobans with disabilities (www.gov.mb.ca/fs/imd), provides information on supports and services available in the community.

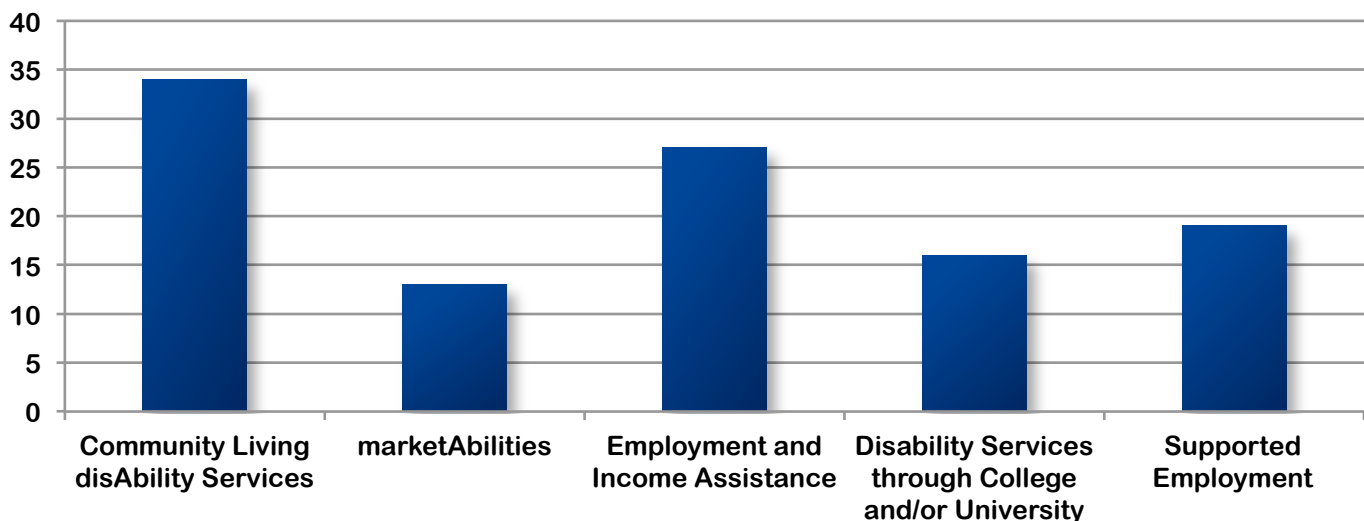
When parents were asked of their awareness about these supports and services

- 34% indicated that they were aware of the Community Living disAbility Services,
- 13% were aware of the marketAbilities program,
- 27% were aware of Employment and Income Assistance (now housed with Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade),
- 16% were aware of disability services that might be available through College or University,
- 19% were aware of supported employment options.

Further to the awareness of these community programs and services, students over the age of 18 y may be referred to either marketAbilities or the Community Living disAbility Services Programs in preparation for their school leaving. Respondents indicated that three students had been referred to marketAbilities with one on a waitlist while 5 had been referred to the Community Living disAbility Services program and none were waitlisted.

Also of importance for those who have sons or daughters with intellectual disabilities (a total of 23 respondents) is knowledge of the Vulnerable Person’s Act. Only 65% of these respondents indicated that they were aware of this legislation and this has potential impacts on how they assume their son or daughter will handle decision-making and self-determination in adulthood.

Awareness of Community Supports and Programs after Graduation (%)



Support Networks and Supported Decision Making:

An important aspect of the Vulnerable Person's Act and of decision-making by anyone is the need to have a support network/circle to help gather and analyze information that can contribute to how and what kind of decision is reached. When asked whether their son or daughter had a support network/circle outside of immediate family, 34% of respondents indicated that they did, while 65% indicated that they did not. Social isolation is a very real challenge for students in the school setting and without an established circle prior to school leaving, it can be very difficult to transfer the skills that are needed to create and maintain a circle of friends to life outside of school and into adulthood. This has long been a challenge with the concept of inclusion in our schools. Without a sense of social value in the classroom, in the social fabric of the school, often the placement and programming that are attributed to inclusion lack true meaning.

When respondents were questioned whether their son or daughter had a social network that included non-disabled peers from the school or community, 68% acknowledged that they did. The disparity within these two questions may be indicative of the importance of the greater community to the social wellbeing of people with disabilities. When this question was further refined to indicate a support network that included family, friends and neighbours, 82% of respondents indicated that those networks did exist.

Recommendations to make the educational experience better for your son or daughter:

1. Over 32% of respondents recommend more teacher, educational assistant and administrative staff **training** and support regarding disabilities and how to more effectively educate and include them in the classroom and school
2. A number of comments cited the need for **positive attitudes** towards diversity and students with disabilities
3. **Clarifying how funding is applied** for and used with students is important. It is also important to indicate how, in the absence of student specific funding, a student with a disability will be supported at school.
4. Providing support for student **inclusion in extracurricular programming** as well as skill development when it comes to the social/emotional realm was cited many times.
5. Encouraging and **supporting parent/caregiver participation** in the process. Parents/caregivers know their children best and are often the best source of information about what may or may not work in a given situation.

What has been the most helpful when advocating for the inclusive education of your son or daughter?

- Communication is key to making the educational experience a positive one for all concerned.
- Being honest and reasonable about expectations and concerns that might be present where there is not a diagnosis in place.
- Keeping the process student centered. It should be about what is best for the student – what they need to become as independent as possible

What do you think needs to change in the education system to improve inclusive education?

- **More training for classroom teachers, educational assistants and administrators**
- **Increased funding for supports and services**
- **Smaller class sizes**
- **Level 2 funding should not mean that supports are only available for half of the day**
- **Children need to come home from a day at school with a feeling of pride, hope and accomplishment**
- **More accessible and frequent support services**
- **Exploring alternative teaching strategies**
- **More in class support**
- **Communication and information – clarify who is responsible for what in the funding application process, in implementing the IEP, etc.**
- **Attitudes – inclusion is not just a place, disabilities are part of the diversity within the school community**
- **Better IEP development, implementation, reporting, and review.**

Discussion

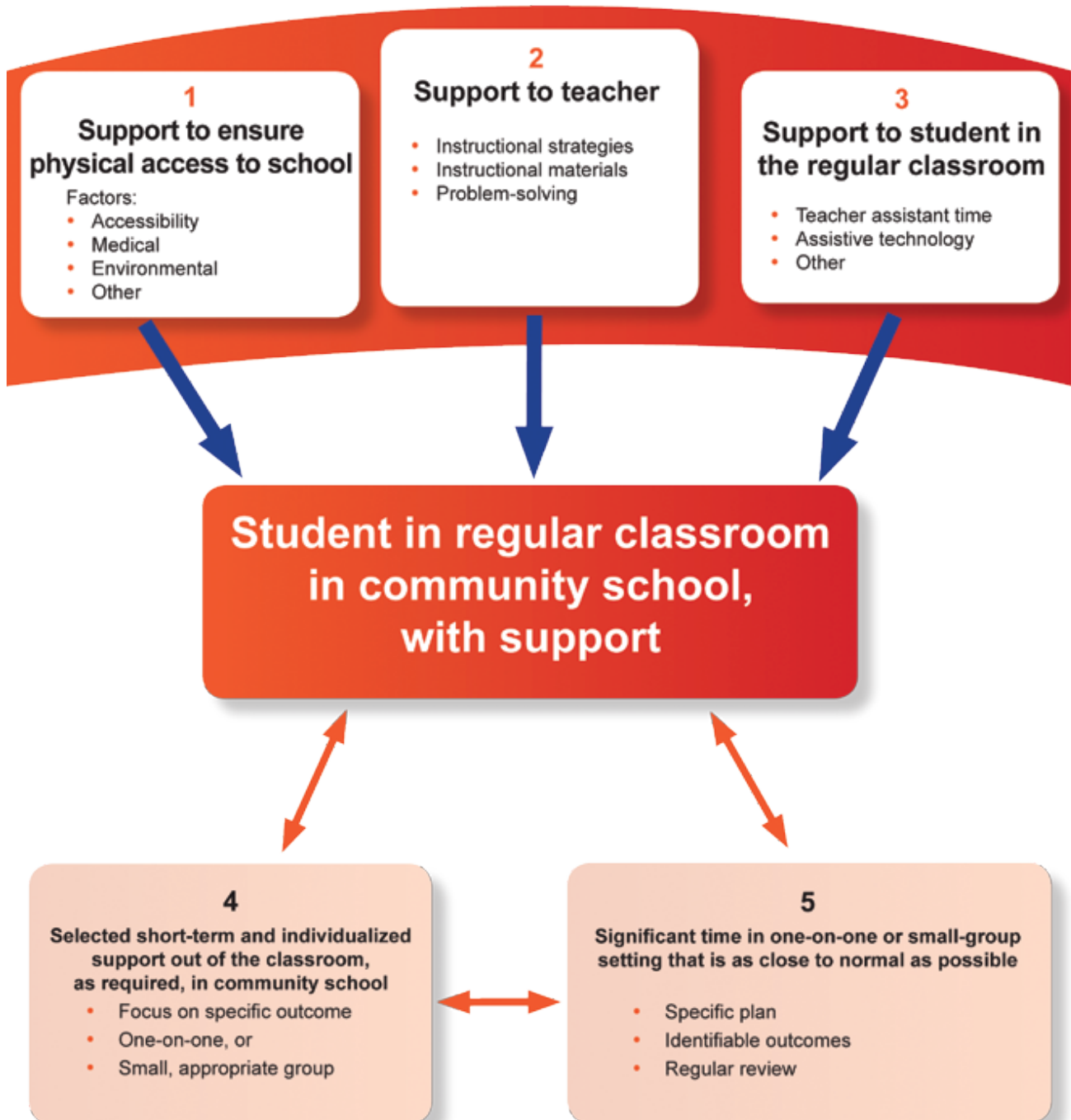
While the intentions surrounding the amendment to the public schools act in 2004 and its resulting supporting standards and regulations that were introduced in 2005 were commendable, there still remain many challenges in our public schools and school divisions when it comes to implementation. All too often, parents find themselves in situations where they do not feel supported or informed about how their sons and daughters with disabilities will be educated in inclusive settings and experience significant stress and anxiety while navigating the education system. Students living with a wide range of disabilities also experience significant stress for a variety of reasons that can include a lack of awareness about their unique needs and talents, ongoing challenges related to the provision of supports, and experiences with in-school discipline and bullying.

While Manitoba Education promotes the idea that **all students are funded students**, regardless of whether there is student-specific funding associate with them, parents and schools still equate the level of funding to the level of support that will be given to a child. The idea that level 2 funding equals half-time educational assistant support leaving a child unsupported during the remainder of the day, whereas level 3 support will provide full day coverage is a common misconception associated with this assumption. There are also concepts related to ownership when it comes to student-specific funding. Some parents think that the educational assistant “assigned” to their child should only work with their child and not be involved with others in the classroom. There is a strong need for reassurance that the education system, the school division, the school principal, and the classroom teacher are responsible for providing the educational program for children and funding is used to help them achieve their goal, be they student specific (identified in an IEP) or associated with the provincial curriculum.

There also needs to be greater support directed towards classroom teachers so they have the tools they need in the classroom to deliver relevant, universally accessible programming to their students. They need to be empowered to take on the challenges of teaching a diverse student body, knowing that there are places and people that they can call on for assistance when needed.

A good illustration of how inclusive education can be better implemented in our province comes from the New Brunswick Human Rights Commissions document on Accommodating Students with Disabilities,³ and there are a number of best practices documents that can be used to help schools and school divisions plan for the future. This illustration is shown below:

Inclusion Process



³ <http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/pamphlet-Accommodating-Students-with-a-Disability.pdf>

It is clear from the results of this survey that there is much to do to further the agenda of inclusive education and this was echoed in a recent report issued by Manitoba's Auditor General⁴ that spoke to "special needs education." A number of recommendations were put forward in this report as follows:

Recommendation 1: We recommend that Education improve the organization of its website information to make it more user-friendly for parents of students with special needs.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that, as part of its broader consultation process, Education consult more regularly with representatives of educational assistants when it develops or updates standards, guidelines or support documents that may affect educational assistants' delivery of services to students with special needs.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that Education work with school divisions to develop processes to monitor and periodically verify the level of school division compliance with special needs education regulations, standards and guidelines.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that Education work with school divisions to improve the level of compliance with the regulations, standards and guidelines for individual education planning, and to further develop the quality of expected learning outcomes and progress reporting.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that Education further clarify what constitutes allowed paraprofessional duties and communicate this guidance to school divisions and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that Education work with school divisions to ensure the public has easily accessible and complete information on programming options at all locations.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that Education work with school divisions to ensure there is a full array of life skills learning resources available for students with special needs.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that Education investigate the potential cost savings and benefits of centralized purchasing of assistive technology for school divisions.

Recommendation 9: We recommend that Education provide learning opportunities specifically for educational assistants in its professional development calendar.

Recommendation 10: We recommend that Education formally assess the potential benefits and impediments to providing non-mandatory certification of educational assistants.

Recommendation 11: We recommend that Education work with school divisions to determine if students are receiving timely access to clinician assessment services.

Recommendation 12: We recommend that Education make the detailed criteria for determining funding eligibility and funding periods available to school divisions and parents.

Recommendation 13: We recommend that Education clearly document in their files the logic and rationale for all individual special needs funding decisions, including the justification for providing, altering, or denying the funding requested by a school division, and the reason for the selected funding period.

Recommendation 14: We recommend that Education ensure that all significant financial decisions for individual students receive additional review before approval.

⁴ <http://www.oag.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/6-Special-Needs-web.pdf>

Recommendation 15: We recommend that Education refine its post-funding review process by:

- Determining the number of post-funding student reviews to be conducted based on an assessment of the underlying risk
- Reviewing student files (in addition to observing students and holding discussions with school personnel) to verify and update application information
- Assessing if individual education plans reviewed during post-funding reviews meet Provincial regulations, standards and guidelines
- Ensuring prompt follow-up of all potential over- or under-funding situations.

Recommendation 16: We recommend that Education annually require school divisions to report any changes, or confirm that circumstances remain unchanged, for all students receiving multiple or maximum year funding.

Recommendation 17: We recommend that Education improve its special needs financial and operational information and analysis by:

- Tracking future year funding commitments
- Applying description codes to all funding applications and regularly compiling and analyzing this data
- Regularly gathering information on the numbers and costs of educational assistants, resource teachers, different types of clinicians, and assistive technology devices.

Recommendation 18: We recommend that Education work with school divisions to develop methods of monitoring the outcomes being achieved for students with special needs.

Recommendation 19: We recommend that Education provide public performance information on its student-specific grant funding for students with special needs, including information on enrolment, associated costs, and the outcomes being achieved for these students.

Conclusion

It is in the best interests of all of our children to keep moving forward with our vision for inclusive education and inclusive schools in Manitoba. Progress is being made, be it sometimes on an incremental level and we, as parents, educators, administrators, clinicians, educational assistants, policy makers and other education system stakeholders need to keep pushing ourselves to envision the next steps. Follow-up surveys, such as the one used to document findings in this report, should be done regularly to continue monitoring progress from a parent/caregiver perspective.

The ideal of inclusive education and inclusive communities may be the unattainable, but the strides that we make in our current way of living and thinking while moving towards that ideal, challenges us to become better people, challenges all of our children to reach their potentials, and ultimately, benefits us all.