



Honourable Nancy Allen,  
Minister of Education,  
168 Legislative Building,  
450 Broadway,  
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

February 21, 2012

Re: Response to Auditor General's Report – Winter 2012 – Special Needs Education

On behalf of many stakeholder groups and individuals (please see below), the following is our response to the recent Auditor General's report on Special Needs Education. We have reviewed the report in detail and agree that financial and outcomes accountability are urgent issues to address in these very challenging economic times.

#### **AREAS OF CONCERN**

The findings outlined in the Special Needs Education Audit confirm serious concerns that we have identified in many presentations over the last 30 years here in Manitoba. In particular, three overarching areas of concern that were originally identified in the Special Education Review report, 2001, that we see echoed in the Auditor General's Report include: Programming, Accountability and Finance.

#### **1) Programming Areas of Concern:**

- a) *Individual Education Plans* - The need for appropriate development, use, reporting and accountability for progress made using individual education plans.
- b) *Clear Roles and Responsibilities of Professionals* - The need for better identification and clearer communication of the roles and responsibilities of the many professionals involved in the provision of appropriate educational programming. This includes clinicians, educational assistants, support staff, classroom teachers and administration,
- c) *Appropriate Professional Development* - The on-going need for and recognition of professional development in the field of inclusive education and universal design for learning. In this area, we stress the need for specialized course work, beyond that required for classroom teachers, for resource and special education teachers and administrators. The Auditor General's Report notes (p.267) that for teachers who move to Manitoba and are certified, "Manitoba Education sent these people letters encouraging them to take special education courses." We are concerned this likely does not provide enough of an incentive for people to take the six credit hour course required for all Manitoba trained teachers. We note the single course falls short of the appropriate level of teacher training recommended in the Special Education Review Final Report (1998) (pages 461-462).

#### **2) Accountability Areas of Concern:**

- a) *Better Information Sharing at all Levels* - Clearer and better information sharing at the individual, school, school division, and provincial level.

- b) *Accessible Information* - This information needs to be accessible to parents and other community members.
- c) *Data Collection* - Collection of indicator data is needed to support the development of strategic plans with specific time lines and targets at all levels.
- d) *Proactive not Reactive Administrative Responsibility* - We would also welcome a clear communication from the Minister that *proactive* responsibility for the above rests with school and divisional administrators and staff, rather than having schools or Divisions wait reactively for parental complaints.

#### **Funding Areas of Concern:**

- a) *Level of Compliance* - Even with the small sample size of students designated level II -and III- funded that was reviewed, the level of compliance with the regulations was dismal.
- b) *Accountability for all Funded Students* - We realize that this review was done from an auditing perspective and hence, focused on those with student specific funding. However, **all of Manitoba's students are funded students** and there must be accountability on a financial level for how all of our students are supported in their classrooms, at their schools, and in their school divisions. In reality, many students with exceptional learning needs do not qualify for student-specific funding and yet their needs are supported by Manitoba's provisions for appropriate educational programming.

#### **OUR QUESTION IN MOVING FORWARD**

How will this Review influence the work of:

- 1) Manitoba Education,
- 2) our many school divisions, and
- 3) the many other partners and stakeholders within our province who are involved in the delivery and support of appropriate educational programming for all students in our public school system?

As participants directly concerned with progress and outcomes of the process from this point, we believe it is important to have a greater sense of the specific goals and timelines attached to the various responses to the Auditor's recommendations.

#### **MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER**

We ask to participate in moving forward cooperatively, progressively and quickly on these issues and propose the following two gatherings.

- 1) *A Public Forum* - Those affected need to be part of the discussion. A public forum could be hosted by the Children's Coalition on an evening where parents of children with exceptional learning needs would have the opportunity to:
  - a) learn about and comment on the findings and recommendations of the Auditor General, and
  - b) learn about and comment on the responses to those recommendations by Manitoba Education.
- 2) *Involving Education Stakeholders* - We recommend a broader discussion of this report and its recommendations by education stakeholders to determine the level of consensus on the issues identified and the recommendations for moving forward. Significant stakeholders include: MAUDLE (Manitoba Alliance for Universal Design for Learning in Education), MTS, COSL, MAPC, MART, SSAAM, MSBA, CEC, Faculties of Education from our four universities, EAMB, with both parent and student representation (including rural and northern - if an all day session is planned). This discussion will allow for the identification of levels of consensus among stakeholder groups. It will also allow for stakeholder organizations and representatives to see where they are or can be positioned most efficiently and effectively in moving forward with the work that needs to be done.

We also propose a framework and timeline for consensus in moving forward:

- a) *Early Spring, 2012* – The above proposed meetings should take place in early Spring 2012, allowing for the development of a “*Targets with Timelines for Change*” document to be produced by September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- b) *September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012* - The timeline included in the “*Targets with Timelines for Change*” would outline a clear multiyear plan to address the priority targets identified by Manitoba Education. This plan would include continued consultation with the many stakeholder organizations, groups, and associations that support and have a vested interest in appropriate educational programming for students with exceptional learning needs in Manitoba. One way of accomplishing this would be to vest monitoring authority in Manitoba Education’s existing advisory committee on student services.

We welcome this opportunity to move forward within a proactive, accountable and cooperative working environment. Members of the Children’s Coalition will be happy to assist Manitoba Education in the organization and the presentation of materials and information for the proposed public forums. You may contact the Children’s Coalition by phoning 786-1607 or emailing [aclmb@aclmb.ca](mailto:aclmb@aclmb.ca).

Sincerely,

Anne Kresta, Chair,  
The Children’s Coalition

On behalf of The Children’s Coalition membership and in collaboration with:

Rose Flaig, Executive Director, Community Living Manitoba  
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Zana Lutfiyya, Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba  
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\*members of The Children’s Coalition who were part of this working group

Cc: Carol Bellringer, Auditor General

Judith Cameron, President, Manitoba Association of Parent Councils  
Lisa Martin, President, Student Services Administrators of Manitoba  
Brian O’Leary, President, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents  
Paul Olson, President, Manitoba Teachers Society  
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Alan Schroeder, President, Council of School Leaders