Together,
for the success
of all children !

New Nouveau
Brunswick
CANADA

Summary of Proceedings

Forum on Inclusive Education

May 28 & 29, 2006
Fredericton
New Brunswick

Executive Summary

Forum participants consistently identified a number of priority areas. These will be of assistance to government in its development of a government-wide action plan concerning inclusive education. The following summarizes the most prominent messages across the five themes since discussions within themes were similar. Readers will find a range of short-term priorities in the section entitled "selected key messages and priorities" under each theme.

Definitions

- Define inclusive education, its parameters and the core services to be available.
- Clarify the role of the public education system and the roles and responsibilities of those who are involved in service delivery.

Service delivery and coordination *(second-most urgently communicated need)*

- Ensure central coordination through: integrated policy; top-down directive and support; change in bureaucratic structure and legislation; dedicated funding and positions.
- Align physical boundaries of school districts and FCS and Health regions and their mandates regarding the age of clients.
- Eliminate barriers to information sharing and put processes in place to ensure everyone is aware of the manner in which information is to be used and with whom it is to be shared.
- Make better use of expertise outside of the public education system to deliver services and provide consultation and training for personnel.
- Work on better collaboration with community organizations to avoid duplication of efforts and to ensure effective services.

Services

- Make support services available at the school level.
- Ensure services are "wrapped around" the individual, child-centered, flexible, and available to any student who requires them.

Personnel

- Greatest needs identified: resource teachers; speech services; continuity of teacher assistant time (reduce "bumping"); mental health/psychology services; qualified personnel to provide care related to the health/medical needs of students; and personnel to perform assessments in various disciplines.
- Use paraprofessionals to assist with the implementation of recommendations made by professionals.

Disruptive behaviour

- Use behaviour intervention workers or other trained staff at the school level.
- Use school teams, work with parents, hire social workers.
- Identify behavioural issues and intervene early.
- Analyze sources of behaviour and address school-related causes.
- Establish alternate sites for short-term management of students with severe behavioural challenges.
- Work on social skills in kindergarten.
- Allow for innovative approaches at the school level.

Training requirements *(most frequently mentioned topic)*

- awareness of particular disabilities, providing classroom and resource teachers with increased capacity to meet diverse needs and manage classroom composition issues
- better pre-service training for teachers (mostly concerning special education, diversity and disability)
- training for others such as health professionals (e.g., adding university seats)
- training for teacher assistants and other paraprofessionals to ensure sufficient personnel to carry out the recommendations of professionals in various fields
- training on principles of inclusion, teamwork, management skills and ongoing professional development

Student-centered programming

- Provide a variety of learning opportunities for students, including community-based options and mentoring; increasing vocational courses and choice of programming for students, increasing offerings of physical education, art, music and other "non-academic" subjects.
- Permit greater flexibility regarding placement, course choices, scheduling, assessment, etc.
- Provide more technical aides/assistive technology.
- Ensure early assessment and intervention – without labelling.
- Ensure services follow students as long as they are required, without unnecessary re-assessment.

Accountability

- Implement follow-up to ensure the effectiveness of processes and services overall, as well as programming for individuals.
- Conduct regular "check-ups" to monitor the success of inclusion and communication.
- Implement an action plan with uniform, clearly articulated expectations/standards.
- Ensure transparency, stakeholder involvement and public reporting.

Funding

- Ensure funding is sustainable.
- More than five million will be required.
- Give schools and school districts the flexibility to use funds to meet regional/local needs.

Issues of greater prominence in the francophone sessions:

- Services for children and families must be available in French, beginning pre-school.
- University-level training is required (special education, specialists, early childhood).
- Assistive technologies.
- Communicate the value of education.

Issues of greater prominence in the anglophone sessions:

- Clarify government's position on student placement (mentioned slightly more often in anglophone sessions).
- Take measures to make French Immersion classrooms more inclusive.
- Services are required for immigrant students who do not speak English.

Background

On May 28th and 29th, 2006, the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Departments of Family and Community Services and Health, hosted a forum on inclusive education.

The intent of the forum was to provide an opportunity for collective reflection and interchange to inform the government's response to the review of inclusive education commissioned by the Department of Education. Specifically, participants were invited to:

- identify the most pressing actions for implementation in the 2006-07 school year, for which five million dollars have been set aside; and

- provide advice on the development of government's longer-term action plan on inclusive education.

Forum participants were primarily representatives of groups originally consulted by Mr. MacKay, including: stakeholder groups; teachers; principals; school district staff; partner department staff; parents represented through their District Education Councils and Parent School Support Committees; and students. The objective was to include as many people as possible in a representative manner and to ensure that those with key roles in implementing change were included in the discussion. Nearly 200 people were involved.

Forum working sessions were structured around five themes emerging from the MacKay review. These were: (1) Service Levels & Integration of Services; (2) Conditions for Learning – Systemic Change; (3) Meeting Individual Needs; (4) Pre-school and Transition to School; and (5) Ongoing Collaboration and Communication. Each participant was provided the opportunity to take part in discussions on three of the five themes, in the official language of his or her choice. A description of the themes is included in Appendix A.

The following is a summary of the key messages captured from 117 pages of notes of the 38 working sessions, grouped by theme. Though all information generated within the working sessions will be considered in the development of government's action plan, the purpose of this document is to report the main messages of the forum.

Notes were analyzed within each theme. In order to identify the key messages, all session notes were reviewed as written to understand the flow of the conversation and the interrelation of ideas. Notes identified under the headings of "key messages" and "priorities" were considered separately since these tended to summarize thoughts and often indicated a degree of consensus. Then a coding scheme was applied to all notes to provide an indication of the frequency with which topics were mentioned in relation to each other. Where session recorders indicated that a particular comment was mentioned by a specific number of participants, these comments were counted accordingly.

Messages or priorities that are particular to one linguistic sector are noted.

Messages and concepts are listed in order of frequency of mention under each of the five themes.

Theme 1 - Service Levels & Integration of Services

Service organization / integration (126 mentions)

The greatest number of comments reflected issues and suggestions concerning the manner in which services are organized. Proposed elements of solution can be summarized as follows:

- define inclusive education, its parameters and the core services to be available. Clarify the role of the public education system and the roles and responsibilities of those who are involved in service delivery;
- make support services available at the school level, possibly have personnel or teams assigned to a school or cluster of schools, and make the school the center of the community;
- ensure central coordination through integrated policy; top-down directive and support; change in bureaucratic structure and legislation; dedicated funding and positions ("one cannot have two masters");
- align physical boundaries of school districts and FCS and Health regions and their mandates regarding the age of clients;
- ensure services are "wrapped around" the individual, child-centered, flexible, and available to any student who requires them; and
- centralize support services for students within the Department of Education or within a single department. There was some support for this idea in several groups and it was repeated within several of the five themes, however, concerns and alternatives were also brought forth. Several of the francophone participants believed having a single department structured around linguistic duality would help to address the shortage of services available in French.

Personnel requirements (107 mentions)

When discussing personnel requirements, teacher assistants were the subject of over a quarter of the suggestions. The main recommendation was that measures should be taken to reduce TA "bumping" to ensure continuity of service for students. Other messages conveyed the need to improve TA working conditions and pay, provide more training, re-examine their role, hire more, and not use TAs as a short-term "quick fix" solution.

Participants signalled a need for additional well-qualified resource teachers. The high student to resource teacher ratio was seen as limiting the effectiveness of resource teachers and possibly affecting their retention in the school system. Other positions perceived to be needed were: speech-language pathologists, psychologists, physio- and occupational therapists and teachers. In addition to requests for specific services, there were many comments regarding the need to augment services and reduce wait times generally. Health/medically-related needs of students also featured prominently in discussions. Several participants suggested a need for clinical nurses in schools. Other services mentioned were: better assessment; technical aides/assistive technology for students; and supports to address disruptive behaviour.

Training (50 mentions)

Types of training suggested by participants included:

- awareness of particular disabilities, providing classroom and resource teachers with increased capacity to meet diverse needs and manage classroom composition issues;
- better pre-service training for teachers (mostly concerning special education, diversity and disability);
- training for others such as health professionals (e.g., adding university seats);
- training for TAs and other paraprofessionals to ensure sufficient personnel to carry out the recommendations of professionals in various fields;
- and other areas such as training on principles of inclusion, teamwork, management skills and ongoing professional development.

Funding / Resources (33 mentions)

Participants called for adequate human and financial support at the school level. School district administrators were clearly concerned about adding programming without taking measures to eliminate the existing deficit in the student services budgets of school districts. There was some discussion about the manner in which funds should be allocated and cautioning that five million dollars will be insufficient to address existing needs.

Information sharing (31 mentions)

One third of comments concerning information sharing reflected a need to overcome barriers to effective information sharing about individual students ("break down artificial barriers to sharing information"; "a global consent from parents is needed"). Other suggestions reflected the need for better interdepartmental communication generally and also concern for effects on employees when information is not shared appropriately. The need for opportunities and time for communication was raised.

Recruitment and retention (21 mentions)

Solutions included: better pay (for teacher assistants); reduce the workload of personnel; increase the number of out-of-province university seats for New Brunswickers; offer competitive salaries; grants; bursaries; and mentorship programs.

Other topics discussed:

- Suggestion: support proposals to improve/increase services in schools, making funding contingent on the degree of interagency cooperation or service integration.
- Francophone participants identified the need for services in French.
- Provide training and compensation for District Education Council members (mentioned in francophone sessions only).

Selected "key messages" and priorities:

- We are here to improve the system for ALL children – not just one group.
- Create one "Ministry for the Child."
- The province is diverse and differences abound – rural versus urban. We need flexibility based on the variety of needs.

- La francophonie is at risk: linguistic duality must be respected and the need for financial resources to meet the needs of the francophone minority must be recognized.
- Before we spend money, we need to sit down and clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Clarify the definition of inclusion.
- Make sure we are using service providers in the best way possible (teachers, SLPs, etc).
- Use money to provide support personnel (TAs, rehab support personnel).
- Need to increase TA time to be present in schools.
- Professional development is needed for TAs. Often first thing to be cut. Train the personnel that we have. Offer opportunity for specialization (in-service). Have it as a committed budget. Use non-contact days as PD. Teacher and TA could learn as a team.
- Place more professionals in the education system: teachers, M&R, Physios, OT's, SLP's etc.
- We need to create flexibility to add teachers to be able to split large classes. Flexibility in staffing. Spend $5M on more teachers.
- Look at the one-time amount of money given to behavioural challenges. Need to look at role of intervention worker, TA.
- Target behaviour problems in pre-school age group. Focus on families and parents. Give parents skills early on so that they can work together with us. Intensity of need could be reduced as the child ages (ex. Preschool focus of autism treatment).
- Use towards students services debt of districts, can't afford to offer what is being offered now. $5M is not a lot.
- $5M should go towards initiatives that are integrated. Good place to start. Makes us work towards where we want to go.
- In summary: funding; linguistic duality; communication; centre of services; evaluation.

Theme 2 - Conditions for Learning – Systemic Change

Curriculum / programming changes (56 mentions)

Suggestions included: providing a variety of learning opportunities for students, including community-based options and mentoring; increasing vocational courses and choice of programming for students, increasing offerings of physical education, art, music and other "non-academic" subjects; greater flexibility regarding course choices, scheduling, etc.; and changing the manner in which French as a second language programs are organized.

Training (44 mentions)

Training was strongly promoted as a vehicle for systemic change. Suggestions were similar to those listed under the previous theme, however, the emphasis on good pre-service training and ongoing professional development for all staff was stronger. Francophone groups talked more frequently about university training for teachers and the need for a return to specialization or training in special education.

Personnel / services for schools (38 mentions)

Recommendations included: better service integration; adding services, particularly at the school level; reducing class size; adding resource teachers; adding one full-time teacher per school to be used at the principal's discretion; adding a minimum of one full-time behaviour intervention/ autism support worker to each school; and providing a full-time principal for every school.

Engage parents and communities, improve communication (37 mentions)

Anglophone and francophone groups alike, expressed the wish for schools to open their doors to their communities and also to benefit from community partnerships and opportunities offered outside of schools (e.g., on-the-job experiences). The importance of parental involvement from birth throughout their child's education was stressed and schools were asked to find meaningful ways to involve parents, keep them informed and ensure their collaboration in decision-making concerning their children.

Address disruptive behaviour (29 mentions)

Solutions proposed included: use of behaviour intervention workers or other trained staff at the school level; use of school teams; working with parents; hiring social workers; identifying behavioural issues and intervening early; analyzing sources of the behaviour and addressing school-related causes; establishing alternate sites for short-term management of students with severe behavioural challenges; working on social skills in kindergarten; and allowing for innovative approaches at the school level.

Meet learner needs (26 mentions)

Participants felt strongly that education must be student-centered and students must be placed in learning environments that best meet their needs. Learning should be optimized for all students. Anglophone and francophone groups raised programming for gifted students in this context.

Positive learning environments (19 mentions)

Suggestions under this heading included: providing continued/additional funds and/or supports for positive learning environment initiatives, addressing harassment (by students and parents), and updating the Positive Learning Environment Policy.

Greater school / district autonomy (18 mentions)

There was a request for schools and school districts to be provided with greater autonomy and flexibility regarding allocation of funds, use of staff and the ability to find solutions to meet the particular needs of the individual school and its community. This was repeated in a number of groups and under more than one of the five themes.

Funding / resources (14 mentions)

In addition to the discussion reflected under Theme 1, needs were stated in the following terms:

- ensure sustainable funding;
- ensure sufficient resources to properly support inclusion;
- allocate monies based on needs and per capita funding; and
- communicate budget allocations in a timely manner to enable districts to spend money effectively.

Other comments included:

- clarify roles and responsibilities of school personnel, build a common vision
- provide additional time for teamwork and planning
- enable earlier identification of student difficulties / risk factors;
- define inclusion;
- address classroom composition;
- improve student transitions;
- upgrade the physical environment in school buildings;
- provide greater autonomy for schools and school districts;

Francophone participants also identified an urgent need for services in French.

Selected "key messages" and priorities:

- Flexibility and resources
- Strong leadership from the top
- Long term commitment to finding solutions
- Need human resources – specialists to meet the needs.
- There's a lack of flexibility in the curriculum … too much emphasis on academics.
- Focus on resolving disruptive behaviour in classrooms.
- Inter-agency communication is critical to meet the needs of children. Require respectful and open dialogue between parent/teacher and teacher/student
- Need to continuously include people from outside the education system (e.g., Health, FCS) to provide "fresh eyes" to support the system
- Medically-fragile students need to be the responsibility of persons other than teachers – teachers need to be able to teach
- Teamwork and training are essential for the long term

- Remember that we need to optimize learning for all students
- Time – for planning, for teaming
- *** The #1 Priority*** Classroom composition. The local district/schools need flexibility re how to use the resources provided to address this matter.
- Initiate training for individuals (e.g., behavioural intervention workers) to meet behavioural challenges
- The school as the center for service delivery
- Affirm linguistic duality in education and in all departments involved in early childhood services and services to schools.
- Training for school administrators in the area of inclusion.
- Have a team around the disruptive student to modify behaviour.
- A neutral centre for services and a meeting place for parents, students and the community
- Training on inclusion to be part of all courses offered for pre-service teacher training

Theme 3 - Meeting Individual Needs

Training (64 mentions)

Training was at the top of the list of mentions for this theme. Suggestions were very similar to those noted in the previous sections. Mentions under this theme included: differentiated instruction, compulsory course work regarding special needs as part of pre-service teacher training, behaviour modification/intervention, medical needs, training for resource and methods teachers, training for all personnel. The message that additional time must be set aside for training, planning and meetings was also reiterated.

Integrated services (59 mentions)

Observations concerning the need for service integration were also similar to those mentioned previously. The two strongest messages under this theme were: the public school system needs multidisciplinary teams, including an appropriate array of qualified professionals at various levels of the system; and we need to resolve issues around information sharing. The need to provide proper monitoring and follow-up of service for individuals and to ensure existing resources are used appropriately and coordinated was also stressed.

Flexibility in programming and placement (36 mentions)

As anticipated, the theme of "meeting individual needs" gave rise to many discussions regarding placement of students and the need for programming and services to retain the flexibility required to meet student needs. More than two-thirds of the comments conveyed the message that various options for student placement must be provided ("regardless of TA support, some students cannot cope with the classroom environment). Most noted that programming must meet the needs of the individual student and some emphasized that students who are removed from the regular classroom need to be engaged in learning. Several participants felt that small schools where staff know all of the students work well for students with exceptionalities. It is noteworthy that only one recorded comment about placement of students came from a francophone session. That comment was on the subject of disruptive behaviour in classrooms.

Personnel / services for schools (32 mentions)

Participants emphasized the need for increased support services and stressed these should be available without long waiting times and delivered at the school. Some thought it might also work to have them housed together within a community center in every community or a mobile team that could serve schools. Services requested included: speech (most mentioned); mental health; audiology; physiotherapy; occupational therapy; health-related services; and screening /assessment.

In addition to services from outside of education, support was requested to address the following:

- disruptive behaviour
- learning disabilities / difficulties
- autism
- gifted / enrichment
- health services

Another twenty participants mentioned the need for additional personnel in schools or to assist teachers generally and twelve mentioned the need for more resource teachers specifically.

There was considerable discussion about teacher assistants (39 mentions). Most of the recommendations referred to reducing the movement of TAs during the school year to ensure continuity for students; increasing the number of hours of individual TAs to enable their participation in meetings and planning; more training; and hiring more TAs. Some participants suggested the role of the TA should be clarified and stated that, if a student spends more time with a TA than with teachers, then the TA is in effect being "taught" by the TA.

Curriculum and student assessment (24 mentions)

The two most frequent changes suggested regarding the curriculum were the addition of life skills and vocational options. Comments concerning assessment reflected the need for ongoing assessment and that the manner in which this is done should be appropriate for the student.

Funding (27 mentions)

Comments under this heading may be summed-up with the following quotes:

- "Inclusion is working in many situations - but we do not have the resources to meet all needs."
- "Fund services, time and training."
- "…Providing a child with adequate equipment and training engages them in a lifetime of productivity."
- "Fund what we already do before you expand upon what we are expected to provide."

Other topics also mentioned under this theme:

- meeting the needs of all students, student-centered programming, ensure continuum of services ("think about the impact on students");
- including parents as part of the team is paramount;
- improve processes affecting students at all points of transition (e.g., pre-school, school-to work, First Nations students entering public school);
- greater accountability is needed within the public education system, transparency, reporting and communicating with the public;
- need to clarify the mission of the public education system, define roles and core services;
- need more technological aides, computers and specialized computer programs (FM systems for classrooms were mentioned in a number of groups under several themes);
- greater school autonomy ;
- earlier identification of student needs, better/earlier diagnosis, prevention services/activities;
- build on best practices already in place;
- work with community groups.

Issues of greater prominence in the francophone sessions:

- services to students and families must be available in French; more support is required for francophone students whose French language abilities are limited;
- emphasis on training for teachers generally and particularly the need for courses in "adaptation scolaire" and the return of a BA in "adaptation scolaire";
- the need for mental health services;
- more technological aides and specialized software for students; and
- a focus on elevating the learning culture.

Issues of greater prominence in the anglophone sessions:

- services are required for non-English speaking immigrant students; and
- provide student services in French to French Immersion students to make this program more inclusive.

Selected "key messages" and priorities:

- Need to ensure services are available to all age groups (no grey areas).
- Government must be responsible and must evaluate itself. Government should hold a session with stakeholders a year from now to evaluate successes and challenges.
- Develop and monitor integrated services model now – identify necessary services to meet student needs and ensure they are available in schools.
- Good inclusive education is not a one size fits all concept. It means adapting our environments, teaching strategies and services so all children can learn alongside their peers in their neighbourhood schools.
- Define inclusion soon.
- Better inter-departmental accountability for students.
- Best interests of the student is main focus; team approach and collaboration and communication; involve stakeholders.
- Address student behaviour through additional resources.
- Train and hire more TAs and give them more time with students, parents and teachers
- TRUE partnership is essential. Agreements have already been in place that did not survive the changes. These agreements must survive and a structure must be in place. We could have a charter of the child.
- Negotiate with our universities for better training that will meet the needs of our system.
- Paid mandatory targeted appropriate training program for all staff in system – well planned.
- Keep children out of segregated classrooms and settings.
- Don't let flexibility be mistaken for segregation.
- Remember all students not just those who have a special interest group working on their behalf – you are losing great chances with students without exceptionalities – they are failing in their grades.
- Devolve implementation of inclusion process to local districts and schools – treat districts and schools with flexibility as children have their needs met.
- The education system can no longer meet on its own. True partnerships with other departments are needed.
- Additional human resources, particularly resource teachers.
- Focus investment at K-2. Screening is very important.

Theme 4 - Pre-school and Transition to School

Service integration (57 mentions)

The most common topic discussed under this theme was the need for integrated services. There were nearly twice as many comments about this as about any other topic. They ranged from general statements about the need for government departments to work more collaboratively to more specific suggestions about developing common goals, language and boundaries, ensuring appropriate persons are included in discussions and coordination efforts, and the suggestion of having a single entry point for access to services for children and families. There was a clear message that government departments and unions should remove any impediments to having services follow children regardless of age as long as the services are required.

Parents (30 mentions)

Not surprisingly, the second-most discussed subject was the role of parents. Approximately half of the comments reflected a need to assist parents through information (about services, disabilities, parenting, etc.), and better outreach (beginning when their children are born, in-home, in parent-friendly locations). Some participants also indicated that schools should contact parents well before their children are to begin kindergarten and that many different means should be used to attempt to contact all parents. Many of the other comments reflected the need for parents to assume their responsibilities and included suggestions to require parents to participate in meetings and take their children for recommended services, etc.

Services / personnel required (26 mentions)

The emphasis of discussion regarding services for young children was that waiting time should be eliminated. Services/personnel requested were: speech (most frequent); teacher assistants (increase their hours); resource teachers; mental health/psychology; autism, audiology; and physical accommodation (buildings). Two other concepts mentioned were that services should be available to all children, including gifted, and that First Nations children should have access to services provided by First Nations professionals.

Transition to school (22 mentions)

"Seamless" transition into kindergarten was characterized by participants as including: continuation of pre-school services - with the same personnel if in the best interests of the child; schools beginning contact with families of pre-schoolers well-before kindergarten and including all significant family members; ensuring important information is passed along to school personnel and including the kindergarten teacher in planning for individual students. Some degree of uniformity of transition programming and processes should be in place across the province.

Information sharing (19 mentions)

Participants recommended that more effective ways to share relevant information between pre-school service providers and school personnel, while respecting privacy considerations, be pursued. Suggested actions included the creation of a portfolio that would accompany the child and obtaining parental consent for sharing of information with schools as soon as possible.

The second subject of discussion under this heading was the need to share information generally, for example, about available services and about developmental "markers" common to young children. It was also noted that persons who work with pre-schoolers have a wealth of knowledge that could be shared with the school system.

Services in both official languages (15 mentions)

Francophones voiced an urgent need for preschool services to be available in French. They stated that some children are lost to the francophone education system even before school age because services are available only in English. Solutions suggested were: ensuring duality in other departments serving children as it exists in Education; providing more funding to deliver French services; and providing programming for French language learning during the pre-school years.

Screening / Early identification of difficulties (13 mentions)

In order to address developmental delays as quickly as possible, the following was suggested: begin screening prior to 3.5 years; provide training to personnel working with pre-schoolers and teachers; consider Ontario's on-line screening tool; ensure learning disabilities are detected by age four – perhaps as part of the planned pre-school curriculum; and increase budget allocations to the Department of Health dedicated to prevention. Some pointed out the need to ensure that diagnosis would be appropriately done and benefit the child rather than labelling.

Professional development / training (12 mentions)

Suggestions for training included: daycare staff (child development and learning disabilities); teacher assistants; bus drivers; awareness of autism services; assessments; pre-service training to increase availability of specialists; and pre-service training in special education and early childhood.

Other topics discussed:

- inclusive practices in daycares (e.g. provide sign language training);
- ensure the needs of the whole child are addressed, not just cognitive abilities;
- provide time for personnel to meet, plan, case conference;
- build on best practices, existing knowledge, research, models in effect in other provinces;
- ensure adequate funding, sustainable programs, and align the fiscal and school years to ensure budget allocations are made in time for districts to be able to plan appropriately

Selected "key messages" and priorities:

- Train more specialists at the university level.
- Develop a common understanding of school-readiness.
- Ensure there is an appropriate wait time for speech language services and develop an integrated program for implementation of such a speech plan.
- Develop a universal way of screening children to flag those who may have a learning disability at an early age so we can implement a developmentally appropriate early intervention.
- The three departments (Family and Community Services, Health and Education) should listen more closely to the community.
- Add more money than the five million.
- Review service delivery to ensure the duality of services for children 0-5 years of age..
- Ensure continuity of services regardless of the age of the child.

- Define the core services (provincial and federal) that should be available to young children and their parents/guardians and where these services are to be delivered (e.g., in the school system, family resource centre). These core services need to be tangible and should not change if there is a change in government. If this requires legislation or a defined structure, this needs to be put in place. It is better to have a smaller number of well-funded services than many which are not well funded.

Theme 5 - Ongoing Collaboration and Communication

Over-arching messages

Interdepartmental, interagency and stakeholder communication (58 mentions) – Comments were very similar to those reported previously. Implementation of collaborative training for all personnel across departments and agencies was suggested, as well as making greater use of community expertise for training.

Continued, pro-active communication (31 mentions) – Participants requested formal processes, mechanisms, strategies and/or policies to ensure communication at all levels occurs in a proactive manner. Some desired outcomes were: ongoing consultation with stakeholders and parents; a predictable, effective and well-publicised process governing information flow; and greater openness of the public education system to information and expertise from community and stakeholder groups, parents and external professionals.

Common understanding of roles, vision, goals (25 mentions) – Suggestions included: define inclusion; ensure buy-in; clarify roles (i.e., departments, districts, schools, District Education Councils, Parent School Support Committees, non-educator professionals in schools, Home and School, parents, stakeholders); and communicate system-wide.

Privacy issues (17 mentions) – Ensure information about students is shared appropriately to support the best outcomes for the student. More information and training is required to clarify and de-mystify the requirements of the *Protection of Personal Information Act*.

Training (16 mentions) – Implement training for all personnel on: positive, respectful relationships and attitudes; awareness of rights, roles and responsibilities; how to diffuse negative situations; facilitation; and meeting management.

Child-centered communication/collaboration (15 mentions) – Maintain the child as the focus of communication and programming; ensure students are included in decision-making pertaining to them; and provide child and youth advocacy services (suggestions: extend these services to families; provide this service within the public school system).

Department-level

Accountability, transparency (20 mentions) – An important message resulting from this discussion was: implement follow-up to ensure the effectiveness of processes and services overall, as well as for individuals. Other suggestions included: regular "check-ups" to monitor the success of inclusion; annual forums to review accountability and communication; and implementation of an action plan with uniform, clearly articulated expectations/standards.

Provide information on existing services (20 mentions) – Several participants noted the need for information regarding available services, resources and programs, for parents and school personnel alike, (government and community-based).

Public relations (16 mentions) – Nearly all of these comments stressed the need to mount a public awareness campaign to highlight the importance of education.

School-level (79 mentions)

The main messages pertaining to communication/collaboration at the school level were: find ways to engage parents; pursue those that are difficult to involve; build trust and ensure communication is not just in response to issues; provide staff time for communication and teaming; and ensure communication modes are accommodating enough to include all parents (e.g., consider literacy levels, computer access). The need for school-located resources, teams and services was reiterated.

Other topics discussed:

- Suggested improvements in communication with students included clear articulation of rules and expectations and involving students in decisions pertaining to classroom management.
- A number of participants promoted the use of FM systems and other technology in classrooms (e.g., SMART boards) as having a positive impact on student learning and engagement.
- Several participants requested that a summary of the forum proceedings be made available as soon as possible after the forum.

Selected "key messages" and priorities:

- Promote a culture of learning and cooperation among all stakeholders (socio-marketing).
- Collaboration should occur at all levels (departments, schools, etc.), between levels and within each level.
- Access the expertise from advocacy groups
- Inter-departmental communication has to be put in place – mandatory
- Better communication of Privacy Laws
- Child youth advocate(for all children) – fill position, review current mandate
- Annual forum to check in on process (accountability and communication) – open invitation
- Clear communication of roles and responsibilities, clarify roles of all involved – gear towards parents
- Student involvement wherever possible – key message