Council to Improve Classroom Conditions

Meeting Discussion Summary and Recommendations
April 9 - 11, 2018

Complex Classrooms: Inclusive Education "*Students First*" Report

Council received an overview presentation on the *Students First* report, the same presentation given to stakeholders by the Commission on Inclusive Education on March 26, when the report was released.

Council members reported that feedback from teachers has been generally very positive, and teachers are eager to see action quickly. However, Council members also acknowledged that the report is very lengthy and complex, covering a lot of important topics. They would like a deeper understanding of it, to inform their recommendations on implementation related specifically to Council's legislated priorities: Complex Classrooms, Discipline (Behavior) and Teachers Scope of Practice.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Teachers wants to see more supports in their classrooms, beginning in September.		
Act immediately on staffing and training recommendations in the *Students First* report, in partnership with teachers and other partners. Invite a Commission representative or representatives to answer questions and clarify recommendations.	Immediate action will reassure teachers that they will see changes in September. Additional information will help Council advise on implementation.	The Council co-chairs will extend an invitation to Commission members to present at the May meeting.

As priorities for the April meetings, Council had more in-depth discussions around recommendations on:
- the $5 million complex classroom fund
- modifications, accommodations, and individual education plans
- professional development

$5 million Complex Classroom Fund

In *Students First,* the Commission on Inclusive Education recommended government increase funding through "an additional $5 million contingency grant pool to provide a mechanism for addressing issues of class complexity."

The Deputy Minister has asked the regional executive directors and the CSAP superintendent for recommendations on ideas about how the $5 million can most effectively be invested to meet the complex needs of students. As complex classrooms are among the 10 legislated priorities for Council to address, Council members are also being asked for their input.

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To inform this work, information was shared with Council on existing funds used to support complex classrooms:

- Special Needs Support Grants – Complex Cases (total to regions: $1,500,000): The purpose of these grants is to assist in providing **programming and services** for children and youth requiring intensive support and often multi-agency support due to the severity of their needs.
- Grants to Enhance Service Delivery Supporting Students with Complex Needs (total to regions: $1,109,000): The purpose of these grants is to hire **additional staff** to enhance service delivery and establish a continuum of programs and supports for students with complex needs.

Based on the information shared, Council was asked:

- What are the benefits and challenges of adding the new $5 million funds to the existing grants?
- Should some of the $5 million contingency fund be held to respond to unanticipated priorities and needs that arise over the course of the school year?

Generally, Council members said they do not have the expertise or experience to recommend on specific programs or detail. Rather, their role is to recommend criteria, consistent with student needs and teachers' advice, as aligned with the inclusion report. Council members also acknowledged the reality of emergency situations that arise throughout the year, and the value of having resources available to deal with them.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Teachers see classroom composition as one of the major issues affecting their students and classroom conditions.		
Consider the following criteria for Complex Classroom contingency funding, supporting: • students and teachers in the classroom • training and professional development for teachers and specialists currently working directly with students • Tier 2 and behavior-related priorities • classrooms and schools with the greatest needs (e.g., where classroom composition is creating the biggest challenges)	Teachers and students need more people and programs supporting them in the classroom, without delay.	EECD is working to finalize criteria with other partners so benefits from funding will be felt in classrooms in September. This work must also consider the unique challenges in finding qualified people to meet the needs for all regions.
Retain a portion of the fund to respond quickly to unanticipated needs that emerge throughout the school year.	Classroom composition or the individual needs of a student may change mid-year and lack of funding can slow down response.	EECD will discuss with regional education centres and the CSAP.

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Modifications, Accommodations and Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

EECD and NSTU staff led conversation on the Commission recommendations around modifications, accommodations and IEPs, including initial analysis of the differences between these recommendations and what exists currently, specifically Stage 2 and 4 adaptations and Individual Program Plans.

Council members discussed the impact on teachers of constantly changing language and related processes, and how that can lead to confusion and frustration. However, they also respect the research and thought that the Commission has behind these recommendations, and acknowledged that new language can send a clear message about the need to do things differently.

Council members generally felt that the language of accommodations, modifications and IEPs may also be more student-focused, and could be the foundation of a process seen as a bridge to student success. This could ultimately lead to fewer students requiring IEPs, leaving more doors open for students.

A recommendation requiring clarification from the Commission is around what information would be included about accommodations, modifications and IEPs on report cards. While Council recognizes the importance of effective communications between teachers and parents, the privacy, dignity and human rights of students must be protected.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Processes and policies around adaptations and IPPs are not well understood, or consistently applied – in some cases, closing doors for students and adding workload for teachers and students without value.		
Create a task team to (a) be clear on the objectives of the changes to accommodations, modifications and IEPs, and (b) develop an effective implementation plan (including communications, training/professional development, technology, etc.) that meets those objectives in this priority area.	A task team of all partners can ensure that the issues identified by the Commission – as well as teachers, parents and students – are addressed, while avoiding unintended consequences (e.g., adding to teacher workload).	The task team should involve EECD and regional/CSAP staff, classroom teachers, SEPS (provincial special education group), experts and specialists, parents, and students. Professional development needs to include practical components (case studies, scenarios, etc.).
Consult the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) on transition and admission requirements and processes, prior to moving to accommodations, modifications and IEPs.	NSCC current admission requirements for students on an IPP, even in one subject, can create needless barriers, when considering the readiness	EECD should lead this work, in consultation with the task team referenced in the previous recommendation. Labour and Advanced

	of some students to enter certain programs.	Education will also be contacted.

Professional Development

Teachers do not feel well prepared in inclusive education. About two-thirds of educators who responded to the Commission on Inclusive Education's **disagreed** that:

- their B.Ed. program, or other university or professional education, helped them learn how to design and implement inclusive education in the classroom
- professional development opportunities are available that will increase their ability and confidence in supporting inclusive education
- professional development opportunities are available that will help them learn how to implement individualized student programs

Further, more than half of our educators who responded to the Commission survey said they received 10 hours or fewer of professional development on inclusive education in the past five years.

Council brainstormed on what works well now, what can be built upon, and what is not working, to change teacher's experiences and perceptions about training and professional development.

Training and Professional Development		
What Works Well	**What Can Be Built Upon**	**What's Not Working?**
- Can be used in the classroom immediately; focuses on the practical aspects of teaching (e.g., what is an adaptation, what is not) - Up-to-date and on topic ("PD should make me a better teacher") - Collective efficacy - Purposeful, self-directed, and linked to student learning needs - Collaborative Learning Teams - Comfort in learning with school colleagues - Research, evidence-based	- Surveying teachers on their PD needs - Credible presenters - Induction programs – welcoming and supportive (Current programs vary by region) - Quality of the PD, supporting the quality of teaching - B.Ed. practicums - Mentor teachers, co-teaching, modelling - Twitter Hangouts - Sharing best practices - Co-ordination, collaboration	- Train the trainer ("Like a game of broken telephone") without sufficient time and support "Flash in the pan"; PD is not supported afterwards - Uncoordinated or disconnected - B.Ed. program is a very linear option, needs more depth and breadth to equip teachers to teach within complex classrooms - B.Ed. needs more rigour

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Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Significant changes have been made in inclusion policy and practices without supporting training and professional development for teachers and other school staff.		
Create a framework, to coordinate the work of all partners, that provides teachers and other school staff with what Council has identified as working well (see previous table: Training and Professional Development)	Teachers need current, effective, practical professional development and training to support all students. This will also ensure that professional development funding is used effectively.	EECD will work with partners on developing this framework, guided by the recommendations within the report on inclusive education.

Complex Classrooms: Inspiring Schools Pilot

At the March meeting, Council recommended that funding be used to continue the Inspiring Schools pilot project for **one more** year, supported again by a $2 million investment, cost-shared by Council and EECD. The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development has accepted this recommendation, including the commitment to provide $1 million from the department's budget to match the Council funding. (Note: The EECD funding does not extend beyond the 2018-19 school year.)

In March, Council also recommended that they establish a working group to review how the funding will be invested this year and evaluated next. The working group met and considered: how schools would be selected; what amounts would be provided; and the criteria for proposals, emphasizing sustainability and measures that can be used for evaluation.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: While new support and resources will reach schools in September, the *Students First* report recommends a phased approach. Inspiring Schools will benefit from an additional year of support.		
Allocate the funding for Inspiring Schools based on the following principles: • Regions/CSAP are in the best position to identify what schools need help most. • The feedback submitted by Inspiring Schools, as well as data and needs at other schools that did not receive funding, should guide decisions. • Teachers and administrators are in the best position to determine how their student needs can best be	Support should continue for **one more year** to complement the investments through *Students First*.	Regions and the CSAP will again determine what schools should receive funding. They may choose to give existing Inspiring Schools funding again, or may select other schools. Like last year, selected schools will be asked to submit brief proposals to a council working group for

addressed, once their school has been selected. • Sustainability, capacity-building, and measures for evaluating impact should be considered. • Grants may range in value from a maximum of $50,000 to a minimum of $25,000, to provide flexibility and balance the value of sharing the funds with additional schools, while ensuring an individual school has enough funding to make an impact. • Funding cannot be used for capital repairs and purchases.		review to ensure they adhere to criteria and principles. However, professional judgment of the principals and teachers who develop the proposals will be respected.

Regional executive directors and the CSAP superintendent have been advised that they must select their schools. Schools will have until May 25 to develop their proposals. The Council working committee will review the proposals on June 4.

Complex Classrooms: 40 Additional Teachers Pilot

Teachers remain very concerned about how to support the needs of all students within complex classrooms. The Council was required to wait to make policy-related recommendations in this area until after the Commission on Inclusive Education reported.

As Council awaited the Commission report, Council committed to fund 40 additional teachers to work with junior high math and literacy teachers with the most complex classrooms. This was funded as a pilot project in the current school year (2017-18).

Based on the direction within the Commission report, that their recommendations will be phased in over five years, Council wants to extend its pilot for 40 additional junior high teachers for one more year. They see these teachers as an excellent example of Tier 2 supports that help students. In making its recommendation, Council emphasized that these teachers must be assigned to work directly with students and teachers in classrooms, not as mentors or coaches.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: While new support and resources will reach schools in September, the *Students First* report recommends a phased approach.		
Continue to fund 40 teachers (FTEs) to work with junior high math and literacy teachers who have a high number of students with adaptations and Individual Program Plans.	Junior high teachers and students will still benefit from additional teachers in math and literacy next year.	Regions and the CSAP can determine how these FTEs are allocated, based on the following: (a) teachers

		must work directly with students and teachers in classrooms and (b) the impact of fragmenting the position or FTE below .5 should be assessed. Decisions should consider terms of impact for students and teachers in classrooms with the greatest needs.

Budget

Council reviewed how its 2017-18 budget was invested, as well as the status of its budget for 2018-19. Based on commitments to date, Council has $5.2 million remaining to invest in 2018-19.

Action	2017-18	2018-19
Jr. High Class Caps (49 FTEs)	$2.9M	$4.4M
Sr. High Class Caps (50 FTEs)	$3M	$4.5M
Jr. High Math, Literacy Support (40 FTEs)	$2.4M	$3.6M
Inspiring School Grants	*$1M	*$1M
Attendance Support Workers (14 FTEs)	$600,000	$1.3M
EAL/FAL Grants	$100,000	N/A
Total Allocated	**$10M**	**$14.8M**
Budget Remaining	**0**	**$5.2M**

*Additional $1M contributed by EECD for a total of $2M.

In discussing priorities for its remaining funding, Council began discussing pressures that exist in high schools outside of the Halifax region. When Council funded class caps last year, the funding primarily benefited the Halifax region, which received 67 of the 99 teachers, adding to the pressure in schools outside of the Halifax region. These pressures are intensified by how teachers are scheduled outside of the Halifax region, particularly in how they affect teachers' ability to respond to needs within complex classrooms.

Council provided additional funding at that time for more junior high teachers to assist them in responding to complex classrooms, but did not have enough funding to add teachers at senior high.

To this end, Council asked EECD to research options to provide additional high school support outside of the Halifax region and support teachers and students in complex classrooms.   This information will be used to support budget decisions at the next Council meeting.

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Report Cards

Council members continued their work on report cards.

Members said teachers remain frustrated with the amount of work that goes into report cards (particularly on comment writing), given their belief that they are not the most effective way to communicate with families. Council members would like teachers to be able to spend their time on more individualized, meaningful communications.

Council members also acknowledge that, given the primary purpose of report cards is to communicate with parents, parents must be consulted on significant changes. In terms of paperless report cards for junior high and high school, parent choice is a critical principle. Access to reliable Internet is also a consideration.

Recommendation	Rationale	Additional Comments
Problem: Report cards, particularly comment writing and the frequency of change, remain a significant frustration for teachers.		
Use a developmental code and comments to chart student progress in Grades 1 – 3. Use a developmental code and comments for math and literacy in the first term only for the new integrated 4 – 6 report card; use a grade in 2nd and 3rd term for math and literacy, with comments in those and specialist subjects.	Support the change with clear communications for parents on what the developmental code means.	Review materials in other jurisdictions to identify successful communications tools (e.g., simple "placemat")
Put a three-year moratorium on any additional report card changes for elementary (Primary to 6).	Teachers and parents are tired of the continuous changes.	Additional changes mean any beyond those Council has recommended since beginning its work. All elementary report card changes will be communicated as part of one package before the end of the school year.

Attendance Video Challenge

Information on the high school video challenge was shared with council members by the working group. The Attendance Video Challenge details will be shared using a promotional poster and a website link. This will be shared with regional/CSAP offices, schools and student councils. The deadline for submissions will be mid-May.

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The Council working group will review the video submissions and bring the top 10 videos to the June Council meeting.

Attendance Awareness Campaign

The Attendance Awareness Campaign posters were distributed to schools in early April, while the social media advertising campaign ran on Facebook and Instagram.

The resource Toolkit pieces which include FAQs for parents, a guide of suggested activities for school staff, students and families, and an infographic promoting the benefits of regular attendance are available on the department's website, in English https://www.ednet.ns.ca/educators/toolkit and French https://www.ednet.ns.ca/fr/educators/toolkit.

Next Meeting

The next meetings are scheduled for May 7 - 9.