

YEAR 1 INTERIM REPORT

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NOVA SCOTIA INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

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Introduction

We are submitting this interim report during a highly unusual time. The global COVID-19 pandemic has altered the lives of children, families and those engaged with education systems in Nova Scotia in many ways, including the physical closing of schools in March of 2020 and the introduction of at-home learning. Our work in the first year of the developmental evaluation largely precedes the pandemic and our report captures the perceptions and experiences of educators, administrators and system leaders as they relate to the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy. In other words, we have not focused our evaluation on the implementation of the Policy through the lens of COVID-19 and related restrictions. We discuss later in our report some of the future plans for the developmental evaluation that have shifted in light of COVID-19 which will include a look to the future of the implementation of the Policy situated within the current and future reality of education during a pandemic.

Inclusive Education in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia has a strong history in Inclusive Education. It was an early leader in providing mandated access to public education for students with exceptionalities and has continually sought to maintain high standards for all students. A number of reviews, reports, and position papers have documented the strengths and needs that have developed within the complex systems of Inclusive Education over several decades (Aylward, Farmer, & MacDonald, 2007; Collective Wisdom Solutions, 2012; Glaze, 2018; Njie, Shea, & Williams, 2017, 2018; Minister's Panel on Education, 2014; Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, 2009; Nunn, 2006; Province of Nova Scotia, 2015).

These strengths and needs reflect issues that many school systems confront nationally and internationally as they balance a range of considerations including social and academic inclusion, high standards and equitable outcomes, teacher preparation and specialist supports, traditional academics and wellbeing, and the ever-present call for additional resources to support diverse and complex student populations (Jahnukainen, 2015; McCrimmon, 2015; Newman & Dusenbury, 2015; Slee, 2018; Whitley, Klan & D'Agostino, 2020). In addition, the concept of inclusive education has expanded beyond students with identified disabilities or exceptionalities, to encompass consideration of those at-risk of exclusion and under-achievement such as immigrant and refugee populations, Black and Indigenous students, those growing up in poverty, and gender-related minorities (Hargreaves, Shirley, Wangia, Bacon, & D'Angelo, 2018; Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). The historical and continuing challenges faced by African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq students within the education system have been well documented (Enidlee Consultants Inc., 2009; UN Human Rights Council, 2017).

Inclusion is closely interrelated with both equity and well-being. In relation to equity, not feeling included by being able to see oneself in the school, its educators, leaders and curriculum can lead to problems with learning and then to subsequent underachievement (UN Human Rights Council, 2017). Students in Nova Scotia take part in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA; OECD, 2020) which is a collaborative effort of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and is designed to provide indicators of skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students as well as a number of contextual factors including student attitudes and expectations. Students in English-language schools in Nova Scotia scored similarly to the Canadian average on reading on the 2018 PISA test which placed it on par with the top 10 OECD countries; students in French-language schools scored below the Canadian average (O'Grady et al., 2019). Similar results were seen in the 2016 Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) of Reading, Mathematics and Science where 85% of Grade 8 students in Nova Scotia

achieved at or above the minimum level of reading proficiency, again on par with the Canadian average and with significant differences between students in anglophone compared to francophone schools (O'Grady et al., 2018).

Science and math scores are relatively lower for Nova Scotia students compared to the Canadian average on both the 2018 PISA and the 2016 PCAP with increases over the years, particularly among girls. Nova Scotia trails only much larger provinces Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia in all areas of the PISA and PCAP and on PISA, scores at (mathematics) or above (reading and science) the OECD average, reflecting a solid position relative to other countries (O'Grady et al., 2019).

The Nova Scotia context includes a larger-than-average rural student population. The province has a large rural population of over 40% (Statistics Canada, 2019). According to the Canadian Income Survey of 2018, 10.3% of Nova Scotians live below the poverty line which is the highest share in Canada where the average is 8.7% (Province of Nova Scotia, 2020b); 24% of Nova Scotian children live in poverty which is the third highest rate in the country (Frank & Fisher, 2020). Some evidence supports the necessarily inclusive approach that small rural schools embrace (Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). However, challenges associated with rural education across Canada and the United States include higher incidences of poverty and other economic disadvantage, reduced capacity for partnerships and outside investment compared to urban communities, and limited social capital within the teaching profession in terms of teachers having access to the knowledge, expertise and support of colleagues with similar kinds of students or curriculum (Battelle for Kids, 2016; Budge, 2006; Cohen 2014). The fact that Nova Scotia has the second highest poverty levels in Canada – a country that also ranks 13th out of 16 comparison countries in poverty levels internationally (Conference Board of Canada, 2017) must also be taken into consideration when considering national and international testing results. However, systems are almost always capable of further improvement, and especially in relation to their educational inequities; this precept also applies to Nova Scotia.

Within Nova Scotia, approximately 5.7% of the population self-identify as Indigenous, the majority of whom are from the Mi'kmaq nation (Province of Nova Scotia, 2014). Approximately 2.5% of Nova Scotians identify as African Nova Scotian, most of whom have lived in the province for three generations or more (Province of Nova Scotia, 2019). There is also a strong Acadian and francophone presence with 4% of Nova Scotians reporting having French as a first language and 10% speaking French with fluency (Province of Nova Scotia, 2020c).

Provincial assessment results in Nova Scotia are regularly disaggregated by student self-identification as either Mi'kmaq or other Indigenous ancestry (6% of enrollment), or of African descent (6% of enrollment). Nova Scotia has in fact been a leader in collecting, analyzing and publicly releasing this data. Most provinces are not yet engaging with this type of data analysis and public sharing of results (Campbell, 2020). Students complete assessments of reading, writing and mathematics in Grades 3, 6, 8 and 10. The most recent results demonstrate discrepancies in the scores, with Indigenous and African Nova Scotian students scoring lower than non-identified peers in all instances (Province of Nova Scotia, 2020a).

Inclusion is also integrally related to well-being. Exclusion, isolation, stigmatization and lack of belonging give rise to problems of emotional, mental and also physical health. For the first time in 2019, students across Nova Scotia in Grades 4 through 12 were surveyed on topics related to well-being and school experiences. Many positives were noted in the findings, including high rates of reports of having a close friend or adult to talk to, and generally high academic expectations of self and teachers. Overall, 78% of

students reported feeling like they belong at their school, with 72% of students of African descent and 70% of Mi'kmaq/Indigenous students in agreement. Notably, only 65% of those with disabilities and 54% of students identifying as LGBTQ2+ felt like they belonged at school. The same four subgroups of students reported feeling less respected than other students and less safe at school than the provincial average.

Concerns regarding equity were also noted in the report produced by the Commission on Inclusive Education which took place in 2017-2018 (Njie et al., 2018). This report, entitled *Students First*, serves as the foundation of the new Inclusive Education Policy and describes obstacles to progress in Inclusive Education, including inconsistent operationalization and implementation of various policies and procedures. As the Commission noted, this lack of shared agreement regarding the basic underpinnings and practices that comprise Inclusive Education in Nova Scotia limits the potential of collaborative learning communities that are key to ongoing development of pedagogical practice within a culture of inquiry. Silos of separate responsibility that were identified in numerous reports (Glaze, 2018; Minister's Panel on Education, 2014; Njie et al., 2018) and that have been documented in many other education and health systems, further reduce the possibility of sharing and building on innovations that exist in Nova Scotia schools and indeed of realizing a student and family-focused system.

The current Inclusive Education Policy (Province of Nova Scotia, 2019), furthermore referred to as the Policy, emerged from the findings and recommendations within the *Students First* report (Njie et al., 2018) as well as the broader history and context of Nova Scotia education. The Policy was developed by the EECD in consultation with multiple groups and was released to the public in August of 2019. Implementation of the Policy is slated to take effect in September of 2020. The Policy includes a broad focus on ensuring equity, opening with the statement: "Inclusive education is a commitment to ensuring a high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive and equitable education to support the well-being and achievement of every student. All students should feel that they belong in an inclusive school—accepted, safe, and valued—so they can best learn and succeed" (p. 1). The eight guiding principles of the Policy are listed in Figure 1.

Every student can learn with enough time, practice and equitable and responsive teaching.
Every student, including those with special needs, should receive full-day instruction every day, with flexibility based on the student's individual strengths and challenges.
Every student should be taught within a common learning environment (e.g., a classroom) with students of similar age within the community school, with flexibility that is based on, and responsive to, the student's individual strengths and challenges.
Inclusive education values, draws upon, and includes student voices and choices to assist students in achieving their goals.
Every student deserves to belong (affirmed, validated, and nurtured), be safe, and feel welcomed in all aspects of their daily experience.
Inclusive education is a commitment to honour and respect each student's cultural and linguistic identities and knowledge systems

Inclusive education practices use evidence of students' strengths and challenges to determine a system of supports and monitor the effectiveness of those supports.
All partners are committed and empowered to work collectively to identify and eliminate barriers that interfere with students' well-being and achievement.

Figure 1. Nova Scotia Inclusive Education Policy Guiding Principles

The Policy also incorporates a number of directives, including the importance of collecting and using evidence, including disaggregated data, to guide necessary supports for students. Directives also contain classroom teachers taking on responsibility for all students, most often in a common learning environment, with support and collaboration. The development of specific school-based teams to support teachers and students is described, along with the directive that “every school will support student well-being and achievement through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)” (p. 4). Finally, a series of roles and responsibilities for each group of education stakeholders (e.g. students, families, teachers, administrators) is detailed.

Following the release and recommendations of the *Students First* report, the Government of Nova Scotia announced initiatives and funding that were situated within the umbrella of inclusive education implementation. In the fall of 2018, 191 new positions were added to the education system. These hires included a mix of positions that were new to the system as well as additional hiring of existing positions; examples include Child and Youth Care Practitioners (CYCPs), Teacher Assistants, Autism and Behaviour Specialists, Parent Navigators, African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq student support workers, Psychologists and Speech Language Pathologists. In 2019, a second wave of additional hires (173 positions) was added.

In late 2018, in order to guide and support the implementation of the Policy, and to provide greater accountability as recommended in the *Students First* report, the government sought proposals for a developmental evaluation. Our research team bid successfully and, in the spring of 2019, as the Policy was being finalized, our team embarked upon a developmental evaluation of its implementation.

Our report highlights key findings and implications arising from the first year of the developmental evaluation of the implementation of the inclusive education policy in Nova Scotia. As described in our original proposal the developmental evaluation has been, and will continue to be, an iterative process.

In collaboration with a design team comprised of EECD early learning, student services and research staff as well as a classroom teacher, a high school principal, and regional executive director, we have generated questions to guide the developmental evaluation, established priorities, identified what data are required and how they will be collected, interpreted findings, and tracked development to inform next steps considering changing conditions and new information gathered throughout the process. Our Year 1 interim report brings together initial and emerging findings and implications to be considered in the ongoing planning of the implementation of the Policy in which we are collaborators. It is not an end point, but a point at which to recognize the many strengths and productive paths that we have identified alongside our partners, and to adjust the route forward to ensure that opportunities for effective implementation of the Policy are realized.

Evaluation Approach

The innovation in inclusive education currently underway in Nova Scotia offered an ideal opportunity to interweave a developmental evaluation. The developmental evaluation is an iterative process, whereby our team works with EECD staff and a broader design team to conceptualize implementation of broad system change for inclusive education. As a collective, we are engaged in collaboratively generating the specific questions to guide the developmental evaluation, establishing priorities, identifying what data are required and how it will be collected, interpreting findings, and tracking development to inform next steps whilst considering changing conditions and new information gathered throughout the process.

Unlike summative types of evaluation that rely upon a logic model and a linear process, in developmental evaluation, “The destination is often a notion rather than a crisp image, and the path forward may be unclear” (Gamble, 2008, p. 13). Within developmental evaluation, building of capacity is key – evaluative thinking is not strictly for the external team but becomes the commitment of the system broadly. All partners develop skills and a mindset in applying evaluative thinking to conceptualizing, designing, and testing new approaches in a long-term process of continuous development, adaptation, and experimentation (Dickson & Saunders, 2014; Patton, 2016).

While the exact path and stops along the way of evaluating an ever-changing and developing innovation such as the redesign of inclusive education in Nova Scotia are purposefully unknown, there are principles that can be adhered to in order to ensure integrity of the approach. In our application of developmental evaluation, we situate ourselves within the 8 essential principles outlined by Patton (2016; see Figure 2).

1. Developmental principle	While the new model of Inclusive Education in Nova Scotia is in development, the evaluation is as well, using an emergent design.
2. Evaluation rigor principle	Our evaluation is empirically driven, where evaluative thinking underpins all aspects of the process.
3. Utilization-focused principle	Our evaluation is driven by the intended use of the data and findings by the intended users
4. Innovation niche principle	The commitment to innovate is clear throughout
5. Complexity perspective principle	We will describe characteristics of a complex dynamic system in the evaluation and reflect these in the design, process, and outcomes.
6. Systems thinking principle	We pay close attention to the networks, interrelationships, perspectives and boundaries at play within the reform.
7. Cocreation principle	We intend to build mutually trusting relationships with the EECD staff and more broadly across the province in order to allow the evaluation to be truly co-created, with a process that is active, reactive, interactive and adaptive.
8. Timely feedback principle	We will provide ongoing and timely feedback including but not limited to formal reports. Approaches such as narratives and visual maps, networks and figures allow even complex information to be communicated effectively and efficiently.

Figure 2. Patton's 8 essential principles for developmental evaluation

Developmental Evaluation – Year 1

Our first year engaging with the developmental evaluation has been focused on: a) establishing working closely with a Design Team to guide the ongoing evaluation planning, b) developing relationships with those knowledgeable about, and likely to be affected by the Policy; c) developing a greater understanding of the many moving pieces that comprise the Inclusive Education Policy implementation; d) collecting and analyzing data provided by key informants; e) analyzing Network School applications, and f) providing initial feedback to the EECD based on our findings to date.

Our first step was to develop an evaluation design team in consultation with EECD which comprises a teacher, principal, Regional Executive Director, EECD Executive Directors of Early Learning and Student Services and Equity and the EECD Director of Research and Partnerships. We also began the process of developing relationships with key individuals and groups to support and inform our shared work. A project manager, based in Nova Scotia, was hired to assist with planning and to maintain a consistent local presence in the EECD. Beginning in the summer of 2019, we also engaged in data collection.

We travelled to Nova Scotia four times in the first 8 months of the evaluation, visiting four different regions. We anticipated additional visits in the spring and summer; due to COVID-19 this was not possible and we have instead relied on virtual engagement. Given the pre-implementation phase within which these visits took place, the focus of our evaluation efforts was on: a) developing a deeper sense of the context in which the Policy and its implementation was embedded and b) exploring the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the Policy.

These goals were facilitated through engaging in information-gathering discussions with 45 individuals with varied roles ranging from senior leadership within EECD, Regional Executive Directors, regional-level staff, school-based administrators and educators as well as leadership of unions, professional associations, universities and community organizations. Fifteen of these individuals preferred not to be interviewed formally and instead provided helpful contextual information that informed our ongoing efforts. Participants who agreed to take part in interviews signed consent forms as part of a process approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa. Interview data were analyzed thematically by our research team.

Our project manager was situated within EECD offices for part of the first year and met with key individuals with the EECD on a weekly basis, to stay abreast of ongoing developments and to take part in the everyday conversations of those engaged in the implementation. We also took part in 6 advisory group or internal leadership meetings, reflecting participation by teachers from across the province, Directors of Programs and Student Services from each region and CSAP (Francophone school board), Regional Executive Directors and the EECD leadership team.

Finally, our team analyzed 113 Network School applications submitted by principals and educators across the province in order to gain additional understanding about current perceptions, priorities and practices related to the Inclusive Education policy.

Findings are organized into two main sections – the first focused on the perceptual data of the key informants who we interviewed and the next on the analysis of the Network Schools.

Key Informant Perceptions

In our analysis of the key stakeholder interviews, 7 themes emerged (Figure 3) that reflect the perceptions and experiences of individuals working in various places within the education system in Nova Scotia. While described in a linear fashion, they are very much intertwined and interrelated in theory and in practice.

Where appropriate, direct quotes and a sense of the role of the individual has been provided; confidentiality and anonymity considerations prevent detailed identification in terms of specific regions or job titles.

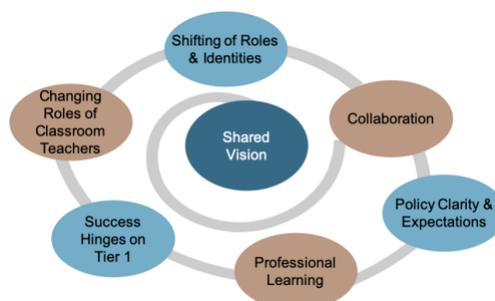


Figure 3. Visual depiction of the themes emerging from interviews with key informants

Shared Vision

The first theme that emerged from the data was that of a shared vision. Very strong support for the overall focus and principles of the Policy was noted in the interviews. One student services consultant went so far as to say “I don't think I've run into a person that disagrees with what's in the Policy” and a senior leader echoed with “The Policy itself is very aligned with our principles, our core values, and how we've operated always, but it's a much broader audience now, which I think is wonderful”. The broadening of the focus of inclusion to students other than those with special educational needs was noted and supported by participants, as was the emphasis on cultural and linguistic proficiency. Teachers were seen as central to the vision of the Policy. Many participants highlighted this aspect. A range of perceptions was seen in terms of shared ownership of the vision and the Policy, depending largely on the extent to which the individual participant had been involved in the development of the Policy. Several were integrally involved or consulted regularly throughout the development process. Others, particularly those working in schools, were presented with the Policy once it was completed.

Shifting Roles and Identities

When discussing the inclusive education policy, the majority of participants described the state of flux, either present or anticipated, of the roles and responsibilities of a range of school staff. Much of the discussion within this theme focused on new positions within the education system that were added prior to the release of the Policy. In general, participants were positive about the positions and the ways in which these individuals and their skill sets could and in some cases already were benefitting staff, students, parents and community partners. CYCPs were mentioned many times as being valuable additions to the system. There were more mixed responses with respect to the Parent Navigators –

largely dependent on the individual hired and the degree of shared understanding about the nature of the role.

The inclusion of the CYCP position in our area has really improved services to students. But the other thing that it has done is it has really empowered teachers to take control of their classrooms.

However, participants who were either in the new positions or working alongside those who were, regularly expressed confusion about newly-created job descriptions, overlap of tasks with those of existing staff, boundaries of responsibilities and a lack of clarity and communication related to the new hires. Efforts by people in the regions to map the roles and responsibilities of the new positions alongside others with the Multi-tiered System Structure were seen as being very beneficial.

Some participants' concerns related to perceived threats to expertise and identity. One school counsellor stated:

We need the support, but I'm always going to be like, "But what's our role?" because in some ways I've felt like our role has been chipped away at through all of the new supports that have been put in. I know a more positive way to look at it would be there are supports and we got to join with them, but it's hard when in some of these cases, some of these roles, we don't really understand what the role is.

The perceived lack of clarity and alignment was also raised as a barrier to providing effective supports for students. Not knowing who was responsible for what in which type of situation could lead to student needs not being addressed or to overlap of services. Some regional staff described the evolving nature of these positions and of their roles within the system, along with the importance of finding the right individual for the position, particularly given the early confusion regarding the exact boundaries of the roles.

Changing Roles of Classroom Teachers

The Inclusive Education Policy increased classroom teachers' responsibilities for meeting all students' needs. The Policy states that "Classroom teachers are responsible for teaching all students. Teaching and interventions are expected to happen most often in a common learning environment, such as the classroom. Classroom teachers cannot do this alone" (p. 3).

Participants described the significant shift in mindset and practice that this would necessitate for some teachers who were at an earlier point along an inclusive continuum and who were used to what was described in one case as the '70's pull out model' which was still in evidence in many schools. One regional consultant stated that "...we've got to support those classroom teachers, if we're saying they're the folks that are responsible with support, we got to do more support for them. Way more support".

The shift towards greater responsibility for classroom teachers calls for increased and more effective collaboration. Many teachers were already working in partnership with other teachers, specialists, families and the community. The sense of ownership for planning and programming for students with special education needs was viewed positively as involving classroom teachers sitting with a resource or learning centre teacher.

What we're seeing, and it's just preliminary, just but it's just so heartening to see it is that with the inclusive policy, the way it's written... what has happened is we're seeing a bit of a mind shift, because...our language has changed, according to the inclusive policy, and our approach has changed. So what we're now saying is and what we're now seeing happening is people are entering classrooms either as TAs or support people, CYCPs, resource teachers, Learning Centre teachers, and it's more of a co-learning and co-teaching model, but very definitely, the classroom teacher has the responsibility of that management of her class and it involves everyone in the class. So even if I'm going in as a resource teacher to work with a particular group of students or individual, it is still clear that it is the teacher's responsibility to program for that child or children.

According to many participants who were providing specialist supports at the school or regional level - e.g. resource teacher, psychologists, student services consultants – this shift in the Policy changed their roles from focusing mainly on supporting individual students to spending more time supporting teachers. This contrasts with the current role of some resource teachers that mainly involves working directly with students in a pull-out model or of employing some psychologists to engage primarily in individual student assessment and intervention. In this respect, the Policy described how a range of support teachers “would provide direct, collaborative support to classroom teachers and students” (p. 3). One specialist wondered,

Can we do more in class consultative types of services with our SLPs so that teachers are building their skillsets and understanding what they can do at the classroom level before they are asking for direct therapy whether small group or individual?

Increased collaboration within a regular classroom requires a high degree of openness and teacher self-confidence. Some teachers felt this was challenging. For instance, one regional consultant believed that

The big issue, I think, for teachers is that they're not really used to having people in their classroom.. and they feel like they're being judged all the time. And it's not about judging them. It's about supporting them. And with a multi-tiered system of support and inclusive education, you've got to get used to having many people in your room.

Success Hinges on Tier 1

There was a very strong and shared belief among participants regarding the importance of Tier 1 in terms of the need to bring supports to the classroom and to ensure effective classroom practices that were differentiated and universally designed. One regional leader described how “there's no question that there's an increased focus on excellence in teaching at Tier One, which I am a very strong proponent of”. A school psychologist shared her belief that “the Tier 1 has a ton of potential to really improve overall student learning if we are looking at increasing some of the more evidence-based interventions”.

One guidance counsellor wanted to work more often alongside classroom teachers rather than spending most of her time supporting individual students, but she was concerned about the overwhelming mental health needs of students in her school and the existing 1:500 ratio of counsellor to students. “*You want to get into the classrooms and do the proactive piece. You do, because you're hitting 30 kids when you're*

getting in there and doing cyber stuff [e.g. addressing cyber bullying], when you're doing positive mental health".

A resource teacher described how supporting individual teachers at the Tier 1 level, in the general classroom, was just not feasible. The long-term view adopted by system leaders and supports was less palatable to those working on a daily basis with large caseloads of students.

Well, I usually group my students according to their needs. So ideally, I get into classes, which I do. But a lot of the time, because of the needs in this building, I find that it turns out being a pull-out model because I might have a student in Grade 8A, 7B, and 6C who all need to work on comprehension. Well, just for the amount of students that I need to see, I could have upward of 50 students during first intake and another 50 during second intake. So the needs are high, and it's much more efficient for me to take them all at the same time rather than to try to provide some remedial...working on compensation or whatever in class.

Professional Learning and Development

The increasing focus on regular classroom practices at the Tier 1 level and the shifting roles of educators and staff in a number of different positions generally led to recommendations for more professional learning and development (PLD).

PLD opportunities that were highlighted repeatedly by participants as being especially impactful and inspirational were those focused on *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, specifically sessions led by Dr. Sharroky Hollie. Participants also gave examples of training related to supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorders or with behavioural issues that added to their skill set in a positive and significant way.

Discussions of PLD typically centred around capacity-building among classroom teachers, particularly in terms of the role of skill development in building teachers' confidence and a willingness to take ownership for students experiencing difficulties. One regional consultant described how she noticed in her work that,

A lot of people don't feel that they have the skill set to be able to deal with students that have diverse learning needs, that they really don't feel that they've had the training... Because if they've been in the school system a long time, differentiation (or UDL) may be not really a concept that's... that is something that they can pull out of their back pocket.

Participants recognized that different teachers working in different roles within different regions would have varying PLD needs. A shift to a capacity-building versus a child-fixing mindset is a long-term view that is likely to be challenging for some teachers overwhelmed by day to day demands. One regional consultant articulated this view.

But you really have to look at the staff that you have and the expertise and how can we make this work if we do things in a different fashion. Because it's about building capacities... and that's what a lot of the time people aren't seeing. They just want the immediate fix or the immediate, like, "Come and help me right now," not realizing that if we teach them how to fish it's going to be something that they can use for a long time and the skill set that they develop this year is

going to... They may not have students exactly the same next year, but they're going to be able to go in that toolkit and say, "Oh, but ... I know how to do this and this and this, so there's only... I'm going to try that." And then that works, so it's like, "I might need a couple of other things, but I can get help from somebody to do that." It is about building their own repertoire as far as I'm concerned, in terms of skill set.

Teachers identified a number of challenges in considering the PLD required.

- * A shortage of substitute teachers often resulted in in-service opportunities being scheduled after school hours which could preclude the involvement of staff (e.g. Teacher Assistants) whose work days were scheduled differently.

- * Opportunities to collaborate with and learn from other schools was seen as very valuable but came up against geographical challenges in the geographically large, rural areas of Nova Scotia. These included travel time and costs of releasing teachers even if substitutes were available. Perhaps the increased use of virtual collaboration during COVID-19 has changed and will change this situation.

- * While some participants shared examples of committees, advisory groups or informal networks that allowed them to discuss and develop plans for implementing the Policy, one participant had concerns that these roles and committees could fall into separate silos with student services coordinators going to provincial student services meetings, program coordinators going to program meetings and technology coordinators attending technology meetings. This participant felt that a shift in mindset and practice would occur if regional PLD was planned and offered by diverse and integrated teams.

The most senior members of the system felt that schools had opportunities to apply for Network School projects (see [Network Schools](#) section for more information) as ways to build collective efficacy among school-based educators and administrators to support students more effectively at the Tier 1 level. This initiative was funded by EECD as part of the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy and is discussed in the next section of this report.

Policy Clarity and Expectations

A number of participants, particularly those in leadership roles, expressed a need for greater clarity and shared understanding in terms of the implementation of the Policy. Concerns were specifically related to the organization and roles of teams that have been newly added through the Policy (teaching support and student planning), tensions between autonomy and accountability of and within regions, coherence with the existing special education policy and program planning process, and the timing and pace of implementation.

Those in school and regional leadership roles repeatedly mentioned that the development of the Teaching Support Teams and the Student Planning Teams within schools should be accompanied by guidelines and procedures. Participants were concerned that without consistent messaging and implementation, there would be wide variations in how these teams were understood and organized. They also said there was a need to ensure that regional planning and hiring reflected what was expected within the Policy, and by these teams in particular.

Yet the call for clarity did not amount to a demand for more prescription *per se*. Prescriptive approaches were not valued. Opportunities for regional variation and diversity based on local contexts and circumstances were important. One participant stated,

I think you need to be really clear and consistent going forward and then if you move around between schools or you move between regions it's as consistent as it can be. Now I'm sure you've heard that no two regions are alike and it will never be completely like copycat but will it be recognizable between region to region?

Interviewees repeatedly asked for a structure that would provide some consistency and guidance in planning teams and other aspects of the Policy. These guidelines, it was felt, should also encompass communications among EECD, regional leadership and educators in the regions. If the Policy and its procedural elements were not readily understood, there was a risk of losing trust, participants felt, which would have negative implications for implementation. As one participant reflected,

I think we have one chance to really be clear in our communication about this. Everything from the definitions, understandings, communications, what does it look like, what's my responsibility as a teacher?

The tensions between autonomy and accountability were also evident in the nature of the expectations for teachers and administrators. Given the Policy was being implemented in Fall 2020, many did not think that it was reasonable to expect educators to have the skill set or supports necessary to fulfil their roles within the Policy. Others wondered how the expectations in the Policy regarding teacher and administrator roles would be monitored.

Some participants appeared confused or unclear about the co-existence of the Special Education Policy, the Program Planning Process and the new Inclusive Education Policy. They expressed concerns about the ways in which parents and families may or may not understand the relationships between these policies in terms of how their children and their programming might be affected. Multiple participants expressed the understanding that elements of the Special Education Policy would fit within the Inclusive Education Policy in the form of guidelines or procedures, with the belief that "it's not inclusive to keep that separate".

Finally, with respect to the timing and pace of implementation, some interviewees appreciated the 'soft launch' – the 2019-2020 school year where the Policy was introduced to the system prior to implementation - as it gave them time to learn more about the elements and plan collaboratively within their region. Others thought that full implementation with expectations of significant system change by September 2020 was unreasonable. One participant stated that "... we will do a huge disservice to the possibilities that it can bring about if we don't pay attention to just the whole process of change, and systematic change". Participants concerned about the rapid pace suggested that a more gradual implementation, a slower and more focused approach to building skills over time would be more effective in making change.

And the pace of change means a lot. I mean, I know that we have teachers that are never going to change their ways. In every profession, they're there. But, for the most part, teachers are used to change, and they will come about it as a group right within their school. But if you force it, or if the changes are too rapid, then you lose some of the change process that's actually beneficial to making sure that the changes you want to happen are institutionalized in your buildings...

Because you move too fast, and you can't stop the snowball. Once it starts, it starts going downhill.

Collaboration

The final theme captures the many places within the education system where participants described how collaborative efforts were critical to the implementation of the Policy. Several participants discussed ways in which the shifting role of teachers was more collaborative as they worked alongside other school and regional staff to provide supports to students within the MTSS model. One participant described meeting with a school team to explore aspects of the Policy.

At some points today I could see almost relief on the faces of the people from the school because it's not a burden that just one person in school shoulders. It's something that everybody's going to work together on.

The example of SchoolsPlus was raised many times as a strong interagency partnership model that allowed for supports to be provided to students and families. Other participants described school principals who met regularly in their region to share ideas and how helpful this was in building shared understanding of the Policy and other initiatives. One of them highlighted a collaborative learning team for school counselors that was soon to be launched.

Collaborative PLD and supports were described as being effective and key to implementing the Policy, particularly if they cut across silos, thus modeling the practices expected within the MTSS model.

But we now have support teams of both programs and Student Services staff, who our school see working together, and who go into our schools together. So instead of like our math consultant or our math mentor going in, and our literacy mentor going in at another time, and our student service behavioral specialists going and they're going in as a team.

One participant suggested that funding could be best focused on the Teacher Support Teams, ensuring that they operated as collaborative, interdisciplinary and cross-role support systems, that drew upon school-based data to share learning and co-construct PLD and inquiry.

Not all school- or regional-level teams were as inclusive as they could be. For instance, participants provided examples of staff working in certain roles not being invited to take part in collaborative activities, such as student or program planning meetings or PLD opportunities.

Key Informant Perceptions Summary

The seven inter-related themes that emerged from the interviews with key informants reflect significant areas of strength and capacity within the system – in particular with reference to the shared vision, internal expertise and effective PLD, and numerous examples of collaborative practices and processes. Many of the people we spoke to have extraordinary insight, perspective and experience to contribute to the system change necessary for the Policy to be implemented. Concerns were raised regarding the shifts necessary to implement the Policy, including altered roles and identities, in particular, the changing role of classroom teachers. Many participants expressed a belief in the need for substantial,

sustained and specific PLD to support Tier 1 practices as well as guidelines and procedures that would serve to clarify expectations, with room for local contextual interpretation.

The overwhelming and overriding on-the-ground concern, perhaps, is that of classroom teachers still feeling they need more support to respond effectively to a full range of diversity of students in their classes, and support staff feeling that the demands on them for collaboration and support still exceed their capacity to provide these things.

In contrast to the wide-ranging scope of the Policy, the bulk of the discussion with participants, which was prompted by very open questions, centred around student services and special education needs. This is likely in part a reflection of the participant pool, which was heavily weighted towards those who traditionally held roles in these areas and who were suggested to us as knowledgeable key informants. A few participants spoke specifically about students who were African Nova Scotian or Mi'kmaq and raised issues of equity and of making connections with families and communities. This broader issue was noted by one regional equity consultant,

In order for this to be effective, it cannot sit with Student Services... And certainly the optics will be that it is still a policy that is targeting a very specific population. So, there has to be collaboration at the provincial and at the regional level in order for this to be truly realized...If you're going to bring in a team to talk about the implementation of this, it shouldn't be students service coordinators

The majority of the participants held leadership or specialist roles in the system and many had decision-making roles regarding the implementation of the Policy. As such, their perspectives and beliefs are key. However, while the role of classroom teachers and Tier 1 practices was highlighted by many as crucial to the Policy, their views were largely absent. Due to early phase of implementation, the Policy had yet to be introduced to the broader staff including classroom teachers. For the same reason, the voices of students and families are notably absent in the perceptual data. The perspectives and experiences of classroom teachers as well as students, families and broader communities will be situated at the forefront of the next phase of the implementation and of the evaluation.

The next section summarizes our analysis of the Network Schools applications.

Network Schools Applications

The Network School applications provide a unique opportunity for our research team to gain insight into how educators across the province understood the EECD's inclusive education policy and envisioned its implementation.

Introduction to Collaborative Inquiry Teams

The creation of Collaborative Inquiry Teams was an EECD-led initiative in which educators were encouraged to create teams that "support professional learning, focusing on strengthening universal practices at Tier 1 within an inclusive education framework" (Network Schools Invitation, p. 1). Teams could consist of educators from one or many schools as well as community and departmental partners. Teams were invited to develop an action plan and apply for funding from the EECD via the Network School Application to support the implementation of their initiatives. Once established, teams with similar inquiries would then be connected through a network or networks to promote collaboration and would receive support from Inclusive Education Leadership Teams.

Network School Applications

In total, 113 applications received funding. This included 141 schools, which represents 39% of public schools in Nova Scotia. In some centres like CCRCE, SSRCE, and HRCE, some individual applications included participation by multiple schools.

Table 1. The number of applications funded and schools represented in the Network School Applications

Centre	# of Applications	# of Schools Represented	Total Schools	% of Schools Represented
SRCE	16	14	20	70%
CCRCE	13	31	59	53%
TCRCE	11	11	22	50%
SSRCE	7	12	24	50%
CBVRCE	17	18	39	46%
AVRCE	18	18	42	43%
CSAP	5	5	21	24%
HRCE	26	32	135	24%
TOTALS	113	141	362	39%

Thematic Analysis

The Network School Applications required Collaborative Inquiry Teams to identify their team and describe their proposed action plan, expected outcomes, measures to assess the impacts of their interventions, and what resources they were requesting for implementation when applying for funding. This content served as the data source for our thematic analysis; the results of which provide insight into how educators intend to implement the guiding principles of the inclusive education policy within the Network Schools inquiries.

Two members of the evaluation team reviewed the Network School Applications that were approved for funding. These were then analyzed in order to determine a) the tier level of intervention or support (Tier 1, 2 or 3), b) the primary intervention theme, b) resources, c) expected outcomes and d) measures identified that would capture the anticipated change arising from the intervention.

Table 2. The five areas of focus explored in the thematic analysis of the Network School applications

Area of Focus	Question	Examples
Tier level	What tier level of support is the intervention?	Tier 1, 2, or 3
Intervention	What is the primary intervention theme?	Student achievement
Resources	What resources are being requested?	PLD
Outcomes	What are the expected outcomes?	Student wellness
Measures	How will the outcomes be measured?	School-based assessments

Strengthening Universal Practices at Tier 1

The Network School applications process focused on strengthening universal practices at the Tier 1 level. The vast majority of applications did this by focusing on inclusive practices in a common learning environment in line with the Policy's Guiding Principle:

4.3 Every student should be taught within a common learning environment (e.g., a classroom) with students of similar age within the community school, with flexibility that is based on, and responsive to, the student's individual strengths and challenges.
(p. 2)

Approximately 20% reflected more focused, Tier 2 level of supports, aimed at smaller groups with specific learning targets such as assistive technology for students with Learning Disabilities or supports for marginalized, under-represented, and under-served students. The remaining 1% of applications focused on Tier 3 Intensive, evidence informed, individualized interventions and supports such as individual reviews of students on IPPs.

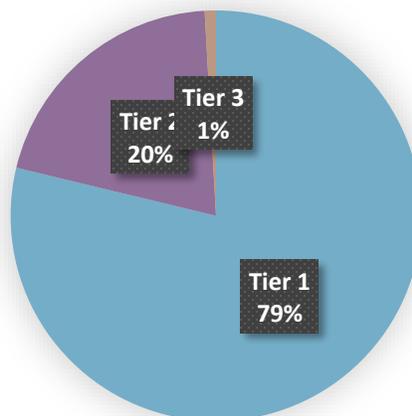


Figure 4. Main MTSS tier level reflected in each application.

Themes – Intervention

The five main intervention themes that emerged in order of frequency were: student well-being (n=40), teaching practice (n=30), student achievement (n=28), improvement in school and classroom environment (n=11), and student-specific interventions (n=4). Specific sub-themes also emerged within several of these.

The map below shows the first four themes distributed across the provincial regions. As student-specific interventions were not strictly part of the goals of the Network Schools, the four applications with this theme were excluded from further analysis.

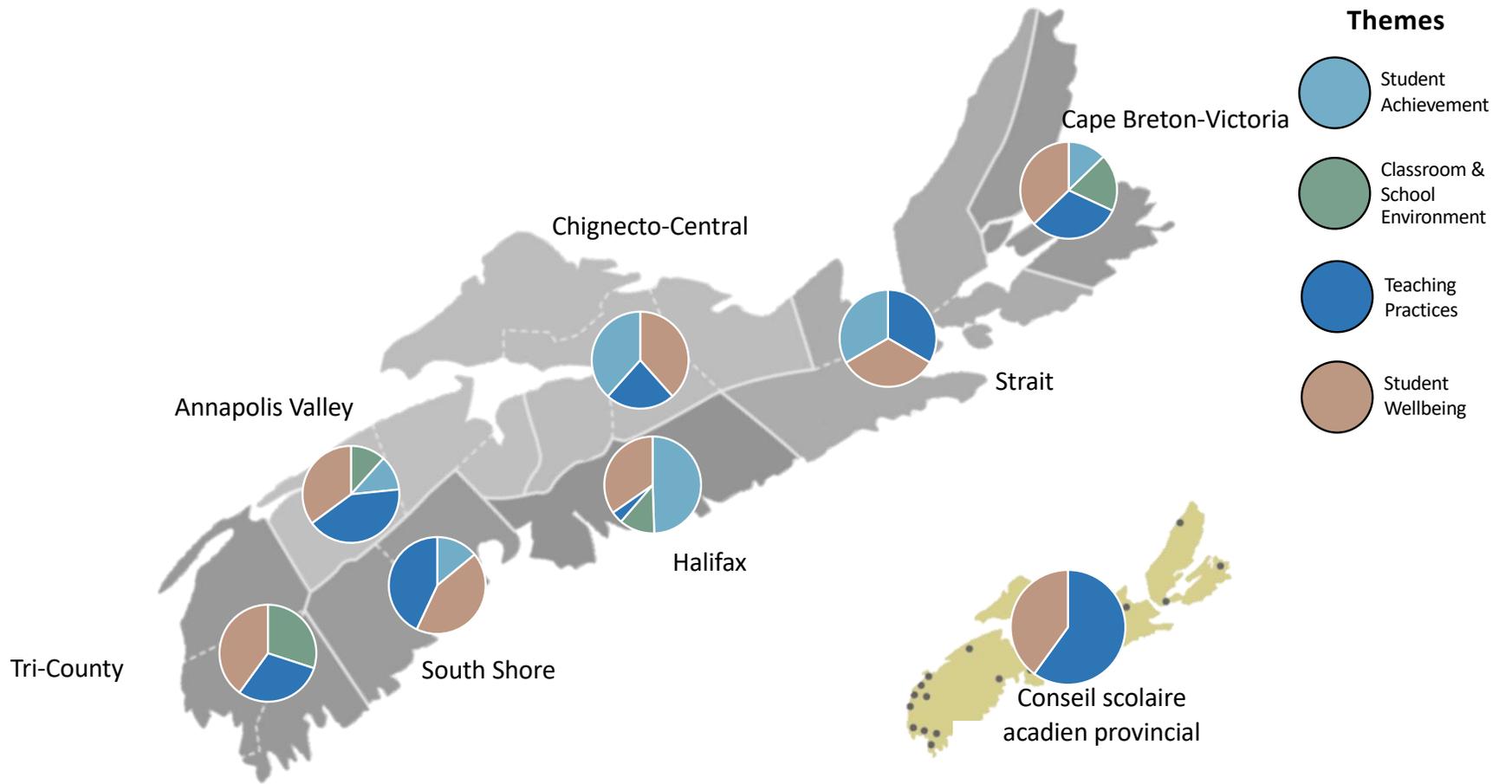


Figure 5. Intervention themes represented in Network School Applications by region

By far the most frequently identified intervention theme was student well-being which included applications focused on improving social-emotional learning (SEL), student engagement, self-regulation, and general student wellbeing. Building teacher practices at the Tier 1 level in areas such as culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), high leverage teaching practices, and universal design for learning (UDL), was also a frequently identified theme. Applications with a theme of student achievement specifically focused on literacy and mathematics with some applications focusing on both literacy and math.

Ten percent of applications had a theme related to improving the learning environment in the school and classroom. Examples of this were seen in applications that focused on modifying classrooms with flexible and alternative seating options or through the construction of outdoor classrooms with the goal of creating more UDL friendly and inclusive spaces. Applications that included the construction of an outdoor classroom highlighted their ability to create an inclusive and diverse learning environment that reflects cultural relevance both to indigenous communities as well as students who live in rural areas.

Four applications had a student-specific or special education focus. Two of these focused on students with IPPs while the other two focused on students with learning challenges who required adaptations and/or assistive technology.

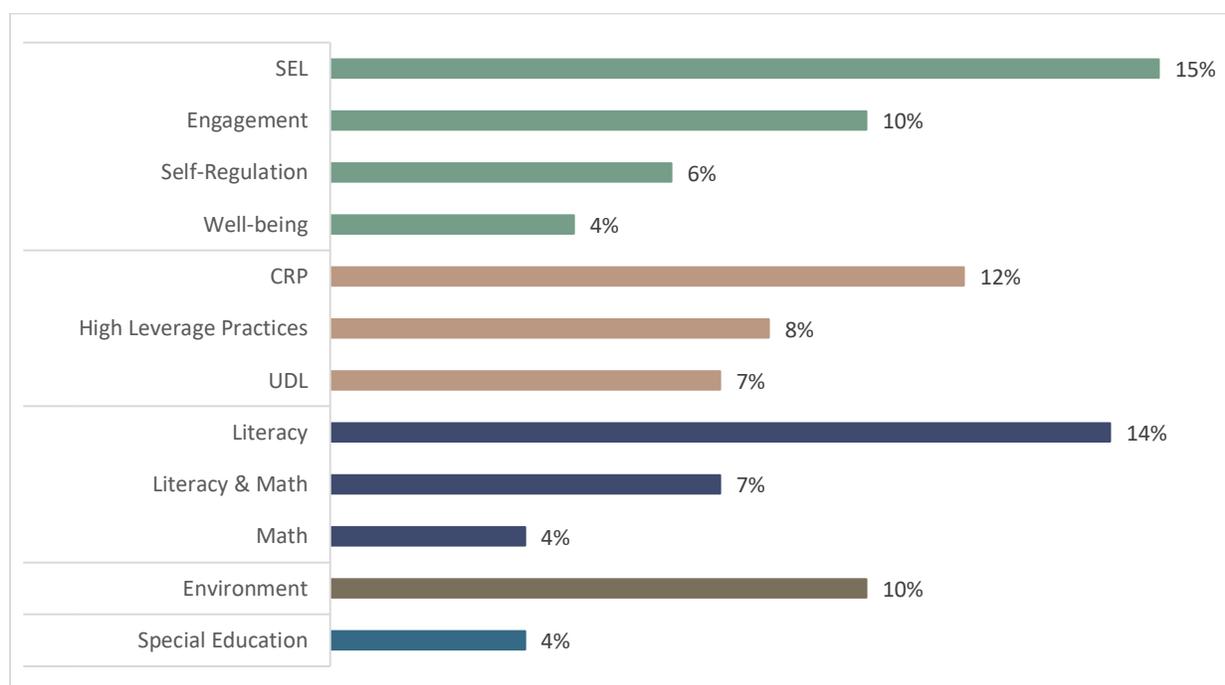


Figure 6. Frequency of interventions represented in Network School applications

Themes – Resources

When examining the resources requested by applicants to implement their proposed action plan, three themes emerged: PLD (n=174), physical and human resources (n=90), and student personal development (n=19).

PLD was further divided into categories that included: teacher and staff collaboration (e.g., collaborative planning time), professional literature and programs (e.g., Jennifer Katz literature), PLD (e.g., MTSS workshops), consultants (e.g., math and literacy consultants), and networking with other schools (e.g., visiting other schools with SEL programs).

The **physical and human resources** that were requested encompassed four themes: materials, microenvironments, technology, assistive technology, and new positions. Examples of materials ranged from classroom supplies such as culturally responsive reading material to recreational equipment like games and archery supplies. The sub-theme *microenvironment* included requests for resources to create alternative learning spaces within classrooms or schools. For example, a number of requests were made for resources related to flexible and alternative seating like purchasing standing desks, Hokki stools, and Spark Bikes. Similarly, there were a small number of applications that requested materials related to calming spaces and the construction of outdoor classrooms. Both general technology, such as computers and monitors, and more specifically assistive technology like C-Pen readers for students with learning disabilities were often requested as part of applicants' action plans. Finally, there were five applications that requested human resources such as the creation of a new position like a culturally responsive counsellor for African Nova Scotian (ANS) students or increasing the hours of a current position.

The resource theme of **student personal development** included funding student learning opportunities such as cultural learning to enhance student engagement (e.g., buying drums and providing drum lessons) or supplies to support a focus on the arts or on nutrition, health, and hygiene (e.g. hygiene kits, art materials).

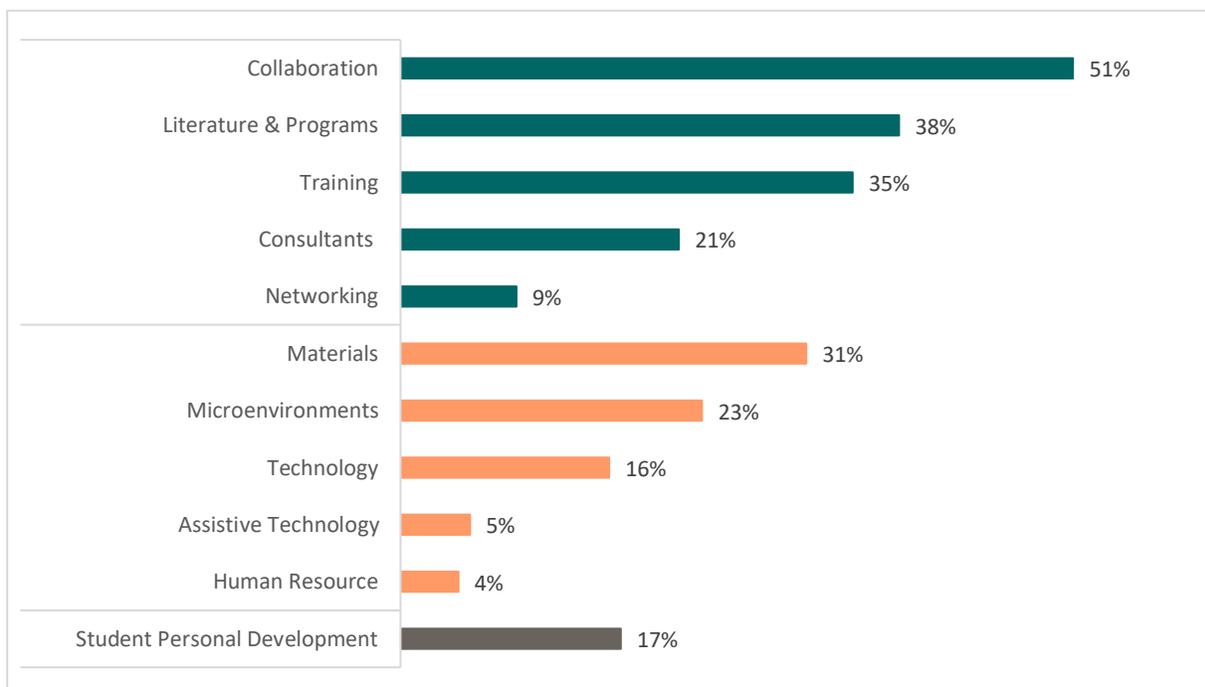


Figure 7. Frequency of resources represented in Network School Applications

Themes – Outcomes

For each application, the outcomes anticipated by applicants as a result of their proposed action plans were recorded and six themes were identified: changes in student behaviour (n=72), student wellness (n=71), academic achievement (n=69), building teacher efficacy in classroom practices (n=59), improved school and learning environment (n=41) improved relationships and connections (n=37).

When it came to expected outcomes, there was a strong focus on **student behaviours**. For example, observing an increase in engagement and focus, a reduction in behavioural incidents, and increases in student independence as a result of their proposed interventions.

Many applications focused on **student well-being** as an outcome theme which contained four sub-themes of social-emotional learning and development, overall wellbeing, mental health, and physical health.

Applications that expected **achievement** outcomes as a result of their interventions focused on literacy, mathematics, academic skills like nutrition and food prepping skills, and general achievement.

Another outcome that applicants targeted in their interventions was **developing teacher practices**, specifically in the areas of universal design for learning (UDL), culturally responsive teaching practices, literacy and math, social-emotional learning and the use of technology.

Improving the **school and classroom environment** was also a frequently sought outcome. Applicants often described wanting to create more inclusive and engaging environments in which students felt a sense of belonging and saw themselves reflected.

Improved **relationships and connections** was the final outcome theme with a similar number of applications focusing on improving relationships between students and teachers, between students and schools, between students, and among schools and families. Applicants often stated that developing better relationships between individuals at the school, whether it be among students or between students and teachers would result in an increased sense of belonging, student wellness and social-emotional learning, as well as more school pride. Two out of three of the applications that mentioned improving connections between school and community focused specifically on building relationships with local Indigenous communities.

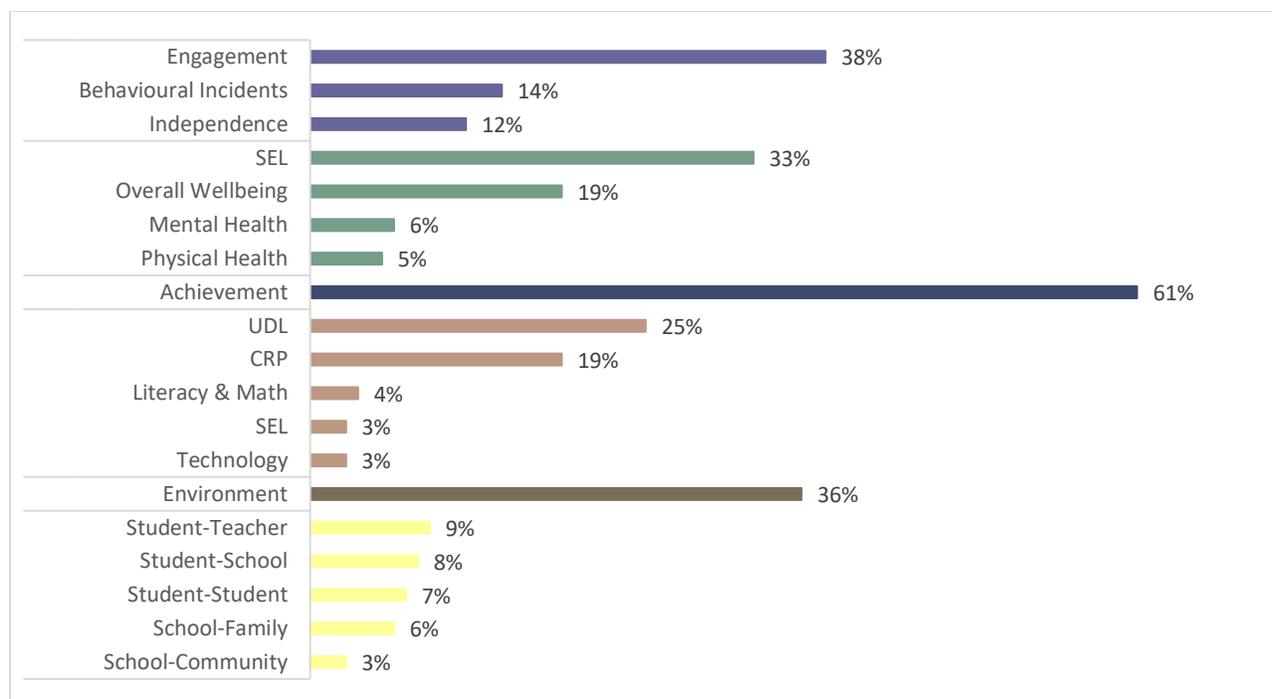


Figure 8. Frequency of anticipated outcomes represented in Network School applications

Themes – Measures

Applicants proposed a number of methods to measure the success of their action plans. The four main sources of data reported were: staff perceptual data (n=76), student achievement data (n=73), student behaviour data (n=57), and student perceptual data (n=43).

Staff perceptual data were the most frequently cited theme and included measures such as staff observation, surveys to monitor the progress and staff perceptions of the action plan, collaborative monitoring (e.g., classroom shadowing, meetings to discuss), self-reflection tools, focus groups and interviews, and qualitative feedback.

Student achievement data were the second most frequently cited measurement theme and contained both school-based data such as report cards and classroom assessments as well as provincial assessment data. Although often not specified, provincial assessment data was thought to refer to assessments like the Literacy and Math assessments conducted by the EECD's Program of Learning and Assessment for Nova Scotia (PLANS) in grades 3, 6, 8, and 10.

Tracking **student behaviours** to assess the impact of the proposed action plans: tracking the number of behavioural incidents and use of restorative practices, student engagement which consisted of measures of attendance or time on task, tracking the number of students requiring Tier 1, 2, and 3 levels of support, and the number of students accessing supports such as learning support teachers or referrals to counsellors.

Student perceptual data were the least referenced measurement theme and consisted of surveys to monitor student perception of implementation, qualitative feedback which included student anecdotes and testimonials, self-reflection tools, focus groups and interviews, and the provincial Student Success

Survey (3%) which contains student feedback related to experiences in school as well as well-being and achievement in literacy and mathematics.

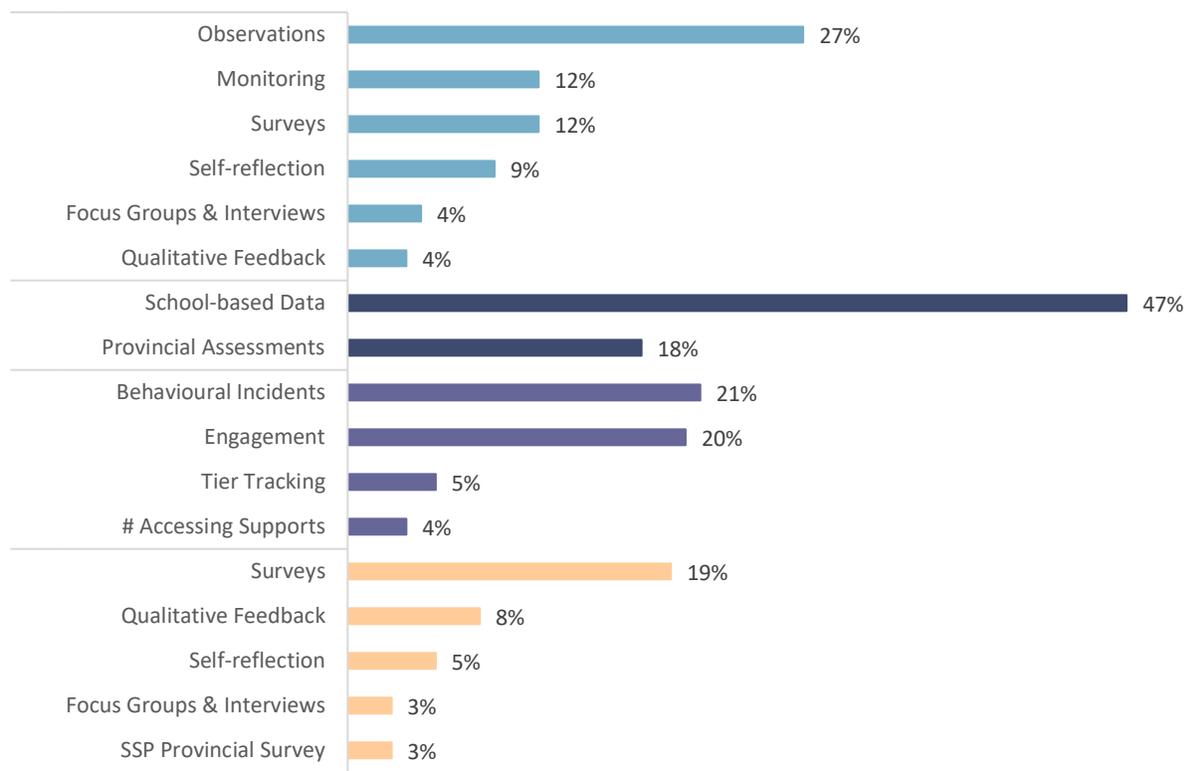


Figure 9. Frequency of measures represented in Network School applications

Network School Applications Summary

Based on the thematic analysis of the content of the Network School applications, educators across the province are incorporating the eight guiding principles of the inclusive education policy in the design and implementation of their proposed action plans. There was evidence of a strong focus on Tier 1 practices, PLD, with an emphasis on collaborative professionalism and collective efficacy. The big story of the applications, however, is about student social and emotional learning, engagement and health. The larger umbrella theme of student well-being was at the core of 35% of the applications, with teaching practices next at 27% and student achievement at 25%.

A major and widespread challenge in the field of student well-being is a tendency to place it in a separate silo of roles, specialists and planning processes and emphasize that is separated from a silo of student learning and achievement. As a result, or perhaps as a cause of this separation, there is often limited attention paid to understanding and ensuring interconnection of outcomes concerning well-being and achievement (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2018). There is a need to be vigilant about this division occurring in the implementation of the Policy.

For example, an application describing a social-emotional program or approach, supported by resources related to time and funding for collaborative PLD (book study, lesson study) did not include anticipated outcomes related to teacher efficacy and practice, student achievement, and student engagement.

However some of the proposed inquiries did reflect an understanding of the interrelated nature of well-being and achievement, typically in the outcomes section where, for example, a SEL-focused intervention was linked to improved self-regulation and achievement. In drawing on collaborative inquiries as a tool to implement the Policy, network teams should specifically and consistently consider the relationship between well-being and achievement and explore ways in which each can be attended to.

We also noted challenges in identifying measurement and outcome data and indicators that would allow school teams and networks to get a sense of whether, why and for whom the intervention activities were having an impact. In general, applicants connected the resources they required with the goal of their action plan. There was less explicit connection between the desired outcomes and the plan for measurement. For instance, in our earlier example, an application with a SEL-focused intervention may list myriad potential outcomes and specify student literacy achievement and a reduction in behavioural incidents as measures, or it may describe simply 'improved wellbeing'. The collaborative inquiry projects overall would benefit from greater clarity and depth related to the theories of change underlying and driving the interventions and their intended impact.

Areas of the Policy that were reflected less often in the applications include student voice, family and community engagement, and including key partners from the community and from other departments. The emphasis on cultural and linguistic identities and knowledge was also observed less often at the Tier 1 level although CRP was strongly reflected within interventions related to teaching practices. Many action plans that had a strong focus on supporting the success of ANS or Indigenous students included Tier 2 levels of support (e.g., ANS Counsellor, ANS math class, Recreational club for Indigenous students). In considering the results of the most recent Nova Scotia student surveys, it is also notable that the well-being needs of students identifying as LGBTQ2+ were only mentioned in a minor way in one Network School application. Furthermore, student perceptual data were the least cited source of data in the applications. All of these findings point to the need to pay more attention to student voice in the inclusion process itself and in how the impact of the policy is evaluated in the Network Schools projects.

Regional Diversity

Regional diversity can be seen throughout all key areas of focus. Charts for each region can be found in Appendix A. For example, when looking at the representation of intervention themes across regional centres we see that regions are prioritizing different aspects of inclusive education within the Network Schools projects. In some regions, we see an even proportion of applications focusing on student achievement, student well-being, and building teacher practices. In others, inquiries reflect a more concentrated focus on the learning environment. This diversity in focus suggests that educators are tailoring the implementation of the inclusive education policy to suit the strengths and needs that are unique to each region.

Policy Implementation Analysis and Implications

We situate our analysis of findings within several bodies of literature and in reference to frameworks based on national and international expertise. In doing so, we recognize the inclusive education reform work being engaged in by Nova Scotians as unique to local, regional and provincial contexts and universal in its reflection of the Policy reform and implementation efforts engaged in world wide.

As part of their Implementing Education Policies Program, the OECD recently released an implementation framework for effective change in schools. While not the only tool available for this purpose, it provides an accessible approach to consider inclusive education reform in Nova Scotia. The framework was developed in response to the common phenomenon experienced in education systems internationally – the failure of policy to transform practices and processes and ultimately have a positive impact on student outcomes (OECD, 2015). Policy development and implementation in education systems is complex and historical efforts are often impeded or unrealized due to a range of factors. In reviewing educational policy implementation efforts, OECD policy analysts Viennet and Pont concluded “Observing that policies often do not get implemented as planned, or not with the desired outcomes, governments, experts and international organisations have come to acknowledge the need to focus more on implementation processes” (2017, p. 8).

Successes are most often seen within systems that prioritize a coherent implementation strategy which considers sustained PLD, situates the Policy implementation within a conducive context, and addresses and actively addresses the common experience among educators of reform fatigue or ‘initiativitis’.

The OECD implementation framework, summarized in Figure 10 details three key dimensions of a coherent implementation strategy: smart policy design, inclusive stakeholder engagement and conducive and collaborative context. We have drawn upon our learnings about the implementation of the Nova Scotia Inclusive Education Policy derived through multiple meetings, discussions and reviews of documents, analysis of data from interviews we conducted as well as Network Schools applications, in situating the efforts to date within this framework.

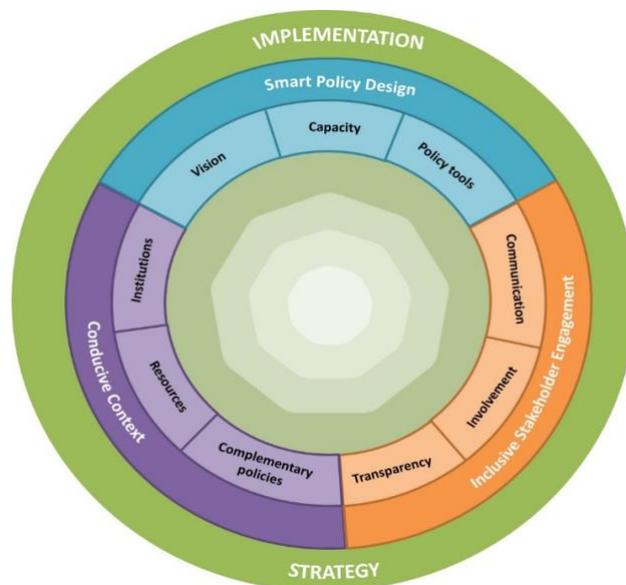


Figure 10. Education policy implementation: An OECD Framework (OECD, 2020)

Smart Policy Design

A **smart policy design** is driven by a **vision**. One of the most powerful findings that emerged from our discussions with school, regional and departmental staff, system leaders, and teacher educators was an awareness and endorsement of the vision guiding the Policy. Vision also includes specific objectives to achieve the vision as well as strategic indicators, both of which are housed within a clear theory of change. As a key tenet of collaborative professionalism, this shared vision speaks to ‘big-picture’ thinking – “they see it, they live it, and create it together” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018, p. 7). The soft launch strategy has enhanced the inclusive and collaborative ownership of the vision among many leaders in the province.

The developmental evaluation that has led to this report also reflects OECD’s smart policy design – the monitoring of implementation and the ongoing use of data to refine it. The evidence we have analyzed to date indicates that the Policy vision for Inclusive Education in Nova Scotia is clear and widely shared. According to Corbett and Slee (2000), “inclusive education begins from the context of policy and the recognition of the complexity of identity and difference” (p. 137).

The Policy in Nova Scotia was co-created by those working within the education system at multiple levels and reflects a broad view of inclusion encompassing all students. The guiding principles of the Policy contain specific reference to students ‘with special needs’ and use of language reflective of traditional inclusive education policies that have superseded special education policies, including mention of a ‘common learning environment’. The guiding principles also highlight the commitment to ‘honour and respect each student’s cultural and linguistic identities and knowledge systems’ which is more typical of equity-focused policies emerging and existing across Canada and beyond, and that in the case of Nova Scotia, would relate specifically to African Nova Scotian and Mi’kmaq students. The province has adopted a bold, strong vision within the Policy, which reflects interwoven goals of inclusion and equity and an underlying basis of social justice and human rights (Ware, 2016). This allows for a strong foundation to support the work of implementation.

In identifying key themes related to inclusive education policy in various international contexts, Corbett and Slee (2000) identify a) paradigm busting, b) reconstructing schooling, and c) contextualizing schooling. Elements of these three themes are evident in the Nova Scotia Policy. It reflects paradigm busting in that it speaks of *all* students and recognizes the dynamic interplay between schools and student identity and difference. It allows for examination of the fit between what students bring to the classroom and what is valued within those settings. The focus is on preparing and providing for teachers so that they can best support students in collaboration with knowledgeable staff, rather than on the remediation of problems or deficits associated with individual children. The 3 block UDL model developed by Katz (2012) also supports the valuing of diversity, a sense of belonging, and self-concept as a key cornerstone of inclusive policy and practice.

The Nova Scotia Inclusive Education Policy contains aspects of the necessary reconstruction of schooling, beyond the historical discussions of mainstreaming and a narrow focus on placement. Within the MTSS model, a range of supports is considered with the heaviest focus on Tier 1, where “pedagogies of inclusion” (Katz, 2012, p. 114) - including universal design for learning intertwined with culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies - are emphasized. The shift to teaching support teams and learning support teachers also reflects organizational changes necessary for inclusive education policy to be enacted. Katz’s 3 block UDL model (Katz, 2012) similarly includes a key focus on system and structural

changes such as multi-levelled resources and team planning time as well as inclusive instructional practices.

Within the vision element of the OECD framework, we look next to the specific and tangible objectives that allow the guiding principles of the Policy to be reflected in concrete action which will ultimately result in successful educational experiences for all Nova Scotia students. The objectives are linked to the Policy by the theory of change that makes explicit the beliefs and assumptions underpinning the Policy. Developing a clear causal theory is essential “because it tells the story of how and why the Policy change takes place, and can contribute to get engagement and guide those involved” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 29).

We summarize our current understanding of the theory of change in Figures 11 and 12, which we put forward as working drafts intended to stimulate discussion. The same theory of change is depicted in two ways – a more traditional linear format and a cyclical format that reflects the dynamic, reflective nature of the change process. Both prompt ‘if-then’ thinking where the actions and resources that lead to outcomes in the short, medium, and long-term ultimately produce the intended results. The cyclical format positions the impact or ultimate intended outcomes as leading the cycle, in the same way that a backward design approach leads instructional planning. Backward design encourages intentionality during the design process by beginning with the results and learnings sought and working to identify the activities that can best lead students to the results (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). At a system level, the equitable impact on student wellbeing and achievement guides the implementation planning, with actions and resources identified as effective in specific relation to the impact purposefully chosen and funded.

As part of the developmental evaluation and the ongoing implementation efforts of the many partners in the province, the theory of change will continue to be co-developed over time. As well, many of the elements we have included as resources and processes are in progress, in part because the Policy will not be in place until fall 2020 and because of the extraordinary and abrupt shift within the systems resulting from COVID-19 and subsequent school disruptions.

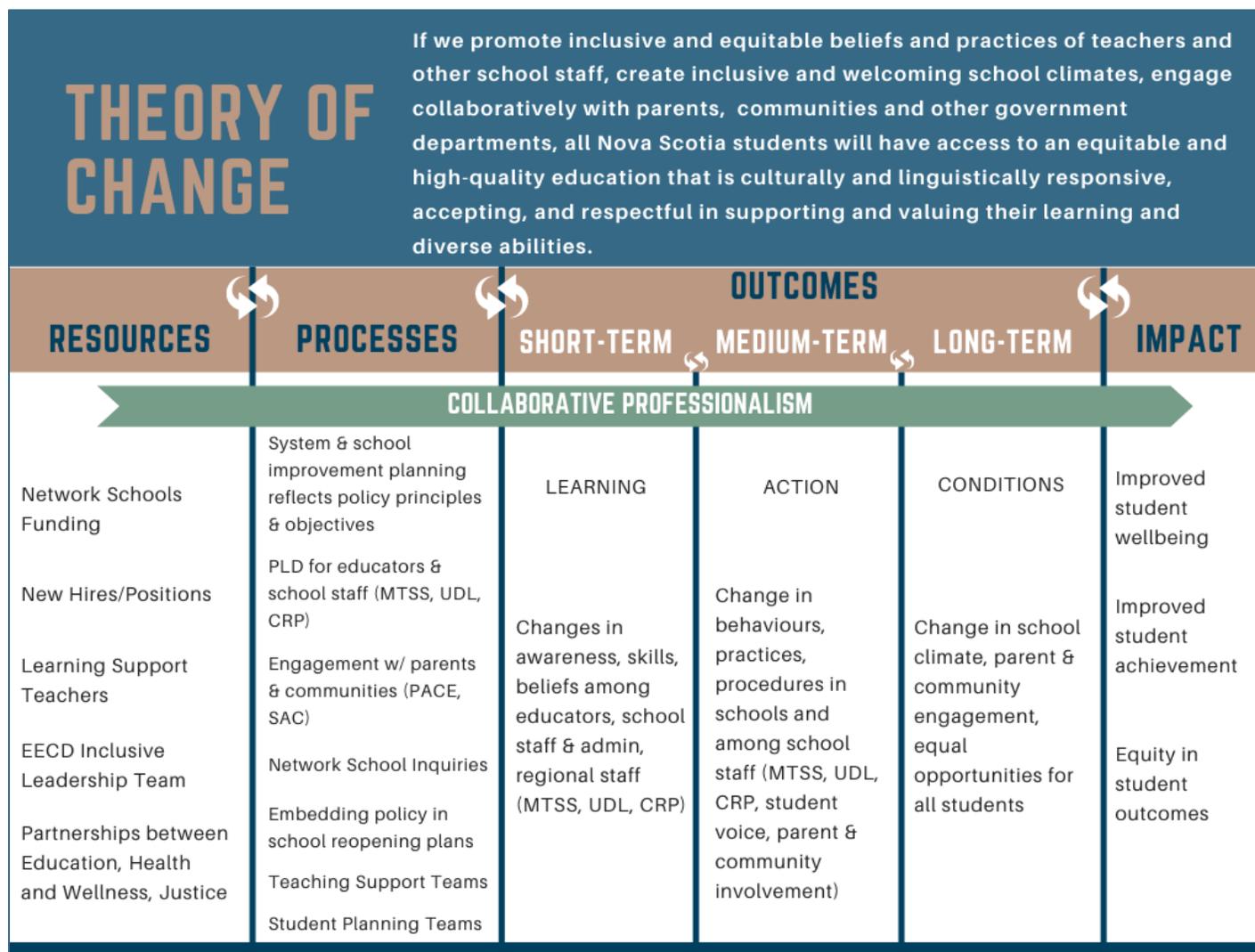


Figure 11. Working draft of Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Theory of Change: Linear

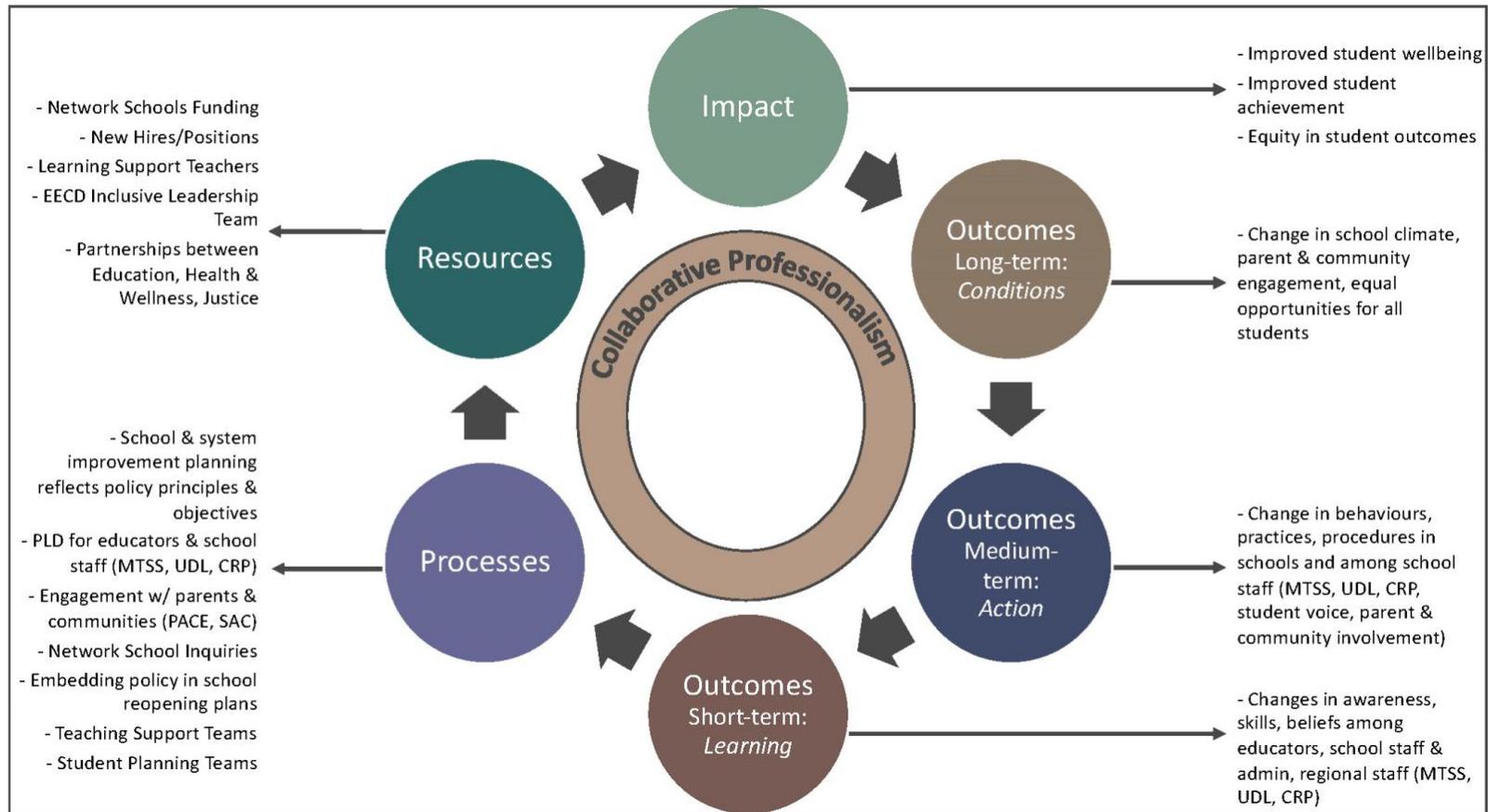


Figure 12. Working draft of Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Theory of Change: Cyclical

In addition to the bold vision necessary for Smart Policy Design, the OECD framework highlights the need for **capacity** – the human, social and decisional capital that comprise the broader professional capital that actually enable the Policy objectives to be accomplished (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). We saw evidence of enormous capacity, and particularly human and decisional capital in our first year – in the specific examples related to PLD in areas of Cultural Responsive Pedagogy and supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, in the insight and expertise of regional consultants and coordinators, and in the expressed understanding of theoretical and practical elements of MTSS. Many examples of close partnerships between regions, the universities offering B.Ed. and graduate programs, and the EECED, including the Inter-University Research Network were described to us. Several participants described taking part in graduate-level education specifically focused on inclusive education teaching or leadership with funding provided by the EECED. We also noted a desire to continue building this capacity in the Network School collaborative inquiry applications and the recognition of areas of need related to CRP, UDL, differentiated instruction, and SEL.

Many of the examples described by participants describe the individual capacity-building of individuals – becoming more skilled through attending a workshop or completing a series of modules. The Policy has also prompted reflection and some uncertainty among the participants we spoke to about the shift to capacity-building that includes, surrounds and supports the classroom teacher, where social capital is emphasized and collaborative professionalism is paramount.

Collaborative professionalism is defined as teachers and other educators working together to transform teaching and learning to improve broad and diverse student outcomes. It is organized in an evidence-informed way through “rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018, p. 4). Collaborative professionalism requires joint work to be embedded within a culture of a school where educators share responsibility for students and work collaboratively within a supportive community.

The Student Planning Team described in the Policy is an example of collaboration to support specific students as are many of the specific instances of PLD described to us – developing skills and efficacy in supporting a child with ASD, or in addressing behavioural concerns of another student.

The school-based Teaching Support Team is an example of a capacity-building structure embedded in the Policy that has the potential to build collaborative professionalism among educators. It is designed to meet frequently, to work in collaboration with classroom teachers and learning support teachers and to draw on evidence to monitor and evaluate the success of supports and interventions. Many participants expressed confusion regarding the mandate and processes guiding this team, depending in part on whether or not they had similar teams in place prior to the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy. As the implementation of the Policy continues to develop, teams should consider ways in which the tenets of collaborative professionalism can inform their planning, including development of the mindsets and skillsets required to collaborate effectively with depth and focus.

The collaborative inquiry projects supported through the Network Schools reflect another possible vehicle for building capacity among educators and developing collaborative professionalism. PLD was listed as the second most frequent intervention focus and it was by far the most frequent resource, with collaborative planning time being a strongly endorsed element. Book studies, lesson studies, co-teaching and the use of data walls, in some instances with support from regional coaches or consultants, were specifically mentioned as supports and structures to facilitate change in teacher practice.

As the network projects evolve, participants should be guided to be more precise, detailed, and explicitly reflective about what they are seeking to accomplish through collaborative professionalism in particular rather than collaborative activity more generally. This means paying attention to strong *solidarity* and *solidity* of collaborative practice and their interrelationship.

How will *solidarity* be established through securing and sustaining high trust between teachers and administrators who have a short history of belonging to different professional organizations? What leadership development and leadership coaching strategies can be created to enable trust to be built deliberately as part of collaborative school cultures? How will silos be prevented from occurring between educators with strengths, interests and specializations in well-being and student achievement respectively; or between teachers in a variety of roles, and teacher assistants who provide support for vulnerable students, for example?

What procedures, protocols and other tools will be drawn on and developed to initiate challenging but respectful conversations that have a high degree of specificity for drawing attention to and dealing with areas of intervention and implementation that are being overlooked or falling short? What about LGBTQ2 students whose needs didn't arise in conversations with educators to the same extent as the needs of other marginalized groups?

Collaborative professionalism is not a synonym for collaboration *per se*. A future next step in PLD for teachers, administrators and other staff is to create and sustain robust forms of collaborative professionalism that will yield the expected outcomes of implementation for the Inclusion Policy.

The final element outlined within the smart policy design is **policy tools** – the multiple levers put in place to achieve the Policy goals. These are what come to mind for most educators in the system when the term 'policy' is presented to them and as such, provoke the strongest response – be it positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

The summer and fall of 2019 involved introducing the Policy to various groups in an effort to spread awareness. These included regional leadership teams, the Provincial Advisory Committee on Education (PACE), universities that offer teacher education and graduate education programs, some School Advisory Councils (SACs) and numerous advisory groups and committees at the provincial and regional levels. Second and third generation PLD also took place within regions as regional staff outlined and explored the Policy at principal and vice-principal meetings where participants interpreted the Policy for their local contexts and brought the message to department heads and school staff who may not have been part of the consultation process prior to the release of the Policy.

The Network Schools projects developed by collaborative inquiry teams are a tool that we have analyzed in detail. The networks that have and will be developed and funded present an opportunity to draw upon the deep expertise related to inclusive education that is present in pockets within the regions – among classroom teachers, resource and learning centre teachers, African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq student support workers, Teacher Assistants, Child and Youth Care Practitioners, attendance support workers, principals, regional staff and others. The collaborative inquiry process of asking questions, developing theories of action, determining action steps and gathering and analyzing evidence to assess impact (Donohoo, 2013) is at the core of the Network School projects.

Engaging in collaborative inquiry as PLD has been the focus of extensive research over the past twenty years, as conceptualizations of teaching have embraced “contextualized decision-making that

instantiates pedagogical principles and practices to best meet students' needs" (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). Collaborative inquiry also reflects a growing understanding of the shared nature of problems of practice and situates teachers as learners who actively participate in the production and dissemination of knowledge within a school and system culture of inquiry (DeLuca et al., 2015; Donohoo, 2013). Benefits of engaging in collaborative inquiry include the development of pedagogical skills, knowledge and efficacy, opportunities for teacher leadership, and coherence between school improvement goals, PLD and student and teacher needs (Butler, Schnellert, & MacNeil, 2015; DeLuca et al., 2017; Harris, Jones, & Huffman, 2017). Harnessing the social capital (Leana & Pil, 2006) of a group engaged in inquiry, and of broader communities through networking, can also improve collective teacher efficacy, listed by Hattie (2017) as having a greater impact on student achievement than any other measured factor. Simply bringing teachers together to address a perceived need, however, is not sufficient to constitute collaborative inquiry. Nor are structures and processes such as data teams that convene educators to work on completing a task without necessarily also attending to the relationships and levels of trust and mutual support among the team members. Collaborative inquiry needs to have a shared, explicit purpose focused on student learning, with commitment from teachers, a clear operational structure, data capturing the breadth of student learning, and organizational and cultural support (DeLuca, Bolden, & Chan 2017; Harris & Jones, 2017).

In the case of Nova Scotia, the potential of the Network Schools rests on the collaborative inquiry process as well as the larger network structure that will allow professional capital to develop and be shared across the province in order to benefit students. The funding provided by the EECD to support the collaborative inquiry teams reflects organizational support; most teams requested funding to pay for teacher release time or for specific PLD opportunities. Beyond the Network School funding, some regions and schools already organize time in the schedule for teachers to collaborate regularly. A review by DeLuca et al. (2015) summarized teacher perspectives regarding resources that supported collaborative inquiry activities. Teachers most valued release time, using evidence-based processes related to reviewing student work, and the availability of consultants and coaches to assist them. Support and guidance for the collaborative inquiry teams, in the form of coaching on inclusive practices and the elements of collaborative inquiry cycles as well as continued funding to support shared time in the day is needed to ensure that their goals can be realized. It is important to note that while crucial, time for collaboration is not sufficient for it to be effective – "leadership also has to encourage, engage and empower teachers in the collaborative quest" (Hargreaves, 2019, p. 618).

It was interesting that Network Schools applications were more skewed towards inquiries focused on well-being compared to student achievement. As mentioned earlier, well-being and achievement are, however, closely interrelated (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2018). The Policy clearly states that well-being and achievement go hand-in-hand. In further developing the collaborative inquiries and in designing the networks, system leaders and teams should therefore be vigilant about the risks of separating into silos and they should seek to integrate well-being and achievement in clear strategies and narratives of implementation.

Other policy tools include the development of an inclusive education website, practical guides specifically related to MTSS, reflection tools related to equity during COVID-19 closures and multiple PLD sessions offered within regions or provincially, as part of conferences or regionally-developed opportunities. We have seen the practical MTSS guides being used to prompt participants and organize discussions within regions and promote early reflection on the Policy implementation. Assistive and accessible technology, planning and resourcing is an especially salient policy tool as students have been learning from a distance due to COVID-19 restrictions (Whitley, 2020). Some school advisory councils

have also taken part in PLD related to the Policy. This tool explicitly involves parents and community in the implementation process.

Some tools identified by stakeholders existed prior to the Policy (e.g. online PLD modules related to ASD) and may not necessarily reflect the shift towards directly supporting teachers rather than students; towards the primacy of Tier 1 compared to Tiers 2 and 3 practices; and towards a new language of 'teacher support teams' and 'learning support teachers'. In this respect, a coherent toolkit requires not just the addition of new tools, but also the revision or abandonment of older ones that are no longer appropriate or useful. Coherence between tools and the Policy is essential if they are to facilitate implementation.

The adoption of the Pyramid Model, a multi-tiered approach to supporting social, emotional and behavioural development of young children within pre-primary settings can also be considered a policy tool, though it is focused more heavily on early learning. The model reflects elements of MTSS and also emphasizes the key role of inclusion coaches in supporting educators – in ways similar to the role of the Learning Support Teacher described in the Policy. The experiences and learnings of those involved in the implementation and evaluation of the Pyramid Model in Nova Scotia are important sources to draw upon as the P-12 system considers implementation of the Policy.

One potential tool that has not yet been adopted in a cohesive way is an inclusion index, or a set of indicators that reflect progress or change in measures that capture outcomes. For example, given the theory of change we would expect the number of students receiving services at the Tier 1 level to increase as teachers and other professionals and support staff adopt a collaborative, inclusive model of teacher and student supports. The Design Team generated a list of possible indicators (Appendix B) that might be included in such an index and that could capture progress in the short, medium and long-term in order to help guide the implementation.

Our identification of policy tools is challenged by the all-encompassing nature of the inclusive education policy. We have heard many times in our first year that inclusive education 'is the work' and that it needs to be reflected in any and all initiatives, meetings, PLD, etc. This infusion is a policy tool unto itself – weaving and repeating key messaging related to the Policy in order to build coherence and convey a sense of importance. It will be important moving forward to have a clear shared sense of the Policy tools drawn upon implicitly as well as explicitly in order to identify effective levers of implementation. This will allow for assessment by, of and with the system regarding whether and how the objectives of the Policy have been met and where ongoing efforts should best be focused. Being able to point to a policy tool and have concrete ideas about indicators that would reflect impact is important.

Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement

Our findings show evidence of **inclusive stakeholder engagement**, which consists of communication, involvement and transparency. We heard many examples in our discussions and interviews with school and regional staff and system leaders of ways in which they had been closely or peripherally involved in the development of the Policy. Few were surprised by the final version and many saw their perspectives and feedback directly reflected. We have also seen evidence of engagement efforts with stakeholders, within multiple advisory groups and regular meetings where policy implementation tools are brought forward to be discussed and altered if necessary. These include groups/meetings involving teachers, principals, Directors of Programs and Student Services and many others.

Our early discussions with educators and principals in regions suggest that the communication and engagement strategy lands clearly with some but less so with others. The spread and deeper level uptake of the messages will require ongoing efforts in this area. This engagement would also benefit from considering the ways in which individuals occupying different roles are brought together to ensure silos are not perpetuated - for example, programs staff, student services staff, equity staff etc. Fullan and Gallagher (2020) describe the need to lateralize learning to address this type of silo-ing that often occurs within and across multiple levels in education systems. It is important to have strong and frequent communication by and interaction among key individuals at 'the top' who represent a range of roles that come together in what business professor, John Kotter (1996), terms a *guiding coalition*, "giving consistent messaging and achieving greater internal and external coherence" (p. 37).

The third element, transparency, will also benefit from developing a sharper focus during implementation. At some levels, particularly regional ones, clear role definitions, a sense of purpose and a shared understanding of responsibilities were evident. At the same time, many participants raised concerns regarding accountability, and about needing a concrete sense of what was expected of system leaders, principals and teachers in September 2020.

Conducive Context

The final aspect of the OECD framework is a **conducive context**. Part of the context relates to institutions, which include teaching standards and collective bargaining agreements as well as the level of trust that exists between, for example, teacher unions and the government. Our findings reflect an understanding among many leaders of the need to achieve coherence between the Policy, the teaching standards and the new teacher performance appraisal. This work is in progress and will be key to the Policy implementation.

A conducive context also ensures coherence among policies and other initiatives. Efforts to ensure coherence between the Policy and new initiatives such as the assessment policy and the Grade 7 and 8 curriculum renewal were described to us by system leaders. However while the Inclusive Education Policy comes into effect in September 2020, the Special Education Policy continues in parallel, with plans for a review at some point in the future. This policy contains the eight-stage Program Planning Process, which was referenced many times by stakeholders. Confusion was expressed by some as to the coexistence of these two policies and processes, whether or not the Inclusive Education Policy and the MTSS model would replace the former policy and process, and if so, what timelines were anticipated for this. Clarity for educators, system leaders and parents should be a priority as the Policy implementation moves forward.

We noted in the Network Schools applications that the focus on building Tier 1 practices based on the needs of African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq students and those students identifying as LGBTQ2+ was limited. In part, this may reflect the persistent association between Inclusive Education and student services or students with special educational needs seen in Nova Scotia data and in systems internationally. Coherence between the Inclusive Education Policy, the African Nova Scotian Framework, the Racial Equity Policy, Treaty Education Framework, Student Attendance and Engagement Policy, Together We Can (mental health and addictions strategy), the Achievement Gap Initiative, the Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Gender-nonconforming Students, efforts focused on Anti-

Black Racism and other related frameworks and policies is absolutely key in communications strategies and PLD opportunities.

Our analyses of the Network Schools applications and the proposed collaborative inquiries also revealed a frequent separation of well-being and achievement as priorities, policies and practices. Considerable work also needs to be done to integrate and interrelate these respective emphases too.

Resource allocations also contributed to the creation of a conducive context. Public announcements in Nova Scotia have described the investments in new hires to support the implementation of the Inclusive Education policy. The result of this funding, including increases in the number of school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, Schools Plus facilitators, African-Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq Student Support Workers and the addition of the new role of Child and Youth Care Practitioners was seen as helpful among stakeholders. A few individuals at the regional level gave examples of how the role descriptions for new positions were purposefully developed to fit within the MTSS model and in relation to the Policy broadly. Other positions had been added to the available resources within systems and although they were seen as providing necessary supports for teachers and students, they were not always reflective of the Policy.

Resources related to a conducive context also include timing and pace. The 2019-2020 school year was dramatically interrupted by the arrival of COVID-19 and the subsequent closing of schools in mid-March, 2020 with distance learning taking place between early April and early June. Implementation of the Policy in its entirety was scheduled for September, 2020 when first released in August of 2019. The activities taking place so far comprise efforts to prepare the system for this implementation. Many stakeholders involved in our developmental evaluation suggested changes in timing of the Policy – some supporting a more staggered approach with certain elements put in place over months or even years as the system shifts and develops capacity. The time allowed for the Policy to be fully implemented in this and all contexts should be considered with particular care.

Recommendations

Based on our analysis and findings, we have seven recommendations with respect to the shape and direction of the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy. We recognize that some of these may not be immediately possible or may need to be planned within the uniquely complex nature of teaching, learning and leading during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1) Articulate and elaborate specific high impact practices of collaborative professionalism

Given the shift to greater collaboration required by the Policy, and the need for capacity building identified throughout the system, implementation plans need to reflect a significant focus on the ways in which collaborative professionalism can be developed and sustained. There are many examples of practices and processes in place across Nova Scotia that promote collaborative professionalism, including the collaborative inquiry projects, book and lesson studies, the use of data walls, and school-based PLD communities.

There are also coaches throughout the Nova Scotia education system presently, who guide the work of teachers and administrators in the P-12 system in areas such as literacy, math and technology, and others who support the implementation of the Pyramid Model in pre-primary and licensed child care settings. There are also deeply knowledgeable student services consultants, some of whom support the inclusion-related learning of school teams through coaching. Coaching is a high impact feature of collaborative professionalism (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018), Nova Scotia already possesses significant expertise in this area, and we therefore recommend that some of this expertise be targeted to support the work of implementing the Policy in schools and classrooms, especially in relation to developing new teaching and learning strategies in fully inclusive classrooms.

Coaches can assist the Network Schools to collaborate effectively and implement inquiry plans, they can work with families of schools on key areas identified within school and system improvement plans, and they can work with individual teachers and teaching support teams to shift Tier 1 practices. Specific PLD related to coaching expertise and practices should be provided for these individuals and a role description should be developed for existing and new coaches assigned to support implementation of the Policy.

2) Develop a specific network design for circulating professional knowledge and practice

Once the Network Schools have circulated their collaborative inquiries, the next step will be to connect them for mutual learning and support in the promised and planned networks. It will not be automatically obvious what the best way or ways will be to do this, however. Network designs should be selected on the basis of the closeness of fit to the purposes that the networks are supposed to advance and to the context in which they are meant to operate. It is therefore important to develop and draw on knowledge of different network designs before choosing and constructing one that is best suited to the Policy and context(s).

One design with which some Nova Scotia educators are familiar has been disseminated by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching at Stanford University. This has a highly regarded reputation in the field of improvement science with a purpose of creating specific teams to identify and resolve precise and measurable improvement challenges within a 90-day period (Bryk, 2015). This

strategy may have been appropriate for a US-based environment of high stakes testing and data-driven improvement pursuing short-term results but it may be less suited to the more professionally empowered and educationally holistic environments that are more typical of Nova Scotia in particular and Canada in general. The presidency of the Foundation is also currently in transition, so support and capacity behind this particular network design may therefore become less robust.

A second network design, *New Pedagogies for Deep Learning* (2019), based in Ontario, includes a group of schools in Halifax as part of a large network involving over 1000 schools in several countries. Schools involved in this network design pay a membership fee providing access to resources, within a pre-set conceptual structure of deep learning that offers an annual conference for participants and options of additional PLD targeted for particular clusters of schools. This network, and any other pre-established networks, may be appropriate for sub-networks of schools in Nova Scotia but are less well suited to the overall network design. They have different purposes from the Policy and a pre-set structure and financial operating system that may be difficult to accommodate in the provincial context.

The breadth and inclusiveness of the Policy, rather, calls for a self-designed, professionally empowering network that is created by stakeholders. In his book, *Inclusive Leadership*, Ryan (2006) argues that a policy designed to create inclusion for students should incorporate inclusion as a design and development principle among the adults responsible for it. To have an imposed inclusive education policy would, therefore, be a contradiction in terms.

We attach one possible PLD network design for EECD to consider (Appendix C). There are others that could be employed. The point is to select or create a design framework that supports purposeful, planned collaboration, including leadership considerations, that is necessary for networks to be seen and experienced as effective, inclusive, and engaging for educators and students. Many virtual ways of connecting have been advanced during COVID-19-related school closures; and these should now be actively considered and built upon in planning the networks beyond the pandemic, particularly in light of the geographic spread and rural remoteness that are typical in many regions of the province.

3) Create an inclusive steering group to reduce the risk of silo-like processes of policy implementation planning

The need for shared ownership of the Policy and coherence across initiatives, policies and programs was raised numerous times by participants. Ongoing implementation should be planned, monitored and revised by a collaborative steering group (the guiding coalition) with representation across key areas and levels within EECD. This group should include representation from Programs (Literacy/Numeracy), Innovations (Technology), Student Services and Equity, African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq Services, the LGBTQ2 community, representation of working class and high poverty constituencies, and other key areas, as well as the evaluation team. At the same time, attending to the pressing need for inclusive representation should not lead to the establishment of cumbersome, bureaucratic processes that impede rather than advance effective implementation. We therefore also recommend that a small task-force of no more than half a dozen members be created within this group to undertake much of the work and lead a considerable amount of thinking, although this should be with constant reference back to the interests and perspectives of the steering group.

4) Create a student review and reference group to provide feedback regarding experiences of policy impact.

Collaborating *with* students and not only *for* students is a key component of collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). It is also essential in designing a fully inclusive policy development and implementation process. A well-facilitated and widely represented student reference group will enable those responsible for implementing the Policy to become more aware of how the Policy is or is not having an impact at the school and classroom level and to be able to monitor and manage progress over time.

5) Further develop and articulate the theory of change

Numerous theories of change are explicitly and implicitly guiding the work of the implementation. The OECD policy implementation framework highlights the key role that a clearly defined and widely understood theory of change has in guiding the work of implementation. A theory of change should be co-developed and clearly communicated through a compelling and consistent narrative to ensure clear direction and monitoring of the implementation over the coming years. We have drafted such a theory underpinning the Policy implementation in order to stimulate engagement and promote its ongoing development.

6) Publish the developmental evaluation reports along with EECD responses

We recommend that our evaluation feedback and reports be made public along with a response from EECD outlining the ways in which the recommendations are already or will be reflected in the ongoing policy implementation planning, in the short- and long-term. The response can also include any recommendations not accepted or not accepted presently – for reasons such as resource priorities or the COVID-19 pandemic. One member of our team serves as one of a team of educational advisers to the Government of Scotland where such a process of public transparency has strengthened responsibility of all participants and been a vital tool for building public confidence in the government's evolving reform programme and its implementation.

7) Consider using the Inclusive Education policy to guide the province's education response to COVID-19

Planning for the 2020/2021 school year and beyond is necessarily heavily focused on processes and procedures that will allow students to be able to access their education within public health guidelines. At the same time, issues of inclusion and equity have not diminished in their urgency; many in fact have been magnified for students who are without access to technology, for students who have had to be sheltered in place in high-risk home environments and for those such as students with a variety of special educational needs who rely on their schools for a range of supports. A recent report from the OECD describes how "overall, the crisis is a stress test challenging the resilience and equity of education systems" (2020, p. 3).

Examples of ways in which EECD has addressed equity concerns have emerged in the COVID-19 response including the Primary to Grade 9 At-Home Student Learning packages delivered to many student homes, in recognition of the unavailability of internet access in many parts of the province. School staff have engaged in reflection guided by an EECD framework that prompted specific attention to the ways in which opportunities and barriers arose during school closures for students typically marginalized and underserved. Technology was harnessed in various novel ways to allow for virtual connections between students and school and regional staff (e.g. Mental Health professionals, Speech-Language Pathologists).

EECD should continue to explore ways in which the Policy can inform planning in terms of student and family access to learning, student inclusion, well-being and voice, the reflection of UDL and CRP principles in both virtual and in-school offerings, and a range of service provisions based on student need within an MTSS framework. For educators, opportunities to collaborate in meaningful and productive ways to develop and share ways of responding to their own as well as student and family needs within COVID-19 restrictions are essential.

With these recommendations helping to guide the ongoing work of the implementation, we can begin to map the ways in which the vision of inclusive education will result in inclusive practices across the system.

Including Forward

Drawing on our analyses, findings, and recommendations, we conclude with our representation of inclusive system change in Nova Scotia. This figure includes a number of interrelated elements that work together at different levels to shift the system towards sustained and widespread development of inclusive practices. The elements within the rings include many of the current policy tools described in our analysis as well as those arising from our recommendations. In this way the graphic both reflects the current efforts underway and shines a light on a path forward.

Starting with the outer ring, we recognize the deep, shared vision of inclusive education reflected in the Policy alongside the professional and community engagement that provides the framing of the development of inclusive practices. These high-level elements are necessary to enable the more immediately impactful actions. Student, family and community voices are key to informing the ongoing implementation of the Policy and will be situated at the forefront of the next phase of the evaluation.

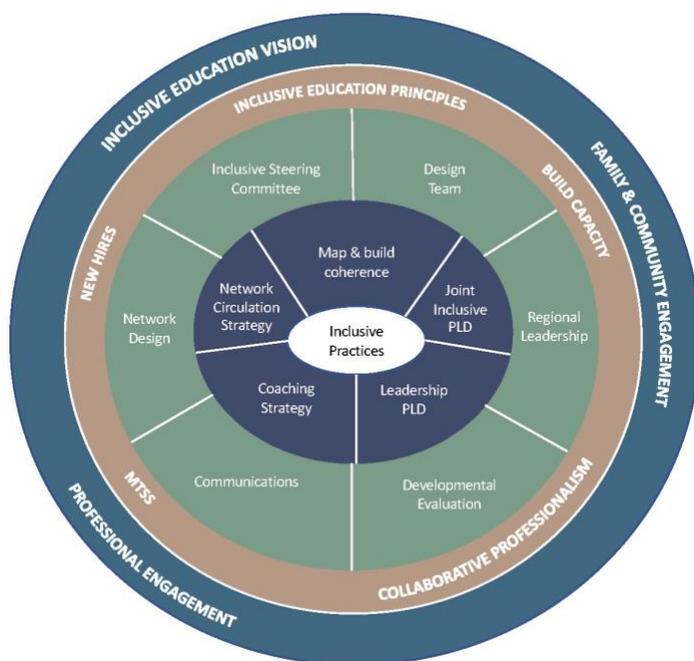


Fig.

The second ring includes the eight explicit principles arising from the vision that guide the Policy. These principles, in tandem with efforts to build capacity among educators, fund new positions, and develop the MTSS model through collaborative professionalism, move the system closer to the core. These elements in turn steer and propel the work of the developmental evaluation, the design team, and the proposed inclusive steering group, all of which are closely interrelated. The key role of regional leadership in inclusion implementation is also critical in this third ring as is the design of the Network Schools and broader communication efforts between EECD and the regions.

Finally, the ring closest to the core contains the most proximal, immediately impactful elements of the system change vision. These include the network sharing and circulation strategy, inclusion coaching, PLD that is collaborative and integrated across roles and content, PLD for system leaders to be able to best support and guide the implementation in their contexts, and the mapping and building of coherence across policies and initiatives.

The elements included in this figure are not exhaustive – there may be new elements added, and others removed or changed as the implementation planning and evaluation continues to evolve. Timelines also vary with some elements well underway and others in the early stages of planning. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic will likely require ongoing shifts in implementation of the Policy within and across regions. As with the report as a whole, the depiction of inclusive system change is intended to promote reflection, discussion and collaboration in implementing the Policy.

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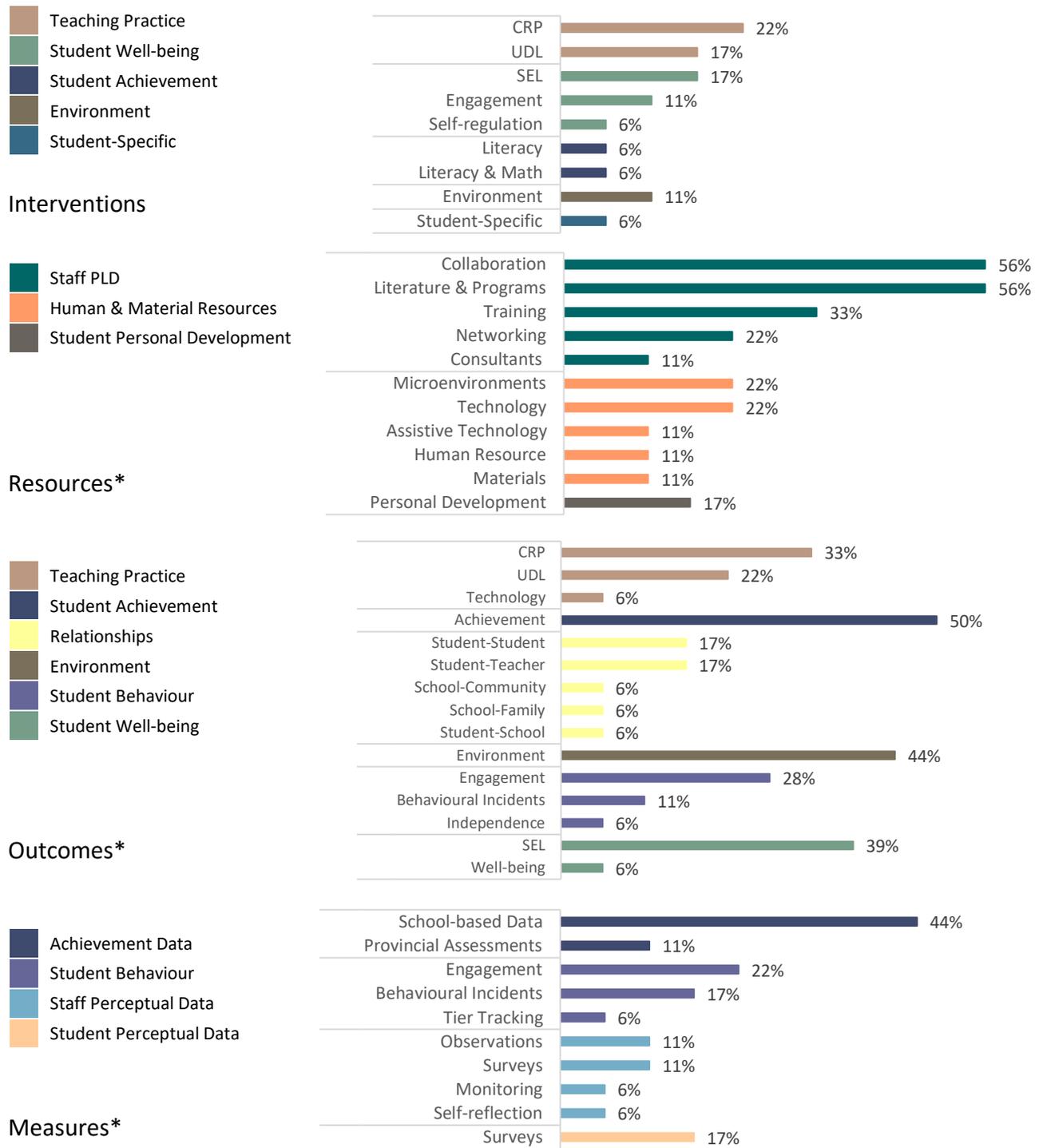
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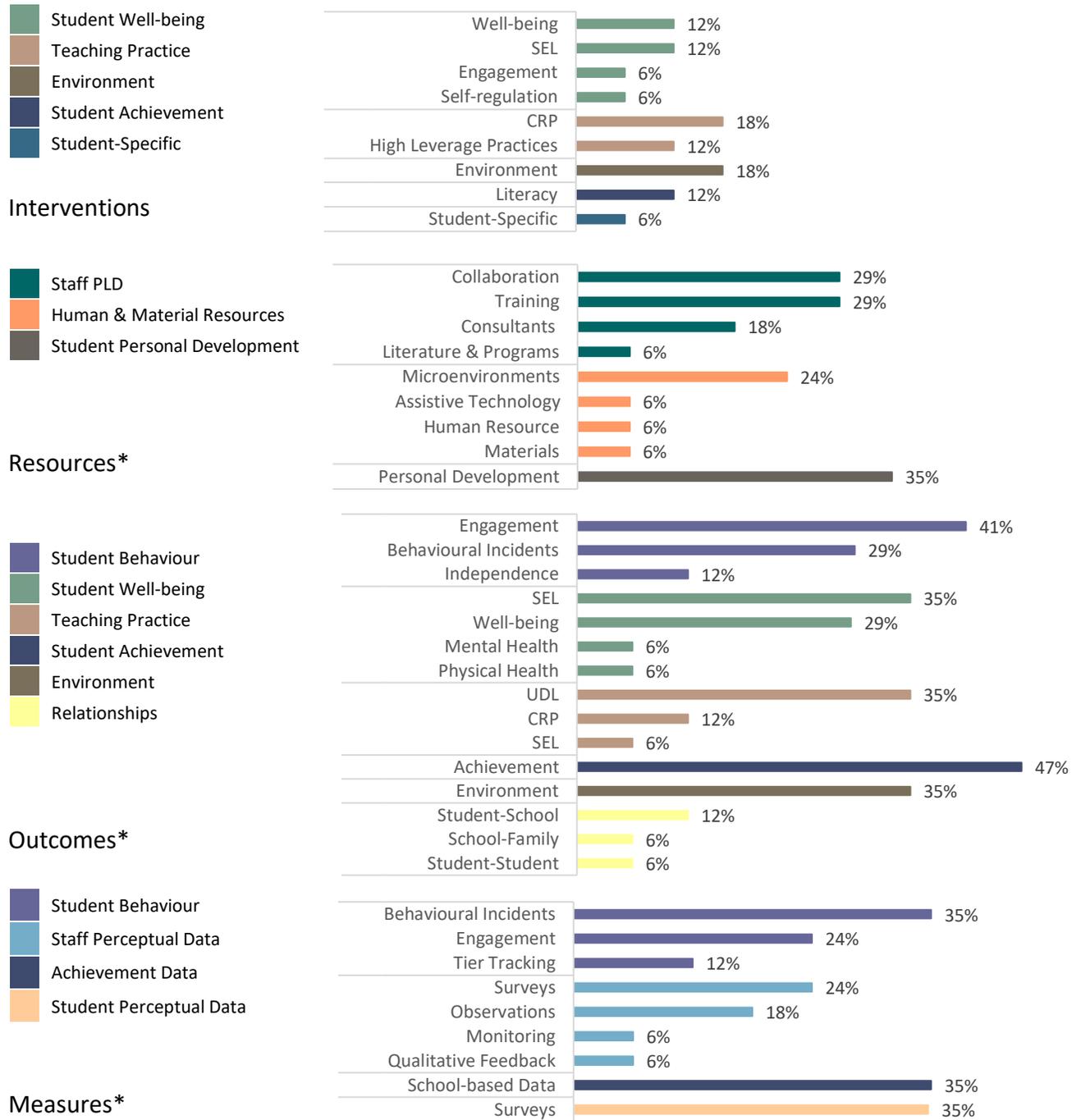
Appendix A: Regional Network School Charts

Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education



*The % of AVRCE applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 56% of AVRCE applications included 'collaboration' within Staff PLD as a resource.

Cape Breton and Victoria Regional Centre for Education

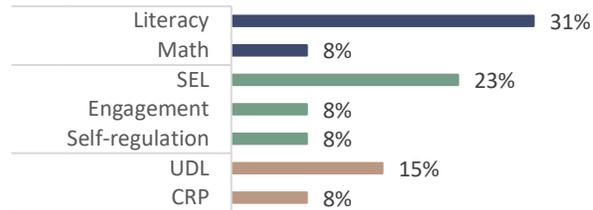


*The % of CBVRCE applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 29% of CBVRCE applications included 'collaboration' within Staff PLD as a resource.

Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education

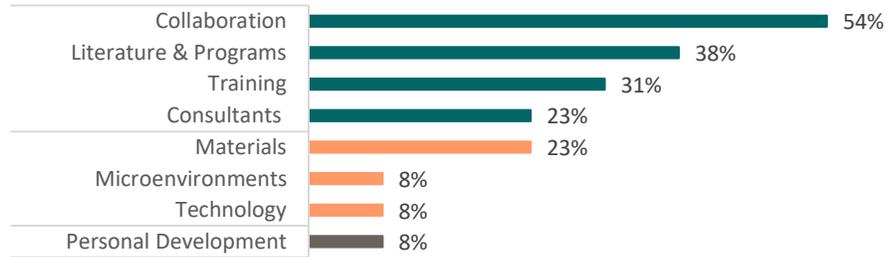
- Student Achievement
- Student Well-being
- Teaching Practice

Interventions



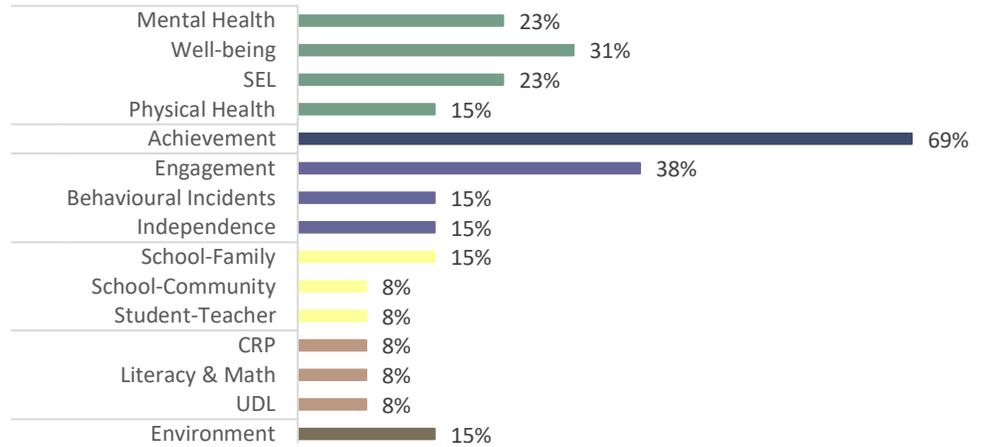
- Staff PLD
- Human & Material Resources
- Student Personal Development

Resources*



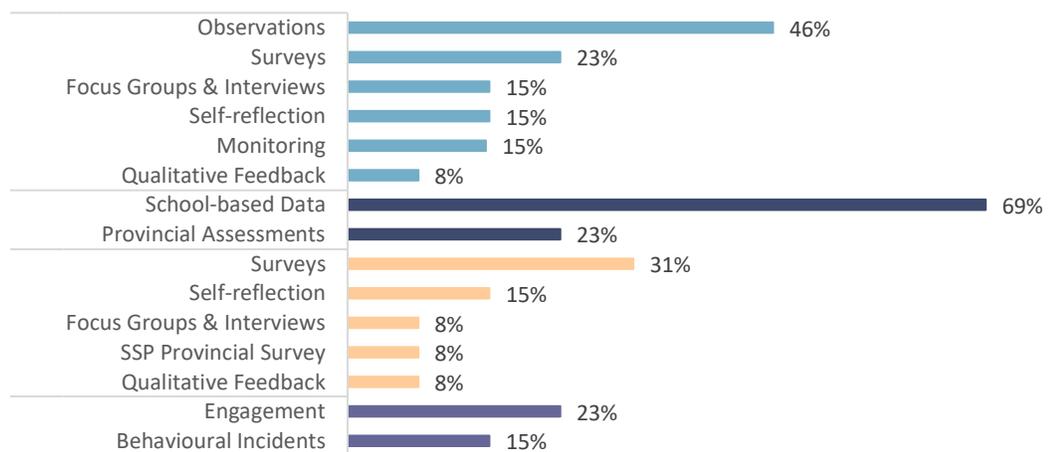
- Well-being
- Student Achievement
- Student Behaviour
- Relationships
- Teaching Practice
- Environment

Outcomes*



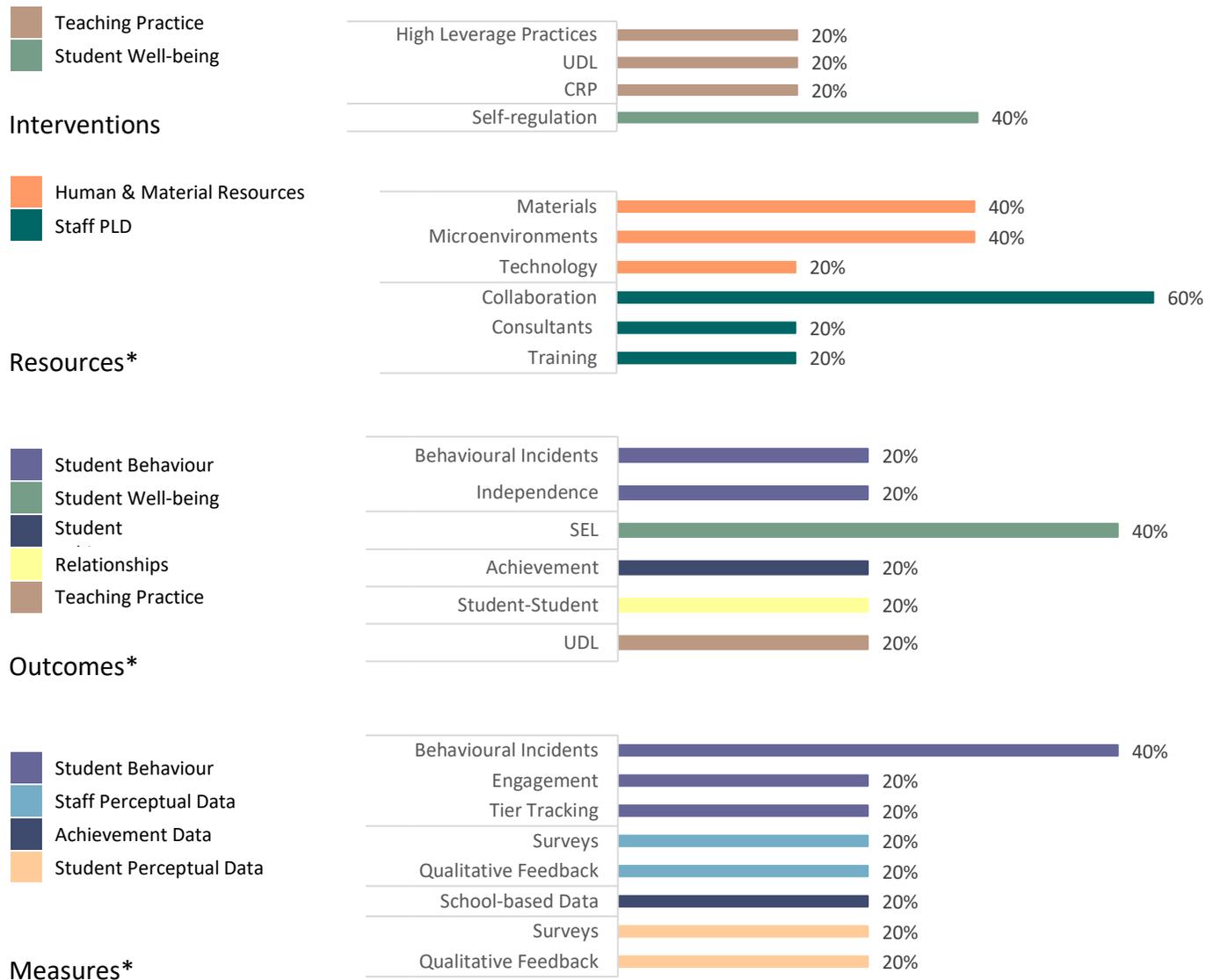
- Staff Perceptual Data
- Achievement Data
- Student Perceptual Data
- Student Behaviour

Measures*



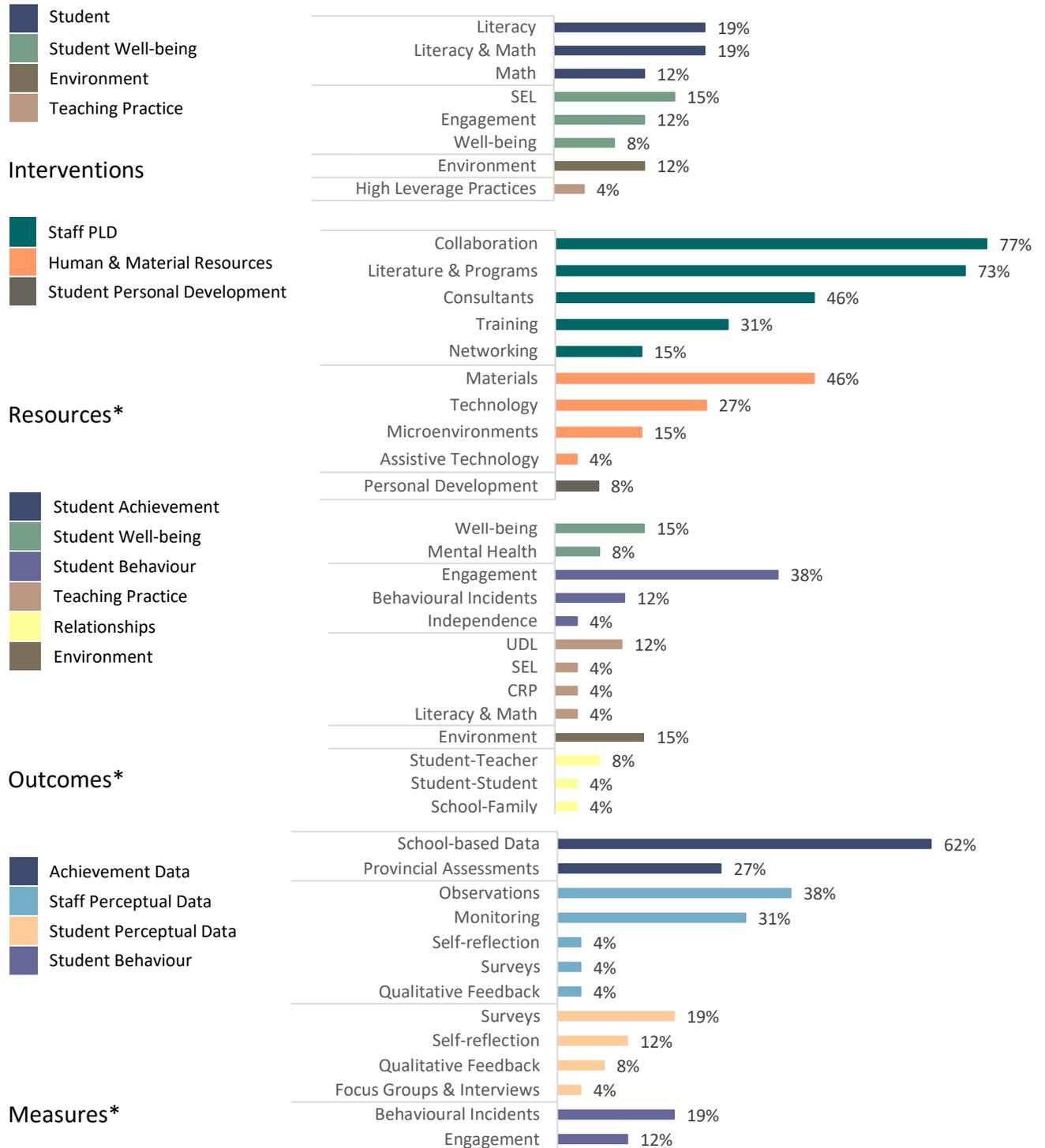
*The % of CCRCE applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 54% of CCRCE applications included 'collaboration' within Staff PLD as a resource.

Conseil scolaire acadien provincial



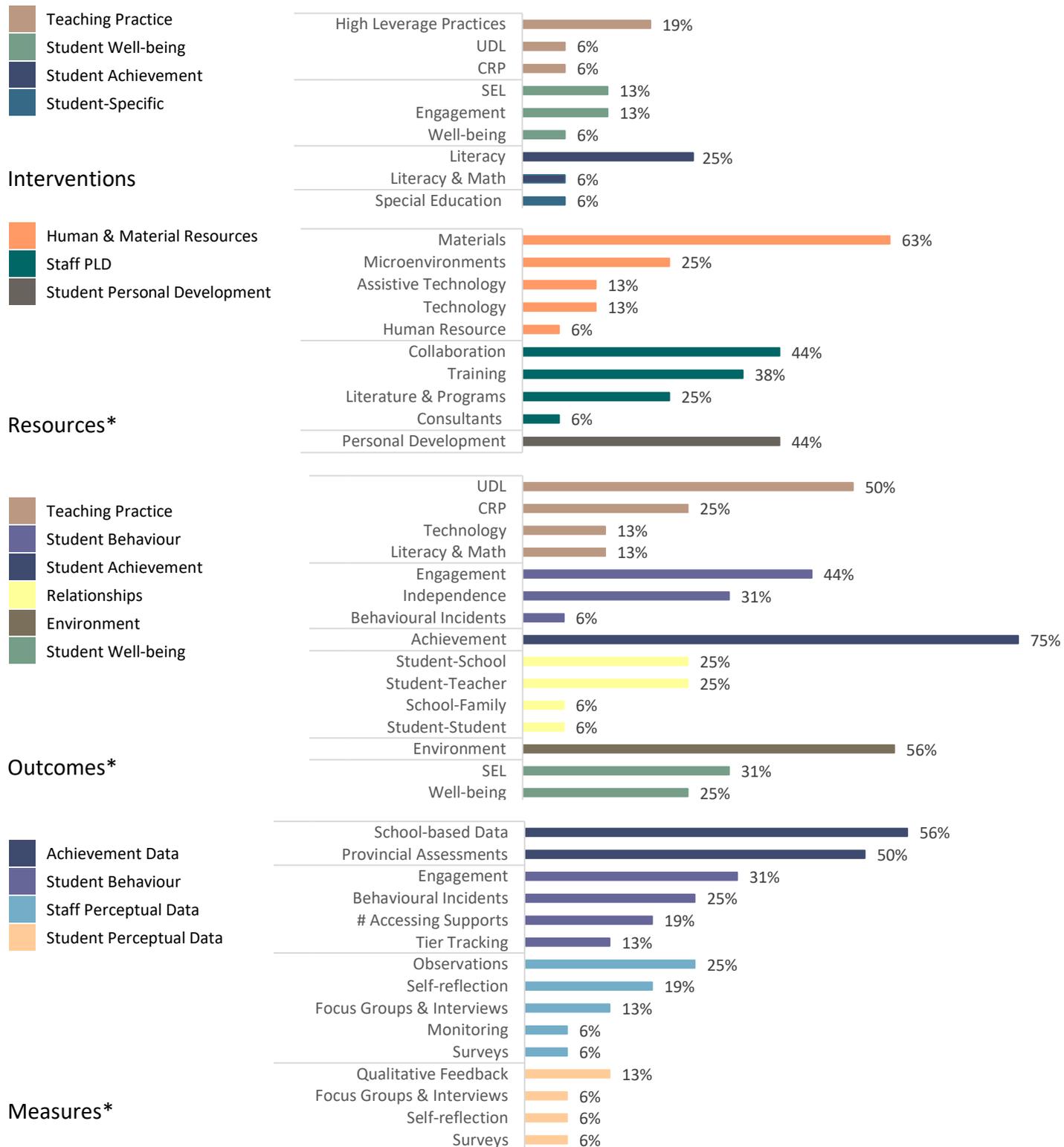
*The % of CSAP applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 40% of CSAP applications included 'materials' within Human & Material Resources as a resource.

Halifax Regional Centre for Education



*The % of HRCE applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 77% of HRCE applications included 'collaboration' within Staff PLD as a resource.

Strait Regional Centre for Education

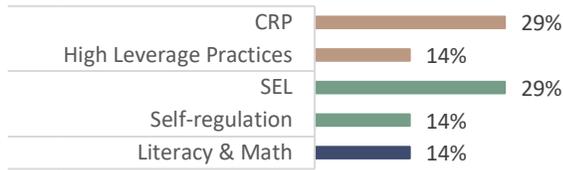


*The % of SRCE applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 63% of SRCE applications included 'materials' within Human & Material Resources as a resource.

South Shore Regional Centre for Education

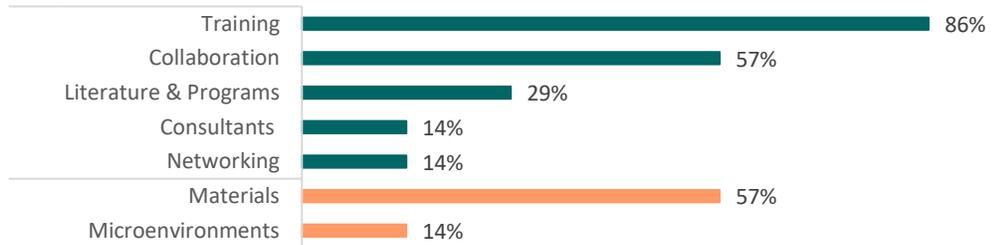
- Teaching Practice
- Student Well-being
- Student Achievement

Interventions



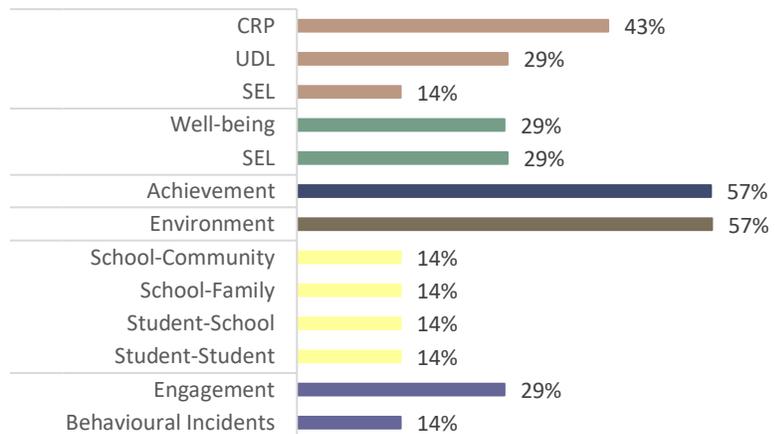
- Staff PLD
- Human & Material Resources

Resources*



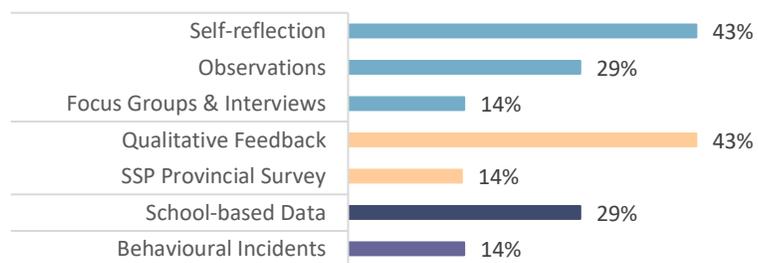
- Teaching Practice
- Student Well-being
- Student Achievement
- Environment
- Relationships
- Student Behaviour

Outcomes*



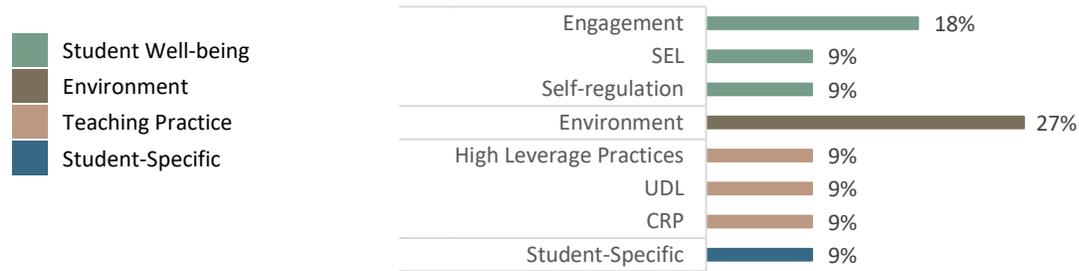
- Staff Perceptual Data
- Student Perceptual Data
- Achievement Data
- Student Behaviour

Measures*

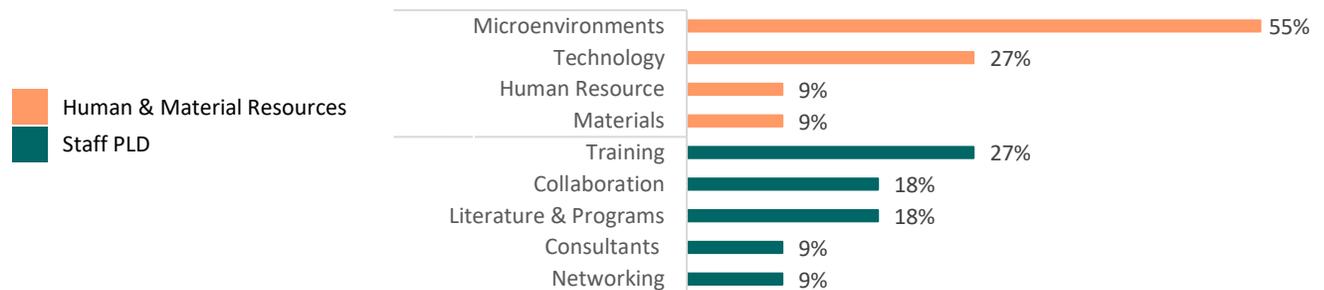


*The % of SSRCE applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 86% of SSRCE applications included 'training' within Staff PLD as a resource.

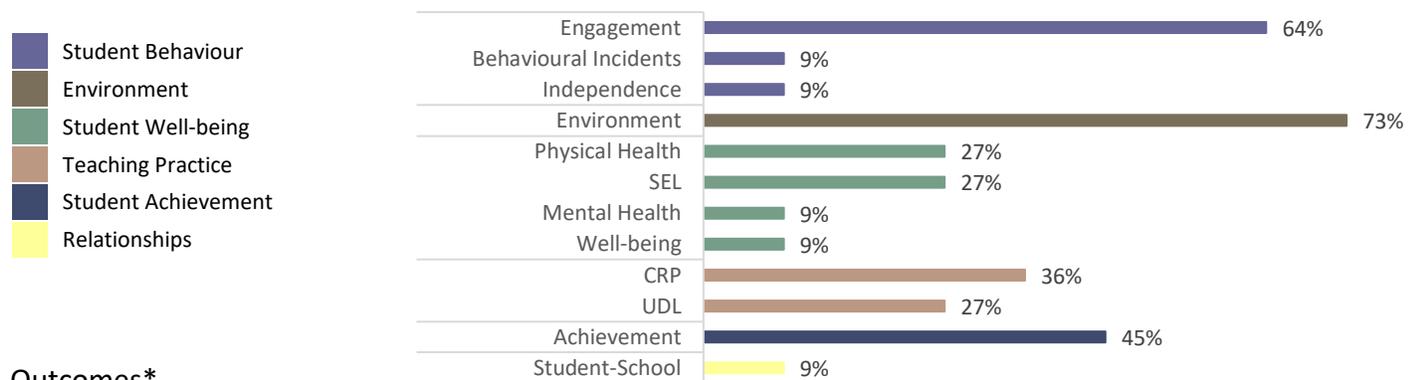
Tri-County Regional Centre for Education



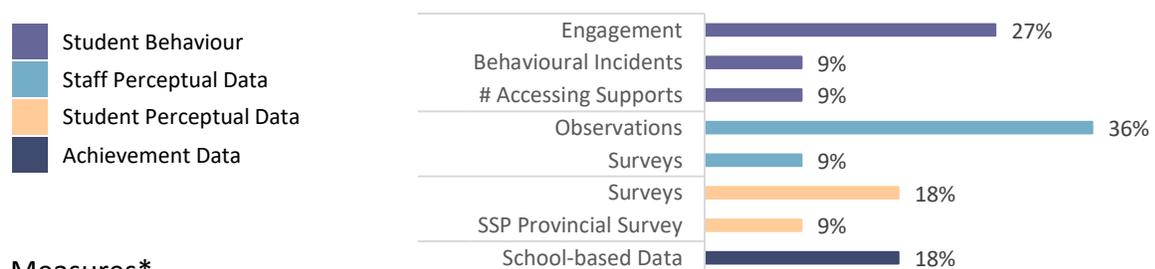
Interventions



Resources*



Outcomes*



Measures*

*The % of TCRCE applications that contained the category/resource/outcome/measure. For example, 55% of TCRCE applications included 'microenvironments' within Human & Material Resources as a resource.

Appendix B: Inclusion Index Items

A) SSP Student Success Surveys

Construct/Item	#
Identity Data	1-9
Relationships @ School	10 & 11
Student-teacher Relationship	12-16
Social Relationships	17 & 18
School Belonging	19-21
Bullying	27-30
Absences	31 & 32
Learning	
-Diversity	34-36
-DI/UDL	37-53
-Technology	54 & 55
Wellbeing	
-Food	56-60
-Physical Activity	61
French Language	62-67

B) Attendance Data

Measure
Days missed (Excused, Non-Excused)
Credit loss

C) Achievement Data

Provincial Achievement Data
Enrollment in Academic vs. Non-Academic

D) Inclusive Education & Student Services Data

Tier Tracking
- Assigned & unassigned instructional time
IPP Data
- Disaggregated
Rates of Formalized Adaptations
Referrals
- Student Planning Teams, Specialized Services etc.

Appendix C: Network Schools Design Option

Professional Learning Network Design Workshop

Danette Parsley, Andy Hargreaves, Dennis Shirley – 2020 ICSEI Marrakech

1. Shared Vision, Goals & Focus

The purpose and desired outcomes for collaboration. What members (adults) hope to gain from participation, and what they hope to achieve (with and for students) as a result.

Guiding Questions

- What is the compelling purpose for developing a PLN?
- What will be different when we are successful as a PLN?
- What specific impact do we want the network to have on ... students?
Adults? Others?
- What is our overall theory of action?

Sample Design Decisions

- Purpose: to promote engagement through collaboration and innovation for teachers and students in rural areas of the state to increase equity, learning, belonging and wellbeing.
- Sample goals for educators: reduce isolation; increase retention; strengthen belonging, connection, and agency; build professional capital; increase equity and rigor in classroom practice
- Sample goals for students: increase student connection across schools; improve student engagement, agency, achievement, and community attachment; increase understanding and ability to knowledgeably navigate a path through high school to postsecondary success in careers, college, and/or life
- Sample goals for the collective: to identify and circulate promising practices; establish a collective voice for rural education

Our PLN Design

2. Membership & Network Citizenship

Who participates in PLN activities, how they are selected to join, and what we expect of each other as network participants.

Guiding Questions

Start-up Phase

- What process will we use to recruit members (e.g., open application, invitation)? Who is responsible for recruitment?
- Prioritize high needs schools (e.g., needs improvement)?
- To what extent does level of school readiness and eagerness matter?
- What is our desired level of diversity (e.g., size, remoteness, students served)?
- What is the desired unit of membership (district, school, teams within schools, individuals)? What level (secondary, elementary)?
- What does it mean to fully participate in the network?
- What kind of scaffolding might members need to effectively collaborate with one another?
- Will there be formal norms of network participation?
- What is the ideal membership size to start? Intended growth rate?
- What mechanism, if any, will we use to formalize membership?

Ongoing Considerations

- How do we quickly and effectively orient/onboard new members?
- What is the right balance of autonomy and accountability?
- How do we plan and mitigate for individual and group turnover/attrition?
- How open should we be in recruitment (inclusive vs. exclusive)?
- How do we secure deep system commitment and individual teacher commitment?

Sample Design Decisions

- Select sites that have a common structure to participate; specifically, small K–12 districts with less than 500 students
- Use a combination of invitation and open application for recruitment
- All educators from member districts welcome to participate; site administrators prioritize teachers targeted for retention efforts (e.g., teachers in their 2nd and 3rd years in the district)
- Member schools/districts sign a memorandum of understanding to clarify mutual expectations and agreement to share data
- Provide a “how to guide” for the PLN that is porous, adaptable, organic; include short list of accountability expectations
- Site administrators are expected to fully participate and create the conditions for teachers to engage successfully in the network
- Choose key partners that can serve as regional ‘hubs’ to growth network within geographical areas of the state
- Target 50-75 active participants first year, with ~20% annual growth

Our PLN Design

3. Form of Collaborative Activities

The key ways network members communicate and collaborate with one another.

Guiding Questions

Start-up Phase

- What are the priority topics or activities around which the PLN should engage participants?
- What *in-person* opportunities for collaboration will network participants pursue? For what purpose? How many times a year?
- What *virtual* forms of collaboration will network participants engage in? For what purpose? How often?
- What are our non-negotiables for collaborative work?

Ongoing Considerations

- Prescriptive/common approaches for collaboration (e.g., curriculum planning, action research) vs. flexible/organic approaches to joint work
- Balance of whole group vs. small group learning and collaboration
- Amount of emphasis on internal vs. external expertise
- Time for building relationships/trust and getting to meaningful work
- In-person collaboration vs. time away from classrooms
- Identifying meaningful, productive ways to involve students
- Managing varied levels of readiness for deep collaboration
- Ensuring equity and voice in identifying focus for joint work

Sample Design Decisions

- Combine in-person meetings with a robust distance networking
- Convene network participants in person, two times per year for two days in central location
- Job-alike collaboration will be a key feature—educators who teach the same grade/subject or have similar roles. Facilitation, guidance, and support will be provided to help groups identify and organize around common problems of practice.
- Provide multiple virtual (synchronous and asynchronous) collaboration opportunities between in-person convenings (e.g., webinars, online discussions, job-alike project check-in meetings)

Our PLN Design

4. Collective Leadership

Structures, processes, and people for setting strategic direction and ensuring ongoing management and development of the PLN.

Guiding Questions

- What is the role of the network's leadership team (e.g., steering committee)?
- How will formal leadership roles be appointed and renewed?
- How will we communicate with and secure feedback from members?
- How tight and how loose should the steering be?
- How do we enable the network without micromanaging it?
- What is the role of the steering committee in monitoring member activity?
- What are the advocacy responsibilities of network leaders?
- How will decisions be made on behalf of the network?
- How might we provide numerous and varied opportunities for formal and informal leadership?
- How do we support leadership development throughout the PLN?
- How do we ensure inclusive and responsive leadership practices?

Sample Design Decisions

- The steering committee (SC) establishes a vision and sets direction, monitors progress and collects member feedback, plans and adjusts network activities, and ensures adequate resources
- The SC is representative of overall network membership; four-seat state delegations include both administrators and teachers
- The SC meets in person twice per year and virtually at least quarterly; each member contributes to at least one working group
- The network intermediary provides network infrastructure support (e.g., facilitation, logistics coordination, design, knowledge management, resource identification)
- External organizing partners and invited presenters "disturb" the network periodically by inserting ideas and examples from other network efforts

Our PLN Design

5. Resources & Sustainability Supports

The resources (human, financial, technological) necessary to support and sustain the work of the network.

Guiding Questions

- What types of resources will it take for members to participate? What resources might be available to support member participation?
- Is there a fee (e.g., membership dues)? If so, what is the unit of cost (e.g., by participating teacher, school, etc.)? What is the right balance of third party sponsorship (e.g., grants) and local “skin in the game”?
- How might we help members overcome or address resourcing issues?
- How can we attend to resource needs without getting tripped up by it?
- What external partners might we want to engage? What are the best uses we can make of external partners?
- What incentives will be sufficient to motivate participating schools/individuals? Any disincentives? How might we create a sense of privilege/benefit for being part of the network?
- What is the nature, extent, and timeline of the return we expect from this investment?
- How do we guard against any future funding vulnerabilities?
- How do we monitor and accommodate evolving technology tools, platforms, and preferences? Should use of specific tech tools be centralized or individualized?

Sample Design Decisions

- Face-to-face is critical for authentic engagement, presence and relationships
- Technology is important to making this work
- Explicit resource needs (district- and school-level support for time and connections; long-term sustainable funding identified)
- For the next two school years, we will use existing grant resources to support the PLN. Network leadership will pursue alternative funding sources to ensure the sustainability of the network after the grant ends
- Use continuing education credits to support and incentivize teacher participation
- Align in-service days to support network involvement

Our PLN Design

6. Continuous Improvement

Deliberate and iterative cycles of data and evidence use to strengthen the PLN over time

<p>Guiding Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will members report on the progress and challenges of the network?• How will we monitor and review the impact that the network is having?• Who is responsible for developing and executing an evaluation plan? What information and evidence do different stakeholders require and/or want?• What strategies will we use for communicating, obtaining input, and creating effective feedback loops?• How do we foster a culture of experimentation and continuous improvement? <p>Sample Design Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Steering committee creates and monitors implementation of a plan to document and communicate the work, successes, and lessons learned from network activities• The steering committee will form a working group focused on data collection and use• Use the steering committee to continually assess the utility and relevance of activities to make adjustments as needed	<p>Our PLN Design</p>
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7. Knowledge Circulation

How knowledge, tools, ideas, and strategies are circulated throughout the PLN and beyond.

<p>Guiding Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do we communicate our ideas and impact within the network? to our districts, organizations, and institutions? to others in the state and beyond?• What are the venues and formats through which we can share our work and learn from others? <p>Sample Design Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members make intentional efforts to connect with and communicate through other existing initiatives and organizations• Present at national and international events to connect with other PLNs, share learning, and contribute to larger rural network movement	<p>Our PLN Design</p>
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