

Inclusive Education Policy

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1. Introduction

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. Successful inclusive education requires

- safe, caring schools that welcome parents/guardians, families, and include the broader community as key partners in education. Parents/guardians are particularly important in identifying the strengths, interests, and challenges of their children and in working with teachers and others in the school to determine the best way to support all students.
- teaching and supports, based on evidence, that promote students' physical, social-emotional, and behavioural well-being and achievement.
- promoting the independence of every student and developing their resilience as they progress through school.
- a focus on equity by supporting success for students who are historically marginalized and racialized (African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students) or who come from other groups that have been traditionally under-represented and under-served, including, but not limited to, students with special needs and those struggling with poverty
- stimulating and accessible learning opportunities to keep every student engaged, challenged, and inspired.
- ensuring that every student sees themselves reflected throughout their schools, learning resources, and within their learning experiences.
- everyone, including partners in the departments of Health and Wellness, Community Services, and Justice, working together to support students' strengths and help address their challenges in a culturally and linguistically responsive, accepting, respectful, and supportive manner that honours all students' cultural identities and values their experiences and world views.

2. Policy Statement

The *Inclusive Education Policy* reflects the importance of the well-being of all students and the impact it has on their achievements.

Inclusive schools are equitable, and culturally, linguistically, and socially responsive. They have structures, processes, and practices that are student-centred, appropriate, and collaborative.

3. Policy Objective

The *Inclusive Education Policy* objective is to ensure every student has access to an equitable and high-quality education that is culturally and linguistically responsive, accepting, and respectful in supporting and valuing their learning and diverse abilities. To meet this objective, the policy provides clear, consistent direction with respect to inclusive education and equitable practices in public schools.

This policy will be supported by policies, guidelines, and procedures to assist in its implementation.

The *Inclusive Education Policy* provides a framework which will apply to all other policies, procedures, strategies, and initiatives.

4. Guiding Principles

The guiding principles provide an overview of what education will look like when inclusive education practices are working well in classrooms and schools. They describe what all partners in education will achieve.

- 4.1 Every student can learn with enough time, practice and equitable and responsive teaching.
- 4.2 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.
- 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.
- 4.4 Inclusive education values, draws upon, and includes student voices and choices to assist students in achieving their goals.
- 4.5 Every student deserves to belong (affirmed, validated, and nurtured),¹ be safe, and feel welcomed in all aspects of their daily experience.
- 4.6 Inclusive education is a commitment to honour and respect each student's cultural and linguistic identities and knowledge systems.
- 4.7 Inclusive education practices use evidence of students' strengths and challenges to determine a system of supports and monitor the effectiveness of those supports.
- 4.8 All partners are committed and empowered to work collectively to identify and eliminate barriers that interfere with students' well-being and achievement.

1 **validate:** the intentional legitimization of the home culture and language of the student.

affirm: the purposeful effort to reverse the negative stereotypes, images, and representations of marginalized cultures and languages.

nurture: to recognize and foster all aspects of students' being and knowing, including the spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and environmental; to honour all students and treat them with care, respect, and dignity.

5. Directives

- 5.1 As part of the Student Success Planning process, every school will use evidence, including disaggregated data, to monitor and evaluate how students are doing and will respond with appropriate, timely supports. These identified supports will be supported by the Teaching Support Team at each school.

The primary role of the Teaching Support Team is to strengthen the school's capacity to support student well-being and achievement by assisting teachers in developing strategies to meet the needs of their students. The team will focus on proactively building capacity among teaching staff, as well as supporting changes in teaching practices to meet students' needs and on identifying other needed supports as required.

- 5.2 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.

- 5.3 Learning support teachers are experienced and skilled teachers who provide direct, collaborative support to classroom teachers and students. Examples include learning centre and resource teachers, mathematics mentors and coaches, and literacy specialists. Learning support teachers support classroom teachers by developing and implementing strategies to promote students' well-being and achievement. They may also work directly with individual or small groups of students.

Learning support teachers:
a broad category of experienced and skilled teachers who provide direct, collaborative support to classroom teachers and students. They may be any teacher or specialist that does not have a class assigned to them.

- 5.4 Every school will establish a Teaching Support Team that will meet frequently to address immediate issues facing teachers and quickly identify resources, people, and strategies that can help those teachers more effectively support their students. The team, in collaboration with the classroom teacher, will monitor and evaluate the success of these supports and interventions. Principals or vice principals will lead the teams, which will also include learning support teachers. Teachers will attend if discussions involve their classroom, students, or teaching practices.

Regional centres for education (RCEs) and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) support staff, such as, but not limited to, school psychologists, speech language pathologists, African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw support staff, culturally responsive and SchoolsPlus teams, consultants, coordinators, and directors provide additional supports to Teaching Support Teams, teachers, students, and families. These professionals work with Teaching Support Teams to support teachers in improving their teaching practices and to provide individual supports to the students that need them.

- 5.5 Schools will establish Student Planning Teams, as needed, to support the identified learning strengths and challenges and/or ongoing well-being and achievement of individual students.

Student Planning Teams will work to support the identified well-being and achievement of individual students. The student (if appropriate) and the parents/guardians are valued members of their Student Planning Team and will be supported and involved in decisions around additional programming and/or supports for the student. Please see Special Education Policy (under review) and related guidelines for more details.

- 5.6 The Teaching Support Team and Student Planning Teams will ensure that plans are flexible in terms of how and where programming and supports are delivered to best support well-being and achievement. Teams will be created in ways that make the most sense within the school.

- 5.7 Teaching practices as outlined in the *Public School Program (PSP)*, including culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, are foundational and necessary to support students, and therefore, will be implemented in every school and every classroom.

- 5.8 Every school will support student well-being and achievement through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching:

teaching practices that connect students' social, cultural, family, and linguistic backgrounds to what they are learning and their sense of belonging.

MTSS is a framework that ensures effective instruction, assessment, and support for all students with a focus on well-being and achievement. Please see the Multi-Tiered System of Supports document for additional detail.

- 5.9 Every employee will be accountable for adherence to the principles of inclusive education.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities provide specific direction to partners and individuals working in Nova Scotia's public education system with respect to the implementation of this policy and related guidelines.

Students

- attend school and actively engage in their learning.
- actively participate by communicating their preferred ways of learning, strengths, challenges, and interests.
- actively work with teachers and other staff to communicate when they need help or support(s), or if there are barriers to their learning.

- promote student voice and choice by actively taking part in decisions with respect to their own learning and act as leaders within the school community.
- take part in Student Planning Teams, when appropriate.

Parents/Guardians and Families

- engage in and support their child's learning.
- support their child in attending school.
- maintain ongoing, regular contact with teachers about their child's well-being, including their strengths, challenges, and interests.
- will let the school staff know how they would like to be included in the discussion around their child's well-being and achievement.
- work with the teacher and the principal to seek clarification and collaborate on solutions when questions arise with respect to their child's education and to identify and eliminate barriers to their child's learning.
- promote and value student voice and choice and providing opportunities for them to speak to their strengths and challenges.
- act as active members of their child's Student Planning Team.

Employees of the Public Education System

- build meaningful relationships with students, parents/guardians, families, and other members of the school community to collectively support students' well-being and achievement.
- support the well-being and achievement of every student.
- act collectively to name, eliminate, and prevent systemic inequities and barriers within the classroom, schools, region, and system.
- create and support positive, accessible, and equitable learning environments where students feel welcome, safe, and can access and reach their academic potential.
- use evidence-informed strategies, resources, and/or collaborative practices that provide culturally and linguistically responsive and engaging instruction and support for students.
- recognize (affirm and validate) the variability of learning needs, social-emotional needs, and cultural backgrounds of the entire student population and the school community.
- recognize the strengths that greater diversity brings to every aspect of education, including but not limited to race, culture, disability, neurodiversity¹, heritage, linguistic background(s), community cultural knowledge, beliefs, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- work to understand and support the individual abilities, identities, and unique strengths and challenges of every student.
- monitor student progress frequently and provide timely interventions as required.
- ensure decisions are made and resources are allocated, aligned with this policy.

1 **neurodiversity:** variations in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood, and other neurocognitive functions.

Teachers

- value student voice and choice and provide opportunities for them to speak to their strengths, challenges, and preferred ways of learning.
- work with parents/guardians to help them feel welcome in the school community and to empower them as essential decision-makers regarding programming and/or supports for their child, including, but not limited to, participating on Student Planning Teams.
- work with parents/guardians to understand their preferred ways of working with teachers, principals, and other staff, and make efforts to accommodate it.
- promote students' well-being and achievement in collaboration with other staff.
- work collectively with school-based and regional support staff, as appropriate, to deliver instruction and interventions to their students.
- are accountable for adherence to the principles of inclusive education.
- adhere to the principles of the teaching standards.
- communicate regularly with students, parents/guardians, and other teachers and school staff with respect to student progress.
- work with the Teaching Support Team to meet the strengths and challenges of the students in their classrooms.
- serve as members of the Student Planning Teams for their students; work with the Student Planning Team through the Program Planning Process as needed, and be responsive to students and parents/guardians.
- assess and evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional strategies.

Learning Support Teachers

- value student voice and choice and provide opportunities for them to speak to their strengths, challenges, and preferred ways of learning.
- work with parents/guardians to help them feel welcome in the school community and to empower them as essential decisionmakers regarding programming and/or supports for their child, including, but not limited to, participating on Student Planning Teams.
- work with parents/guardians to understand their preferred ways of working with teachers, principals, and other staff, and to accommodate it, as much as possible.
- provide direct support to classroom teachers to meet the identified needs of their students.
- promote students' well-being and achievement by developing and implementing strategies with teachers and other staff.
- provide specific interventions and support(s), primarily in classrooms or common learning environments, to individual students or small groups of students who may require additional supplemental and intensive interventions.
- work collectively with school-based and regional support staff, as appropriate, to support teachers in the delivery of instruction, assessment, and interventions to students.
- maintain regular communication with students, parents/guardians, and other teachers and school staff with respect to students' progress.

- are accountable for adherence to the principles of inclusive education.
- work with the Teaching Support Team to meet the needs of teachers and students.
- work with Student Planning Teams through the Program Planning Process for individual students as needed.
- assess and evaluate the effectiveness of their practices.

School Administrators (Principals and Vice Principals)

- value student voice and choice and provide opportunities for them to speak to their strengths, challenges, and preferred ways of learning.
- work with parents/guardians to help them feel welcome in the school community and to empower them as essential decision-makers regarding programming and/or supports for their child, including, but not limited to, participating on Student Planning Teams.
- work with parents/guardians to understand their preferred ways of working with teachers, principals, and other staff, and to accommodate it, as much as possible.
- work with teachers to support effective instructional strategies as evidenced by student growth socially, emotionally, and academically.
- ensure that teachers are following appropriate processes, as described in this policy and accompanying guidelines.
- ensure teachers and school staff have access to information and opportunities for professional learning that aligns with teachers' assessments of students' learning strengths and challenges.
- lead the Student Success Planning process in schools to gather data and set goals to improve student well-being and achievement.
- establish and lead the Teaching Support Team for their school.
- ensure that Student Planning Teams are put in place when required to initiate the Program Planning Process.
- are accountable for adherence to the principles of inclusive education.
- communicate this policy to students, staff, parents/guardians, and families.
- monitor and evaluate the implementation of this policy in their school.

Teaching Support Teams

- work with individual teachers to identify opportunities where additional interventions, professional learning, and/or resources may be needed to support student well-being and achievement.
- encourage and enhance collaboration among peers.
- strengthen the capacity to support student well-being and achievement by assisting teachers in developing strategies to meet the core, supplementary, and intensive needs of their students.
- create cultures where teachers feel comfortable seeking advice from their peers and from specialists on effective teaching practices to meet the needs of their students.
- identify opportunities, strategies, and resources to support all school staff in meeting the needs of students.

- work with teachers to determine when Student Planning Teams need to be formed to better support the strengths and challenges of individual students.
- monitor and evaluate the success of the supports and interventions and adjust as needed.

Student Planning Teams

- value student voice and choice and provide opportunities for them to speak to their strengths, challenges, and preferred ways of learning.
- work with parents/guardians to help them feel welcome in the school community and to empower them as essential decision-makers regarding programming and/or supports for their child.
- work with parents/guardians to understand their preferred ways of working with teachers, principals, and other staff, and to accommodate it, as much as possible.
- collaborate on decisions regarding instruction, interventions, and evaluation needed to best support individual students through the Program Planning Process, as well as the support(s) needed to assist the student's teachers in meeting the student's strengths and challenges.
- monitor and evaluate the success of the supports and interventions designed for individual students and adjust them as needed.

Regional Centres for Education and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial

- ensure that all students learn and grow socially, emotionally, and academically over time.
- work with partners in the departments of Health and Wellness, Community Services, and Justice to support students' strengths and help address their challenges.
- designate the responsibility for inclusive education at the Director level or higher.
- allocate appropriate resources to support the delivery of inclusive education in their schools in accordance with the *PSP*.
- provide principals and school staff with information and access to opportunities for professional development on inclusive education.
- lead the system improvement planning process to gather evidence and set goals to improve student well-being and achievement.
- guide the implementation of this policy and support interventions and strategies designed to improve student well-being and achievement.
- work with principals to ensure that each school establishes a Teaching Support Team and Student Planning Teams as needed.
- ensure every employee is accountable for adherence to the principles of inclusive education.
- communicate this policy to schools, parents/guardians, and school communities.
- monitor and evaluate the implementation of this policy in schools and ensure that the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy and related guidelines in their schools is reviewed regularly.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

- collaborate with RCEs/CSAP and stakeholders to identify, provide, and maintain supports for instruction and interventions to ensure that every student is able to access educational programming.
- provide RCEs/CSAP with information and access to opportunities for professional development to support inclusive education.
- work with external partners that have a mandate to advocate for students, that provide supports to students, and/or that work with students and families from traditionally marginalized backgrounds.
- ensure decisions are made and resources are allocated and used, aligned with this policy.
- develop guidelines and other supporting materials for effective implementation of this policy.
- ensure every employee is accountable for adherence to the principles of inclusive education.
- communicate this policy clearly and broadly.
- monitor and update this policy and any supporting guidelines as required.
- evaluate the implementation of this policy.

7. Monitoring

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development staff are responsible for reviewing this policy and its implementation in consultation with RCEs/CSAP, schools, partners, and external advisors when appropriate.

8. Application

This policy applies to all P–12 students and employees of the Nova Scotia public education system.



Special Thanks

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- Black Educators Association
- Council to Improve Classroom Conditions
- Council on African Canadian Education (CACE)
- Council on Mi'kmaq Education (CME)
- Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP)
- Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute
- Education Consultative Forum (ECF)
- Education Program Committee (EPC)
- Education Standard Development Committee—Accessibility Directorate
- Mi'kmaw and Student Services Coordinators and Consultants
- Parents
- Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Provincial Lead Team
- Nova Scotia Teachers Union
- Principals' Forum
- Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE)
- Provincial Lead Team: Inclusive Education Policy
- Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia (PSAANS)
- Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding, and Human Rights (RCH) Coordinators
- Regional Assessment Coordinators
- Regional Centres for Education
- School Psychologists, Speech Language Pathologists, and Resource/Learning Centre Teachers
- Special Education Programs and Services (SEPS) Committee
- School Advisory Councils (SACs)
- Student Success Planning Coordinators
- Teachers