

Saskatchewan Rivers School Division No. 119

Student Support Services Review

REPORT

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April 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the cooperation and assistance received in conducting the Student Support Services review for the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division.

The senior administration played an integral role in conceptualizing the study. We would like to thank the Director of Education, Robert Bratvold, Superintendent of Schools, Donna Baergen, and Superintendent of Schools, John Schultz. A thank you is extended to the students, school-based administrators, senior administration, parents, teachers, educational support teachers, educational associates and student support services staff and consultants for taking time to participate in the study by completing surveys and meeting in focus group sessions.

A special thank you is extended Betty Rohr, Cecile Laprairie, Kim and Anne for their assistance in the review. Thanks to Norm Dray, SELU Associate Director, for his ongoing support.

Finally, we want to thank the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division for undertaking this study. It is our hope that the report will facilitate discussion on the student support services review so that the students can be the beneficiary of system policy and practices.

To all a sincere thank-you.

Respectfully submitted,

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Saskatchewan Rivers School Division is one of the larger school divisions in the province. The division has both rural and urban schools that serve approximately 9000 students in 31 schools. The division covers a vast geographical area as a result of amalgamation and is committed to offering equitable opportunities for education. In November 2011 the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division contracted the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit to conduct a review of the division's Student Support Services.

The goal of the project was to review the student support services programming to determine the effectiveness and equity of student support services provided. There were four main project objectives outlined that include:

1. To determine the perceived effectiveness of student services programs.
2. To determine the perceived equity of student services programs.
3. To determine (as much as possible) the effectiveness of current practices.
4. To conduct a review of promising practices.

A literature review was conducted that examined the historical context of inclusion as situated within Canada and in specific Saskatchewan. A better understanding of past and present practices, foundational principles and the underlying policies guided the discussion. By following this framework a set of best practices for the most effective delivery of inclusive education for schools are articulated.

To address the diverse needs of the student population Saskatchewan Rivers School Division's Student Support Services provides a range of services that include inclusion with supports, career and personal counseling, and special programming like STAR, Alternate Education, Life Skills classes, Developmental Education, Won Ska Cultural School, Learners With Purpose and Eagles Nest. To help contextualize the review information on Student Support Services programs and initiatives, including the site visits that were conducted by the consultants, are presented.

As for data collection, there were two main methods: surveys and focus groups. Two surveys, one for the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division staff and the other for students were constructed. The surveys represent parallel forms with similar items and dimensions for purposes of comparative analysis. A series of nine focus groups were held at the SRSD divisional offices. Three double-layer design focus groups were held with parents and for the remaining focus groups that included principals, educational associates, educational support teachers, classroom teachers, superintendents, and students a more traditional single layer design was employed.

Finally, methodological triangulation was used to ensure there was both trustworthiness and validity to the findings. Data from the surveys and focus group interviews were cross-checked to ensure a more balanced and detailed picture of the findings emerged. Based on the findings a series of recommendations were made. The recommendations are as follows:

1. Create collaborative professional development and scheduled networking (i.e. in-school planning) opportunities between teachers, educational support teachers, teachers associates and Student Support Services personnel so as to better equip local schools with the needed capacity to deliver equitable and effective inclusive education.
2. To facilitate recommendation number 1, SRSD could use technology where face-to-face meetings are not viable due to distance for purposes of planning, problem solving and collaborating.
3. Continue to ensure the allocation of educational associates and educational support teachers in schools is based on the needs of the school.
4. Ensure the substitution policy for educational associates does not disadvantage the classroom teacher or students with needs, intensive or otherwise.
5. There is the need for the development of an updated parent handbook, electronic document or web-based resource that parents can use to access information and better advocate for their child.

6. The Saskatchewan Rivers School Division should change its rural access policy regarding special programs offered in Prince Albert so that it is not based on historical amalgamation boundaries. Rather a policy needs to be established that is based on geographical radius to provide a more equitable form of service delivery.
7. For those rural schools which do not have access to special programs, a needs-based model should continue to be implemented, delivered and supported for all students. Further, for those students whose needs cannot be reasonably accommodated in the regular classroom then the provision of an accessible special program should be provided so as to ensure equitable service delivery for rural non-access schools.
8. There is a Ministry requirement for outside agency referral for intensive needs designation. It is recommended that the division explore multiple ways to meet the requirement for outside agency referral as well as lobby the Ministry of Education for change to the policy requiring outside agency referral.
9. The division should review the placement process for STAR and partner with the health region to offer a special program for students with severe emotional behavioural disorders and co-morbid mental health needs. Instead of continuing the current configuration of divisional resources allocated to STAR the new partnership will see a special program run in conjunction with the health region to serve only those students with severe emotional behavioural disorders and co-morbid mental health needs.

1 CHAPTER ONE

STUDY PROCESS AND DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

The Saskatchewan Rivers School Division (SRSD) is a restructured school division comprised of several legacy jurisdictions. There was a desire by the Board of Education to examine the student services practices within the division. The division has both rural and urban schools that serve approximately 9000 students in 31 schools. The division covers a large geographical area but is committed to offering equitable opportunities for education. In November 2011 the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division contracted the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU) to conduct a review of its Student Support Services.

PROJECT GOAL

The goal of the project was to review the Student Support Services programming to determine the effectiveness and equity of Student Support Services provided.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

There were four main project objectives outlined that include:

1. To determine the perceived effectiveness of student services programs.
2. To determine the perceived equity of student services programs.
3. To determine (as much as possible) the effectiveness of current practices.
4. To conduct a review of promising practices.

STUDY DESIGN AND PROCESS

In November of 2011, the SRSD contracted SELU to conduct a study entitled, "Saskatchewan Rivers School Division Student Support Services Review". David Mykota and Cliff Chutskoff took on the role as lead consultants for the project. The

project school division leader was Robert Bratvold, Director of Education for SRSD. The consultants were to develop focus group interview questionnaires and student and staff survey questionnaires and submit them to the Director of Education for approval. Consultation took place between the consultants and Director of Education, Robert Bratvold and the Superintendent of Schools responsible for student services, Donna Baergen, as well as other senior administrators, regarding the construction of the surveys and focus group interview questionnaires. A significant amount of time was taken to develop the survey items so as to satisfy the needs of the project. The survey forms and semi-structured focus group interview questions developed were then vetted through the Director of Education until they were acceptable for use in the study. In February, guidelines for administering the surveys were developed with the Director of Education providing a letter of introduction to the principals. Procedures relating to administration of the survey on-line were provided to the SRSD Director of Education and to the Superintendent of Schools.

A schedule for the completion of the staff and online surveys was developed as well as a schedule for the nine focus groups to be held at the SRSD divisional offices. Three double-layer design focus groups were held with parents and for the remaining focus groups that included principals, educational associates, educational support teachers, classroom teachers, superintendents, and students a more traditional single layer design was employed. A schedule for site visits of the special programs offered by SRSD in Prince Albert was developed for the consultants. Data collection took place on the following dates:

1. Staff and student surveys administered online from February 8-17, 2012;
2. Site visits February 13, 2012; and
3. Focus group interviews February 13-16, 2012.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

All staff (administrators, teachers and educational associates) employed by the SRSD were surveyed and all students' grades 6-12 completed the student survey. In interpreting the survey data response rates are considered the standard by which results

can be deemed reliable. The response rate (i.e. number completed/total population) for the staff survey was 86 % (674/783) and for the students 66% (2951/4501). Based on the response rates, especially the high rates for staff, it is reasonable to assume the results are reliable.

The staff and student data were analyzed by type of school (i.e. rural elementary vs urban elementary, rural high school vs urban high school, and rural access vs rural non-access). For purposes of this report the terms “rural access schools” and “rural non-access schools” are used. Rural access schools are those who have access to Student Support Services programming in Prince Albert and include: Birch Hills School, Kinistino School, Meath Park School, Christopher Lake School, East Central School, Osborne School, Red Wing School, Spruce Home School, West Central School and Wild Rose School. Rural non-access schools do not have access to the Student Support Services programming in Prince Albert and included: Canwood Community School, Debden School, St. Louis Community School, W.P. Sandin School, Shellbrook Elementary School, T.D. Michel Community School, and Big River Community High School. As well, for purposes of the survey elementary students were those in grades 6-8 and high school students were those in grades 9-12.

Survey data were collected and analyzed by computer and the results were presented in the form of frequencies and percentages for each item and category. Survey participants were asked to respond to a number of statements about their Student Support Services. A five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘1’ for strongly disagree to ‘5’ for strongly agree was used as response categories. In addition, the scales employed a ‘don’t know’ rating for respondents who did not feel they knew enough to comment on that particular item.

The surveys contained parallel items, where possible, for different respondent groups. This process allowed for a comparison of the major dimensions among the various respondent groups by school type. In addition, the survey provided an open response category. To help better understand the significant differences reported dimensional item tables were constructed with the results reported appearing as

percentage of agreement and disagreement with each statement. An item with a score of 85/15 would indicate that 85% of the respondents agreed with the statement and 15% disagreed. In some cases, the percentages did not add up to 100% because a few respondents may not have responded to the statement or they may have rated it as “don’t know.”

The means for the various respondent groups are provided as based on the major dimensions. The means range from 1.0 to 5.0. A mean of 1.0 indicates strong disagreement and a mean of 5.0 indicates strong agreement. Means above 3.0 imply agreement with that statement. T-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used to test levels of significance among respondent groups by item and mean with a .05 level of significance used. For purposes of interpretation the means and significant items are reported by dimension and by type of school for both staff and student surveys.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This chapter provided the background and the terms of reference for the study. The chapter also outlined the research methodology and processes for gathering and reporting the data. Chapter two presents a literature review on inclusive practices. Chapter three presents information on Student Support Services programs and initiatives, including the site visits that were conducted by the consultants. Chapter four presents the results from the staff and student surveys. Chapter five presents the focus group results. The final chapter presents the findings and makes recommendations for future policy action.

2 CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on the movement towards inclusive education in schools. The review will examine the historical context of inclusion internationally, as situated within Canada, and in specific Saskatchewan. By understanding the history of inclusive education we will better be able to understand why we provide inclusive education the way we do today. An appreciative inquiry into past and present practices, foundational principles and the underlying policies will guide the discussion. By following this framework a set of best practices for the most effective delivery of inclusive practices for schools are articulated.

PRIOR TO 1950

The education of individuals with disabilities during the first half of the twentieth century was mainly directed to those with sensory impairments (i.e. deaf or blind) or intellectual impairments. During this period institutions were established away from the mainstream of society and looked after, to a greater degree, the physical care of those with identifiable disabilities as opposed to their educational needs. In many instances institutions were established at a distance from the major urban centers to warehouse the needs of those “less fortunate”. This period of time is often referred to one of segregation and institutionalization and in fact the legacy of this form of service delivery was the guiding practice in Canada and its provinces, including Saskatchewan, until educational reform began to take place.

With provincial governments continuing to shirk responsibility even for regular educational development, provisions for students with disabilities were left largely to families, to the benefaction of the churches, or to provincial social welfare systems. Even though there were reformers who advocated for the inclusion of students with identifiable exceptionalities there continued to be considerable pressure to keep special needs children out of regular classes. As a result, special classes and schools became more common (Chaves, 1977). Consequently, the public system continued to insist that it was

unequipped to deal with children with identifiable needs and advocated for congregating low incidence students. As a result there were more institutions established for children who were severely intellectually and physically disabled.

Despite the fact that an increasing number of special needs students were being served by the public school system, special classes continued and in some instances became dumping grounds (Gearhart, Weishahn, & Gearhart, 1988) while at other times a vehicle for segregation, and in some geographic areas a way of doing something for culturally different (i.e. First Nation) children.

1950-1960

Students with learning disabilities and/or behavioural problems were not identified or received placements at the beginning of the decade. However, there was a growing trend by school boards to reexamine the practice of institutionalization and segregation that had occurred in the previous decade. This movement towards a more equitable system of service delivery was largely the result of the growing number of parent and professional advocacy organizations. With increasing pressure being put on federal and provincial governments, schools were forced to reexamine their policies. As a result, the growing advocacy movement towards the mainstreaming of students with disabilities resulted in the creation of a number of organizations at the provincial and national levels. For example, the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded (Canadian Association for Community Living), Canadian Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (established during 50's-60's) and the Canadian Branch of the Council for Exceptional Children were established during this time.

Because of the growing dissatisfaction with the dumping ground approach to special education and due to the increased pressure of the advocacy movement a reexamination of assessment and placement policies and practices began to take place. This resulted in the advent of the testing movement that was concerned with the labeling and categorization of individuals with exceptionalities for purposes of placement. The effects of this movement were long lasting and have tended to dominate special education practices for a number of years. Instead of assessment for purposes of understanding

individual learning needs, assessment was conducted for purposes of labeling and subsequently program placement, a trend that still exists to greater or lesser extent in some jurisdictions in Canada today. Interestingly, Saskatchewan remains one of the more enlightened provinces with its movement towards a needs-based assessment model of service delivery (Ministry of Education, 2011).

1970's

The 1970's witnessed a shift towards the least restrictive environment. At this time, it was argued students with special needs should receive their education in the most appropriate environment, which entails different degrees of integration for different students at different times and in different circumstances. Based on the principle of the least restrictive environment it was advocated by Deno (1970) and others that a Cascade Model of service delivery be developed which would see a continuum of placements and programs be offered.

The movement towards integration was the result of a growing backlash against segregated special classes. Stereotypes were beginning to occur and the special placement options usually did not result in students being reintegrated into the regular classroom. Labeling practices were now considered, or at least began to be viewed as discriminatory giving rise to inappropriate stereotypes. Interestingly, although there was support for the least restrictive environment and normalization among educators it was also argued by some that the least restrictive environment could also be interpreted as meaning a special class with specialized instruction.

With growing pressure being mounted by the advocacy groups that had been established in the previous decade, legislative changes began to take place. Foremost was the passing in the United States of Public Law 94-142. Although this was American legislation it had far reaching impact on educational provisions for children with exceptional learning needs in Canada and led to the main themes of normalization and deinstitutionalization. With the passing of Public Law 94-142, the Education of all Handicapped Children Act, it was now legislated and mandated that public funding be provided for students with disabilities in the United States. Embodied within this

legislation are key concepts that have been variously considered and incorporated into provincial legislation across Canada and that can be seen as the benchmarks for special education reform in Canada. These included: zero reject, non-discriminatory evaluation, appropriate individualized education, least restrictive environment, procedural due process and parental participation.

1980's

The general move towards the integration of exceptional students began to focus on the concept of mainstreaming, a term used to describe the trend of integrating the mildly handicapped as much as possible into the regular classroom (Robichaud, & Enns, 1980). This decade saw growing pressure on provincial and territorial governments to give serious attention to the inevitability of mainstreaming special needs students into the regular classroom. It was also a decade of considerable confusion because, despite widespread support for mainstreaming, there was limited means and precedents to suggest the most effective method for its implementation.

Although there were pressures for mainstreaming there was still a number of jurisdictions that maintained categorical services for students and as such there still existed an assessment for purposes of placement movement. At the same time, schools were being increasingly pressured by their communities and by society in general, to succeed in the mainstreaming process. The initiative to merge regular education and special education, thereby eliminating pull out services was known as the regular education initiative (Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Will, 1986). Consequently, school districts had begun to serve more students with exceptional needs in the classroom, but they were not supplying teachers with the knowledge, training and experience needed to deal appropriately with the unique educational challenges that each exceptional child presented (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011).

1990's

During this period concepts relating to inclusive practices such as professional school-based teaming and collaborative consultation came to dominate the landscape. In

essence, the new thinking was based on the full realization of normalization and zero-reject principles. The philosophical basis for inclusive education, then, is a belief that all students should be included within the regular classroom, and that any removal of a student to other educational settings must be justified on the basis of individual learning needs and not categorical definitions. What we see then are schools in transition.

One of the overriding objectives of inclusion is to increase the social competence of students with exceptionalities and to foster positive peer and teacher relationships. Proponents argue that to realize this objective requires the merger of general and special education into a more unified and inclusive system of schooling in which separate programs for students with exceptionalities are significantly reduced or eliminated (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989).

In order for inclusion to be implemented it was argued that there needs to be individual and collective commitment among educational professionals, families, and the community toward “ownership” of all students with exceptionalities. Features of inclusive classrooms were found to include and continue to include: heterogeneous grouping; the provision of multi agency support; a personalized approach to educating students; authentic and performance assessment practices; adapted strategies including multi modal presentations, computer based instruction, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, team teaching, team problem solving and decision making.

THE SASKATCHEWAN CONTEXT

Prior to 1960 the provision of education to students with disabilities by Boards of Education in Saskatchewan was mainly done on a voluntary basis. With mandatory legislation being passed by the provincial government in 1971 all boards were required to provide free and appropriate education to all students regardless of their perceived disability (Sanche & Dahl, 2007). Consequently, special classrooms and developmental centers fell under the mandate of the province’s various Boards of Education. Unfortunately, not all divisions had the resources or the appropriately trained personal to ensure a seamless transition would occur. Nevertheless, when it was mandated that institutionalization be stopped over 20 developmental centers for preschool intervention

services for those students now described as having intensive needs were established by the Boards of Education in the province (Sanche & Dahl, 2007). Along with this initiative was the development of home-based intervention services for those children with intensive needs. This became known as the Early Childhood Intervention Project, which has given rise to what is now known as the Early Childhood Intervention Program.

With mainstreaming gaining popularity in Saskatchewan a shared services model was developed and implemented so that smaller boards could partner and receive the services of educational psychologists and the speech language pathologists, for example. At this time, a diagnostic model of service delivery existed with a deficit based approach predominating educational services (Haines, Boyczuk, Green, Lendzyk, & Billay, 2000). In schools, the resource teacher provided pullout services to those students identified as having special needs. During the 1990's a shift in funding approaches for students with special needs occurred. In specific, legislation saw the retention of Designated Disabled Program Funding, for those with low incidence exceptionalities and saw the addition of Special Needs Program funding for those with behavioural disorders and learning disabilities and shortly thereafter the establishment of Targeted Behavioural Programming (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1989). However, as more parents demanded the integration of their child in the regular classroom, resource teachers were called upon to provide services to students with learning disabilities, behavioural disorders, intellectual disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, and attention-deficit disorder to name just a few.

Consequently, the 1990's were also a time of curriculum reform and it was in 1992 that the implementation of the adaptive dimension occurred (Haines et al., 2000). Often adaptive education was subject to inaccurate characterizations. In light of this it is important to make several distinctions. Although adaptive education involved individualized planning for each student, it was not in opposition to the group instruction format. The suggested adaptive education approaches included group based instruction, as well as individual tutoring, problem-solving, and exploratory learning processes. In classrooms using the adaptive education approach, instruction took place in a variety of settings and grouping arrangements depending on the material to be learned and the

learning characteristics and needs of the student. In this sense the term adaptive refers to the modification of school learning environments to respond effectively to student differences and to enhance the individual's ability to succeed in learning in such environments. In fact, by definition, effective implementation of the adaptive education approach mandated the incorporation of a variety of instructional methods that provided learning experiences matched to individual characteristics, talents, interests and knowledge.

CURRENT DIRECTIONS

In Canada, there has been an increasing shift in the educational sector away from terminology that refers to individuals with exceptionalities as being disabled or handicapped. This is because there is growing recognition that individuals with exceptionalities have both strengths and needs with one of the primary goals of special education being to capitalize on the strengths of individuals. Further, not all individuals requiring special education services have disabilities in the traditional sense and in some cases their exceptionality is related to their special talents or abilities as in the case of gifted students. Thus, there is a growing movement in the field of disability studies that challenges the notion of disability as being wholly related to individual pathology. Rather, disability is viewed as the result of the complex interplay between the social and physical environments that impact an individual's full participation in society, and in this sense, is exacerbated by the social and environmental structure of society.

Unlike the United States, federal Canadian law is not the unequivocal legislative authority relating to the education of exceptional students. This is because the responsibility for the education of exceptional children rests entirely under the jurisdiction of provincial legislation. However, Canada is unique in that it was the first country to constitutionally guarantee the rights of people with disabilities to legal equality. This occurred through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom in 1982, which guarantees that every Canadian is equal before and under the law, and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and in particular, without discrimination based on mental or physical disability. As a result,

provinces and territories have enshrined in their own educational acts and human rights codes the philosophical and foundational guarantee of equality and nondiscrimination to those with disabilities by supporting the inclusion and accommodation of exceptional students in the classroom. For example, Ontario was one of the first provinces to enact legislation (i.e. Bill 82) and is now moving towards greater accountability in the development and implementation of individual education plans (IEPs) leading to an enhanced quality of education for those students with exceptionalities. However, it is difficult to articulate where each and every province and territory are at when it comes to inclusive schooling legislation. Some provinces have not conducted reviews of special education since the 1990's while others such as Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have had special education reviews within the last decade or several years. Nevertheless, provincial and territorial educational policies tend to promote inclusive education although the degrees to which actual practices are implemented vary across the provinces and territories (Crealock, 1996).

However, barriers do exist and in some instances government policy and its implementation in the schools are seen as the culprit. In a recent review of Canadian Teachers Associations and the inclusive movement conducted by Winzer and Mazurek (2011) it was recognized that government shifts that are more market driven and framed as a movement towards economic accountability have forsaken social justice in an inclusive society. According to Winzer and Mazurek (2011):

Common views [of teacher's associations] criticized governments for not offering systematic support for schools as they attempted to implement inclusive policies and chided that the process was often effected without systematic modification to a school's organization, due regard to teacher's instructional expertise, or any guarantee of continuing resource provision. (p. 18)

It is clear then, that challenges do exist to the inclusive education model. To help better understand the issues that affect best practices in inclusive schools a study was conducted by the New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL) in 2007.

In it NBACL (2007) argued that due to the greater range of diversity in New Brunswick schools today, inclusive education practices are needed now more than ever. In conducting the review, the two main questions asked related to why some schools are more inclusive than others and since inclusive practices have been shown to benefit all students and the school, why have best practices not been generalized. Reviews of Student Support Services previously conducted in some of the New Brunswick school districts highlighted a number of systemic barriers that are in concordance with the findings of previous research conducted by the NBACL Inclusive Education Committee. Since it was determined that there is an inconsistency across school districts it was decided that a review which addressed the systemic barriers was needed. Although a number of systemic barriers were identified the authors' of the report also acknowledged there was a high degree of interconnectedness among them and that more than systemic issues are involved.

Interestingly, although funding and resource allocation received a high degree of attention during the public consultations the NBACL also recognized that inclusive education practices vary from district to district even though the amount of funding received is comparable across districts. This led the authors' to conclude that socio-economic challenges may present themselves in some areas while not in others. To help better understand some of the systemic issues that face inclusive education in New Brunswick the following barriers were identified.

1. Difficulties with embracing diversity and the inclusive education philosophy/model.
2. The lack of knowledge and skills to effectively implement inclusive education.
3. The lack of adequate and appropriate accountability mechanisms.
4. The serious inadequacies of the current system in providing professional supports within the educational system.
5. The lack of adequate opportunity and time for good collaboration, planning and preparation.
6. Ensuring that classrooms are an appropriate size and are heterogeneous (i.e. they reflect the broad range of diversity that exists within the student population).
7. The lack of relevant curriculum based on the principles of universal design.
8. The appropriate use of paraprofessional supports within the educational system.

9. The discriminatory effects of paraprofessional and transportation scheduling.
10. The lack of adequate transitions for students entering a new school or moving from one grade level to another.
11. The lack of adequate support for parents/families to be true partners in inclusive education.

(NBACL, 2007, p. 3-11)

Although the report focused on barriers to inclusive education, the authors' noted that by addressing these systemic challenges concrete and effective changes would occur.

BEST PRACTICES

To help understand how systemic change can result in effective change a set of best practices for inclusion were developed (Roher Institute, 2004). The best practices developed are from a series of principles that embody the idea of normalization whereby all children attend age appropriate regular classrooms in their local schools. Although the best practices are seen as encompassing the main features of inclusive education they are negligent in their articulation of non-categorical assessment that focuses on the strengths and needs of the child for instruction as opposed to labeling or categorization for program eligibility (Roher Institute, 2004). Nevertheless, a number of provincial and territorial governments have remediated this oversight by incorporating needs-based assessment practices into their own government policies as applied to inclusive education. To help conceptualize the guiding principles of best practices for inclusive education the following categories were developed:

1. A school learning environment that holds positive expectations and opportunities for all students;
2. Collaborative planning among administration, students, teachers, parents, and community partners;
3. An administration that provides an enabling and empowering school environment for all students;
4. A school environment that enables and expounds the importance of social responsibility, including the celebration of difference;
5. The inclusion of students and parents in the planning of curriculum to students with disabilities, and the accommodation of individual strengths and needs;

6. Support programs and services (e.g. counselors, health and social service workers, educational assistants) that meet the needs of students with disabilities;
7. The use by teachers of a range and variety of instructional and assessment practices in order to accommodate various learning preferences;
8. Transition planning that involves all stakeholders in the life of a particular student (i.e. receiving teachers and administrators, job counselors, parents, external service workers, etc.);
9. Partnerships between the school, the student's family, and the greater community;
10. Innovative system and staff growth through evaluation and professional development; and
11. School and school district accountability, both to student/parents and to the Department of Education. (Roher Institute, 2004, p. 6).

Using the above principles as a framework for understanding, the report then examined actual legislation in the provinces and territories to determine the degree of inclusiveness as based on the best practice principles outlined above.

The best practices in provincial and territorial legislation are found to include a number of similar themes that have become standard practice in the provision of inclusive education. For example, multi-site needs-based practices recognize informal assessment information should be used by the school-based team and resource teacher in program planning for the child even though formal identification and placement has not occurred. It was also recommended that school-based team meetings occur in a timely fashion so that delays do not occur between the time that the child is admitted to school and provision of services occurs. As well, it is required that all students identified as having special/intensive needs have developed an individualized education plan. Further, there should be timely scheduling of reviews for individual education plans (IEPs) and when a parent is not in agreement with the IEP developed they have the right of appeal and to seek legal recourse if necessary. It is also imperative that the province or territories have enshrined in their respective legislation a policy that is supportive and favors inclusion. Within this context, inclusion is also to be part of the culture that permeates a school and thus a part of all school activities that include recreation activities, intramural sports and school trips, for example.

Best practices in provincial and territorial legislation for inclusion must also have appropriate educational and curriculum accommodations. Moreover, accommodations should not only be extended to instruction but also to assessment and testing. As well, modified curriculum should enable all students to receive a transcript of secondary achievement. There is also a need for transition planning both within the school years and beyond the school years. It is incumbent on school staff and administration to liaise with community resources so as to interact not only with parents and outside agencies but also with other community-based agencies that support, service, and advocate for special populations of students (Loreman, 2007; Loreman, Deppler & Harvey, 2005; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2005). Finally, it is imperative that teacher training requirements and provisions enable teachers to be able to recognize the variety of learning styles that exist and be able to accommodate for these differences through differentiated instruction and *Understanding by Design* practices (Roher Institute, 2004; Tomilinson, 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

To help Saskatchewan schools and school divisions assess effective practices as associated with Student Support Services the Ministry of Education (2012) developed the Student Support Services Service Delivery Model Rubrics for best/effective practices. There are four main rubrics articulated with a series of core elements that have descriptive categories for exemplary, evident, emerging/developing or not evident. The four main rubrics are found to include: outlining inclusionary philosophy and belief, instructional programming practices and programming interventions, and collaborative culture. The current 2012 Student Support Services Service Delivery Model Rubrics is a revised version of an earlier set of rubrics developed in 2011. The purpose of the rubrics as set out by the Ministry of Education is to engage school divisions in a series of steps that include the selection of priority areas, gathering of data, and the creation of shared/common understandings. This initiative by the Ministry of Education does hold promise and will enable the further development of inclusionary practices in schools and divisions in the province.

SUMMARY

Inclusion is an international movement and is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The values and beliefs that guide inclusion in Canadian schools are that all students have the right to be educated in their local school, in heterogeneous classrooms and with age appropriate peers. This means that heterogeneous groups make the school richer and that all children can learn, have the right to belong, are more alike than different having individual needs and strengths. By definition it doesn't mean dumping students with exceptionalities into regular education classrooms and it also doesn't mean that all students will achieve the same educational objectives or use the same methods to learn. What inclusive education does mean is that everyone belongs and is supported, there are effective educational programs, and all children are welcomed into the school (i.e. zero reject principle). Inclusive education practices are enabled by professional development activities (Englert, & Rozendal, 2004; Monteith, 2000) the appropriate use of paraprofessionals, the effective use of peers in the classroom, curriculum adaptation, sharing expertise, combining resources, collaboration and cooperation (Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998; Friend & Cook, 2010), along with shared problem solving teams. Inclusion requires that there be partnerships with parents, the community, and other human service agencies. Finally, inclusion means that there be flexibility in thinking, staffing, in programming and co-teaching opportunities. Thus, by following best practices and using evidenced-based research, new directions for inclusive schools in the 21st century will be actualized.

3 CHAPTER THREE

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

The Saskatchewan Rivers School Division is one of the larger school divisions in the province. The division has both rural and urban schools that serve approximately 9000 students in 31 different schools. The division covers a large geographical area but is committed to offering equitable opportunities for education.

The division employs a number of staff in Student Support Services that includes speech language pathologists, counselors, educational psychologists, social workers, and Student Support Services consultants. Student Support Services staff is clustered by school grouping so as to ensure continuity and individualized support to the schools and communities served. As well, SRSD partners with the Prince Albert Parkland Health Region to provide outreach worker support to schools in the division.

The past few years have been one of change for the SRSD, and in particular, Student Support Services. Specifically, a revision to the personal program plan was undertaken in 2009 and it was identified as a priority area by the division. SRSD personnel guided the project and it used an action research methodology. The purpose of the project was to attain the following five outcomes that include:

1. Ground personal program plans in Saskatchewan curricular outcomes and access all required areas of study;
2. Create a working document that supported the work of educational support and classroom teachers and reflected a year's worth of student learning;
3. Ensure students receive authentic, challenging programming and accurately monitor and measure student growth;
4. Increase classroom teacher involvement in planning for students with intensive needs; and
5. Increase parent and student participation in development, understanding, and monitoring of the personal program plan. (Mills, p. 3)

The overarching goal of the initiative in 2009 was to foster student independence. To enable this to occur a number of actions have taken place. There are opportunities for the team meetings between the classroom teacher, Student Support Services consultant,

educational psychologist and social workers, with administrators invited to attend when possible. This is important, as it has provided a structured opportunity for the team to meet and receive feedback. The students plans developed are living documents and are reviewed and adjusted as appropriate. The Student Support Services consultants have developed a data collection form to measure SMART goals and intend to begin collection in June 2012 to determine if Student Support Services practices are meeting the desired outcomes. Consequently, the project implemented by the division continues to experience success although it is recognized that “more time for collaboration, lower student-teacher ratios, lower consultant-school, greater opportunities for home and school support, along with increased resources” (SRSD, 2012, p. 11) would be welcomed.

Other areas of change in Student Support Services for the division have seen the development of a Response to Intervention (RTI) behavioural protocol for students. The goal of the protocol is for the student to foster independence by being able to monitor and manage his or her own behaviour. The behavioural protocol developed is a living document that facilitates a three-tiered approach that includes:

1. Tier 1-School Based Classroom Interventions;
2. Tier 2-School Based Individual Plan; and
3. Tier 3- School Based Consultation with Division Wide Staff.

At present the behaviour protocol is in its implementation stage and is being supported in the schools by the Student Support Services team. Advantages to the protocol are found within its tiered approach that enables pre referral strategies to be tried and documented and the facilitation of school-based problem solving team meetings for individual student planning prior to a referral process for Student Support Services being enacted.

The division is also committed to continued support and development of assistive technology as a priority area. Assistive technology is viewed both as a learning tool and for promoting inclusive practices. To this end Student Support Services anticipates the development of an assistive technology protocol at the universal and targeted levels so there is a tiered approach. In this way the learning needs of all students can be addressed.

To facilitate this endeavor enhanced partnerships with the Ministry as well as the need to increase budget allocations are articulated as requirements by SRSD.

The third priority area identified by SRSD relates to an e-master plan. Of the priority areas identified the e-master plan is acknowledged as being one in which greater development and resource allocation need to occur. Nevertheless, the e-master plan has potential for addressing some of the challenges currently facing Student Support Services by offering resources for programming and teaming in a more streamlined, efficient, and accessible means for school based personal, Student Support Services personal, and students served by SRSD.

The division is also committed to continued interagency involvement, building capacity in the educational associates (i.e. e-master plan) and to address the growing demands being placed on the division to provide English as an additional language services. Furthermore, in keeping pace with the Ministry of Education (2011) initiatives the division has moved away from a medical diagnostic model for the identification of students with intensive needs. This is because of the perceived inequities in special programming being incumbent on identification. Consequently, a needs-based model was adapted and is now being implemented.

To reiterate from Chapter 1, for the purposes of this report, and more particularly this section, the terms “rural access schools” and “rural non-access schools” are used. Rural access schools are those who have access to Student Support Services programming in Prince Albert and include: Birch Hills School, Kinistino School, Meath Park School, Christopher Lake School, East Central School, Osborne School, Red Wing School, Spruce Home School, West Central School and Wild Rose School. Rural non-access schools do not have access to the Student Support Services programming in Prince Albert and included: Canwood Community School, Debden School, St. Louis Community School, W.P. Sandin School, Shellbrook Elementary School, T.D. Michel Community School, and Big River Community High School.

SITE VISITS

Recognizing the diverse needs of the student population SRSD's Student Support Services provides a range of services that include inclusion with supports, career and personal counseling, and special programming like STAR, Alternate Education, Life Skills classes, Developmental Education, Won Ska cultural school, Learners With Purpose and Eagles Nest. To help contextualize the review a number of site visits were conducted of the special programs offered in Prince Albert.

Eleven different programs in six schools were covered in the one-day allocated for site visits. Program templates were completed by the Student Support Services consultant so as to provide an overview of its characteristics. The purpose of the site visits was not to provide a program by program basis for comparison but rather to provide contextualization and understanding of the special programs offered by the division.

The conclusions and opinions in the Site Visits section were drawn from the information submitted by the Student Support Services consultant and comments made by staff of the programs to the researchers during visitations. The researchers had no means to judge the veracity of this information. There were no other specific data to support the stated conclusions and opinions; and, thus, the conclusions and opinions must be judged in that regard.

CARLTON CONNECTIONS

The goal of Carlton Connections is to provide students with severe learning disabilities the strategies necessary to be independent learners in the regular classrooms. There is a senior classroom for grade 9 to 10 students and a junior classroom for grade 7, 8 and 9 students with a maximum of 14 in each program. Students are referred from schools within Prince Albert and those rural schools that have access. Intake occurs at the beginning of the year with few being referred during the course of the academic year. The teaching composition is one teacher and one educational associate per classroom.

The senior classroom is equipped with notepads and Smart boards and has a low pupil teacher ratio (PTR). Staff views the low PTR positively as it enables connections to be built with the students, however, it is recognized that an even lower PTR would facilitate more individualized support.

Although there is some integration with regular classes in the high school it was reported that students do experience some stigma associated with the program. Students exit the program after grade 10 and can register in the high school and program of their choice. Although parents' visits are part of the admission process, continual parental support does present as an issue. Further, in special programs like Carlton Connections the current SRSD educational associate substitution policy is perceived to threaten the program's continuity.

In the junior classroom a similar staffing arrangement exists and the PTR is also similar. Students usually transition from the junior to senior program and those in the junior program have the opportunity to attend practical and applied arts and physical education classes in the larger school.

Part of the challenge that exists is because of the younger grade entry level into the program. For example, students in grades 7 and 8 are admitted into the program, however, because the junior program is located in a high school some students and their parents are anxious about attending the program and in some instances refuse service even though there is a perceived need. Other challenges relate to the numbers who want to attend and the cap on enrollment to maintain the desired PTR. In this respect, it was suggested a junior classroom in an elementary school might address the waitlist effect coupled with the concerns of young students and their parents have about enrolling in a high school, which is larger and has an older student population.

INDEPENDENT FUTURES

Independent Futures is located in Carlton Comprehensive High School. It is in year two of its pilot project and is described as a hybrid of the developmental education and life skills programs found elsewhere in the division. The provincial curriculum is

used to instruct students enrolled in Independent Futures who have intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities. Independent Futures combines functional academics with adult preparation skills so as to build on previous skills learned and to prepare students for life after high school. Students are divided into three classrooms of ten students and there are three teachers and 9.5 education associates assigned to the 30 students. Students are referred at the beginning of the year from urban schools and rural schools that have access. Integration occurs for the students during physical education and the classes offered in the program engage the students in outreach activities in the community. The benefits to this type of programming are the unique team of staff and the culture of caring that permeates the program.

Challenges relate to meeting the individual needs of students, behavioural outbursts that cause safety issues for staff, and lack of planning time. As some of the students live at home while others live in group homes this adds another complexity to the home and school relationship as not only parents but social workers are also now involved and consulted. Suggestions for improvement by staff begin with an even lower PTR, and the development of a resource allocation model that recognizes that not all students are “equal” in terms of need. There are also some questions as to what is the least restrictive environment as some of the students do present with violent behavioural outbursts and this compromises staff safety.

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS

There are three life skills programs offered by the SRSD. There is an elementary classroom for students age 9-12 years of age and a middle years classroom for ages 13-15. Both of these classrooms have an enrollment of 12 and are located at Riverside Community School. There is one other life skills program and it is for students 16-21 years of age. It is located at Wesmor Community High School and has an enrollment of 18 students.

The overarching goal of the life skills programs as offered by the division is to better prepare the students to participate and be integrated into their community as fully as possible. Students come to the program with a diagnosis of moderate to severe

intellectual disability. Students are referred to the program from urban schools and rural schools with access in the SRSD. The teaching team is composed of one teacher for each of the classrooms and one educational associate per class for the elementary and middle years programs and two educational associates for the high school program.

One of the strengths in the elementary and middle years classroom life skills programs housed at Riverside is the ability to transition students from one program to another. Further, there is a good team relationship between staff in each program, which allows for greater flexibility and a shared understanding of the unique needs of each child in his/her own particular context. Successes of the program relate to the low PTR, which allows for greater individualized programming to be offered. Further, the children in the program have developed friendships with other students in the school due to their participation in intramurals, gym, computers and the library. As the children experience success and accept consequences they are better equipped to handle the challenges that can present themselves when transitioning from class to class within the school and then from program to program to regular classroom. Other positives relate to the students' ability to interact in the community, how some have developed friendships with other students in the school and how they actively participate in a peer buddy program.

Challenges that exist relate to the children's behaviour and overall classroom safety issues. There is also a significant amount of administrative paperwork required in such a program with little release time to conduct such paperwork. As well, there is little opportunity for positive role modeling in the classroom, as many of the children are challenged and present with co-morbid mental health issues.

At Wesmor Community High School the life skills program has excellent support from the Student Support Services consultant, is able to engage in community outreach type of activities and allows students to enter the program from urban schools or rural access schools. As some of the students live at home while others live in a group home setting this sometimes can present as a challenge for good home school communication. It was suggested that the class be split to create a lower PTR.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

There are eleven alternative education programs offered by the SRSD. There is a middle years classroom for students' in grades 7-8 at Riverside Community School, five alternative education classes are offered at Wesmor Community High School for Grades 7/8, 9, 10, 11 12 and another five alternative education classes are offered at Carlton Comprehensive High School to students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 (two classes). Students are referred from urban schools and from those rural schools that have access. Behaviour is not the primary reason for students being referred to the program; rather the program is designed for those students who have experienced ongoing challenges in the regular classroom. Students are usually four or more years behind academically and have below average intellectual capabilities. The programming offered students in alternative education classes is unique in that it allows for greater individualization, volunteer experiences, along with career and work exploration classes. Furthermore, the curriculum was renewed and approved by the Ministry of Education and the classes offer both regular and modified courses. Unfortunately, the alternative education program does not meet the current admission requirements for most post-secondary institutions.

The strengths of alternative education programming are the way block intensive coursework is offered so that the students have the opportunity to experience success. As well, the PTR is lower than that in a regular class, which is advantageous, but at times still presents challenges in meeting the unique needs of every child. Other challenges relate to attendance, parental support, and the need for more technological aids like iPads. As well, there are issues relating to equitable provision of services as some students are unable to attend because they reside in rural schools that do not have access to special programs as offered in Prince Albert.

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

There is one developmental education program and it is offered at Ecole Vickers School. Students who attend the developmental education program have a severe intellectual disability that may be co-morbid with a physical disability, autism, a speech

language disorder, social/emotional disorder, to name a few. Students enter the program between 3 to 12 years of age. Referrals are taken from urban schools and rural schools that have access. The teaching compliment is one teacher to nine educational associates and there have been up to 20 students enrolled in the program.

The positive aspects of the developmental education program at Vickers relate to the ability to have the children in a classroom where they can socialize with others in the school. In this way there are aspects of integration and there have been instances where students have left the developmental education program for the regular classroom in the school. Other positive aspects of the program are found to include the parent/foster parent communication as this is viewed as an integral component.

In terms of programming, it is considered important to allow for change of assignments to students so that a routine between staff and student doesn't develop. Initially upon implementation of the program resourcing wasn't as much of an issue. The current relationship is now with the PA health region, however, that link isn't viewed as strong as previous arrangements with Kinsmen Children's Centre. In this respect, occupational therapy and physical therapy do occur, but the frequency of visits has decreased along with the speech language pathologist services provided by the division.

Challenges exist with type of children referred to the program as those with intellectual disabilities and co-morbid mental health issues are the most difficult to deal with. Consequently, safety for staff continues to be an issue and it is not uncommon for students to hit, bite, slap and push staff. Thus, concerns are expressed that the demands placed on educational associates in a developmental education program are significant and this isn't reflected in the wage scale they are provided.

STAR

STAR is offered at Riverside Community School and is for students with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. In STAR the students are provided the opportunity to learn the necessary strategies that will support their successful reintegration into the regular classroom. Students are referred from urban schools and

rural schools that have access to the programs offered in Prince Albert. The age of referral is typically between 5-10 years of age and students usually remain in the program 1-2 years. The teaching team is composed of one principal, 3.5 teachers and 4.2 educational associates who serve up to a maximum of 25-28 students. STAR is a shared program with the Prince Albert Catholic School Division and students can be referred from that division as well.

Strengths of the program are found in its low numbers and the ability to offer individualized educational program planning. There is a real team approach within the school and between the division consultants and the medical profession. Usually, parental involvement is quite good and there is a fair amount of home/school communication that occurs through daily report cards and the normal school based reporting periods. Regular curriculum is offered but is complimented by the behavioural protocol that enables staff in the program to have a better understanding prior to admission what has been tried behaviourally with the student. Some of the challenges relate to the transiency of the population being served, the difficulties in finding positive role modeling within the classroom, and attendance.

WON SKA CULTURAL SCHOOL

Won Ska Cultural School is a senior program that serves about 140 students 16 years of age and older. Junior students are served in an alternate “downtown” location for students between 11 and 15 years of age (about 40 students). Ninety percent of students are First Nation and it is believed that a significant number have gang associations. The program is affiliated with Prince Albert Outreach and the SRSD provides the facility and maintenance for the building. The program takes students off the street with most having had limited contact in the past with the provincial school system. The program’s focus is on “readiness”. There is no timetable and no attendance requirements at the school with all students on individual programming.

The successes at the school are due to the staff being non-judgmental; it is perceived as being an “open school”. There is a high degree of equity reported between staff and students. As well, it is important that schools like Won Ska are enabled and

supported even though they are different than the “normal” high school. Consequently there is little graffiti and very few violent outbursts. As a result, staff and students support one another.

Challenges relating to perceptions about the school are reported to exist both within the community and the SRSD community, as well. Further, it was disclosed that the school is often forced to search for grant money to keep the school functioning. In this respect, staff believes it requires and needs a steady and reliable source of funding, as already the facility is too small to serve the needs of the student population it serves. Also due to off campus violence, homelessness, and drug abuse there are situations at the school that can develop into a crisis.

LEARNERS WITH PURPOSE

Learners With Purpose serves youth age 16-21 that come from any part of the city. There are up to 35 students at any one time with two thirds maintaining consistent contact. The young adults that attend have been outside of the school system for a number of years and in some instances don't have a permanent residence. Learners With Purpose is an academic outreach program that encompasses both life skills and work placement for students. The teaching team comprises one half time teacher who is also the coordinator for the program, another .5 and .3 teacher. There is a social worker from mental health that comes for the Young Mom's group and also provides individual ongoing counseling. The Young Mom's meet once a week and discuss issues that include: childhood development, parenting styles and strategies, healthy intimate relationships, housing, work and post secondary plans, addictions, childhood sexual abuse, family of origin issues, depression, anxiety and sexual health.

Strength-based programming is offered and provides experiences that are positive in nature. All the youth who are enrolled in the program contribute to the running of the program and in this sense the program tries to address some of the roadblocks that exist for inner city youth. Because of the school's willingness and ability to provide specialized programming for the students they stay in school. Students report being supported without being pressured with in-school accommodations being made that allow

them to continue to do their best while attending. Some the challenges that are faced, relate to addictions, transportation and housing. The strength of the program is found in the caring attitude that the staff share with the youth as they try to empower them through the development of trust and community focused capacity building activities.

4 CHAPTER FOUR

SURVEY DATA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a synthesis of the survey data. Two surveys, one for the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division (SRSD) staff and the other for students were constructed. The overarching goal of the SRSD Student Support Services review was to determine the effectiveness and equity of Student Support Services provided within the division and between schools. The surveys represent parallel forms with similar items and dimensions see Table 4.1. However, there were two exceptions, first the student survey contained an added dimension relating to student needs as provided by Student Support Services. Second, there was a Student Intensive Needs dimension that asked school-based questions of staff pertaining to student intensive needs. A series of open-ended questions were also included at the end of the survey for both student and staff and are presented at the end of the chapter.

Table 4.1: SRSD Survey Dimensions

Staff Survey	Student Survey
Learning Environment	Learning Environment
Inclusive Practices	Inclusive Practices
Home/School Communication	Home/School Communication
Student Support Services	Student Support Services
Student Intensive Needs	Student Needs
Factors Influencing Effectiveness	Factors Influencing Effectiveness

All staff members employed by the SRSD were surveyed with students in grades 6-12 completing the student survey. In interpreting the survey data response rates are considered the standard by which results can be deemed reliable. The response rate (i.e. number completed/total population) for the staff survey was 86 % (674/783) and for the

students 66 % (2951/4501). Based on the high response rates it is reasonable to assume the results are very reliable for staff and reliable for the students.

The staff and student data were analyzed by type of school (i.e. rural elementary vs urban elementary, rural high school vs urban high school, and rural access schools vs rural non-access schools). As also defined earlier in this report, rural access schools are those who have access to Student Support Services programming in Prince Albert and include: Birch Hills School, Kinistino School, Meath Park School, Christopher Lake School, East Central School, Osborne School, Red Wing School, Spruce Home School, West Central School and Wild Rose School. Rural non-access schools were those that did not have access to Student Support Services programming in Prince Albert and included: Canwood Community School, Debden School, St. Louis Community School, W.P. Sandin School, Shellbrook Elementary School, T.D. Michel Community School, and Big River Community High School. As well, for purposes of the survey elementary students were those in grades 6-8 and high school students were those in grades 9-12.

The means for the various respondent groups are provided as based on the major dimension. The means range from 1.0 to 5.0. A mean of 1.0 indicates strong disagreement and a mean of 5.0 indicates strong agreement. Means above 3.0 imply agreement with that statement. T-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used to test levels of significance among respondent groups by item and mean with a .05 level of significance used. For purposes of interpretation the means and significant items are reported by dimension and by type of school for both staff and student surveys.

To help better understand the significant differences reported dimensional item tables were constructed with the results reported appearing as percentage of agreement and disagreement with each statement. An item with a score of 85/15 would indicate that 85% of the respondents agreed with the statement and 15% disagreed. In some cases, the percentages did not add up to 100% because a few respondents may not have responded to the statement or they may have rated it as “don’t know.”

It should also be noted that from time to time phrases such as “some,” “a few,” “moderate,” or “a majority” are used. When the term some or a few is used it implies less

than one-quarter of the respondents. Moderate refers to 30 to 40 percent with a majority implying over 50 percent of the respondents held that perception. A large majority, on the other hand, implies 80% or greater agreement or disagreement.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The results for the Learning Environment major dimension for the staff survey are presented in Table 4.2. Overall, the school learning environment had very high ratings among all staff respondents. For example, a large majority were in agreement as to the belief every student can learn, students feel they can succeed, the fairness of evaluation, there is a caring atmosphere, student learning is supported, staff are available to help students when needed, and students receive help with problems not related to schoolwork (more so in urban than rural high schools). Minor, yet significant differences were reported relating to children feeling safe going to school, the school environment being viewed as safe and the school having good spirit. Based on the survey results for these items it would appear that rural schools are rated by respondents are safer. Further, students are perceived to arrive to school ready to learn by a majority of respondents in rural schools, whereas in urban schools, both elementary and high school, less than 50% were in agreement. Other significant differences related to the perceptions of individual attention students receive when needed where rural elementary were significantly different from urban elementary, though in both instances a majority of respondents were in agreement with the statement.

Table 4.2: Learning Environment, Staff

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
I believe every student can learn.	99/1	100/0	97/0	99/0	98/1	99/1
The instructional program at this school is challenging.	76/14	76/9	85/12	79/12	77/15	78/12
The school provides an atmosphere where every student can succeed.	94/4	90/7	91/9	92/3	93/6	96/3
Student evaluation is fair in this school.	87/4	83/5	82/9	81/4	90/5	81/4
Children feel safe in school.	93/2*	89/4	91/3*	74/10	96/1	88/4
Children enjoy going to school most days.	93/2	95/1	85/3	77/4	94/1*	89/4
The school has a caring atmosphere.	99/1	98/0	94/6	86/6	99/1	96/2
The school has good school spirit.	93/4*	89/6	85/12*	66/27	97/2*	85/9
Expectations for student behaviour are fair.	95/2*	92/5	90/10	76/14	94/4	95/3
The school provides a safe environment for students.	98/1*	94/3	93/3*	81/10	99/1	95/1
I am satisfied with how the school prepares students for the future (i.e., post-secondary/or the world of work).	80/9*	67/10	71/27	68/21	81/9	74/14
I teach in ways that best support student learning.	95/1	94/0	100/0	95/0	98/0	92/1
Students in this school arrive ready to learn.	72/14*	45/46	65/26	49/35	75/15	66/17
Students can easily access programs and services at school to get help with schoolwork.	84/5*	72/13	82/9	88/5	86/6	82/5
Students can get help in this school with problems that are not related to schoolwork.	92/2	86/6	88/6	92/1*	93/3	91/2
When students need it, staff in this school are available to help them.	94/2	95/3	97/0	95/1	96/2	93/2
This school provides the learning resources that meet student needs (such as textbooks, software, audio and video materials).	85/11	84/11	82/12	92/6*	85/11	85/11
In this school, students receive the individual attention they require from teachers.	79/12*	66/23	82/12	81/4	79/14	81/9
In this school students with exceptional needs receive their education in the most appropriate environment, which entails different degrees of integration for different students at different times and in different circumstances.	76/11*	68/21	65/21	79/6*	72/15	79/8
The needs of students with exceptional learning needs are well served through current practice.	62/19	56/24	59/18	73/6*	57/24	67/12*
Overall Mean	4.17*	4.03	4.02	4.07	4.17	4.13

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

When the items relating to the education of children with exceptional needs are examined, a significantly higher number in rural elementary and in urban high schools

believe students with exceptional needs receive their education in the most appropriate environment. Further, ratings were lower among all school types, with the exception of urban high schools, when the question was asked if the exceptional learning needs of students are well served through current practice. However, in these instances more respondents replied don't know. When the overall mean is compared across school types a significantly larger majority of staff from rural elementary schools were in agreement with the items. However, it should be noted that the mean ratings were in strong agreement in all instances for all schools, which speaks positively to the quality of the learning environment in the schools of the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division.

Since parallel forms of the surveys were created the results for the student survey major dimension Learning Environment are presented in a similar manner, see Table 4.3. The students were in general agreement with most items though the items were not as strongly endorsed as those by the staff and in one instance students did not endorse the item. The particular item in question referred to how students felt about the quality of the instructional programming where between 40-47 percent did not find the instructional programming challenging. Other items that were also not as strongly rated pertained to students enjoying school and the connection teachers make with classroom learning to life outside the school. In most instances for these items a simple majority approximating 50 percent were in agreement.

Significant differences in perceptions were reported between students in urban high schools and rural high schools and for students in rural schools with access and rural schools without access. For example, students in urban high schools and rural schools with access were in stronger agreement for all items than their counterparts. Although not exhaustive, some of the items include the belief every student can learn, students feeling they can succeed, students enjoy going to school, the fairness of evaluation, there is a caring atmosphere, the school has good spirit, expectations for behaviour are fair, students arrive ready to learn, students can easily access programs, staff are available to help students, the school provides appropriate learning resources, and the needs of students with exceptional learning needs are well served. Urban high school students showed significantly more agreement than their rural counterparts with items related to:

teachers being able to connect what they are learning to life outside the classroom; and being able to receive help with problems not related to school. Even though agreement was significantly higher for urban students than rural, it was still only 59% and 67%, respectively, for each of these items.

Table 4.3: Learning Environment, Students

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
I believe every student can learn.	95/2	95/2	91/6	96/1*	96/2*	90/6
The instructional program at this school is challenging.	30/47	33/45	31/40	34/41	30/44	31/44
The school provides an atmosphere where every student can succeed.	79/7	80/5	72/17	88/3*	78/10*	73/13
Student evaluation is fair in this school.	71/13	71/9	58/26	73/10*	68/17*	63/20
Students feel safe in school.	73/10	71/9	72/10*	65/8	75/8*	70/13
Students enjoy going to school most days.	55/24	55/23	44/31	57/16*	54/24*	48/30
The school has a caring atmosphere.	75/9	74/7	65/18	72/6*	76/10*	64/16
The school has good school spirit.	84/8	83/5	72/8	76/9*	82/9*	75/16
Expectations for student behaviour are fair.	70/11	69/10	71/14	84/4*	73/11*	66/15
The school provides a safe environment for students.	85/6	83/4	81/7	85/4	85/5*	81/8
I am satisfied with how the school prepares students for the future (i.e., post-secondary/or the world of work).	73/7	75/7	58/23	84/5*	72/12*	61/16
Teachers instruct in ways that best support student learning.	76/10	78/8	59/23	78/8	72/13*	66/18
Students in this school arrive ready to learn.	85/8	83/7	76/12	87/5*	84/9*	78/11
Students can easily access programs and services at school to get help with schoolwork.	69/11	69/9	66/17	81/5*	71/11*	63/16
Students can get help in this school with problems that are not related to schoolwork.	67/11*	62/14	54/16	67/4*	66/11*	56/16
When students need it, staff in this school are available to help them.	82/6	77/7	76/11	85/3*	82/7*	77/9
This school provides the learning resources that meet student needs (such as textbooks, software, audio and video materials).	88/7	86/5	81/10	93/2*	86/7*	84/9
In this school, teachers connect what I am learning to my life outside the classroom.	56/17	57/15	49/28	59/11*	58/19*	48/25
In this school, students receive the individual attention they require from teachers.	60/15	61/16	59/21	70/9*	62/15*	56/20
The needs of students with exceptional learning needs are well served.	76/5	77/4	67/8	80/1*	72/6*	71/6
Overall Mean	3.86	3.85	3.62	3.95*	3.85*	3.65

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

It should be noted that rural elementary students also endorsed these items at a significantly higher rate than urban elementary students. Similarly, like the staff the overall means for all groups of students by school were in majority agreement as to the positive aspects of their learning environment. What was a difference is that the overall mean for the rural elementary students responses were not significantly higher than their urban counterparts, which differs from the rural elementary staff results. Rather, both urban high school students and rural students with access overall mean scores were higher than their counterparts rural high school students and rural non access students, respectively.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

The results for the Inclusive Practices major dimension in the staff survey are presented in Table 4.4. This dimension has items pertaining to school based professional partnerships that are considered best practices for inclusive schools. What is encouraging is that there are few significant differences and a large majority of staff for all schools endorsed items pertaining to the school: encouraging parents to be active partners in their child's education, encouraging the use of school-based teams, encouraging communication between teachers for regarding student's learning, and providing a positive working environment for staff. However, there was one significant difference in the first item between rural and urban high schools where the latter did not as strongly endorse the school promoting personnel decision making in practices and policies. Interestingly all staff regardless of type of school did not strongly endorse there being sufficient time to collaborate or for co-teaching opportunities between teachers.

Table 4.4: Inclusive Practices, Staff

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
Promotes personnel participation in decision-making that affects school practices and policies.	81/8	76/10	82/12*	57/26	80/9	82/9
Encourages parents to be active partners in educating their child.	93/2	94/3	79/12	81/7	91/4	91/4
Encourages the use of a school-based team approach to discuss specific student needs.	83/6	81/8	82/15	75/8	86/9	87/6
Encourages teachers to communicate with one another to make learning consistent for all students.	88/5	85/6	85/12	90/4	88/8	88/3
Provides sufficient time to collaborate with colleagues regarding service to students with learning and/or behavioral needs.	54/34	54/33	50/41	64/23	53/35	56/35
Provides a positive working environment for staff that serves students with learning and/or behavioral needs.	85/7	79/11	85/0	71/10	87/4	84/9
Provides co-teaching opportunities for staff to serve students with learning and/or behavioral needs.	63/19	56/21	50/29	52/10	62/24	60/16
Overall Mean	3.88	3.82.	3.70	3.82	3.86	3.85

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

The results for the Inclusive Practices major dimension in the student survey are presented in Table 4.5. In general, the students were in agreement with most items though some of the items were not as strongly endorsed as by the staff. Further, there are significant differences reported between urban high schools and rural high schools and for rural schools with access and rural schools without access for all items. This is of interest because a similar result was reported for the major dimension Learning Environment in the student survey. The differences were the greatest between rural and urban high schools for items pertaining to the school encouraging participation in decision-making, encouraging teachers to communicate with one another, providing teachers with enough time to collaborate and allowing staff to teach together. For these items, rural high school students' percentage agreement was low and ranged from 44-51 percent. Unlike the results reported for the inclusive practices major dimension on the staff survey, the student survey results in terms of significant differences by school (i.e.

urban high school and rural access) parallel previous results as reported for the learning environment major dimension means.

Table 4.5: Inclusive Practices, Students

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
At least one teacher who would be willing to help me with a personal problem.	71/9	71/9	67/9	75/5*	72/7*	66/10
At least one teacher who really cares about how I am doing at school.	75/8	78/6	74/10	80/4*	78/7*	70/10
At least one teacher who I could talk to if I was having problems in class.	76/9	72/9	76/8	83/4*	79/7*	73/11
Promotes student participation in decision-making about the school.	66/9	65/9	61/15	78/3*	66/9*	61/14
Encourages parents to be active partners in my education.	63/10	67/8	48/21	63/8*	62/12*	51/17
Encourages teachers to communicate with one another to make learning consistent for all students.	63/6	66/6	51/14	68/3*	65/7*	49/12
Provides enough time for teachers to work together (collaborate) to help students better.	64/8	65/7	44/13	64/5*	62/8*	48/12
Is a good place for teachers to work.	73/5	79/3*	63/7	75/1*	74/5*	63/7
Allows opportunities for staff to teach together.	64/9	67/6	46/14	60/4*	62/9*	50/14
Overall Mean	3.76	3.81	3.45	3.78*	3.75*	3.49

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

HOME/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

The results for the Home/School Communication major dimension in the staff survey are presented in Table 4.6. In general all items regardless of school type were strongly endorsed by a majority or large majority of staff. There were only three items that were reported as being significantly different. The first related to a significant difference reported between rural and urban elementary schools with a larger majority of staff from rural elementary schools endorsing the item pertaining to the adequacy of the

number of parent-teacher reporting periods. Second, rural access school staff endorsed two items by a large majority significantly higher than the majority of their rural non-access counterparts. The items pertained to the adequacy of information that parents have about their child’s learning and the adequacy of information parents have about their child’s personal program plan. There was only one significant difference in the overall means where rural access schools staff opinion generated a slightly, although significant, higher overall mean than their rural non-access counterparts.

Table 4.6: Home/School Communication, Staff

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
This school communicates effectively with parents/guardians.	91/3	86/5	91/3	79/6	83/4	89/1
The school staff provides sufficient information about the programs available in the school to parents/guardians.	85/2	89/1	79/3	85/6	87/3	80/2
The number of parent-teacher reporting periods is acceptable.	93/3*	88/3	91/9	94/4	94/4	92/2
Parents/guardians have access to information about their child's learning.	91/1	91/1	88/3	89/4	93/2	88/1
Parents/guardians receive timely communication about their child's progress.	86/3	86/1	85/3	85/3	91/4*	78/3
Parents/guardians have enough information about their child's learning.	76/4	75/5	85/0	77/6	86/5*	67/2
Parents/guardians have enough information about their child's personal program plan.	74/3	68/5	62/9	65/3	76/5	68/2
Overall Mean	4.11	4.05	3.97	4.09	4.17*	3.99

* indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

The results for the Home/School Communication major dimension in the student survey are presented in Table 4.7. In general, the students were in agreement with most items though the items were not as strongly endorsed by as large a majority as by the staff. Further, there are significant differences reported between urban high schools and rural high schools and between rural schools with access and rural schools without access for most items. The one exception being the item pertaining to the number of parent-teacher reporting periods in which rural elementary students more strongly endorse this

particular item (with a large majority) than their urban elementary counterparts. As well, significant differences were reported between the rural elementary and urban elementary students with the urban elementary reporting significant majority ratings for the items pertaining to school staff providing sufficient information about programs to parents and parents receiving enough information about their child’s learning. What is of interest is that, when the overall means are examined, again significant differences exist between urban high schools and rural high schools and for rural schools with access and rural schools without access. This confirms a trend as similar results were reported for the other major dimensions.

Table 4.7: Home/School Communication, Students

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
This school communicates effectively with parents/guardians.	71/10	72/8	59/21	71/8*	69/12*	63/17
The school staff provides sufficient information about the programs available in the school to parents/guardians.	74/10	78/7*	63/21	72/10*	74/12*	65/17
The number of parent-teacher reporting periods is acceptable.	81/6*	74/7	74/8	76/4	78/5	78/9
Parents/guardians have access to information about their child's learning.	69/6	75/5	66/11	75/4*	72/7*	61/11
Parents/guardians receive timely communication about their child's progress.	56/11	66/7*	52/18	65/7*	60/12*	47/16
Parents/guardians have enough information about their child's learning.	70/7	69/8	62/13	73/6*	73/7*	59/13
Overall Mean	3.85	3.89	3.58	3.81*	3.84*	3.62

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The results for the Student Support Services major dimension in the staff survey are presented in Table 4.8. The items for the Student Support Services dimension refer to issues relating to adequacy and equity of services provided. Overall, the items were not as strongly endorsed as in the previous major dimensions reported for the staff survey and there are a higher percentage of don't know responses. However, the trend for significantly higher ratings by urban high school staff than their rural counterparts continued. For example, higher majority ratings for the perceptions of equitable delivery of services by the educational psychologist, social/outreach workers, educational support teachers, Student Support Services consultants combined with overall satisfaction with the equitable provision of Student Support Services were reported by urban high school staff in comparison to their rural counterparts, although there were a larger number of don't knows.

Table 4.8: Student Support Services, Staff

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
I am satisfied the range of programs by Student Support Services are equitable for this school within the school division.	50/24	53/22	64/18	64/5	53/21	51/26
I am satisfied that the timelines of the response provided by Student Support Services are equitable for this school within the division.	48/16	45/20	50/24	46/12	51/18	47/17
I am satisfied that the speech language pathologist services are adequate for this school.	36/32	38/26	29/15	21/10	39/28	31/33
I am satisfied the services provided by the educational psychologists are equitable for the school within the division.	40/24	32/26	24/18	37/8*	39/28	31/32
I am satisfied the services provided by the social workers and outreach workers are equitable for this school within the division.	43/23	46/21	21/12	42/7*	44/20	37/24
I am satisfied the services provided by counselors are equitable for this school within the division.	47/20	40/18	62/6	53/6	51/15	50/23
I am satisfied the services provided by educational associates are equitable for this school within the division.	68/17	65/22	59/18	59/6	66/22	69/11
I am satisfied the services provided by educational support teachers are equitable for this school within the division.	68/14	63/18	41/24	53/6*	65/20	63/9
I am satisfied the services provided by Student Support Services consultants are equitable for this school within the division.	46/11	45/13	32/12	48/3*	46/9	41/13
I am satisfied the services provided by occupational and physical therapists are equitable for this school within the division.	18/37	22/28*	21/21	20/11	22/27*	14/45
Overall, I am satisfied that the Student Support Services provided are equitable for this school within the division.	47/22	47/23	42/21	52/8*	52/21	43/24
Overall, I am satisfied the services provided by other human agencies, like the Health region, are equitable for this school within the division.	47/12	40/16	38/15	42/6	52/11	51/11
Overall Mean	3.28	3.28	3.25	3.51*	3.31	3.23

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

Interestingly, respondents generally were in disagreement as to their satisfaction with the equitable provision of occupational therapist services and in all cases the majority disagreed that the services were equitable. It should be noted that this particular item had the highest number of responses in the “don’t know” category as evidenced by

totaling the percentages indicating agreement or disagreement. Similarly there was not strong majority agreement for all schools regardless of type as to their satisfaction that there is an equitable provision of speech language pathologist services in the division for their school, but again there were a large number of don't knows. Overall a majority agreed they were satisfied that the Student Support Services provided were equitable though it was not a strong majority with responses ranging from 42-52 percent, and a large number of don't knows. When the overall means are examined for this major dimension it is found that there is moderate endorsement for the dimension with urban high school staff having a significantly higher mean endorsement than their counterparts.

The results for the Student Support Services major dimension in the student survey are presented in Table 4.9. In general, the students were in agreement with most items though the items were not as strongly endorsed as in the previous dimensions reported. This is not surprising as there are a larger number of don't know responses for the items. The trend for significant differences reported between urban high schools and rural high schools and for rural schools with access and rural schools without access for all items continued. As well, there were significantly higher majority ratings by the urban elementary students for the items pertaining to the overall satisfaction with the adequacy of the provision of services by the speech language pathologist, educational psychologist, social/outreach workers, and occupational/physical therapists. As well, when the overall means are examined the trend for significant differences to exist between urban high schools and rural high schools and for rural schools with access and rural schools without access continued with urban high school students and rural access students having higher mean endorsement. It should also be noted that when items are examined individually the percentage agreeing is always lower for rural elementary, rural high school and rural no-access students than their respective counterpart.

Table 4.9: Student Support Services, Students

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
The development of speech, language and communication is important for students.	80/4	81/1	82/4	88/1*	83/3*	77/6
In this school it is important that educational programs are modified and/or adapted so as to help students learn better.	70/4	74/3	68/8	86/3*	74/4*	62/8
In this school social and emotional learning is important for students.	74/6	75/4	64/10	79/2*	74/6*	64/9
Assessment and testing are important to help me learn better	76/7	80/6	68/15	80/8*	76/8*	69/13
I am satisfied that the speech language pathologist services are adequate for this school.	41/8	49/6*	28/18	44/2*	42/10*	28/15
I am satisfied that there are adequate educational psychologists for this school.	41/7	50/6*	30/18	47/1*	44/10*	27/13
I am satisfied the services provided by the social workers and outreach workers are adequate for this school.	51/7	61/7*	36/15	56/2*	50/9*	38/12
I am satisfied the services provided by counselors are adequate for this school (career and personal).	65/6	67/6	52/13	69/2*	64/7*	54/11
I am satisfied the services provided by educational associates are adequate in this school.	64/5	67/4	56/7	63/1*	66/5*	54/7
I am satisfied the services provided by educational support teachers are adequate in this school.	64/4	67/4	58/8	63/2*	67/4*	54/7
I am satisfied the services provided by occupational and physical therapists are adequate in this school.	45/10	50/7*	32/19	50/2*	47/11*	31/17
Overall Mean	3.73	3.80	3.44	3.8*	3.72*	3.47

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

STUDENT NEEDS

To further tap into Student Support Services from the perspective of students a separate Student Needs dimension was created for the student survey, see Table 4.10. What is of interest is that no discrepancies between the two similar major dimensions (i.e. Table 4.9) are observed and when the overall means are examined the trend for significant differences to exist between urban high schools and rural high schools and for rural schools with access and rural schools without access continued with urban high

school students and rural access students having higher mean endorsement. As well, for three of the items there was a significant majority of urban elementary students in comparison to rural elementary who were satisfied that students in their respective schools could receive help from a social worker, speech language pathologist, and educational psychologist. It was also confirmed that rural elementary, rural high school and rural no-access students, had consistently lower ratings than urban elementary, urban high school and rural access student counterparts, as previously reported in the Student Support Services major dimension.

Table 4.10: Student Needs, Students

I am satisfied that students in this school can receive help...	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
for problems with learning.	84/3	83/5	76/7	92/1*	83/4*	79/6
for social or emotional problems.	68/11	70/9	56/16	74/4*	68/9*	58/17
if they have special needs.	80/4	80/4	70/7	87/1*	77/5*	75/6
with counseling for problems.	74/6	74/6	71/8	83/2*	77/5*	67/9
from a social worker or outreach worker.	58/8	63/6*	47/14	69/2*	58/9*	47/12
from a speech language pathologist.	42/10	53/9*	31/22	54/3*	45/13*	28/17
from an educational psychologist.	39/11	50/9*	33/17	57/2*	42/12*	29/16
from an educational associate.	66/5	69/5	60/8	73/2*	69/5*	57/8
from an educational support teacher.	74/4	75/5	67/6	78/1*	76/4*	65/6
Overall Mean	3.81	3.85	3.54	3.93*	3.80*	3.58

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

STUDENT INTENSIVE NEEDS

The results for the Student Intensive Needs major dimension for the staff survey are presented in Table 4.11. In general, all items regardless of school type were moderately endorsed by staff. There were only seven items that were reported as being significantly different. Four items related to significant differences were identified between rural and urban elementary schools with a higher endorsement by staff from

rural elementary schools. For this pairing of school type, in rural elementary schools a majority of respondents was satisfied with the personal programs developed, that authentic assessment approaches were being used, that *Understanding by Design* was being used with students who have intensive needs and there was satisfaction with the degree to which the adaptive dimension was being used to accommodate classroom diversity. It was also found that urban high school teachers significantly more strongly endorsed than their rural high school counterparts items pertaining to their satisfaction with educational programs and modifications that are in place for intensive needs students. This was also true of the items relating to the use of *Understanding by Design* with students who have intensive needs and that a needs-based model of delivery for services to students with intensive needs is occurring. In examining the overall means for this major dimension it is found that there is moderate endorsement with rural elementary and urban high school staff having a significantly higher mean endorsement than their respective counterparts.

Table 4.11: Student Intensive Needs, Staff

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
I am satisfied with the personal program plans that have been developed for students with intensive needs.	70/8*	62/15	56/21	50/3	71/14	72/5
I am satisfied with the educational program modification and adaptations in place for addressing students with intensive needs.	67/14	58/17	47/27	53/3*	64/18	67/11
I am satisfied that differentiated instruction is being used to meet the intensive needs of students.	69/12	61/17	65/21	66/5	70/16	68/10
I am satisfied that authentic assessment approaches are being used to inform instructional practices and programming interventions.	67/6*	54/13	59/18	60/5	70/7	60/8
I am satisfied that <i>Understanding by Design</i> (UbD) is being used to meet the intensive needs of students.	56/6*	42/12	38/24	54/7*	56/9	53/8
I am satisfied that the adaptive dimension is being used to accommodate the diversity in student learning needs.	68/6*	60/12	77/12	79/6	56/8	51/8
I am satisfied that a needs-based delivery model to support students with intensive needs is being used.	57/8	49/13	47/18	57/3*	56/11	67/6
Overall Mean	3.66*	3.48	3.34	3.71*	3.61	3.62

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

FACTORS INFLUENCING EFFECTIVENESS

The results for the Factors Influencing Effectiveness major dimension in the staff survey are presented in Table 4.12. In general, all items were endorsed regardless of school type by a moderate to majority percentage of the staff with the exception of the items pertaining to the effectiveness of the occupational/physical therapists and the items relating to the overall effectiveness and equitable provision of Student Support Services, and whether school size and geography does inhibit the equitable provision of services. However, for these items there were also large percentages of don't know responses. There were also a few items showing significant differences, one for rural elementary staff, in which the majority was satisfied with the degree of parental involvement in the educational programming offered. As well, a significantly larger majority of rural access school staff was satisfied with their professional development opportunities in comparison to their counter parts in rural schools that do not have access.

There were also two items showing significant differences for urban elementary and urban high school staff, where in both instances a majority of staff were in concurrence as to the effectiveness of the social/outreach worker and that geography does not inhibit the equitable provision of services (as might be expected). The flip side was that geography does effect the perception of provision of equitable Student Support Services for rural schools, with the exception of those rural schools who have access. As well, in urban high schools there was a significant difference as evidenced by the moderate endorsement for the item indicating school size is not a factor in the provision of services and overall effectiveness of Student Support Services consultants, but for these items there is also a large percentage of don't know responses. What is of interest is that for rural elementary, rural high schools and rural schools without access, geography was viewed as having a negative effect on the equitable delivery of Student Support Services. The overall means for the dimension though did not have any significant differences when reported by school type.

Table 4.12: Factors Influencing Effectiveness, Staff

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
I am satisfied with the parental support and involvement in the educational programs for students with learning and/or behavioural needs.	57/22*	29/54	44/32	37/21	55/23	56/26
I am satisfied with the level of funding for Student Support Services.	19/34	17/39	24/29	24/15	19/38	20/29
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the educational associates.	84/9	79/14	85/6	71/3	83/13	88/4
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the educational support teachers.	79/9	79/12	74/15	61/6	78/12	80/6
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the educational psychology personnel.	46/11	40/17	34/6	37/4	48/13	39/8
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the social worker and outreach personnel.	44/15	56/18*	29/9	40/6*	44/18	42/11
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the counseling personnel.	54/11	46/17	65/3	59/6	55/11	57/8
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the Student Support Services consultants.	43/10	45/12	38/6	52/4*	45/9	39/10
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the occupational and physical therapists.	25/31	25/24	21/12	17/7	32/3*	14/36
Overall, I am satisfied there is an equitable division of the resources for Student Support Services for this school within the division.	37/23	38/25	29/21	36/10	54/11	57/8
Geography does NOT inhibit the equitable provision of Student Support Services for our school.	32/35	39/22*	21/44	51/8*	39/27*	18/49
School size does NOT inhibit the equitable provision of Student Support Services.	39/25	37/23	12/41	45/20*	39/25	31/32
I am satisfied the staff development opportunities available to achieve educational effectiveness are equitable for this school within the division.	72/13	68/12	74/12	70/7	81/8*	62/20
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the policies for student services.	52/11	42/12	41/3	57/8	53/11	49/7
Overall Mean	3.34	3.30	3.28	3.52	3.37	3.27

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

The results for the Factors Influencing Effectiveness major dimension are presented for the student survey in Table 4.13. The students were in agreement with most items, though only a moderate to majority percentage, as in the previous dimensions

reported, endorsed the items. The trend for significant differences reported between urban high schools and rural high schools and for rural schools with access and rural schools without access for all items continued, except only a majority of rural access students significantly endorsed that school size was important to the quality of the education they received. As well, a significant majority of rural elementary students also found being bussed to school was important for them. This item also had a significant majority of urban high school and rural access schools endorsing it. Further, when the overall means are examined and, as reported previously for the other major dimensions, significant differences exist between urban high schools and rural high schools and between rural schools with access and rural schools without access.

Table 4.13: Factors Influencing Effectiveness, Students

Statement	% Indicating 'Agree' & 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' & 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
I am satisfied with the parental support and involvement in the educational programs for students with learning and/or behavioural needs.	77/6	79/7	65/18	70/11*	75/9*	68/13
I am satisfied that there is adequate Student Support Services in this school.	60/8	65/7	48/19	75/3*	59/11*	49/15
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the educational associates.	65/5	68/8	57/9	65/2*	68/5*	54/9
I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the educational support teachers.	67/6	66/6	55/9	65/2*	67/6*	56/9
Being bussed to school is important for me to receive my learning.	61/15*	45/24	57/23	59/18*	64/16*	53/21
School size is important to the quality of my learning.	54/22	59/21	56/23	58/19	58/20*	52/25
Overall Mean	3.74	3.70	3.49	3.75*	3.74*	3.51

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

MAJOR DIMENSIONS: STAFF AND STUDENT SURVEYS

The means for the major dimensions for the survey of staff and students by school are reported in Table 4.14. It would appear then that based on the results of the survey,

staff in urban high schools and rural access schools have higher ratings for all the major dimensions than their counterparts and this is significantly different for the students from urban high schools and rural schools with access. What is of interest is that for all dimensions of the student survey the means reported for the urban high school students (grades 9-12) and the rural access students (grades 6-12) were higher than their counterparts. Similarly, urban high school staff responses showed significantly higher means for the two dimensions Student Support Services and Student Intensive Needs. Rural access staff responses showed a significantly higher mean for Home/School Communication. Further, rural elementary staff results for the major dimensions Learning Environment and Student Intensive Needs also showed significantly higher mean differences than their counterparts.

Table 4.14: Major Dimension Means for Staff and Students by Type of School

Major Dimension	Rural Elementary vs Urban Elementary		Rural High School vs Urban High School		Rural Access vs Rural No Access	
	Rural Elementary	Urban Elementary	Rural High School	Urban High School	Rural Access	Rural No Access
	Learning Environment Staff	4.17*	4.03	4.02	4.07	4.17
Learning Environment Students	3.86	3.85	3.62	3.95*	3.85*	3.65
Inclusive Practices Staff	3.88	3.82.	3.70	3.82	3.86	3.85
Inclusive Practices Student	3.76	3.81	3.45	3.78*	3.75*	3.49
Home/School Communication Staff	4.11	4.05	3.97	4.09	4.17*	3.99
Home/School Communication Student	3.85	3.89	3.58	3.81*	3.84*	3.62
Student Support Services Staff	3.28	3.28	3.25	3.51*	3.31	3.23
Student Support Services Student	3.73	3.80	3.44	3.8*	3.72*	3.47
Student Intensive Needs Staff	3.66*	3.48	3.34	3.71*	3.61	3.62
Student Needs Student	3.81	3.85	3.54	3.93*	3.80*	3.58
Factors Influencing Effectiveness Staff	3.34	3.30	3.28	3.52	3.37	3.27
Factors Influencing Effectiveness Student	3.74	3.70	3.49	3.75*	3.74*	3.51

*indicates significant difference from its counterpart ($p < .05$)

OPEN ENDED RESPONSES-STAFF

A series of open-ended questions was asked at the conclusion of the staff and student surveys. It should be acknowledged that in many instances responses for the questions were not completed or were just a few words; consequently a reliable analysis wasn't possible, nor was it expected. A series of three questions were asked that included:

1. What do you like most about the Student Support Services provided?
2. If you could change anything about Student Support Services what would it be?
3. Please provide recommendations to improve the equitable delivery of Student Support Services

The anecdotal comments for the staff survey provided are grouped according to rural access schools, and rural schools without access and urban schools by question. Small samples of survey responses are provided as examples of the responses solicited.

RURAL ACCESS SCHOOL STAFF

The responses provided for Question One pertaining to what is liked most about Student Support Services are best illustrated by the following comments.

- *What I like best about Student Support Services provided by our school is the recognition that student supports are necessary and integral to the academic success of students.*
- *I think that the Student Support Services are utilized as effectively as they can be with the amount of time allotted. I believe that all parties are doing the best they can with the limited resources available.*

The second question pertained to what the respondents would like to change to about Student Support Services.

- *More modifying and adapting for students needs.*
- *Testing should be done to assess for learning disabilities.*

- *Focus on pull-in rather than pull-out. More focus on EAs working with regular students going to the classrooms where there are student in need.*
- *More EA time in the classroom for students with PPP's. Meetings between all teachers and Ed. Support staff more times thought the year to discuss ongoing concerns about these students. This does NOT happen in the school at any time throughout the year for students.*

When asked to provide recommendations to improve the equitable delivery of Student Support Services for students in the school, the following responses were elicited:

- *I think staffing is the biggest issue. E.A.s are spread very thin. 1:3 or more ratio is too high.*
- *Re: Subs - I know from experience at our school, E.A.s are coming to work ill because they know their absence has a huge impact on the children, and their co-workers (teachers and E.A.s alike) will bear the brunt of being short-handed in class.*
- *Smaller class sizes would allow us to focus more on individualized instruction. Some teachers say they have multi-leveled classrooms, but I don't believe any back to having small classes for special needs students, which would give them the one on one time they need.*

Some of the unique challenges that smaller multi-grade rural schools faced are raised in the rural access responses, but also the perception of need for more educational associates, smaller class sizes and the perception of need for more inclusive education practices are illustrated. It should also be noted that general satisfaction exists for the level of services provided.

RURAL NON-ACCESS STAFF

Concerns rural non-access school staff had as to what is liked most about Student Support Services for students in the school are best exemplified by the following:

- *Built-in collaboration time for classroom teachers SSS teachers-ownership of student programming is primarily classroom teacher based with the exception of alternate education students*

- *I think the team approach for the PPP's are informative to all members of the team including the parent. Our outreach worker is excellent but overworked.*
- *I am glad there is a social worker that comes but am unsure if the amount of times this service is available is enough. I think we should have a social worker at our school more.*

The responses to the second question regarding suggestions for change related more broadly to issues concerning intensive needs designation and the need for more educational associates. For example:

- *The need for more teacher associates. Regular teaching staff need to know more about the involvement of the support associates that come into the school from the division There is not enough funding for student diagnosis for all the students needing support.*
- *Students that should have Student Support Services but do not because they don't have outside agencies working with them, so don't receive or lose their designation.*

The third question, which asked for recommendations to improve Student Support Services, included remarks about programming options which are illustrated by the following:

- *Some of the programs available in Prince Albert should be open for rural students example Dev Ed.*
- *Access for rural students to have the same opportunities as students in the city.*
- *Access to special programs-technical support for students' Technical Aids-technical consultant assigned to the SSS area only I believe.*

Of the three questions the last provided the greatest opportunity for responses to delve into equity for rural schools that don't have access. Not surprisingly, there were issues related to access of programming that were raised. In general, staff are pleased with the team approach is evidenced in school-based practices, but also had concerns regarding designation for intensive needs students and the perceived need for more educational associates in the school.

URBAN SCHOOL STAFF

Responses provided by urban staff to Question One were similar to those that were provided by their rural counterparts. For example, some of the high school staff comments included:

- *I like the diversity of expertise of the Student Support team.*
- *Staff do as much as possible to meet the needs of students; while encouraging independence*

Interestingly, there wasn't much difference in the comments offered by the following elementary teachers:

- *Very professional staff people who are caring and compassionate with each individual student and work together to have the student's needs best met.*
- *Our Resource Teacher makes every effort to accommodate teachers and have small 'pull out groups' for those students who need that extra help outside of the classroom.*

Certainly, there were some suggestions for change that were programmatic in nature owing to the array of special programs offered in urban settings. Some of the remarks made by urban high school staff included the following.

- *The student support teachers would work with students in life skills and alternative education classes. More testing would be done for students who are continually struggling, even if they are in alternative education.*
- *Better communication regarding student transfers in advance with clear information about the student before a decision is made.*

The following comments were offered by elementary teachers and seem to illustrate the perceived need for educational associates and time for inclusive practices.

- *Not just at this school, but division wide. I wish that there were more Ed. Associates for students that aren't designated 'high needs' but desperately need that extra instruction time.*
- *I would like more time to collaborate with teachers.*

- *More time with teachers to ensure that the academic program fits the student's needs. This would include time for PPP development, differentiation of instruction, and in developing strategies/tools to aide the student in reaching their potential.*

The final question relating to recommendations to improve the equitable delivery of Student Support Services acknowledged the perceived need for best practices, more educational associates and challenges that rural communities might have.

- *More opportunities for staff to see easy ways to incorporate UbD, adaptive dimension, differentiated instruction into their lessons.*
- *We need to make sure that all services available in the urban centers are also available in the rural settings,*
- *Finding an equitable method of EA distribution within the division that is understood by all. With the high level of needs in this school, there needs to be more EAs in place*

OPEN ENDED RESPONSES-STUDENTS

A series of open-ended questions were asked at the conclusion of the student surveys. A similar grouping for rural with access, rural without access and urban students is provided. Open-ended responses were elicited for the following five questions on the student survey.

1. What do you like most about your school?
2. What do you wish was different about your school?
3. How do you think your school can best help students with their learning and behaviour?
4. How do you think your school can best help students with special needs?
5. What else would you like to tell me about your school?

RURAL ACCESS STUDENTS

The following are examples of the open-ended responses to the five questions from rural students whose schools were deemed as having access.

- *What I like most about my school is that there is always someone there to help when needed. I may have an issue with a subject and a teacher will help me finish that unit and so I am ready for the next one. I am proud that I will be ready for high school.*
- *Something I wish was different about my school was just having more time with the councilor than once a week, I feel like she is too busy to even talk to me anymore. I just would like to spend more time with her, I have too many problems going on and it can't wait until every Thursday. Sometimes there is even no one to talk to here.*
- *I wish the teacher's would teach in different ways so everyone could understand, because everyone learns in different ways.*
- *I think that counseling can really help kids... Because if you have anger management issues the counselor can really help. Also with learning, the teachers can really get you more help. For example, the educational support teacher can also help you.*
- *How I think my school can best help students that have a learning disability or special need is giving those specific students more time to work on a subject*
- *The teachers show a great amount of kindness for all the students in our class especially the special needs students. We have created many extra out door placements for the better sake of the student in a wheelchair.*
- *I would like to tell you that our school is really great. They have really great support and really great counselors.*
- *Just that it is an amazing school. Because it's a rather small school, everyone knows each other and everyone is a friend. There is rarely ever conflict and we know that we can be ourselves around our peers. The learning is really good and the staff is so helpful.*

RURAL NON-ACCESS STUDENTS

Some examples of the open-ended responses to the five questions for the rural non-access students are as follows.

- *The thing I like about my school is that the teachers are nice. They help you with problems that happen out of school. They put on events for the school and the community.*
- *I like that when you need help you get.*
- *Well if anyone cares about the students there will be a change in the system back to percentages....*
- *I wish that there was no bullying at my school, although there isn't very much of it that goes on.*
- *The students at this school don't realize that racism is a form of bullying.*
- *I like my school a lot, the teachers are good, the kids are good, most people get along, the teachers help me when I need the help, its always clean, I feel safe in this school, and I would not pick any school but this one.*
- *I think that our school helps special needs kids by getting to know them and learning about them so that they can get their trust.*
- *I think that are school has a very good special needs program for the kids I just think that they should maybe give them a little more socialization with say the grade 8's because they are a little more mature.*
- *That this is the best school I have ever gone to. It has so many classes that I wish I could take them all. All of the teachers are super nice and they are always there when you need them most*

URBAN STUDENTS

The open-ended responses to the five questions posited, for the urban students, are as follows.

- *The thing I like about my school is how friendly all the teachers and E.As are. They want us to get the best education there is and you get to meet new people*

and make new friends. I like size of my school but I know when I get into high school, the school will be bigger.

- *I like how when you are having a problem any teacher can help you.*
- *That there are caring teachers who want to talk to us if we have a problem*
- *I like that the staff wants you to succeed.*
- *I like the nice teachers, the daycare facility, the lunch program, small size (so basically everyone knows each other) The way the blocks runs, its easy for someone like me who has a child to just focus on two classes at a time instead of worrying and stressing about five all at once.*
- *I cannot help but to show a large amount of hatred towards your terrible 1,2,3,4 marking system...*
- *Bullying among peers needs to stop*
- *Sometimes there are a lot of students in a class, so it makes it harder to for the teacher to be able to get around and help everyone.*
- *By giving them every opportunity offered to other students not involved with special needs because they deserve it just as much as anyone else.*
- *I think my school is doing very well on helping with special needs children.*
- *I think that it is really small and in some cases that is a good thing but not usually. We don't have very many sports programs, and we are crammed for space. We have a mixed grade 7/8 class and 6/7. And now that we have pre-school we lost our art room. I think we need a better art program.*
- *This school is perfect for me, I get the help that I need. The block system is great, I get the time to keep up in my work the daycare here is good too, I can drop off my baby in the morning grab a snack head to class, lunch is provided too in the daycare. The counselor is awesome. She helps you with anything personal or not, she is willing to do whatever she can to keep the student happy. I plan to graduate at this school, glad I came here !!!!!*
- *That there is a lot of drama and some of it needs to be stopped because some teachers just walk by and try to ignore what is going on.*

OPEN RESPONSE SUMMARY

The open response answers from the staff and students seem to generally support the data from the surveys. Differences among groups are noted but these differences are understandable when examined in light of the survey data.

The data lead the researchers in the same direction as the survey data and add credence to the results from the surveys. The open response data add depth and fullness to the picture created in this report.

5 CHAPTER FIVE

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

This chapter presents data on a series of nine focus groups that were held at the SRSD divisional offices. In planning for focus groups there are a number of different design options that can occur. As there were multiple parent focus group sessions planned a double layer design was used. In a double layer design it is anticipated that there are geographical areas (the first layer) from which participants for the focus groups (second layer) are drawn (Kruger & Casey, 2000). The advantage in this type of design is that it allows for comparisons and contrasts to be made with different audiences from various locales. Thus, three double-layer design focus groups were held with parents. For the remaining focus groups that included principals, educational associates, educational support teachers, classroom teachers, superintendents, and students a more traditional single layer design was employed. In total there were nine focus groups which occurred from February 13-16th with approximately 10 participants in each with the exception of the senior administration group that consisted of four participants. A series of semi-structured focus group interview questions were constructed for the focus groups (i.e. SRSD Staff and Administrators, Students, & Parents) and on average the focus groups lasted approximately 120 minutes each. Two representatives from the SELU research team were present for each focus group with one team member acting as the moderator and the other as recorder. After the conclusion of the focus groups the notes were transcribed and thematically analyzed by the research team members.

PARENT FOCUS GROUPS

There were three parent focus groups that occurred. The sample was heterogeneous in that it was representative of parents who had children with intensive needs and those that did not. Parent cluster one was comprised of those parents whose children attended school in either Prince Albert secondary schools or the surrounding rural area. In these cases students were deemed to have access to the Student Support

Services as offered by SRSD in urban schools, however, there was also one parent who attended from outside of the rural area deemed to have access. Parent cluster two was comprised, for the most part, of those parents whose children attended rural schools who did not have access to SRSD services, in other words the students were not bussed to urban schools and received their education in their home school. However, there was one exception with a parent attending from a rural school that does have access. Parent cluster three was comprised of those parents whose children attended Prince Albert elementary schools.

There were a number of common themes that emerged from the parent focus groups. All parents from the various clusters were favorable towards the idea of inclusive education and for children with intensive needs to be educated in the least restrictive environment. For almost all parents the least restrictive environment was the home school in the regular classroom. Nevertheless, parents recognized the need for special individualized programs for some students. Although access to special programs was not an issue in the urban schools it was a factor for those parents whose children attended schools that were deemed to be rural with no access and for those that were rural and had access (i.e. bussing). For example, even for those that had access and were from smaller rural schools, bussing was viewed as a challenge and in some instances parents told stories where families moved to Prince Albert in order to receive the Student Support Services that might not be otherwise accessible or were accessible except that the arrangement for access (i.e. bussing) was viewed as not in their best interests.

The second most common theme that emerged for all parent cluster focus groups related to the use of educational associates. There seemed to be a general perception among parents that the number of educational associates in the classrooms has been reduced over time. This was viewed as problematic especially for smaller schools and high schools-both rural and urban. Suggestions around how to use educational associates in an efficient manner related to increased opportunities for the educational associates to have more training by the itinerant Student Support Services, like the occupational therapist and physical therapists for those children with intensive needs. This was viewed as a way to enhance the continuum of care for these children.

Although there was general agreement on the efficacy and effectiveness of early childhood programming and the need for speech language pathologist services to be provided, there was also the concern expressed that not enough was being done for older students. As well, a concern expressed by rural parents was the frequency in which speech language pathologist visits would occur and that the perceived use of block scheduling was viewed as a deterrent. Parents in all groups also agreed that more support from occupational and physical therapists was needed for children and youth with intensive needs and that overall counselor support was uneven though those parents in cluster two agreed that there was improved social worker services. In general, rural parents from cluster two viewed Student Support Services and specialized programming as having declined since post amalgamation and that school size was as a factor (i.e. small schools were more affected than larger schools).

Parents from all clusters saw team meetings as being of value especially for students with special needs. It was also thought that better transition planning for students with intensive needs is required between elementary schools and high schools. Further, this should be followed through with transition plans for students as they exit high school. As well, many parents felt that more information could be provided them and that workshops which included the teachers, educational support teachers, educational associates, and parents surrounding support services for students would facilitate greater team and joint learning about students with intensive needs. Overall, it was difficult for parents to make comparisons relating to the equity and effectiveness of Student Support Services across the division, as they did not consider themselves to have in-depth knowledge about the various modes of service delivery provided.

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

There was one educational support teacher focus group that was comprised of ten educational support teachers heterogeneously chosen from the schools in the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division. One of the main themes that emerged from the focus group was the perception of resource allocation within the division since amalgamation. There was consensus among the group that their perception was that the

allocation of educational support teachers was not equitable across the division and that all schools do not have access to a social worker, while some might have access to an outreach worker but not a counselor. Within this context, questions as to how staffing decisions are made were raised as well as the perceived differential treatment with regards to staffing between rural and urban schools.

Concerns were expressed by the educational support teachers around speech language pathologist services and how block scheduling doesn't allow for adequate follow up with little perceived progress being made in the interim. According to one educational support teacher:

She came out and did the screens in the fall and we still don't have her coming. She says after the February break but we have some high intensive need kids where they cannot speak clearly trying to get programs set up. She might come out or send something back and forth through e-mail but the parents are asking too. I want some programming set up, but we aren't scheduled again till March."

In addition:

What does make it so frustrating is that the Ed psychs, the OTs, the SLPs, they have such wonderful knowledge that you see what they can do for your kids. It is such a team. We need to have that team. I mean I think we all have things that we are bringing to it but if one piece is missing then that might be the critical piece for that student and it puts things back even further as far as moving forward.

A solution offered to this perceived challenge was based on past practices when an aid was trained to assist the itinerant speech language pathologist or physical therapist, for example, and then provide follow-up when the itinerant Student Support Services professional was not in the school.

The second major theme that arose out of the discussions related to resource allocation and designation. It was suggested that intensive needs designation limits the ability of teachers to receive support for students because of the outside agency referral requirement. Subsequently, some students' needs are not being met and there are a

number of students who continually ‘fall through the cracks’. To further exacerbate the issue, there is a perceived shortage of educational associates, especially in rural schools. In this instance recruiting well-trained and qualified educational associates is viewed as being problematic. Nevertheless, the few educational associates that are in the schools are doing good work but when they are ill difficulties in finding a replacement arise when one cannot be found in the community or the substitute has to travel to a rural school.

Further, to enhance the effectiveness of the educational associates the educational support teachers believed that teachers in the school needed to receive professional development on how to work with educational associates more effectively. As well, there is a lack of in-school time provided to facilitate collaborative practices between, teachers, educational support teachers and educational associates which includes but is not limited to the development of personal program plans. This is best illustrated by the following comment:

And how to use an EA cause a lot of them don't you know...it would be nice I think if there was in servicing on that as well. A lot of times the EAs are coming back from these PD days that they've had with knowledge and information that classroom teachers don't have, knowledge of programs and what to do... or even the opposite, teachers come back knowing a program and then the EA is in there having to run with kids on it and they don't have a clue what they're doing too. So there isn't the time to communicate, collaborate, meet as a team, it's always on the run, in the hallway. Can you do this next period with this student?

Some solutions offered related to increased teacher in-servicing on addressing students' needs or ideally combined educational associate and teacher in-services. Other concerns related to smaller classrooms, the need to lower the student to educational associate ratio. More practical suggestions were found in the development of an adaptations checklist that can be used with teachers. It was also suggested that demonstration of the adaptations would also provide greater opportunities for co-teaching and collaboration. As well, transition planning involving the teacher, which in some cases requires release time, would be beneficial.

EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATE FOCUS GROUP

There was one educational associate focus group that was comprised of ten educational associates heterogeneously chosen from the schools in the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division. Similar themes that were reported in the educational support teacher focus group emerged for the educational associates. For example, how to best make use of educational associates and what their role was prior to amalgamation when they could provide more direct support to programming as provided by speech language pathologists and occupational therapists and their role in follow-up was discussed and depicted in the following quote:

We did have the educational associates that were specially trained in speech to help the speech paths... it helped those kids immensely, then it was cut and now they have nothing.

Similarly, the educational associates saw the requirement for outside agency referral as a deterrent to receiving intensive needs designation and the funding that such a designation might offer. In this instance students not qualifying for designation were not receiving the needed program support. This was viewed as being an unfortunate situation because there are students who have the potential to function in a regular classroom if they had the needed intervention programming.

Although the educational associates see their role as one in which they can provide classroom support to all students they also recognized that not always was the regular classroom environment the best place for all students. In this respect, they viewed the least restrictive environment as the provision of a continuum of services and that there was a lack of physical space in which they could provide pull out services to those students who needs weren't being met in the regular classroom. An educational associate offered this comment:

Inclusion is an ideal but it just doesn't always work...some of those kids you have to take them out just so they can focus and concentrate on what you are doing

with them....I don't think it is fair to the other kids for you to be working and basically interrupting what the teacher is doing with the rest of the class.

In general, the educational associates thought the SRSD was trying to maintain the appropriate level of service delivery for the division, or at the very least the division was not viewed as cutting back educational associate services to the schools. However, there still were a number of issues that were considered barriers. For instance, sick leave and finding a substitute proves to be a challenge especially for rural schools. Further, in some instances substitutes are only being called when an educational associate is sick for three or more days and this was perceived as not being in the best interests of the child with intensive needs.

Many of educational associates value their role in the school as helping professionals and see the need for a team approach as being very important. However, the way in which educational associates are used varies from school to school. There is a perception among educational associates that some teachers seem not to understand how to best utilize educational associates in the classroom and they would suggest that continued in-services involving teachers, educational support teachers and educational associates are needed. In the opinion of both the EAs and the researchers, the role of the school's administration in setting the tone for the school cannot be overstated and it is important that everyone in the school has a clear understanding of what an educational associate should be doing and how they are best utilized. This is exemplified by the following statement:

I think administration sets the tone, I really do. If you have an administration that believes in strong teamwork and that's everyone in the school, all the staff working together, then they will work together and it will happen.

Overall, the need for more educational associates and counselors was stressed, as was the need to continue early intervention programming. It was also the opinion of the educational associate focus group that since amalgamation some of the rural schools do not have access to services and programs that they once might have had. Educational associates believe they are valued members of the school community, however, they feel

undervalued as they put in a number of unpaid volunteer hours. Further, at times they feel their safety can be compromised when working with students that have a variety of intensive needs and behavioural problems.

CLASSROOM TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

There was one classroom teacher focus group comprised of ten teachers heterogeneously chosen from the schools in the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division. Classroom teachers spoke positively about some of the changes that have been occurring system wide. The most notable change was the use of within school teams to serve the diversity of students.

The one thing I've noticed as a big change in that when I went for resource time it was just the resource teacher and me. Now it's me, the resource teacher, the counselor...there is such a wider set of networking going on with the student than there was ever was before the last two or three years.

Other system wide initiatives that were viewed positively included greater access for educational psychologists and the support services they are providing, the availability of student counselors and the consistency of social worker and outreach worker school visits during the course of the year.

However, there was agreement among the focus group participants that issues relating to the equitable delivery of the speech language pathologist's services are evident. There was also the belief that English as an additional language and pre-K students receive more support and direct service by the speech language pathologist. They believe that this is further exacerbated by block scheduling which they believe creates a delay of services for some older students along with the discontinuation of speech language paraprofessionals.

Since getting pre-K, my grade fives don't qualify for funding, which is so sad because some of them really need it...and all of the speech language pathologist time is spent with the younger children.

The classroom teachers perceive that the new personal program plan (PPP) initiative is working as roles and responsibilities seem to be more clearly defined. In this respect, the classroom teacher is responsible for the learning area monthly update whereas the educational support teacher is more of a case manager. They believe that this in turn allows for more productive planning sessions to occur between the educational associate and classroom teacher. Further, this group believes that although parent buy in and investment in learning can be difficult to predict, it was acknowledged that the current format provided the opportunity for greater parental involvement.

When examining this perceptual data, another major theme that emerged, as a challenge, was that since amalgamation there is a perception that the rural schools do not have access to the same programming support. They believe access to programs varies according to geography even when the communities have similar needs. The SRSD catchment areas for the schools were viewed as impacting school population and funding. The following comment offered by a classroom teacher illustrates this sentiment.

There are programs in Prince Albert like the STAR program and alternative education. Our kids don't have access to that but Meath Park and Birch Hills do. So since the amalgamation Shellbrook doesn't get it either. We're only 30 kms away. So I think that needs to be looked at as well because we have kids that could definitely benefit from both of those programs that should be there.

Within this context, there was also some discussion around community school funding and how it could be used more effectively. Issues relating to equity and access were discussed as not all schools have the programming that can be offered by a community school but still have high needs and demands placed on them. Nevertheless, focus group participants agreed there are benefits to community schools that include a school community coordinator, additional educational associates, nutrition and day care programs.

Issues were raised relating to accessing of intensive needs support and the need to revisit the requirement for outside agency involvement in order for intensive needs funding to occur. It was the opinion of the group that a significant portion of the

population is not being served as it prevents students from being identified. Consequently, some schools have difficulty in meeting the needs of students who don't meet the intensive needs funding criteria. Nevertheless, teachers felt that progress was being made towards the delivery of differentiated instruction in the schools so as to better meet the needs of students. The following quote from a participant is illustrative of this concern:

What I find in my school is that diagnosing, or differentiating instruction per child is really working well. We have a wonderful relationship with our educational support teacher but it's the lack of human resources. I mean I have 27 kids in my classroom this year and I have seven of them that have special needs or designated needs. I have two or three that have highly designated funding-I guess that is what they are called-and I have only one educational associate every other day. And so it's like, I can differentiate, I can plan for seven educational associates but I have one every other day....and there is only so far that peer tutoring can go.

PRINCIPAL FOCUS GROUP

There was one principal focus group comprised of ten principals heterogeneously chosen from the schools in the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division. The principal focus group participants were in general agreement that a continuum of services is provided to students with special needs and that students should be taught in the least restrictive environment. Overarching this sentiment was the belief that SRSD schools prepare students to be independent so they have the appropriate tools and supports to successfully integrate into society.

Principals also felt that there were inequities in the provision of Student Support Services due to the amalgamation agreements. There was consensus among principals that there is a need for the division to work towards a system of sharing that is fair to both rural and urban settings. Schools in the western portion of the division are not able to access any of the programs that other rural schools can. A principal focus group participant offered the following comment:

I think when we're looking at the urban and rural, I think we have equity as far as access to the people at the Ed Centre and all the, you know, support people that can come out and help us. But where we're missing is the access to city programs. And then what's happened is we have an agreement with Parkland Health and so they provide an outreach worker to four schools in our area so we get access about one day per week or a little bit better. We get fabulous service when this person can come to us, but it's rare....So when that agreement came into place, the school division pulled our social worker so we don't have a social worker and an outreach counselor. And that, from what I understand, wasn't the intent of Parkland Health. It was to be an additional service on top of our school social worker.

And in addition:

I sit in ...the old Parkland School Division, and many others sit in a similar situation. We have no access to any of the resources, or the programs available, we have no access. That is written in stone somewhere? That is definitely not equitable. That is number one. Yet we see kids with needs in a high school how do we deal with that? And those situations are happening...but how do we support those kids as well?

One of the major themes that emerged from the principal focus group related to the need for a more equitable manner to offer supports and services to the schools. The perspective school-based administrators had was unique, in that although it was agreed that a process exists for support services, they believe the allocations are not equitable. Specifically, there was concern relating to how educational associates were allocated to schools. It was suggested that a different approach was required that took into account school population, the number of students requiring intensive needs support and the diversity and potential vulnerability in the school population. Two of the recommendations made by this group were for educational associates to be in every K-3 classroom and that a cap on enrollment in these classrooms be put in place.

The principals also expressed concern over some of the more recent Ministry of Education initiatives and the culture of the relationship between the schools and Ministry. According to the principals there was a sense of disconnect that exists and first arose during the last negotiations where the schools were not seen as doing well enough. Since a business model is being applied there has been a lack of stakeholder consultation and that demoralizes staff within the schools.

Other concerns surrounding equity that have been raised in the principal focus group are some of the perceived challenges that exist in schools accessing occupational therapists, speech language pathologists and educational psychologists. Although there was agreement that response times for educational psychologists were improving, occupational therapist and speech language pathologist response time continues to be an issue. Nevertheless, they believe there were positive changes happening. In this respect, speech language pathologists, educational psychologists, and the consultants were now able to team and participate in collaborative planning on a more regular basis and that the outreach workers are very supportive and include the parents in their meetings. However, there was the perception that in some instances there were fewer social workers because of the new agreement with the health region for the provision of outreach workers.

In terms of classroom-based practices, the educational associates were viewed as doing very good work and the workshops they participated in were of benefit both to them and the school. There seemed to be good support for the rolling out of the new curriculum and personal program plans with both initiatives being well received. However, it was suggested that opportunities for classroom teachers to learn more about intensive needs students and best educational practices was warranted. As well, there were classroom-based challenges expressed specific to the high school age population. Attendance and transiency is a problem in schools and their respective classrooms. Better ways in which to support the classroom teacher to plan for the vulnerable student needed to occur. There was a perception that the pupil teacher ratio is getting higher and as it does the group perceives that it is becoming more difficult to connect with the hard to reach kids with the reality being that many classrooms have multi-grade skill levels and multiple programs in each. This principal focus group seemed to believe that this is a

continuing challenge for the classroom teachers and that the solution to this can support the school to best emulate inclusive practices.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

There was one student focus group comprised of ten students heterogeneously chosen from the schools in the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division. The students in the focus group also represented secondary and middle years students. The students spoke positively about their school climate and the effort put forth by their teachers. They appreciated the extra time classroom teachers would make for extra-curricular activities that included driving them to another school if they did have the resources available in their school for the preferred activity. Further, they agreed that their teachers were there for them if they required emotional support and this sentiment extended to the school's administration as well. Some of students felt their schools were under resourced (i.e. library) because of their size and they didn't have the same opportunities as larger urban schools because of the lack of variety in programming. However, they did not feel that multi-grade classrooms affected their education negatively.

The students also agreed that the educational associates were of benefit to everyone in their class and that they were also able to help those students who require assistance. In this respect, a student offered the following comment:

We have two educational associates in our classroom and they help everyone but they mostly focus on the kids that need the extra help. And sometime they will take them into a different classroom if it's too distracting in the normal classroom.

In the opinion of the students, those with intensive needs in their classroom received the appropriate amount of assistance from the educational associate. However, some of the students participating in the focus group observed that the other students treated those with intensive needs differently. One of the reasons as to why this might be is because of the transition planning that occurs with the students prior to the entry of a student with intensive needs in their classroom. The following quote illustrates this point:

Sometimes people make fun of them but the teachers try their best. I find bigger schools they would be in their own classes. There is an autistic kid at our school and he is really welcome here. They brought in a counselor to come talk to us about autistic people before he came so everyone was prepared and he was really welcomed when he came and everyone talks to him now and he felt really welcome and he likes our school.

Students generally thought that students with intensive needs were included and this is the best environment for them as they can be treated equitably. It was also felt that all students benefited from having students with intensive needs in their classroom as it helps them develop compassion, sympathy and skills needed to understand diversity. For example, the following comment was offered:

It kind of teaches you sympathy and compassion towards other people. It helps you with your social skills as well. It helps with like after school if I encountered any of these people I couldn't talk to them I had trouble with... it really helped, it helps, it prepared me for if I meet more people like that.

The students also agreed that their learning was not just academic in nature but was social-emotional learning as well. Further, if their school did not have a counselor there was always a teacher who they could talk to about personal issues. In those schools that did have counselors they provided assistance for learning, family issues, emotional problems or career guidance and questions. It was also felt that in smaller schools students felt safer and there was more of a family type of climate the existed. In those schools where a number of students are at-risk issues pertaining to overall safety and bullying surfaced. Overall, the students were happy with the education they were receiving and felt that their teachers cared for them and there was an attempt to connect their learning to real world experiences that the students perceived as being of benefit.

CONSULTANT FOCUS GROUP

There was one Student Support Service consultant focus group that was held with ten participants. The Student Support Services consultants for the SRSD discussed in detail what they viewed as best practice. For example, much discussion ensued around teams and how their ability to work in an inter-professional manner through collaboration on both pre-referral strategies and in meetings for students with intensive needs has become the cultural norm. This in turn, builds classroom teacher capacity around supporting students with mild to moderate needs. As well, the consultants felt that there was an appropriate array of services and programs provided by SRSD and that there existed fluid dialogue among team members, schools, and families. Further, they were positive towards the implementation of culturally appropriate programs (i.e. elders) and felt overall they had good relations with the various agencies and were well linked to community services and supports so as to create seamless transitions for students. Because of these practices, students do not need to wait for referral or assessment to have access to supports. For instance, the team can provide strategies on-site and this in turn has become the culture of collaboration within the schools. However, there are also challenges with team relationships in the schools as articulated by the following consultant:

...sometimes you end up maybe compromising what the ideal would be with school-based staff or parents. There's lots of times when we want to go deeper with finding out what's going on with school-based staff... with parents, there's often times when we'd like to know more about what's going on, but if we broach it right now with parents we might lose them altogether. They just stop coming to school and that's a pretty big cost for us finding out what's going on...and within our team, if we don't have healthy school-based teams that affects what we're able to accomplish as goals.

Other challenges that the consultants discussed related to the transiency of the population, attendance, building trust with parents, and ensuring follow through with the program plan being implemented. They also viewed a need for preventative programs

surrounding the behavioural, social, and emotional needs of students. There were also concerns expressed how best to provide services with limited resources while maintaining a balance between universal (preventative) with intensive support and how best to prioritize these services when there is a scarcity of resources. Issues relating to the equitable service delivery and the pressures of time versus caseload numbers, especially for the speech language pathologists, were raised. It was acknowledged that a formula for the provision of educational support teachers needs to be developed based on the diversity of needs from school to school. This sentiment is illustrated by the following quote:

As we've made an effort to reduce our intensive needs, there's no formula for calculating what that diversity population is. And there's a real inequity for how those Ed Support Teachers are filled. Sometimes they're covering off more grades, sometimes they're covering off different teaching assignments in the schools, and so there's real inequity in that. And that rolls out to the students' big time. We know of schools that have managed to get those supports one way or another, and it's starting to show now in their assessment for learning results.

Furthermore:

The challenge is as it relates to building capacity is the time it takes and that our students with more severe needs, be it speech, language, cognition or socio-emotional problems, their needs cannot be met by universal classroom practices.

The authors believe that part of the challenge then for SRSD is to provide support for a diverse student body and to identify, or at least recognize, that differences across schools exist that reflect the placement of educational support teachers. It was suggested that decisions surrounding the funding of Student Support Services, not only as it applies to educational support teachers but educational associates and pre-K staffing allocations, need to be revisited and should include input from a variety stakeholders within the division (i.e. consultants).

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW

There was one focus group held with the superintendents for the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division. There was also one interview held with the Director of Education and the Superintendent of Schools. The same semi-structured interview was used for both the focus group and interview. The major themes articulated are represented as follows.

General discussion around the least restrictive environment as being the goal division wide occurred. In all instances it was agreed placement decisions that are closest to the students' home environment are the ideal and deemed appropriate when parents are in agreement. However, it was recognized that geography and issues surrounding access and the equity of access for rural and urban schools are in some instances problematic. Other perceived barriers include but are not limited to parental reluctance, and teacher/administration misalignment with division philosophy. Further, it was also recognized that special programming for students with intensive needs can also support school-based inclusive practices.

In terms of current Student Support Services practices the senior administrators agreed that the consultants' support team was very collaborative and they were acutely aware of some the challenges that exist. In this respect, they believe that the SRSD is unique as to the transiency, demographics and socio-economic status of the population that it serves. Consequently, it is those students who are not identified as having intensive needs, but who have learning and or behavioural needs, or mild to moderate learning disabilities that require additional classroom support. Further, it was acknowledged that even though the amount of speech language pathologist time has increased division wide, with an increased focused on servicing children in the early years, it has created some friction as it pertains to service for older students.

One of the best practices identified by the senior administrators is the professional development opportunities offered. They have found that teachers, educational support teachers, and educational associates have expressed appreciation for the level of professional development activities offered by the division. As well, the educational psychologists have been enthusiastic for the opportunities that they have to provide

preventative service and professional development activities. Other points to consider are the increased numbers of new Canadians and the demand now being placed on the division for English as an additional language programming (which is a new responsibility being added to Student Support Services). Even though this challenge has arisen, it is also acknowledged that there are a number of students within the system whose first language is Dene or Cree and who also require EAL support, placing more demands on an already scarce resource pool.

Further, the senior administration identified that the division has established a number of partnerships that provide an interagency focus that include but are not limited to health, HUB/COR, the Regional Intersectoral Committee, early childhood intervention program, mental health, and Eagle's Nest. Nevertheless, they perceive a need for more mental health involvement and perhaps a realignment of existing resources allocated to programs, like STAR, for an example. The senior administrative team is aware of the challenges that exist for SRSD and their hope is that the current review will enable Student Support Services to address these challenges so that the system goal of supporting all children to the best of the division's ability is attained.

I do not have an illusion of perfection, but I believe a pursuit of excellence is a viable and attainable goal

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

The focus group data adds further depth to the data collected. Each stakeholder group had particular suggestions and concerns that, when considered in combination with the open ended response items and the survey results, can lead researchers to consider certain common themes that seem to emerge.

All focus groups generally supported the SRSD philosophy of inclusion and participants seemed pleased to offer their ideas about how the system could be improved. Generally, there seems to be an understanding of the philosophy of the division with respect to Student Support Services programming, but sometimes there seemed to be

misunderstandings or differing interpretations related to individual programs and procedures. The idea of rural access schools and rural non-access schools comes in for considerable criticism from a number of groups, and, given the differences in satisfaction levels of the various groups of school stakeholders identified from the survey data, consideration must be given to addressing this issue.

6 CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter identifies the key findings of the report that emerged from the data on the review of Student Support Services programming for the division as it relates to equity and effectiveness. Methodological triangulation was used to ensure there is both trustworthiness and validity to the findings (Denezin, 2006). What this means is that data from the surveys and focus group interviews were crosschecked to ensure a more balanced and detailed picture of the findings emerges (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, & Somekh, 2008). It is hoped that the findings will serve as a springboard for discussion and planning. Recommendations for effective practices were written where appropriate. The school division needs to examine the data and determine from the conclusions what aspects require a different focus or increased attention.

FINDINGS

The following represent the major findings from the study:

1. There are no significant differences among staff by school type for inclusive practices. Educators are responsive to students' needs and the needs-based model of service delivery is in place. It is still a challenge to find time to collaborate and plan for co-teaching opportunities.
2. There is overall satisfaction with the effectiveness of Student Support Services programming. Further, there is general consensus among staff and administration that the Student Support Services staff provided by SRSD are well respected and work very hard to assist those in the field and the children they serve. There is an openness that allows staff to easily approach the Student Support Services team. The specialized, professional cadre of Student Support Services assistance (i.e. speech language pathologists, consultants, occupational therapists, social workers and educational psychologists) is perceived to be better than previous support provided with the exception being occupational therapists.

3. There were questions arising as to the efficacy of speech language pathologist block scheduling and long wait times that some schools experience.
4. There is a perception that the equitable provision of Student Support Services programming appears to advantage urban schools. Challenges facing the division relate to inequitable access to Student Support Services programming. Although the services provided are viewed as effective, inequities are perceived to exist. A solution to the inequities that exist for those schools that are within a reasonable geographic distance from Prince Albert but are denied access into the urban program because they were later into the amalgamation needs to be found. Further, rural elementary school staff and rural high school staff do believe that geography does inhibit the equitable delivery of Student Support Services.
5. School-based practices surrounding student intensive needs are rated significantly higher by rural elementary school staff and urban high school staff. All staff agrees that the new multi-disciplinary team concept that actively includes the teacher and Student Support Services is a much needed improvement. Challenges do exist when it comes to intensive needs designation as the requirement for outside agency referral is viewed as an impediment. As well, issues relating to the need for a lower pupil teacher ratio were raised as being needed in special programs and to address the needs of a diverse student population.
6. One of the most consistent challenges raised in the focus groups related to the need for increased educational associate support in the school. It was suggested that perhaps educational associates could once again become “paraprofessional support” for speech language pathologists so that programming could be reinforced during “block scheduling gaps”. There were also some issues raised around the substitution policy for educational associates, as it was the perception that educational associates needed to be absent three or more consecutive days before a substitute would be hired.

7. The learning environment, inclusive practices, home/school communication, Student Support Services provided (including student needs), and satisfaction with effectiveness of Student Support Services are rated significantly higher by students in urban high schools and rural schools with access.
8. Parents feel unsure or are uninformed about what their rights are as they pertain to their child and or the resources that are available to them within the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The traditional approach to the delivery of special education services within schools has been to provide a continuum of placement options that operate under the principle of the least restrictive environment. However, this type of service delivery has seen changes with the advent of inclusive education and a needs-based model of service delivery. In this respect, the notion of a continuum of services has shifted more towards the delivery of programming within local schools and classrooms. Nevertheless, there still exist arguments for other programming options outside of the local school when the needs of the child are so great that they cannot be served in the local school. This dual system of service delivery presents challenges and they are even more apparent in school divisions, such as SRSD, that as a result of amalgamation include both rural and urban schools. In these instances, some view geography as an impediment to the equitable delivery of Student Support Services.

To help address the perceived inequity of Student Support Services a series of recommendations are offered. It should be noted that the decision to adopt or reject the recommendations offered is at the discretion of the division, its Board of Education and current priorities. Further, it is important to recognize that the recommendations are interdependent and in this sense should be viewed, as a group, as promising practices for inclusive education.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. Create further collaborative professional development and scheduled networking (i.e. in-school planning) opportunities between teachers, educational support teachers, teachers associates, parents and Student Support Services personnel so as to better equip local schools with the needed capacity to deliver equitable and effective inclusive education.

There was a perception of the participants of the study that staff and students would benefit from more collaborative planning time for team meetings and for professional development. The literature supported the idea that collaborative professional learning and planning time can enhance educational outcomes for students.

Appropriate professional development has often been cited as one of the major obstacles to best practices for inclusive schools (Englert, & Rozendal, 2004; Monteith, 2000; NBACL, 2007; Roher, 2004; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011). Professional development is needed surrounding the growing diversity of the student population. Moreover, professional development activities on differentiating instruction, the adaptive dimension (Haines et al., 2000), the use of authentic assessment approaches, how to work with educational associates and *Understanding by Design* are required as the basis for best inclusive practices in the classroom (NBACL, 2007; Tomilinson; 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Lack of scheduled time within the teaching schedule to allow for planning and networking can be a major impediment for the provision of inclusive practices (Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998; Friend & Cook, 2010). With this in mind, SRSD should continue to encourage shared problem solving, collaboration and co-teaching opportunities among and between teachers, educational support teachers and educational associates. Further, shared scheduled activities between speech language pathologists (for example), educational support teachers, and educational associates should be provided so as to increase the local capacity in schools to deal with the diversity of learning styles and abilities of students.

2. To facilitate recommendation number 1, SRSD could use technology where face-to-face meetings are not viable due to distance for purposes of planning, problem solving and collaborating.

Video conferencing has been advocated as having the potential to reach a large number of people in a lot of different areas and has direct application to both the education and health sectors (Haines et al., 2000). Further, greater use of internet technologies, distance education tools, and enhanced website development can also facilitate communication between professionals (Geer & Hamill, 2007; Winter & McGhie-Richmond, 2005). In this respect, SRSD's e-master has the potential to provide a unique way in which technology can be used to build local capacity in schools and to enable collaborative consultation.

3. Continue to ensure the allocation of educational associates and educational support teachers in schools is based on the needs of the school.
4. Ensure the substitution policy for educational associates does not disadvantage the classroom teacher or students with needs, intensive or otherwise.

The data suggest that there is a lack of understanding (and therefore concern) about how educational associates and educational support teachers are allocated and some negativity toward these allocation processes was identified. There also seems to be lack of understanding about the educational assistant substitution policy and some negativity toward it. Other data suggest that SRSD has clear policies and processes on these issues. It is suggested then, that there needs to be further clarification and therefore clearer understanding about both the allocation of resources and the substitution policy.

As noted in the literature, the needs of the school should take into account the growing diversity of the student population and not be solely based on enrollment (Haines et al., 2000). In this respect, it would seem that the present diversity staffing formula for educational support teachers and educational associates might be enhanced to take into account school-based needs and community social demographics. Promising practices recognize that providing adequate school based resources including extra staffing (Loreman, 2001) and appropriately sized classrooms (NBACL, 2007) in the school are important as without it can lead to teacher burnout (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011) and not be in the best interests of the child.

5. There is the need for the development of an updated parent handbook, electronic document or web-based resource that parents can use to access information and better advocate for their child.

From the parent focus group, it was discovered that some parents feel they need a greater understanding of their role, their rights and their responsibilities with regard to Student Support Services programming. Information pertaining to parental rights and responsibilities, the various roles individuals undertake when working with their child, the human service agencies that are available, along with some basic principles as how best to advocate for their child could be provided (Loreman, 2007; Loreman, Deppler & Harvey, 2005; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2005). The e-master plan is a vehicle in which this might be actualized. Further, the researchers feel it is important to ensure that parents continue to be encouraged to participate in all aspects of service delivery including school-based teams.

6. The Saskatchewan Rivers School Division should change its rural access policy regarding special programs offered in Prince Albert so that it is not based on historical amalgamation boundaries. Rather a policy needs to be established that is based on geographical radius to provide a more equitable form of service delivery.

As stated in the findings, the data from the surveys, open-ended responses and the focus groups clearly show that the stakeholders from the non-access schools have significantly lower levels of satisfaction with Student Support Services than the other rural schools. Further, participants generally believe this practice of differentiated access should be discontinued. There is no available rationale for the difference of service provision other than in which legacy school division the school was located. This situation should be addressed as soon as possible.

7. In all schools, but particularly for those rural schools which do not have access to special programs, a needs-based model should continue to be implemented, delivered and supported for all students. Further, for those students whose needs cannot be reasonably accommodated in the regular classroom then the provision of an accessible special program should be provided so as to ensure equitable service delivery for rural non-access schools.

The needs-based model advocated by the Ministry of Education requires collaborative consultation, inter-professional teams, and partnerships with other human service agencies. Further, it recognizes that congregated settings in the provision of education to students with intensive needs are not viewed as best practice (Ministry of Education, 2011). Part of the challenge that faces school divisions as they transition to a needs-based model is the building of capacity in local schools and communities to enable a more inclusive form of service delivery. Subsequently, the recommendations provided (i.e. 1-4) will assist in facilitating a more equitable mode of service delivery within the division.

8. There is a Ministry requirement for outside agency referral for intensive needs designation. It is recommended that the division explore multiple ways to meet the requirement for outside agency referral as well as lobby the Ministry of Education for change to the policy requiring outside agency referral.

The researchers believe that the Ministry policy requiring outside agency referral for intensive needs designation is not consistent with a needs-based approach and lobbying for change is appropriate. However, the need for outside agency referral is a reality and it has been implied to the researchers that SRSD normally refers to the health region or another government agency for outside agency referral. SELU is aware that other divisions in the Province meet the requirement for outside agency referral in a variety of ways, some using community-based organizations (e.g. 4H, minor sports) and it is believed this approach would help SRSD lessen time for referrals and offer useful consultation.

9. The division should review the placement process for STAR and partner with the health region to offer a special program for students with severe emotional behavioural disorders and co-morbid mental health needs. Instead of continuing the current configuration of divisional resources allocated to STAR, the possible new partnership would see a special program run in conjunction with the health region to serve only those students with severe emotional behavioural disorders and co-morbid mental health needs.

Alternative arrangements are necessary for those students who are so disruptive or otherwise demanding of vast amounts of time, energy, and resources of general educators that the instructional needs of non-disabled students would be significantly and negatively impacted. It is argued that there is little reason to assume that students will experience success upon reintegration simply because placement priorities have shifted towards inclusion. Rather, a full continuum of placement options for students with severe emotional behavioural disorders and co-morbid mental health conditions that are integrated with other agencies needs be considered (Hallahan, Kauffman, McIntyre, & Mykota, 2010; Kauffmann, Mostret, Trent, & Pullen, 2006).

CONCLUSION

A large amount of data was collected as part of the study. More than had originally been anticipated and it is hoped that the SRSD Board of Education, central office administration, and school staff reflect on what was collected. It was apparent that everyone is interested in improving the effectiveness and equitable delivery of Student Support Services of the school division. The division covers a large geographical area but is committed to offering equitable opportunities for education. However, challenges do exist. Limitations on funding and resources require difficult but informed decisions to be made. Moreover, the growing diversity of the student population places ever-increasing demands on schools today. This coupled with the continued controversy as to how best to serve the needs of a child, indicate that the field of special education is alive and well.

In conclusion, we want to thank all of those who contributed to this study: students, teachers, support staff, parents, the administrative team and division office staff. We want to wish you well as you go continue to go about enhancing the learning environment for your students.

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