Inclusive Education: A Guide for School-Based Leaders

Module 1: SCHOOL-WIDE PLANNING
Making Supports and Services a Priority

Preface

Saskatchewan is guided by a <u>Student First</u> approach which puts the student front and centre by focusing on each student's strengths, abilities, interests, and needs. To create intentional and responsive educational experiences in classrooms and in the school involves the entire school community, including students and families.

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education promotes the belief, attitude and approach of inclusion for meeting student needs. A strong commitment to <u>inclusive education</u> by the school community is demonstrated by inclusive educational practices that are part of the everyday school experiences of the student. Environments where students feel safe, accepted, respected and confident to engage in learning are essential to student success.

Supporting students through a <u>needs-based service delivery model</u> promotes the success of all students, including those who have learning needs that require supports to optimize learning opportunities. The needs-based model is a Student First strengths-based approach in which responsive instruction, interventions and supports are identified, planned and provided to meet student needs at the school and classroom level, through targeted and/or group approaches, and at an intensive individual level. The needs-based model recognizes that a student's needs change over time and that individualized, flexible and responsive supports are required.

School-Wide Planning: Making Supports and Services a Priority is part of a series of modules that provide examples of high quality inclusive practices. **This module provides suggestions for a process that administrators and teacher leaders can use to ensure that supports and services align with student need.**

Supporting documents and resources can be found throughout the module by clicking on the underlined term, phrase or title.

School-Wide Planning: The Role of School Leaders

School divisions are responsible for providing supports to schools to meet student needs in inclusive educational settings. At the school level, collaborative teams, that may include students, if appropriate, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, supporting professionals, human services agencies and community organizations, plan interventions and supports based on individual need. School leadership plays a role in ensuring that each student's plan is being appropriately implemented and supported.

> *Student support services teacher* (SSST) is a generic term used by the Ministry of Education to describe teachers who support students facing a range of barriers to learning to achieve their educational and developmental potential by providing a range of strategies and specialized support at the classroom, targeted group and individual levels. School divisions may refer to this role in different ways, for instance, learning resource teachers or LRTs.

It is important for school leaders to know about inclusive practices and build staff capacity so these practices can be effectively implemented. In many

schools, school-based administrators and student support services teachers collaborate to lead this work. Their leadership supports the actualization of a commitment to inclusion in which students, parents/guardians, teachers and other school staff are authentically engaged.

School leaders make decisions about how to prioritize support in their school based on student need and the services available. Each school leadership team is responsible for making well-informed decisions that best meet student need and support the achievement of student outcomes. Priority planning includes the following steps:

- review what supports and services are currently in place;
- know the learners;
- define school team members' roles and responsibilities;
- prioritize support;
- create and share the priority plan;
- implement the plan; and,
- review and evaluate the plan's effectiveness (adapted from Kilgore, 2010).

Creating a school-wide plan that maps out where support is currently in place and where support may be needed in the current school year is a way for school leaders to coordinate and prioritize supports and services and facilitate information sharing with the rest of the staff.

Current Practices

It is important for school leaders to know which inclusionary practices are already in place to ensure that these practices are understood and implemented. This includes building the knowledge and capacity of all staff members on an on-going basis.

> Reflective questioning provides educators with the opportunity to think deeply about their educational ideologies and practices and how they impact students.

Moving Current Practice Forward
Reflective Questions and Considerations

• Which school-wide inclusive practices are currently being implemented? How successful are they?
     o Where are we now?
     o Where do we want to be?
 • Do we have evidence that we:
     o are a welcoming school community that promotes respect, mutual trust and positive relationships?
     o promote attitudes that value individual diversity, student interests, backgrounds and life experiences?
     o foster positive self-esteem, engagement, participation and a sense of belonging in the classroom and the school community?
     o engage in a collaborative interprofessional team approach for positive problem solving, sharing ideas, collegial support and parent/guardian engagement?

o use high quality responsive instruction that is differentiated to meet students' needs for learning and engagement?
o facilitate challenging and engaging learning opportunities that are culturally and developmentally appropriate?
o create an environment that provides an emotional safe space, reflects the cultural backgrounds of families in the school and incorporates physical adaptations to accommodate diversity?
• What are the strengths of our staff to effectively implement inclusive practices? Do we need professional development or support? • What are our pre-referral and referral procedures to <u>access supporting professionals</u>?   o Are staff members aware of these procedures?

Knowing Our Learners

Inclusive schools create environments and provide supports that meet the needs of all learners. Learners who require supports may benefit from an Inclusion and Intervention Plan (IIP). School leaders need to be aware of students who require on-going adaptations and supports to meet curricular and/or individualized outcomes and plan for the provision of the supports that are needed.

Knowing Our Learners
Reflective Questions and Considerations

• Who are our learners?
• Is the student able to access all areas of the school independently?
• What are their strengths? What do they need?
   o Were students and families involved in discussions regarding supports and/or adaptations?
   o Which students require occasional or frequent support? What does the support entail?
   o Which students are becoming more independent? Which students have the skills to advocate for themselves?
   o Which students work well with others?

• What are the <u>assistive technology</u> needs of our students?
   o What are the low technology (low tech) needs?
      ■ Does the school have the appropriate resources? If not, what are our next steps?
   o Can the classroom teacher provide this support? If not, how can these supports be provided?
   o What are the high technology (high tech) needs?
      ■ Does the school have the appropriate resources? If not, what are our next steps?

▪ Can the classroom teacher provide this support? If not, how can these supports be provided?

• Is there a match between our learners' needs and the supports they are receiving?
   ○ If yes, continue with the priority plan.
   ○ If no, continue to problem solve.

Prioritize Support

School leaders should establish a process to identify how and where to assign support. The needs-based model involves a comprehensive evaluation of the holistic needs of students, the identification of concerns and priorities, and the coordination of appropriate supports through an efficient use of resources.

Prioritizing Support
Reflective Questions and Considerations

• What supports can our school access and/or make available?
   ○ School – e.g., student support services teachers, administrators, educational assistants, parents/guardians, peer tutors/mentors, technology.
   ○ School division – e.g., consultants/coordinators, educational specialists, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, school counsellors, social workers.
   ○ Outside agencies – e.g., human services agencies, community organizations.
• How much support can be accessed? Is the support direct or consultative?

• Which students presently require the most support?
   ○ What kind of support do they need?
   ○ Who needs to provide that support? How often? Where, when and why?

• Have the classroom teachers been involved in conversations regarding when and how support would be most beneficial? If no, how can we involve them?
• Which students are becoming more independent and require less support? Do we have a transition plan in place to begin reducing support to foster independence?

Aligning Roles and Responsibilities of School Team Members

Inclusive education is about making schools places of learning and success for all students. As schools embrace the philosophy of inclusive education, the once distinctive line between general and special education blurs. Creating a priority plan helps to ensure that supports and services are being used in an efficient and effective manner to assist all students in achieving curriculum and/or individualized outcomes. Team members share the responsibility for decision-making, planning and taking action for students who may require

> *Saskatchewan teachers believe in honouring the dignity and roles of all individuals in the educational community and strengthening relationships with colleagues in order to support shared student and teacher success.*
>
> (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2016, p.9)

occasional or frequent supports to meet their potential. School team members create collaborative partnerships to deliver supports and services. A coordinated plan is critical to facilitating this essential relationship between support and student success.

For collaborative endeavours in schools to be successful, it is important to pay attention to the ways that professionals work together. For instance, clearly articulating roles and responsibilities can resolve misunderstandings before they become a problem.

At the school level, inclusionary practices may involve team members having the following roles and responsibilities:

Administrator

✓ Leads and facilitates the development of the mission, vision and culture of a school community, one that focuses on the learning success of each student.
✓ Nurtures a healthy and supportive physical and social environment that is responsive to the local context.
✓ Supports an effective alignment of resources with school goals for inclusion.
✓ Engages school community councils and staff to address the diverse needs of students.
✓ Uses data, evidence and inquiry to analyze student learning and teacher instructional practice (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2017).

Student Support Services Teacher

✓ Works with classroom teachers and other team members to develop and implement individualized programs for students with intensive needs.
✓ Provides support to targeted groups and/or individual students.
✓ Works with classroom teachers to find appropriate resources to support student learning.
✓ Provides guidance to teachers, educational assistants, students, parents/guardians and administrators to help them understand and support the achievement of IIP outcomes.
✓ In collaboration with the classroom teacher, monitors and reports student IIP progress to the student and parents/guardians on a regular basis.

Classroom Teacher

✓ Nurtures a classroom learning environment that is welcoming and equitable for all students.
✓ Uses the Adaptive Dimension to adapt the learning environment, instruction, resources and assessment so that students have equitable access to learning experiences to maximize their potential.

> *Classroom teacher* includes teachers responsible for teaching a grade or subject.

✓ Provides information to the team about a student's characteristics, behaviours and needs as appropriate.
✓ Engages in collaborative planning with members of the school-based and/or school division team for students in his/her classroom.

✓ Shares responsibility with the student support services teacher and other team members to support and report on the achievement of student IIP outcomes.

Psychologist

✓ Administers and interprets behavioural, cognitive and/or academic assessments to inform planning for student needs.
✓ Shares assessment report(s) with the student (if appropriate), parents/guardians and other team members.
✓ Makes suggestions about supports and strategies that relate to student need.

Speech-Language Pathologist

✓ Assesses communication skills through observation and testing.
✓ Consults with parents/guardians and teachers about strategies to support speech and language development.
✓ Provides direct service to individual and/or small groups of students.

Educational Assistant

✓ Carries out responsibilities as directed by the school division.
✓ Works under the direction of a teacher, school administrator or learning specialist to provide support to students in a variety of contexts, including targeted supports to individual students or groups of students with specific learning, behavioural or physical needs.
✓ Collaborates with members of the student support services team.

Aligning Roles and Responsibilities
Reflective Questions and Considerations
• Have school leaders clearly defined team members' roles and responsibilities in their school? • Do all team members understand their own roles and responsibilities? • Do all team members understand the roles and responsibilities of others?
• Does the school plan identify gaps in and overlaps of services for students? • Is there on-going and regular communication among team members to avoid gaps in and overlaps of services for students?
• Do all team members agree on the supports that are necessary to support student learning and/or well-being?   o Were classroom teachers consulted when assigning school-based support, such as educational assistants, to their classroom?

The School Support Allocation Plan

The school support allocation plan should be shared with staff once the leadership team has prioritized support. This process provides an opportunity for staff to offer feedback, clarify misconceptions and/or concerns, and discuss the priorities outlined in the plan. Ideally, sharing the school support allocation plan occurs early in the school year. Seeing the big picture helps staff members better understand how support staff are being utilized and the scope of their roles.

The school support allocation plan should be reviewed throughout the year as students' needs change. The plan needs to be flexible enough to reflect the on-going needs of the students in the school.

School Support Allocation Plan
Reflective Questions and Considerations
• Does our plan focus on the students who currently require the most support?   o Can our plan be effectively implemented by our school team? If not - what other kinds of supports could we consider? What could be changed to make the plan more manageable?
• Were classroom teachers consulted before creating the support plan? Does the staff understand and support the plan? Do we need to change anything before assigning responsibilities?
• How are we going to monitor whether the support plan is working for students and staff? How often and when should we review the plan?

Review and Evaluate the School Support Allocation Plan

Successful implementation of a school support allocation plan is determined by students' growth academically, socially and/or behaviourally. Data help to determine if outcomes are being achieved as a result of implementing appropriate supports and interventions or if the school allocation plan needs to be re-evaluated or revised as student needs change. There are numerous ways that schools can collect data. These may include:

- student progress reports;
- Inclusion and Intervention Plan Progress Reports; and,
- data from:
  - attendance;
  - student surveys;
  - parent/guardian surveys;
  - formal and informal assessments; and/or,
  - student behaviour.

Review and Evaluate School Support Allocation Plan
Reflective Questions and Considerations

• What process should we use to evaluate, review and/or revise our school support allocation plan?
    o How often?
    o Who should be involved?
    o What data are we collecting?
    o How can we use the data to inform future planning?

• Is our review process efficient and effective?
    o Can we gather data quickly?
    o Are the data relevant and reliable?

Teachers and support staff need to see and celebrate the results of their work. School leaders can accomplish this by sharing positive correlations between support and improved student outcomes with staff.

Helpful Ministry Documents and Resources:

- Accessing Professional Supports: Saskatchewan Guidelines for School Division Professional Services
- Actualizing a Needs-Based Model
- The Adaptive Dimension for Saskatchewan K-12 Students
- EAL, Immigration and Languages
- Following Their Voices
- Help Me Tell My Story
- Inclusive Education
- Stewart Resources Centre
- Supporting All Learners

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