

Subject: Understanding inclusive education in Red Deer Public Schools

TEACHER VOICE

Some rich and insightful conversations were had around the table regarding inclusion at this month's Teacher Voice meeting. This was the first of two meetings to be held on this topic.

Committee members heard that Red Deer Public Schools receives \$8 million in funding for inclusive classrooms from the province, and the district actually spends \$13 million for inclusive classrooms.

"We understand inclusion is important to parents. We have to find best ways to be accommodating to that. We recognize that inclusion is complex and we need to develop strategies and solutions to meet the needs and build our capacity," said Chad Erickson, Associate Superintendent for Student Services.

There were two round table exercises the committee participated in which included discussions around:

- Fears and challenges of inclusion (physical, cognitive, social/emotional, sensory, behavioural) in your teaching spaces
- What supports are working

Some of the **fears** and **challenges** expressed included:

- Spending so much time with kids that need the extra supports, but feeling like we are letting the other students down. There are also concerns of the academics for all students and how things that are happening in the classroom are impacting the students at large.
- Parents allowing teachers to be open so they can support students in the classroom. It is hard to support a student when you aren't allowed to talk about what their needs are. There needs to be better communication between teachers and parents.
- Many teachers are perfectionists and they take a lot of pride in what they do. If they have one tough kid, they can feel like they failed.
- The difficulties managing the variety and complexity of issues in the classroom.
- A lot of support is being directed to behaviour and that is taking away from issues that are equally as important but not behaviour related.
- Professional development - university doesn't always prepare us for the challenges and some of the needs of the classroom. There needs to be more training for inclusive education.
- Students having an understanding of inclusion. It is important they have a good understanding of diversity and respect.

- There is a lot of concern regarding the diversity of the classroom that teachers are having to support and maybe that efficacy is not always there due to the complex needs they are supporting.
- Frustration from parents shared in terms of their children's needs being met. Examples of what teachers hear sometimes includes: "What does my child have to do? Throw a chair in order to get some support?"
- Teachers are hesitant to have certain training because they then may be expected to help support in situations where a student is aggressive. It's frightening due to past injury or their own fear of a situation.
- Other students have increased stress or fear in a classroom due to behaviours.
- We can have children that are maybe bubbling, but it's the ones that are clearing classrooms that are causing stress. It's the most socially/emotionally challenged students that cause stress for staff and students.

The second exercise included discussion around what **current supports** are working in the classroom. The committee provided feedback on those supports.

- Community Liaison Workers:
 - It's great to have them connecting with families.
 - Need more of these positions.
 - The wrap around support with AHS has been great.
 - Mental health counsellors in addition to CLWs would be welcomed.
- Student Support Rooms
 - This initiative is a positive step, but some communications and consistency are needed with the pilot.
- Neufeld Training
 - The training is still too new. Most staff had, at the time of the Teacher Voice meeting, only watched the first video.
 - Liked that everyone is learning the same thing and allowing us to see a different perspective when it comes to behaviour.
 - Loved the common language and the common perspective. Wish the timeline was faster.
 - Negative feedback included mode of delivery and the amount of time that it takes. It is common sense material.
 - The information was great, but the format and timing was not great.
- Educational Assistants
 - They are amazing, competent and understand their roles.
 - They are no longer doing anything but supporting our toughest kids in our classrooms and the teachers.
 - It's another adult to connect with students and the training they have had with mental health/First Aid has been an asset. They can help teachers pick up on those cues.
- Learning Assistance Teachers

- Some concern when the LAT role is split between individuals versus having one primary.
- This needs a possible revamp - it may not do what it was meant to do when it was developed in regards to helping teachers develop their skills. It's now more about paperwork and keeping up.

Other supports teachers said are working well:

- Mental Health lessons
- The shared Numeracy & Literacy Drive
- FNMI supports have been great

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Student Services team will review all of the feedback given during both table discussion exercises and come back at a later meeting with some thoughts and possible plans and solutions.

"What we heard last year in terms of concerns was aggressive behaviour and we came out with a plan. That is what we're going to try and do in this situation as well - we're going to take those fears and challenges back and we're going to talk about it as a Student Services team, Senior Admin, different groups and we'll bring it back to this group and hopefully get some feedback from you on those thoughts and plans."

The next meeting, which is set for February 5, will be used as a staff town hall for the recent community engagement process Red Deer Public Schools just completed.