

A Review of Inclusive Practices in New Westminster Schools 2019-2020

Completed by: **Susan Powell, PhD.**

Kathy Guild, M.Arts

Laurie Meston, M.Ed.



New
Westminster
Schools

INTRODUCTION

The New Westminster School District recognizes and acknowledges the Qayqayt First Nation, as well as all Coast Salish peoples, on whose traditional and unceded territories we live, we learn, we play and we do our work.

In the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system as of 2018-2019, there were about 7,000 students, including approximately:

- **298 Aboriginal students;**
- **1,026 English Language Learner (ELL) students;**
- **993 French Immersion students; and,**
- **524 students with identified Special Needs**

Learners are taught by more than 550 teachers and supported by over 400 district staff. The New Westminster School district has 12 schools: 8 elementary, 3 middle, and one secondary school. In addition to our 12 schools in the District, we are proud to have three Youth Alternate Programs: Sigma, offering flexible academic programming for students age 16-18; Power Alternate Secondary School with innovative and unique learning opportunities; and Royal City Alternate Program, supporting transition to both regular and alternate high school programs for students aged 13 to 15.

In January 2019, The New Westminster Board of Education voted to direct the Superintendent to begin a comprehensive review of Inclusive Education services and programs, seeking to ensure that services are available to all children and that access is as seamless as possible.

In April, the Board approved a budget bylaw that included \$50,000 to support the review process. An implementation plan was presented to the Board in May 2019 and the services of experienced long-time educators Susan Powell, Laurie Meston, and Kathy Guild were contracted.

The Review of Inclusive Practices was conducted under the direction of the Inclusive Education Advisory Group, co-chaired by Director of Instruction Bruce Cunnings and Trustee Maya Russell.

An Advisory Group was formed with members:

- Board of Education: Maya Russell (Co-Chair), Dee Beattie
- New Westminster Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association: Pam Craven, Kathleen Chad
- CUPE: Karrie Andrews, David Bollen
- New Westminster Teachers Union: Neesha Blajberg, Christie Hayashi
- New Westminster District Parent Advisory Council: Alejandro Diaz, Deb Blount
- Settlement Workers In School Program: Ghada Tallia
- Aboriginal Education: Bertha Lansdowne
- New Westminster School District: Bruce Cunnings (Co-Chair), Maryam Naser

PROCESS

A comprehensive range of methods was used to collect information on the effectiveness of inclusive practices in the New Westminster School District. Many perspectives were gathered through these varied methods.

The crowdsourcing platform Thoughtexchange was utilized. The open-ended question “*What are the most important things we can do at New Westminster Schools to meaningfully support inclusive practices for all our students?*” was posed to parents, students, staff and community.

Multiple focus groups were conducted with education assistants, Aboriginal support workers, school based learning services teachers, Alternate education and district learning services staff.

In these focus groups three questions were asked:

- *What is working well with the current student supports? What factors make the outcomes for students positive?*
- *What challenges do you face with current student supports?*
- *What needs to be changed or improved to make a positive difference in the education of students?*

Each school completed the customized program review tool adapted from “Assessing and Improving Special Education”. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education developed the tool. It identified features that are considered essential to a high-quality special education program. Schools were asked to rate and provide examples of practices for thirteen features related to inclusive practices and 3 features related to Indigenous Education.

Members of the Special Education Advisory Group conducted 1-1 interviews. They asked:

- *What is working well with our current support?*
- *What challenges do we face with our current support?*
- *What needs to be improved or changed?*
- *Is there anything that I have not thought to ask you that you think is important to know?*

Four focus group meetings were held to get input from parents of students with special needs. These included sessions at:

- Lord Kelvin – elementary parents
- New Westminster Secondary School – secondary parents – low incidence program
- Ecole Glenbrook Middle School – middle school parents
- New Westminster Secondary School – secondary parents

In the parent focus groups three questions were asked:

- *What is working well for your child at school?*
- *What challenges do you see with your child's education? What is not working so well for your child at school?*
- *What are your suggestions for improvements/changes?*

In addition, parents were invited to access the Thoughtexchange and if individual phone calls were requested instead of participation in the parent focus groups these were implemented. The review of Inclusive Practices included using the BC Ministry of Education Equity Scan Guiding Questions for evaluating Indigenous Education programs. The process that was followed for gathering input included focus groups of the Indigenous Education staff, secondary student input through writing and a focus group, a meeting with parents of Indigenous students, a meeting of the Indigenous Advisory Committee and schools completing a school review tool that included questions regarding Indigenous Education.

The focus group questions for secondary students were:

- *Where do you go to find help in the school with your academics?*
- *In what ways are the school programs preparing you for your future?*
- *Where do you go to find help in the school for your social emotional needs?*
- *In what ways does the school support you with your social emotional needs?*
- *What do you see in the NWSS school community and beyond that support belonging for Indigenous students?*
- *What aspects of Indigenous culture seem to be missing at NWSS hallways?*
- *What aspects of Indigenous culture and activities have you noticed or participated in?*
- *In the future (think new school) what do you want to see in NWSS hallways and school community to promote Indigenous culture?*
- *In the future what do you want to see in your classes that will better include Indigenous ways of knowing and being?*

The focus group questions for parents of Indigenous students were:

- *What do you hope for your children as they attend school?*
- *In what ways are you made to feel welcome at your child's school?*
- *What is working well for your children at school?*
- *What challenges do you see with your child's education?*

The School District Indigenous Advisory Committee was asked to provide their top priorities/wishes for the Indigenous program in the New Westminister schools.

The review of the Alternate Education programs involved gathering input from a focus group of Alternate staff, a review of current Ministry policy and procedures and the history of Alternate Education in New Westminister. The Alternate schools also completed the customized program review tool.

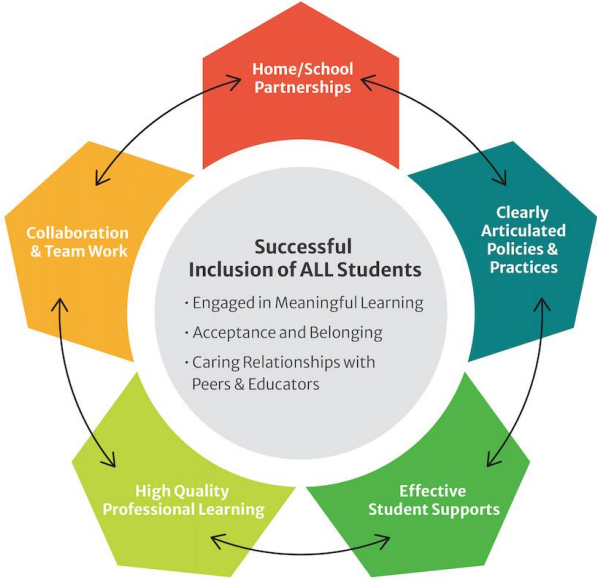
A brief review of education for gifted students was also a component of the district review of Inclusive Practices. The process for gathering input for this section included a discussion with district administration, a review of current school district practices and a review of Ministry policy and procedures.

FINDINGS

New Westminister School District is dedicated to the successful inclusion of ALL students. The district states it will accomplish this through students being:

- Engaged in meaningful learning
- Accepted and feeling they belong and
- Having caring relationships with peers and educators.

The Inclusive Practices Review identified five areas for the New Westminister School District to work on in order to strengthen their effectiveness in successfully including ALL students.





Effective Student Supports refers to the expectation that all children can learn. As such their access to the curriculum, personalization, mental health supports, cultural safety and representation, and positive behaviour supports all contribute to their opportunities for learning and ultimately their achievements.



Collaboration and Team Work includes such areas as teamwork, collaboration, Individualized Education Program (IEP) development, follow-through on recommendations, roles of team members and the documentation of team meetings. Authentic team means that families and students are essential and respected members. Teams should welcome members in culturally appropriate ways and when appropriate, staff with Indigenous ancestry will be part of the team.



Home School Partnerships entails parent participation in a child's education program, effective communication for diverse families, links between home and school learning opportunities, involvement of families in student transitions, involvement of families in school activities and creating an understanding with families about the school system.



High-Quality Professional Learning describes such activities as staff professional growth, embedded professional learning/in-service opportunities and training for cross stakeholder groups.



Clearly Articulated Policies and Protocols refers to administrators and staff being knowledgeable about current provincial and district inclusive education policies; as well as district policies, protocols and practices being clearly articulated, easily accessible and applied consistently across the district.



THEME 1: EFFECTIVE STUDENT SUPPORTS

This feature of quality inclusive practices establishes the expectation that all children can learn. As such their access to the curriculum, personalization, mental health supports, cultural safety and representation, and positive behaviour supports all contribute to their opportunities for learning and ultimately their achievements.

Schools (as per the school-based assessment) generally rated their work in this area as acceptable with acceptable-to-high in a few incidences. School and learning services personnel noted a number of approaches such as the use of technology, differentiation and appropriate implementation of support plans were working well. However, they also noted these were applied inconsistently across schools and the district. Parents indicated attention to this key area as fundamental to them feeling their children are growing and developing, but that this could change year to year, or by whomever is supporting their children's learning. This variability, as well as the many comments made by school personnel to feeling inadequate to support some students indicates a need to strengthen the direct teaching and supports provided to students. Staff and parents also referenced a desire for increased academic and social/emotional support for Indigenous students.

Recommendation 1.1 New Westminster School District develop and access training on Positive Behaviour Supports for school based teams. Training should be delivered following best practices in Professional Development/In-service.

Recommendation 1.2 New Westminster School District expand the capacity of our existing District Behaviour Team to assist schools who are supporting students with significant challenging behaviours.

Recommendation 1.3 New Westminster School District implement training focused on practical strategies for Universal Design for Learning, with an emphasis on differentiation and adaptations for **all** learners across K-12. This training needs to include a focus on how to effectively engage students who have significant physical and cognitive challenges. Training should be delivered following best practices in Professional Development/In-service.

Recommendation 1.4 New Westminster School District support and facilitate the inclusive educational practice of co-teaching between classroom teachers and Learning Support Teachers (LST's), thus enhancing and strengthening access for all students to the curriculum and the many learning experiences in a class.

Recommendation 1.5 New Westminster School District support schools to develop strategies to facilitate positive interactions and “friendships”. The district will also support the secondary school to increase peer supports to facilitate inclusion in various parts of the school e.g. cafeteria, gym, extracurricular clubs and activities, etc. These approaches will contribute to an increased sense of belonging and connection for all students in every aspect of school life.

Recommendation 1.6 New Westminster School District ensure that academic supports are in place for Indigenous students and that a frequent review of student performance/ learning profile is done to improve student achievement and equity.

Recommendation 1.7 New Westminster School District improve supports for Indigenous students needing social emotional support and access to authentic cultural teachings.

Recommendation 1.8 Ensure academic supports and interventions are in place to support students who are struggling in the areas of literacy and numeracy.



THEME 2: COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK

This feature of quality inclusive practices includes such areas as teamwork, collaboration, IEP development, follow through on recommendations, roles of team members and the documentation of team meetings. Authentic teams means that families and students are essential and respected members. Teams should welcome members in culturally appropriate ways and when appropriate, staff with Indigenous ancestry will be part of the team.

All stakeholder groups stated a positive and constructive team, that includes parents as partners, makes all the difference to supporting student learning and progress. Schools generally rated their work in this area as acceptable to high but noted that if teams were not functioning well then this negatively impacted students and hindered personnel from being able to do their work effectively. All stakeholder groups made many suggestions on how to strengthen the work of school-based teams and collaborative planning teams.

Recommendation 2.1 New Westminster School District strengthens the capacity of school-based teams through mandatory training for all regular members.

- Component (a) An additional training session be included to support the chair of the SBT understanding their role, maintaining the appropriate documentation, following up on recommendations and the filing of all SBT meeting notes.

Recommendation 2.2 New Westminster School District develop and conduct mandatory training for all relevant school staff on IEP development and implementation, including an emphasis on how to meaningfully include parents and students in the development and implementation of the IEP.



THEME 2: COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK

Recommendation 2.3 New Westminster School District provide training to school and district staff focused on meaningful consultation, effective communication with families and ways to resolve conflict in a proactive and positive manner.

Recommendation 2.4 New Westminster School District Ensure all support staff are present for IEP and relevant School Based Team meetings.



THEME 3: HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

This feature of quality inclusive practices entails parent participation in a child’s educational program, effective communication for diverse families, links between home and school learning opportunities, involvement of families in student transitions, involvement of families in school activities and creating an understanding with families about the school system.

Schools (as per the school-based assessment) generally rated their work in this area as acceptable; only one school rated themselves acceptable to high. Parents noted that clear, timely, consistent and collaborative communication between families and school staff is critical to the family’s relationship with the school and their child’s learning.

Recommendation 3.1 New Westminster School District develop systems and structures which provide parents with the ability to easily understand and navigate the school system and ensure that school-based administrators are familiar with the information contained in the Inclusive Education Parent handbook.

- Component (a) The district create an easy-to-read parent handbook to include:
 - General information relating to inclusive education in New Westminster schools.
 - How parents can access services for their child and how to advocate in effective ways.
 - Specific information relating to transitions. Preschool to kindergarten, elementary to middle, middle to secondary, and secondary to school leaving.
 - Frequently asked questions by parents.

- Component (b) The district develops pertinent one-page info sheets on key education topics that incorporate visuals and can be translated into other languages.

Recommendation 3.2 New Westminster School District establish procedures for schools to share information with parents to assist them with working collaboratively with the school, specifically:

- Information about the roles of individuals who are working with their child.
- Who parents should contact for different issues and how they should contact them. This is particularly important at middle and secondary schools.
- The district administrative procedure that outlines how home teams and external consultants will work with the school.

Recommendation 3.3 New Westminster School District conduct a series of family focussed info sessions/workshops that are held at times convenient to parents.

Recommendation 3.4 New Westminster School District provide in-Service for staff on family engagement, working with families with students with disabilities and working with Indigenous families. The training should include a focus on increasing staff's understanding of the experiences, perspectives and challenges that diverse families face.



THEME 4: HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

This feature of quality inclusive practices describes such activities as staff professional growth, embedded professional learning/in-service opportunities and training for cross stakeholder groups. This will assist staff and families to learn contemporary, relevant, culturally appropriate and effective approaches and strategies to support diverse learners.

All participants in this review indicated they need continual professional growth to meet the complex and vast needs of today's diverse learners. Parents indicated that when school staff had the knowledge and skills required to understand their children's needs, and design interventions that supported their growth, that their children were much more successful. In some situations, parents shared that school staff had indicated that they didn't know what to do with their child, particularly those with complex needs. Additional training and professional development will contribute to a strong knowledge base along with practical strategies to ensure staff can actively engage all students in their learning. This training would also include developing skills for teachers and staff to understand and incorporate Indigenous worldviews and perspectives into the curriculum.

Recommendation 4.1 New Westminster School District create a district multi-perspective committee to facilitate the development of a multi-year professional development/in-service plan for all personnel.

- Component (a) The committee will utilize the recommendations and other findings of the review, to provide the basis for this professional development/in-service plan.
- Component (b) The district will encourage school teams to participate in professional development/in-service together.
- Component (c) The district will encourage all professional development/in-service offering to include practical strategies.

Recommendation 4.2 New Westminster School District engage in the development of a process and / or select personnel with the focus of supporting staff to attain new inclusive practices and skills.

This approach will follow the best practice in professional development for attaining new skills by working with staff on a frequent and regular basis.

- Component (a) The intent of this approach will be to support classroom teachers and school based LSTs with effective and practical strategies that address the needs, skills and education of diverse learners.
- Component (b) Additionally, this approach will support education assistants by demonstrating effective strategies and working side-by-side with them to further develop their competency with specific practices.

Recommendation 4.3 New Westminster School District develop a professional development/in-service plan to increase teacher and staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history and culture as well as their ability to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and perspectives into the curriculum.



THEME 5: CLEARLY ARTICULATED POLICIES AND PRACTICES

This feature of quality inclusive practices refers to administrators and staff being knowledgeable about current provincial and district inclusive education administrative procedures; as well as district protocols and practices being clearly articulated, easily accessible and applied consistently across the district.

All stakeholder groups indicated this was a critical feature in the work conducted by teachers, education assistants, learning support personnel, aboriginal support workers, administrators and families to support student learning. Schools generally rated their work in this area as acceptable (as per the school-based assessment); and all school related personnel provided feedback on a wide range of challenges in this area. Families also reported the need to more fully understand how the education system and district functions. Their responses to this area will be more fully addressed in theme area #5 Family Support and Engagement.

Recommendation 5.1 New Westminster School District create and maintain a single repository or portal for staff to access current administrative procedures, referral procedures, documents related to Indigenous Education and inclusive practices, etc.

Recommendation 5.2 New Westminster School District complete an updated District Manual on Inclusive Practices including Indigenous Education and special education. The District will ensure all school administrators, school-based team chairs and schools have a current copy.

- Component (a) The Director of Learning Services and the District Principal responsible for Indigenous Education will conduct information / training sessions at the beginning of each school year to update new administrators, new school-based team chairs and new LST district staff on district administrative procedures.
- Component (b) The Director of Learning Services and the District Principal responsible for Indigenous Education will provide regular and timely updates to all administrators and staff on changes to district administrative procedures.

Recommendation 5.3 New Westminster School District develop an Alternate Education outline which includes a program description, procedures outlining the referral and intake process, and expectations regarding student learning plans, transition plans and documentation of supports and services provided.

Recommendation 5.4 New Westminster School District articulate in writing, and communicate widely, (including to families), the roles and responsibilities of Administrators, Classroom Teachers, Learning Support Teachers, Aboriginal Support Workers, Child and Youth Workers and Education Assistants.

In all instances participants stated how important it was for New Westminster School District to take genuine and timely action on the findings from this comprehensive review on Inclusive practices, Indigenous Education and Alternate Education. The Recommendations will be implemented over the next three years.

Consultative Review: 2019-20

Phase 1 Recommendations: 2020-21

Phase 2 Recommendations: 2021-22

Phase 3 Recommendations: 2022-23