

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project co-directors, we would like to take this opportunity to thank numerous people for the assistance they provided us as we undertook The Manitoba Special Education Review.

We would like to thank those who took the time to attend the Community Forums and/or make formal submissions to the Review. We realize that for the parents of children with special learning needs, their time is already over-committed as they work tirelessly in the best interests of their children. We appreciate the additional effort required to participate in the Review process. We also appreciate the interest and participation of many community organizations, agencies and other government departments that work with exceptional children and their families. Their involvement was of critical importance.

We extend our gratitude, as well, to the educational community, both individuals and educational organizations, for their high level of participation. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the support we received from superintendents, Student Services administrators, school administrators, teachers, para-professionals and other educators as we conducted the case studies. We were met with nothing but cooperation as we visited schools and communities across the province.

The case studies also included other service providers and community professionals, as well as parents/caregivers and students. Their willingness to be involved in the case studies was greatly appreciated. We would like to say a special word of thanks to the students whose voices in the case studies added a rich and compelling dimension to the Review.

Thank you to representatives of the Manitoba Children and Youth Secretariat for providing assistance with the FAS/FAE section of the literature review (Chapter IV).

The staff at Proactive Information Services Inc. worked tirelessly to support all aspects of the process. They know how much their efforts and commitment to quality work are always appreciated. We were also fortunate to have two skilled people assist with case study interviews and Forum facilitation. Marjorie Deluca's background in special education and Denise Belanger's ability to speak both official languages fluently were assets to these aspects of the Review.

In addition, we had expert external associates who contributed to the Review. Stuart Whitely, Q.C. undertook the legal analysis and wrote Chapter VI. Dr. Patricia Crawford added an outside research perspective, reviewing the methodology, literature review, and case study components. Brian Scott assisted with the financial analysis, while Dr. Andy Rowe provided an external review of this component. Their expertise was invaluable.

A word of thanks is also due to Dino Altieri, who was our contact and technical support person from Manitoba Education and Training. He was always helpful, responding promptly and graciously to our many requests for information.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all members of the Special Education Review Steering Committee. They were clear in their role, always providing support and insights that guided the process but never interfering with our ability to conduct an impartial and comprehensive Review.

*Linda E. Lee & Larry K. Bremner
Proactive Information Services Inc.*

THE MANITOBA SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW

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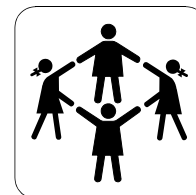
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PREAMBLE



As the consultants from Proactive Information Services Inc. who were responsible for conducting The Manitoba Special Education Review, we would like to introduce the Review report by expressing our gratitude to the thousands of people across the province who participated directly or indirectly in the Review process. While the Acknowledgments recognize those who assisted us in conducting the Review, we wish to highlight the contributions of time, energy and effort of all those Manitobans who lent their voices to the Review. We thank you for your support and for the trust you placed in us.

From the beginning we realized that a comprehensive review of this nature posed many challenges, not least of all the complexity of “special education”. While we have tried to address the wide range of issues that fall within the domain of special education, we recognize that there will be, undoubtedly, areas where more information could be gathered and where more detailed recommendations could be made. With this in mind, we hope that the Review report will stand as a guide post for future action at many levels, rather than as a definitive document on special education.

The focus of the Review was on improving the delivery of special education programs and services in Manitoba with the goal of enhancing students’ learning outcomes. At the same time, we wanted not only to identify the areas that require improvement, but also the good practices that currently exist. The Review attempts to recognize successes, while keeping the spotlight firmly on improvement. We would be remiss if we did not applaud the progress that has been made over the past decade in promoting an inclusive philosophy. While reality tells us that practice does not always mirror our ideals, we take an optimistic view that the gains we have seen in special education are but the starting point for the future.

Through the Review process we have identified three major themes upon which the future can be built: equity, capacity and community. We believe that these are fundamental concepts whether we are considering the individual or the system.

EQUITY: The system must strive for equity if children and youth are to have multiple and equitable opportunities for growth and learning regardless of where they live. Equity does not mean that all children are treated the same; quite the contrary. Equity recognizes the fact that different children will require different supports, services and programming if they are truly to have access to opportunities that will foster their success.

While a moral commitment to equity is clearly central, this must be supported by fair and well defined processes, fiscal equity targets, appropriate resource allocation and expectations for accountability. Realities of geography and school divisions’/districts’ ability generate revenue sometimes work against achieving equity. Nevertheless, equity must be fundamental goal towards which we all strive. New or refined processes, including intersectoral initiatives, need to be established and implemented in support of this goal.

CAPACITY: In order for children and young people to reach their individual potential, educational experiences must build their capacity for continuing success. Success may mean many different things depending on the individual, but it is clear that success is cultivated through building on children's strengths, supporting them in areas of need, and thus enhancing their capacity for living and learning.

It is also important to build the capacity of systems. The education system should have the capacity to program appropriately for all students. If a system is to function well it must have adequate financial resources, well trained and appropriately deployed human resources, well understood and well implemented internal and intersectoral processes for service coordination, vehicles for meaningful client participation (parents*, caregivers, students), as well as mechanisms for public accountability and ongoing improvement. The focus for any systemic processes that are developed should be on building capacity rather than creating compliance.

COMMUNITY: We know that a student's sense of belonging to a school is one prerequisite for successful learning. This sense of belonging is fostered, firstly, by the school recognizing that all children in its neighbourhood are part of its community. It is further nurtured by putting into practice an inclusive philosophy that recognizes the strengths and learning needs of all students. Providing a continuum of supports and services, coupled with appropriate identification, assessment and planning processes, gives schools the ability not only to recognize individual strengths and needs but to program for them as well. Ideally, all students will achieve success within a supportive school environment.

The school community, however, is not simply comprised of students and school staff. It must include parents, as well as other professionals and service providers who work with students and staff. Less directly, but perhaps not less importantly, people in social agencies, business persons and other citizens should all be connected to their local school. The alliance between school and community needs to be a symbiotic one. If school and community are mutually supportive as a matter of practice - working collaboratively in the best interests of children and youth - then, there should be a greater likelihood that young people with exceptionalities can move seamlessly from inclusive schools into inclusive communities.

We approached the Review not only as a challenge, but as an opportunity to help "make a difference" to the future of public education in Manitoba as it relates to enhanced opportunities and outcomes for students with special learning needs. We hope that the Review findings and recommendations will be used in positive and constructive ways to help make a difference in both the short and longer terms. Finally, we must stress that governments, educators, parents, young people, as well as agencies and stakeholder organizations must work together in the true spirit of community if capacity and equity are to become reality.

* The term "parents" is used in this report to refer to parents, guardians and caregivers.