



July 31, 2024

Hon. Dennis King
Hon. Hal Perry
MLA Karla Bernard

via email to educationpolicy@gov.pe.ca

Dear Premier and Interim Leaders of the Official Opposition and Third Party,

Re: Response to Draft Inclusive Education Action Plan by Current and Past Members of Child and Youth Advisory Committee

On behalf of both current and alumni members of the Child and Youth Advisory Committee of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, I am pleased to submit their attached Response to the PEI *Inclusive Education Action Plan: Consultation Draft*.

In providing an opportunity for the critically important amplification of student youth voice in response to the public call for consultation, our office extended an invitation to both current and alumni members of the office's Child and Youth Advisory Committee. The importance of seriously considering youth views in matters affecting them was recognized by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, when it delivered its Concluding Observations on June 23, 2022, and recommended that Canada and the Provinces and Territories should:

"Ensure that hearing the views of the child are a requirement for all official decision-making processes that relate to children, including custody cases, child welfare decisions and cases concerning criminal justice, immigration and the environment"¹

I wish to express appreciation to the youth who reviewed the Draft *Inclusive Education Action Plan* and gathered at our office, prepared to give up part of their summer break, in order to provide feedback on the important systemic issue of inclusive education in PEI. It is their wish to have their Response provided to the Premier and the Interim Leaders of the Official Opposition and the Third Party.

I trust you will find the information set out in the attached Response instructive in considering whether to add further inclusions and/or amendments to the Draft *Inclusive Education Action Plan*.

Respectfully,

Marvin M. Bernstein, B.A., J.D., LL.M. (ADR)
Child and Youth Advocate

cc: Hon. Natalie Jameson, Minister of Education and Early Years
Brad Trivers, Chair of Standing Committee of the PEI Legislature on Education and Economic Growth

¹ Concluding Observations to Canada, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, (June 23, 2022), CRC_C_CAN_CO-5-6-EN.pdf., at para.22(b).

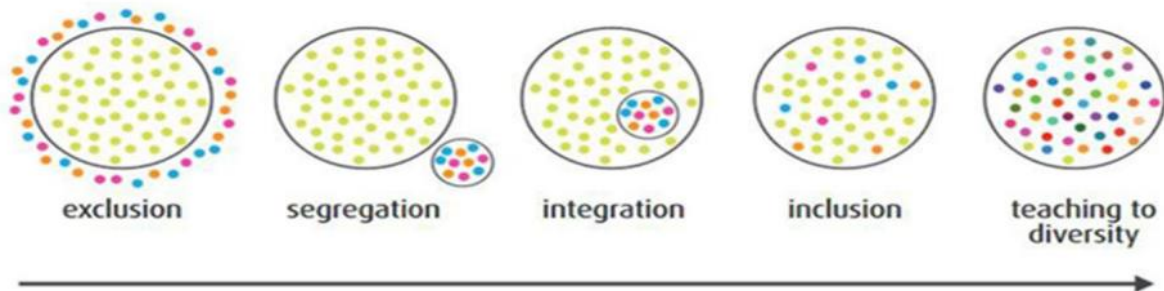
Child and Youth Advisory Committee Review of the PEI Draft Inclusive Education Action Plan July 2024

Introduction

Current and alumni members of the Child and Youth Advisory Committee worked together to review the Inclusive Education Action Plan. We started by thinking about definitions of inclusion and sharing our ideas. Then we worked in small groups and looked at the findings and recommendations from the Better Together report. Each group had a focus on one or two of the pillars in the Inclusive Education Action Plan. We thought about the pros and cons of each pillar. We talked about this and one person in each group wrote down our ideas. Then the groups got together and shared their work with the other groups. We talked about all five pillars. We realized there were some ideas that kept repeating in our feedback, and we labelled these themes. From our themes we thought about recommendations to improve the Inclusive Education Action Plan.

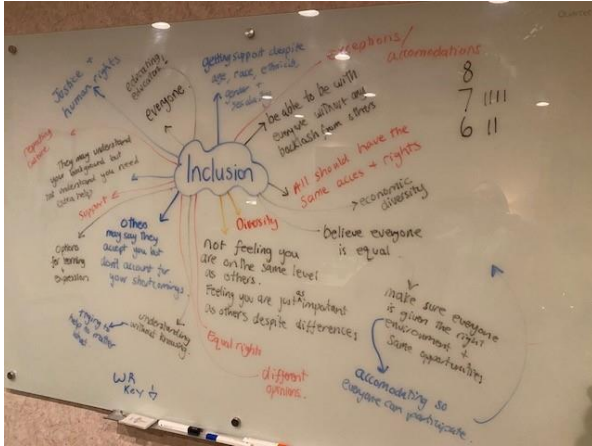
Definitions of Inclusion

We think it is important to have a complete understanding about what inclusion is. We thought about inclusion. We talked about this image from the *Better Together* report:



We thought that school today in PEI looks like ‘integration’ and sometimes ‘segregation’.

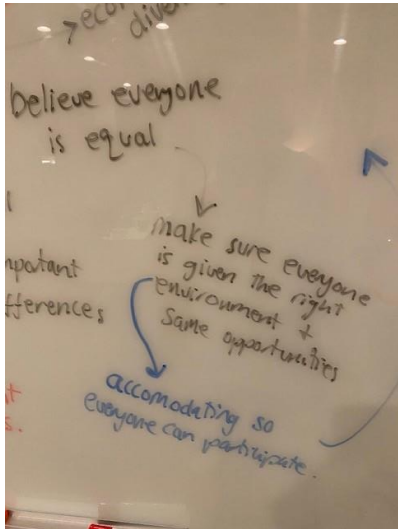
We wrote our own definitions of inclusion and then shared our ideas with each other:



"Inclusion is about justice and human rights"

"Inclusion is about: Diversity, support, equal rights, justice, respecting culture and allowing different opinions"

"Inclusion is when you make sure everyone is given an environment where they are regarded equally and have the same opportunities as others"



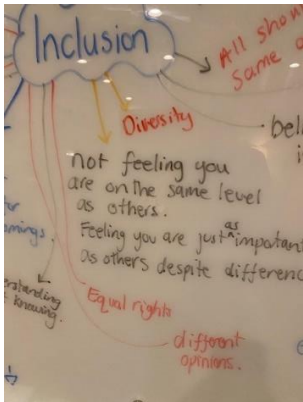
"Inclusion should be getting support despite your age, race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality"

"Inclusion isn't just putting a bunch of different people in the same place – it's about accommodating each individual so that they can all participate"

"Inclusion is about options for learning"

"Inclusion is where all should have access and rights"

"To reach inclusion, is to believe everyone is equal"



Themes Identified

As we shared our ideas with each other, we saw that there were pros and cons across the pillars that were similar. We grouped our feedback in five themes:

Diversity: Diversity was something we talked about when we were defining inclusion, so it was something we were thinking about when we looked at the pillars. There was mention of diversity in the pillars, but we thought this wasn't strong in the plan. We wanted to see more about cultural difference, reference to indigenous students, and more ideas about tackling racism.

Concrete Actions: We liked it when we saw actions that were real actions and we knew what the plan was. We didn't always see concrete actions in the pillars.

Children's Rights: We talked a lot about how students are included and how students can participate. We thought student voice was missing in a lot of the pillars.

Reframing or Transformative: We looked for the ways the Action Plan will transform the education system and make it inclusive. We looked at the recommendations in the Better Together report and thought about how the Action Plan would help to make big changes. We thought the focus on early childhood was good. We weren't sure how things will really change for students.

Clarity of Document: We weren't always sure what the actual actions were and thought the Action Plan was often vague.

Table of Feedback Responses to Five Pillars

Diversity	Concrete Actions	Children's Rights	Reframing or Transformative?	Clarity of Document
<i>"Anti-racism is being brought up."</i>	<i>"Partnering with higher up departments when trying to problem solve education systems is a positive action."</i>	<i>"What about the actual children?"</i>	<i>"The overall premise of Pillar 1 is good because it is important to have a good experience early on in education."</i>	<i>"Often the pillar bullet points are a re-wording of the title a bunch."</i>
<i>"Diversity is not being addressed."</i>	<i>"Broad things are discussed without concrete actions."</i>	<i>"The document is not youth friendly."</i>	<i>"The action plan does not address how there is a lack of education for the educator"</i>	<i>"Don't always understand what they are saying."</i>
<i>"There are anti-racism ideas being"</i>	<i>"Being accountable and ensuring"</i>	<i>"Assessing children before"</i>	<i>"Revisiting a new education idea after it's been"</i>	<i>"There is no substance to"</i>

<i>mentioned but there are no plans and methods being mentioned."</i>	<i>progress of success is positive."</i>	<i>kindergarten is helpful."</i>	<i>started is a good idea to confirm things are improving and children and youth are happy with the changes."</i>	<i>this document, it is vague."</i>
<i>"French school system is mentioned."</i>	<i>"Providing updates annually to the Minister of Education is positive."</i>	<i>"It mentions school staff and administrators but there is no mention of children's involvement, including their voice."</i>	<i>"Will things stay the same for students who don't need any changes or help?"</i>	<i>"These are ideas for an action plan instead of an actual Action Plan."</i>
<i>"Pillar number 4 is not being diverse enough."</i>	<i>"Inclusion Steering Committee is positive."</i>	<i>"It's hard to treat kid as normal when they are elsewhere – should not be excluded to the corner."</i>	<i>"Don't just "explore", take action."</i>	<i>"The action plan does not tell us what the actions are."</i>
<i>"There is no mention of indigenous children."</i>	<i>"There is no specific description on how they will do things and rather just discussing the topic of their plan. For example: what will the annual updates to the Minister include?"</i>	<i>"Communication tool with public is positive."</i>	<i>"It's good to acknowledge violence prevention but will you understand why students are being violent?"</i>	<i>"No details about which policies will be updated"</i>
<i>"No mention of children with trauma or PTSD, and the need to educate adults about this."</i>	<i>"Who will be included in annual reviews of the inclusive system?"</i>	<i>"Will youth be represented on the Inclusion Steering Committee?"</i>	<i>"This is not a transformation."</i>	<i>"Pillar number 3 is about policies but there is nothing in here about changing policies other than in the title."</i>
<i>"No specific mention of mental health."</i>	<i>"What tools are they using for communication?"</i>	<i>"Will youth be asked about the progress of change?"</i>	<i>"Why is the title better than the text itself?"</i>	<i>"They don't tell us what the Action Plan is."</i>

	<i>“Continued education for adults is mentioned but no details given.”</i>	<i>“Will student needs be met?”</i>	<i>“What are we updating?”</i>	<i>“They use buzz words.”</i>
	<i>“Pillar 2, there is mention of other departments but not specified which departments. This needs more detail.”</i>	<i>“Will external input include parents and youth?”</i>	<i>“We need change now, something in the meantime. We cannot wait three years for change.”</i>	<i>“It seems that they did not take time to agree what the definition of inclusion is. No consensus of what inclusion is. Only talked about specifics things.”</i>
	<i>“What specific education will there be for adults?”</i>	<i>“How will you know if youth see a change?”</i>	<i>“How are we going to keep an equal balance of keeping the things that are working the same, and change the things that aren’t working?”</i>	
	<i>“What are the curriculum changes?”</i>	<i>“The needs of children are not being considered.”</i>	<i>“What will the information from the annual survey be used for?”</i>	
	<i>“What are the sources used to support the actions?”</i>	<i>“What about students in crisis.”</i>	<i>“How much will the Department listen to the survey?”</i>	
	<i>“Talk about supports please.”</i>	<i>“Were youth consulted on the Action Plan?”</i>	<i>“Will the survey results be made public?”</i>	
	<i>“There don’t seem to be plans.”</i>	<i>“If I’m in high school and they are changing something about the curriculum, I want to know about it.”</i>	<i>“Linking Pillar 4 and 5, how do you make sure that information you get from people is used to hold the government accountable?”</i>	
	<i>“There is talk about abuse but there is no definition to</i>	<i>“Include students. A parents’ perception might</i>	<i>“Pillar number 3 says ‘explore’ – we should be past</i>	

	<i>define what abuse is."</i>	<i>be different from the students. It's important to have both parents and students."</i>	<i>exploring because this is an Action Plan."</i>	
	<i>"What will the tiered supports be and what will they look like in a school setting?"</i>	<i>"They don't talk about how policies impact children. How will children be helped?"</i>	<i>"How does the Department define success? Is it just about the academics? But isn't inclusion about the whole student, success is different for everyone."</i>	
	<i>"How to respond to unplanned incidents and students in crisis?"</i>	<i>"Adults should work with students to help problem solve their needs."</i>	<i>"The school system has a very specific view of what success is and defines it academically."</i>	
	<i>"How will universities perceive the adjusted curriculum, and will your diploma be viewed the same?"</i>	<i>"The document does not feel student centered."</i>	<i>"There is a lack of consideration of mental health."</i>	
	<i>"In the tiered supports, is there wiggle room for students who don't quite make it to the next tier but are still struggling at the lower tier?"</i>	<i>"Are students included in determining supports?"</i>	<i>"They should regularly review curriculum to make sure it meets students' needs."</i>	
	<i>"The tiered system is flawed because it does not tackle the problems."</i>	<i>"There is nothing about children's rights."</i>	<i>"We need more people, it's hard to have just one or two teachers."</i>	
	<i>"It's not clear if Pillar 1 is just about early years or the whole school system."</i>		<i>"We are trying to renovate a house, when the foundations are rotten."</i>	

	<i>“What happens when the tiers fail? What happens then?”</i>		<i>“With the current system we will not achieve ‘teaching to diversity’ without huge change.”</i>	
			<i>“This isn’t a transformation – it is a renovation.”</i>	
			<i>“Transform the curriculum to how people learn and ensure children are interested in what they are learning about.”</i>	

Recommendations

The Child and Youth Advisory Committee would like to present these recommendations to the Department of Education and Early Years:

1. Include youth voice and participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Inclusive Education System;
2. Update the document to reflect diversity and greater representation of the student population;
3. Review the current Draft Inclusive Education Plan document to ensure all content is clearly expressed for everyone to understand;
4. Ensure all action points are specific and measurable.