

Common Threads for Inclusive Education



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A Note on Terminology

PLANNING YOUR LEARNING JOURNEY

What are key terms and learnings that will support my understanding of inclusive education?

FIRST STEPS

The *Teaching Quality Standard* requires teachers to establish, promote and sustain inclusive learning environments where diversity is embraced and every student is welcomed, cared for, respected and safe. Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by indicators such as;

- fostering in the school community equality and respect with regard to rights as provided for in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*;
- using appropriate universal and targeted strategies and supports to address students' strengths, learning challenges and areas of growth;
- communicating a philosophy of education affirming that every student can learn and be successful;
- being aware of and facilitating responses to the emotional and mental health needs of students;
- recognizing and responding to specific learning needs of individual or small groups of students and, when needed, collaborate with service providers and specialists to design and provide targeted and specialized supports to enable achievement of the learning outcomes;
- employing classroom management strategies that promote positive, engaging learning activities;
- incorporating students' personal and cultural strengths into teaching and learning; and
- providing opportunities for student leadership.

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance and promotes a sense of belonging for all learners.¹

—Alberta Education



Inclusive education uses a team approach, which requires the teacher to work with other professionals, service providers and parents to design and provide the appropriate learning program for the student. Knowledge and use of correct terminology supports this team approach.





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Creating inclusive learning environments can include offering noise cancelling headphones for students sensitive to classroom activity.

In an inclusive learning community, diversity is viewed as an asset. A school and a classroom are a reflection of society. Students learn to appreciate differences between people and to understand that differences contribute to richer learning opportunities and more engaging and authentic communities. Inclusive education acknowledges those common threads that bind us together. Each learner is its own thread, woven in concert with their peers, forming the communities of our classrooms.

The philosophy and approach of inclusive education is about supporting all students rather than focusing only on students with disabilities. Teachers welcome, respond to and honour the diverse strengths and needs of all children. All children have the right to an education that will help them to grow and learn, along with the right

More information on inclusive education is available at <https://www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx>

to be in a welcoming, safe and caring inclusive learning environment that respects diversity and provides equitable opportunities for success.



Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments Guide

The Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments Guide is a newly developed resource guide intended to support school leaders and professional development leaders to work collaboratively with school staff to develop professional competency for inclusive education. This guide includes

twenty-one professional learning activities to support the establishment of inclusive learning environments as indicated within the Teaching Quality Standard. Topics within this guide align with, and support, the indicators within competency 4 of the Teaching Quality Standard related to inclusive learning environments.

View the facilitator guide and accompanying documents at [teachers.ab.ca](https://www.teachers.ab.ca) > My ATA > Professional Development > Inclusive Education > Collaborative Professional Learning Activities.

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Inclusion

- A way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance and promotes a sense of belonging for all.
- Not just about students with exceptionalities. There is no us and them.
- We all belong, contribute and have value in our community of learners.²

Inclusive Education

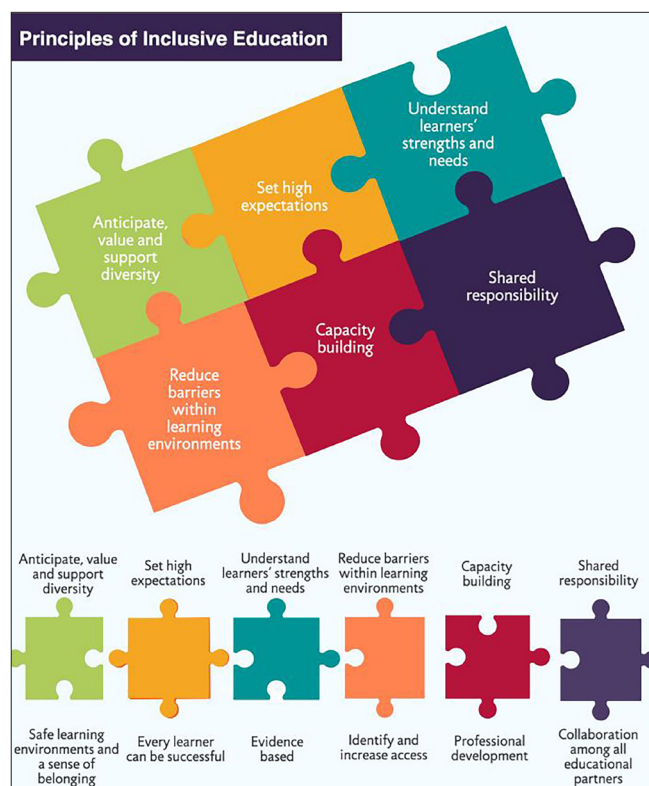
- An approach, not a place, which values choice in programming and placement that best meets students' learning needs.
- Focuses on student strengths.³

Inclusive Learning Environments

- A classroom, school, online learning environment or other educational setting structured to anticipate, value and respond to the diverse strengths and needs of all students.⁴
- Below are six key principles of an inclusive education system in Alberta:
 - › Anticipate, value and support diversity and learner differences.
 - › Create a culture of high expectations for all learners.
 - › Understand learners' strengths and needs.
 - › Remove barriers within learning environments.
 - › Build capacity at the individual, school and system levels to develop responsive learning environments.
 - › Collaborate with all education stakeholders to support the success of all learners.⁵

Differentiation

- A teaching philosophy and pedagogy in which the learning of all students is supported through strategic assessment, thoughtful planning and targeted, flexible instruction and learning activities.
- The key idea is that all students can learn, in their own ways and in their own time. Most teachers naturally incorporate elements of differentiated instruction in their classrooms every day.⁶



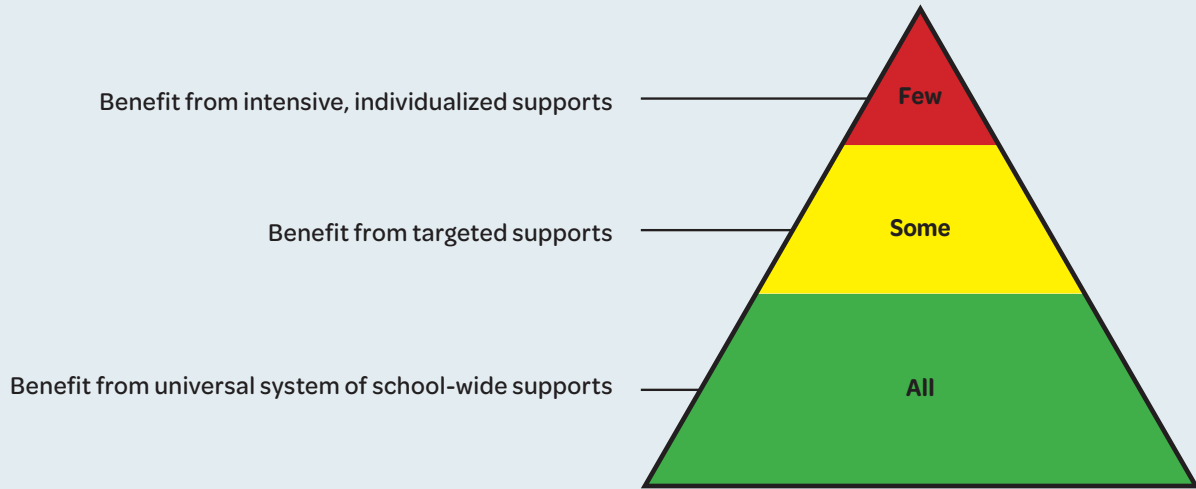
Inclusion Infographic, Health & Physical Education Council (<https://www.hpec.ab.ca/uploads/files/Inclusion%20Infograph.pdf>)

Equity Versus Equality

- **Equity:** Individuals' needs are met in ways that ensure they can achieve the same learning goals.
 - › All students study the same curriculum but take different routes to achieve success. For example, some students will read a book by listening to an audio version while others may decode text in a paper version.
- **Equality:** Everyone is treated in the same way.
 - › Assumes that everyone can meet some of the same goals in the same manner and that everyone starts their learning from the same place. For example, all students are given a paper-and-pencil task independent of ability to read or write text.

Response to Intervention (RTI) or Pyramid of Intervention

- Respond to a student's immediate learning need in a specific circumstance.
- Exist on a spectrum:
 - › Universal supports are available to all students within the learning environment.



Response to Intervention (RTI) or Pyramid of Intervention

www.alberta.ca/response-to-intervention.aspx

EQUITY



- › Targeted strategies or interventions for learners who need more specialized learning opportunities or access to additional expertise.
- › Specialized/Individualized supports directly related to students' specific learning needs.⁷

Individualized Program Plan (IPP) / Instructional Support Plan (ISP)

- In order to foster success, students with learning needs may require specific and detailed learning plans.
- Plans focus on student strengths, needs and participation.
- Enhanced communication, student self-advocacy and creation of long-term and transition plans, results in enriched understanding of students.
- School divisions may use alternate terminology to describe individualized program plans/instructional support plans. Check with your principal for clarification.

Positive Behaviour Supports

- Strength-based, whole school approach to promoting positive social and communication skills
- Focuses on building and strengthening positive relationships in schools
- Involves learning environments with clear behaviour expectations, positive reinforcements, predictable consequences and helpful feedback.

EQUALITY



More information on positive behaviour supports is available at <https://www.alberta.ca/positive-behaviour-supports.aspx>.

Scaffolding

- Instructional scaffolding provides students with the “just right” supports they need to participate in learning, complete a challenging task or learn a new concept.
- Common scaffolds for learning include building and activating background knowledge, modelling, guided practice, prompts, strategy instruction, graphic organizers and assistive/learning technology.

Sample student support templates can be downloaded from the Inclusive Education Library at <https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptLibrary/lib07.html>.



Inclusive Education in Alberta Classrooms and Schools (2021) Research Report

The Alberta Teachers' Association, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Alberta and the Council for Inclusive Education, conducted a study to better understand the state of inclusive education in Alberta classrooms and schools. Data was collected from teachers and school

leaders in Alberta classrooms and schools to provide an update to previous data collected in 2014 (*Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education on Alberta Schools, 2014*). The information gathered from Alberta teachers and school leaders will be used to help guide and inform the Association on supports, services and resources required for implementation and sustainability



Open communication and regular meetings between the members of a student's learning team ensure that the student's learning plan is effective.



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Trauma-Informed Practice

- Trauma-informed practice creates a school environment where every student feels safe and supported and staff understand how trauma affects behaviour and emotions.
- Trauma refers to prolonged stress caused by issues such as abuse and neglect can impact brain development. Students who experience severe or chronic trauma are at risk of having difficulties with learning, behaviour and forming friendships. They may demonstrate a range of actions from severe behaviour to complete withdrawal.
- It is estimated that within any given school, one quarter of students have been exposed to adverse experiences.
- Teachers can support students by showing empathy and creating safe environments. They can also avoid unknowingly causing students to feel unsafe or distressed.

When school leaders and teachers understand how trauma affects the brain and the lives of students and their coworkers, they can avoid unknowingly causing people to feel unsafe or distressed as no two individuals experience a similar adverse event in the same way.

of inclusive education. View this research report at teachers.ab.ca > My ATA > Professional Development > Inclusive Education > Inclusion Framework & Research.

NEXT STEPS

Alberta's vision for an inclusive education system is one where every student has the relevant learning opportunities and supports necessary to become a successful learner. Teachers will design an appropriate learning plan for students with diverse learning needs and establish a learning environment that is welcoming, caring, respectful and safe for all students. Every student is unique and may require targeted strategies and specialized supports to be successful in an inclusive classroom.

Teaching in an inclusive learning environment requires teachers to be responsive and flexible in their approach. As a teacher you may have experience and success working with diverse student needs or you

may need to engage in professional growth activities to enhance your knowledge and skills in a given area. Being familiar with the basic terminology of inclusive education is necessary for developing and fostering an inclusive learning environment for all learners.



Posting visual supports around a classroom is a direct way to engage learners with language difficulties.

Visual Support

- A visual support refers to using a picture or other visual item to communicate with a child who has difficulty understanding or using language. Visual supports can be photographs, drawings, objects, symbols, written words or lists.
- Visual supports can be used to communicate the classroom schedule, teach social behaviours and provide instructions to the student.

More information about visual supports is available at <https://tinyurl.com/AutismSpeaksVisualSupports>.

CONTINUING YOUR LEARNING

- How do you anticipate, value and respond to the diverse strengths and needs of all students?
- Consider your classroom practice, list three things you already do that foster inclusive education. What does this look like and sound like?
- From whom can you get support for your learning within, and outside your school and division?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Alberta Education

www.alberta.ca/education.aspx

Inclusive Education Library

www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptlibrary/

Inclusive Education Videos

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvrD8tiHIX1Kyc2RNs7klPyC2qIjv-CAy

Instructional Supports: resources and supports to help meet needs of individual learners

www.alberta.ca/instructional-supports.aspx?utm_source=redirector#toc-0

Medical Disability Information for Classroom Teachers

www.learnalberta.ca/content/inmdict/html/index.html

For Further Study, continued

Alberta Teachers' Association

Alberta Teachers' Association, Library Guides

https://teachers-ab.libguides.com/topicguides?b=g&d=a&group_id=15070

Alberta Teachers' Association, Professional Development

www.teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Professional%20Development/Pages/Index.aspx

Help for Me

www.teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Helpforme/Pages/default.aspx

Beginning Teachers' Handbook

[www.teachers.ab.ca/Members%20Only%20Documents/Beginning%20Teachers%20Conference/PD-34-2%20BTC%20Handbook%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Members%20Only%20Documents/Beginning%20Teachers%20Conference/PD-34-2%20BTC%20Handbook%20(English).pdf)

Beginning Teachers' Collection Differentiation

<http://library.teachers.ab.ca/Presto/home/home.aspx>

Council for Inclusive Education (CIE)

www.cieducation.ca

NOTES

1. Alberta Education, "Inclusive Education," www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx (accessed September 18, 2019).
2. Government of Alberta, *Inclusive Education Conversation Guide for the video: Valuing All Students*, July 2018, www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/ed-video-discussion-guide-1-valuing-all-students.pdf (accessed September 18, 2019).
3. Government of Alberta, *Inclusive Education Conversation Guide for the video: Valuing All Students*.
4. Government of Alberta, *Alberta Education Teaching Quality Standard*.
5. Alberta Education, "Inclusive Education."
6. For more information, go to <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/cross-making-a-difference.aspx>.
7. Alberta Education, "Inclusive Education."

*Common
Threads*
FOR INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION

Common Threads for Inclusive Education is a publication of the Alberta Teachers' Association intended to support certificated teachers on their learning journey to inclusive education competency within their classrooms.

For additional ATA resources and information on inclusive education, visit www.teachers.ab.ca. © Copyright 2019



The Alberta
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