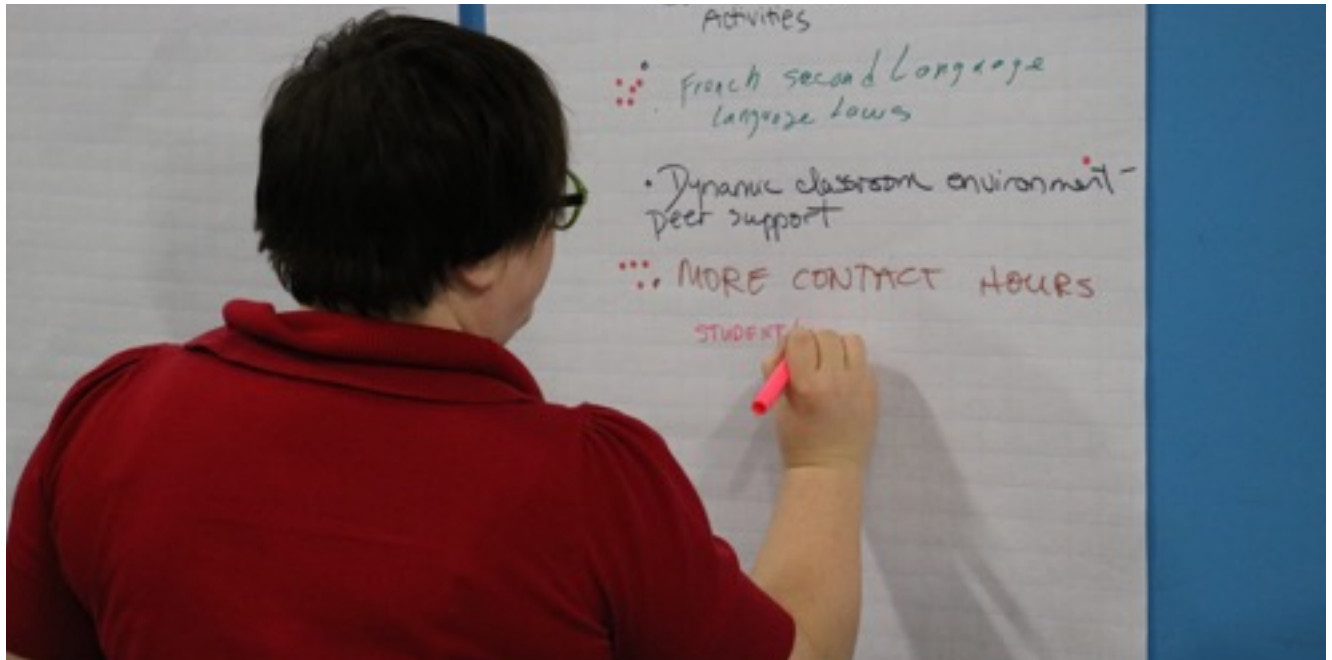


# Report: Education Plan Public Meeting



## Boys & Girls Club

January 27, 2016

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**“Get the politicians the hell out of education.”**

*-Tom Hanley, former Director of Development & Innovation in the Department of Education, quoting Edward Byrne*



## 1. Summary

The Education Plan Public Meeting began with a panel:

Dr. David Wagner, Dean of Education at UNB, laid out three important words: attention, connection and responsibility. We need to pay attention to the long term objectives of education. We need to connect knowledge with actual reality. We need to trust in the ability of teacher and students to make their own decisions and have responsibility, or “response” “ability”.

Louise Melanson, retired teacher, echoed Dr. Wagner’s observation that there is little trust in teachers. Increasingly, teachers are micro-managed. She shared her love of teaching and her love of children, but lamented how little time she had to teach through music, art, dance and movement, as she used to earlier in her career.

Katherine Aske, student at Renaissance College, introduced six things that need to change or be added to education: 1. media literacy to identify good and bad information on the internet, 2. lots of subjects need to be introduced at an early age: mental health, sexuality, etc. in order to normalize them, 3. food education, 4. mindfulness training, 5. widening the way history is taught (different perspectives, not just European), 6. rehaul of the structure of education, modelled off of alternative models.

Ben McLaughlin, student at Ecole St. Anne, championed inclusion of queer literacy and the subject of sexuality at an early age. French immersion as it is now does not work. If the province is bilingual, then the province should offer proper French as a second language training. We need more symmetry and communication between English and French school systems so they have a consistent curriculum.

Following the panel everyone was invited to participate in a dot survey on three of the questions on the government's survey: 1. Most important skills to succeed in life, 2. Improvements needed and 3. More attention needed for... These questions and their results were shown on flip chart paper on the wall.

Each person had nine dot stickers; they were asked to put three dots per question, placing their dots next to the answer they agreed with most. People were also invited to add to the list of answers. The results of the dot survey are shown in Section 2 of this report.

The final and largest portion of the meeting was the breakout discussions on six themes: 1. Teachers and Innovation, 2. Structural Changes in the System, 3. Literacy and Communication, 4. Inclusion, 5. French as a Second Language, and 6. Mental Health. All notes have been transcribed and are provided in Section 4 of this report.

## 2. Top Ideas by Theme

### Teachers and Innovation

1. Move from a teacher-centred, content-oriented structure to learning-centred, student-led structure. Teachers as learning facilitators; classrooms structured differently: with many stations for varied interests and levels, more fluid, less stationary.
2. More freedom and flexibility for teachers to teach innovatively and creatively.
3. Tear down the walls to allow more collaboration between teachers, with the community, between different learning levels and ages.
4. Incorporate community makerspaces.
5. More opportunities for hands-on learning outside the classroom: outdoors, in the community, community projects and partnerships, etc.

### Structural Changes in the System

1. Need an Education Commission that is arms-length and independent from the government.
2. Group students by ability and interest, not by age.
3. Allow students to fail; can build resilience and be an opportunity to learn.

4. Change assessment practices so self-worth is not tied to grades (assessment of growth, progress, self-assessment, levels based on ability not age, etc.)
5. More school districts and school boards.
6. Curriculum must include more viewpoints (aboriginal, queer, etc.) and adopt the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations.

## Literacy & Communication

1. More grammar education and writing training.
2. More class discussions / group presentations and forums.
3. Look at past literacy test results to see what has worked.
4. Have more peer mentors.
5. Flexibility for teachers to push more advanced students (ie. let them choose their own books to analyze).

## Inclusion

1. Inclusion is a good idea (can teach empathy and cooperation) but it needs the resources and supports to make it work.
2. Sometimes separation can work better for a special needs child, but it should be a last, and temporary option.
3. Proper training for all teachers, staff and administration on learning disabilities and special needs.
4. Resources and supports need to be available in all schools and programs, so there is no rural divide, or English and French immersion streaming.
5. Inclusion can apply to some classes, but some subjects should be grouped by ability and level.

## French as a Second Language

1. French immersion doesn't work as it is currently, it does not produce bilingual people who can work in a bilingual job, the education/training needs to change, or the language laws (French test for bilingual jobs) needs to be relaxed.
2. French immersion needs to return to early immersion: kindergarten or first grade.

3. If the government insists that New Brunswick is a bilingual province, then they have a responsibility to produce bilingual citizens with proper bilingual training available at all schools.
4. All education should be 50/50 French and English, for both French and English students together; Francophone students also need English education so that Francophones can also be bilingual.
5. There should be an option for French in all subjects, all the way through to twelfth grade.

## Mental Health

1. Social development, education and health need to collaborate and communicate, break down the silos that prevent them working together.
2. School should be a key access point for mental health services: need more social workers / counsellors who are present and know the students.
3. Talk about mental health and wellness, identify feelings, break down gender norms at an early age to normalize and familiarize students with mental health
4. Students should be in the “pilot seat” of their education so they can pursue their own interests and look forward to school.
5. More art, music, sports, physical education; foster hobbies and healthy habits.

## **3. Dot Survey Results**

### Most Important Skills to Succeed in Life

	Gov. Survey Results: %	Public Meeting Dot Survey Results: numbers
Critical Thinking	61%	22
Communication skills	85%	17
Environment, life skill connection, culinary arts, trades	not in original survey	9
Adaptability to change	75%	7
Self-confidence	64%	7
Active citizenship	29%	4
Empathy	not in original survey	4
Ability to collaborate	43%	2

## Improvements Needed

	Gov. Survey Results: %	Public Meeting Dot Survey Results: numbers
Smaller classes	65%	13
Support for mental health	53%	10
Sense of belonging	55%	8
French second language laws	not in original survey	8
Dynamic classroom environment - peer support	not in original survey	6
Discipline policy	not in original survey	6
One French & English school district	not in original survey	6
More contact hours	not in original survey	4
Student/teacher autonomy	not in original survey	4
More curriculum flexibility/ interdisciplinary education	not in original survey	2
Increased access to sexual healthcare services (other services too) through schools	not in original survey	2
Advanced classes	not in original survey	1
Better access to extracurricular activities	50%	0

## More Attention Needed for:

	Gov. Survey Results: %	Public Meeting Dot Survey Results: numbers
Literacy	66%	13
Aligning the curriculum to match Alberta, BC, Ontario and international standards	not in original survey	12
Math	45%	10
Support all learners	38%	10
Mental health	32%	9
Challenging students	not in original survey	9
Teacher wellness	not in original survey	7
Sexual education	not in original survey	4
Law as a life skill	not in original survey	2
Astronomy & earth sciences	not in original survey	1

## 4. Transcribed Notes

### Six Themes & Discussions

#### 1. Teachers and Innovation

- Teachers should have flexibility to cater to students need
- Incorporation of community maker spaces into the education environment. Socialization
- Teachers need more free time to create innovative ideas.
- Tear down walls to encourage collaboration
- Teachers turn into learning facilitators
- Current system is organized around teaching.
- Reorganize system around learning.

- Teachers would become learning facilitators
- Students engaged in content aided by teacher as facilitator which would change social environment. Physical structure would also change.
- Teaching as a subversive activity 1970's
- 1967 education in NB became much centralised. Before, the province had 400 plus school boards.
- Foundation program: Student led learning, but there is a lot of resistance to this approach.
- Literacy and math level are further behind than other countries.
- Why are all six year olds together? Why are all grades one age? Should be grouped by level of learning and not by age.
- However, there seems to be too much resistance to innovation or change.
- Level 1 5: Different levels for different courses. Not age based. Some schools that have implemented these programs have had excellent results.
- Another approach: 75 kids, 3 teachers. 1 teacher with a group. 25 students and 1 teacher. 5 students struggling. Not more work or money.
- Tom Hanley 'Learning Reconsidered': Need to consider how to implement this across province because there are cities and rural areas that need to consider resource challenges. What would program look like at different schools. Do they need to look the same?

## 2. Structural Changes in the System

- Education commission: at the provincial level away from politicians.
- More school districts and school boards.
- School structure should change from teaching to learning
- 1 teacher for 25/40 kids
- Outcome Based Education (OBE). By the end of the year, students should know X, Y, Z. Pass those who know X, Y, Z and don't pass those who do not know.
- Group the grades by knowledge not by age



- Truth and reconciliation recommendations: Implementing inclusive viewpoints such as Queer theory, Aboriginal, Afri-centric, etc.
- Examine the way we group students. Not by age, group by ability.
- The education plan is ten years. This is good because it is a progressive approach. Structural change takes time.
- Needs to be more school districts
- Assessment practices tying self-worth to grades. Different learning styles need to support all learners
- Measuring growth getting learners to articulate their growth
- Critical thinking skills practical knowledge
- Hands-on learning community partnerships/active citizenship
- Outdoor education..... All of these programs already exist how do we bring that here?
- Breaking down silos. Loosening rigidity classes in blocks. DO NOT REINVENT THE WHEEL, programs already exist.

### 3. Literacy Communication

- More grammar/sentence structure training before university.
- Flexibility for teachers to give more challenging work to push advanced students (in same class). E.g. choosing your own books to analyze
- More class discussions/group presentations forums
- Looking at past literacy test results to see what has worked over the history of NB education
- Establish work habits at a young age.
- Having more peer mentors.

### 4. Inclusion

- All students have the right to learn regardless of disabilities/handicap
- Exclusion/separation is last option, supposed to be temporary

- Very difficult to include all students of a different levels of knowledge (especially math and languages)
- Students can choose level of difficulty in math (gr. 11 and 12).
- Rural divide
- Policy 322 Good idea, not the supports to maximize effectiveness, need for more EA + more training
- Classroom inclusion teaches empathy and cooperation
- What is public education? More than filling a brain, it is building our society. Very easy to include students in practical classes
- Sometimes inclusion isn't always a good thing. Separation to accommodate their knowledge = more success.
- Stress for students and teachers are leading to mental health issues.

## 5. French Second Language

First of all NB is a bilingual province. ALL students should be taught in English and in French equally across the board to ensure true bilingualism, not separatism. European countries teach students to become fluent in multiple languages successfully, so we know it has and is being done. No need to waste time doing a feasibility study! It is time to lower costs and use on board/district for both languages. Bi means both not just French! In the meantime do no fret about having bilingual teachers. Use French speaking teachers to teach the French components and English speaking teachers to teach the English students. It is not rocket science. It is time to think outside the box, stop talking and just fix the system. Also, Ottawa has started teaching 50/50.

- French immersion not working for future jobs.
- English kids need to also use English
- French immersion is hurting math
- Should be like Ottawa, where the curriculum is 50/50 bilingual from kindergarten
- In the working environment the francophone struggles because they do not have English.
- Also need English education for francophone

- The language laws need to be soften
- However, with all of the cuts there is no more support in French immersion.
- An exam for both languages.
- Education should be 50/50 for all from kindergarten with two teachers French and English immersion.
- Immersion currently not producing people who can work bilingual jobs. No more supports in EI.
- Most students who went through the program, struggled.
- Two separate districts also a problem costly to have two boards.
- Prefer grade 1 start when moved to grade 3 start, still same textbooks so grade 4 is the same book as used before. Don't have two entry points. Not grade 3 or 6, just one. Grade 3 only or grade 1 only.
- Need new books. Resource needs.
- Why teach math in French? Hard to do in second language. However, there should be an option for french in all fields of classes. All the way until the 12th grade.
- Even students at Ecole SainteAnne are not 100% fluent.
- With the current structure, the result is kids without skills in English or French.
- Expectations: Raise the bar. More focus on spelling and grammar (in English) for both French immersion students and English core students.
- French Immersion should begin at an early age for everyone using subject areas.

## 6. Mental Health

- Resiliency
- 'Empty desks' Need to be present physically and mentally (?)
- Social development, education and health need to collaborate for effectiveness
- Social workers/counselors need to be present and know the students
- Moving forward like Ontario. Parent and student groups

- Departments can't communicate, privacy laws
- School = key access point for services
- Talking fosters a healthy dialogue surrounding mental health. Breaks the stigma
- Changing the vocabulary mental health > wellness
- Breaking down gender norms surrounding masculinity at a younger age
- Foster hobbies and healthy habits to give them something to look forward to
- Identifying their emotions.
- Kids should look forward to school instead of fearing it.
- Disconnect because children are taken out of the pilot seat of their education

## Comment Cards

- Increase student/teacher contact hours
- Addressing teaching days lost to weather and PD days. Extend the school year or have PD days in the summer.
- Longer school days
- Increase incentives for teachers and students to succeed
- Increase teacher pay for exceptional student results
- Provide free university education to those students that graduate from high school with a higher average and are bilingual

“After speaking with one of my friends, who recently moved back from Alberta, I was a bit disappointed with what she had to say. She mentioned to me that her daughter missed going to school in Alberta as she felt as if she were learning. Here, she could feel herself getting dumber and dumber. This is quite sad”.

“I spoke to some parents whose kids went through the NB curriculum and asked them whether or not I should put my kids in French Immersion. They say I should because the regular school system is too easy. Daily homework in both and literacy should be given. The math/literacy

level is lower in NB compared to Ontario and Asian cities. E.g. Math grade 7 in China = grade 10 at FHS”.

“I disagree with the increase in the amount of homework. We want learning to be a positive experience. My son is away from home 7am to 330pm. He needs a break. I love him having some homework at home, however when it has increased I have been met with huge resistance because he is tired and is not retaining anything. However, I agree with giving the parents a monthly breakdown of what the children are learning and where each student needs to experience growth”.

“Some homework just ends up being make work projects. Do not teach children to relearn what they already know. Reinforce what they know but focus what they need help with.

## Emails sent in:

### “1) FRENCH IMMERSION NEEDS TO RETURN TO KINDERGARTEN OR GRADE 1

- the earlier students learn a new language, the better.
- less apprehension to learning a new language in the earlier years (Grade 3 is a different childhood development, which impacts children socially & potentially academically while trying to learn).
- huge disservice with NB being different from the rest of Canada, for those coming & going from NB (thinking about Oromocto & military moves).  
ie: students who can't learn french until Grade 3 and then move out of province. They are now behind or can't continue in French elsewhere. The reverse is true, students who already have 2 3 years (or more) coming to NB and can't work at their level because they are already ahead.
- being an officially bilingual province and families can't begin learning french until much later (doesn't make sense!)

### 2) INCREASE ASSISTANCE IN THE CLASSROOM FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS

Being a homeschooling mom of a son with many learning disabilities, it is important that NB and the Districts continue to recognize and respect homeschooling on a go forward basis. All New Brunswickers have the right to learn in their respective ways. I have seen and heard way too much from other parents who are not able to provide the hands on support that we can to help our child learn. I am aware of the Social Determinants of Health and that many families are at risk in our province specifically; families with low income, low education level/literacy,

unemployment, food insecurity, low income housing, health status (including mental health), lack of social safety network for children in the home).

The children of these families are less likely to succeed.

<http://www.phacaspc.gc.ca/phsp/determinants/indexeng.php>

Therefore, I would like to see the following in the education plan. Increased support for students with learning disabilities. This goes beyond autism. Autism is only the tip of the iceberg. There are many students who have "some difficulty" with learning, but cannot be helped because they aren't "severe enough".

Support includes

- extra hands-on staff for students in need in the classroom. Yes this means more money & staff! The reality is that there are more children now being diagnosed in classrooms. ONE or even TWO teachers cannot meet the needs of all these students.
- it needs to start earlier in the elementary years (not waiting until Grade 4 or 5 for assessment & diagnoses!!) The earlier students are identified, the greater the likelihood of success.
- these students move on to middle & high school. I've heard some middle school classes have had HALF their students with diagnoses. How does a teacher manage that?? They DON'T. The kids suffer.
- support for the parents in the school. More times than I can count, the parents are blamed for the behaviour or lack of learning in the child (our experience included). This is not appropriate nor acceptable.
- immense learning and training for ALL staff on learning disabilities and how to assist. Not just the teachers, but administration too! (Imagine if the resources were placed here, instead of revamping report cards of all students, followed by evaluation, followed by redesign, followed by reevaluation)!!

### 3) INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE IN SCHOOLS AT ALL LEVELS

As the learning disabilities and challenges arise, that student is then at HIGH risk for mental health illnesses and comorbidity. Therefore in thinking of all the students again, who are at risk given their social determinants of health, there is no wonder that mental health of students is in jeopardy. The numbers of students being diagnosed are only going to continue to increase!

“My biggest concern at this point is the no failing rule. Children need to fail, yes it might be upsetting but they rally pretty well. If you fail a child but provide them with extra help and encouragement the second time around, those children will prosper. But if you don’t fail them and try to provide them with extra help in the next grade it might just be too much and without the proper fundamentals at their disposal they end up getting lost in the flow. These children don’t have outside support, they don’t have someone else looking out for their wellbeing, they are the ones who need the education systems time and expertise, they need to learn it. If they can’t be given that opportunity the first time around, they need to do it again. Their confidence will grow and they might surprise you by learning and being proud of their learning. Honestly they also might not but at least give them the opportunity.

My reference for this is my son was born in late December, we decided to send him to school at the regular time and now regret that decision because of the problems we have had. All through kindergarten he received below average marks for reading and writing. He was passed. For the first and second report card in grade one he received below average marks for reading and writing. My husband and I asked to meet with his teacher, principal and resource teacher. We explained that this wasn’t acceptable and that we would be seriously considering holding him back to do grade 1 again if he didn’t meet the mark. This was met with a lot of hesitation, it was only slightly considered because of the date of his birthday. We paid for private tutors, he received extra help and managed to get a passing grade at the end of the year. We still should have kept him back because he was just barely there. He has continued to struggle because I just don’t think he was ready. He is very smart in other parts of school but reading has not been easy. But had the school made the decision or at least made it a viable good solution for us during those first two years, we think he would be in a better place. We decided to go in, the school did not contact us after 5 report cards below average. We paid for the tutors, the school did not suggest it, we did. Not all kids have parent willing to do this for them. Our education system should be doing this for them.

My next concern is French immersion, this is obviously a hot ticket item and I don’t expect it to be solved or sorted out while my children are in school (I have one in Kindergarten). However, I think we would be much better suited to have French class in every year. From Kindergarten up and other subjects are taught in English. If you want your child to learn in French, we have a whole district for that. I believe they would learn more French and more of their other subjects in this case. The average of children that start in French immersion in elementary school that finish bilingual is very very small. You would have more children (people) able to communicate in French if it was a class offered in school every year.

This brings me to my last point. Inclusion, it’s great for everyone to be included but when you have everyone that doesn’t want that type of child in their class or wants their child to go into French immersion because everyone else is, you leave an English class that is very heavy in children with special needs. My son (same one born in December) is currently in a grade  $\frac{3}{4}$  split at Park St School and there are about 2022 students in his class. If they are all in the

classroom there are 5 additional adults. You can't tell me that is a good learning environment for children. Most who are in the English class because they weren't educationally ready to add a new language, they most likely struggle in some way or another. You are doing them a disservice by having so many distractions in their classroom.

These are things I see in my child's school. I don't know what happens in so many other children's classrooms but I can only speak from our experience. The education system needs to concentrate on those kids that need the help, the children who do well are going to do well anyways. They are going to pull through, this system seems to be leaving a lot of children falling through the cracks and then wondering why they aren't able to find jobs and contribute to society when they exit school".