

Report: Education Plan Public Meeting



FHS Teachers

February 29, 2016

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1. Summary

David Coon met with teachers at Fredericton High School to hear feedback from them regarding the 10 Year Education Plan. There was some skepticism expressed about the length and outcome of this report. Some felt there was insufficient time to create a good plan for such an important and comprehensive reform. By far the greatest issue was with inadequate support and resources given to Inclusion. This has led to high levels of stress and burnout among teachers and Education Assistants (EA). Inclusion was seen as particularly problematic at the high school level where full grown students are physically capable of harming teachers and other students. It has become a safety issue, as well as a mental health issue, let alone an education issue.

2. Notes

- March 15 – Draft Strategy Roundtable when Advisory committee will meet with co-chairs and other stakeholders.
- Feel skeptical about the 10 year plan: Is there a desire to create something cohesive that all parties will stick to even if the government changes? Yes, the Education Minister seems to feel believe so, but don't know about Premier. Co-chairs do believe so.
- In Alberta – all government parties decide together on Education, so that it doesn't change with parties.
- Q: Breakdown in committee – how many are directly involved in Education? A: All are involved with education, there are no businesses. But it's not very visible who the committee is consulting with.
- Inclusion: Classroom composition is the #1 priority for teachers. Province talks Inclusion but doesn't fund it.
- Q: Is this going to be rolled out gradually? A: Don't know. They are going to start implementing in April.
- Inclusion: Not enough investment of personnel. Has a large impact on classroom instruction. Inclusion has become overwhelming. It wasn't properly monitored. The current situation is not what was intended. It has become a burden on all, including the students.
- Looking at the survey results and seeing how Citizenship is not a priority, I think about the money spent on citizenship education two years ago looks. If it is not seen as a

priority, according to this survey, then we should invest time and energy in something else. It was a major mandate in the past year, it makes me feel concerned about the new ten year plan.

- Small class: this priority concern comes out of Inclusion. Range of students is too high. Large classrooms plus inclusive is immensely stressful. There is no streaming anymore, classroom range is so broad, teachers could be doing more than six lessons per class. It has become very challenging to teach. People outside don't realize this. Teachers are reaching a mental breakdown point. Work is ten-fold what it used to be
- Literacy/ Numeracy – We should have these classes cut up into two semesters, like we've done with ninth grade math (9a + 9b math). Splitting courses in two offers the option not to fail entire school year but a semester. Students have a chance to learn the subject in the next semester. Frustrating that system isn't listening; there are great ideas but they're not getting picked up or spread.
- Inclusion: (Education Assistant for 22 years total, 10 at FHS) Tired and discouraged: on one end you have a student who is violent, on another end, you have a students who doesn't know his last name. By High School the students have a very large gap. In the same classes you have kids with down syndrome not learning what he needs, sitting in a Canadian Law class. Education Assistants are not paid enough. She has been without a contract for three years. She makes \$25,000 per year.
- Inclusion in high school has specific problems. Lots of students have grown, there are safety concerns. The dynamic is different.
- Teacher in grade 9 English: needs EAs when one kid reads grade 1 level, another grade 10. How are you supposed to teach to such a wide gap in one class?
- Some classes have one EA to handle four kids who need help. Not fair to all. Classes were not made for this many people, some of the EAs don't have a chair to sit in; and you can't meet everyone's needs if you only have one EA.
- Wish decision makers would come and see. Sit with teachers for a day, work with them. See what it's like on the inside. Decision makers should know what's going on in the classes.
- Things have changed so much in education, advisory committee told not to think of their own school experiences because things are so different now.
- Regarding Survey: hard to separate out the categories because they're all interconnected. Inclusion is connected to teachers ability to meet needs, to mental health, to teaching to all learners, etc.

- Decision makers are not talking to teachers or are not teachers themselves. Also changes are fast and big; former teachers don't know situation of today's teachers and education. Want to see more decision makers talk with teachers. More power to teachers to be decision makers.
- Teachers feel not listened to. Feeling very frustrated, and there is growing frustration.
- Q : Ten year plan, how does that fit with negotiations? A: Don't know.
- Should allow for streaming at all levels. Kids don't know how to do basic life skill; this isn't offered for inclusion students. Need relevant curriculum to meet their needs.
- Structural changes: reorganize grades, etc.
- Q: What about French Second language, what's the plan? A: Government wants to return early immersion to grade 1. Don't know if they are looking for other things.
- Concern because scope is so huge. Need more time. Concern that this is too hasty.
- March 15: Draft Strategy will be presented, they will receive comments. Final strategy will be delivered to government before May. This is the one opportunity for the Advisory Committee to give input.
- Q: Will it be presented as a bill? Will it be debated? A: No, it doesn't require legislation.
Q: Will there be any debate? A: Yes, during Question Period. Likely there will be a motion to debate it.

4. Comment Cards

- Inclusion
 - In theory, full inclusion is a good thing. However, in reality, we do not have the support necessary to make it work.
 - EAs are placed with only the most extreme needs (physical, mental, or behavioral). Unfortunately, extreme behavior needs take a lot of our resources.
 - If every class had EA support, and if the school had full time physiotherapists, psychologists/psychiatrists, occupational therapists, we could make this system work
 - We need more people specialized in trauma and extreme behavior

- We have many students who are not able to function in the classroom
- M&R does not have time to work with students with academic needs. Our very low students (who would have been supported 10 or 20 years ago) get no extra support beyond the classroom teacher
- 2 examples (of many!):
 - “Joseph” – horrible child abuse care, is not able to function in the classroom – this child needs daily therapy
 - “Adam” – Mentally 6 months old, very limited sight and hearing, immobile, feeding tube. This child should be in a facility where his needs are met (“snoezelen” room, pool, lights/music etc.), not at the back of the classroom. Perhaps a couple hours per week would benefit other students in developing empathy for their peers with exceptionalities, but full inclusion is not giving him what he needs.
- Attendance is a joke
- Think it’s not going to last
- EA for 22 years
 - o Kids very violent
 - o Kids don’t know last name
 - o Tired and discouraged
- EA’s grossed \$25,000
 - o Don’t work full school days (only six hours a day)
 - o Most work two jobs
- Inclusion okay in elementary, but in high school – wide gap
- Kids not knowing whole name in with those studying to go to UNB in the fall
- Down Syndrome – gr 11 – no EA, cause of his great behaviour