

***Supporting
Teachers:***
**A Foundation for Advancing
Inclusive Education**

– Discussion Document –

L’Institut Roehrer Institute



Supporting Teachers: **A Foundation for Advancing Inclusive Education**

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I. Overview

This discussion document sets out an approach to thinking about and furthering inclusive schools and classrooms for all learners. The Roeher Institute's aim is to foster shared policy dialogue and a set of understandings and expectations that a range of stakeholders would mutually hold on this issue

In particular we are placing emphasis on finding ways to support regular teachers so they can experience success with all learners in regular schools and classrooms.

The document is based on research recently sponsored by The Roeher Institute and conducted by Dr. Gary Bunch at York University's Faculty of Education (2002),¹ symposia involving knowledgeable people on teacher education and research in inclusive education, a review of Statistics Canada's National Population Health Survey (NPHS) of 1998 and the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) of 2001, as well as focused discussions with Canadian leaders in inclusive education and the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

II. Education Matters

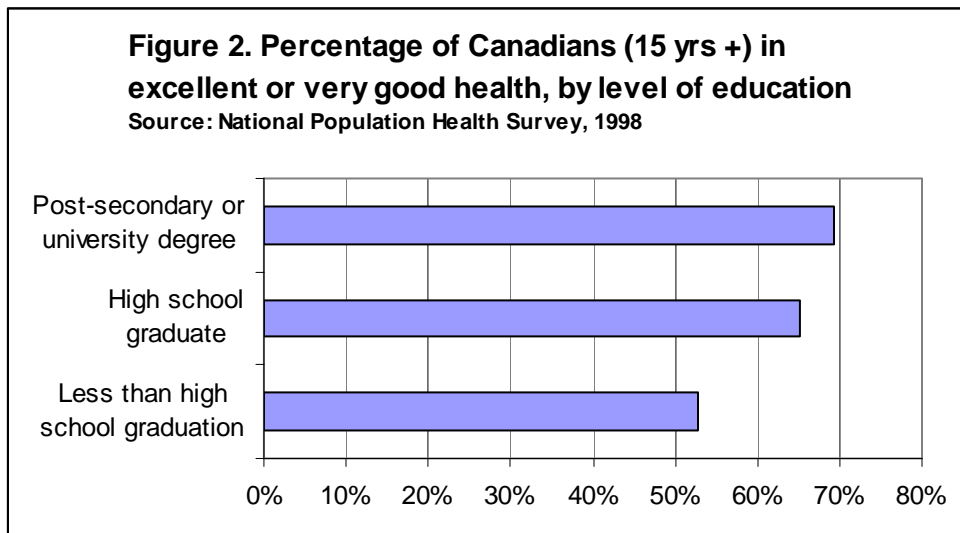
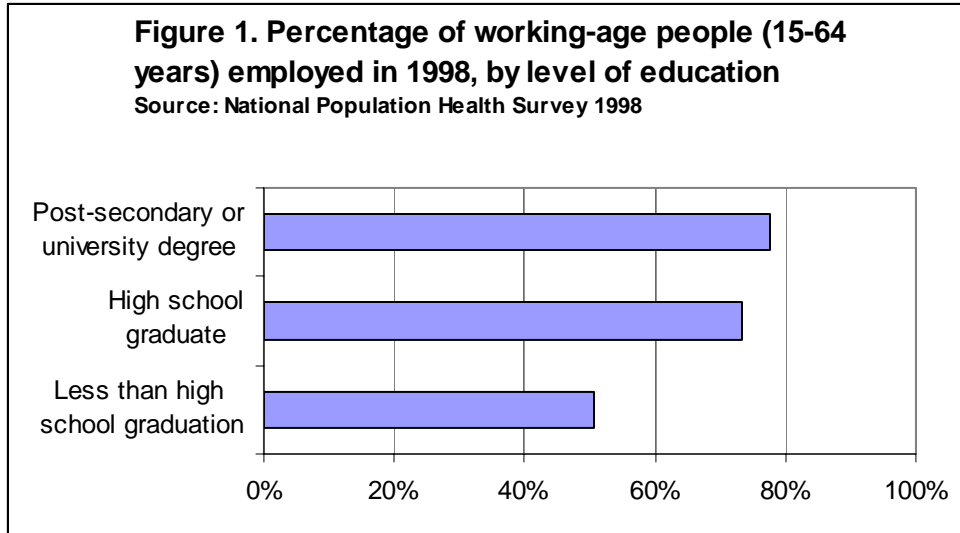
Education is a cornerstone of responsible citizenship in robust and stable democracies. Since the Confederation of Canada, governments and ordinary citizens have recognized the importance education and have made public provision for its universal availability to children and youth at the elementary and high school levels.

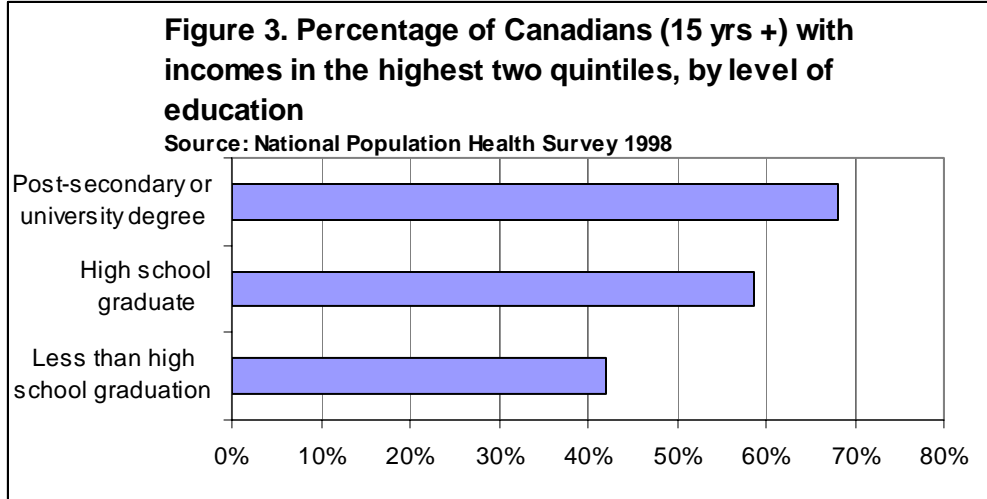
Presently Canada spends 3.3% of GDP on public elementary and secondary education (\$39.6 billion in 2002/03).²

¹ Faculty of Education, York University and The Roeher Institute (2002). *Not Enough: Canadian Research into Inclusive Education, Final Report*. Toronto: Authors.

² François Nault (2004). *Summary public school indicators for the provinces and territories, 1996-1997 to 2002-2003*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada (Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Division), pp. 12 and 25.

With increases in the level of education attained, the chances also increase that people will be integrated within the paid labour force, will enjoy economic security, will participate in a range of community activities and will enjoy better health and wellness overall (Figures 1 – 5).





*A quintile is defined as one-fifth of the total population.

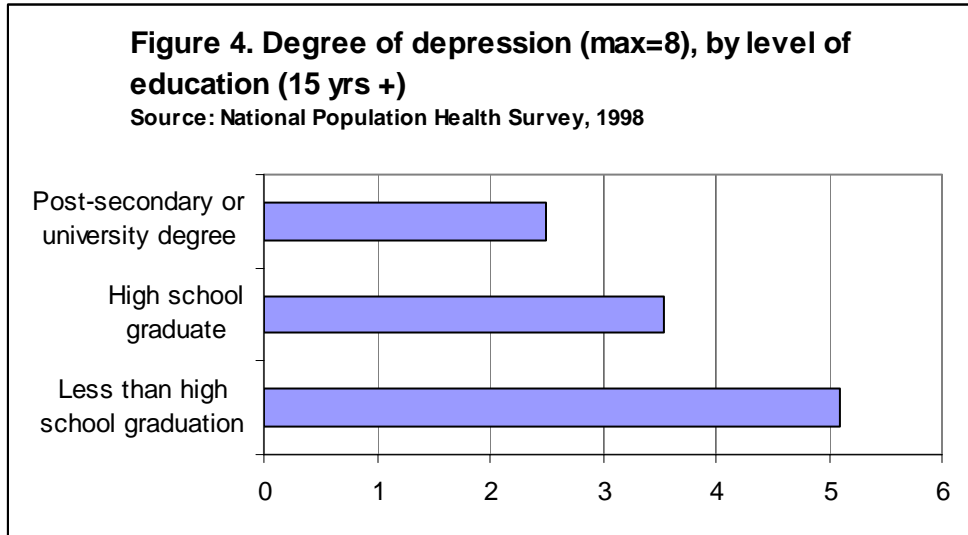
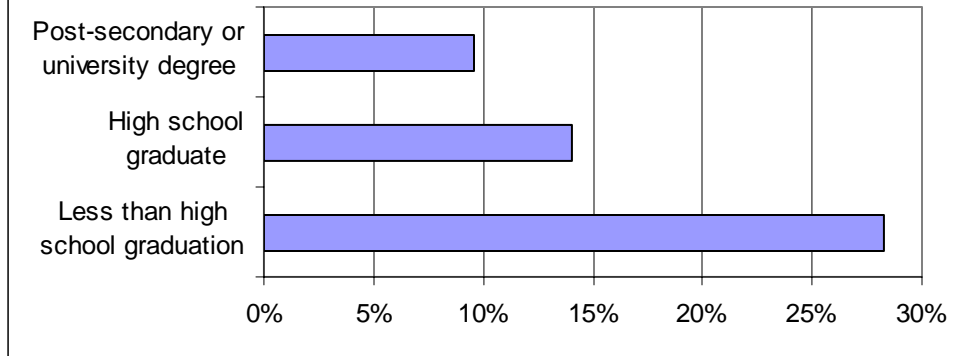


Figure 5. Percentage of adults with disabilities who never participate in community activities, by level of education

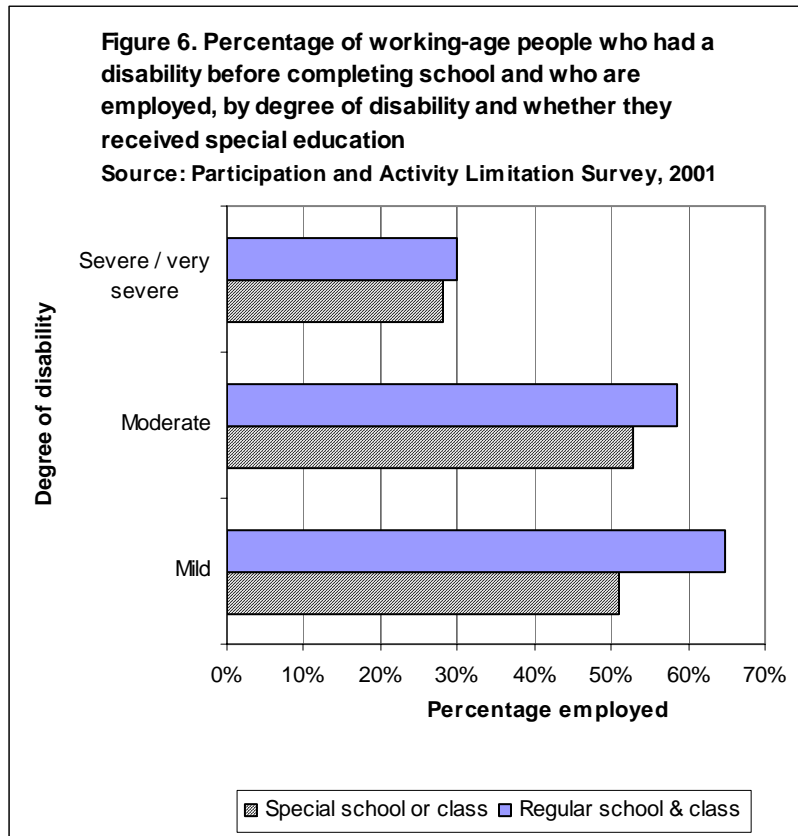
Source: Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001



*Community activities are defined as ones that involve people other than immediate family or friends, such as volunteering, doing hobbies outside the home, attending sporting or cultural events (e.g., plays, movies), taking personal interest courses, visiting museums, libraries, or national or provincial parks. Shopping, physical activities and travel for business or personal reasons have not been included.

III. Inclusive Education Matters

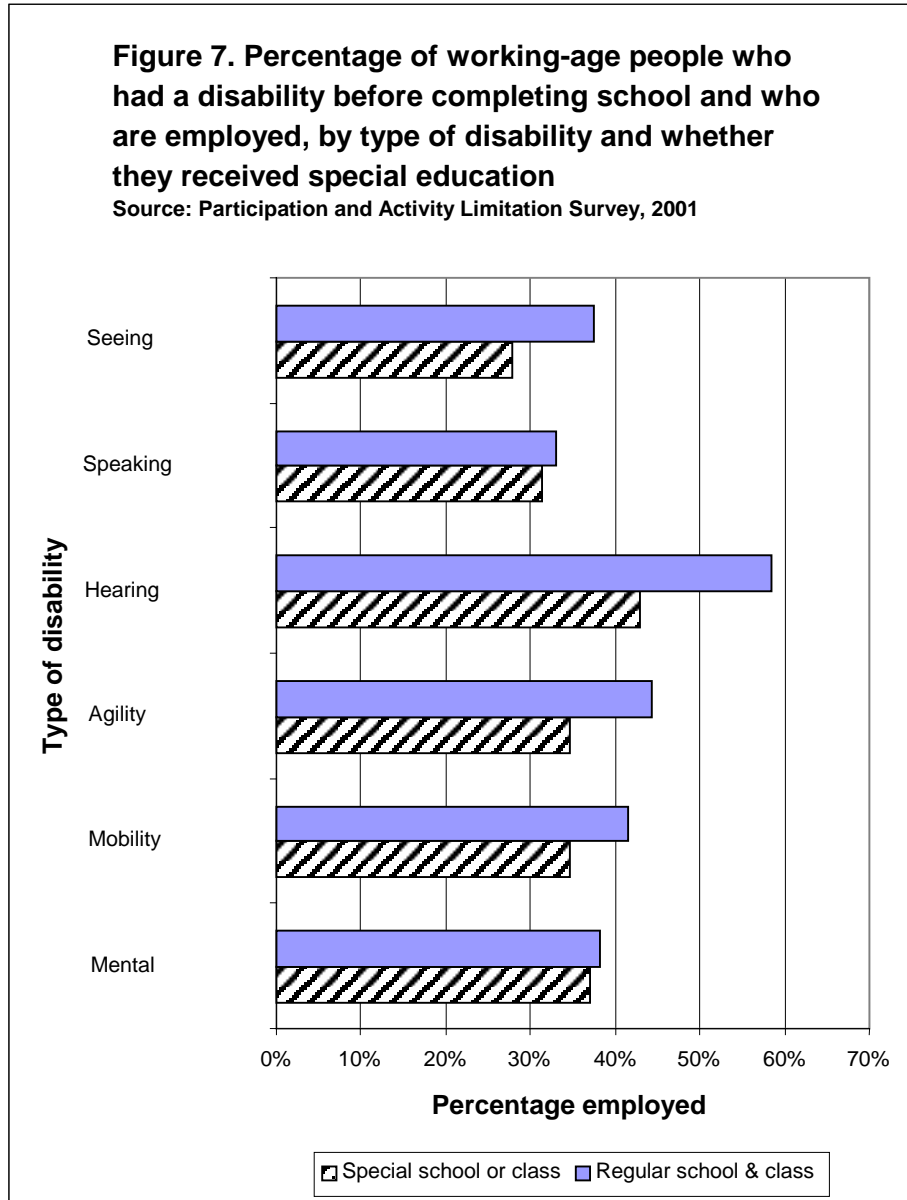
People disabled before completing their schooling, and who have been educated in regular rather than special education programs, are more likely to be involved in the paid labour force later in life and to be participants in a range of community activities. The trend generally holds up regardless of the nature or severity of disability (Figures 6 – 7).³



³ Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) data are similar to findings based on the Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS) of 1991.

Figure 7. Percentage of working-age people who had a disability before completing school and who are employed, by type of disability and whether they received special education

Source: Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001



IV. Challenges to be Addressed

We recognize that some key issues are of concern to teachers and to parents and need to be addressed. These include the following:

- Class size and composition;
- Increased expectations of educators to address diverse issues (e.g., family poverty, child nutrition, students' emotional well-being, challenging

behaviours, accommodating ethno-racial diversity, meeting the needs of students who require and who do not have ESL support);

- Paperwork and bureaucracy for educators who are involved in individual education planning and in categorizing students for special education funding;
- The regular teacher's lack of background on issues of disability and on implications for instructional practice;
- Teachers' lack of access to exemplary practice and role models on inclusive education;
- Lack of professional support from support teachers;
- Lack of teacher assistant support in some jurisdictions;
- Disconnect between provincial/territorial policy commitments and actual practices at the district and school level;
- Striking a workable balance between teaching all learners and paying particular attention to disability-specific needs and issues in the regular classroom.

As well, improving access to inclusive, quality, public education for students with disabilities has been addressed from various perspectives. Debates about inclusive education tend to look at a wide range of factors, and often leave the participants and the witnesses to those debates struggling to make sense of how to put all the pieces together. Is legislative change the key? Should we focus on public policy, or teacher education, or supports in the classroom? If schools focused more intensively on individual education planning, would that improve access and the quality of education? Or should the priority be to develop curriculum materials and resources?

V. Towards a Framework of Mutual Expectations

All of these challenges and questions are important. A review of the research and consultations with researchers, and with community and teacher organizations like the Canadian Association for Community Living and the

Canadian Teachers' Federation, points to the relationship between factors that can help to organize our thinking and strategies to advance inclusive education.

The following is a proposed framework for thinking through the dimensions of effective, inclusive practices in education.

A. Defining Terms: Inclusive Education with a Focus on the Teacher

The proposed framework for inclusive education is based on the premise that teachers should have the instructional and other supports to:

- welcome and include all learners, in all of their diversity and exceptionalities, in the regular classroom, in the neighbourhood school with their age peers:
- foster the participation and fullest possible development of all learners' human potential; and
- foster the participation of all learners in socially valuing relationships with diverse peers and adults.

It is understood that any child, regardless of whether he or she has a disability, may need individualized attention and support from their teacher to address difficulties with the curriculum on any given day. However, where such support is needed outside the regular classroom, it should be for as brief a period of time as possible with an active plan to reintegrate the student back into the regular classroom as soon as possible with appropriate supports for the teacher and student.

B. The Centrality of the Teacher

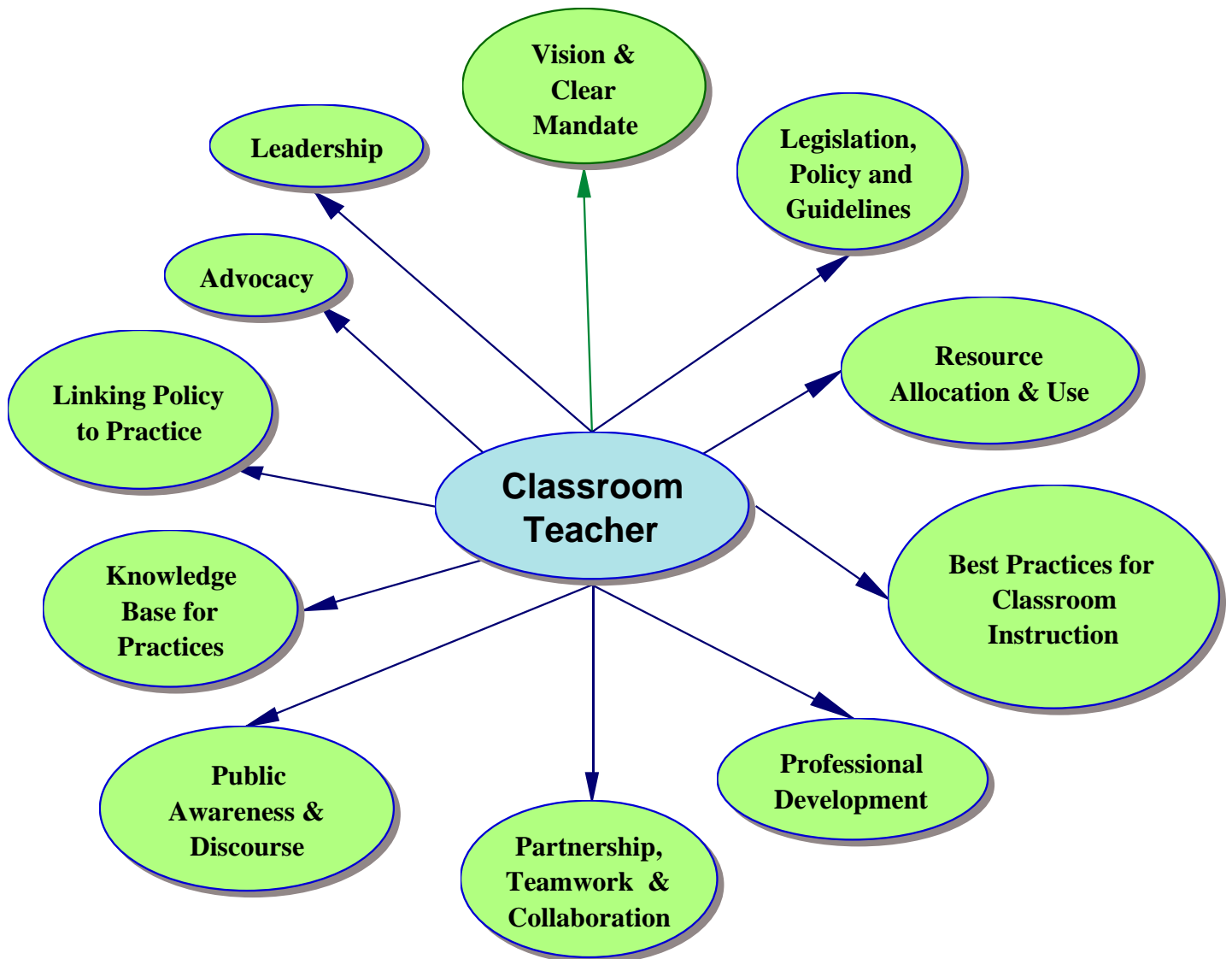
What emerges clearly in the research is that inclusive education results from the leadership of teachers in the classroom. Child development research also affirms the centrality of the teacher's role and of environments that are rich

with opportunities to learn (Willms et al, 2002).⁴ Warm and responsive teachers who are committed to the inclusion of learners in stimulating learning environments are key to securing not only access to the classroom, but a quality of education that results in positive developmental outcomes. When teachers have knowledge, classroom supports, leadership and support from their school administrators and the broader education system, an inclusive approach to quality education for all learners can take root in regular classrooms and schools.

⁴ J. Douglas Willms (2002). *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.

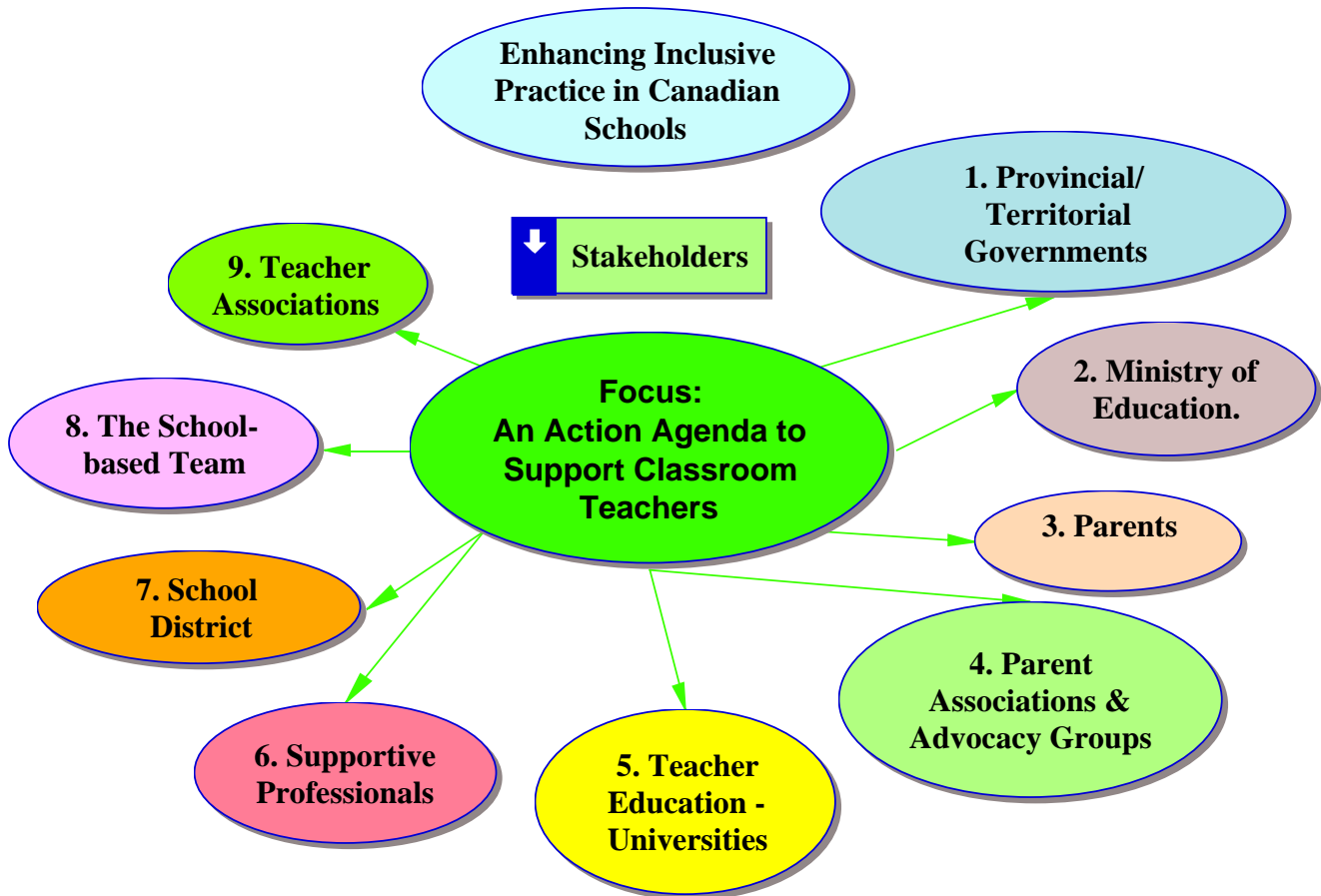
C. Supports Needed by Regular Classroom Teachers

Inclusive educational practice places challenging demands on the classroom teacher; on that everyone agrees. The expectations for the teacher must be matched with support in a variety of ways and from a number of stakeholders. The diagram below sets out some of the most noteworthy areas in which classroom teachers need support.



D. Key Stakeholders Who Can Support Classroom Teachers

In every school community, every district and province there are many stakeholders who can positively contribute to the success of the classroom teacher in meeting the challenges of inclusion. We have identified nine of these stakeholders below. You may suggest other important ones be added depending on the circumstances in your community.



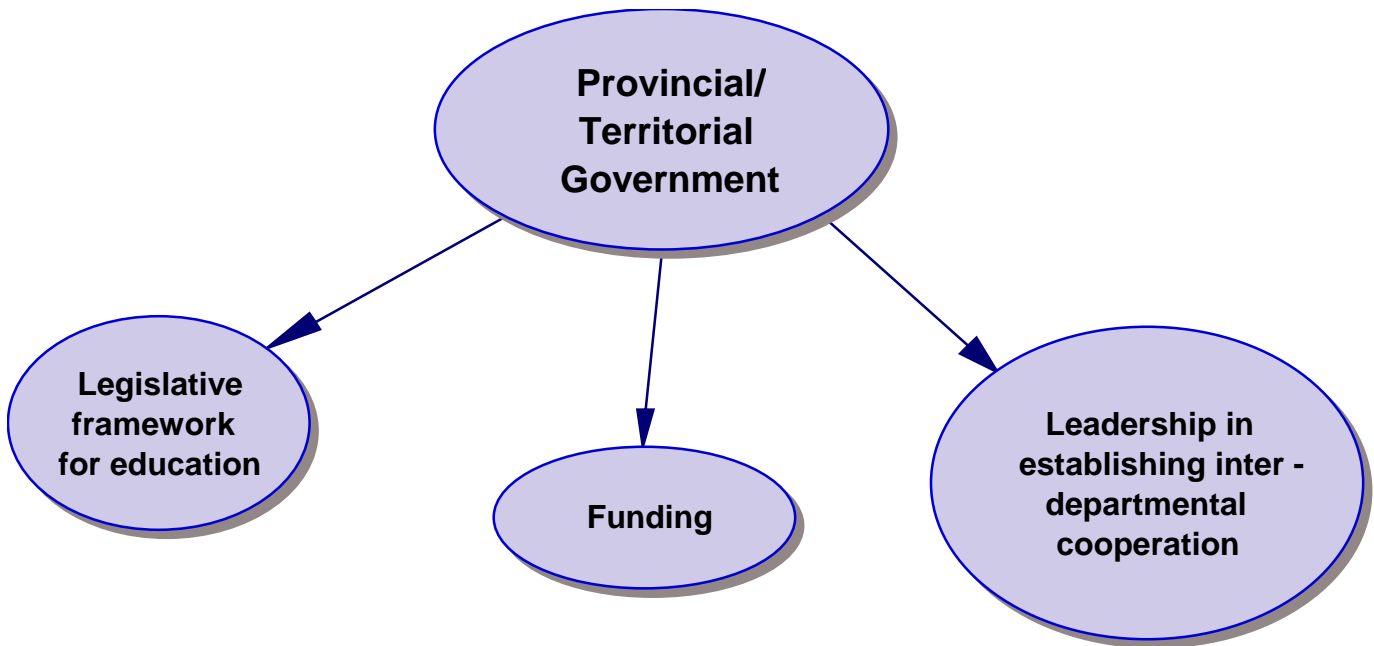
- ✓ In the diagrams on the following pages we provide some context for the discussion of ways these stakeholder groups can support teachers in the practice of inclusive education in the regular classrooms of our nation. Please use the pages as a basis to clarify your own analysis and to identify priorities for action in your community, district or province/territory.

Diagrams

**Stakeholders and Support
to Classroom Teachers**

E. How Provincial/Territorial Governments can Support Teachers

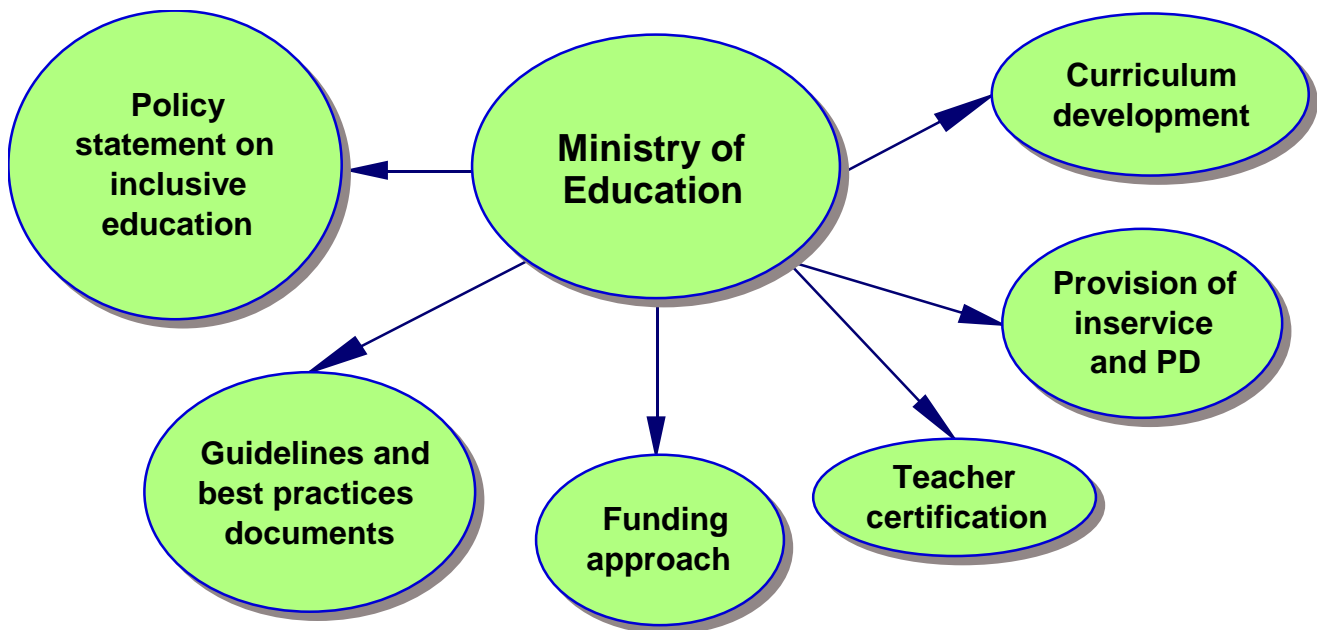
In order to support teachers, provincial and territorial governments need to develop a legislative framework for education, with a coherent focus on the inclusion of all learners in regular schools and classrooms. Adequate funding needs to be allocated to make inclusion successful for teachers, students and parents. Governments also need to show leadership by establishing and modelling interdepartmental cooperation (e.g., between education, health and social services) in fostering full inclusion and educational excellence for all learners.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

F. How Ministries of Education can Support Teachers

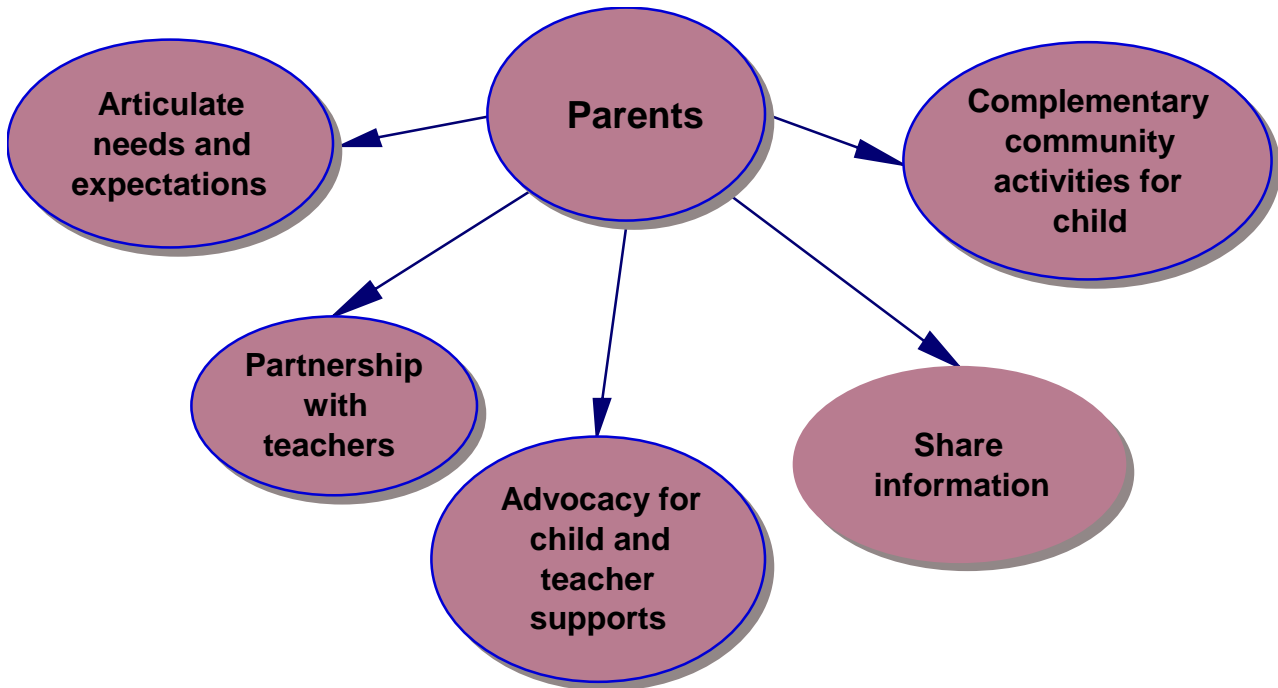
In support of teachers, ministries of education could establish funding approaches that have focused, dedicated revenue streams for inclusion but without requiring categorical approaches that involve labelling and stigmatizing students while burdening classroom teachers with extra administration. Ministries can ensure the provision of in-service and professional development, and encourage and recognize teachers' efforts for undertaking professional development. Ministries of education can require teachers to be able to deal with diversity in the classroom to be certified. They can clearly articulate the broad directions and standards for professional training. Standards can in turn inform the efforts of teacher training institutions including universities. Curriculum development should place some focus on diversity and inclusion and facilitate the learning of positive messages about people of diverse abilities, family backgrounds and cultures. Learning resources should be accessible and support the place in society of people with disabilities and others from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Ministries should develop clear, well-communicated policy statements that establish inclusion as the practice norm, should disseminate practical guidelines for implementation and make available best practice documents and e-resources.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

G. How Parents can Support Teachers

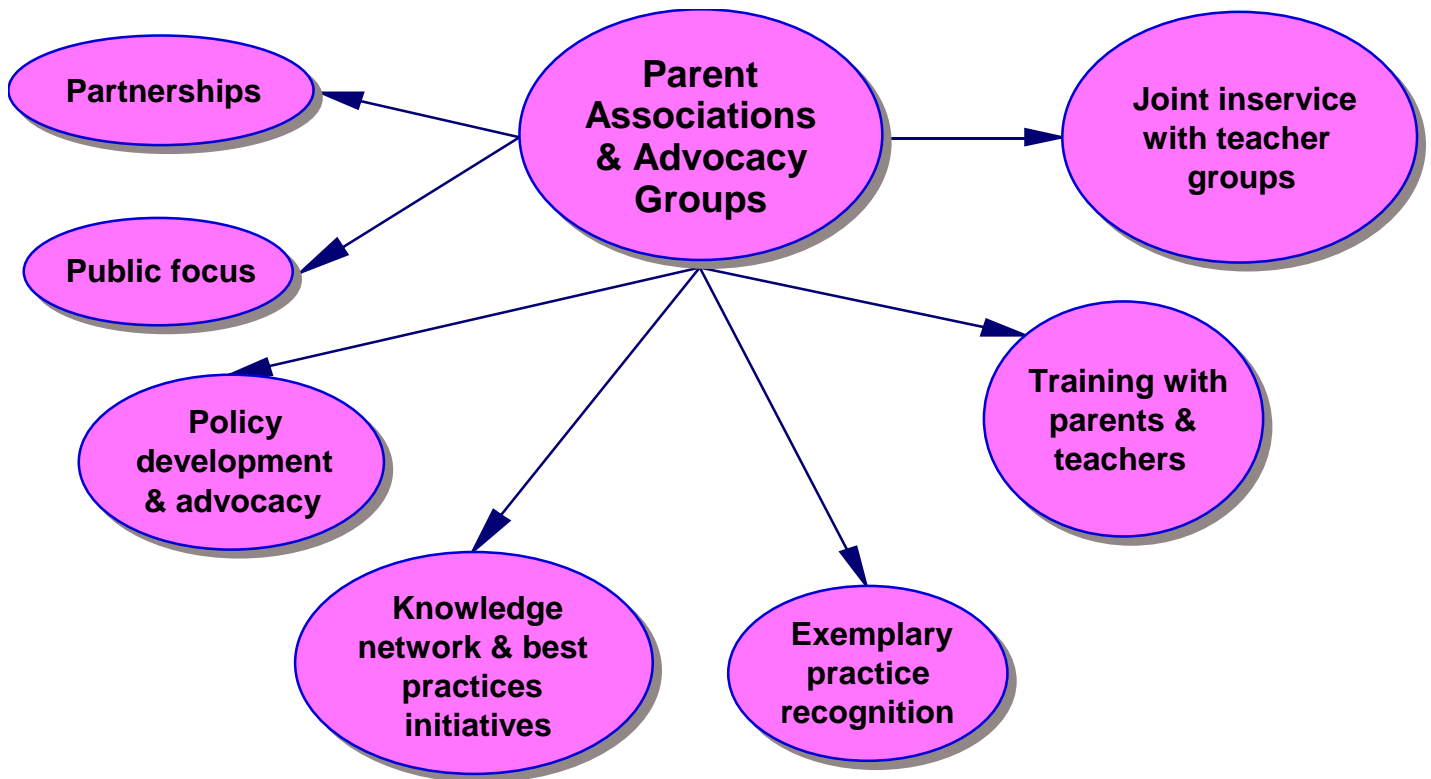
Parents can support classroom teachers by engaging in constructive partnerships with them. This involves establishing high but realistic expectations about the learning and development of their children, helping teachers better understand the particular needs and strengths of their children, reinforcing the teachers' efforts in their homes, and facilitating complementary activities for their child's development in the community. Parents can share information and knowledge about instructional strategies and other supportive measures that have worked well with their children with teachers.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

H. How Parent Associations and Advocacy Groups can Support Teachers

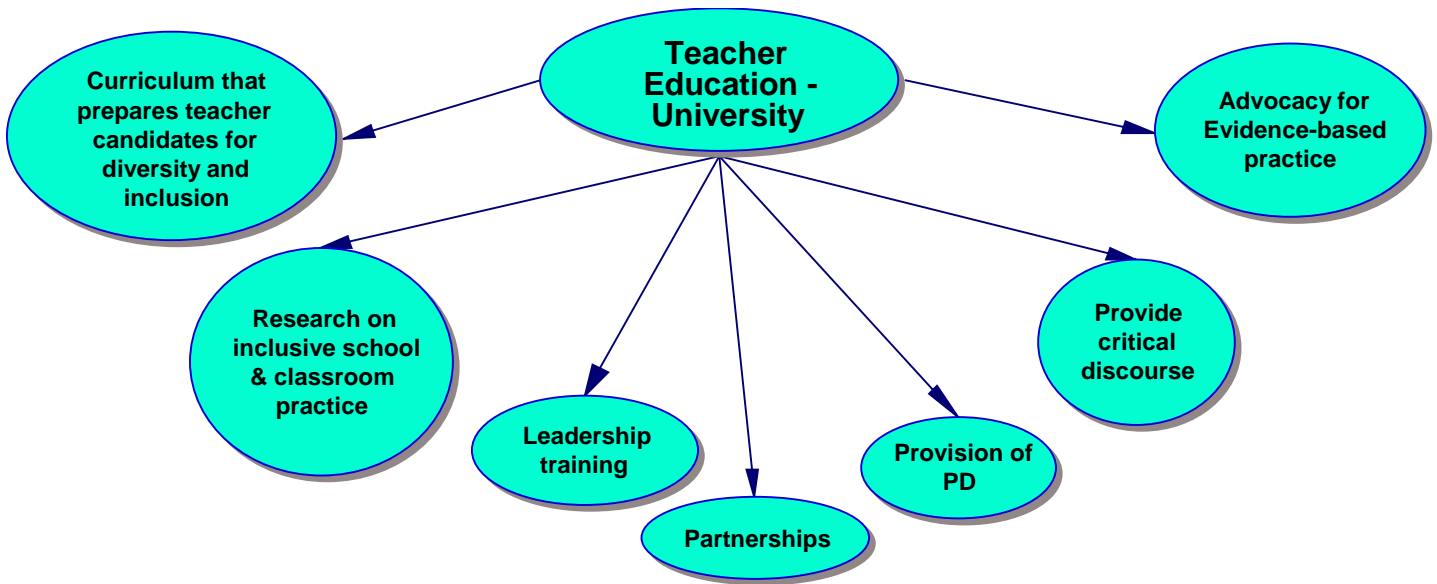
Like individual parents, parent associations and advocacy groups can support classroom teachers by engaging in constructive partnerships. This can involve holding high but realistic expectations for the learning and development of all students. These associations can collaborate with teachers' organizations to jointly sponsor in-service development for teachers and school administrators. Their members can provide co-leadership and co-instruction in professional development with members of teachers' organizations. Parent and advocacy organizations can extend formal recognition to exemplary practice and can draw attention to it through newsletters, symposia and conferences. They can help develop positive public focus and attention to issues of inclusion through their dealings with the media and political leaders. They can facilitate knowledge networking and best practice initiatives, and can engage in policy development, curriculum development and advocacy.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

I. How University-based Teacher Education Programs can Support Teachers

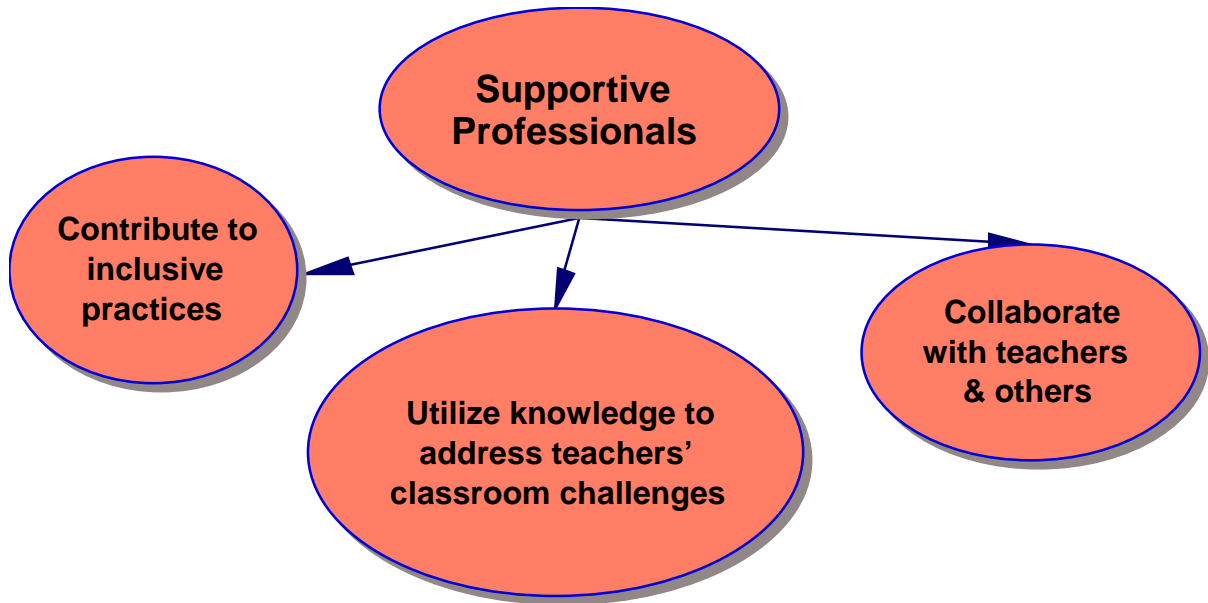
University-based teacher education programs can develop curricula that prepare teacher candidates for diversity and inclusion in regular classrooms. They can insist that all teacher candidates meet basic competency standards on inclusive practices in order to graduate. They can provide ongoing professional development for teachers (e.g., in-service; e-learning) and leadership training on inclusion for district and school administrators. Universities can conduct research on inclusive school and classroom practice, advocate for evidence-based practice and establish incentives for new researchers to place a focus on issues of inclusion in education. The programs can facilitate critical discourse and engage in partnerships with ministries of education, teacher associations, parent and professional groups and other universities. Universities have a key role to play in diffusing knowledge about current research on inclusive education, translating the research and other knowledge into readily accessible language and formats for practical use in schools and classrooms.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

J. How Other Professionals can Support Teachers

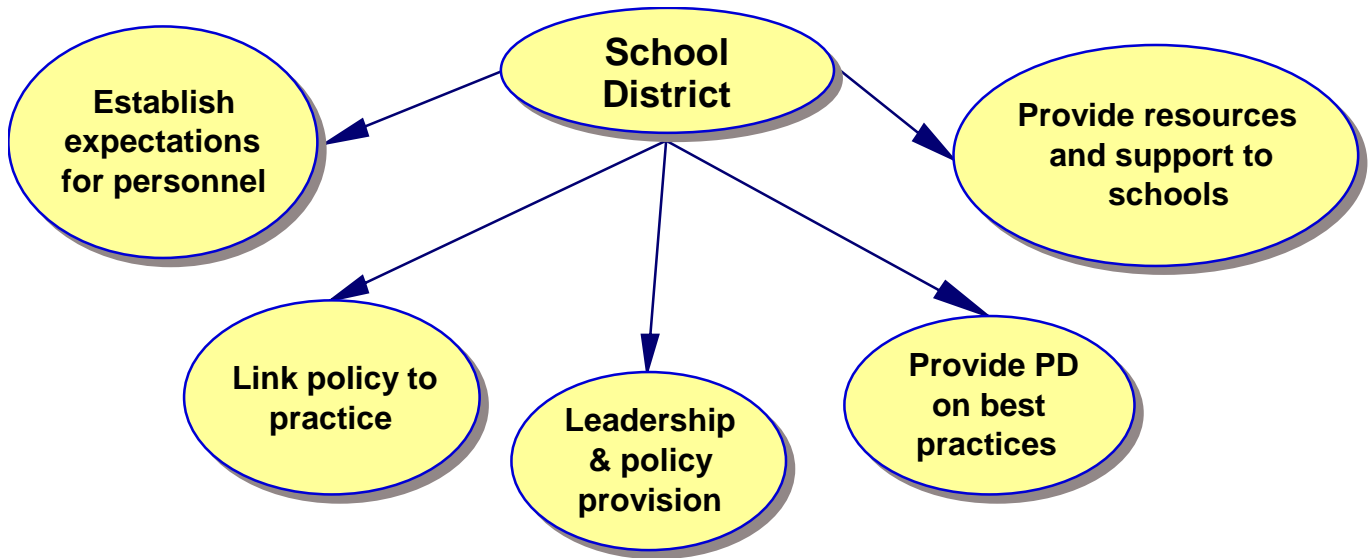
Other professionals such as social workers, psychologists, speech and language specialists, public health nurses and personal support workers, also have a role to play in supporting teachers. They can collaborate with teachers, administrators and others who are involved in the lives of young people who may be facing complex challenges. They can utilize their knowledge to help address teachers' challenges in the classroom. They can develop new strategies to facilitate inclusion and focus on reducing use of segregated practices.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

K. How School Districts can Support Teachers

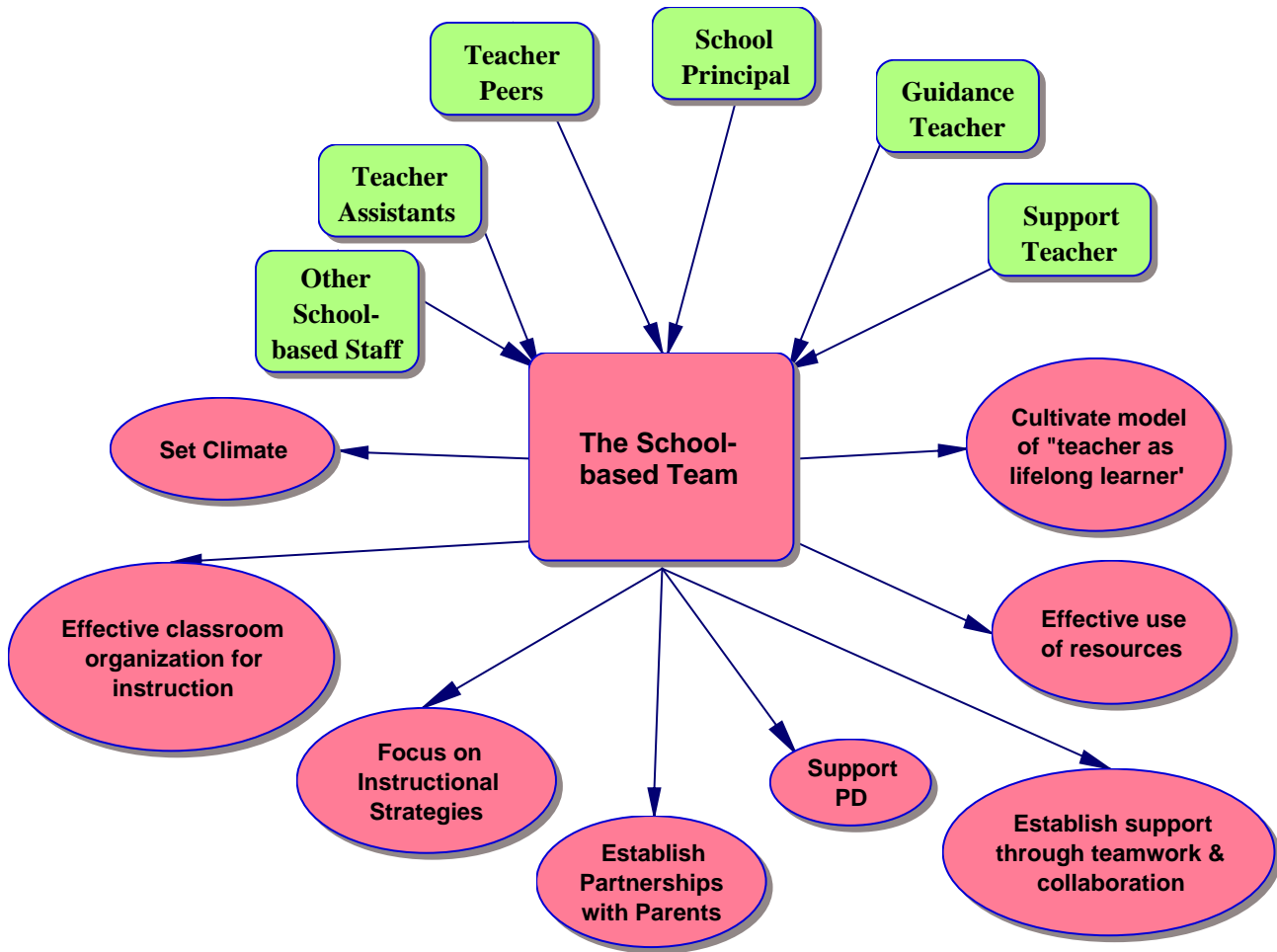
School districts should provide leadership and policy support, articulating clear standards and expectations for administrators and teachers. They also need to communicate a commitment to support teachers in efforts to bring quality education to all learners. In their efforts to support teachers, school districts can provide professional development on best practices and link policy to practice through evaluations of school, administrator and teacher performance. They should provide adequate resources and support to schools and advocate with ministries of education to ensure that the funding and other necessary measures are in place. District-level human resource considerations should make provision for teachers to have adequate instructional planning time so teachers can gear their instructional strategies to the strengths and interests of all learners.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

L. How the School-based Team can Support Teachers

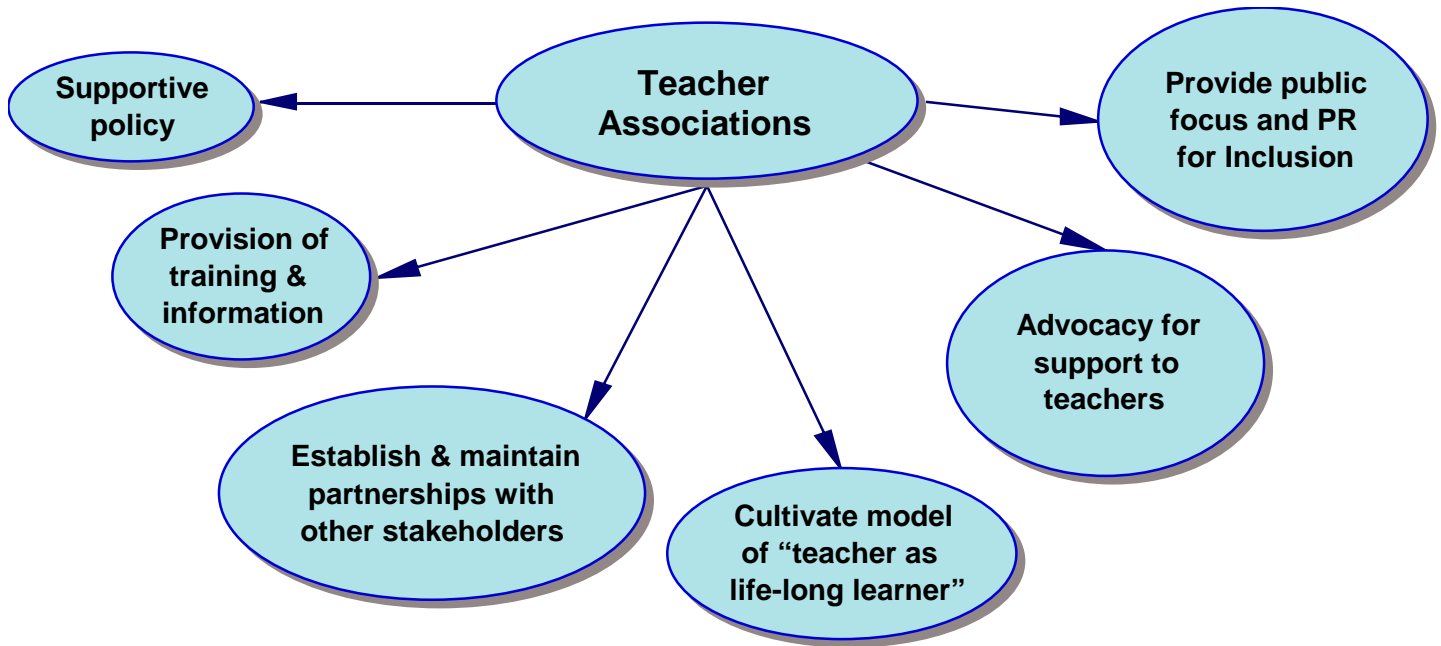
At the school level, the principal and other school-based team members should establish a positive, supportive and welcoming climate for all students. They should welcome and engage in effective partnerships with parents. They should encourage, support and reward teachers' professional development efforts and cultivate the model of teacher as "lifelong learner". School leaders should establish mutual support among teachers by creating a climate and work routines that favour teamwork and collaboration. They should ensure effective use of resources, focus the attention of teachers on effective instructional strategies and ensure that classrooms are effectively organized for quality instruction.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

M. How Teacher Associations can Support Teachers

To support teachers, teachers' associations should develop policies that encourage and support effective practices for inclusion. They can sponsor and provide training and, like ministries of education, universities and family and advocacy organizations, they can disseminate knowledge and information, broker knowledge networks and foster effective practice initiatives. They can establish and maintain partnerships with parents, ministries of education, other professional groups and universities. They can reinforce the model of teacher as "lifelong learner" and can advocate for professional development, good instructional materials and other supports for teachers. Teachers' associations can engage in positive public relations on issues of inclusion and can complement the work of family and advocacy organizations to attract public focus and attention to inclusion through the media and in transactions with political leaders.



Identify gaps or priority actions:

VI. Pulling Together

By pulling together and each doing their own part, stakeholders can make a positive difference in fostering inclusive schools and classrooms and in furthering excellence in education for all learners.

The Roeher Institute welcomes feedback on what we understand to be the supports that teachers need in order to move this agenda forward with other stakeholders. Comments can be provided to:

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