

BCTF Research Report

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

Section III
2002-WLC-01

B.C. teachers' views of Special Education issues

**Data from the Spring 2001
BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series,
2: Special Education**

www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2002wlc01

by Charlie Naylor
BCTF Research
June 2002

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Executive Summary

This report is based on data from a survey of British Columbia teachers conducted in June, 2001, "BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 2: Special Education." 1,500 surveys were mailed to a stratified random sample of B.C. teachers in all school districts. A total of 617 surveys were returned, a response rate of 41%. Younger and less-experienced male teachers were somewhat under-represented in returns, while older and more experienced female teachers were over-represented. In terms of teachers working full-time, respondents closely matched provincial demographic profiles while part-time teachers were slightly under-represented in the survey responses.

Only 17% of respondents taught students in one grade level, while 51% taught students in split or multi-grade classes, which more than half of respondents working in such classes considered stressful. While some class-size reduction was reported in Primary classrooms compared to five years ago, a large majority of non-enrolling teachers indicated increased caseload.

Data were collected to ascertain teacher perspectives in the areas of: philosophy and practice; the availability of supports for integration; class composition; and dealing with aggressive and disruptive students.

Respondents identified a number of positive changes resulting from inclusion. They reported evolving attitudes in the general student population towards students with special needs, specifically greater levels of acceptance, understanding, and empathy. Improved social benefits for students with special needs were also identified, particularly in terms of peer interactions. Improved academic attainment was identified, but to a lesser extent, and often in subjects such as Art, Music, and Physical Education.

While most respondents philosophically support the concept of inclusion, they expressed disappointment and frustration at the difficulty of daily implementation. Respondents felt most strongly about what they considered the difficulty of meeting all student needs, limited resources, minimal supplies of modified or adapted curriculum resources, non-recognition of students with conditions such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, inadequate support from the Ministry of Education, and excessive paperwork. For many teachers, adequate time for effective implementation was not available.

In terms of the availability of supports, responses were more ambivalent. Respondents stated that although supports actually exist, they do not exist at levels sufficient to meet needs. Respondents also clearly stated that they had minimal time to collaborate with other staff, so that while Resource Teachers may be theoretically available, they were not easily or sufficiently accessible because of time constraints. While the responses assist us to identify components of support, we may need to explore how each optimally contributes to successful integration, and how to share positive practices.

In terms of class composition, responses indicate that most teachers work in classrooms that integrate significant numbers of students with special needs, making integration an everyday norm of B.C.'s schools. The data also provide evidence of considerable diversity in schools, with a wide range of students with special needs in many classrooms. They also present evidence that teachers believe that many more students with special needs are in schools but are not recognized as such by Ministry designations.

Analysis of data concerning aggressive and disruptive students is both encouraging in terms of prevalence and problematic in terms of consequences. Comparing current responses to those of

a 1993 survey, teachers report fewer aggressive or disruptive students in their classes. However, in terms of time taken during each school day to manage these students, respondents indicated that substantial amounts of time were used to deal with disruptions. One possible analysis of such data is that while the numbers of aggressive and disruptive students may have declined, the severity of the aggression or disruption may have increased, with the result that significant amounts of time are used to deal with incidents.

Many teachers reported excellent working relationships with teacher assistants, but data from this study also indicate that in some cases, there may be a need to address the issue of how teachers and teacher assistants work together.

Three conclusions are made and discussed.

1. Substantial progress has been made in terms of integrating students with special needs, but such progress is often unacknowledged.
2. Some students' needs are not being met, while teachers' workload and stress has increased.
3. Teachers believe that there are many more students with special needs in B.C. schools than are recognized by the Ministry of Education.

At a time of considerable change in B.C.'s educational system, the future of implementing inclusionary policies is problematic, as government forces changes to collective agreements and introduces legislation that will negatively impact educational services to many students with special needs.

This report indicates that teachers in June of 2001 did not believe that the implementation of inclusionary policies was adequately supported in ways that met students' needs. Both classroom and Resource teachers stated that their workload and stress levels have increased because they are left to cope in an inadequately funded system with low levels of support. If that was the case in June 2001, then further reductions of support for integration are almost certain to result in even greater workload and higher stress for teachers in the coming years.

A case is presented that a different vision is needed as an alternative to that offered by the B.C. Liberal government. This includes increased funding and centralized support for inclusion at both provincial and district levels to make inclusion work in ways that meet students' needs and that are manageable for teachers. In the absence of a government with either the vision or the commitment to provide leadership in terms of inclusive educational practices, the BCTF should consider building and extending coalitions with other partner and community groups. These might advocate for appropriate support, and assist teachers in building and sharing practical and professional approaches to meeting the needs of all students.

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Acknowledgments

BCTF Research wishes to thank all those teachers who added to their workload and responded to this and other BCTF surveys during the Spring of 2001. The range and depth of their responses has provided the data on which to base this report, which will be used to lobby government and school boards to develop a healthier school system by reducing teachers' workload and stress.

The survey instrument was designed in collaboration with BCTF Research Analyst Anny Schaefer and Research Director Larry Kuehn.

Anne Field, BCTF Research Assistant, formatted the survey for *TELEform* data capture, processed the surveys, and prepared the qualitative data for analysis using *Atlas* qualitative data analysis software.

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The context of this study

In the Spring of 2001, three surveys focusing on the worklife of B.C. teachers were prepared by BCTF Research staff and mailed to teachers across the province. The first survey examined the workload of secondary teachers of English. The second considered workload and stress issues as perceived by both elementary and secondary teachers, and the third addressed teacher perspectives on issues in Special Education. BCTF Research staff are producing a series of reports based on data generated from these surveys.

Some reports have already been published and are listed below; they are accessible on the BCTF web site:

"I love teaching English, but..." A study of the workload of English teachers in B.C. secondary grades, www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc02

– Charlie Naylor and John Malcolmson, September, 2001.

Teacher workload and stress: An international perspective on human costs and systemic failure, www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc01

– Charlie Naylor, September, 2001.

What do British Columbia's teachers consider to be the most significant aspects of workload and stress in their work? Analysis of qualitative data from the BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 1: Workload and stress, www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc03

– Charlie Naylor, October, 2001.

Demographic overview: Teacher workload issues and stress survey, Spring 2001, www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc05

– Anny Schaefer, December, 2001.

"How I spent my summer vacation": Time-use data from the Spring 2001 BCTF Worklife of Teachers Workload issues and stress survey, www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc04

– Anny Schaefer, December 2001.

For further information and other worklife reports, visit the **Worklife of British Columbia teachers** home page at www.bctf.ca/education/worklife and Information Services' **Teacher workload** home page at www.bctf.ca/info/research/workload.html . To be alerted when new reports are published, sign up for the BCTF Research Department's electronic mailing list, *bctf-research*, by visiting www.bctf.ca/research/list/ .

Introduction

The integrating of students with special needs in the public education system has been a consistent focus of BCTF Research over the last ten years. This ongoing research has resulted in publication of:

Six case studies in the “Partners for Inclusion” series, available from BCTF Lesson Aids (LA #9909, A–F, www.bctf.ca/LessonAids/index.html).

A data base of modified and adapted curriculum materials, available on the BCTF web site (LA #9912, www.bctf.ca/MAM), or in hard copy from BCTF Lesson Aids.

ESL learners with special needs in British Columbia: Identification, assessment and programming, available on the BCTF web site (www.bctf.ca/Education/esl/ESL-SpecialNeeds.shtml).

Behaviour problems and early intervention: Teacher research reports from the Maple Ridge Special Education Review, available from BCTF Lesson Aids (LA #9902, www.bctf.ca/LessonAids/index.html).

In addition to the above reports, BCTF Research collected input from teachers in preparation for the B.C. Ministry of Education Review of Special Education¹, and conducted other, earlier surveys to ascertain teacher perceptions of Special Education in this province.

This report, *B.C. teachers' views of Special Education issues*, is based on data from the 2001 Worklife of Teachers survey series, 2: Special Education, conducted in June, 2001. Fifteen hundred surveys were mailed to a stratified random sample of B.C. teachers in all school districts. A total of 617 surveys were returned, a response rate of 41%.

In addition to collecting demographic information concerning respondents, this survey collected data in the areas of:

- Philosophy and practice
- The availability of supports for integration
- Class composition
- Dealing with aggressive and disruptive students.

¹ *Special Education Review: A brief to the British Columbia Ministry of Education* (June 1999) can be accessed on the BCTF web site at www.bctf.ca/Education/SpecialEd/SpecialEdReview/brief/intro.html .

Part 1: Analysis of quantitative data

Respondent demographics

Age

Table 1: Age distribution of survey respondents compared to the provincial profile

Age	Survey respondents	Provincial profile ²
Under 25	1%	2%
25-34	20%	19%
35-44	20%	26%
45-54	44%	42%
55 and over	14%	11%
No response	1%	

The youngest teachers (under 25 years of age) and those in the 35-44 age bracket, are somewhat under-represented in the profile of respondents, compared to the provincial profile, while those in other age brackets are slightly over-represented.

Gender and FTE status

Table 2: Gender and FTE status of survey respondents (provincial profile in brackets)

	Gender %	Full-time as % of gender total	Part-time as % of gender total	TOC as % total
Male	26% (34%)	89% (91%)	4% (9%)	1%
Female	74% (66%)	72% (69%)	26% (20%)	8%
Overall		76% (77%)	15% (20%)	9%

Males are under-represented in responses to this survey, while females are over-represented. The breakdown for the numbers of respondents working full-time closely matches provincial profiles, both overall and by gender. The number of respondents who worked part-time are somewhat fewer than are reflected in the provincial profile.

The 15% of respondents who worked part-time were asked to state why they worked part-time. Just over half (57%) of part-time teachers who responded chose part-time work as a personal preference, with 95% of those respondents female. Almost a quarter (23%) indicated that they would prefer more work as teachers, or full-time employment. Another 7% worked part-time because of workload, while 8% worked part-time because they were either sick or on a rehabilitation program.

² Data source: Ministry of Education Standard Report 2057, *Age distribution of educators within province* (for 2000-01). N.B. The term "educators" includes all educators – teachers and administrators – in B.C. public schools, so comparisons are approximate rather than exact.

Sixty-four respondents (10% of the total) were on leave at the time they completed the survey. Of these, 19 were on maternity/parenthood leave (all female), 17 were on stress-related leave (13 female, 4 male), 10 on non-stress-related illness and the rest on a variety of educational and personal leaves.

Years of teaching experience

The survey gathered information on respondents' experience levels, and compared them to the provincial profile, using data from Ministry of Education Standard Report 2067, *Years of experience within B.C. education system of educators by position and gender within school districts* (for 2000–01).

Table 3: Years of teaching experience—survey respondents compared to provincial profile

Experience Group (Years)	Survey respondents	Provincial profile	Variance from profile
Less than one	1%	3%	-2%
One to four	13%	18%	-5%
Five to nine	19%	21%	-2%
Ten to nineteen	26%	29%	-3%
Twenty +	40%	29%	+11%

As can be seen from Table 3, there is slight under-representation among survey respondents compared to the provincial profile in most categories, except for those teachers with over twenty years of experience, where there is a significant over-representation of respondents. When considered with the data on gender, survey respondents include a higher proportion of very experienced female teachers than are reflected in the general teaching population.

Teaching assignment and subject/work areas

Classroom teachers made up 72% of respondents, with another 17% non-enrolling and 2% itinerant; 3% of respondents identified themselves as department heads, with 6% in "other" assignment categories.

Respondents were invited to identify the subject/work area in which they spent most of their teaching time (Table 4). Almost half of respondents (44%) were elementary or middle school generalist teachers. Slightly over 40% of respondents indicated that they taught in more than one subject area, a pattern particularly pronounced in CAPP, English, and Learning Assistance.

Table 4: Respondents' subject/work areas

Subject/Work area	% of respondents - most teaching time	% of respondents - other responsibilities
Elementary/Middle school generalist	43.92%	1.3%
English/Language Arts	6.16%	3.4%
Special Education	5.67%	2.76%
Library	4.05%	2.27%
Music/Drama/Fine Arts	3.57%	2.43%
Science	3.4%	1.94%
Social Studies	3.24%	2.11%
Learning Assistance	3.08%	3.4%
Industrial/Vocational/Tech. Studies	2.76%	0.32%
Counselling	2.43%	1.13%
Physical Education	2.43%	2.59%
French as a Second Language	2.27%	2.27%
Home Economics	2.27%	0.97%
English as a Second Language	2.27%	0.65%
Mathematics	2.11%	2.43%
French Immersion/Programme Cadre	1.78%	1.62%
Alternative education	1.62%	0.49%
Business Education	1.13%	0.16%
History	0.49%	1.3%
CAPP	0.32%	4.05%
Distance Education/Distributed Learning	0.32%	0%
Geography	0.16%	0.32%
Languages other than English or French	0.16%	0.16%
Other	3%	3.08%
Non-responses	1.62%	58.83%

Grade levels taught

Only 17% of respondents taught students in a single grade level, with the vast majority of respondents teaching students in different grades. All of those who taught at one grade level worked in elementary or middle schools, with over half teaching students in Primary (K-3) grades. Seventy-eight different combinations of grade levels were identified, from two grades being taught by individual teachers in some locations, through to some teachers teaching every grade level from K-12.

In elementary schools, the largest single group of teachers who taught more than one grade level taught students in two grades. In secondary schools most respondents taught students in four or five different grade levels.

Split-grade and multi-grade classes

Over half (51%) of respondents worked in split or multi-grade classrooms, while 49% responded that they worked in single-grade classes. Forty-five combinations of split/multi-grade classes were identified, with most (69%) in elementary or middle schools. The most common split-grade class consisted of two grades (58%); over three-quarters of these were in elementary schools. Slightly over 31% of split/multi-grade classes were reported by secondary respondents, with a four-grade-level class (Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12) being the most common example.

The combination of working with students in different grade levels and/or working in split-grade classrooms adds not only to the complexity of teaching but potentially to teachers' workload and stress. Although teaching different grade levels is not new, the large range of combinations, and the significant numbers of respondents teaching in split/multi-grade classrooms, may reflect a change in teachers' work over time. In an earlier BCTF Research report³ I suggested that there were economic reasons for many split-grade classes, in addition to districts combining numbers of students in different grades to meet class-size contract requirements. In recent years the economic imperative may have become more prevalent, thereby increasing the numbers of split and multi-grade classes.

When the integration of students with special needs is added to the large number of grades taught, whether separately or in split classes, the degree of complexity increases for a substantial number of classroom teachers. Teaching at two (or more) grade levels with different curriculum requirements is a challenge in itself; add limited or no access to modified or adapted curriculum materials, a diverse range of student abilities, several students with special needs or who are ESL, and at least one aggressive and disruptive student to a class, and the complexity is compounded.

Respondents who taught in a split or multi-grade class were invited to rate teaching their class as a source of stress. While 42% considered teaching in these classes to involve either no, or low, stress, 58% considered split/multi-grade classes as medium or high sources of stress. It should be noted that respondents to this survey reflected an over-representation of highly experienced teachers, with 11% more survey respondents having 20+ years of experience than the provincial profile. Many of these teachers would have experienced teaching at different grade levels and teaching split-grades during their career. Even with this level of experience, over half of respondents indicated medium or high stress levels related to teaching in split-grade classes.

Even as the most experienced teachers report stressful working conditions, the increased prevalence of split-grade classes is occurring at a time when higher-than-normal numbers of new teachers are starting their teaching careers. With data from international studies⁴ suggesting that younger, less-experienced teachers are at risk when workload becomes excessive, the issue and prevalence of teaching in split-grade classes should be considered as one factor in causing high workload and stress.

³ Naylor, C. (2000). Split-grade and multi-age classes: A review of the research and a consideration of the B.C. context. www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2000ei02 .

⁴ a. Naylor, C. (2001). Teacher workload and stress: An international perspective on human costs and systemic failure. www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc01 .

b. Naylor, C. (2001). Exodus of teachers from English schools: A lesson for B.C.? www.bctf.ca/research/list/archive/2001-02/2001-11-29.html .

Class size and caseload

Respondents were asked to consider whether they believed their class size and/or caseload had increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the last five years. Table 5, below, shows their responses.

Table 5: Changes in class size/workload

	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same
Compared to five years ago, my class size has:	22%	34%	44%
Compared to five years ago, my caseload has	62%	8%	30%

The class size data links to responses from classroom teachers, while the caseload data is provided by non-enrolling teachers. Some significant patterns and differences can be observed. The majority of responses indicating decreases in class size are provided by Primary (K-3) teachers, with 85% of respondents who indicated reduced class size working in K-3 classes. 81% of respondents who indicated increased class size worked in non-Primary classes. These data suggest that not all Primary teachers are reporting reduced class size, even though such reductions were introduced in recent years. They also indicate that while over one-fifth of respondents indicated increased class size, and over one-third reported decreased class size, almost half reported no change.

The status quo or increased numbers in classrooms may appear problematic for many non-Primary-grade teachers, who have witnessed a changing educational context in recent years – a context which includes increased diversity in terms of class composition, high levels of integration, and many split-grade classes. It also includes high expectations in terms of outcomes and an expanded range of tasks, reduced support, inadequate learning resources (so inadequate that teachers spend considerable amounts of their own money to provide them), and limited access to modified and adapted curriculum materials.

The caseload data tell a different story. Almost eight times as many respondents (62%) reported an increased caseload over the last five years compared to those who reported a decreased caseload (8%); 30% indicated no change. These data reflect respondents' perceptions of a significantly increased workload for non-enrolling teachers purely in terms of caseload. But, in addition to caseload, these teachers have often been allocated responsibility for ensuring adequate documentation to meet accountability requirements for Ministry of Education audits. 81% of the respondents who were non-enrolling teachers reported increased paperwork in the last five years. The combination of increased caseload and greater demands for documentation suggest considerable pressure on non-enrolling Special Education teachers in the B.C. educational system.

Philosophy and practice: Respondents' views of inclusion and integration

Respondents were asked to respond to eighteen statements relating to either the philosophy of inclusion or to integration practices. The statements, and teachers' responses, are shown in Table 6 in the order set out in the survey instrument.

Table 6: Respondents' views of inclusion and integration

	N/A or don't know	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
a. I believe in and support the philosophy of inclusion.	2%	7%	17%	10%	48%	17%
b. The daily implementing of integration is difficult.	3%	2%	4%	5%	42%	44%
c. Paperwork linked to students with special needs has increased over the last 5 years.	15%	1%	2%	6%	22%	53%
d. Some students who have special needs are not included in Spec. Ed. policies (e.g., Fetal Alcohol Syndrome [FAS], ADHD).	17%	2%	4%	6%	21%	51%
e. Resource/financial supports for inclusion are adequate and enable appropriate delivery.	10%	56%	22%	5%	6%	1%
f. Curriculum material supports for inclusion (e.g., modified and adapted materials) are adequate.	10%	49%	28%	6%	6%	1%
g. There is adequate support from the ministry for improving programs and services.	9%	53%	25%	8%	4%	1%
h. The caps on numbers of students should be eliminated to more accurately reflect current research data regarding the actual number of students with a specific disability.	25%	9%	4%	12%	21%	29%
i. The identification and assessment of students considered likely to have special needs is timely (i.e., done promptly).	8%	41%	26%	7%	12%	6%
j. Students with special needs are well served by current identification processes and assessment instruments.	10%	33%	34%	10%	12%	1%
k. In my school or district, students with special needs are required to spend 100% of every day in a regular classroom.	14%	30%	28%	5%	13%	9%
l. Most students with special needs benefit <i>academically</i> from inclusion.	7%	21%	27%	12%	28%	5%
m. Most students with special needs benefit <i>socially</i> from inclusion.	2%	3%	9%	7%	52%	27%
n. Integration of students with special needs affects my capacity to meet the needs of other students in the class.	6%	2%	5%	8%	33%	45%
o. I feel professionally prepared to work with students with special needs.	1%	26%	30%	9%	22%	12%
p. I am positive about working with other teachers to implement integration.	3%	5%	11%	16%	41%	24%
q. I am positive about working with Special Ed Assistants to implement integration.	3%	5%	9%	11%	40%	32%
r. My relationships with the parents of students with special needs are generally positive.	9%	1%	3%	13%	38%	35%

There were few areas of ambivalence among respondents to the statements in this section—only four statements generated less than 60% agreement or disagreement. For the remaining fourteen statements, there were essentially two categories: one in which a large majority of teachers felt strongly (eleven statements with a 70%+ agreement or disagreement), and the other where teachers held slightly less strong views (between 65% and 67% agreement/disagreement).

Table 6, above, reflects the order in which respondents answered the statements in the survey; Table 7, below, is reorganized to reflect how strongly respondents felt about each statement, in descending order. This order allows some consideration of where teachers identify successes, and potential priorities for change or improvement. The scales in the table below have been condensed, and a column added to indicate whether the responses reflect a positive or a negative perception.

Table 7: Respondents' views of inclusion and integration, ranked by how strongly held

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	N/A, don't know, or neutral	Positive or negative perception
The strongest-held views				
The daily implementing of integration is difficult.	86%	6%	8%	Negative
Most students with special needs benefit <i>socially</i> from inclusion.	79%	12%	9%	Positive
Integration of students with special needs affects my capacity to meet the needs of other students in the class.	78%	7%	15%	Negative
Resource/financial supports for inclusion are adequate and enable appropriate delivery.	7%	78%	15%	Negative
There is adequate support from the ministry for improving programs and services.	5%	78%	17%	Negative
Curriculum material supports for inclusion (e.g., modified and adapted materials) are adequate.	7%	77%	16%	Negative
Paperwork linked to students with special needs has increased over the last 5 years.	75%	3%	22%	Negative
My relationships with the parents of students with special needs are generally positive.	73%	4%	23%	Positive
I am positive about working with Special Ed Assistants to implement integration.	72%	14%	14%	Positive
Some students who have special needs are not included in Spec. Ed. policies (e.g., Fetal Alcohol Syndrome [FAS], ADHD).	71%	6%	23%	Negative
Somewhat strong views				
The identification and assessment of students considered likely to have special needs is timely (i.e., done promptly).	18%	67%	15%	Negative
Students with special needs are well served by current identification processes and assessment instruments.	13%	67%	20%	Negative

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	N/A, don't know, or neutral	Positive or negative perception
Somewhat strong views (continued)				
I am positive about working with other teachers to implement integration.	65%	16%	19%	Positive
I believe in and support the philosophy of inclusion.	65%	24%	11%	Positive
The caps on numbers of students should be eliminated to more accurately reflect current research data regarding the actual number of students with a specific disability.	50%	13%	37%	Negative
Divided views				
In my school or district, students with special needs are required to spend 100% of every day in a regular classroom.	22%	58%	20%	N/A
I feel professionally prepared to work with students with special needs.	34%	56%	10%	Negative
Most students with special needs benefit <i>academically</i> from inclusion.	33%	48%	19%	Negative

Some of the information reflected in Table 7 is open to different interpretations, so care should be taken in attempting to state definitive conclusions from these data. The response to the statement concerning Ministry caps in certain areas of special needs (h), for example, had a very high neutral or “not-applicable” response, suggesting uncertainty among many respondents. But among those with either an “agree” or a “disagree” response, four times as many believed the caps to be problematic than did not. Hence, this statement might reasonably be included in the “strongest-held views” section. Similarly, the data indicating that 79% of respondents believed that students with special needs benefited socially from inclusion (m) must also be balanced with the more negative views on academic benefits for students with special needs (l). Part 2 of this report (“Analysis of qualitative data”) explores the data on social and academic benefits in greater detail.

Despite the above caveat, the table indicates a general sense of negativity among respondents concerning the pragmatics of integration, with five positive and twelve negative views expressed. In terms of financial and curriculum resources, Ministry supports, being adequately prepared, and assessment issues, respondents expressed strongly negative views. The few positive views related to supporting the general philosophy of inclusion and working with other teachers and para-professionals.

These data confirm teachers' general approval of the philosophy of inclusion, but a level of disillusionment and frustration with the lack of support for integrating students with special needs. Other data reflect the same view over time. In 1993, “Teaching in the ‘90s” data showed that 84% of teachers believed that “Integration of students with special needs is the right policy but there are serious problems with implementation.” Data collected from teachers in preparation for the 1999 Special Education Review reinforced this perspective. In the BCTF submission to the Review⁵, we made the following statement:

⁵ Special Education Review: A brief to the B.C. Ministry of Education (1999). www.bctf.ca/Education/SpecialEd/SpecialEdReview/brief/nfindex.html .

Much as the federal government is perceived as offloading problems to provincial governments, which in turn download to municipalities, so do many classroom teachers believe the provincial government downloads the responsibility for implementing its special education policy to school districts, which in turn pass the primary responsibility on to teachers. The daily and ongoing responsibility for the implementation of policy lies with classroom teachers. We argue in this submission that if a policy is not workable for them, then it is not working for students (p. 20).

Availability of supports for integration

Respondents were asked to indicate which of a number of supports were available to them. Their responses are shown in Table 8, below, from most to least available.

Table 8: Availability of supports for integration

	Available	Not available	Not applicable
IEPs produced for each student with special needs.	81%	9%	10%
District services for assessment and support which are available to me in my school.	75%	13%	12%
Support from a Resource Teacher in the school or district.	75%	13%	11%
An effective school-based team.	75%	16%	9%
A supportive Administrative Officer.	75%	17%	8%
Pull-out services for students when needed.	65%	22%	13%
A trained Special Education Assistant.	60%	26%	14%
Contract limits on the number of students with special needs in my class.	58%	23%	19%
Technical resources where needed (e.g., computer, talking books).	57%	28%	15%
In-service training.	48%	40%	12%
Appropriate modified/adapted curriculum materials.	43%	45%	12%
Class-size reduction (reduced number of students).	40%	36%	24%
Paid release-time set aside for consultation.	30%	54%	16%

Respondents were also asked to identify the supports for integration that were most important to them. The most important support, by a huge margin, was reduced class size, chosen by 74% of respondents. Second was a trained Special Education Assistant, identified by 50%. Third were contract limits on the numbers of students with special needs in a class (27%), and appropriate modified/adapted curriculum materials (also 27%).

At first sight, these responses may appear contradictory to those recorded in Tables 6 and 7. In only two of thirteen categories (paid release time and appropriate modified/adapted curriculum materials) do a majority of respondents state that the listed supports were not available. In two other categories (in-service training and class-size reduction) slight majorities state that the supports were available. In the remaining nine categories, a significant majority of respondents indicate that the stated supports were available.

However, responses to the "Availability of Supports" (Table 8) statements are generally more ambivalent than are the responses to the "Views of Inclusion" statements (Tables 6 and 7). 38% of the "availability" statements generated a 70%+ agreement or disagreement, compared to 56% in the "views" statements. In addition, some clarification can be found in the qualitative data, examined in Part 2 of this report. Here, respondents stated that although supports do exist, they are not available at levels sufficient to meet needs.

Respondents also clearly stated that they had minimal time to collaborate with resource teachers and other staff, so that while they were theoretically available, they were not easily accessible because of time constraints. Conversely, if collaboration did take place, it necessarily added to the workload of teachers when it occurred outside of instructional time.

Viewed positively, these data show that basic support structures and personnel exist, though access to these supports appears limited in the view of many respondents. This statement is not intended as a criticism of other educators or para-professionals – it reflects the limits of system capacity rather than any measure of staff competency. Support structures and personnel came under threat from the employer's demands at the bargaining table for concessions in terms of staffing ratios. The threats in turn became a reality, as government mandated the changes demanded while also increasing districts' spending "flexibility" and ending targeted high-incidence categories. Many teachers consider "flexibility" and "de-targeting" to be euphemisms for "cuts to services."

One issue has remained a constant over the years: the capacity to access appropriate modified or adapted curriculum resources still appears to be identified as a major problem for many teachers, as it was in the "Teaching in the '90s" (1993) survey results, where modified and adapted materials were ranked as the second-least-available support after "time for consultation."

Responses to these statements also indicate that although we have identified components of support, we may as yet have inadequately explored how each contributes to successful integration, and how to share positive practices. What is the role of the specialist support teacher? How do teachers and Special Education Assistants collaborate? How does an effective school-based team operate? Although a number of resources are available which describe good practices in each of these and other areas, the combined quantitative and qualitative data gathered by this survey may indicate that more models of good practice need to be in place, shared, and discussed, if we are to replace the "availability" of support with "adequate" supports.

Perhaps even more importantly, learning environments must be supportive of integration for these models of good practice to survive, allowing the teachers and others working in the education system to have time, and manageable classes or caseloads, to build better inclusionary practices.

A strong case can be made for the importance of combining documentation of "good practice" with creating more-supportive environments. Reading about good practice is of little use to teachers with a large and complex class or an overwhelming caseload, or who are facing major bureaucratic requirements to satisfy audits. But creating the conditions for success without

models of good practice means that each educator develops his or her own approach, resulting in a constant, wasteful, and isolated reinvention of good practice.

Tuition Rebates

Tuition rebates have recently been introduced for teachers taking approved courses in Special Education, and respondents were asked if they had accessed them. Of those who responded to this question, 3% indicated that they had accessed tuition rebates, while 97% had not. This figure may appear low, but 3% of B.C. teachers represents over 1,000 teachers who have accessed tuition rebates in a relatively short time period, suggesting considerable utilization of the rebate system.

Class composition

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of students in their classes or caseloads who fell into the ministry's eleven categories of special needs, and whether or not they were officially so designated. Results are reported in Table 9, below. Because we cannot separate class composition data from teachers with one class from data provided by teachers with multiple classes, the data collected must be viewed with some care and caution. The table may reflect an over-estimate of the number of students with special needs, as the same students may be reported by several teachers. We cannot state that the class composition numbers indicated are reflected in every class, only that some teachers report that they have these students in one or more of their classes.

In addition, the idea of identifying a student as having a special need who is not officially designated as such, necessarily involves an element of subjectivity from respondents, resulting in a range of responses depending on the respondent's perspective.

In spite of the above reservations, the data still provide a sense of class composition from the perspective of classroom teachers, and of the "big picture" of classroom teachers' extensive exposure to students with special needs in their classes.

The caseload data, provided by specialist teachers, require similar caveats, though for different reasons. One might expect the data provided on non-designated students by specialist teachers to be more precise because of their expert knowledge of the constituent parts of a special needs designation, but there were problems in seeking data on specialists' caseload that we did not anticipate when designing the survey instrument used in this study. Some specialists work only part-time in Special Education, and while the data from these respondents could be separated and better quantified, it has not been for the writing of this report. Other factors relate to caseload descriptions, including the very disparate amounts of time required by different students. This may depend on need, the nature of itinerant services, with time spent travelling between schools, whether a specialist works in a resource room and/or provides more direct service to students or support for classroom teachers, and how caseload is defined in different schools and districts. All these factors complicate the assessment of just what constitutes caseload.

I am indebted to members of the Special Education Provincial Specialist Association executive, who shared their expertise with me when I expressed concerns with the caseload data collected in this survey. They provided the insights noted above, along with a suggestion for a more promising approach which might better focus on and describe the caseload of specialist teachers:

My premise has always been, if we talk about caseload, then it will be confusing, because of the many models used [around] the province since the days of closed classrooms for students. I believe the more fruitful way to go is to try and describe workload based on documents that mandate that workload, and includes contracts of Special Education teachers in the various districts throughout the province. So the way to go is to solicit job outlines from people in the field and then try to determine what each job requires in terms of time to do the job right as defined in documents, and the time allotted to do their job. So to put numbers on this sort of thing becomes very problematic. We found this out when we tried to survey our district teachers. They had so many blended roles that most did not even know the time allotted for each position – Learning Assistance or Special Education.

– Janice Reiswig, Special Education PSA Executive

Having stated why the data in Table 9 may be flawed, they are nevertheless presented here. The mean numbers of students with special needs by designation in the classroom(s) of teachers, and in the caseload of specialists, are reported.

Table 9: Which, and how many, students with special needs do you have in your class/caseload?

	Classroom teachers – class composition		Specialist teachers – caseload	
	designated	non-designated	designated	non-designated
a. Students with mild intellectual disabilities.	0.61	1.32	3.15	3.18
b. Students with moderate to severe/profound intellectual disabilities.	0.35	0.21	1.46	1.02
c. Students with learning disabilities.	1.00	1.66	6.49	6.00
d. Gifted students.	0.40	0.63	1.56	1.01
e. Students with moderate behaviour disorders.	0.48	1.25	2.66	2.98
f. Students with severe behaviour disorders.	0.23	0.36	2.14	1.23
g. Students with multiple disabilities.	0.19	0.17	1.11	0.41
h. Students with physical disabilities or chronic health impairments.	0.25	0.16	2.57	0.50
i. Students with visual impairment.	0.22	0.08	0.34	0.07
j. Students who are deaf/hard of hearing.	0.14	0.06	0.84	0.15
k. Students with autism.	0.10	0.02	1.03	0.08
TOTAL	3.97	5.92	23.35	16.63

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results reported in the table. The data provided by classroom teachers probably indicate higher numbers of students with special needs than actually occur in classrooms, for reasons outlined above. However, they still suggest that most teachers work in classrooms that integrate significant numbers of students with special needs, making integration an everyday norm in B.C.'s classrooms. The data also provide evidence of considerable diversity in schools, with a wide range of students with special needs in many classrooms.

The data also present evidence that teachers believe there are many more students with special needs in schools than are recognized as such by Ministry designations. This view is not purely subjective, as evidence exists⁶ that the Ministry funds below prevalence-levels by imposing caps on funding in a number of categories.

B.C. has a history of under serving exceptional students. In 1987 the ministry provided special education funding to 6.2% of the students enrolled in public schools while other jurisdictions were supporting 12% of their populations. In 1989, the Canadian Council for Exceptional Children reported prevalence estimates for LDs in several jurisdictions across Canada. B.C.'s estimates were the lowest at 1.29%. Estimates in other jurisdictions varied from 3–10% (Perry et al, p. 18).

Dealing with aggressive/disruptive students

The survey asked teachers to identify numbers of aggressive/disruptive students in their class or caseload, and to state the gender of those students. Table 10, below, shows the percentage of respondents who reported each number of aggressive or disruptive students in their classes or caseloads.

Table 10: How many aggressive/disruptive students are in your class?

Number of aggressive students per class	% respondents reporting this number of students	% of aggressive students		% of aggressive students identified as:	
		male	female	designated	non-designated
0	22%	—	—	29%	15%
1	16%	54%	46%	17%	15%
2	13%	70%	30%	9%	16%
3	8%	82%	18%	4%	12%
4	5%	92%	8%	4%	6%
5	4%	71%	29%	3%	4%
6	1%	88%	12%	0%	2%
7+	7%	85%	15%	5%	10%
No Response	23%				

⁶ Perry, N.E., McNamara, J.K., and Mercer, K.L. (May 2001). *Principles, policies and practices in Special Education in British Columbia*. Paper presented at the CSSE conference, Laval, Quebec.

54% of respondents indicated that they taught in classes or had caseloads where there were aggressive or disruptive students who were designated within a special needs category. 25% taught in classes where there were three or more disruptive (and designated) students. 65% of respondents stated that they taught in classes where there were aggressive or disruptive students who were not officially designated as having a special need. 34% taught in classes or had caseloads where there were three or more disruptive (but non-designated) students.

The data are disturbing, as a majority of respondents report aggressive or disruptive students in their classes or caseloads. Managing student aggression and disruption necessarily adds to the complexity of teaching, and to the workload and stress of teachers. The high levels of problematic student behaviour reported by teachers may also be related to an increase in the occurrence of conditions such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and reflect societal changes, such as increased family dysfunction or breakdown. Whatever the causes, many teachers face the challenge of dealing with problematic student behaviour as an everyday part of their work.

Implementing early intervention initiatives, and some intervention programs such as Effective Behaviour Support (EBS), may offer some hope for reducing problematic behaviour. Even so, data from this survey indicate both a high prevalence of problem behaviour in schools, and significant concern by teachers who spend considerable time dealing with disruptions, and find that this reduces the time they have available for the majority of their students, whose behaviour is not problematic.

To get a sense of whether there has been a change over time, we compared current results to data collected in the 1993 BCTF survey "Teaching in the '90s." There is evidence of improvement over nine years, as can be seen in Table 11, below. The table indicates that considerably more teachers now report that they have no disruptive or aggressive students in their classes or caseloads than did earlier, and 3% more reporting only one or two disruptive students. It also reflects declines in the number of teachers reporting between three and six disruptive students.

Table 11: Aggressive and disruptive students: 1993 and 2001

Numbers of aggressive/ disruptive students	% of teachers reporting in 1993	% of teachers reporting in 2001	% change between 1993 and 2001
0	8%	22%	+14%
1-2	26%	29%	+3%
3-4	25%	13%	-12%
5-6	14%	5%	-9%
7 or more	9%	7%	-2%
No response	17%	23%	+6%

These data show encouraging signs that the numbers of disruptive or aggressive students have declined; however, respondents indicated that they spent a considerable amount of time dealing with behaviour problems, as shown in Table 12, below.

Table 12: Percentage of time used in a school day to deal with aggressive/disruptive students

% of time spent managing aggressive or disruptive behaviour	% of respondents		% change between 1993 and 2001
	1993	2001	
Less than 20% of the day	30%	35%	+5%
20–29% of the day	19%	19%	0%
30–39% of the day	16%	13%	-3%
40–49% of the day	7%	9%	+2%
Over 50% of the day	9%	12%	+3%
No response/don't know	19%	12%	-7%

In terms of time taken during each school day to manage these students, respondents indicated that substantial amounts of time were used. Over one-third of 2001 respondents (34%) spent 30% or more of their time dealing with aggressive and disruptive students, 2% more than in 1993. One possible interpretation is that while the numbers of aggressive and disruptive students may have declined, the severity of the aggression or disruption may have increased, with the result that more time is used to deal with incidents.

This level of time commitment to dealing with aggressive or disruptive students indicates that it has become a major focus of many teachers' work – reinforcing the likelihood of increased stress for teachers. Dealing with aggression and disruption every working day reflects a highly stressful and unhealthy work environment. In addition, the data also support the belief that the disproportionate amount of time used to deal with aggressive and disruptive students necessarily takes time and attention away from other students.

Fewer than one-third of respondents (29%) considered school or district support for dealing with aggressive students to be "good" or "excellent." One-third (35%) of respondents were ambivalent, rating school or district support as "fair," while a similar proportion (36%) considered these supports to be "poor."

Comparing the impact of aggressive students today to five years ago, 62% of respondents indicated that it had increased, 7% reported a decreased impact, and 31% indicated that impacts had stayed about the same. These data also support the assertion that the severity of aggression/disruption has increased in the last five years.

The combination of these data – the continued prevalence of aggressive and disruptive students, and the considerable and increased time spent dealing with them – suggests that the problems associated with negative students' behaviour and aggression continue to be serious issues in B.C.'s schools.

Part 2: Analysis of qualitative data

Respondents expressed both positive and negative views concerning the integration of students with special needs. Those positive views welcomed more-inclusionary school environments, with a diverse student population, and described considerable social benefits. The negative views described the difficulty of meeting all students' needs, with very limited time allocation, considerable time used to deal with aggressive and disruptive students, and minimal supports.

Positive aspects of integration

Many respondents identified positive aspects of integrating students with special needs. The vast majority of comments focused on social benefits for students with special needs, for other students and teachers, and for schools as communities. The shift away from isolated, segregated settings towards inclusive settings was seen by many respondents as necessary and positive in philosophical terms, and a progressive step for the public education system, but not without problems in terms of implementation. While "social benefits" describes the overall focus of a considerable number of comments, many distinctions were made concerning the nature of these benefits. These distinctions are explored in more detail here.

Changing attitudes towards students with special needs

One category of social benefit relates to a change in thinking or attitude among those (mainly students) without special needs. In most cases, respondents noted a change in students' thinking, moving towards greater acceptance and understanding of, and increased empathy for, students with special needs. These attitudes might be considered as a continuum. Acceptance develops first, understanding grows as regular contact develops in the school community, and empathy builds through contact and communication at an individual level.

Acceptance

Some respondents used the term "acceptance," implying that many students had increasingly accepted the diversity brought about by integration. They also stated that the education system's progression towards inclusion offered benefits to society as a whole, with the shift in thinking going beyond the school environment:

"Acceptance and acknowledgement of each other's differences has increased.... More positive, socially acceptable and desirable behaviour by all students."

"I think that integrating special needs students into a school in their community is very positive, both for the special needs student and the 'garden variety' students. The regular students learn acceptance of differences, can observe many examples of tenacity, courage in everyday life, and the importance of hard work. The special needs students form bonds that will linger after the classroom experience."

"Acceptance of differences is carried over to society in general by students and parents."

“[There is] increased development of social skills and acceptance of special needs students and other students; increased support available to families of special needs students – greater connection with society rather than alienation.”

The comments about societal benefits reflect a view that schools exist within a societal context, that inclusion is not just a schooling issue, but a concept that includes beliefs about the nature of community and how schools reflect greater levels of inclusion in society.

Understanding

If “acceptance” indicates a conceptual shift in accepting the philosophy of inclusion, “understanding” relates to daily interactions with other people. Respondents used the term “understanding” to reflect the dynamic of students’ coexistence in schools, where understanding is better because of exposure to differences and diversity. Most comments focused on students, but a number of respondents identified an increased understanding of students with special needs among teachers:

“[Integration] provides both special needs students and ‘normal’ students the opportunity to ‘rub shoulders;’ promotes understanding and tolerance.”

“[Integration] giv[es] regular students a chance to learn understanding of the normal human needs and strengths of the special needs student.”

“An understanding, by staff and students, of people with disabilities, both mental and physical. Children have become more accepting and have shown kindness to...special needs students.”

Respondents indicated that better understanding developed respect between students with special needs and other students:

“Integration makes all children aware of each other as individuals and the needs of these individuals.”

“Developing tolerance in the ‘regular’ students...exposing ‘regular’ students to the variety of human individual differences.”

While some respondents accepted a growth in understanding, they suggested that there were limits to the social integration of students with special needs:

“The most positive aspect of integration is that normal students become more aware of, tolerant of, and accepting of special needs students. However, this is only to a certain degree!!! For the most part, the other students don’t make good friends with them, accept them into their peer groups, or do things with them at recess, lunch, and after school.”

Empathy

While the terms “empathy” and “understanding” were used synonymously by some respondents, empathy was mentioned more frequently in a context where a student with special needs and another student engaged in some activity together.

Acceptance can occur at a distance in schools, understanding might happen in a classroom, but empathy appeared to build with direct interaction between students with special needs and other students.

“It’s beneficial for the special needs child to work and play with peers. It’s beneficial for other students to work closely with the special needs child. It helps build understanding, empathy, tolerance. Special needs students do have the capability to grow and develop, just more slowly than other students. It is important for them to be a part of the classroom with their peers.”

"[Benefits come from] allowing children the experience to learn the empathy and kindness of befriending a student who is different than themselves."

"[There are] positive social and emotional benefits/growth for both the special needs student and the entire class, who learn compassion and empathy while working and learning with physically and/or mentally disabled classmates."

These data indicate that many B.C. teachers report positively on changing student attitudes as a result of integration, among students both with and without special needs.

Positive social impacts for students with special needs

In addition to the benefits which accrue from increased acceptance, understanding, and empathy, respondents described other factors and positive practices which led to improved social impacts.

Peer interactions

Some respondents identified peer interactions as having a positive effect on both students with special needs and other students. Integrated classrooms lead to more interaction, which leads to more and improved communication between students, more participation in class activities, and better behaviour in some circumstances:

"Special needs students might follow behavioural examples of their peers. Regular students are aware of our diverse community and, at Primary level, helpful and kind to special needs students."

"The special needs students...get social interaction when getting help from peers."

"[Integration] educates the 'non-special needs' students to be more aware and sensitive of all their peers. Reduces the labels of 'inferior,' rather it allows the uniqueness of each student to help provide a diverse and safe classroom environment."

Some respondents, clearly strong supporters of the philosophy of inclusion, stressed peer interactions as a key factor in integration:

"Isolation, exclusion and special classes are no way to handle the majority of students with special needs. Ghetto-izing students with learning differences clearly does not educationally or socially benefit these students in positive ways. All students have the right to attend their neighbourhood school, be involved with their age-appropriate peers and have designed and supplemented for them appropriate and effective learning plans that meet their academic and social needs."

Role modeling

Role modeling appeared in a number of comments, often as a part or extension of peer interactions, in which students with special needs observed and learned from other students, who were role models for them:

"I think it's a positive experience for the special needs student and for the other students if the integration is done properly. The special needs student can learn from the role modeling of other students. The other students learn to work with and play with special needs students. Hopefully, they'll be more understanding adults."

"Integration provides positive role models for children with special needs."

“Positive modeling of normalized behaviours for special needs students to observe and pattern after.”

However, a note of caution was introduced when one respondent stressed that there should be limited numbers of students with special needs in any class, in order to enable effective classroom management and student role-modelling to take place:

“Positive role models are always necessary, but when you have too many students with special needs in one classroom, teaching time decreases substantially and you are just managing instead of teaching.”

Academic benefits for students with special needs

A number of respondents commented that integration resulted in improved academic performance for students with special needs:

“As an ex-special ed. teacher I believe integration is very positive for all students; [it] brings out caring and respect for differences in the ‘normal’ population and encourages special needs children to succeed both academically and socially.”

Several comments were made which linked the degree of academic benefit to the nature of the special need, with a sense that students within certain categories of special need benefitted more academically than did others:

“For students with mild intellectual disabilities...or physical disabilities students in our school have generally benefitted both socially and academically from integration. However, students with severe disabilities and/or severe behaviour can have serious repercussions on (other) students with few benefits for the students with disabilities.”

“Students with physical handicaps (hearing, for example) whose academic potential is within normal range benefit socially and intellectually from inclusion.”

Similarly, many respondents also expressed caution about “blanket” integration, in which students were placed in an environment which, while integrated, did not maximize academic learning for students with special needs:

“Students of all shapes, sizes, and needs deserve to be in school integrating as best as is possible. However, it should not be ‘blanket’ inclusion. Students with severe needs deserve to be educated in a way that they learn best and experience integration where it is beneficial to them and their peers.”

This comment reflects the debate not only among teachers but also among the parents of students with special needs. While most support and advocate for a fully inclusionary system, there are others who stress the need for a range of settings, including separate classes.

Although some teachers were skeptical about academic benefits, others identified subject areas such as Art, Music and Physical Education as ones they believed were academically beneficial to students with special needs:

“It works sometimes for some students in areas like gym, art, music, etc. In academic subjects it is a bad idea for everyone including the special needs student. In gym, art, music, etc., integration is excellent for some students. The philosophy of inclusion does not make room for individual assessment of needs.”

"Special needs students in visual arts often produce successful projects of which they are very proud. Usually I am pleased by their work and attitude."

"[Students with special needs are] able to be a part of P.E., art, music class."

"As I taught music it was wonderful to see students of all abilities working together and enjoying themselves. Music is a very important part of the curriculum because it can be a positive experience for everyone."

"[It is] good for students' self-esteem to be part of the band. Sometimes this is the only area [music] a particular student may find success. This happened with an autistic girl several years ago; this year a girl with social/behavioural problems is finding an 'anchor' in the Band class."

The role of Teachers' Assistants

In Part 1, it was reported that 72% of respondents were positive about working with Special Education Assistants.

Many positive comments were made by teachers about Teachers' Assistants (TAs):

"The assistants at our school do a wonderful job, but they sometimes get burned out."

"It is difficult to teach a class with many levels of learning and to individualize assignments for learning disabled students. There simply isn't enough time to prepare such instruction or to provide simplified instruction when the teacher is dealing with 30 other students. Therefore, good TAs really are helpful."

Many also identified problems connected to the availability or utilization of Teachers' Assistants:

"I have 5 designated students – 2 with autism – and no training. My teaching assistant and I are run ragged. She has no training either. We have many designated students in our school who are given inadequate assistant time – they need full-time coverage for their own safety as well as the safety of others, but they are NEVER funded for that. As a result, they lump 5 kids in one room so they can share an assistant. Sounds good on paper, but doesn't work in practice, and is a disservice to the other kids, whose learning environment is disrupted."

Some respondents reported mixed experiences with Teachers' Assistants:

"Having a special educational assistant is a mixed blessing."

"The most problematic issue is programming and modifying materials. Teachers' Assistants are all different. I've had 5 over the last 6 years. Two of them have been excellent in helping to modify materials and programs. Sometimes, they can cause more stress than if you just handled it all yourself."

Levels of friction also clearly exist in some schools between teachers and Teachers' Assistants:

"Frequently, successful integration depends on the learning assistant and TA support. Many TAs assigned to specific cases are untrained and invasive in the classroom, creating stress for the teacher."

A few respondents challenged the rapid growth in the numbers of Teachers' Assistants and suggested that having more teachers would provide a better solution:

“Teachers often believe students with special needs require more teacher assistant time when, in fact, more professional staff are required to ensure the quality of program and instruction is maintained at a high level. Teachers need support in building their understandings of how to better meet the needs of all learners within their classrooms rather than believing they belong to someone else and downloading them to paraprofessionals.”

The purpose of this section of the paper is not to engage in criticism of teacher assistants, but to explore and describe the range of teacher views of their experiences working with teacher assistants. In many cases, teachers report excellent relationships. In some cases they report strains in the working relationships. Creating and maintaining good working relationships between teachers and teacher assistants is an essential component of good inclusionary practices. Data from this study indicate that in some cases, there may be a need to address the issue of how teachers and Teachers' Assistants work together.

In recognition of the need to foster good collaborative practices involving teachers and Teachers' Assistants, the BCTF and CUPE have recently co-published the resource “Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants.” This publication has been widely distributed to schools in the province, and can also be viewed on the BCTF web site, at www.bctf.ca/Education/SpecialEd/TeacherTA-Roles/index.html .

Negative aspects of integration

The difficulty of meeting all students' needs

Many respondents felt that it was difficult to meet all students' needs in integrated classes:

“[It is difficult to] develop/implement significantly different goals and strategies for individual students while maintaining instruction of other students and managing the diversity of their needs/goals, etc. with[in the] classroom. [It is also difficult to] manage behaviour/disruptions created by students whose needs are significantly different, and to provide a meaningful learning environment for such pupils.”

“Needs” were defined by many respondents as relating to both the students with special needs, and other students; comments reflected concern over the needs of the “regular” students, whether in terms of academic work or of disruptions caused by negative behaviour:

“It is too hard to help such a wide range of skills in the classroom. Somebody suffers because you spend too much time with the special needs students or you spend too much time with the rest of the class and they get neglected.”

“Sometimes the behaviours of some of the special needs students put the health and safety of the other students at risk. Overly-aggressive students are sometimes left in the regular classroom/school setting longer than is best for the other students in the school. Some situations require too much of the teacher's attention, therefore average students pay the price.”

Meeting student needs also appeared problematic for specialist support teachers, who identified a mix of factors relevant to their capacity to meet students' needs:

“[The problems with integration include] modifying/adapting classroom work to level of student with special needs; providing relevant learning for student with special needs; and educating teachers to the students' working abilities —

the teacher thinks the student can work either more or less than their ability level.”

These comments reflect one support teacher's concerns over creating an appropriate learning environment, and about effective collaboration between the specialist support teacher and the classroom teacher. The implicit conclusion is that both are essential to meet each student's needs.

Time

Two issues emerged in teachers' description of “lack of time” as a hindrance to effective integration.

Too many tasks, too little time

Respondents identified pedagogical, communication, and organizational factors as having an impact on their time. For many respondents, teaching in an integrated setting necessitated extra planning and often preparation of individualized materials and teaching. Communication demands increased – involving classroom teachers, specialist teachers, school-based teams, parents, Teachers' Assistants, to name but some of those involved. In terms of school organization, some students are pulled out of classes as they move in and out of resource rooms, or they may be partly or fully integrated. Many factors add significantly to the complexity of a teacher's work implementing an inclusionary policy:

“There just isn't enough time allocated to looking after these students. We need Pro-D, and MORE TIME for consulting, planning and assessing. In school, resources are limited: books, TAs, programs. L.A. time keeps getting reduced; needs of students are increasing. Sometimes I feel like I'm on the Titanic and it's slowly sinking. Special ed students just aren't getting as much help as they need – perhaps some time should be spent in resource rooms.”

“[There is] less time to teach. IEPs and planning take up a lot of time, not enough time to spend preparing class. No meeting time for people involved with special needs students, and no release time.”

“The time a classroom teacher must devote to a special needs student during academic learning is enormous.... It is extremely difficult to divide teaching time in 2 when it is often 28 to 1 (or divide in 3 when a split grade is involved).”

“[There is a] lack of time for training for Personal Care Assistants, teachers, for connecting with parents, and a lack of time and money to provide materials, environment, and training.”

Impact on other students

Respondents appeared most frustrated with integration when they felt that one or a few students in their class took up too much of the teacher's time:

“When special needs students spend the entire day in a regular class their special needs are not being met adequately. Any time the classroom teacher spends with that child is valuable time taken from other children who may benefit more for the time given them. Special needs children need trained special education teachers, not classroom teachers, for at least half the day. Tutors are helpful but they are not teachers and don't have the skills to help these children.”

“Special education students take too much time away from teaching the rest of the class.”

“Some special needs students take an inordinate amount of time both during

class time and outside of it due to meetings with various other professionals. Often support is not adequate. Some students would benefit from having part of the day in the regular classroom and part of the day one on one or in a small group with someone who is especially trained to deal with students with particular issues. This is often not possible with full integration. At times, if the needs of the one child interfere with the learning environment of the rest of the class, the needs of the rest of the class may outweigh the benefits to the one."

While many of the comments mirrored teachers' frustration with the extra time demands of students with special needs, some were more openly hostile to the concept of integration:

"Time...these kids [students with special needs] take the majority of my time (comparably) because their parents demand it (the most noise gets the action) and they disrupt (behaviour kids) the tone, focus, and mood of the class – set bad examples for others. The rest of the kids suffer. Autistic kids can also be very demanding and disruptive. I'm not trained to nurse the needs of my kids, just teach."

Special Education policy clearly offers a range of settings for students with special needs, but data from teachers provided in this survey suggest a prevalence of integrated classrooms rather than a wide range of settings. Future studies may need to examine the range and utilization of alternative settings, in order to consider their utility for some students with special needs.

Disruptive students

Many respondents expressed strong concerns over the issue of a number of students who disrupted their teaching, and who distracted other students in the class:

"Students with special needs are often disruptive of normal classroom routine. In a small school, there is often no extra space to take a child who screams, for example. The other children are easily distracted and often the focus of the lesson is lost."

"Students with severe behaviour problems require too much of the teacher's attention. Disruptive behaviour is stressful for the teacher and class."

"We have two autistic children in a small school. Next year we will have three! These students are very disruptive to the whole school. One child has regular sessions of screaming and kicking. I think the rest of the students are greatly distracted by the behaviour happening around them."

"These students are extremely disruptive to the rest of the class. They command an excess of my time, taking away 'positive' instructional time for the rest of the class."

Some respondents noted degrees of disruption, stating that some milder behavioural problems were more manageable in an integrated setting than were other, more severe behaviours:

"[It depends on] the degree of disruption behaviours of special needs students. The children and I have been frightened in the past with aggressive behaviours, which may quickly occur for no apparent reason. Dealing with special needs children can take a significant amount of time and energy away from teaching the rest of the class. I have also seen very positive results when a special needs student has a capable Teaching Assistant, and has a mildly disruptive behaviour pattern."

Limited support for teachers implementing integration

The practice of integrating students with special needs is often dependent on a range of supports which, when they work well, maximize the chances of successful integration:

“By ensuring adequate supports (Special Education Assistants, peer tutors, Learning Disabilities teacher, modified/adapted curriculum materials) are all in place, successful teaching & learning can occur.”

Respondents described limited or non-existent support related to almost every aspect of integration, whether in terms of modified or adapted curriculum, specialist teachers, teacher assistants, training/preparation, or collaborative approaches.

“Some special needs students take an inordinate amount of time both during class time and outside of it, due to meetings with various other professionals. Often support is not adequate.”

“[There is] not adequate funding to provide support services, i.e., teacher aides, release time to teacher, resources....”

A number of respondents indicated declining support, particularly TA support, as students grew older:

“As students get older, seems support is cut back even more, thereby increasing the difficulty in dealing with severe behaviour disorder children.”

Some identified limited supports for classroom teachers, and caseloads which overwhelmed support teachers:

“[There is a] lack of support for classroom teachers. Special needs teachers often have caseloads they can't manage.”

Even the concept of “support” invited criticism. Some respondents equated support with increased workload as they were drawn in to more meetings and greater levels of collaboration with a range of other educators, health care workers, para-professionals, and others:

“ ‘Support’ only increases the teacher workload, as she must now manage that, too.”

The clearest message that many classroom teachers conveyed in their comments was that they felt abandoned in trying to integrate students with special needs. This does not mean that integration was a solitary exercise. Indeed, many described many consultations and meetings. But they felt that supports were not offered in ways that helped them as teachers when they needed such help, leaving them isolated and alone to deal with a range of students with special needs.

A few teachers expressed anger at having to deal with any students with special needs, with or without support:

“If I had wanted to teach special education, I would have taken courses.”

This perspective essentially rejects the concept of integration, reflecting a belief that a teacher's job does not include accepting diversity in classrooms. Although this may seem disturbing, it does reflect a view that is present in schools today, which should be considered with all other perspectives.

Teachers' views span a continuum on the issue of inclusion. Some fervently support inclusion, while a few totally reject it. The majority of respondents to this survey philosophically support inclusion as a concept and a philosophy. They also express their concern that special needs are not met because of limited support, and articulate their anger that they are left to cope with the consequences of implementing an expensive concept in an under-resourced system.

Conclusion

A number of conclusions may be drawn from the data in this report.

1. Substantial progress has been made in terms of integrating students with special needs, but this progress is often unacknowledged.

It is possible that British Columbia educators tend to accentuate concerns rather than progress when they reflect on their work and on the education system. Data in this report both challenge and support this argument. In identifying substantial areas where progress has been made, teachers implicitly challenge negative and pessimistic views of integration. In many ways, schools and those who work in them have taken impressive strides to include an increasingly diverse student population. These strides are very modestly stated by those who work in schools, and those who responded to this survey. The modesty of educators masks the progress made, and tends to accentuate the negative aspects of integration. "Yes, we have made progress, but..." appears to be the general sense of teachers' reflection on integration progress. Although this begins with a positive statement, the grammatical effect of "but" is to negate the positive words preceding it. The good is lost when the sentence ends on a negative note – an accurate, and unfortunate, reflection of teachers' feelings.

Yet it is surely worth stating and celebrating the more-inclusionary nature of B.C.'s schools, which now routinely educate and include a large number of students who were once segregated and isolated from their peers. Schools have come a long way in a short time in terms of inclusionary practices, with little apparent appreciation and minimal celebration.

Perceptions of progress must be tempered by the negative perceptions held by a large number of teachers with regard to many aspects of implementing integration. The negative perceptions outlined in this report are depressingly familiar to almost any experienced educator in B.C. The findings in this report are consistent with the conclusions of previous BCTF research, which showed that teachers supported inclusionary philosophies, but were frustrated and angry at the lack of support for those who face the task of implementing integration in their classrooms.

2. Many students' needs are not being met, while teachers' workload and stress have increased.

Many of the views of inclusion and integration held by B.C. teachers in 2001 are very similar to those elicited by the 1993 "Teaching in the '90s" survey. Paucity of resources and limited access to supports were reported similarly in both years. British Columbia's teachers then and now support the rights of children to an inclusive education, but are frustrated and negative in terms of the daily pragmatics of implementing an inclusionary policy with inadequate support. Respondents' negativity is linked to the failure of successive governments to adequately fund and support policy, with the result that many children's needs are not being met. This in turn makes teachers' work more difficult and more stressful as they struggle to maximize students' academic learning and socialization. Teachers attempt to meet all students' needs with no time for consultation, they have students in their classes who have special needs but who are not recognized as such, and they have minimal access to supplies of adapted and modified curriculum materials, to name but a few of the missing factors necessary for success. Specialists who support classroom teachers face increased paperwork as districts prepare for audits, report

substantial increases in caseload, and state that their work and their workload have changed in ways that are not reflected purely in numbers.

Teachers are tired of carrying the major burden of implementing an inclusionary policy with inadequate support. In October 2000, when teachers were asked by the BCTF to identify the issues they believed crucial to negotiate in a new collective agreement, over 13,000 teachers responded by saying that the second most important issue was increased support for the integration of students with special needs. BCTF data collection in 1993 ("Teaching in the '90s"), 1999 (Special Education Review), and this 2001 "Worklife of Teachers" project, all reflect the consistent frustration of teachers with the limited supports provided for the implementation of special education policies. Respondents to this survey state that they are expected to cope with unrealistically low levels of support for integrating a wide range of students with special needs. Their views make the case that there is a mismatch between the rhetoric of inclusionary policies and the reality of implementation in schools. This results in unmet student needs, and unacceptably high workload and stress for teachers.

3. Teachers believe that there are many more students with special needs than are recognized by the Ministry of Education.

Data from this survey and the survey of secondary English teachers⁷ show that many teachers report "non-designated" students with special needs in their classrooms. Alarming, they also appear to state that these students outnumber those who are officially designated within special needs categories. Further evidence that substantial numbers of such students exist in B.C. schools was presented in a (2001) paper by Perry et al.⁸

Respondents to our survey identified six categories of special needs where they considered non-designated students with special needs to outnumber those who were designated; three of these (Learning Disabilities, Moderate Behavior, and Gifted) matched categories where Ministry caps are in place to restrict funding. Caps are not supported by any research and are essentially indefensible. They exist for fiscal reasons only, and contradict the policy of inclusion for the simple reason that they exclude substantial numbers of students from receiving appropriate educational services.

Data concerning the numbers of aggressive and disruptive students who are not designated is also of concern, as they suggest that the existing categories for students with behaviour problems exclude many students with behaviour problems so severe that many teachers identify them as aggressive and disruptive.

Three other factors increase the likelihood of some students with special needs not being designated. One is limited access to diagnostic assessment in many school districts, where long waiting lists are the norm. Another results from Ministry audits, which frequently remove funds from districts which cannot provide satisfactory evidence of designation or service provision. A third factor is that some districts want to avoid the limits on class composition that are required by contract language, so they do not assess and designate some students.

The combined weight of data leads to a conclusion that B.C.'s supposedly inclusionary policy in fact systematically excludes many students. The exclusion is disguised, as most school-aged students with special needs are physically in schools, but the system does exclude, by systemically withholding the supports needed for those students with special needs who are

⁷ Naylor, C. & Malcolmson, J. (2001). "I love teaching English, but...." A study of the workload of English teachers in B.C. secondary grades, www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc02.

⁸ Perry, N.E., McNamara, J.K. & Mercer, K.L. (May, 2001). Principles, policies and practices in Special Education in British Columbia. Paper presented at the CSSE conference, Laval, Quebec.

not recognized, or who might be designated but receive minimal service. Again, the rhetoric of inclusion appears ill-matched with the fiscal constraints which are imposed by successive provincial governments.

As this report is being written, hearings are ongoing in a case of systemic discrimination being considered by the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal. Evidence from this study would support the conclusion that systemic discrimination occurs because of non-designation and/or non-provision of appropriate services.

Afterword

This report is based on data from a survey of teachers. Such data clearly showed that in the opinions of many teachers, there were significant problems associated with implementing inclusionary policies prior to the election of the Liberal government in B.C., including underfunding. However, the new government's actions may have severe effects on services offered to students with special needs.

The following section, more a personal opinion than a data-based analysis, is nevertheless offered to stimulate discussion about the future of inclusion within the context of actions taken by the B.C. Liberal government.

The uncertain future of integration in B.C.

Many teachers are fearful of government-imposed contracts and conditions that they feel will reduce teachers' ability to meet students' needs. These include abolition of ratios for specialists, removal of targeting in funding high-incidence categories, and increased class size. The "flexibility" that government is promising districts will affect special education more than most areas, as districts seek to cut costs for integration. While it is important to recognize that special education is inadequately funded by current and previous provincial governments, it is also important to acknowledge that many school districts, and particularly larger urban districts, spend much more on special education than they receive from the provincial government. In 2000–01, School District #44, North Vancouver, budgeted 41.1% more than the targeted grant amount, while the district-budgeted amounts were 30.0% higher in SD #42, Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows, and 29.4% higher in SD #36, Surrey.⁹ In the current political context it is difficult to have any optimism for the short-term future of special education, as the "new era" appears set to substantially reduce services to children with disabilities through funding freezes or cuts in education and other ministries' budgets.

The policy approach of the Liberals prior to the last election – that decisions are best made at the school site level – may also negatively impact efforts to improve effective integration. If every school site is defining and building its own version of integration, there is needless duplication of effort, and reduced sharing of information. Where site-based management has been introduced in other countries, notably in England, some schools have exercised their decision-making power by excluding students who are considered behaviourally problematic, thereby avoiding dealing with this category of students with special needs. This power is less likely to be exercised where district or provincial policies exist which mandate inclusion, and where structures and staffing are provided to support and to monitor the implementation of inclusionary services.

It has also been argued that narrowly-defined accountability measures have increased exclusions of students with special needs from some schools in England, where a school's success is measured by its students' exam or test performance, which is reported in "league tables." The current B.C. government's view of accountability (largely outcomes-based, with

⁹ 2000/01 Preliminary Targeted and Budgeted Amounts for Special Education & Aboriginal Programs, Table 12. Ministry of Education web site: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/revenue/0001/.

outcomes equating to test scores) appears similar to that espoused in England, and Vancouver media have already developed and published school league tables. The presence of students with special needs may lower a school's placement in a table, as some categories of students with special needs would have less potential to achieve high marks on exams or tests. For some schools in England, the answer has been to exclude these students, thereby boosting their apparent academic performance at the cost of inclusion and equity.

Though limited, supports do currently exist in B.C., with provincial Special Programs Branch initiatives, and Student Support Services in many school districts. The Liberal approach, in particular the abolition of the Ministry's Special Programs Branch, may restrict the Ministry's focus to policy and accountability. Such a change will be accompanied by the elimination of Ministry efforts to document and share strategies and resources. While these efforts are hardly the factors that currently ensure adequate sharing of good practice, the elimination of Ministry Special Programs will further splinter approaches to integration. How districts will exercise their new "flexibility" remains to be seen, but many suspect that it will mean reduced services for many students with special needs. Indeed, some districts have developed new models of integration, with substantial reductions in the number of specialist positions.

The need for an alternative perspective

When considering the future, it may also be useful to propose alternatives to the narrow perspective of the Liberal government's fiscal conservatism, imposed contracts, and further decentralization, all of which may result in the reduction of services to students with special needs. What factors are relevant for building and improving a system which meets students' needs and which maximizes inclusion? What kind of inclusionary system is manageable for those who work in schools?

The following discussion identifies two central systemic supports argued as necessary to support inclusion, as well as three key areas for focus and action. The case made here is that inclusion requires systemic support from government and from districts acting in coherent and co-ordinated ways. By addressing systemic issues, recognizing current context, and by building a new context, inclusion can be better supported, thereby meeting the needs of more students, while also addressing teacher workload and stress issues.

Central, systemic factors

Two factors are considered here as primary responsibilities that, I argue, should be the focus of both the provincial government and school districts.

1. Avoid decentralization, and maintain systemic support for improving inclusion in schools.

Most government or school district decentralization efforts involve the devolution of problems, not of control or money. The rhetoric of decentralization stresses control at the local or school level, but funds are allocated centrally. Thus the central power, the provincial government or the school district opting for decentralization, distances itself from decisions which are announced locally but are actually forced by funding decisions made centrally.

By setting policy and funding while imposing accountability structures, many governments have kept tight control while implying the opposite. At the same time, decentralization ends the more productive co-ordination and sharing role of a Ministry Branch such as Special Programs, and will likely lead to an increasingly fragmented approach to inclusion across the province.

An alternative direction would stress the Ministry's importance in building capacity and sharing resources, to a much greater level than exists now. Capacity might include more web and hard copy publications, support for professional development linked to Ministry or other resources, and responsiveness to the needs of educators and to the parents of students with special needs in addressing integration issues. This does not mean a monolithic approach, where districts or schools have no capacity to innovate, but instead suggests a balance where the Ministry priority is to actively build a better system. This would shift both focus and energy towards improvement, rather than limiting Ministry involvement to setting policy and monitoring compliance with accountability. Ministry roles might also include encouraging and documenting good practice where it occurs, so that others can learn and benefit from those who have developed useful approaches and structures.

At the district level, similar central and systemic support is needed to support and share good integration practices, and to ensure equity of services across schools. Just as the province has downloaded responsibility to districts, some districts may download responsibility to schools while reducing or eliminating supports previously provided by the district. Districts which decentralize, fuel the case for removing district governance and administration. This potentially paves the way for a New Zealand-type model of decentralized education in B.C., a model which has drawn increased criticism in academic research in recent years.¹⁰ Much of the literature critical of decentralized "market" models of education argues that decentralized educational systems serve well the needs of those already advantaged in society, usually those in above-average socio-economic status groups. Those who are less-well-served include students who are poor, racial minorities, or students with disabilities. Decentralization is almost always initiated with frozen or reduced funding, forcing decisions on cuts which often most affect those already marginalized by poverty, race, or disability.

2. Fund inclusionary policy appropriately so that successful implementation is possible.

There is strong evidence that B.C. underfunds special education, placing enormous strain on those who are responsible for implementation – the educators of B.C. This underfunding reduces teachers' capacity to meet student needs and exacerbates teacher workload and stress. In the face of huge government funding cuts, the call for appropriate (i.e., increased) funding may appear at odds with current economic realities. Nevertheless, all major educational organizations which submitted positions to the Special Education Review argued that there was insufficient funding for special education; this input was ignored then by the New Democratic Party, as it is now by the Liberals. The only stakeholder in the province that does not accept the underfunding case is the provincial government itself, which sets policies without matching sufficient funding. Ministry policies raise expectations among families of students with special needs, and in some cases increase conflict between families and educators as some expectations are not met. Inclusion cannot work without the money to make it work, and all the creativity, sharing, and innovation in the world still need resources to make integration effective. Governments which expect educators to make inclusion "work" without appropriate funding and support, are ensuring that inclusion will never work as it should, or as it could if it were adequately funded.

¹⁰ Lauder, H. & Hughes, D. (1999). *Trading in futures: Why markets in education don't work*. Open University Press, Buckingham.

Leithwood, K. & Menzies, T. (1997). "Research on school-based management and school councils." *Orbit*, 28, 2.

Gordon, L. & Whitty, G. (1997). "Giving the 'hidden hand' a helping hand?: The rhetoric and reality of neoliberal education reform in England and New Zealand." *Journal of Comparative Education*, 33, 3.

In the short-term, one might expect that the central systemic directions will be the opposite of those stated above. Services to students with special needs will be cut because of government policies on detargeting, district "flexibility," removal of specialist ratios, and increased class size. In this environment, educators and school district staff, unions such as the BCTF and CUPE, and community organizations, might consider participating in some of the pro-active approaches outlined below.

While this perspective assumes reduced central support for inclusion, the suggestions made here are intended to encourage actions which build capacity and sharing. These proposed actions will never be as effective as the same actions with central (i.e., provincial) systemic support, but they offer directions which would benefit students' learning, and support the work of teachers to include all students as they learn and participate in the community of school.

While being aware of the current context, we need to believe that we can change it by using our skills and resources to demonstrate that alternatives do exist. Such alternatives can create the foundations of a more cohesive and supportive framework, even in the context of an ideology which appears hostile and unsupportive.

Building a different context

1. Reconsider how to meet the needs of students.

At the heart of any education system lies the notion of meeting all students' needs, yet in reading the details of recent government changes there has been little clear articulation of just how the changes made will better meet the needs of students. As government decisions impact programs and services in schools, it is important to consider this issue, replacing rhetoric with evidence and analysis.

Even before the government-mandated changes impact the system it is worth considering what progress has been made toward meeting the needs of students with a wide range of special needs across the province. The answer is not clear. Many teachers responded to our surveys with pleas for help to deal with an area of disability that was unfamiliar to them, and for which they were unprepared. Many educators let us know that while much progress has been made, not all student needs are being satisfactorily met, and this failure is reported in our survey as being of great concern to them. Meeting the needs of students is an obvious goal of the education system, and a focus for all teachers, but we may need to expand our consideration and analysis of whether all student needs are being met. If there are changes in the student population over time, with more students who may have a disability linked to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), for example, how effective are programs for students with FAS? Are we generally successful with certain categories of students, for instance students who are deaf/blind, but less so with those who are autistic? Is there room for more "training as needed" initiatives, where classroom teachers might receive training in preparation for teaching in a class which includes a new and unfamiliar category of special need? Success in meeting the needs of students will also vary depending on location, prevalence of a disability, teacher experience, availability of specialist support teachers, and other factors. The question of ascertaining the needs of each student is at the core of successful inclusion, and remains the central focus of any educational program.

There exists a dichotomy of views in B.C. between the government and the BCTF on how students' needs are to be met. The government claims its policies will allow districts more flexibility to better meet students' needs. The union argues that increased class size, reduced specialist support, fewer teachers, and a host of other government initiatives, reflect fiscal priorities above students' needs, and that meeting the needs of all students will be more difficult as a result of government actions. Future BCTF research will explore how student

needs are being met in the “new era” of education. However, regardless of the dichotomy of views, successfully meeting students’ needs is a far more complex issue than choosing one or the other side of the dichotomous arguments, and requires support to build teacher, school, and district capacity.

2. Build teacher, school, and district capacity to meet student needs while ensuring that teacher workload is manageable.

In the next ten years, teacher demographics will change enormously as significant numbers of B.C. teachers retire. Replacing this skilled and experienced workforce will be newer teachers with minimal experience of integration and working with students with special needs. Assuming districts exercise the “flexibility” ordained by an apparently inflexible government, and cut specialist support while increasing class size, many newer teachers may struggle to effectively include all students. With higher class size comes reduced teacher time for individual students. Reduced specialist support means less direct specialist service to students with special needs, and reduced collaboration between classroom and support teachers – both of which are key factors in successful integration.

In the absence of a provincial government willing to adequately support inclusionary policies, new union initiatives should be considered to support all teachers in teaching students with special needs, with a particular focus on those new to teaching. The BCTF and its Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) might consider how to develop resources and professional development provincially, regionally, and locally to support inclusive practices. At a time of fundamental, and negative, government change, the union alternative should be professionally focused as well as politically opposed to government actions which will reduce the efficacy of services to students with special needs. At the same time, the issue of excessive teacher workloads identified in this and other recent BCTF “Worklife of Teachers” series reports must be addressed, as it is impossible to meet students’ needs if teachers have unmanageable workloads.

3. Build coalitions and alliances

For almost a year, the BCTF has been participating in meetings with community and parent organizations in a group which has become known as the “Special Education Partners’ Group.” This fledgling group encourages improved dialogue and understanding between those who work in schools, parents of students with special needs, and community organizations. To date the group is aiming to develop a collective advocacy, and to develop projects to support integration practices in schools. This partnership reflects a desire to move away from isolation, and in some cases, confrontation between organizations, and to replace these stances with more constructive engagement to support the needs of all students, as well as their families, and the work of teachers and others in B.C.’s schools.

Other coalitions and alliances might be developed by the BCTF, some including districts and universities, or with other unions, perhaps to develop resources, professional development or training. If the government is opting out of systemic support, coalitions and alliances are necessary to share or to build organizational strengths and resources which, through collaboration, can help meet students needs, and maximize teacher capacity. BC is rich in its human resources in the education system. Such resources can be used to support and build more inclusive schools, and they will be stronger through partnership than if isolated.

There is an alternative to accepting the Liberals’ view of education and its effects on inclusive education, but it requires much more consultation, articulation, and development. No claim is made here that the ideas reflected above are adequate or comprehensive. They are offered purely to generate thinking and debate on future directions among teachers and those who might wish to explore some preferred directions to meet all students’ needs in our schools.

Appendix

The survey instrument, "BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 2: Special Education, June 2001," follows as the Appendix.

CN:af:utfe/IWA 1-3567

RT02-0008
June 2002

BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series

2: Special Education

June 2001

This form will be electronically processed. Please print clearly in the spaces provided, use **dark ink**, and fill in circles as shown. Choose one response only for each question unless otherwise indicated.

Fill in circles like this:

Note: This survey is anonymous and confidential. No attempt will be made to identify individual respondents. The ID code in the bottom right corner of each page is the same on every survey with this title, and is a code used by the computer to link the scanned data with the correct survey key. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Anne Field at BCTF Research, 1-800-663-9163 or 604-871-2251.

* Please complete this survey based on your usual teaching assignment. *

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Demographics

1. **Gender:** Female Male
2. **In what age category are you?** under 25 years old 25-34 35-44 45-54 55 and over
3. **In which school district do you most often teach/work this school year?** #

School District Name:

4. **a. Are you on leave?** Yes No **If No, please omit b. and c. of this question and go to question 5.**

b. If Yes, please indicate the reason:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> education | <input type="radio"/> illness/disability, not directly stress-related |
| <input type="radio"/> secondment or other employment | <input type="radio"/> illness/disability, stress-related |
| <input type="radio"/> personal | <input type="radio"/> other (please specify) <input style="width: 400px;" type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> maternity/parenthood/adoption | |

- c. If Yes, did workload issues contribute to your decision to take a leave?** Yes No

Note: *If you are a teacher on leave for all or part of this school year, please complete the rest of the survey based on your most recent school experience. Thank you.*

5. **By the end of this school year, for how many years will you have been teaching?**
 < 1 year 1-4 years 5-9 years 10-14 years 15-19 years 20-24 years 25 + years

Type of Contract

6. **a. Is your employment contract:** (fill in only one)
 full-time continuing part-time continuing Teacher On Call (TOC)
 full-time term part-time term TOC plus part-time

If part-time, please indicate:

- b. for what percentage of time (use a whole percentage, e.g., 33%, 50%):** %

c. if your decision to work part-time was:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> voluntary - personal preference | <input type="radio"/> because of illness/disability |
| <input type="radio"/> involuntary - would prefer full-time or more time | <input type="radio"/> Accommodation or Rehabilitation employment |
| <input type="radio"/> because of workload | <input type="radio"/> other (please specify) <input style="width: 200px;" type="text"/> |

- d. If Teacher On Call, please approximate the number of days worked so far this school year (September to end of March):** days

61285



7. If you have a continuing or term contract, please identify your teaching assignment(s) and full-time equivalent (FTE) status. Refer to the box for examples.

If you are a TOC in this school year, please omit this question and go to question 8.

Example 1:

If you are a full-time classroom teacher, you would indicate the following:

- a. Teaching (classroom or subject specialist) . FTE

Example 2:

If you have a 0.175 FTE contract as a learning assistance teacher, and 0.25 FTE contract as an itinerant teacher (0.425 FTE total), you would indicate the following:

- b. Non-enrolling area such as special education or ESL, or as a teacher-librarian, counsellor, or L. A. teacher . FTE
- c. Itinerant teaching (i.e., teach in more than one school) . FTE

- a. Teaching (classroom or subject specialist) . FTE
- b. Non-enrolling area such as special education or ESL, or as a teacher-librarian, counsellor, or L. A. teacher . FTE
- c. Itinerant teaching (i.e., teach in more than one school) . FTE
- d. Department head or equivalent . FTE
- e. Other (use only if you cannot answer in another category; please specify)

. FTE

Subject/Work Area(s)

8. Please indicate up to two (2) areas in which you currently teach/work most of the time.

Enter in box "a" (below) the number representing how you spend most of your teaching/working time. Choose from "01" to "24" in the list given here. If you have other responsibilities, enter the corresponding number in box "b" (below).

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 01 = I teach my students the majority of their subjects (most elementary teachers, some middle school teachers) 02 = Alternative Education 03 = Business Education 04 = CAPP 05 = Counselling 06 = Distance Education/Distributed Learning 07 = English/Language Arts 08 = English as a Second Language 09 = French as a Second Language 10 = French Immersion/Programme Cadre 11 = Geography 12 = History 13 = Home Economics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 = Industrial/Vocational/Technological Studies 15 = Languages other than English or French 16 = Learning Assistance 17 = Library 18 = Mathematics 19 = Music/Drama/Fine Arts 20 = Physical Education 21 = Science 22 = Special Education (please specify) 23 = Social Studies 24 = Other (please specify) |
|--|---|

a. most of my teaching time

b. other responsibilities



Grade(s) Taught/Caseload

9. What grade(s) are you teaching, or from what grades is your caseload drawn, this school year? Please fill in all the appropriate circle(s).

- K 1 2 3 4 5 6
 7 8 9 10 11 12 Adult Ed

10. a. Do you teach any class as a split-grade or multi-grade class? Yes No

b. If Yes, please specify the grades:

- K 1 2 3 4 5 6
 7 8 9 10 11 12

c. If Yes, please rate this as a source of stress: none/neutral low medium high

11. a. Compared to 5 years ago, my class size has: increased decreased stayed the same N/A

b. Compared to 5 years ago, my caseload has: increased decreased stayed the same N/A

c. Comments:

SECTION B: PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

12. For each of the following statements, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree, using the scale provided.

	N/A or <u>don't know</u>	strongly <u>disagree</u>	somewhat <u>disagree</u>	<u>neutral</u>	somewhat <u>agree</u>	strongly <u>agree</u>
		1	2	3	4	5
a. I believe in and support the philosophy of inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. The daily implementing of integration is difficult.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Paperwork linked to students with special needs has increased over the last 5 years.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Some students who have special needs are not included in Special Education policies (e.g., Fetal Alcohol Syndrome [FAS], ADHD).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Resource/financial supports for inclusion are adequate and enable appropriate delivery.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Curriculum material supports for inclusion (e.g., modified and adapted materials) are adequate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. There is adequate support from the ministry for improving programs and services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. The caps on numbers of students should be eliminated to more accurately reflect current research data regarding the actual number of students with a specific disability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. The identification/assessment of students considered likely to have special needs is timely (i.e., done promptly).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Students with special needs are well served by current identification processes and assessment instruments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. In my school or district, students with special needs are required to spend 100% of every day in a regular classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	<u>N/A or don't know</u>	<u>strongly disagree</u> 1	<u>somewhat disagree</u> 2	<u>neutral</u> 3	<u>somewhat agree</u> 4	<u>strongly agree</u> 5
l. Most students with special needs benefit <i>academically</i> from inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. Most students with special needs benefit <i>socially</i> from inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. Integration of students with special needs affects my capacity to meet the needs of other students in the class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. I feel professionally prepared to work with students with special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
p. I am positive about working with other teachers to implement integration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
q. I am positive about working with Special Ed Assistants to implement integration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
r. My relationships with the parents of students with special needs are generally positive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SECTION C: AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORTS FOR INTEGRATION

13. Please indicate whether each of the following supports is available to you.

	<u>not applicable</u>	<u>not available</u>	<u>available</u>
a. Class-size reduction (reduced number of students).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. In-service training.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. A trained Special Education Assistant.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Contract limits on the number of students with special needs in my class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Support from a Resource Teacher in the school/district.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. District services for assessment and support which are available to me in my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. A supportive Administrative Officer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. An effective school-based team.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Paid release-time set aside for consultation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Pull-out services for students when needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. IEPs produced for each student with special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. Technical resources where needed (e.g., computer, talking books).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. Appropriate modified/adapted curriculum materials.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. Other support (please specify): <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. Other support (please specify): <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Please identify, from the choices above, the 3 supports for integration that are most important to you. Fill in up to 3 circles only.

- a b c d e f g h
 i j k l m n o

15. a. Have you accessed tuition rebates for Special Education courses? Yes No

b. Please list any courses for which you have received tuition rebates:

- i. ii.

c. Do you intend to access Special Education courses with tuition rebates in the foreseeable future?

- Yes No



Instructions for completing sections D and E on this page:

- * if you are a **classroom teacher**, please answer with respect to your **class**
- * if you are a **secondary teacher**, please **choose one class that you consider typical** on which to base your responses
- * if you are a **non-enrolling teacher**, please answer with respect to your **caseload**

Definitions:

"designated" - a student who is officially recognized by the ministry (fitting in one of the 11 categories below) as having a special need, with extra funding provided

"non-designated" - a student whom you believe has a special need, but that need is not officially recognized by the ministry and no extra funding is provided

SECTION D: CLASS COMPOSITION

16. For sections D and E, I am identifying a (choose one only): class caseload

17. Which, and how many, students with special needs do you have in your class/caseload?

(The following list reflects ministry designations/categories.)

	<u>none</u>	<u># designated</u>	<u># non-designated</u>				
a. students with mild intellectual disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
b. students with moderate to severe/profound intellectual disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
c. students with learning disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
d. gifted students	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
e. students with moderate behaviour disorders	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
f. students with severe behaviour disorders	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
g. students with multiple disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
h. students with physical disabilities or chronic health impairments	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
i. students with visual impairment	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
j. students who are deaf/hard of hearing	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
k. students with autism	<input type="radio"/>	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>		
l. other (please specify):	<input type="text"/>	-----	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>				
m. Comments:	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td></tr></table>						

SECTION E: DEALING WITH AGGRESSIVE/DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

Please refer to the instructions and definitions at the top of this page.

18. How many aggressive/disruptive students are in your classroom or caseload?

designated: none 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

non-designated: none 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

19. Of the aggressive/disruptive students in your class or caseload, how many are male, and how many are female?

male: none 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

female: none 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

20. How much of your teaching time goes into managing these students?

less than 20% of the day 20-29% 30-39% 40-49% 50% or more of the day

21. How would you rate the support your school/district provides you for managing aggressive/disruptive students in your class? excellent good fair poor N/A

22. Compared to 5 years ago, has the impact of aggressive/disruptive students in your classroom or caseload

(select one): increased decreased stayed about the same
 N/A don't know



**SECTION F: POSITIVE FACTORS & PROBLEMATIC ISSUES
IN INTEGRATION, AND CONTRACT IMPROVEMENTS**

23. a. Positive factors

Please use this space to comment on what you believe to be the most positive aspects of integrating students with special needs into the school(s) where you work.

b. Problematic issues

Please use this space to comment on what you believe to be the most problematic issues in terms of integrating students with special needs into the school(s) where you work.

24. If you were to identify 3 areas of the collective agreement which are related to integration of students with special needs that would benefit most from improved language, what would they be?

1.

2.

3.

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
Please return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by June 22, 2001.**

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RT01-0026
June 2001

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