

Provincial SSAAM Resolutions
For the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth
December 2008

Preamble

The Student Services Administrators' Association of Manitoba (SSAAM) is committed to supporting appropriate educational programming for all students, including those who have physical, cognitive and/or social emotional needs. This association has actively advocated for enhanced access and equity for students with special needs for over 25 years.

As educators, we continually search to better understand the needs of our students and the societal changes that affect them and their families. The Public Schools Amendment Act, Appropriate Educational Programming, has clearly outlined the duties and responsibilities of school divisions in regards to students with exceptional learning needs. As we work to implement the provisions in the Act, we are faced with some important challenges that impede our ability to fully respond to student needs. The following is a description of the most critical challenges we face in Manitoba today and recommendations for the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth and other governmental partners. We are committed to working with the Government of Manitoba to better respond to the evolving needs of our children and their families.

Our recommendations are grouped under four main areas of challenge:

1. Students Severely At Risk:

- 1.1. Students with Mental Health Issues
- 1.2. Students with Severe Behavioural Issues
- 1.3. Students from newly immigrated families, including those from war-torn countries

2. Policies and Practices that Impede Shared Ownership and Shared Responsibility for Children Between the Governmental Departments of Education, Health, Justice, and Family Services and Housing

2.1. Strategic Planning

3. Staff Qualifications and Recruitment

- 3.1. Certification of Resource Teachers, Special Education Teachers and Counsellors
- 3.2. Pre-Service learning in Special Education
- 3.3. Recruitment of School Clinicians

4. Adequate Funding to School Divisions to meet the requirements in the Appropriate Educational Programming Regulations

- 4.1. Increased Funding for students with L2 and L3 funding
- 4.2. Increased Funding for Student Services Administrative Costs
- 4.3. Increased Funding for Student Services Grants

RESOLUTIONS

1. Students Severely At Risk:

1.1. Students with mental health issues

THAT WHEREAS the lack of coordinated mental health services for students and their families is a critical issue facing schools at this time, and;

WHEREAS the SMHRT program is being implemented to address the needs of students with mental health issues in the school system, however there continues to be limited services available to young children with severe mental health issues within the school system;

WHEREAS families have the option of refusing mental health services if they wish, and;

WHEREAS mental health agencies can refuse to continue providing services to students with mental health issues that impede their ability to safely attend school, and;

WHEREAS this leaves school staff without access to qualified resources to support planning for the student, and;

WHEREAS school divisions are nonetheless required to provide an appropriate educational program;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth develop a strategic plan that would involve the necessary decision-makers including the departments of Health, Justice, Child and Family Services and Family Services and Housing for more comprehensive and extensive mental health services for children aged 5 to 18.

1.2. Students with severe behavioural issues

THAT WHEREAS school divisions are encountering increasing numbers of students exhibiting severe, violent behaviours and/or sexual offences (K to 12), and;

WHEREAS these students require specific and consistent 24-hour interventions that cannot be met by the school system alone and;

WHEREAS the level of expertise required is beyond current training of educational staff, and;

WHEREAS schools have the obligation to provide safe and supportive environments for all students and staff;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth invite other Government Departments to review and define roles and process to ensure appropriate interagency 24-hour planning occurs as outlined in the Interdepartmental Protocol Agreement for Children and Adolescents with Severe and Profound Emotional/Behavioural Disorders and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that departmental barriers in policies and practices be removed to enhance programming, bridging and transitioning between the Departments of Health, Justice, Family Services and Housing, and Education, Citizenship and Youth.

1.3 Students from newly immigrated families, including those from war-torn countries.

THAT WHEREAS the Manitoba government is committed to significantly increasing the number of newly immigrated families over the next few years, and;

THAT WHEREAS most school divisions have limited access to multilingual staff and knowledge of culturally appropriate resources in the province to support these families, and;

THAT WHEREAS basic background information on the student's age and previous academic experience is not always readily available to school personnel upon registration, and;

THAT WHEREAS research shows that proper reception of newly immigrated families is critical to both the parents' and the students' success;

THAT WHEREAS it is not feasible both financially and practically for each individual school division to establish their own reception centers due to the extensive range of resources that are required for the multiple cultures represented in our immigrant population;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth work collaboratively with the Minister of Labor and Immigration and the Minister of Health to establish a provincial reception centre for newly immigrated students. This provincial reception centre would:

- collect the necessary student data
- conduct an initial assessment of student need
- offer basic information on the cultural aspects of becoming a Canadian citizen,
- offer basic introductory conversational English and

- assist in the transition to their community school.

2. Policies and practices that impede the establishment of a philosophy of shared ownership and shared responsibility for children between the Departments of Education, Health, Justice, and Family Services and Housing:

2.1. Strategic Planning

THAT WHEREAS research strongly supports that of all the professionals and caregivers in a single child's life collaborate and share information to better support planning and intervention for the child, and;

THAT WHEREAS all professional service providers, whether they represent Justice, Health, Family Services and Housing, Child and Family Services or Education, all endeavour to enhance the quality of life of children and youth and;

THAT WHEREAS the barriers that impede successful planning and service to children and youth are often related to individual departmental policies as well as a lack of communication and understanding of individual departmental practices;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth invite the Ministers of Health, Justice and Family Services and Housing to establish an Interdepartmental Advisory Group that includes representatives from each Department as well as MASS and SSAAM. This advisory Group would meet twice a year to identify means to provide seamless service and seamless financial support between departments to the children in Manitoba.

3. Staff Qualifications and Recruitment

3.1 Certification for Resource Teachers, Special Education Teachers and Counsellors

THAT WHEREAS certification is not as yet a requirement for resource teachers, special education teachers and guidance counsellors, and;

WHEREAS there continues to be an increasing number of students with very diverse learning needs who require specialized supports, and;

WHEREAS Regulation 155/2005 requires appropriate assessments and programming for students with special needs and;

WHEREAS certified resource/special education teachers and counsellors require specialized training to enable them to provide leadership, programming and specialized assessment for students with special needs;

WHEREAS the Special Education Review clearly supported the need for certified professionals to support students with special needs;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, citizenship and Youth conduct a feasibility study into provincial certification of resource teachers, special education, and guidance counsellors.

3.2 Pre-service learning in Special Education

THAT WHEREAS the Public School's Amendment Act articulates a philosophy of inclusion for all students in all Manitoba schools, and;

WHEREAS the Special Education Review and the Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming) strongly supported the need for both administrators and teachers to have a basic knowledge and understanding of appropriate educational programming;

BE IT RESOLVED that all universities include a minimum of 12 credit hours of pre-service learning in the area of inclusive education, resource or exceptional learning, perspectives in appropriate education and universal design.

3.3 Recruitment of qualified clinicians

THAT WHEREAS Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth has made progress in assuring the existence of the school psychology training program at the University of Manitoba, school divisions currently continue to experience difficulty in recruiting qualified clinical staff, and;

WHEREAS this apparent shortage of clinical staff does not appear to be a temporary condition, but rather, due to the projected retirement rates in clinical areas, an ever-increasing issue, and;

WHEREAS there is currently no Masters level program in speech language pathology in Manitoba;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth take a leadership role in expanding university training in speech language pathology and audiology;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth review the requirements for school psychology eligibility;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth have his department pursue incentives that will encourage qualified clinicians to remain in Manitoba.

4. Adequate Funding to School Divisions to Meet the Requirements in the Appropriate Educational Programming Regulations

4.1 Increased funding for students with Level 2 and Level 3 funding

THAT WHEREAS the present level of funding does not cover the necessary educational supports for before and after school supervision and lunch hour supervision for students with L2 and L3 funding, and;

WHEREAS the funding is not indexed to reflect increases in salaries, cost of living, and other expenses and;

WHEREAS Regulation 155/2005 stipulates that students with special needs have a right to be involved in field trips, assemblies and sports days:

BE IT RESOLVED that Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth increase the funding for L2 and L3 categorical grants to cover the increased costs for maintaining current supports and the additional supervision time needed to adequately ensure safety and support for all students.

4.2 Increased funding for Student Services Administrative Costs

THAT WHEREAS the present level of coordinator/clinician grants does not cover the increased demands and growing complexity of coordinator/clinician roles and responsibilities and;

WHEREAS the role of student services administrators is to provide leadership, co-ordination, implementation and assessment of appropriate educational programming legislation and standards and;

WHEREAS school divisions are now required to help establish and facilitate community coalitions and committees involving agencies, government departments and parents to oversee the planning and implementation of projects

WHEREAS school divisions are now required to coordinate URIS student identification, planning and training for students with medical needs, and;

WHEREAS that the Safe Schools Charter also requires community involvement, threat assessment and a planned response coordinated by school division personnel, and;

WHEREAS school divisions are required to involve other government departments when planning a system of care for our most needy students and that these responsibilities fall upon Student Services Administrators and;

WHEREAS all of these responsibilities have required considerable additional administrative time;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth increase the amount of funding specifically to Coordinator Clinician grants to respond to these extended responsibilities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT Provincial ministers include administration costs when requesting or requiring new initiatives of school divisions.

4.3 Funding for Student Services Grants

THAT WHEREAS the present level for funding does not cover the necessary educational support for resource teachers, guidance counselors special education teachers to adequately meet the needs of our student population and;

WHEREAS school divisions are experiencing difficulties maintaining and recruiting resource teachers and other teachers to work in the area of exceptional education due to increased workloads and the ever increasing complexity of the job and;

WHEREAS total school populations may be declining in many schools across the province, while the special needs population is increasing:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth increase the funding for the Student Services Grant which includes

resource teachers, special education teachers, and counselors to help ensure appropriated educational programming.