

QUALITY LEARNING AND TEACHING IS AT STAKE: ECHOES FROM THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Increasing feedback from local teacher unions and numerous consultations with teachers, including past and present attempts to improve conditions for teachers and students through provincial contract negotiations, signaled a need to look further into issues pertaining to inclusion.

The prevailing sentiment among teachers is that the inclusive model, in its current form in Quebec's English sector of the education system, is not meeting the needs of typical and atypical learners. In turn, all students' rights to quality education in the English public education sector is being infringed upon. A growing sentiment of defeat, burnout, or career abandonment is present in the teaching community. Coupled with the teacher shortage, teachers are very overwhelmed.

QPAT SURVEY TO PRODUCE A PORTRAIT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE ENGLISH SECTOR IN QUEBEC

To further understand and obtain a representative and objective portrait of the situation, QPAT, with the support of Canadian Teachers' Federation and a research consultant, engaged teachers across Quebec using participatory research (PR) methods. Several focus groups were held with teachers from the Youth sector and led to a digital survey (SimpleSurvey), distributed in the spring of 2019 to members. Out of approximately 6500 teachers, 2259 (34.75%) responded to the online survey, resulting in a confidence level of 99% with a margin of error of 2.2%!

The survey consisted of closed-ended and opened-ended questions, and 4 areas: Classroom composition, Services and support for students, Support for teachers, and Violence and aggression. The responses were consistent across question type and areas with open-ended questions providing rich contextual information. Consistent with PR, a member-checking survey was completed March 2020 confirming the validity of the findings.



MAIN SURVEY FINDINGS

Inclusion's effectiveness is contingent on:

- **appropriate** day-to-day support and services available to students with (and without) special needs
- the **right** resources and teacher training at university, and in professional development.

The survey shows that for many, neither of these conditions are satisfied in the English sector. The analysis of the 4 areas of the survey revealed this overarching finding. The results for each area are presented next.

CLASSROOM COMPOSITION: NEGATIVELY IMPACTING LEARNING AND TEACHING

Most teachers reported between **21 to 40%** of their students have IEPs, with many having a LD or At-Risk designation in an inclusive classroom.

Most teachers also indicated:

- a huge variation in student academic range (e.g., in a grade 5 class, students range in skill level from grade 2 to 6), several types of needs (e.g., LDs, BDs, physical and intellectual handicaps, At-Risk including mental health issues) which also range in severity,
- and class size as too big or problematic.

Teachers also revealed the number of students with special needs is increasing yearly and with a minimal availability of specialized programs (e.g., Sports Étude), regular students are reportedly seeking such programs elsewhere, including private schools. This may be contributing to a high concentration of special needs students in inclusive classrooms.

The findings in this area revealed and teachers reported outright that classroom composition is negatively impacting teaching and learning for students with and without special needs.

SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS: AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

When asked if they felt students with special needs are well supported in their schools, **67%** of teachers *strongly disagreed or disagreed*.

Teachers reported often that services and support are lacking or greatly insufficient and when available, there are problems with accessing them or problems with what is available:

- 27% of students experience delays of 1-2 years before receiving screening or assessment (initial services) from non-teaching professionals
- receiving ongoing support or follow-ups with non-teaching professionals are also *very or somewhat unlikely* for designations: At-Risk students 66.39%, LD 52.12%, BD 59.53%
- lack of services and support resulting in IEPs not being properly implemented and/or the IEP becoming a service in and of itself
- to compensate for the shortage of support, several students with varying special needs are grouped into one class to share one aide/attendant (e.g., grouped 2 students with code 50, 1 with Down Syndrome, and 1 with toileting needs)
- aides/attendants being asked to do tasks beyond their mandate or qualifications (teach and prepare learning material for students), indicating that students may not be receiving appropriate in-class support
- remedial/supporting teachers working outside of their mandate by being asked to carry out administrative tasks instead of working with students, indicating students may not be receiving appropriate in-class support



SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS: AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

- non-category approach not being respected or practiced (teachers being told/believing students need a code to access service or support), also indicating students may not be receiving appropriate in-class support

Misunderstanding the purpose and process of IEPs:

- 37.32% of teachers agreed their school follows the IEP process (administrator and multidisciplinary team process according the Education Act and MEQ guidelines), yet 30.62% reported being solely responsible for establishing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs

Unclear (e.g., elementary to high school) transition process for students with special needs:

- 43% of teachers agreed their school has a transition process in place, yet 42% of teachers also reported they were unsure or did not know of such a process

The findings indicated many students with the At-Risk designation receive little services and support and the process to assign their designation may be erroneous. The findings showed that current services and support for students adversely affects teaching and learning.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS: LACKING

Whether initial teacher training at the university level or professional development, 48.75% of teachers reported that training for teaching students with special needs is lacking. This, combined with the issues of services and support for students, leaves teachers with a sense of despair regarding their ability to meet the needs of all students. Many teachers also reported being further burdened by:

- the lack of administrative support with aggressive or harassing parents and the IEP process,
- having their concerns and professional opinion questioned or doubted,
- the daunting request process for support for their students or themselves,
- and the lack of collaboration and communication with remedial/supporting teachers, non-teaching professionals, consultants



VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION: NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Although many teachers reported experiencing incidences, the majority of teachers (77.66%) said they felt comfortable reporting incidences of violence and aggression carried out by a student with special needs. However, only half (53.50%) had the impression their school administrator(s) took violence directed against teachers by students with special needs seriously. Once incidences were reported, many teachers indicated experiencing the following:

- incidences not/inadequately addressed by administration
- administration not supporting/blaming teachers and/or siding with parents
- student behaviour excused or ignored because student has special needs

NOW MORE THAN EVER: A NEED TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC ISSUES

The portrait of inclusion in Quebec's English education sector reveals (systemic) problems which are negatively impacting students and teachers alike. Inclusion, in its current form, needs to be re-examined to ensure that the needs of ALL students are met effectively. This goes beyond the exercise of atypical students learning in proximity with typical students. The academic needs of all students can only be met if the right services and support are available to all students and teachers.

