

CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT

**Examining the Program Model, Organizational Structure, and Stakeholder
Perceptions of the Special Education Programs and Services
(With Recommendations)
of School District No. 33 (Chilliwack)**

December 6, 2012

Prepared for the Board of School Trustees

Submitted to Evelyn Novak, Superintendent

Prepared by

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Thanks:

I would like to state my thanks to everyone involved in this somewhat detailed review. The author visited 31 school/program sites, met with parents in 82 personal 20-minute meetings (involving 116 parents and in some cases grandparents, family advocates, and children), received and examined about 650 survey. Five twelve hour days were spent meeting parents at the Board office and throughout clerical support was always "on-site."

The process of this review has been a singularly positive one for the author. At every school and program I was greeted with courtesy and much caffeine by staff. Some of the most important and pleasant interactions were unscheduled ones in hallways, at the back of classrooms and in staff rooms. Senior staff responded positively and quickly to every request.

From time-to-time people had strong opinions they wished to express (and did) - but at no time was I made to feel anything less than respected and well-treated.

It would be unfair to single out individuals for their courtesy, help and support, but I will make one exception. My primary "logistical" contact throughout was Judy Simmill (Administrative Secretary) and her support was not only of the highest caliber, it was indispensable. From making a binder of maps showing "the best routes to the schools" to (unasked) loaning me her own GPS device to help me find my way. From a friendly word and smile to good company in the staff room over cold supper, she was always helpful. Even when I got "off schedule" or geographically lost, not only did she re-direct me back on track but even tried to take the "blame" when it was never hers. She deserves special mention and my public thanks.

Section A. INTRODUCTION

A.1 Terms of reference and processes used:

In April, 2012, Susan Edgcombe, District Principal of Student Services for Chilliwack contacted this author. After first consulting with the Ministry of Education for advice she requested a meeting to discuss a possible review of special education programs and services in the Chilliwack School District.

Shortly after, a meeting was held that included Susan Edgcombe, Dr. Michael Audet, the then-current Superintendent of Schools and this author. Agreement was reached about general terms of reference and timelines for a review.

Further e-mail discussion and telephone calls resulted in the shaping of a more refined general process and a description of the “deliverables” for the review. These were subsequently broadened; and enhanced (expanded) methods of parent involvement were agreed to.

On May 4 the following terms of reference were agreed:

“The review will involve detailed analysis of surveys (Chilliwack will be doing them before the end of June, 2012) from various groups including parents, teachers, senior staff, school administrators, itinerant staff and paraprofessional aides. Both statistical and descriptive analysis will be done. ... (there will be) an examination of the degree to which “integrated” versus “segregated” special education programming is offered and the efficacy of the model, along with the degree of “match” between Ministry of Education Guidelines and philosophy and (the Chilliwack) school district.”

The district then proceeded to distribute detailed broad-ranging surveys that were well advertised. Data was tabulated, and when surveys came in after posted deadlines they were always received, added and the data re-done.

The letter explaining the use of the survey (parents, etc.) stated:

We are happy to advise you that we will be reviewing our current service delivery model to students with special needs. This process is important to us as it allows us to see what is working well and plan for areas that need improvement. ...Dr. Carter will gather information, conduct interviews and provide us with a report. Once we have examined the recommendations from the report we will work with a team to develop a three year strategic plan that aligns with our district achievement contract for all students. (signed by Susan Edgcombe, District Principal, Student Services).

The district expressed a strong desire to provide parents with as much opportunity to express their opinions as time would permit. To that end, a day was set aside in which parents could schedule twenty-minute personal and private interviews with the author. To maximize this opportunity, the author suggested that days running from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm be used (important for families whose work hours required evening meetings). The first day filled very quickly and then two more days were added. When those also

filled, the contract was modified to permit an additional two days (for a total of 60 hours of meetings). A further day was requested by the district, but the author's schedule did not permit it.

Survey data was accumulated and tabulated and the author spent two days in August, 2012 analyzing the data, looking at it by respondent groups (parents, teachers, etc.) and reading all anecdotal comments. Anecdotal comments were subjected to a standard "thematic clustering" process and numeric frequency values were assigned to all themes both "positive" and "negative."

Thirty-one (of the listed 32) school and program sites were physically visited between mid September and mid October. From 1.5 to 3.0 hours were spent at each site (depending on size). In each case visits started with a meeting with school administration and typically then included meetings with special education staff, some classroom teachers, aides and some delightful spontaneous interactions with students. Notes were kept for each meeting and were subsequently analyzed thematically and tabulated.

Individualized meetings with parents (in twenty minute blocks) took place on five (12 hour) days in late October – mid November. For each interview, notes were kept and each meeting concluded with a request to "rate" satisfaction with district special education services for each child (or children) represented by the family. Notes were subsequently thematically coded and analyzed.

For every meeting (at school and program locations) and with parents meetings were preceded by a brief outline of the purpose of the meeting (to facilitate the district special education review) and it was explained that all comments would be anonymous in that no reference would ever be made to a specific school, staff member, parent or child.

Further, district documents relevant to special education were read and compared to the Ministry of Education expectation as expressed in:

- Special Education Services – A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines
- Special Needs Student Order M150/89
- Individual Education Plan Order M638/95
- Student Progress Report Order M191/94
- Support Services for Schools Order M282/89
- Section 11 of the School Act (BC)

A.2 The context of the Ministry Manual especially as related to "inclusion":

It is noted that expectations of the Ministry with respect to special education have been made clear to districts since the Provincial Special Education Review of 1993-94. Since then the "*Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines...*" has published and regularly revised. The most recent copy of the Manual is that kept on-line by the Ministry and that is available to the public. It is not infrequent that changes are made to the Manual and the Ministry is careful to draw such changes to the attention of senior special education managers (often through the auspices of the B.C. Council of Administrators of Special

Education - BCCASE) (it is noted that Chilliwack is a commendably active member of that Council).

The Manual is the clearest and most detailed expression of the Ministry's expectations for special education service delivery and is also the print basis on which Ministry special education compliance "audits" are done (through the Accountability and Standards Branch).

Basic to an understanding of Ministry expectations for all school systems in B.C. is the policy of "inclusion." Inclusion is defined by the Ministry as:

"...the principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs... (but) inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with full integration into regular classrooms, and goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and the promotion of interaction with others."
(p. 2)

There is at times considerable confusion in the general public as to what is intended by the term "inclusion." It is explicitly not true that there is an expectation that all children should be in regular classes all the time. Ministry documents allow for and even anticipate that individual school districts will make decisions about inclusion across a "continuum of services" model.

Never mentioned in the Ministry documents but inherent in accepted "best practices" in special education is the concept of the "*cascade of services*" model in which special education is organized along the lines of a pyramid – with the broad base being regular class placements with some supports and the apex being high specialized and even segregated programs. The model accepts that for most children full-time integration into regular classrooms with appropriate supports is the best option when it can be arranged.

Some segregated programs are operated in districts, but it is essential that all programs are examined for their efficacy based on data-driven models. Districts usually consider segregated programs only where they are clearly indicated by need and carry them forward only where their effectiveness is supported by data. If not effective they should be ended.

A.3 Structure of this report:

This report is somewhat more complex than others done for districts in B.C. recently. That is primarily because of the strong emphasis this district placed on obtaining detailed information from parents (both survey and interview) and the request that all schools and programs be visited (only one was missed for logistical reasons).

The report will therefore present data/information under a series of headings and reserve analysis of that data to the end of the report (Section E "Discussion") followed by recommendations for district consideration (Section F "Recommendations").

Section B. OVERVIEW OF THE DISTRICT

Please note that throughout enrollment and prevalence data is that reported by the Ministry and for accuracy of comparison on occasion 2010/11 data (from the most recent complete data sets) will be used.

Chilliwack is a moderately sized school district in the upper Fraser Valley. The 2011/12 enrollment was reported by the Ministry as 13,344 students. Students with “categorized” disabilities (reported on the Ministry 1701 form) for the same school year are (with incidence as % indicated). *Note: there is minor variation with Ministry incidence rates within a school year, but it is not statistically significant.*

Ministry Category (2011/12) data	Number	Incidence
Physically Dependent/Deafblind	25	0.18%
Moderate-Profound Intellectual Disability	59	0.42
Physically Disabled/Chronic Health Impaired	215	1.54
Visually Impaired	9	0.06
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	17	0.12
Autism	154	1.11
Intensive Behaviour/Serious Mental Illness	89	0.64
Mild Intellectual Disability	36	0.26
Gifted	84	0.60
Learning Disabled	419	3.01
Moderate Behaviour/Moderate Mental Illness	116	0.83
TOTAL CHILLIWACK	1,223	9.17%
TOTAL PROVINCE	57,250	10.04% *

The district offers an array of school and district-based special education services. Common in-school services include learning assistance and resource teacher programs. There are a number of alternate programs and a large distance learning program that provides significant services to students with special educational needs. At the district level the special education structure (for 2012/13) is reported as (not all are full time positions and ELL/ESD are not reported as special education in this report).

Note: Atypically for a district this size, the immediate senior administrator is a District Principal who reports to a Director of Instruction (in many districts this size there would be a Director of Special Education). Special education programs in any district consume a large amount of the total budget and carry significant risks associated with interpreting and implementing Ministry policy procedures and guidelines, being alert and responsive to the needs of students, parents and schools, and being prepared to substantiate special education financial claims. Districts must be fully prepared for Ministry enquiries and potential audits and this required considerable technical vigilance. There is also a high (and increasing) risk of litigation around special education. It is for all these reasons that a strong, accurate and active link to senior management is necessary.

* per “2012 B.C. Education Facts” (BCTF Information Services, p. 14).

District Principal
3 coordinators: ELL/ESD, High Incidence and Low Incidence
6 ELL/ESD Itinerant Teachers
3 School Psychologists
3 Occupational Therapists
6 Itinerant teachers: Hearing, Hospital/Homebound and Gifted, District Counselor,
Intervention Support, Reading Intervention Support, Vision
4 Braillist Educational Assistants
7 Speech Language Pathologists
3 Speech Language Assistants
2 clerical support

Incidence rates by Ministry special education category are reported for all districts in B.C. annually and comparisons are often drawn among districts and especially between each district and the provincial average. This permits the Ministry to track changes in incidence over time and is often the basis for Ministry questioning and often audits.

Numbers (and therefore incidence percentages) vary from year to year reflecting changes in the overall general enrollment (against which prevalences are measure as a percentage), the graduation or moving of special education students to other districts, and the arrival of kindergarten children. Diagnoses made during the year will also effect Ministry mid-year reporting.

The most recent complete data available is presented here. Data is presented for the last three years (to show any recent trends) and then the 2011/12 incidence and provincial incidence is given. Chilliwack incidence is based on most recently calculated total enrollment of 13,878.

Ministry Category	Chilliwack # children				Chwk % 2012/13	Prov. % 2012/13	Chwk v. Prov (> < -)
	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13			
Phys Dep/Deafbl	16	20	25	21	0.15	0.12	>
Mod-Prof. Intel.	72	64	59	49	0.35	0.34	>
Phys. D/Chr.Hlth.	166	197	215	243	1.75	1.32	>
Visually Impaired	9	11	9	11	0.08	0.06	>
Deaf Hard-of-Hrng.	19	18	17	17	0.12	0.19	<
Autism	136	156	154	153	1.10	1.15	>
Int. Beh./S.M.Ill.	136	129	89	95	0.68	1.26	<
Mild Intell. Dis.	49	34	36	38	0.27	0.39	<
Gifted	68	73	84	86	0.62	1.18	<
Learning Disabled	366	418	419	412	2.97	3.35	<
ModBeh/M/M/Ill.	134	105	116	119	0.86	1.05	<

Section C. COMPARATOR DISTRICTS

This report will examine key elements of district special education expenditures by comparing Chilliwack's spending to the Ministry reported provincial average and to five additional "comparator" districts. These comparator districts were selected primarily for similarity in general pupil enrollment. In addition three were chosen within the Fraser Valley and two from the Interior of B.C. Districts selected and their 2011/12 enrollments were:

<u>District</u>	<u>pupil enrollment</u>
Chilliwack	13,344
Abbotsford	18,472
Langley	16,038
Maple Ridge	14,454
Prince George	15,017
Kamloops	14,506
Province of B.C.	555,414

Comparison of allocation of funds to sped by comparator districts and province on key variables.

Note: between-district comparisons of financial costs of special education services are difficult in that while there is "discrete" funding based on a per-child (Ministry 1701 report) calculation for the "low incidence" students, not since 2002 has there been such funding for high incidence students (MID, LD, Gifted). The Ministry places support funds for those programs with a more general context but notes that "funds are provided".

It is not allowed for a district in B.C. to spend less on special education than it receives and all districts spend more than they receive (as reported annually by the Ministry) in their summary "Tables."

Local data shows that the district's total expenditures on all budgeted special education is approximately \$14.24 million for the 2011/12 school year, while levels 1, 2 and 3 (special education "discrete" funding) totals 10.04 million. This is expenditure in excess of discrete revenue of about 4.2 million (41.79%). Revenues for levels 1 – 3 are as follows:

Level 1	\$915,000.00
Level 2	\$8,308,000.00
Level 3	\$818,000.00
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>\$10,042,000.00</u>

While accurate data is not available, examination of a comparator study done for the Delta school district in 2010 shows that the level of over-expenditure is probably within the lower average range for the province.

One reasonable method of comparison is to look at the general enrollment of a district, the rate at which a district is growing or declining in general enrollment, then examine the total special education expenditures (per Ministry reports) and calculate the special education reported expenditure divided by the gross enrollment giving a “benchmark” among districts. *This is done here:*

Table 1

District	2011/12 report year budget enroll	change from previous year (%)	grand total sped expend. (millions \$)	sped expenditure div. by budget enrollment (\$)
33 (Chwk)	13,344	1.4	14.65	1,098
34 (Abb)	18,472	(0.1)	24.63	1,333
37 (Lang)	16,038	(0.4)	24.57	1,532
42 (MapR)	14,454	(2.2)	22.69	1,570
57 (PGeo)	15,017	(1.7)	17.93	1,194
73 (Kam)	14,506	(3.1)	17.14	1,182
99 (BC)	555,414	1.1	727.40	1,309

This comparison shows that among the comparator districts, Chilliwack (the only one experiencing general enrollment growth in this group) expends the least amount. Having said that, Chilliwack is spending above the provincial average on sped (by about 16.1%). Expenditures above the money provided by the Ministry for sped must be “internally found.”

One primary division of sped expenditures reported by the Ministry is that dedicated to “professional” versus “paraprofessional” supports (EA). Different districts seek different balances between the two and there is absolutely no “best practice” formula. Comparison among the same districts is informative (See Table 2).

Table 2 shows that among comparator districts, Chilliwack expends a similar amount (as a %) on EAs as does Abbotsford, Maple Ridge and the Province. It expends less than Langley, Prince George and is almost exactly at the Provincial average.

For professional staff Chilliwack is expending less than the Prince George, Maple Ridge or the Provincial average but more than Abbotsford, Langley and Kamloops.

Table 2

District	2011/12 EA costs (millions \$) Min Tbl 16	2011/2012 EA costs as % of total sped	2011/12 Prof costs (millions \$) Min Tbl 23	2011/12 Prof. costs as % of total sped “other prof.”
33 (Chwk)	7.07	6.3	2.22	2.0
34 (Abb)	10.82	6.3	2.77	1.6
37 (Lang)	10.94	7.7	2.45	1.7
42 (MapR)	8.51	6.5	2.77	2.1
57 (PGeo)	10.02	7.9	3.11	2.5
73 (Kam)	6.72	5.3	2.40	1.9
99 (BC)	327.92	6.4	111.95	2.2

Section D. DATA OBTAINED:

D.1 Comparison of district special education documents to Ministry standards/expectations:

A wide array of district documents were collected and examined. Included were pamphlets, handbooks, district web-based documents and several other major print documents. The largest documents were:

- Chilliwack School District “Student Services Special Education Resource Manual (Revised) (2010)
- Chilliwack School District Crisis Management Handbook (Revised 2012)
- Community Suicide Intervention Protocol (Revised 2010)
- Violence Threat Risk Assessment (2012)

Comments: It is the author’s conclusion after a detailed reading of the above listed documents plus many others (including pamphlets) that the Chilliwack School District has current and very comprehensive print (and in some cases electronic) documents related to special education. The district has developed a Resource Manual that provides staff with an easily accessible and usable (well ordered, tabbed) resource. On a few occasions some Resource Teachers indicated they were not able to find certain documents related to their work, but in each instance it appeared to be a case of the person “*not knowing where to look.*” In a few instances older versions of more current forms were being used but this was not a common problem.

The special education documentation in the district is thorough and at a level of detail that is much higher than commonly seen in the author’s experience. Considerable care has been taken to develop the paper needed to track children, report needs and facilitate student classifications and classification changes. ***Throughout ALL documents read are entirely consistent with the stated expectations of the Ministry and are of a commendable quality.***

D.2 Survey results (PARENT – critical items):

A total of 291 parent surveys were received (after extending acceptance deadlines and accepting 2 additional surveys presented during the one-on-one parent interviews). The surveys for all groups have been tabulated and are reported in a colour-coded bar-graph format (all now held at the Board Office). Following are determined to be “critical items” by the author – the tabulated results have complete data sets and are highly detailed.

Total number of surveys included	291	(100%)
Child in K – grade 3	53	(18%)
Child in 4 – 7	124	(43%)
Child in 8 – 12	114	(39%)

Q. My child is identified by the district as “special needs”			
Yes	249	(89%)	
No	9	(3%)	
IDK	21	(8%)	

Q. My child has an IEP			
Yes	257	(89%)	
No	10	(3%)	
IDK	4	(1%)	

<i>Scaled items Code:</i>	SA =	Strongly Agree
	A =	Agree
	SmA =	Somewhat Agree
	D =	Disagree
	SD =	Strongly Disagree

Critical Item (parents)	SA	A	SmA	D	SD
	%	%	%	%	%
IEP developed in reasonable time frame	23	40	24	9	4
IEP reviewed on an ongoing basis	23	34	28	11	4
I am offered opp. to have input into IEP	38	41	15	4	1
I am invited to meetings to discuss IEP	49	33	13	4	1
I attend IEP meetings for my child	66	26	14	4	5
The IEP takes into consid. my priorities for child ³⁷	38	19	5	1	
Goals of IEP reflect my child’s needs	36	41	20	3	1
The (program) develops independence	23	46	23	6	1
The (program) develops positive social skills	22	41	30	6	1
The (program) develops child self esteem	21	37	31	7	3
Takes into consid. input from other professionals	21	41	26	11	1
The wait time to receive and assess is reasonable	4	20	32	26	18
My child receives district serv. in reasonable time	5	24	35	26	11
I am satisfied with my child’s safety at school	35	44	14	5	2
School provides a positive, caring and supp. env.	33	44	19	2	1
My child is treated with respect by staff	38	46	14	1	1
My child is treated with respect by other students	16	46	30	7	1
My child is included in school events as appropriate	26	54	17	3	1
In general I am satisfied with my child’s school	30	43	20	6	2

Additional critical items (parent – yes/ no responses)

Critical Item	YES	NO	IDK	Not Appl.
	%	%	%	%
My child receives support from sped or school resource teacher	72	10	13	5
My child receives EA or CCW support	60	17	13	11

Does your child receive support from:	YES %	NO %	IDK %	Not Appl. %	
Teacher of Vis. Impaired	3	–	–	–	
School Psychologist	13	–	–	–	
Speech Language Path.	21	–	–	–	
Physiotherapist	7	–	–	–	
Occupational Therapist	14	–	–	–	
Teach of Deaf /H of Hearing	4	–	–	–	
Special Ed. Technologist	8	–	–	–	
Speech Lang Path. Assistant	3	–	–	–	
IDK	53	–	–	–	
I am satisfied with the amount of service/ support my child receives	13	25	28	23	11
I am satisfied with the type of service/support my child receives	15	31	32	14	8

Anecdotal information (parents):

After transcription, more than 60 pages of single-spaced text emerged. These were carefully read and following accepted procedures “themes” within the comments were detected. Each time a new theme was found it was placed at the heading of a column and then anyone else having an anecdotal response matching/similar to that column was recorded. In some cases no anecdotal comments were made by respondents and in other cases very considerable detail was offered. A single parent response might therefore result in the detection of from 0 to a 5-6 themes. After all anecdotal responses were read, the number of entries under each theme were added and then the themes placed into two categories “positive comments” and “not positive comments.” These were then placed into a frequency rank order for additional examination. *Note: As will be seen, this same process was also used for the other respondent groups. For student services/itinerant staff many question results cannot be pooled because of the very diverse nature of work done among the 17 respondents.*

The rank ordered themes are: (total of all comments = 168)

“positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1	unprompted positive mention of staff by name	45
2.	supports are excellent – pleased	9
3.	pleased this review is occurring	7
4.	district has good special education	4
5.	distance education is very good	2

“not positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	not enough EA time	39
2.	not enough Gifted education	15
3.	general lack of good services	14
4.	teachers lack sped knowledge (special and regular ed)	13
5.	IEPs are done too late and/or poor quality	13
6.	stung pejorative/sarcastic remark	7
7.	lack of SLP service/time	7
8.	lack of autism training	6
9.	too many EA changes (staffing changes)	6
10.	job action (last year) interfered with my child’s education	6
11.	lack of transparency with EA allocation/assignment	6
12.	lack of sped consistency across district	6
13.	problems with transitions within district	3
14.	more sped training offered by district for teachers/parents	3
15.	need more technology for sped	3
16.	resource combined with admin not working	2
17.	lack of safety/emergency plans	2
18.	seniority problems with EA	2
19.	physical space too small for child	2
20.	problems with bus schedules/pick up	2
21.	service gap between elementary and secondary	2
22.	confused about “Dogwood” versus “Evergreen”	1
23.	poor system for service allocation (SEA?)	1
24.	school administrator does not understand sped	1
25.	better “non-verbal” assessment	1
26.	shortened day (for my child) is unfair	1
27.	class sizes (regular ed.) are too large	1
28.	this survey is too long	1
29.	this survey came to me too late	1
30.	First Nations (within sped) not properly recognized	1
	TOTAL	168

D.3 Survey results (EDUCATION ASSISTANT (EA) – critical items):

Total number of surveys included*	126	(100%)
I usually work in K – grade 6	66	(52%)
I usually work in grades 7 – 8	27	(21%)
I usually work in grades 9 – 10	48	(38%)
I usually work in grades 11 – 12	31	(25%)
I am casual	2	(2%)

* some responded to more than one choice

Q. The child(ren) I most often work with are in what Ministry Classification?

This data was not clear as reporting within multiple classifications (or confusion about classifications) was seen, I have therefore chosen not to include it.

Scaled items Code:

SA =	Strongly Agree
A =	Agree
SmA =	Somewhat Agree
D =	Disagree
SD =	Strongly Disagree

Critical Item (EA)	SA	A	SmA	D	SD
	%	%	%	%	%
There is a reasonable amount of collab. time	4	14	19	39	22
Resources are available to meet needs of students with special needs (RT, SLP, EA, etc.)	2	19	50	15	12
District services come in reasonable time	1	15	31	31	15
School provides positive, caring, supportive learning environment	21	51	24	3	1
I am satisfied with my safety when working with students with special needs	12	41	28	15	4
Students w/sp. needs treated with respect by staff	31	47	20	2	0
Students w/sp. needs treated with respect by stud.	8	49	39	3	0

The rank ordered themes (EA) are: (total of all comments = 151)

“positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1	I work with a professional team	12
2.	I know how to talk with/access prof. staff	10
3.	I enjoy working with my assigned child(ren)	10
4.	I am treated well by the other staff	10

“not positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	There is not enough EA time in the district	42
2.	The student(s) I work with do not get enough service	27
3.	There is insufficient funding in BC/District for sped	24
4.	There is no (or not enough) EA collaboration time	22
5.	Teasing or bullying of sped children	9
6.	I do not receive enough hours	5
	TOTAL	151

D.4 Survey results (TEACHER – critical items):

Total number of surveys included	197	(100%)
I am a K – 3 teacher	78	(40%)
I am a grade 4 – 7 teacher	44	(22%)
I am a grade 8 – 12 teacher	49	(25%)
I am a non-enrolling teacher	36	(18%)
I am a teacher-on-call	2	(1%)
I am a Case Manager	19	(10%)

Item	Yes %	No %	IDK %	N/A %
I have one EA working in my classroom	65	23	1	12
I have two EAs working in my classroom	30	57	1	12
I have more than two EAs working...	17	69	2	12

Item	Always	Most	Some	Few	Never	N/A
		times	times			
Goals, obj, strat. of IEP well artic. to me	24	43	20	4	3	6
Offered opp. to input into IEP	55	20	12	3	5	10
Involved in reviewing the IEP	55	18	9	6	8	5
Imp. of IEP possible with resources I have	7	29	40	15	4	4

Scaled items Code:

SA = Strongly Agree
 A = Agree
 SmA = Somewhat Agree
 D = Disagree
 SD = Strongly Disagree

Critical Item (EA)	SA %	A %	SmA %	D %	SD %	N/A
Prof resources are available to meet needs of sped in my class	3	12	35	29	16	5
Dist services received within reasonable time frame	2	9	29	32	19	13
Satisfied with safety of sped children at school	12	40	25	17	4	5
School provides pos., safe, caring for sped	35	50	13	1	1	1
Satisfied with my safety working with sped	16	47	23	10	2	4
Sped students treated with respect by staff	59	34	7	1	0	0
Sped students treated with respect by stdnts.	19	51	28	2	0	1

The rank ordered themes (teachers) are: (total of all comments = 186)

“positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
-	-	0

“not positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	Lack of EA time/support	42
2.	No allocated time to meet/collab.with EAs	27
3.	Feelings of being overwhelmed by sped needs	21
4.	Lack of/insufficient SLP supports	13
5.	Lack of assessment/long wait	12
6.	General lack of sped supports to classrooms	12
7.	Class size too large/teaching load	10
8.	Class composition problems	10
9.	Lack of autism-specific training	7
10.	Lack of OT/PT supports	7
11.	Lack of sped tech. support	6
12.	Physical space issues	4
13.	Need more general sped training	3
14.	Behaviour problem children “draw services”	3
15.	EA turnover/change	2
16.	I lack knowledge of inclusion	2
17.	Why do I have to write IEPs?	1
18.	Lack of teacher preparation time	1
19.	Mentally ill child should not be in my class	1
20.	IEP process too slow	1
21.	Poor EA training (in autism)	1
	TOTAL	186

D.5 Survey results (SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR – critical items):

Total number of surveys	28	(100%)
I am a principal	16	(57%)
I am a vice principal	12	(43%)

Critical Item (EA)

Item	Always	Most	Some	Few	Never	N/A
	times		times			
Goals, objectives and strategies of IEPs are well articulated to me	25	50	17	4	4	0
I attend IEP meetings in my school	29	29	25	4	12	0

Item	Always	Most	Some	Few	Never	N/A
	times		times			
I am involved in IEP reviews	33	29	29	4	4	0
Implementation of IEPs is possible with the resources available	8	46	38	4	0	4

Critical Item (EA)	SA	A	SmA	D	SD	N/A
	%	%	%	%	%	
Staff resources (SLP, EA, OT/PT, Vision, etc.) are available to meet student needs	4	39	30	26	0	0
Students receive service w/in reas. time	9	17	48	26	0	0
My school provides a positive, safe, caring and supportive env. for sped students	59	32	9	0	0	0
I am satisfied with staff safety when working with students with sp. needs	36	55	5	5	0	0
Sped students treated w/respect by staff	64	36	0	0	0	0
Sped students treated w/respect by students	36	59	0	0	0	0

The rank ordered themes (administrators) are: (total of all comments = 79)

“positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	Staff treat sped student with respect	8
2.	Students in school very sensitive/positive toward sped	7
3.	This review is a good idea	5
4.	Central sped staff are too busy – but do their best	5
5.	I have a good sped staff (RT, LAT)	4
6.	Good psych services but too little – missing id.	3
7.	Given what we have (resources) we do a good job	2

“not positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	Allocation of sped resources not “even”	5
2.	Job action (last year) makes it hard to judge	4
3.	Too many student do not generate EA time	4
4.	Parents demand things we do not have (threaten media)	4
5.	Newer EAs not well-enough trained	4
6.	Too little collaboration time	4
7.	EA support allocation lacks transparency	4
8.	RT system problematic – lack of training in low incid.	3
9.	EA formula is not equitable – “squeakey wheel”	3
10.	We are missing too many kids – lack of i.d.	3
11.	Need to re-visit how EAs hours are calculated	2
12.	Unfair/discouraging media coverage	2
13.	Senior staff should come out more often	2
14.	Need more low incidence/autism specialist support	1
	TOTAL	79

D.6 Survey results (STUDENT SERVICES/ITINERANT – critical items):

Total number of surveys		17	(100%)			
Critical Item (std. services/itinerant)	SA	A	SmA	D	SD	N/A
	%	%	%	%	%	
There is reasonable collaboration time	7	14	50	14	7	7
Other resources (itinerant sped) are avail.	7	29	43	7	7	7
My stud. rec. service w/in reasonable time	7	7	14	43	0	4
I am satisfied with safety of sped students	14	36	14	7	0	29
Schools are positive, caring and supportive learning environment for sped children	14	50	14	7	0	14
I am satisfied w/my safety working with children with special needs	21	36	14	7	0	21
Sped students are treated w/respect by staff	21	50	14	0	0	14
Sped students are treated w/respect by other students	14	50	21	0	0	14

“positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1	People work very hard at their jobs	5
2.	Sped students treated with respect by staff/students	4
3.	Staff are doing the best they can with the resources they have	3
4.	Sense of team among itinerants	3
5.	Staff are well meaning and want the best for children	2
6.	Senior staff good at making funding understandable	1
7.	There is a passion for special education services	1
8.	“Typical” children very tolerant and welcoming	1
9.	School staff treats itinerants well	1
10.	Some EAs are excellent	1

“not positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	Not enough EA time in system	6
2.	IEP process needs to be simpler/faster	2
3.	Hard to keep kids in class and out of halls	2
4.	Significant variation in program styles school-school	1
5.	Too much use of shortened day/year	1
6.	EAs change too often	1
7.	Behaviour needy children draw services from others	1
8.	Need EAs with specialty recognition e.g. Autism	1
9.	Itinerant caseloads are too high	1
10.	General workload is too high for itinerants	1
11.	Resource Teacher split w/ Admin not working well	1
12.	Clerical time too low – itinerants doing own clerical	1
13.	Student services is understaffed	1
	TOTAL	42

D.7 Parent Meetings: (20 minute scheduled meetings at parent request):

Parent meeting days	5
Parent scheduled time per meeting	20 minutes
Number of meetings held	87
Number of parents/grandparents/guardians	116
Number of friends/advocates/consultants	7
Number of children included at request	12
Number of written documents received	6

Procedure:

The district broadly advertised the meetings and Student Services clerical (and other) staff took requests, organized schedules, phoned to remind/confirm, filled in cancellations and “no shows,” and were present to meet parents from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm.

Parents sat in a quiet and private room. The author greeted them, introduced himself and gave a roughly two minute introduction in which:

- The purpose of the review was explained
- Author gave a precis of his own background/experience
- Guaranteed anonymity explained (indicating each interview was numbered)
- Enquired about the number of children in the school district, their grades and any designated special educational needs
- Parents were invited to share anything they wished (and the author took notes and highlighted key statements)
- At the close parents were invited to assign a “number” to their satisfaction “with the sped services (each child) has received over approximately the last 12 months on a scale from one to 10 where one is a ‘train wreck’ and 10 ‘is perfection’....”
- Some parents asked to give two numbers (sometimes for each child) usually indicating that the service in the preceding school year should be assigned a different number than the current year – this was always accommodated and the number written down as the parent watched.”

Two analyses of these data are presented. First, the numbers assigned by the parents are given (with any half points rounded upward). After all meetings were completed the author carefully re-read his notes and highlighted “themes” evident in comments. These were then analyzed exactly as was done for the anecdotal comments on the survey forms and the results presented.

Results of parent ratings: total ratings received in 87 meetings = 161**Ratings assigned (request was for 1 – 10 as described)**

Rating Assigned	Number	%
0 (as requested)	1	0.6
1	10	6.2
2	11	6.8
3	10	6.2
4	7	4.3
5	20	12.4
6	28	17.4
7	21	13.0
8	21	13.0
9	16	9.9
10	16	9.9
TOTAL	161	99.7 (rounding)

Clustered results (following a commonly used procedure scores were clustered as follows): Per cent in each rating group:

Parent rating “low” (0-3)	32 (19.9%)
Parent rating “moderate” (4-6)	55 (34.1%)
Parent rating “high” (7-10)	74 (45.9%)
TOTAL	161 (99.9% - rounding)

The rank ordered themes (parent interviews) are: (total of all comments = 205)

“positive comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	Very pleased/mention staff by name	47
2.	Positive mention of specific program/school	7
3.	E.A. system works well	3
4.	Good transitions	2

“negative comments”

Rank Order	Theme	number comments
1.	Poor transitions/file/IEP transfer	18
2.	Poor Res. Teacher model/services	10
3.	Poor staff knowledge of autism/other low incidence	8
4.	Lack of school psych/waiting list/needed private	8
5.	Lack of special education funding	7
6.	Parents need more/better system information	7
7.	Very negative/pejorative comment about district	7
8.	Lack of/insufficient SLP time	6
9.	Too many sped staff changes	5
10.	Poorly trained EAs	5
11.	Inconsistent EA allocations	5
12.	Lack of EA time	5
13.	EA seniority issues interfere with program	5
14.	I am not being listened to	4
15.	Unwilling to include/listen to parent consultant/service	4
16.	District does provide good sped services	4
17.	EA runs/manages program (negative)	3
18.	IEP poor quality	3
19.	Children not taught self-advocacy	3
20.	Need more alternate programs	3
21.	Need more work experience for sped	3
22.	IEP done too late	3
23.	Weak regular teacher education in sped	2

24.	“our hours belong to our child”	2
25.	Child placed into hall too much	2
26.	Child sent home too much	2
27.	Poor access to SET-BC	2
28.	District lacks sufficient behavioural programs	2
29.	Need more gifted services/programs	2
30.	Need a sped parent council	1
31.	Problems with bussing	1
32.	Need scent-free zones/schools	1
33.	My child’s day is being shortened	1
34.	Delayed start for my child in September unfair (1 week)	1
35.	Delayed start for my child is September unfair (2 weeks)	1
	TOTAL	205

D.8 Results of School/Site visits:

The author physically visited 31 of a possible 32 school locations/program sites. Visits were scheduled in advance and from 2-4 were done in each working day.

Visits began with a meeting between the author and principal (and often vice principal) and on occasion (as the principal chose) the resource teacher and LAT. If not present these people were often included later in the visit (but not always). In many schools meetings were held with individual EAs (usually informal but on occasion privately and more formally) and also with groups of EAs. In the latter case some were set up by the school administration and in others, EAs themselves requested meetings. Requests were always honored.

In each meeting with the principal (or other staff if a “sit down” meeting were to occur) the purpose of the meeting was explained, and the guarantee was given that this is for the purpose of collecting information to help with my report. Anything said here is confidential in that the names of personnel, children and schools will not be used, and that only broad themes will be looked at in the report and may be reflected in any subsequent recommendations.

These visits were uniformly positive in every way. Staff was friendly and accommodating and appeared very forthright in their comments. On some occasions staff from a meeting asked for “a private word” with the author, and many short but helpful conversations ensued from walking the hallway, visiting classrooms or sitting in the staffroom during breaks.

Detailed notes were kept and then analyzed in a broad thematic manner.

Based on the notes the following are a representative sample of comments heard both positive and negative.

Positive comments: *(not in rank order – but the order first noted – this list is not exhaustive but representative - some similar comments may have been made many times):*

- All our schools feel they are doing a “good job with what they have”
- Schools accept that inclusion of students with special needs often presents challenges in terms of support services, class composition, and work load (especially IEPs and associated meetings) – that’s reality
- Addition of a work experience coordinator has been excellent!
- We get our fair share of EA (and other services) but it is not and never will be enough to meet the needs
- The new Universal Planning Tool takes some getting used to but we are starting to like it
- Overall Chilliwack sped is good but we struggle like all districts do
- Inclusion is our goal – we try to include and do it pretty well
- Inclusion is not just about space – it is about attitude and ours is good
- District sped structure (Board Office) is pretty clear and they try very hard to get back to us when we need them but they are swamped
- We get some additional training (in Autism) but need way more
- Student Services Binder is helpful
- Inclusion in this district is “first rate”
- SBT process works well here
- Student Services in-services are good (but sadly are poorly attended)
- Speech aides have been a God-send
- Partnership between Alt. Ed and Dist. Is improved
- Partnership (with our local Middle School) is great!
- We have an outstanding SBT here
- Senior admin try hard to be responsive to us
- Sped Binder is good (but not always up-to-date)
- Our itinerants work very hard and are great!
- Senior staff are always approachable and work hard
- Paperwork in the district is clear but very time consuming
- Inclusive staff “I have never heard a teacher say ‘no.’”
- Our school psychologist is amazing!
- If I call the Board Office I get heard and get an answer
- We know whom to call – they may not have much to give us though
- Relations with our parents is very good
- District does the best they can with what we have – other places have more problems
- Easy to get to senior staff
- Sped is pretty good here in the district and very good in this school
- I like Chilliwack and it is better (than recent previous district)
- The district appears open to new sped ideas
- Easy to get to district office (but overwork slows turnaround)
- Emails from Central Office are good – very clear
- New work experience is a great addition – well received
- The district is not stagnant and resting on it laurels
- Central admin. are patient and non-judgmental
- School sped team dynamic is excellent

- Paperwork has been reduced/streamlined of late
- FVDL is a helpful “last resort” for some kids
- Overall the district values inclusion and does it pretty well
- (regular education) students very accepting of sped
- Itinerants are very, very good but scarce
- PT/OT has been so helpful
- SLP is excellent and the aide sure helped us a lot (SLP aide)
- Working hard (as a school) at the RTI model
- If we need expertise (district level): it is there but you have to wait a long time for it to come... stretched!
- CAST is very good
- RT/LAT hybrid is good – works well
- Great staff and exceptional EAs in our school
- Psych service is great but you wait too long!
- Student services is soooo careful about paperwork so we are “safe”
- We are pretty good as a district in sped and I think improving
- POPARD training sure helped our EAs
- Emergency response supports are pretty good
- BCCASE series has been used and was good
- We try hard to be ready for audits here
- This district and school has a “huge heart for inclusion”
- New “drop box” is great – really needed it.
- Glad the review is being done – shows transparency

Not Positive comments: *(not in rank order – but the order first noted – this list is not exhaustive but representative some similar comments may have been made many times):*

- We desperately need more money for EAs
- Our sped space is old and crowded
- We need enough EA time to do the job – we don’t have it
- Process for detecting “H” is far too stringent
- Negative stories (in media) are unjustified and discouraging to staff
- More allocation of resources based on “SES” of school
- Need more emphasis on life skills for sped
- We are missing too many “R” and “H” children
- Question consistency of service levels across district for high incidence
- Feel that the ability of principal to “yell ...murder yields extra supports more than actual need”
- A crisis at one school is not one at another – consistency of reporting needs
- District needs a consistent voice to respond to “co-ordinated parent requests”
- EA scheduling is irregular from school to school – need better guidance
- Inefficient EA scheduling in some schools
- How about assigning experienced mentors to new staff?
- We need a “go to” person for ASD-Low Incidence we are big enough to need more of this
- CAST system is good sometimes but is not a strong model
- Excessive central scrutiny of behaviour category – fear of audit is too big

- Why is there not a special education committee to advise?
- Lack of local outside agencies messes up “H” and the children are here regardless and “eat resources and draw resources”
- EA posting process is too slow and there are too many gaps and it gets worse
- Need more SLP help badly
- A lot of Alt Ed. children are undiagnosed and therefore unclaimed “R” and “H”
- Interface with community agencies is “glitchy”
- It is hard to make the time to get people to complete classification files
- We can’t get enough SLP and psych time for assessment – frustrates schools and parents
- RT ratios are too high
- Binders get out of date....
- Need specific help and training in Autism – that is the big one – that and undiagnosed behaviour
- Does the Board have and show faith in the district?
- High turnover and non-replacement of SLP – we are so short of SLP!
- Allocation of EAs needs transparency – is it who you know?
- High turnover within all areas of sped – is this “the canary?”
- Need large wheelchair capable bus
- Tough to defend yourself when public criticism – morale is hurt
- We only get 3-4 psych assessments per year – not enough
- How can a child be classified in another BC district but not here?
- Behaviour kids draw things from others – need more behaviour supports and behaviour EA hours
- CAST is well intentioned but did not help – too stretched
- Behaviour children are “time suckers” they suck resources dry
- EAs not released for consultation diminishes their perceived value
- We lack EA substitutes
- Need a single admin. For Alt Ed. – not split up
- Too many RTs are admin who are not trained in sped and do not know what to do about low incidence
- Central office tasks have been slowly downloaded onto schools
- Formula for EAs is too complex and not transparent
- Reduce paperwork is needed
- Need to catch more unclassified kids – missing funding
- Need more LAT hours
- Children with mental illness are almost impossible to help – need expert help for them

SECTION E. DISCUSSION

The data accumulated for this report is very large (and is much larger than any other such study in B.C. with which I am familiar). The Chilliwack School District wished to have all (not a sample) of schools/programs visited and wanted to provide parents with considerable opportunity for giving feedback both in writing (surveys) and in person (individual meetings with the author).

While the pages preceding provide a detailed summary of the data and examples of comments received in writing and verbally, it remains for the author to try and bring together his whole experience over the 22 days spent working on this report into a synthesis and then make reasoned recommendations for the district to consider.

Throughout, an effort was made to discover “themes” indicative of district strength and areas for improvement. All individual comments (written and verbal) were taken into consideration but at the end, individual comments must be taken within the context of a desire to find themes.

For example, the rating parents gave the district ranged from a single “zero” (outside the scale but requested) and 13% of parents rating the district at a “one” or “two” through to almost a third of parents who rated it from “eight” to “ten” with 9.9 % giving it the highest mark of ten. Clearly it is seen that for some parents there is a distinct lack of satisfaction and for others very high satisfaction.

A consistent issue among parents is a strongly perceived shortage of EA hours – this is shared broadly within the professional and para-professional community as well. This in itself does not necessarily constitute a shortcoming of the district but must be examined in the light of the overwhelming problems with sped finances experienced right across the province. The author’s own experience as a senior manager in two large school districts (spanning many years) suggests that the same concern would be expressed ten years ago.

A number of professional respondents and some parents said *“we do the best we can with what we have but we do not have enough”* or *“the (district) does the best with what it has but it does not have enough.”* As opposed to this is the perception among only a few professionals that resources are unfairly distributed and among a few parents that *“my child is entitled to their own aide time and if it is shared it is being stolen – it came to the district for my child.”* It is not and never has been the case that special education funding calculated by the Ministry from the 1701 form generates funding for a particular children – but that perception persists and does in all districts.

Persons reading the thematic summary of comments might feel their individual comment has been “missed” but barring an error by the author, they have not been – however they have been categorized together by theme and examined for frequency. That many people share the same comment (positive or negative) does not prove any point but it most certainly suggests that the theme is important and needs careful scrutiny since it may hold the kernel for good recommendations.

The broadest facts/themes I see in the aggregate of all data (parent, teacher, EA, administration, itinerant) are:

1. Like all districts Chilliwack faces challenges with special education costs and services. It is a medium-sized district and one of the few in B.C. experiencing growth in enrollment. It has a history of providing complex special education programming and has made changes over time in an effort to deal with evolving needs and financial constraints. It is expending (based on Level 1, 2 and 3 discrete funding) almost 42% more than it receives for special education – and this is very common. **Chilliwack is not unusual in this respect and variation across the province is great. It must be remembered that when additional funds are supplied they “must come from somewhere else.”** The struggle with finances is recognized by most people.

2. Chilliwack reports about 9.25% of its student population as being within special education categories (more than 1,200 children) – a large and diverse group.
3. Chilliwack has recently moved to “de-centralize” some of its special education services by following a school-based Resource Teacher model, while retaining centrally some (but very few) highly specialized staff. The functional head of special education is a District Principal reporting to a Director of Instruction. In a district this size this is not typical.
4. Chilliwack’s incidence rates (by 1701 category) contains some anomalies. For low incidence categories like deaf, blind, physically dependent, autism, vision etc. the numbers appear right around provincial averages (commonality among these is that they are “diagnosed” usually before a child reaches school and from outside the school system). For others the numbers are much below (mild intellectual, gifted, and moderate behaviour) and for one they are significantly below (Intense Behaviour Intervention/Serious Mental Illness).

For the latter (category “H”) the local incidence rate of 0.64% is 48.8% below the provincial average and has been generally declining in all years but the current where it has risen). “H” is a difficult category to demonstrate for funding purposes because of the Ministry rubrics around “outside” services *and these have recently been made more challenging to meet*. Some districts have more problems with this category because their surrounding (not school district run) infrastructure is “thinner” than in other areas. Parental unwillingness to take or even refer their children can also be a problem. It is noted that within “H” there is a drop of 47 children between 09/10 and the current year (drop of 34.5%) in a period of slow district growth. It is recognized that some of the students who have left the “H” category were correctly moved into category “D” as supporting reports were received from Sunnyhill and other sources. **Category “H” remains problematic for the district and its implication for overall sped funding is significant.** Students with significant behaviour problems are repeatedly mentioned by staff and parents as “drawing” service away from other children, and this personally was seen during site visits. **The Ministry has in recent years shown exceptional diligence around category “H” and I note that in Chilliwack the latest Ministry “rules” appear to be most carefully followed.**

5. Comparison of Chilliwack to the five comparator districts and the Provincial average shows that overall sped expenditures while being about 42% over combined revenue for Levels 1, 2 and 3 is the lowest among the comparators all of whom are over-expending by even more.
6. District documentation both print and on-line is thorough and highly detailed. It is entirely consistent with Ministry philosophies and is at a standard well above the average – **it is in fact commendable.**
7. Parents overall are satisfied with the sped services their children receive, but they are far from unanimous. The author was impressed by the candor of parents both on the surveys and in-person. Many parents went out of their way to come in to state their satisfaction with services and to single out staff, schools and programs by name. Some other parents were not at all satisfied and were able to articulate their reasons. Overall ratings on the parent surveys were a strong match to those expressed in the personal meetings. This is perhaps best captured on page 20 of this report. About 20% of parents rate overall services as “low” while more than 45% rate it “high”, with about a third being “in the

- middle.” It is noted that some low ratings were aimed primarily at perceived lack of funding by the Ministry but some were directed only to the district. Parent satisfaction with special education in B.C. has been in apparent decline for some years as financial constraints challenge districts to match services to student needs.
8. Key parental concerns detected (where more than 10% reported dissatisfaction) were the speed of IEP development, IEP reviewing issues, and wait times for assessment – both SLP and school psychology, as well as slowness in receiving district services once assessment is done. Many parents experiences with IEP issues was still centered on the “job action” during the 2011/12 school year and are not applicable to the current school year (but considerable residual parent unhappiness was encountered).
 9. Key EA concerns detected (more than 10% report dissatisfaction) were insufficient collaboration time, lack of resources, speed of response with district resources, and concerns about personal safety when working with children.
 10. Key teacher concerns detected (more than 10% report dissatisfaction) were lack of professional resources, and speed of receiving district services (wait times). In addition many concerns were anecdotally made about a need for “more EA time.”
 11. School administrator concerns detected (more than 10% report dissatisfaction) were lack of staff resources (especially itinerant), and speed of service delivery. These were identified with *very strong* dissatisfaction levels (56% and 74% respectively) and anecdotal comments identified wait lists for school psychology, SLP and especially support for low incidence children (with autism being mentioned most often) as special problems.
 12. Students Services/Itinerant staff concerns (more than 10% report dissatisfaction) were lack of collaboration time, need for more itinerant supports (especially low incidence/autism) and delays in students receiving services after assessments are completed.
 13. Parent in-person interviews showed that Chilliwack has many excellent staff and common comments mentioned the overall quality of service and approachability of regular education teachers, special education itinerants, aides, and administrators. Where parents had seen positive improvements in their child’s program they often identified individuals who had “*listened to me carefully and then acted quickly.*” Many parents were careful to single out the importance of having school administrators who “*paid attention*” to special education in their schools.
 14. A small group of parents (seven) made their feelings clear in the strongest terms (pejorative). Those parents often shared the feeling that either (a) their own outside consultants/experts were not valued or were blocked from involvement at the school, (b) that the Ministry was sending funds (especially for EAs) “dedicated solely for their child” (*literally by name*) and that the district was “moving my child’s money and using it elsewhere.” This notion is incorrect and always has been, but the belief persists in some.

15. Transition points (movement of a child between physical locations as in a move from elementary to middle) were often identified as problem points for a child. Reference to “*files/IEPs not being read*” (at the receiving school) were the most common. This observation was confirmed in several site visits – transitions are well known as a problem points in special education.
16. Issues around and about autism are one of the most common sources of dissatisfaction; but it should be noted that such feelings are not general across this category – in other words many parents of children with autism appear well satisfied with the district, but within the category a disproportionate minority are not. This is seen as the pattern across the province but it in no way excuses the issues attached to autism.
17. Some parents, teachers and administrators show concern about how EA resources are allocated. Some perceive the process of allocation as being “too mathematical” and not allowing for “unique” circumstances. There is some limited but strongly held belief that additional EA allocation from time to time occur because of the stridency with which the case is made by staff and parents – leading to distortions in the distribution of a clearly value resource.
18. The recent development of the use of “speech aides” was widely applauded. The use of such aides permits both more direct intervention (under professional guidance) and frees more SLP time for assessment and other professional functions.
19. The CAST program received some positive comments as well as some less positive. Problems with waiting times and the “concreteness” of recommendations were mentioned but in some schools CAST was generously praised.
20. Programming for gifted children received spontaneous praise from some staff and parents. A brief examination of the program (on paper) shows it to be creative and innovative.
21. The school-based Resource Teacher model received very mixed reviews. In some places it was well thought of (and praised) but in other places there were concerns. These concerns were noted on surveys, parent interviews and also on site visits. *In no way being critical of the staff doing the RT jobs* (and in recognition of the high praise many received) the following issues are apparent:
 - Resource Teachers are in a key position to lead sped programming for a very mixed school population of children. Being “expert” in a wide range of special education challenges is not possible for anyone, but the greatest weakness (identified by a number of RTs themselves) rests with low incidence children. Problems with understanding the needs of moderately-to-profoundly cognitively and/or physically challenged children, children with sensory impairments, and especially with autism (which by its nature encompasses a huge range of needs) is often overwhelming to RTs. While there is more expert help available centrally (and much praised) it is spread very thin. Many parents of children with marked needs (many of whom have their own therapists, SLPs, etc.) are expert in the child’s needs in particular and on the disability(ies) generally - and expect a high standard of knowledge and leadership from staff.

- Split RT assignments are often complex – putting RT with other teaching roles and very often administration – whenever roles are split (regardless of the field of work) there is a tendency for one role to subsume the other (“*pushing it off my desk*” as one person stated) and many people will naturally put emphasis on the things they know best and lack the time to gain knowledge of the things they know less well. Lack of knowledge can sometimes lead to “*not knowing what you do not know*” and that is a source of frustration to a few parents.
22. Given the districts needs for a large number of RTs (and those with partial assignments creates a very large need numerically) it has not been possible to find as many people with strong special education training as needed – this has led in some instances to people being placed into roles they may not be fully prepared for.
 23. The allocation of EA time is not just an activity for the central office (where hours assigned to schools and “emergency hours” are determined) but once hours arrive in the school, administrators must decide how to best use them. This can be a very complex task as the number of EAs in a school can be large, the number of children in need of supports sizeable, needs widely varied, and schedules complex. EAs must be fitted into the timetable allowing for student needs, physical location, emergency occurrences, required breaks as well as start and stop times, and trying to match child and classroom needs with the skills and abilities of the EA. Most schools appeared to be well and efficiently scheduled as they make use of a resource that is always stated to be in short supply. However, some allocations appear less-than-efficient and there is no observed “system” in use. This is a serious problem in some locations and can lead to the use of emergency EA time to plug gaps that may have been created in part by scheduling problems.
 24. Conflicts have been seen between “outside” supports – often parent-hired and their ability to be involved within the school and even to offer services within the school. These are not wide-spread, but have generated some intense media coverage. The district has a protocol for handling “outside” visitors, but observations in schools showed that it is not always followed and when greater access (even in excess of the protocol) is allowed in one school it is noted by parents and creates problems in other schools. The issue of “outside” (non-district employed) staff working within district facilities has powerful contractual elements and is not within the scope of this report.
 25. The balance between integration and segregation of services seen in the district is appropriate and fully meets the expectations of the Ministry – senior special education staff have an excellent grasp of what the Ministry intends and consistently works to maintain the standards of that expectation. **The “match” between the Ministry Guidelines and the philosophy of the Chilliwack School District is generally excellent.**
 26. The final discussion/observation item I wish to offer is a general comment based on all of my time in the district doing all of the tasks involved in this review:

Chilliwack is a district offering special education services that overall are equal to those seen in most B.C. school districts. This district operates under very tight budget constrains (as do all) and is making careful and thoughtful use of the resources at it’s disposal. There is frustration among staff and parents that is traceable not to flaws in the system or weaknesses in the dedication and best intentions of staff – it is primarily

attributable to what happens when very complex children are included in modern classrooms and resources are very, very tight. At no time can the intentions of parents, teachers, EAs, administrators, itinerants, clerical support or others be challenged. There is a uniform desire to do the “very best with what we have” and I saw that over and over.

Schools and school systems are under stress. Effectively diminished resources in the face of increasingly complex and more frequent needs, class composition challenges, and the passionate wishes of parents lead to problems for any district. There is a massive strength within this district and that is the people – people who not only do their best but seek ways to do even better.

The recommendations I offer next are given in precisely that light.

SECTION F. RECOMMENDATIONS

From these recommendations may come actions as the Board may direct.

Recommendation 1:

If accepted in whole or in part, these recommendations should be directed back to senior staff for consideration, modification, implementation along the lines described below.

Recommendation 2:

The district should promptly form a **Special Education Review Working Committee**. This would be the first step in what the district has already stated would be an outcome of this review:

“... (after) we have examined the recommendations from the report we will work with a team to develop a three year strategic plan that aligns with our district achievement contract for all students.”

I suggest that the Working Committee be small for the initial functions needed and not include anyone but district employees (*parent role to come*). I suggest that it start its work in January/February of 2013.

Membership should include:

- The Superintendent of Schools (*ex officio*)
- The Director responsible for Student Services
- The District Principal of Student Services (chair)
- Three school administration representatives (elementary, middle and secondary)
- One representative for itinerant special education services
- One representative for Education Assistant services
- One representative for Resource Teacher/LAT services

This Committee should meet to consider this report and especially its recommendations (if/as accepted by the Board). I suggest that some intensive time needs to be spent on this work and that the timeline for discussion of the report recommendations be not more than two months. Several initial whole-day sessions might propel the work forward.

The purpose of this Working Committee is to develop some broad vision for the “workability” of the recommendations, estimate the resources (especially financial) needed to implement recommendations and time-lines for implementation. The Working Committee may wish to consult with Financial Services regarding cost estimates and funding sources.

The Working Committee should report their findings to senior management first for refinement and then the results should be presented to the Board of Trustees for consideration. This work can be an important “input” into the three year plan.

Recommendation 3:

The configuration of the school-based Resource Teacher model needs reconsideration and most especially enhanced in-service support.

Special consideration needs to be given to:

- How is adequate training/experience of RTs sufficient to their complex role measured and applied to new positions?
- Critically consider the potential negative impact of split assignments for RTs especially when administrative roles are included. Methods for the “protection” of the “RT portion” of split assignment should be considered. This recommendation does not assume that the RT model is “broken” or even not working very well in most instances – the model may appear good in concept but it is the details that appear to be giving problems *in some locations*.
- RT positions appear to fluctuate *significantly* in many schools from year to year, and to attract fewer well qualified applicants than would be expected. For people with strong background and training in special education (*just who is needed*) the split positions may just not be very attractive.
- More intense in-service for RTs is urged. RT teachers would benefit from increased in-service specially focused on low incidence (and especially on Autism Spectrum Disorder). Planning these sessions should be done carefully with reference to the measured needs of RT teachers, might well utilize the services of POPARD, and should be accompanied with TOC support to cover the RTs attending.
- The district should acquire autism specialist supports. This is perhaps the greatest need seen in school visits and is a source of much concern to some parents. This could be achieved by contracting supports from POPARD or by increasing specialist (low incidence/autism) support centrally. I wish to emphasize this recommendation specifically as I believe it has the potential to have a very positive impact on the education of children and would directly address a well-articulated concern among many staff and parents.

Recommendation 4:

Other districts and the Ministry have recently recognized the challenges faced by administrators when planning for the efficient and effective use of EA time. The Surrey school district recently completed the development of a very concrete model for assisting principals in doing scheduling and allocation, and that model has been recently presented through BCCASE. Maple Ridge has also developed a well-reviewed model. Chilliwack is urged to very seriously look at these models and consider applying one (or a hybrid) of them across the district in the near future (at least pilot in September, 2013). This will require some in-service but Surrey and/or Maple Ridge may well provide it; it is not long and should be very inexpensive.

Recommendation 5:

Category H is problematic. Chilliwack has shown due diligence in following Ministry 1701 reporting rules. This is a legal obligation and the district is commended for following them carefully. However, it may be that Chilliwack is missing some opportunity to claim some “H” children. If so, these children would generate discrete funding that might at least mitigate the “drawing away” of services (especially EA) that is reported and has definitely been observed.

Following rules is necessary and the district has already consulted directly with Ministry staff about this problem. The district should continue to examine whether or not funding can be claimed for children where:

- Children meet in-school criteria for “H” but are on waiting-lists for outside agency services, and
- Where children are not referred to outside services because parents choose not to.

A general relaxing of local procedures for interpreting “H and “R” rules is not suggested and *would likely attract negative scrutiny* – but continued personal conversation (using examples) with Ministry staff is strongly urged. This may or may not allow some changes to Chilliwack’s very low “H” incidence rates and the loss of potential special education revenue.

Recommendation 6:

As the Working Committee proceeds with its analysis of this report it should consider whether it is timely to begin a district-wide use of the British Columbia District Student Services Inquiry Process (2010). This process is known to senior student services staff and has been used in some districts. *However, the Inquiry Process takes from 13 – 16 months to complete.*

I am of the opinion that dealing with the immediate results of the current review will take certainly until next June, and to start the Inquiry Process would significantly distract and use up too much staff time and energy. *I think the Working Committee should consider the Inquiry Process - but my current opinion is that it not be necessary given the work done in preparing this report.*

Recommendation 7:

The Working Committee should consider the formation of a Student Services Advisory Committee. Something similar was done in the past in the district but was dropped. Such a committee commonly includes “stakeholders” in the special education programs of the district such as:

1. District Principal/Director of Student Services (chair)
2. a school Trustee
3. several parent representatives (may include representatives for each of low incidence, autism, sensory impairment, learning disabilities, gifted, etc.)
4. a representative from special education itinerant services (SLP, School Psychology, etc.)
5. a representative from the local principal/vice principal group
6. a representative for the local pre-school/child development programs
7. a representative from the Ministry primarily responsible for adult special education programs (social Worker?)
8. a representative from Community Living B.C.

The author has chaired such groups in other districts and found that on-average one meeting a month is appropriate. Membership may vary according to how groups are organized in and around the district and not all people usually attend all meetings; but all are invited. The agenda is commonly distributed a week or two in advance allowing choice about attendance based on agenda topics. It is common for the Trustee representative to “report out” briefly and orally to the Board on a regular basis at scheduled Board meetings. Meetings most commonly occur once each month on well-advertised dates and occur after regular school hours and usually last 1 – 1.5 hours.

This is a strong recommendation as it provides a good way of measuring progress within special education and determining any issues in advance of them becoming “larger.” Interaction among participants can be very positive and provides a sense of community among stakeholders.

Recommendation 8:

Speech Language Services are very stretched in the district (even with recent additions). The addition of speech aides has been greeted very positively and appears to not only allow more direct intervention with needy children; it frees the SLP to do more investigative/diagnostic/prescriptive work. I recommend that the district move as quickly as practical to have one speech aide per SLP and I strongly recommend this idea.

Recommendation 9:

School Psychology Services are very stretched in the district. Chilliwack’s ratio of psychologist to enrollment is very low (while it varies greatly, a general standard is 1:3,000). Sponsoring Intern Psychologists from UBC is commendable and should continue but at a minimum the district should add one fte psychologist *as soon as*

possible. Waiting lists are chronically long, frustrate parents and staff (and cause many parents to pay for outside evaluations). District incidence rates that are low in some areas are probably at least in part a result of insufficient psychology assessment service (and therefore the district is missing funding) and has unusually low incidence rates in some unfunded 1701 categories. I strongly recommend this idea.

Recommendation 10:

District planned and sponsored in-service needs to target key areas of sped need.

Further simple polling of staff (teachers, EAs and administrators) should be done to identify concrete areas for in-service. Based on this report key areas already detected are (a) IEP writing with clarity around the difference between measurable goals and measurable objectives, (b) autism with practical understandings of the complex presentation of autism (it's variation), understanding social reciprocal interaction issues with autism, working proactively with parent advocates and private service providers, (c) understanding the Ministry of Education Manual of Policy, Procedures and Guidelines (especially as related to 1701 reporting and potential audits), (d) reading and understanding SLP and School Psychology reports, (d) what recent litigation decisions mean for the practice of both regular and special education. Chilliwack has a history of doing good special education in-service already, and it should continue with special reference to these and other identified topics (and especially targeting the needs of RTs).

The additional autism supports mentioned in recommendation 3 (above) would well be the key organizing agent for this in-service.

Recommendation 11:

Morale. All districts are encountering morale problems associated with special education loads. This is true for classroom teacher who struggle with class composition, size and the supervision of EAs, EAs who deal often very closely with many children with serious learning and physical needs, itinerants who struggle to keep up with the demands placed upon them, and the administrative, clerical and other support staff who help it all keep running. There are morale issues around these in Chilliwack as there are in all districts. Demands appear to constantly rise along with expectations while resources appear insufficient and time never really stretches! There is no way to minimize this but to continue to support each other and share that everyone is "doing the best with what they have." I am impressed with how hard people in Chilliwack not only work, but how hard they try on behalf of children. I would love this to be communicated with the system – I have been often impressed and sometimes moved by what I have seen.

Recommendation 12:

Recognition of the important role of EAs (always under the supervision of teachers) and their value in working at programming decisions for children: release time for

consultation is always requested but in the current fiscal climate probably largely unattainable. Nonetheless recognition of the value of EAs involvement goes a long way even in the absence of consultation time. If in the future provincial funding becomes available, consideration of this as a built-in process should be made.

Recommendation 13:

Given the administrative structure of special education in Chilliwack and the recent changes in that structure, discussion at the most senior management level of how to ensure that arguably the most costly, complex and potentially problematic of programs – special education – can have a strongest and clearest voice up to the level of the Board of Trustees. As mentioned earlier in this report, special education is a large portion of the total district budget and has the potential for problems if not proactively and carefully monitored and managed.

Recommendation 14:

Beginning in June, 2013 conduct a regular (but very simple) poll of the parents of students with special education needs as to their satisfaction with services and also asking them to identify areas in need of attention. This should be a short and very simple poll and a fine model has been used with good effect in Delta for many years.

Recommendation 15:

Transitions of student files appear problematic in some cases. All elementary and middle schools should internally review (as directed by the principal) the procedures by which the files of students with special needs (and especially their IEPs) are moved to receiving schools. Receiving schools should be diligent in ensuring that the files are not only received but also read (especially the IEPs) by special education and classroom teachers in a thorough and timely manner.

Thanks,

I have very much enjoyed working in Chilliwack. As mentioned at the beginning, I have been well treated in every way, assisted in remarkable ways, and (with the exception of the commute to/from Cloverdale) enjoyed myself very much!

Respectfully submitted,

David E. Carter, Ed.D.
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