

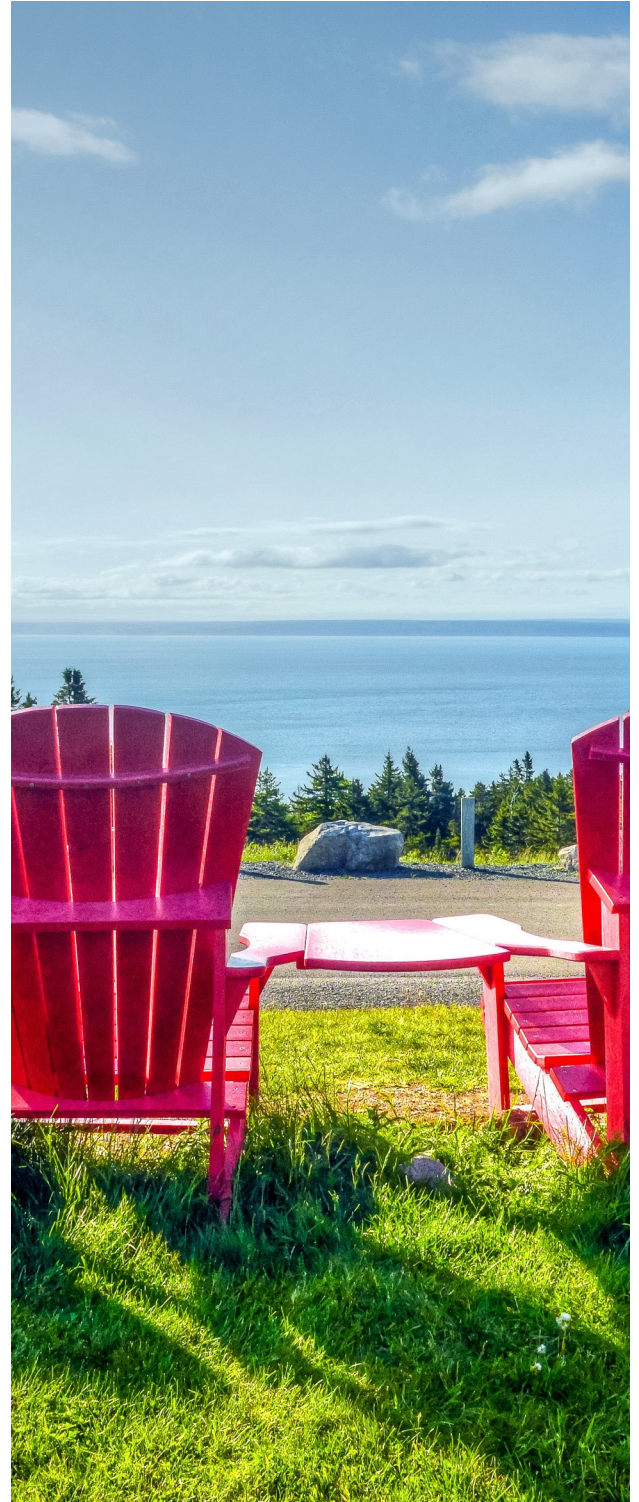
NEW BRUNSWICK - CANADA

The Long Road to Inclusive Schools: In New Brunswick - 40 years and counting ... The New Brunswick Association for Community Living Story

FOREWORD

Gordon Porter writes:

The New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL) is a family advocacy and support group in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. In the 1950s the local associations of NBACL established the first special schools for children with intellectual disabilities. They gradually received increasing financial support from the Ministry of Education but remained partially funded by charitable donations into the 1980s. Increasingly assertive parent voices demanded change and inclusion for their children. During the last 40 years NBACL has been a key factor in initiating and sustaining an inclusive education system in New Brunswick that has drawn positive attention on a global level. In this piece, NBACL's Inclusive Education Specialist, Ben McNamara, shares their story.



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New Brunswick
Association for
Community Living

Association du
Nouveau-Brunswick pour
l'intégration communautaire

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by Ben McNamara, Inclusive Education Specialist, NBACL

We realize that one of the reasons that our daughter Maisey has been having a positive school experience is because of the work that is being done by NBACL. We are fortunate because up until now, Maisey has been doing very well and we have not needed a lot of assistance from NBACL. We realize that is an evolving story and things may change down the road. We are grateful that NBACL is there as a resource for us

- Greg (June 2020)

The New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL) is leading in the creation of opportunities for individuals with an intellectual or developmental disability to live a full and valued life in all aspects of society. The work of NBACL in education has been central to the province's efforts to ensure equal access to quality and inclusive Early Learning, that youth have seamless transitions between schools and when school is complete, and that educators and paraprofessionals have the capacity to support all children within the common learning environment. The work that is done today would have been hard to envision in the past.

New Brunswick's history with inclusive education is one that has overcome challenges and has set many standards for inclusion in Canada and around the world. The work of NBACL has ensured that front-line support for families is accompanied by strong policy initiatives and advocacy at the highest levels of government.





At its core, the work of NBACL is done with the goal to support individuals such as Maisey. NBACL works to ensure that the school system can build capacity to naturally support individuals who have additional needs. This does not mean it is always perfect, but it signifies that NBACL's goal is within reach.

New Brunswick

Situated on the eastern coast of Canada, New Brunswick is one of thirteen provinces and territories. It has a population of approximately 750,000 inhabitants, including Anglophones (2/3), Francophones (1/3), as well as and members of the province's First Nations communities (4%). It is the only province with both French and English as its official languages. In Canada, provinces and territories are responsible for education, in fact, it does not have a national ministry of education. The school system operates in two separate systems, one for each language group and has approximately 300 schools. While there are several small cities in the province, most of the people live in small towns and rural areas. New Brunswick is the second most rural province in Canada.

Hidden Figures

The New Brunswick Association for Community Living was established in 1957 by a number of local associations from around the province whose members saw the benefit of having a provincial federation.

Members included people who had an intellectual disability, family members, professionals, neighbours, and friends. At the time of its creation the organization was called the Canadian Association for Retarded Children – New Brunswick Division. The name was later changed to the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded – NB Division or CAMR-NB for short. The name of the association was changed to the New Brunswick Association for Community Living in 1987, recognizing the problematic former title.

Most local associations, city specific organizations, were created to be sponsoring societies under The Auxiliary Classes Act (1957). These classes provided education and training to students considered unable to benefit from regular education and who were not accepted in the regular school system because they had



an intellectual disability or cerebral palsy. They were assessed by the local mental health clinic and based on their score they went to segregated auxiliary classes in church basements or to another building separate from the regular school system. Many children who had an intellectual disability were deemed to be 'uneducable' by doctors. Auxiliary classes, often run by local associations, gave children 'instruction and training.' Many parents were disappointed by the level of education being taught in the auxiliary classes and felt their children deserved a higher quality of education. Some children were denied entry into the auxiliary classes. For example, children with autism were originally excluded from auxiliary classes until one individual from Lorneville, N.B. petitioned the then Minister of Education to allow her child with autism into the classes.

Over the next twenty-five years Auxiliary Classes were established in many parts of the province. With few exceptions they were operated by local branches of CAMR-NB. But there was growing discontent. Some parents were unhappy with the non-academic "life skills" curriculum in the Auxiliary Classes and felt that their children should be allowed to go to the schools that they supported with their taxes along with other children. Some parents felt that if their children were segregated from other children until age twenty-one they would probably be segregated and isolated for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, some parents felt their children were "safer" in the Auxiliary Classes than they would be in the mainstream school.



From Exclusion to Integration

On May 29, 1982, at the 25th Annual Conference of the New Brunswick Division of the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded, then Premier Richard Hatfield stated that students with mental disabilities and those with special needs had a right to an education. And he promised that his government would integrate those students into the regular school system. This statement by the Premier came one year after the government launched a study of the Auxiliary Classes Act (1981), designed to provide for the education of all children with special needs in the least restrictive environment.

Hatfield's speech was not just a fortunate development; it was the direct result of advocacy and engagement by parents and educators who supported them. The invitation to speak was linked to a strong suggestion that the message supporting integration/inclusion would be enthusiastically received. Advocates then followed up this public commitment by the premier by engaging with senior officials to build the conditions that advanced the effort.



From February to April 1983, the Department of Education sponsored public hearings on the Auxiliary Classes Act, and, in September 1983, the authors of the Correia-Goguen report recommended that the Schools Act and the Auxiliary Classes Act be amended, that a single statute govern special education programs and services, and that free school privileges be offered to all children.

In 1985, the Dr. William F. Roberts Hospital School, an institution for children and youth, was closed. This was coupled with significant investments in community-based programs to support children with intellectual and other disabilities to live with their families or with foster/adoptive families. The Hospital School housed children who were wards of the province who had physical and mental disabilities. Neglect and abuse were staples of the institution.

On June 18, 1986, the New Brunswick Legislature passed Bill 85 amending the Schools Act and repealing the Auxiliary Classes Act. The revised Schools Act marked the launch of the inclusion movement (i.e., the full participation of all students in all aspects of school and community life, without regard to their disability or difficulty).

With the adoption of a new name, the New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL), a decade of advocacy and capacity building ensued. NBACL worked to strengthen parents' confidence that after decades of exclusion and special provision, their child could thrive in an age-appropriate classroom in the community school. Workshops and conferences were held throughout the province attracting parents and teachers, often attending sessions as teams actively working together to learn new strategies to support inclusion. The association found funding to employ a husband/wife team to provide individual support for families struggling to make inclusion possible in their local school. It was especially valuable since the couple were working to have their daughter included in a local high school.

In a Policy Brief in 2005, the New Brunswick Association for Community Living outlined the importance of Bill 85:

In New Brunswick, we have benefited from a legacy of dedication to inclusionary practices for the past three decades. This began with groundbreaking legislation in 1986 with Bill 85, which supported the integrated learning environment within the community school as the primary educational option for all students. Over the years, New Brunswick has been a pioneer in the political and educational support to inclusive schools, but there is still more work to do.

Twenty years after the introduction of Bill 85, the Government of New Brunswick commissioned Wayne MacKay, a nationally recognized scholar and educator, to review inclusion in New Brunswick schools (AuCoin, Porter, & Baker-Korotkov 2020). This report would set the stage for New Brunswick to become an international leader for inclusion, as it outlined the need for

clarity in policies and further work with stakeholders. NBACL played an integral role through the development of policies and formal reviews in advocating for the voices of parents who had a son or daughter with an intellectual or developmental disability. By maintaining a dual strategy of supporting individual parents/families to solve challenges for their child, as well as drawing on those experiences to propose systemic policy and implementation improvements, NBACL claimed a major role in charting New Brunswick's path in education. Ministers of Education and their senior officials were clearly aware of the need to engage with the association when circumstances demanded it.

Policy 322

New Brunswick's legislative commitment to inclusion (Bill 85 in 1986) was the driving factor in the province from the moment it was passed. However, schools were organized in districts or local education authorities (LEAs) that each had their own senior leaders. After Bill 85 was passed the ministry provided guidelines for schools and school districts, but it did not mandate a specific policy for inclusive practices in schools. Since there were two school systems, French and English, organized in 30 or more school districts (LEAs) each developed their own approach to implementing Bill 85. Over time this resulted in a wide variation in how inclusion was implemented in each district and indeed in each school.

In 2011, the Minister of Education established a review of inclusion in NB schools to narrow the diverse policy interpretations and provide



a more focused approach in the province as a whole. The report from this review, *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools*, (2012, Porter & AuCoin) created the context for a province wide policy. In 2013, the Minister of Education of New Brunswick (Hon Jody Carr) signed Policy 322: Inclusive Education. This policy laid out the do's and don'ts for districts, schools and classrooms. It includes the following definition:

Inclusive education is the pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allows each student to feel respected, confident and safe so he or she can participate with peers in the common learning environment and learn and develop to his or her full potential. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centered on the best interest of the student, which promotes social cohesion, belonging, active participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community. These values and beliefs will be shared by schools and communities. Inclusive education is put into practice within school communities that value diversity and nurture the well-being and quality of learning of each of their members. Inclusive education is carried out through a range of public and community programs and services available to all students. Inclusive education is the foundation for ensuring an inclusive New Brunswick society. (EECD 2013)

The policy also recognizes that every student has the right to participate fully in the “common learning environment”, meaning “an inclusive environment where instruction is designed to be delivered to students of mixed ability and of the same age in their neighbourhood school, while being responsive to their individual needs as a learner, and used for most of the students’ regular instruction hours.” Students also have the right to expect that accommodations will be considered and implemented in an appropriate and timely manner and that learning outcomes, instruction, assessment, interventions, accommodations, supports, adaptations, and learning environments will be designed to respect individual learning styles, needs and strengths.



The Community Living (and Learning) Movement

A critical area of focus for NBACL has been to be advocates as well as capacity builders for families so parents have the knowledge, skill and confidence to advocate on their own. This work has not only been done by creating resources but by engaging in direct communication with families regarding their specific situation. This work has included advocating for resources to schools and districts, participating in the province’s *Integrated Service Delivery Model*, navigating complex government structures, and brainstorming with parents and teachers for the best way forward.

NBACL’s vision has been that individuals with an intellectual or developmental disability and their families have full and valued lives in all aspects of society. As an organization, NBACL has worked to create opportunities for individuals and build the capacity of community to include everyone. This work includes supporting educators and paraprofessionals to create an inclusive learning environment for all students.

One example of NBACL’s work to build the capacity of educators is the resource *Creating an Inclusive School: Indicators of Success*. Created in 2010 and revised in 2014, *Creating an Inclusive School* is based on the best practices found in literature, workshops and research on inclusive schools found in New Brunswick and the rest of Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The inspiration for *Creating an Inclusive School* came from a resource tool called *An Inclusive School Culture* that was created by Community Living Ontario. During information sessions presented by Community Living Ontario in 2008, New Brunswick educators and school administrators saw the need for a new tool that better reflected the New Brunswick reality and our history of inclusive education since the mid-1980s.

Achieving an inclusive school goes beyond just developing a value statement that addresses inclusion. It is more than installing a ramp, offering diversity training to staff or deciding to run a workshop on bullying. An inclusive school requires a shift in the attitudes of all the stakeholders as well as the development and use of policies and resources that reinforce inclusive practices. Real inclusion is about actions, not just words. Inclusion is successful when the whole school shares in the responsibility for making it a reality. A real culture of inclusion is demonstrated when everyone embraces it. The NBACL *Indicators of Success* program builds on this principle and challenges schools to critically look at their attitudes and how they are (or are not) supporting all students.

NBACL also celebrates the very best of inclusion within the province through the National Inclusive Education Awards. These awards are celebrated at Government House with New Brunswick's Head of State, the Lieutenant Governor.

"Each year we look forward to recognizing the leaders in our education system who demonstrate strong examples of inclusion. These awards show how we continue to advance inclusive education in our province every year."



- Sarah Wagner, Executive Director of NBACL

NBACL's support for students also focuses on providing important transition supports for students who are looking to build a career. Located in 60 high schools throughout the province, the Transition to Work program supports students build an employment action plan and gain valuable experiential learning experience. This program has flipped the employment rate for individuals with an intellectual or developmental disability with a 79% employment rate after graduation. This program builds on the importance of inclusion within the school system to build a more inclusive labour force and community.

Conclusion

The past 60 years have seen a lot of change to our education system. As a leader in the inclusive education field, New Brunswick has developed a system that welcomes all learners into the classroom. While this system has provided a valuable template for many other jurisdictions, New Brunswick has always focused on looking at outcomes and strategizing on how to improve education for all students. NBACL will continue to work with students, families, educators, and paraprofessionals to ensure a bright future for all students in New Brunswick. An essential element in that effort is to ensure that New Brunswick schools are inclusive. NBACL will continue to work to ensure that our province is a world leader in inclusive education.

With files from:

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