

**A Window into the Accessibility of Manitoba's Education
Systems: From Early Learning and Childcare, through
Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 and into Post-Secondary**

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Education Solutions Manitoba
with support from
Barrier-Free Manitoba and
Community Living Manitoba

Executive Summary

In 2017, the Manitoba Government introduced proposed regulations for the Employment Standard under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. In reviewing the proposal, it became very apparent that one of the greatest barriers to employment for Manitobans with disabilities resulted from their poor educational outcomes and prospects themselves. Without accessible and inclusive education and training, Manitobans with disabilities are at a serious disadvantage when competing for jobs outside of menial or entry level positions.

While a request has been made to government to include an Education Standard with the Accessibility for Manitobans Act, much as Ontario and Nova Scotia have done under their respective accessibility acts, there was clear need to gain a better understanding of the scope and depth of barriers that currently exist in our education systems.

To that end, Education Solutions Manitoba, in conjunction with Barrier-Free Manitoba and with financial support from Community Living Manitoba, developed and implemented three surveys. These surveys collected quantitative and qualitative data relating to the experiences of children, youth and adults with disabilities in Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care, Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12, and Post-Secondary levels from the parent, student and education system staff perspective.

Over 600 persons completed one of the surveys. The opinions shared by this large number of respondents provides a rich window into current accessibility issues in our educational systems. Due to methodological limitations, the results are revealing but cannot be considered conclusive.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the key findings from the surveys.

The human right to an education is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Manitoba's Human Rights Code and the Amendment to the Public Education Act: Appropriate Educational Programming. This right applies to all of Manitoba's educational systems from early learning and child care, to Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 schooling, and to post-secondary education.

While ELCC and post-secondary education are not mandatory, progress has been made over recent years to increase accessibility to these services. However, not all centres and institutions are accessible to all children/students with disabilities. At the ELCC level, the ability to access qualified staff was seen to be very limited. In the present study, specific barriers cited by those within the ELCC system related to policy/communication issues – especially when working with school-aged children where open sharing of information between the child care centre and school is

lacking. Many referred to an expectation that the child care centre address behaviour issues arising during the school day, rather than the school itself. Many also expressed concern regarding the limited funding available for extra support staff and being able to access them in a timely manner.

At the post-secondary level, students with disabilities who apply to and are accepted into programming may access Student Accessibility Services. Roughly one-half of students who had used these services indicated that they were not satisfied with them. Challenges at the post-secondary level most frequently cited by survey respondents referenced instructor/professor attitude, their knowledge of policy and provision of accommodations.

Clearly, at both the ELCC and Post-Secondary levels, more needs to be done to both inform and support staff, parents and children/students regarding accessibility and reducing barriers to participation.

The movement of students from ELCC to N/K to Grade 12 schooling and beyond should be guided by established, multi-departmental government protocols, like the Protocol for Early Childhood Transition and the Bridging to Adulthood protocol cited in the surveys, and yet survey results demonstrated not only a lack of awareness of these protocols, but also a lack of satisfaction with its process by those using it.

The N/K to Grade 12 system is mandatory for all children/youth in Manitoba, aged 7 to 18 years, with the option to extend age of school leaving/graduation to June of the year the student turns 21 years. As such, programming and supports for students with disabilities would be expected to be much more robust.

Results from the surveys shed light on areas where progress has been made (e.g. physical accessibility was cited least as a barrier to education) but there was widespread consensus that more needs to be done, especially when addressing attitudinal, social, policy and programmatic barriers. These barriers lead to profound social exclusion. The high rates of social exclusion (ranging from 68-72% among respondent groups) and vulnerability to negative consequences including bullying (ranging from 77-92% among respondent groups) must be addressed to ensure students with disabilities can gain an appropriate education that prepares them for further education/training and ultimately for competitive employment.

Certain disability groups reported greater challenges with specific barriers, including those with physical disabilities (physical and transportation barriers), mental health conditions (social, programmatic and transportation barriers), those with autism spectrum disorder (social, policy and programmatic barriers) and those with learning disabilities (policy and programmatic barriers).

One of the hallmarks of inclusive education is placement and programming within neighbourhood schools in the regular classroom with same age peers. Survey results

showed specialized classrooms and programs still exist within Manitoba's education system. What was particularly striking was the discrepancy between levels of their reported use between parents and staff. While parents reported significantly higher use ($p < 0.05$) when students presented with intellectual disabilities (54% of parents of students with an intellectual disability reported their son/daughter were in a segregated program), similar rates were not reported by staff.

The survey results also document the reported and widespread inadequacy of many school-based supports required by students with disabilities. Moreover, both the providers and users of the system reported that students faced a wide range of many other barriers throughout Manitoba's educational systems. Most often reported were barriers related to attitude, social exclusion, programmatic limitations and policies.

Basic questions remain: In a province that supports the fundamental human right to education, endorses a philosophy of inclusion and promotes it through its own legislation and policy development, how are the experiences of students with disabilities and their families being monitored to ensure that barriers are effectively identified and addressed? How are barriers to this human right, especially those discussed in this report, being dealt with so that all Manitobans understand and appreciate the critical role that access to quality education plays in supporting a more equitable future for all?

Acknowledgements

Education Solutions Manitoba is a consulting company providing professional development and strategic planning services to a wide range of education system stakeholders in Manitoba.

Their consultants are proven winners in providing training, coaching and support in the K to 12 education system and beyond addressing niche areas including:

- Coaching
- Disability training
- Interpersonal problem solving – meeting facilitation, mediation and conflict resolution
- The Planning Inclusive Cultures in Schools project
- Planning process facilitation – strategic planning, individual student planning
- Program evaluation
- Professional development – workshops, presentations, seminars
- Project management
- Research - including literature reviews, quantitative and qualitative outcomes comparisons

To review their full range of services available through our roster of consultants at www.edsm.ca.

Barrier-Free Manitoba is a non-partisan, non-profit, cross-disability initiative that was formed in 2008. Barrier-Free Manitoba has been and continues to be led by a Steering Committee with members spanning Manitoba's disability communities. Following five years' work to secure passage of the landmark Accessibility for Manitobans Act in December 2013, Barrier-Free Manitoba has been working to promote its full and timely implementation. Barrier-Free Manitoba played important roles in helping design the survey and providing comment on drafts of this report. Learn more at www.barrierfreemb.com

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Introduction

Quality, inclusive education is an essential gateway to labour market success. It increases an individual's lifelong capacity to contribute to their community and the social and economic well-being of our province. Equitable access to education is recognized as a human right in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability¹ and covered in protections enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms² and The Manitoba Human Rights Code. The Human Rights Code specifically prohibits discrimination, either intentional or otherwise, based upon "physical or mental disability or related characteristics or circumstances, including reliance on a service animal, a wheelchair, or any other remedial appliance or device."³

In 2013, Manitoba passed the landmark Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) to break down barriers faced by those living with disabilities. The AMA became the law through unanimous, all-party, all member vote in the Legislative Assembly. Current areas for standard development focus on Customer Service, Employment, the Built Environment, Information and Communication and Transportation.

In work to develop the Employment standard under the AMA community consultations revealed that one of the biggest barriers to accessing real work for real pay when you are an individual with a disability lies in the area of education and training.

Unlike the two other provinces that have enacted accessibility-rights legislation to date (Ontario and Nova Scotia), the Manitoba government has not yet committed to develop an accessible education standard under the Act. While an amendment was made to the Public Schools Act: Appropriate Educational Programming (2005) to reflect the need to support students with disabilities in inclusive schools, it applies only to the N/K to Grade 12 system. It also lacks public accountability regarding implementation and enforcement of its obligations.

In June 2017, in response to substantial support from education system stakeholders and Manitoba citizens, a formal letter was prepared and later delivered to the Minister

¹ States are to ensure equal access to primary and secondary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning. Education is to employ the appropriate materials, techniques and forms of communication. Pupils with support needs are to receive support measures, and pupils who are blind, deaf and deaf-blind are to receive their education in the most appropriate modes of communication from teachers who are fluent in sign language and Braille. Education of persons with disabilities must foster their participation in society, their sense of dignity and self-worth and the development of their personality, abilities and creativity (Article 24).

² Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

³ <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/h175e.php>

of Families, responsible for the AMA file, requesting government commitment to develop an accessible education standard, spanning child care through to post-secondary. In just two weeks, more than 1,100 individuals and 59 organizations representing over 100,000 Manitobans signed on in support of the letter. Additional signatures were collected through the summer and fall of 2017, bringing the current total to 1,595.

The case for the development of an accessible education standard is a strong one. While Manitobans can be proud of progress made over recent decades to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities, these students, their families, and the staff that support them continue to face a myriad of serious barriers. These barriers are found throughout all educational systems, from Early Learning and Childcare into Post-Secondary. For many, these barriers result in markedly diminished opportunity and outcomes.

To better understand the scope of the barriers students with disabilities face, Education Solutions Manitoba and Barrier-Free Manitoba joined forces, with support from Community Living Manitoba, to develop three surveys for staff, parents and students currently working/participating in Early Learning and Child Care, N/K to Grade 12 and Post-Secondary settings. These surveys were designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data related to seven commonly experienced barriers to accessibility: Transportation, Physical/Structural, Policy, Programmatic, Information/Communication, Social and Attitude⁴. Results were collected during the fall and early winter of 2017.

It is hoped the results of this research will help clarify current challenges within our existing education systems and provide a basis for improving access to education for Manitoba students with disabilities.

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability-barriers.html>

Method

Limitations of this Research

The major limitation of the research conducted is the limited number of individuals who responded to the online survey. A total of 664 respondents participated in the survey. While this number is substantial, it does not provide an adequate basis to make firm conclusions. However, the results do provide a valuable window into the experiences that many attending and working in our educational systems are having related to accessible education. The findings, as a result, are suggestive and not conclusive.

Other limitations in this study that were out of our control include the relatively low response rates from parents and students, compared to staff, as well as the relatively high participation of support staff compared to classroom and resource teachers. While the online surveys were advertised and promoted through extensive networks associated with Barrier-Free Manitoba, Education Solutions Manitoba and the Children's Coalition, there is no way of controlling response rates.

Characteristics that limited the scope and defined the boundaries of this study include the targeting of surveys to staff and parents of students in the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system, those in the Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 graduation system, and those in the Post-Secondary education system. Students respondents were limited to those Grades 7 and up.

The scope of questions asked in the surveys related to issues thought to either contribute or to severely limit accessible and inclusive learning experience in the three settings. These included reference to existing legislation, policies and guidelines specific to the needs of students with disabilities, educational supports and barriers. The scope of disabling conditions referenced in the survey included those traditionally referenced by legislation as requiring accommodations, (physical, sensory, cognitive/intellectual) and extended to those with learning disabilities, health conditions and mental health issues.

Assumptions

Participant anonymity and confidentiality were protected, and survey participation was voluntary. It is assumed all respondents replied to survey questions with honesty and integrity.

Survey Development and Deployment

Three similar surveys were drafted to collect information from Staff, Parents and Students in Manitoba's education systems, spanning Early Learning and

Childcare (ELCC), Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 graduation and into post-secondary (surveys can be reviewed on either Barrier-Free Manitoba or Education Solutions Manitoba websites).

- Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.net) was used to collect responses from education system staff working with, parents of, and students with disabilities in Manitoba. There were a range of questions establishing their demographic profile and their current access to services and supports. Finally, questions explored their experiences with a range of barriers to accessibility. Surveys collected both quantitative (rankings, numbers of respondents) and qualitative (opinions, descriptions) data.
- Surveys directed respondents to relevant questions based upon what level of education they were currently working/attending, and their experience with various planning processes including the transition from ELCC to the school system, the individual education plan (IEP) and the transition from school to community upon graduation at Grade 12.
- Barriers were defined as follows:

Transportation barriers (i.e. inadequate transportation limiting the ability to attend programming; e.g. lack of wheelchair accessible busses for field trips).

Physical/structural barriers (i.e. things in the natural or manmade environments that prevent or block your movement (moving around in the environment) or access e.g. steps, curbs, narrow doorways, lighting, sound).

Information/communication barriers (i.e. commonly experienced by those who have disabilities that affect hearing, vision, speaking, reading, writing, and or understanding and who use different ways to communicate; e.g. use of only spoken instructions for those who have auditory processing difficulties, use of only visual schedules for those with visual processing disorders).

Policy barriers (i.e. these are frequently related to a lack of awareness or enforcement of existing laws and regulations that require programs and activities be accessible to those with disabilities; e.g. lack of development of an individual education plan for students with special needs, lack of use of transition protocols from childcare to school, or from school to the community).

Programmatic barriers (i.e. including things like the limited availability of programming as a result of inconvenient scheduling; a lack of accessible equipment, insufficient time set aside for assessments and

planning, little or no communication with parents and/or students, teacher knowledge and understanding of disabilities, etc.)

Social barriers (i.e. these could include teasing, bullying, lack of peer to peer relationships, lack of training in appropriate language, behaviour, etc.)

Attitudinal barriers (i.e. attitudes other people carry regarding people with disabilities. These may be the result of ignorance, fear, misunderstanding or hate. These attitudes keep people from appreciating and experiencing the full potential a person with a disability can achieve).

- On November 2, 2017, the surveys were launched, and outreach began through networks connected to both Education Solutions Manitoba, Barrier-Free Manitoba, the Children’s Coalition, and many others.
- Requests for responses to the surveys were made through a wide variety of channels (email, Facebook, Twitter, in person presentations and requests) to a wide range of individuals and organizations, including:
 - Student Services
 - Administrators Association of Manitoba
 - Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
 - Manitoba Teachers Society
 - University of Manitoba accessibility services office
 - University of Winnipeg student accessibility services
 - Red River College student accessibility services
 - University of Manitoba Students Association
 - Manitoba Association of Parent Councils
 - Cerebral Palsy Association
 - Manitoba Families for Effective Autism Treatment
 - Inspire Community Outreach
 - ADAPT
 - Asperger Manitoba Inc.
 - Autism Manitoba
 - Office of the Children’s Advocate
 - Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre
 - St. Amant Centre
 - OCN Disability Research Centre
 - South Central ASD Group
 - Campus Daycare (U Of M)
 - Inclusion Winnipeg
 - Community Living Manitoba
 - Rehab Centre for Children
 - Manitoba Foster Family Network
 - Continuity Care
 - Muscular Dystrophy Association – MB
 - OHEYS
 - Community Respite Services
 - Society for Manitobans with Disabilities
 - MATC

- University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education
 - University of Winnipeg
Faculty of Education
 - Social Justice Coalition
 - WANTE (Winnipeg
Association of Non-
Teaching Employees)
- Data collection was completed December 15, 2017.
 - Where relevant, quantitative results were tested for statistical significance using the standard t-test ($p < 0.05$) either within the Survey Monkey program itself, or through manual computation.
 - Qualitative data were analyzed for common themes.

Results

Demographics

Education system staff, parents and students responded regarding their experiences within Manitoba’s education systems. The results were as follows:

- 407 respondents were staff working from Early Learning and Childcare through to Post-Secondary Education
- 202 respondents were parents of children ranging from ELCC to Post-Secondary
- 52 respondents were students Grade 7 to Post-Secondary

Educational level reported:

ELCC

- 26% of staff worked in early learning and childcare
- 8% of parent respondents had children in the ELCC system

N/K to Grade 12 graduation

- 66% of staff worked Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12
- 84% of parent respondents had sons/daughters attending N/K to Grade 12
- 38% of student respondents were Grade 7 to Grade 12; 27% parents reported their son/daughter was in Grade 9 to 12

Post-Secondary

- 12% of staff worked in post-secondary
- 8% of parent respondents had sons/daughters at the post-secondary level
- 62% of student respondents were at the post-secondary level

Figure 1: Profile of all survey respondents

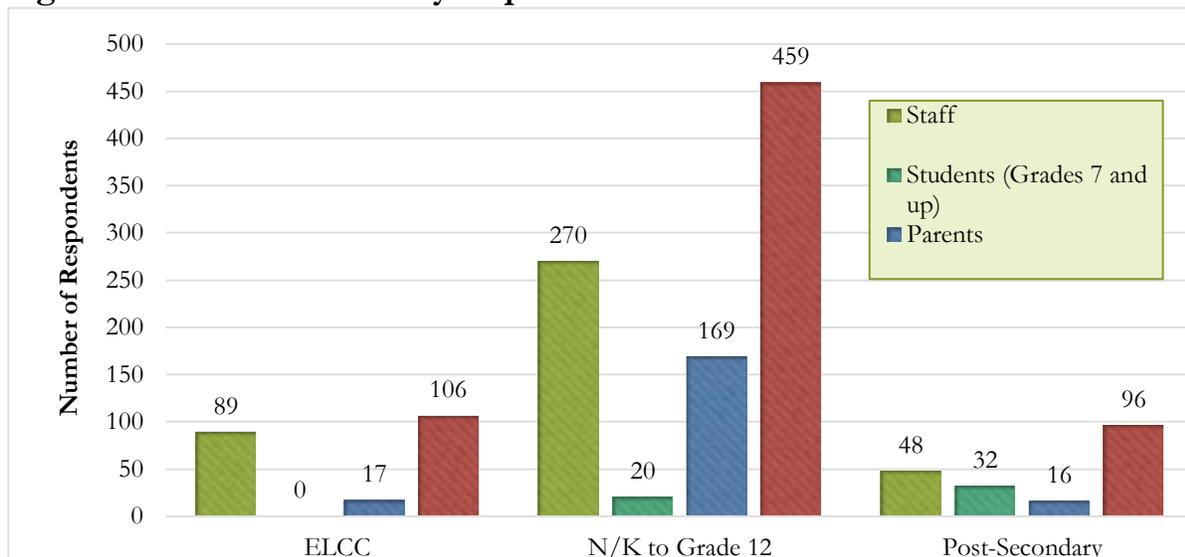
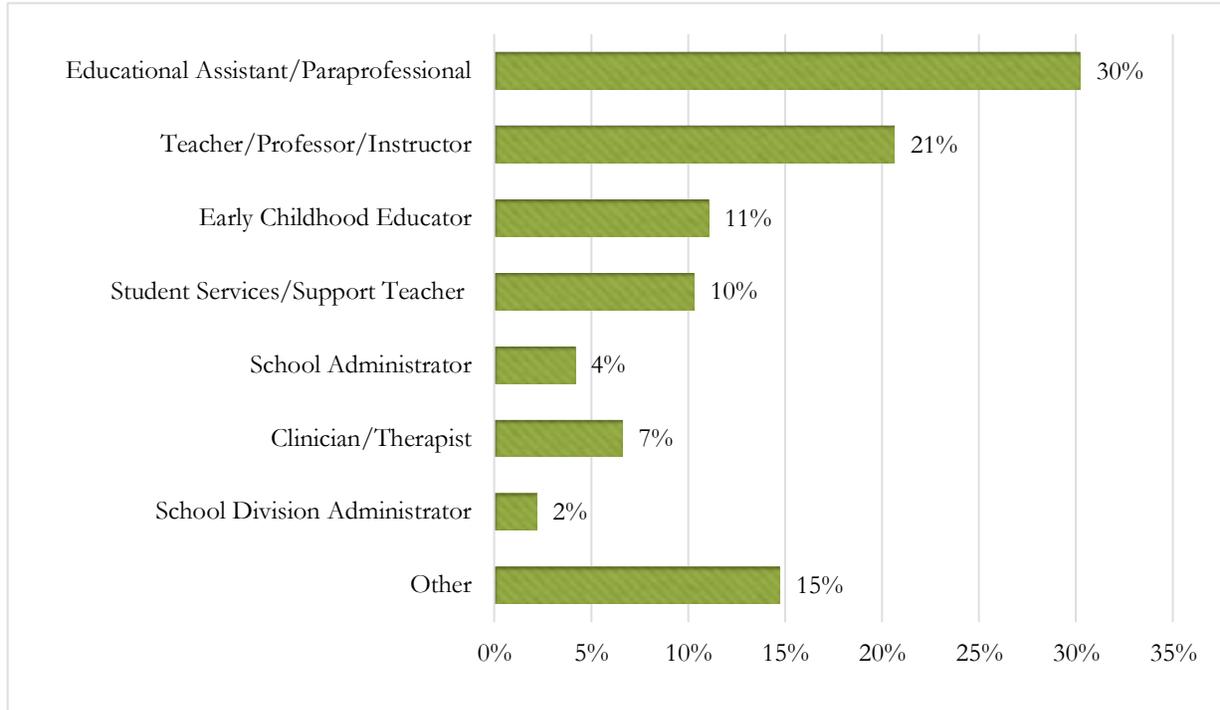


Figure 2: Profile of staff respondents (% of total)



Location of Respondents:

- 70% of all respondents (combined staff, parents and students) were from Winnipeg with a further 3% from other urban areas
- 21% rural
- remainder from combination northern and First Nations

Student Disability Profiles

Figure 3: Parent reported student disability profiles (n=202)

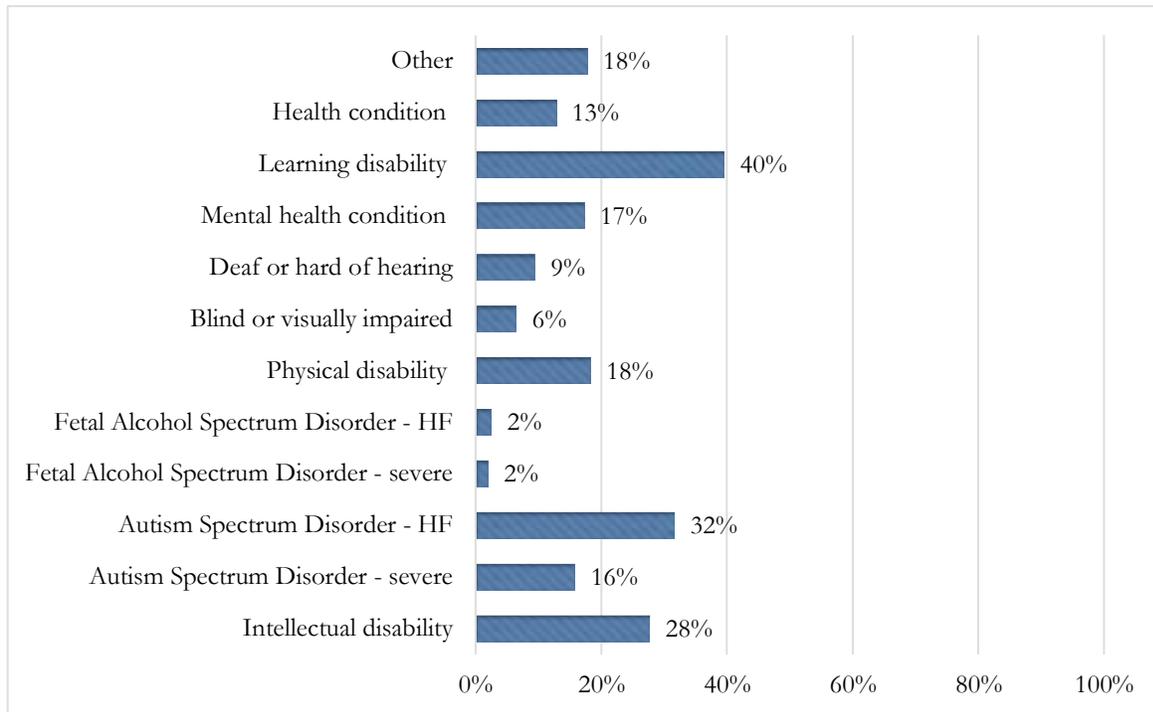


Figure 4: Student reported disability profiles (n=52)

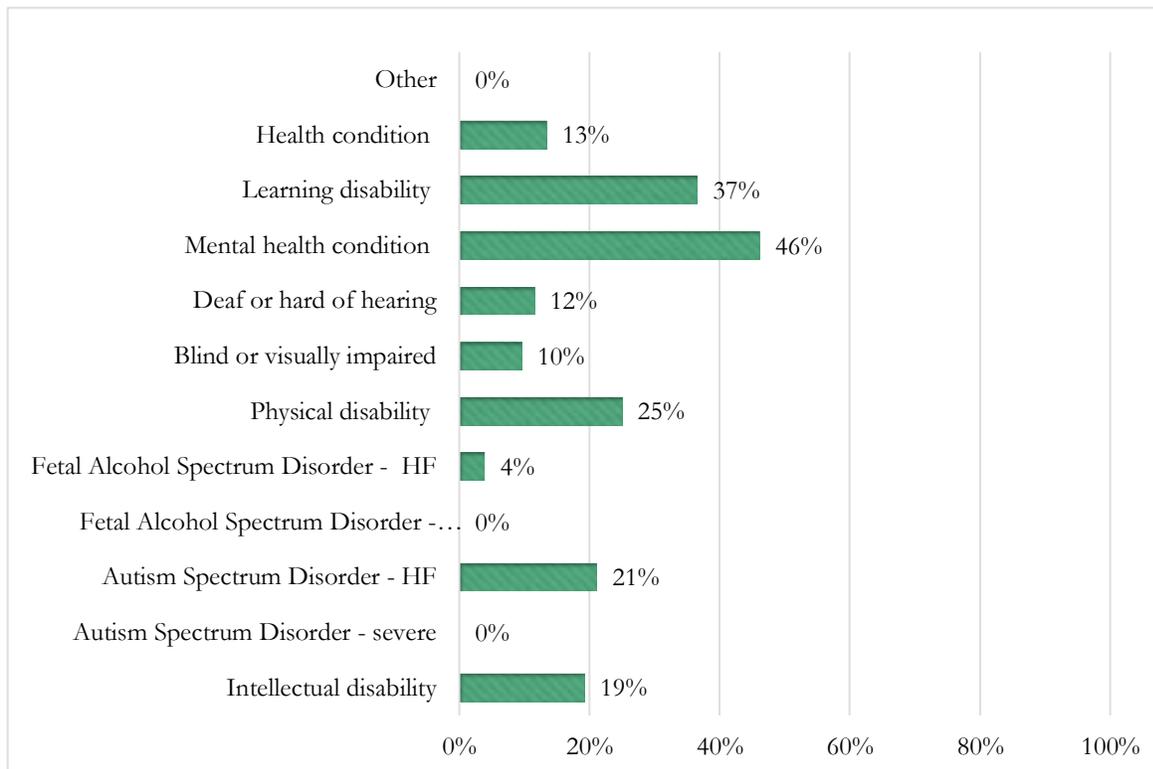


Figure 5: Staff reported student disability profiles (n=407)

Note: Profile of disabilities served appear higher than with parent or student data and reflect the staff experience of working with multiple students with a variety of disability profiles. (note: HF= high functioning)

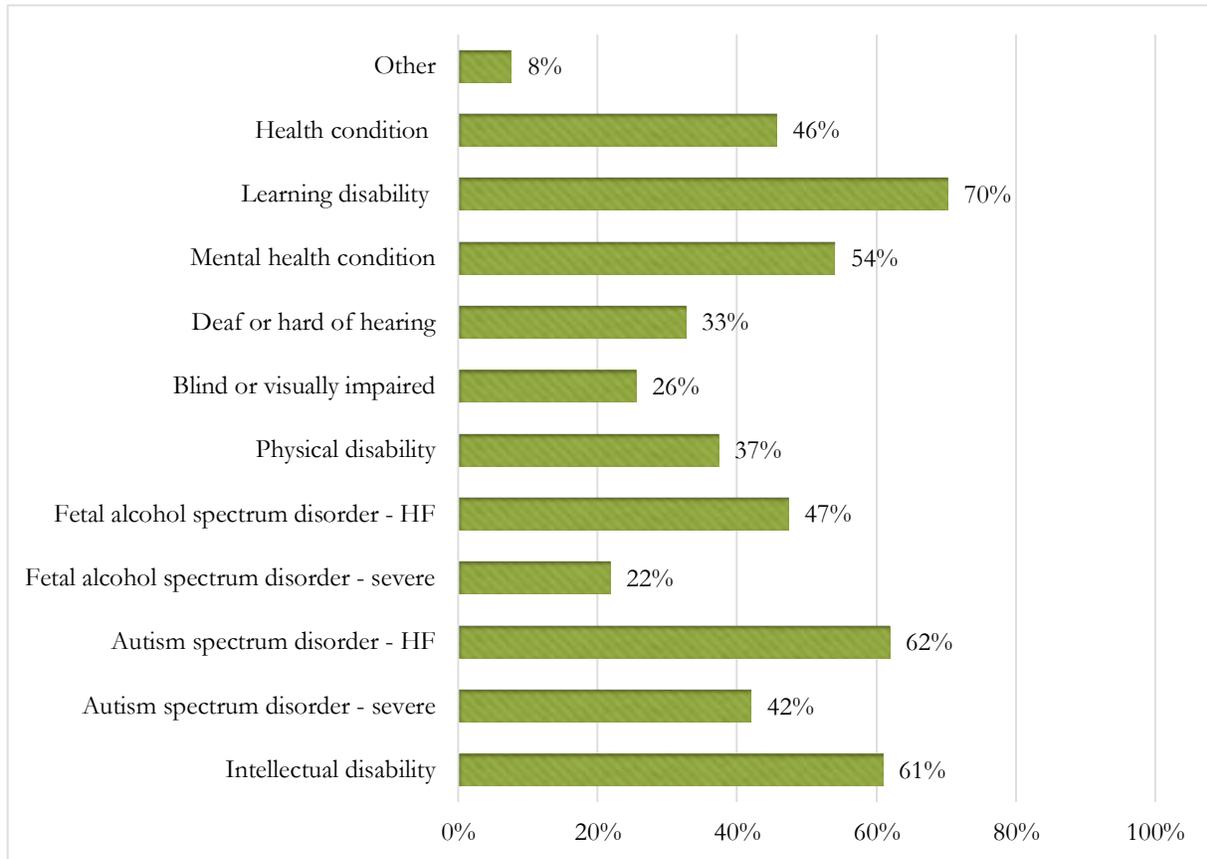


Table 1: Staff reported student disability profiles as a function of educational level (results from Post-Secondary staff significantly differed from those at the ELCC and N/K to Grade 12 levels, except in the case of health conditions)

Type of Disability	ELCC	N/K to Grade 12	Post-Secondary
Intellectual Disability (ID)	55%	66%	44%
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) - severe	53%	43%	17%
ASD-HF	64%	65%	42%
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) - severe	25%	24%	4%
FASD-HF	45%	53%	23%
Physical disability	33%	35%	58%
Blind/visually impaired	12%	25%	50%
Deaf/hard of hearing	15%	34%	56%
Mental health condition	39%	55%	75%
Learning disability	62%	73%	71%
Health condition	45%	44%	56%

Planning Processes for Students with Disabilities and the Use of Provincial Protocols and Guidelines

As students with disabilities move through the education systems, from Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) into Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 and beyond, there are a number of protocols and guideline documents in place to help plan educational programming. These protocols are meant to facilitate smoother transitions through grades and stages of development.

The surveys targeted three of these planning processes to determine respondent awareness, system usage and perception of their effectiveness in supporting students with disabilities:

1. Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs, (2015);
2. Student Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs), (2010);

3. Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to the Community, (2008).

These results are as follows:

The “Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs”⁵:

Awareness:

- 51% of ELCC staff reported they were familiar with the protocol
- only 15% of parent respondents who had children at the ELCC level were aware of the protocol

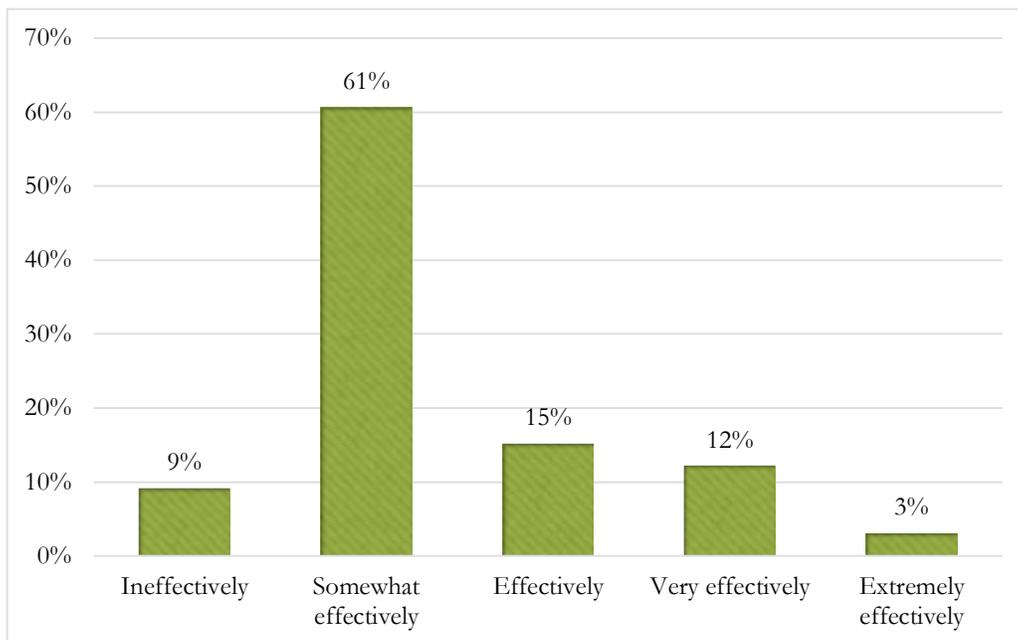
Usage:

- 85% of ELCC staff reported the protocol was in use at their centres
- Only one of the parent respondents reported the protocol was being used

Effectiveness of the protocol:

- 30% of ELCC staff reported it as being effective to extremely effective
- 60% of ELCC staff reported it as only somewhat effective
- 9% of ELCC staff reported it was ineffective

Figure 6: ELCC Staff perspectives on the how effectively the *Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs* is used in their centres (n=33)



⁵ http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/publications/protocol_early_childhood_transition.pdf

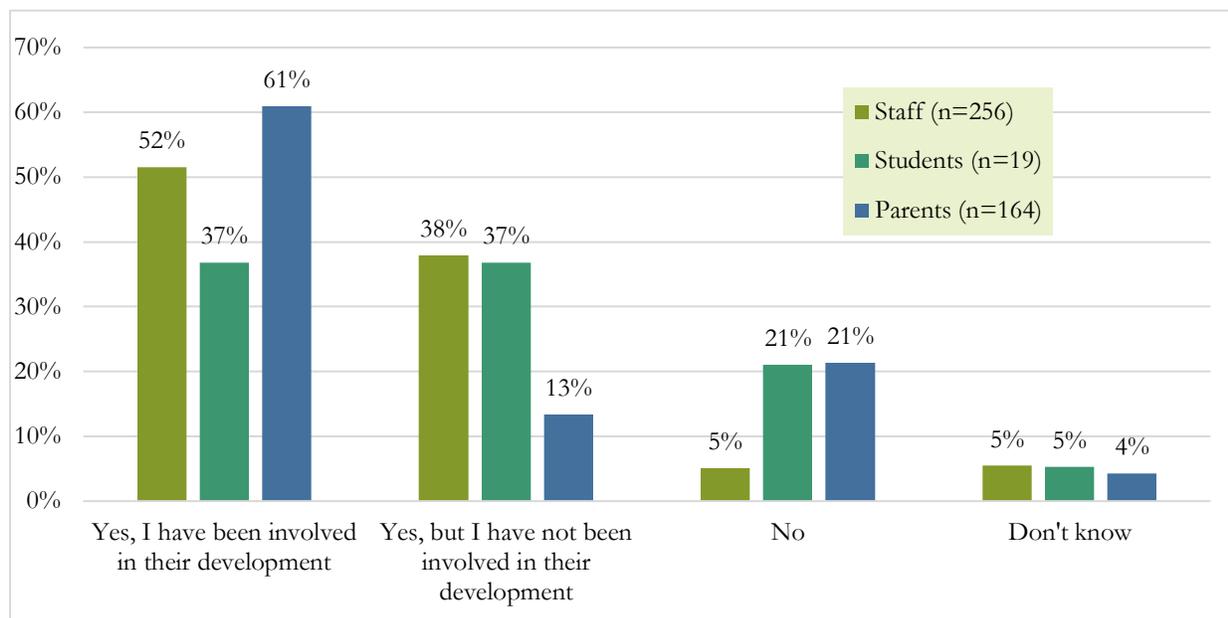
The Individual Education Plan⁶

The IEP process guides educational programming for identified students⁷ in Manitoba's N/K to Grade 12 education system. Standards developed to support the Amendment to the Public Schools Act: Appropriate Educational Programming, 2005, require that identified students with disabilities have an IEP developed using a process where a team is established, and the team works at setting direction, gathering information, developing and writing the plan, implementing, reviewing, and evaluating the plan. Involving school staff concerned with educational programming/supports and clinical services that may be in place or needed, as well as parents and students themselves in this process is seen as best practice.

Awareness:

- Between 4 and 5% of all respondents were not aware whether an IEP was in place.

Figure 7: Awareness of the IEP planning process for students with disabilities in Manitoba schools.



⁶ http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/pdf/planning/student_specific_planning.pdf

⁷ "A student's specific needs and the comprehensiveness of the IEP they require are related. Most students achieve the expected learning outcomes in provincial curricula with the support of differentiated instruction. The teacher plans instruction according to the class profile. Very few students require individualized programming; those who do, have unique needs and require detailed IEPs describing functional outcomes." *Student Specific Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing IEP's, 2010*

Usage

- 90% N/K to Grade 12 staff reported they were in place for their students, with 52% indicating they had been involved with their development
- 74% of students (Grade 7 to 12) reported they were in place, with 37% reporting they were directly involved in their development (37% not involved and 26% did not have or were unaware if there were IEPs in place)
- 74% of parents of N/K to Grade 12 students reported IEPs were in place for their children with 61% directly involved in their development (13% were not involved, with 25% reporting there were either no IEP in place or they were unaware of their use)
 - this correlates to 42 parents reporting there was either no IEP in place or they were not aware there was one in place for their child.
 - of the 42 parents indicating no IEP in place, the disability profile of their sons/daughters were as follows:

Intellectual disability	4%	Blind or visually impaired	1%
ASD - severe	1%	Deaf or hard of hearing	3%
ASD – less severe	12%	Mental Health Condition	12%
FASD - severe	0	Learning disability	18%
FASD – less severe	1%	Health condition	3%
Physical disability	3%	Other	5%

Effectiveness of the Process

When staff, parents and students were asked how effective they found the IEP process⁸ to be, they reported the following:

Figure 8: Effectiveness of IEP Process

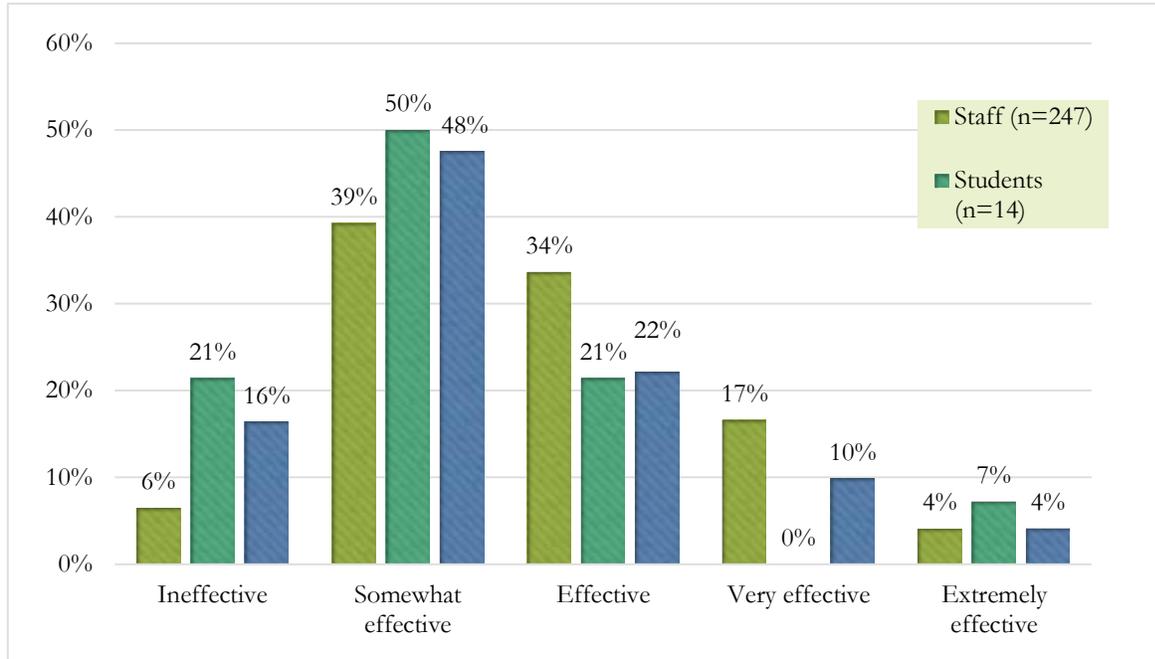


Table 2: Ranking of how effective the IEP planning process is for student with disabilities

Respondent group	Ranking of how effective the IEP process is				
	Ineffective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective	Extremely effective
Staff (n=247)	6%	39%	34%	17%	4%
Parents (n=122)	16%	48%	22%	10%	4%
Students (n=14)	21%	50%	21%	0%	7%

Most responses from staff, parents and students reported the IEP planning process was only somewhat effective

⁸ This may be interpreted as either the process of planning and IEP itself, or the outcome of the IEP, i.e. were appropriate goals set and met as a result of the planning process.

The Bridging to Adulthood Protocol⁹

Various government departments designed this protocol to assist in planning for the transition of students with special needs from school to the community. Within the surveys, if staff, parents or students reported that they were within the Grade 9 to 12 range, they were directed to additional questions regarding this protocol.

Awareness of protocol:

The Bridging to Adulthood Protocol has been in place since 2008 (10 years) and prior to it, there was an existing planning process used to guide students and their families as they transitioned from high school to the community. Previous research by Community Living Manitoba¹⁰ that assessed awareness of the protocol from among parents reported less than 50% of those with sons/daughters between 14 and 21 years, the target age for this protocol, were aware.

In the present survey, all three respondent groups who indicated they either worked, had sons/daughters or were students in the Grade 9 to 12 range were asked whether they were aware of the protocol with the following results:

- 53% of staff (47% answered no or don't know)¹¹
- 24% of parents (76% answered no or don't know)
- 44% of students (55% answered no or don't know)

Usage:

While schools may use a variety of means to plan for this important transition and may not refer to the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol by name, there may still be some kind of planning process in place. Staff, parents and students were asked if this was the case.

Results indicated:

- 41% of staff were involved in a transition planning process,
- 91% of parents of students between Grades 9 and high school graduation were involved in a transition planning process, and

⁹ http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/policy/transition/bridging_to_adulthood.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.asperger-manitoba.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Progress-Towards-Inclusion-20121.pdf>

¹¹ Of the 33 staff who reported they were not familiar with the protocol, 67% worked in Winnipeg with 33% working in rural environments. Their professional profiles were recorded as follows:

Staff	Number (n=33)
Teacher	9
Student Services	1
Educational assistant	16
School division administrator	2
Other	5

- 22% of students between Grade 9 and high school graduation were involved in some kind of transition planning process.

Effectiveness:

Of those staff, parents, and students involved with planning for the transition to adulthood, the following was their rating on the effectiveness of the planning process:

Table 3: Ranking of how effective the transition to adulthood planning process is for students with disabilities in Manitoba schools

Respondent group	Ranking the effectiveness of transition protocol				
	Ineffective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective	Extremely effective
Staff (n=29)	3%	38%	59%	31%	0%
Parents (n=11)	27%	36%	18%	9%	9%
Students (n=3)	0%	67%	0%	33%	0%

Educational Placement and Programming

The Amendment to the Public Schools Act: Appropriate Educational Programming, 2005, and its ensuing standards, stipulates that:

“The first and foremost consideration in the placement of all students is the right to attend the designated catchment school for their residence in a regular classroom with their peers.”¹²

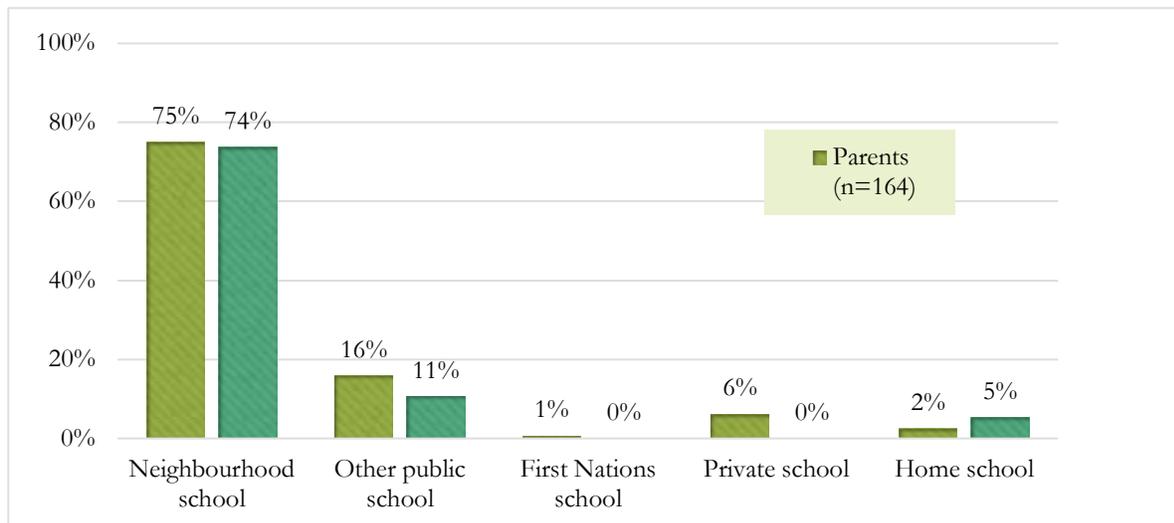
A series of survey questions were asked to determine where students with disabilities attend school and to what extent they spend their school days in regular classrooms with their peers.

School of attendance:

For parents of those attending N/K to Grade 12 and students Grades 7 to 12 (staff were not asked this question as they work in a variety of circumstances with a variety of students who may or may not be attending their neighbourhood schools) the following were reported as the school of placement for students with disabilities:

¹² Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006

Figure 9: School placement of students with disability in the Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system



School day placement

Staff, parents and students were asked where students with disabilities spent the majority (>50%) of their time when at school. The following is a summary of their responses:

- In the regular classroom: 69% of parent respondents; 58% of student respondents, 78% of staff respondents
- In special classroom/program: 24% of parent respondents; 21% of student respondents, 20% of staff respondents
- Outside of regular school environment: 7% of parent respondents; 21% of student respondents, 2% of staff respondents.

While there were insufficient student data to look at any relation between school day placement and disability profile (n=19), when data from parents and staff were examined, the following was reported:

Table 4: Parent reported school day placement of students with disabilities according to type of disability (HF = high functioning)

Disability	In regular classroom	In special classroom or program	In alternate school setting
Intellectual disability (n=41)	46%	54%	0
ASD – severe (n=28)	36%	57%	2%
ASD – HF (n=55)	76%	15%	5%
FASD – severe (n=3)	33%	67%	0
FASD – HF (n=4)	50%	50%	0
Physical disability (n=28)	57%	36%	2%
Blind/Visually impaired (n=8)	50%	50%	0
Deaf/Hard of hearing (n=14)	79%	14%	1%
Mental health condition (n=32)	53%	34%	4%
Learning disability (n=66)	77%	15%	5
Health condition (n=22)	50%	50%	0

There was significantly higher placement of students with intellectual disabilities in special classrooms/programs compared to other disability groups. In other cases where placement in special classrooms/programs met or exceeded 50% there was insufficient data to determine significance.

Table 5: Staff reported school day placement of students with disabilities according to type of disability (HF = higher functioning)

Disability	In regular classroom	In special classroom or program	In alternate school setting
Intellectual disability (n=41)	79%	20%	1%
ASD – severe (n=28)	75%	25%	0%
ASD – HF (n=55)	82%	18%	1%
FASD – severe (n=3)	77%	23%	0%
FASD – HF (n=4)	82%	17%	1%
Physical disability (n=28)	72%	25%	3%
Blind/Visually impaired (n=8)	66%	32%	2%
Deaf/Hard of hearing (n=14)	76%	22%	1%
Mental health condition (n=32)	81%	17%	1%
Learning disability (n=66)	84%	14%	2%
Health condition (n=22)	77%	21%	2%

There were no reported significant differences between groups related to how likely they may be placed in a particular setting.

Of students in special classrooms/programs or outside of the regular school environment (n=51, parent respondents):

- 71% resided in Winnipeg,
- 11% other urban,
- 16% rural and the remaining
- 2% First Nations.

School-Based Supports

Access to School-Based Supports and Services

The following tables and graphs represent staff, parents and student reports of disability-related service and support need and availability.

Figure 10 illustrates the rates of need reported by the three respondent groups. Of those reported as needing these supports, many do not have these needs met. Tables 6, 7 and 8 show the degree to which these needs are met and unmet among the three

respondent groups. Student respondent numbers are relatively small, and their responses may not hold the same weight as those from staff and/or parents. Figure 11 illustrates unmet needs as reported by the three respondent groups.

Figure 10: School-based service needs of students with disabilities as reported by staff, parents and students

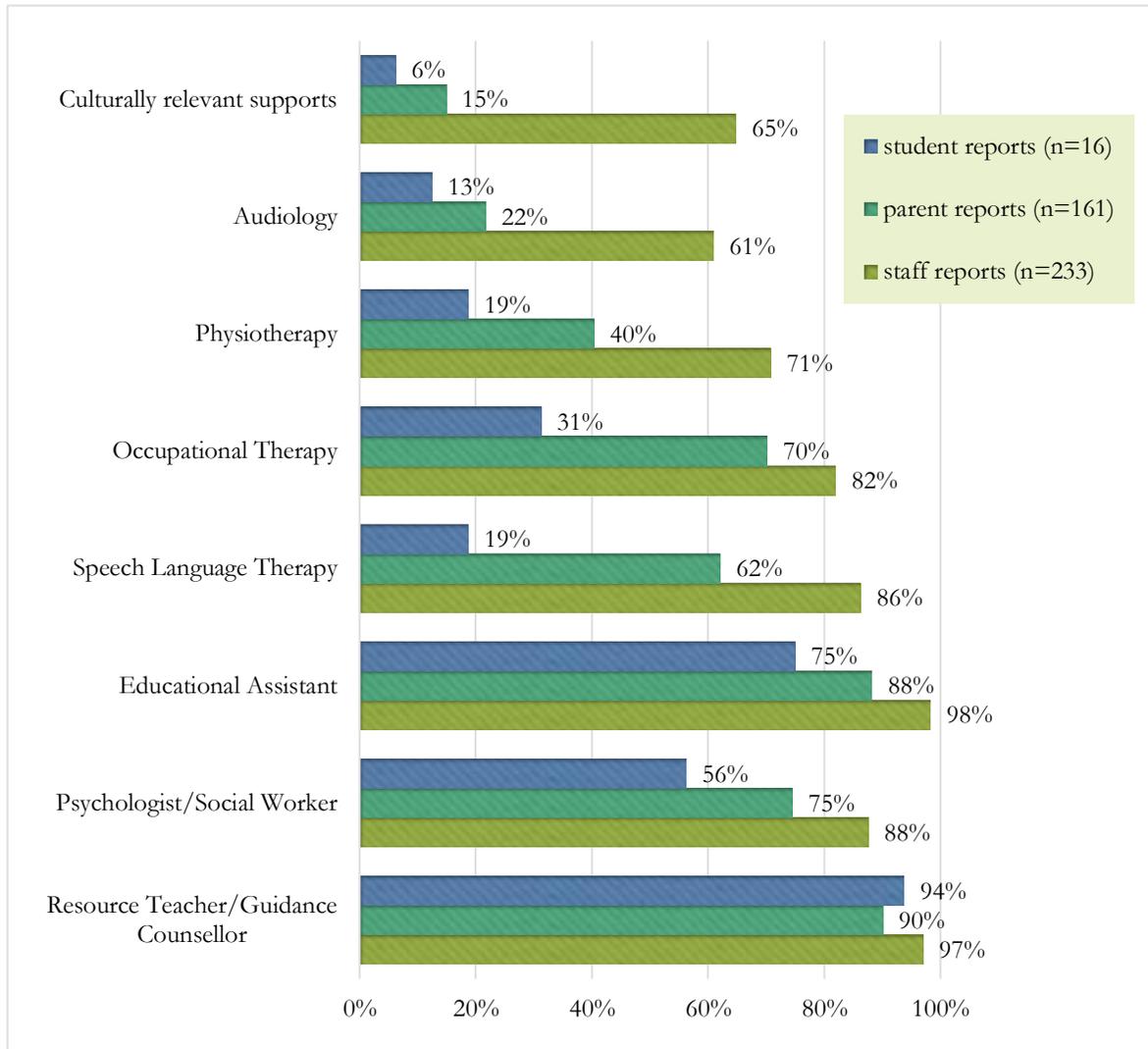


Table 6: Staff reported unmet school-based support needs of students with disabilities

School-based Support	Staff Reports (n=233)		
	Number reporting service needed	Number reporting students not receiving needed supports	% unmet needs
Resource Teacher/Guidance Counsellor	226	59	26%
Psychologist/Social Worker	204	97	48%
Educational Assistant	229	75	33%
Speech Language Therapy	201	61	30%
Occupational Therapy	191	88	46%
Physiotherapy	165	66	40%
Audiology	142	57	40%
Culturally relevant supports	151	90	60%

Table 7: Parent reported unmet school-based support needs of students with disabilities

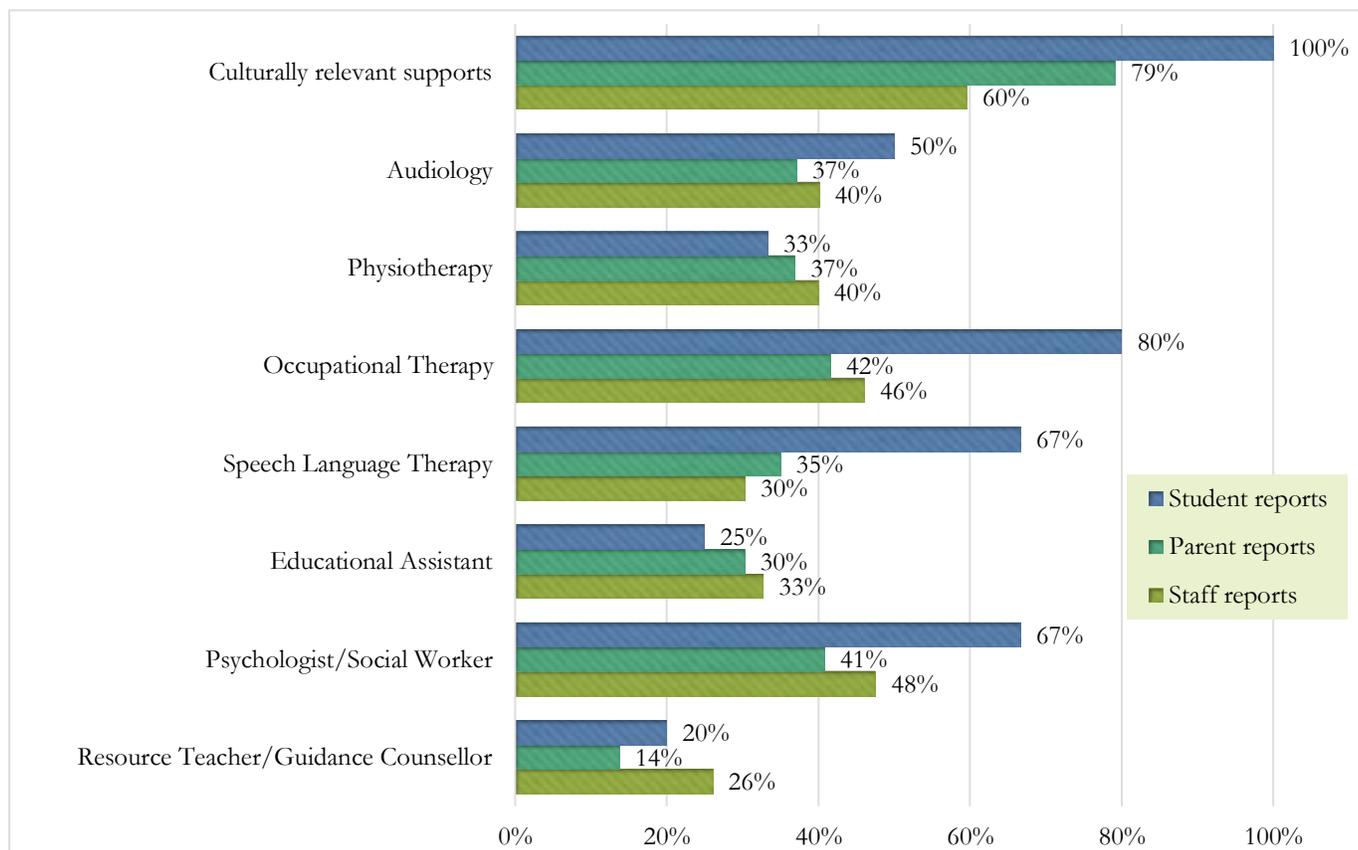
School-based Support	Parent Reports (n=161)		
	Number reporting service needed	Number reporting students not receiving needed supports	% unmet needs
Resource Teacher/Guidance Counsellor	145	20	14%
Psychologist/Social Worker	120	49	41%
Educational Assistant	142	43	30%
Speech Language Therapy	100	35	35%
Occupational Therapy	113	47	42%
Physiotherapy	65	24	37%
Audiology	35	13	37%
Culturally relevant supports	24	19	79%

Table 8: Student reported unmet school-based support needs of students with disabilities

School-based Support	Students Reports (n=16)*		
	Number reporting service needed	Number reporting they are not receiving needed supports	% unmet needs
Resource Teacher/Guidance Counsellor	15	3	20%
Psychologist/Social Worker	9	6	67%
Educational Assistant	12	3	25%
Speech Language Therapy	3	2	67%
Occupational Therapy	5	4	80%
Physiotherapy	3	1	22%
Audiology	2	1	50%
Culturally relevant supports	1	1	100%

*These numbers are very small and so the significance of these findings is not certain.

Figure 11: Reports of unmet school-based support needs by parents, students and staff in Manitoba schools



Other Supports and Services:

Staff, students and parents were asked if there were other supports and services needed by students through our education systems. Their responses were grouped into four themes as follows:

1. Need for services and supports in addition to what is currently available.
Most of the responses parent and staff were found in this area. Examples of some of these responses include the following:
 - “Lights that flash in bathrooms for deaf and hard of hearing students. Shoveled paths in winter to allow children in wheelchairs access to outside” (staff)
 - “Students need deaf adult role models and qualified, certified ASL interpreters.” (staff)
 - “Interpretive services for newcomers are very important and often difficult to access for meetings” (staff)
 - “In school worker for First Nations families” (staff)
 - “availability of artistic things...music, drama, art, that I could take part in and feel good about myself” (student)
 - “in our community, we lack access to a Bilingual educational assistant, bilingual resource teachers, psychiatrists and special needs teachers with training in dyslexia and learning disabilities” (parent)
 - “A French autism program for children after grade 8 is absolutely needed” (parent)
 - The need for more and better mental health supports was also referenced by all three groups.
2. Need for more of existing services and supports
 - “Many supports are needed and available. However, there is not enough service and supports. There are many more needs than clinicians can service.” (staff)
 - “More school psychology involvement” (staff)
 - “CDC, school therapy services, language interpreters including ASL, CFS” (staff)
 - “Need people trained in ASL, FM sound systems in all classrooms” (staff)
 - “Both my kids are on the spectrum with multiple needs but neither have had access to any services because of the wait lists and not being a huge priority” (parent)
 - “Need social skills training groups” (parents)

Negative experiences in the N/K to Grade 12 school settings

Parents, students and staff were asked about student with disabilities experiences with bullying, and social exclusion across all levels within education systems.

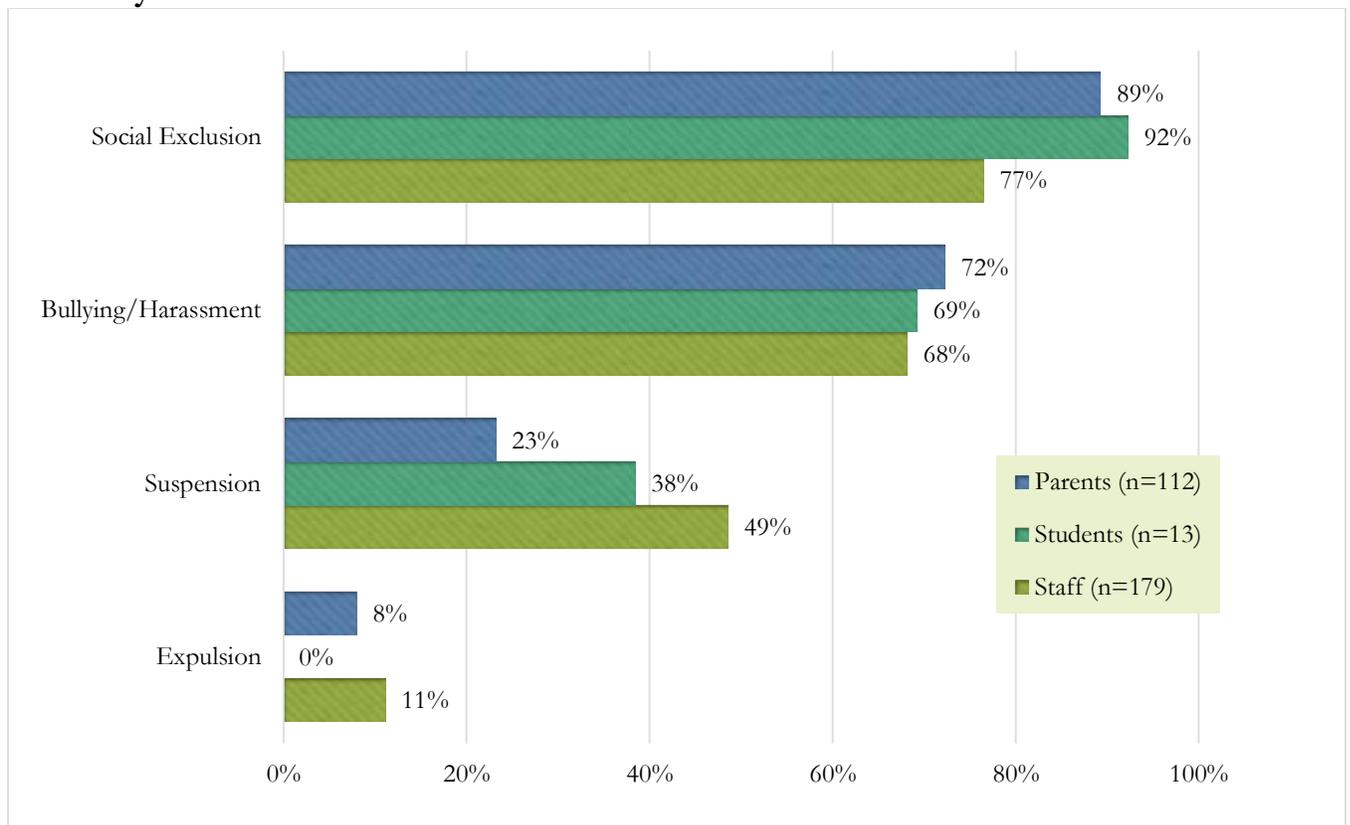
Bullying: 72% of parents, 69% of students, and 68% of staff reported student experiences of this within the past 3 years;

Social exclusion: 89% of parents, 92% of students, and 77% of staff reported student experiences of this within the past 3 years;

Suspension: 23% of parents, 38% of students and 49% of staff reported student experiences of this within the last 3 years;

Expulsion: 8% of parents, no students, and 11% of staff reported student experiences with this in the last 3 years.

Figure 12: Reported rate of negative experiences within the N/K to Grade 12 school system



Post-secondary Programming

Parents of students pursuing post-secondary education and students within the post-secondary education system were asked about their experiences with student accessibility services at their educational institution. Their reports are as follows:

Awareness of services through student accessibility services

Yes:

25% of parents (n=8)

70% of students (n=30)

7% of students knew of the service but were not connected to it

No:

75% of parents (n=8)

7% of students

Don't know:

0% of parents;

17% of students

Usage and effectiveness of these services

Level of satisfaction with student accessibility services among those who have accessed them:¹³

Satisfied to extremely satisfied:

24% of parents (n=8)

50% of students

Somewhat:

50% of parents (n=8)

43% of students

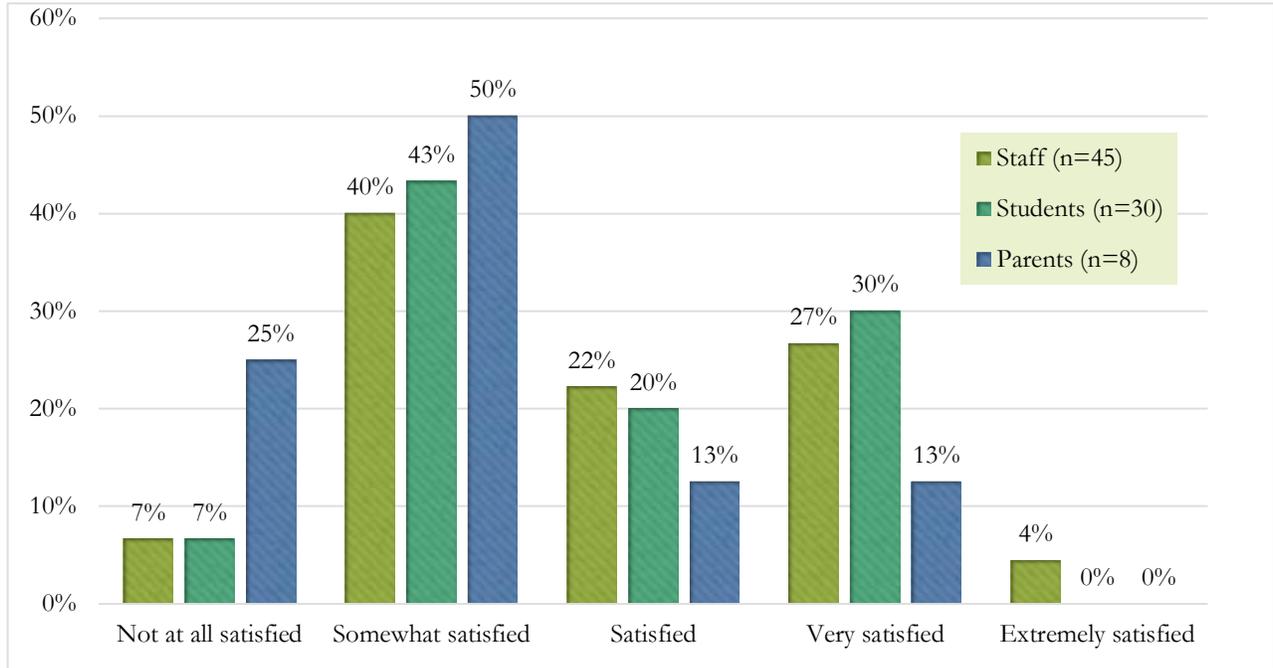
Not at all:

25% of parents (n=8)

7% of students

¹³ Due to the small sample size, the validity of these results could not be confirmed

Figure 13: Effectiveness of student accessibility services at the post-secondary level



Barriers to Accessibility in Manitoba’s Education System

Staff, parents and students were asked about the experiences of students with disabilities with various classes of barriers within the school system. Please see Page 3 for a definition of each of the barrier classes used in this survey.

Figure 14: Reporting of at least one of the barriers listed by respondent group

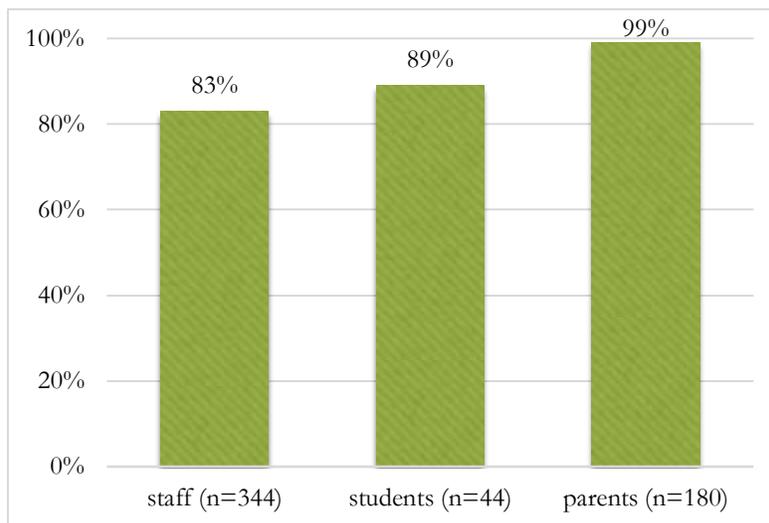


Figure 15: Reporting of listed barriers by respondent group and class of barrier

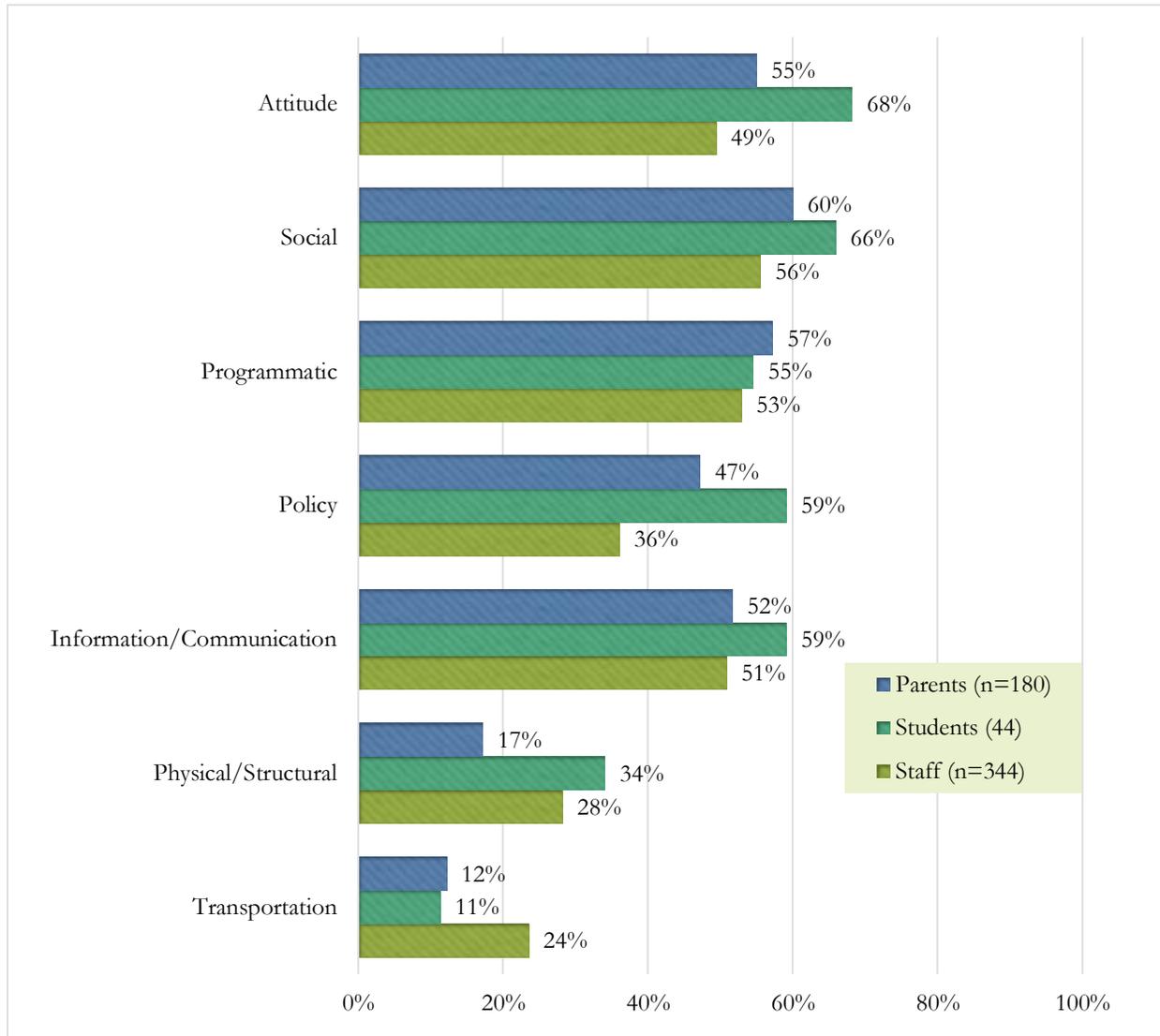
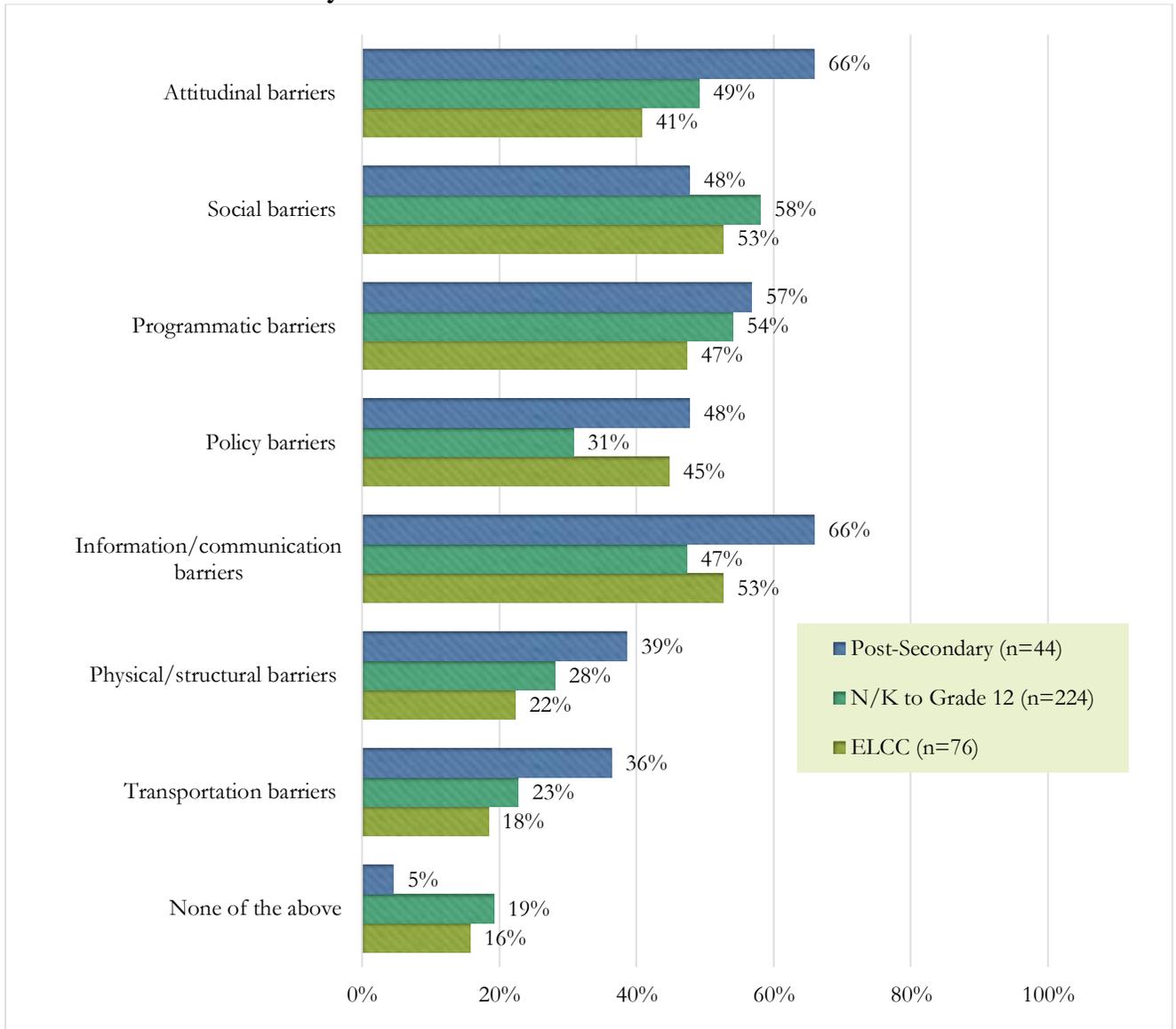


Figure 15 reports student experience with any of the listed barriers as a percent of total number barriers reported for each response group.

- There were significantly higher reports of barriers related to transportation among staff when compared to parent respondents ($p < 0.05$).
- There were also significantly higher reports of physical/structural barriers from staff respondents when compared to those of parents ($p < 0.05$).
- There were also significantly fewer reports of “none of the above” among parents ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 16: Staff reporting of student experience with listed barriers as a function of education system level



Significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were seen between data sets as follows:

- Transportation Barriers: Staff in ELCC reported significantly lower transportation barriers than those in post-secondary
- Information/Communication Barriers: Staff in N/K to Grade 12 graduation reported significantly lower information and communication barriers than those in post-secondary
- Policy Barriers:
 - Staff in ELCC reported significantly higher information and communication barriers than staff from N/K to Grade 12 graduation

and significantly lower information and communication barriers than staff from post-secondary.

- Staff from N/K to Grade 12 graduation reported significantly lower information and communication barriers than those at the post-secondary level.
- Attitudinal Barriers: Staff at the post-Secondary level reported significantly higher attitudinal barriers than either staff at ELCC or at N/K to Grade 12 graduation levels
- None of the above: Staff at the N/K to Grade 12 graduation level reported “none of the above” significantly higher than those at the post-secondary level.

When parent responses to student experiences with barriers to accessibility were reviewed, as a function of disability, there were differences between type of disability and the kinds of barriers to accessibility that were experienced as follows:

- Transportation Barriers: Those with physical disabilities and mental health conditions had significantly higher experiences ($p < 0.05$) of transportation barriers;
- Physical Barriers: Those with physical disabilities had significantly higher experiences ($p < 0.05$) of physical barriers compared to other groups;
- Policy Barriers: Those with higher functioning ASD had significantly higher experiences ($p < 0.05$) of policy barriers compared to other disabilities;
- Programmatic Barriers: Those with learning disabilities, mental health conditions and higher functioning ASD had significantly higher experiences ($p < 0.05$) of programmatic barriers compared to other disabilities;
- Social Barriers: Those with higher functioning ASD, mental health conditions and learning disabilities experienced significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) social barriers compared to other disabilities.

Table 9: Parent reported student experiences of at least one of the listed barriers (HF = high functioning)

Disability	Experience with at least one barrier to accessibility
Intellectual disability	85%
ASD – severe	93%
ASD – HF	93%
FASD – severe	67%
FASD – HF	100%
Physical disability	89%
Blind/visually impaired	89%
Deaf/hard of hearing	100%
Mental health condition	97%
Learning disability	99%
Health condition	92%

Common Themes Among Reported Barriers to Accessibility in Education

Attitude Barriers:

Attitude barriers were cited as the most common class of barriers experienced by students with disabilities who participated in the survey 68%: 55% of parents and 49% of staff also cited this class of barriers as being experienced by students with disabilities. This category generated much feedback among all three respondent groups. Themes that emerged from their comments include:

1. The need for training to raise awareness for various disabilities and the experiences of students who have them and provide appropriate tools and strategies for better supporting them within the school system;
2. A general intolerance among many in the school system to those who are differently abled;
3. And a need for greater understanding that in many cases behaviour is a means of communication – time and energy is needed to address underlying issues.

Staff comments (n=56):

- ⇒ “Secondary to lack of inclusion is bullying being socially isolated, lack of empathy among general student population.”
- ⇒ “Some teachers, administrators, and other students are apparently unaware that a differently abled student is an equal member of the classroom community and the school community. In many cases, they don’t even know the student’s name, and the teacher doesn’t encourage inclusion.”

- ⇒ “We have people in our community who think Autism is contagious.”
- ⇒ “There is still the attitude amongst some educators that students with exceptional needs don’t belong in the classroom.”
- ⇒ “There can be a lack of understanding about the farther-reaching effects of FASD and challenges related to learning are seen as behavioural choices.”
- ⇒ “Attitudes of some instructors still revolve around perceived “fairness” and we hear things like “they would never get that in the workplace”. (both N/K to 12 and post-secondary)
- ⇒ “many instructors challenge the need for accommodations for students with disabilities not understanding human rights legislation and their obligation to accommodate.” (post-secondary)

Parent comments (n=45):

- ⇒ “Most staff think my child is bad or rude, often doing things that trigger his anxiety and make it worse. Almost a complete lack of understanding about what he is feeling and willingness to help him.”
- ⇒ “Worst experience was when our child was informed she was getting a special award for awards day...they brought all the special needs kids up to the front and gave them a special award for coming to school...when we spoke to the superintendent he thought eh practice of singling kids with disabilities out like that was perfectly acceptable.”
- ⇒ “Teachers need to have the proper tools and patience to actually want to help educate children...”
- ⇒ “Stigma for birth mother and lack of understanding how FASD affect people are the main attitudinal barrier.”
- ⇒ “They just don’t understand autism.”
- ⇒ “Schools sometimes require medication for school attendance, expel for behaviours of children that are under supported and don’t address bullying in the classroom or at recess.”
- ⇒ “There is a lack of will to think beyond the stereotypes and take some social engineering steps to create a different environment...The attitude with the school seems to be that parents should be grateful their children are allowed to be in the school.”

Student comments (n=13):

- ⇒ “More open education about what disabilities may look like, and that not all can be seen.”
- ⇒ “General anger towards students with disabilities who require accommodations from both faculty and students...accommodations seen as burdens and cheating.”

- ⇒ Instructors have very little empathy for hard of hearing students and see us as “difficult” or simply “not listening.” Invisible disabilities make navigating for resources difficult.”
- ⇒ I find that adults in my school have an ideal of who I am and judge me – that I’m a distraction, hard to teach and therefore give up on me.”

Social Barriers:

This class of barriers also generated a large number of respondents with 58% of student respondents, 48% of parent respondents and 53% staff respondents indicating they were experienced in the education system. When asked to describe the nature of these barriers, three themes emerged from staff, students and parents:

1. Decreased access to social activities that were part of typical school programming;
2. Direct experience with bullying, stigmatization and discrimination based upon their disability; and,
3. The need for supports when in social situations.

All three groups repeated the need for increased attention and support to build appropriate peer relationships within the school setting.

Staff comments (n=47):

- ⇒ “lack of peer education, and absence of support personnel mean that the students are alone and cannot communicate during break times.”
- ⇒ Deaf and hard of hearing kids who haven’t had language since birth have such a hard time socially.”
- ⇒ “Very limited time and attention is spent on finding ways to support social interactions in the classroom with children who have challenges.”
- ⇒ “Not enough opportunities for students with special needs to attend after hour events as no adult support available or transportation. Limited opportunities to make meaningful relationships with peers in the wider school population.”
- ⇒ “Interpreters and computerized note takers are only for classroom/teaching situations. What happens when all the kids are out with various activities offered on the campus...they can’t get involved because they can’t hear...”
- ⇒ “there is limited interaction among the students and staff of the school’s regular program with our special needs students and this impacts the sense of social inclusion and acceptance.”

Parent comments (N=53):

- ⇒ “My son feels like a failure – even though he is probably as successful in most other areas as anyone else. It just sucks to be different.”
- ⇒ “He is being placed with grade 1 kids instead of age appropriate grade 6 kids and so can’t form friendships with his peers.”
- ⇒ “Students with physical disabilities have to ride on a special bus while the rest of the school population is on a regular bus.”
- ⇒ My son has few friends in his grade and in his school. He needs direct help in communicating with his peers in an effective manner.”
- ⇒ “Students not helped to fit in with group assignments.”
- ⇒ “He is always the one to blame when things go wrong. Other kids can lie about what happened and they are automatically right because of my son’s history.”
- ⇒ “Child does not know how to make friends and other kids do not know how to interact with her.”
- ⇒ “Not being able to participate creates landscape of disconnect and feelings of not belonging.”
- ⇒ My son was excluded from a school-wide field trip/activity day because the school did not have staff to cover him – however, he was able to stay at school with an educational assistant.”

Student comments (n=15):

- ⇒ “I struggle socially due to my disability. I have a hard time with auditory processing personal space and cannot understand social cues and figurative language. Kids don’t want to be friends with me.”
- ⇒ Peers don’t understand the struggles of being hard of hearing. A lot of inappropriate jokes of “what are you, deaf?” or “hello, I’m talking to you! Why aren’t you listening?!” Instructors hold bias that “because you don’t look disabled you must not be” – this makes asking for help difficult.” (Post-secondary)
- ⇒ “Teachers have pointed out to other students that I have failed classes and that I’m special.”

Programmatic Barriers:

This class of barriers were cited by 54% of students, 57% of parents and 47% of staff respondents. There was robust response when qualitative descriptions were requested from staff (n=62) and parents (n=43) related to programmatic barriers. Students responded to a lesser extent (n=8). Comments fell into three theme groups:

1. Barriers to existing programs,
2. Need for additional programs to address student accessibility needs,
3. Need to change existing programs to better fit student needs.

Staff comments:

- ⇒ I am one teacher for 10 children. There is only so much I can do. Part of my day goes well and I am able to program and serve my students well, but the other part of the day we are shorthanded and I spend my day putting out fires..." (N/K to grade 12)
- ⇒ In the part time program, courses that are needed for students to be able to complete their program in a timely fashion may not be available at times/dates that are convenient to the student." (Post-secondary)
- ⇒ "children I support need better tools and spaces in order to regulate themselves..." (N/K to 12)
- ⇒ "all programs are not physically accessible to all students." (N/K to 12)
- ⇒ "We are not given the resources or equipment that is necessary to provide the child with the same educational experience as other children attending the centre." (ELCC)
- ⇒ "The time needed for good planning and assessment is not always available and the program offered to the children suffers." (N/K to 12)
- ⇒ "without ASL support, students are unable to access the curriculum." (N/K to 12)
- ⇒ "My students are not allowed to attend regular classes in my school." (N/K to 12)
- ⇒ "Full time programs do not offer much time for students to access necessary accommodations such as tutoring, assessment, assistive technology training, etc." (post-secondary)
- ⇒ "Most programs are designed in such a way that students are unable to take a reduced course load." (post-secondary)

Parent comments:

- ⇒ "Being told it's too hard to modify curriculum in an inclusive classroom. Being told "special needs students who need supervision have to be in the resource room for lunch."

- ⇒ “Extra time needed for writing, work presented in chunks...these all appear to be huge challenges for the school.”
- ⇒ “Students with disabilities are excluded from the enrichment program.”
- ⇒ “Taking her out of class makes her feel excluded and the level of education being taught drops.”
- ⇒ “When there is a school event, he is never included.”

Student comments (n=8):

- ⇒ “It’s no surprise that it takes longer for someone with a disability to complete their program, especially if much of their time is spent having to put adequate supports in place to ensure their success – policy and programmatic barriers occur simultaneously.”
- ⇒ “...booklists are often not available well in advance.”
- ⇒ “There are currently no supports in place for students with dyslexia. Students will only learn to read and/or do math if families have the income to pay for specialized tutoring which averages between \$7,000 and \$9,000 a year.”

Policy Barriers:

This barrier was experienced by 59% of students, 47% of parents and 36% of staff.

In general, these reports could be categorized into two groups:

1. Experiences where existing policies were not being followed
2. Experiences where the enforcement of policies had negative impacts upon the students with disabilities.

Staff comments (n=42):

- ⇒ “Inadequate and inconsistent policies on First Nations for administration, teachers and EAs.”
- ⇒ “When you have 4-5 special needs kids ... in a regular classroom with several different EAs covering for a period here and there throughout the day, it is chaos.”
- ⇒ “Despite inclusive programming for all students, many students remain in segregated settings.” (i.e. policy does not line up with practice)
- ⇒ “Grants are given to child care centres to provide support staff to help with needs of challenging behaviours in the centre. These grants are not made to support the wage of a trained staff but only that of an untrained individual ...often overwhelmed by the responsibility of providing support/care.”
- ⇒ “students who exhibit challenging behaviour...are excluded from schools who have a zero tolerance to violence.”
- ⇒ “Due to unions, EAs who have more years are permitted to take on roles of signing EAs despite the fact they have limited or no ASL.”

- ⇒ “students with disabilities require documentation verifying their disability(ies) which can be costly to acquire; assessment done in grade school often does not provide adequate information to implement accommodations in a post-secondary environment.”

Parent comments (n=35):

- ⇒ The province of Manitoba education department and the Brandon school division have been arguing for 3 months over who is to pay for my son to get independent study as he has a medical condition that does not allow him to attend school.”
- ⇒ The largest challenge in my daughter’s educational experience is the union policy about EAs. EAs are assigned based solely on years in the system. Not based on skill.”
- ⇒ “child is in grade one and has spent more time out of school than in school due to suspensions and lack of support.”
- ⇒ “told initially my son could not join the school band, was not eligible for vocational training programs, work placements...there are no guidelines to help educators understand how to provide accommodation.”
- ⇒ “Policies prohibiting EAs from communicating with parents are a barrier.”
- ⇒ “Dyslexia has not been accepted as a specific diagnosis.”

Student comments (n=10):

- ⇒ “registering for accessibility services requires a note from a doctor, but the campus psychologist has a months-long waiting list...have to take time and effort and money to get assessed privately.”
- ⇒ “Lack of funding provided for note-takers.”
- ⇒ “I am required to submit receipts for textbook purchases before Assistive Technologies in Accessibility Services can convert them to files that meet my accommodation needs.”

Information/Communication Barriers:

A majority of students (66%) and parents (55%) reported barriers to accessibility related to information and communication with 47% of staff also citing this barrier. Many comments in this section referenced challenges the deaf and hard of hearing community experience within the education system. There were numerous entries citing the need for more (i.e. in number) and more qualified ASL interpreters and the need for timely access to FM systems to better support the education of students who have hearing challenges.

Other comments related to supports for students who use alternate means of communication and learning including iPads, social stories, etc. and need to develop skills to support their use of specialized equipment and methods (e.g. keyboarding versus printing or writing) to increase their ability to communicate. Further, staff supporting students with communication barriers also need training to better support them in the use of alternate communication devices and methods.

A third theme among the comments fielded in this section referenced the need for better communication between home, child care, school involving parents, students and staff.

Staff comments (n=68)

- ⇒ “no one else signs in the building- makes it hard for communication to my student is I am not there.”
- ⇒ “Availability of support services may become known only after student has entered the program.” (this may also be a policy issue, but the lack of communication with involved parties is what brought this comment forward)
- ⇒ “biggest work to be done is providing a document to all staff and professors that clearly indicates what to look for when communication information in online courses, pdf documents, etc.”
- ⇒ English not being the first language for the EA but is for the child.”
- ⇒ “students with specific learning needs often need technological “work arounds” such as iPads with voice-to-text technology and apps to facilitate writing or reading process. However, these are a limited number of devices available and staff are not always comfortable/competent with instructing students how to use them.”
- ⇒ “it is very frustrating when childcare centre is not invited to the IPP meeting held at schools. We could all work together towards the same goals and there would be consistency between home, school and the centre.”
- ⇒ “lack of visuals in classroom and common areas.”

Parent comments (n=47):

- ⇒ “He is asked to pass messages from the teacher to me but can’t remember them, didn’t understand them, and didn’t know how to write them down, so I don’t get the information I need.”
- ⇒ “Lines of communication are not clear. Finding out who to go to has been confusing. Way too many closed doors for a parent who never navigated the school system before.”

- ⇒ “Sometimes a child may have trouble seeing something when out on the playground and the teacher on supervision doesn’t know that child has a visual impairment.”
- ⇒ Not many EAs have experience with my daughter’s communication device, so if her primary EA is away or sick, not much meaningful communication is done.”

Student comments (n=13)

- ⇒ iPad/computer isn’t available at all times. Hasn’t been prioritized for one in classroom. If doesn’t get to one fast enough, then has to go without as not enough for the whole class.”
- ⇒ Sometimes I cannot keep up with instruction...the teachers are talking but I’m still at the beginning trying to understand...it takes longer for me to process information...then I tend to forget.”
- ⇒ “I am three years into my degree and only heard about hard of hearing services this year.”

Physical/Structural Barriers:

Physical and structural barriers were reported by 28% of students, 39% of parents, and 22% of staff. Comments entered under this section were wide ranging and referenced inaccessible school buildings (lack of push buttons, need for better placement of existing buttons, need to turn on power to existing buttons), challenges with double doors (push buttons on one set but not the next), challenges within the school buildings themselves (narrow hallways and doorways, lack of elevators, etc.) as well as need for accessible restrooms throughout the school building.

Examples of some of these comments are listed below:

Staff comments (n=52)

- ⇒ “Regular classrooms not arranged/equipped/adaptable to wheelchairs, specialized seating, or differently-abled children’s bodies, so they spend a lot of time in an adapted room.”
- ⇒ “Front doors are hard to open – Handicapped buttons are turned off.”
- ⇒ “Playgrounds are not adapted to children in wheelchairs.”
- ⇒ Large, overcrowded, sensory overwhelming classrooms and hallways.”

Parent comments (n=24)

- ⇒ “one particular drop off entrance that has push buttons but then a very steep built-in ramp...some drivers will, and some will not help to navigate the ramp.”
- ⇒ There is not one accessible parking space in any of the schools.”
- ⇒ “Physical education equipment is not designed for kids with disabilities.”

⇒ “Lights are too bright and make humming sound...child complains “everything is too loud.”

Student comments (n=11; all from post-secondary level):

⇒ ...quite a few lecture theatres that are inaccessible due to either not railings or ramps.”

⇒ “wheelchair doors to lecture halls in the Armes building have been inaccessible for letting students in but work fine for letting them out.”

⇒ Elevators are cramped. Classroom doors are heavy and don’t have buttons.”

⇒ “overcrowded classrooms effect sensory processing, fluorescent lighting.”

Transportation Barriers:

Barriers to transportation were reported by 23% of students, 36% of parents, and 18% of staff. Most commonly cited were challenges related to a lack of flexibility when it comes to the planning for and use of specialized transportation. Other comments cited a complete lack of services – no public transportation system in the community or a lack of accessible buses in the community (especially northern, rural and First Nations). Examples are shown below.

Staff comments (n=41):

⇒ “Students must leave class early or arrive late, due to Handi-transit pick up/drop off schedule. Handi-transit does not always go to the correct door or does not always arrive/leave at the scheduled time.”

⇒ “Many of our students in wheelchairs cannot access buses during the day for outings with their peers, or to attend work experiences. Students in wheelchairs are often picked up later and sent home earlier than their peers due to busing schedules. Students who need busing but have a walker can’t take their walker onto the bus.”

⇒ “There is a limited transportation budget per class. So, students who can walk can take staff cars or can access the public bus get to go to activities, day program trials, work ed., etc. much more easily and frequently than kids who use wheelchairs.”

⇒ “Poorly trained or inexperienced bus drivers won’t/can’t maneuver into bus loop to wheelchair doors. Seatbelts in bus don’t work. Buses for field trips are not equipped for wheelchairs.”

Parent comments (n=28):

⇒ “the school division has one but that is not wheelchair accessible. Quite often the bus is out of service...my daughter has to travel to and from outings completely separate from her classmates and often leaves/arrives as much as an hour later than the rest of the class.”

- ⇒ “Forced to walk to kindergarten with daughter who is 5 but walking as a 2 year old as no parking provided for parents to drop off.”
- ⇒ “Up until grade 12, my son was able to access a private transportation company for travel to and from school (independent schools) but has to rely on Handi-transit for University – scheduling makes him have to leave home much earlier than ideal and return much later than ideal (when using oxygen, this schedule is very tricky) ...have experienced being left behind, not dropped off or picked up in appropriate locations, variation in what drivers will help with.”
- ⇒ “we won’t qualify for bus in grade 7 because we were told our child is “too bright”
- ⇒ to be in the special education track but they will still require child care next year due to maturity and mental health so we won’t have busing to take him from child care to school.”
- ⇒ “Bus steps are too high making it difficult for child with motor challenges to get on the bus easily. The sidewalk is difficult and dangerous getting off the bus as there’s an extra cement step – uneven surfaces right off the bus.”

Student comments (n=9):

- ⇒ “classes have walking field trips, with no alternative for me.”

Additional Issues and Barriers:

Both students and parents were asked if they had encountered any other, additional barriers to educational programming. Many of these overlapped with the already described accessibility barriers (in most cases comments were made in both the original barrier area as well as this one) – there were some others noted and they fell into the theme of financial capacity/limitations and wait times (which may be inter-related). Examples of these include the following:

- ⇒ “No access to equipment and software, speech therapy,”
- ⇒ “High fees and Bill 31, which may make University more expensive each year...”
- ⇒ “Funding to get extra classroom support is a lengthy and political process. The wait time is unacceptable and excessive.”
- ⇒ “My son could benefit from a certain kind of wheelchair. They denied it because it would be able to be used not just on campus and therefore not strictly for educational reasons.”
- ⇒ “He needs to be home schooled. The barrier there is that even though he will be under the government’s home schooling system, he loses all supports. And I am unable to afford to pay for private services due to being on EIA.”

⇒ “increased tuition prices will make it more difficult for marginalized community members to attend school. I still have to pay for physio, meds, transport, etc. It will make it more difficult to access the education system.”

Other comments, especially from students, reflected the struggles they have on a day to day basis with energy level, fatigue, etc. as they pursue their education:

⇒ “Stress is hard.”

⇒ “Distractions within the classroom, grades suffering because of the required course load for sponsorship and not being able to access the u-pass.” [Peggo card]

⇒ “I will probably not graduate.”

⇒ “I feel so alone in high school”

⇒ “Stigma and dwindling funding is becoming a huge concern.”

Prioritizing Action on Barriers

All three respondent groups were asked the question, “If there was one thing that could be done to improve accessibility within the education system, what would it be?”

While all barrier categories were represented among the many comments fielded in this section of the survey, the top three themes per respondent group were as follows:

Staff (195 respondents):

1. Address attitude and social barriers to accessibility across all levels of system staffing (e.g. in N/K to Grade 12, from superintendent down to educational assistant and support staff).
2. Increase funding and access to existing services (e.g. access to ASL training for EAs, more EAs, clinician support, etc.)
3. Address information and communication barriers.

Parents (109 respondents):

1. Increase training opportunities for staff so they better understand the experiences of students with disabilities and increase their capacity to support and deliver educational programming to them.
2. Address barriers related to policy issues within the school system.
3. Address attitudes and social barriers to inclusion.

Students (25 respondents):

1. Increase training opportunities for staff so they better understand the experiences of students with disabilities and increase their capacity to support and deliver educational programming to them.
2. Address attitude and social barriers to inclusion.
3. Provide additional services and supports aimed at students who have learning disabilities, mental health issues.

Staff were asked an additional question related to this prioritization: “If you could make one recommendation for the improvement of accessibility in Manitoba’s education system what would it be?”

Of the 168 responses to this question, the most prevalent responses recommended there be increased funding available to allow greater access to existing programs. This funding could be used to hire more resource and EA support in the classroom, also cited as one of the top recommendations, and to fund more clinician time and ensure all children are supported equally “regardless of where in Manitoba they live.”

Discussion

While there are significant limitations with voluntary online surveys, a wide range of individuals completed one of the three surveys about barriers to accessibility in Manitoba's education system. The surveys spanned Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) to post-secondary settings with an eye to determining challenges related to both access and participation. Three perspectives were collected – those of staff, parents and students with disabilities.

Five key findings from this study include the following:

1. Despite being in place for many years, strikingly few respondents were aware of interdepartmental protocols and planning processes developed to guide transitions and education planning. Even when used, many felt their use was ineffective in guiding the planning and/or the delivery of educational services.
2. While 75% of students were attending neighbourhood schools, parents and students reported 21-24% were placed in segregated programs for the majority of the school day.
3. High levels of unmet needs were found related to the provision of virtually all types of school-based supports.
4. Alarming levels of social exclusion were reported by all three respondent groups.
5. Greater than 80% of all three respondent groups indicated students with disabilities experience one or more of the seven types of barriers listed.

These findings are discussed in greater detail below.

Awareness and Use of Interdepartmental Protocols and Planning Tools

Early Learning and Child Care

Just over half of ELCC staff respondents reported they were familiar with the Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs. However, the majority of parents of children within this system were not aware of this document and process. Since this document and protocol have been in effect since 2002, with a recently revised version released in 2015, the lack of knowledge and use of this process substantially limits the potential benefits it may have on the children, families and staff.¹⁴

¹⁴ The protocol is a comprehensive tool produced by Healthy Child Manitoba, a committee of Manitoba government's cabinet responsible for interdepartmental protocols, and directs government departments and related agencies to work collaboratively in several specific areas.

Of ELCC staff who responded that they knew of the protocol and that it was in use in their centres, 69% indicated the planning process was only somewhat effective or not at all effective for planning the transition of a child in their care into the traditional education system. Due to the small number of parents who responded they were familiar with the protocol, it was difficult to assess its use and effectiveness from a parent perspective.

Much more needs to be done to ensure all transition team members (ELCC staff, any involved support staff/clinicians, social workers, parents, and incoming school system staff) are not just aware of the protocol but use it effectively to better prepare the incoming school staff, parents and children for their transition.

N/K to Grade 12 Graduation: The IEP

In the province of Manitoba there is a mission to “ensure that all Manitoba’s children and youth have access to an array of educational opportunities such that every learner experiences success through relevant, engaging and high-quality education that prepares them for lifelong learning and citizenship in a democratic, socially just and sustainable society.”¹⁵ Further, Manitoba’s Public Schools Act was amended in 2005 to ensure all students were entitled to an “appropriate education.”¹⁶

“The Amendment to the Public Schools Act: Appropriate Educational Programming provides the regulation to guide policy and programming for all students, particularly those with special learning needs, in receiving the appropriate educational programming they require. The regulations confirm in legislation that all students in Manitoba are entitled to receive appropriate educational programming that fosters student participation in both the academic and social life of the school. The legislation supports Manitoba’s philosophy of inclusion.”¹⁷

“Individual education planning is appropriate when planning to support a diverse range and variety of student needs, including academic, communication, behavioural, and/or physical needs, and begins when someone working with a student notices that she or he is struggling to meet expected learning outcomes.”¹⁸

¹⁵ <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/edu/mandate.html>

¹⁶ <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/bills/38-2/b013e.php>

¹⁷ <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/aep/index.html> and <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/aep/inclusion.html>

¹⁸ http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/aep/handbook_ss/Handbook_ss.pdf

It is commendable that 90% of school staff involved with students from N/K to Grade 12 were aware of the IEP process and over half of them, even with many in a support staff role, had been involved with the process.

It is also a positive finding that the majority of both student and parent respondents were also aware of and involved in the IEP process.

Of those parents who reported IEPs were not in place for their son/daughter, the disability profile of the majority of the students included the less severe end of the autism spectrum, those with mental health conditions and/or those with learning disabilities. Students with these forms of disability are seen, many times, to not warrant a formal IEP as their academic program may be supported through typical in-class differentiation of instruction. This does not mean they would not benefit from having an individualized approach and a more holistic view of their education, including social skill development and support as well as other coping strategies, just that, for the purposes of this survey, need for an IEP was not specified.

It is troubling that, of those who did have an IEP in place, most staff, parents and students reported they were only somewhat satisfied with the process. Given the length of time student-specific planning has been in place for students with special needs (since at least 1999) and how long the right of to appropriate educational programming has been asserted within Manitoba (since 2005), this is very disappointing.

Bridging to Adulthood

A specialized form of IEP is developed as students move through the school system and prepare for graduation. The guiding document for this process is *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to the Community* (2008).

Ten years after the formal rollout of this revised protocol, parent, staff and student respondents were asked about their experiences with transition planning as the students prepared for high school graduation. Only 53% of staff working with students from Grades 9 to 12 were aware of the protocol, although almost half of these staff were educational assistants and may not be privy to some of the guidelines and documents in use within the school system.

Only 24% of parents and 44% of students in this age range responded that they were aware of this process. This is discouraging when the process itself, developed by Healthy Child Manitoba, directs all stakeholders working with a student who has special needs be involved in the planning for their transition into the community. The protocol document includes a timeline to be used to

monitor the planning process from the perspective of all stakeholders, including those of the student and parent.

Many times, however, the title of a process is not necessarily known or shared with participants, and the most important thing is to ensure some kind of person-centered transition planning process is in place. When staff, parents and student respondents were asked if they had been involved with some kind of transition planning process, 41% staff indicated they had been – again this low number may reflect the professional profile of these staff. More interesting is the response of parents and students: 91% of parents indicated they had been involved in this kind of process, a robust and positive response. However, only 22% of students responded that they had been involved in this kind of planning process. This is striking and further attention is required to address this seeming lack in awareness and inclusion in the planning process.

Most staff ranked the transition planning process as effective or higher, while more responses from parents and students were found in the somewhat effective/ineffective ranking.

Educational Placement and Programming

Educational Placement

The amendment to the Public Schools Act directs schools and school divisions to prioritize placement of students with disabilities/special needs in their neighbourhood schools with their same age peers.

When parents and students were asked where they attended school, results indicated that approximately 75% attended their neighbourhood school, with the remaining 25% attending other public schools (11-16%), private schooling (6%) or home schooling (2-5%). There was a low response from those on reserve and the number attending First Nations schools was negligible.

When the disability profiles of those not attending their neighbourhood schools was reviewed, it was difficult to see any pattern related to their likelihood to be within the neighbourhood versus another school.

Those opting for home schooling often do so as a last resort when the student with a special need/disability has had overwhelmingly negative experiences within the public school system, or when the parent-professional trust has been broken. However, the rates of homeschooling reported by parents of children with disabilities are similar to what has been reported as a provincial average.¹⁹

¹⁹ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-parents-choosing-homeschool-1.3751842>

Overall, more needs to be done to bring the attendance figures at neighbourhood schools up to a higher level by addressing the fundamental reasons parents and students may choose or be directed to attendance in an alternate school environment.

Educational Programming

According to Inclusive Education Canada, “Inclusive education is carried out in a common learning environment; that is, an educational setting where students from different backgrounds and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment. Common learning environments are used for the majority of the students’ regular instruction hours and may include classrooms, libraries, gym, performance theatres, music rooms, cafeterias, playgrounds and the local community. A common learning environment is not a place where students with intellectual disabilities or other special needs learn in isolation from their peers.”²⁰

Survey respondents were asked where students with disabilities spent the majority (greater than 50%) of the school day and this was correlated to the type of disability the student had. There were insufficient student data to look at any relation between school day placement and disability profile (n=19), but results for parent and staff respondents, shown in Tables 4 and 5, were compared.

These two data sets represent two very different perspectives on student placement: While parents reported students with intellectual disabilities, severe ASD, FASD, blind/visually impaired or with other health conditions were more likely (i.e. greater than 50%) to be placed in special classrooms or programs for the majority of the school day, school staff reported students with these disabilities were much more likely to be found in regular classrooms (i.e. greater than 66%).

This begs the question of who the students being cited within each of these respondent groups were: were they from significantly different subsets of students or is the fundamental understanding of what constitutes in-school programming and placement so fundamentally different between parents and staff? In either case, further action to determine the extent of use of alternate settings for students with disabilities is needed and should be made public.

In-school services and supports

N/K to Grade 12 Graduation

Accessibility to education is a human right, enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, affirmed in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons

²⁰ www.inclusiveeducation.ca/about/what-is-ie/

with Disabilities. Within Manitoba, in the N/K to Grade 12 system, this is supported by the amendment to the Public Schools Act: Appropriate Educational Programming (2005). Enabling these services and supports that provide a more “level playing field” for students with disabilities. These services and supports can range from resource or specialist teachers mentoring classroom teachers to provide more appropriate programming, or their leading the development of individual programming and supports for these students. Supports and services may also include provision of one-on-one or small group settings using educational assistants, the implementation of various therapy modalities (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech language therapy) to compensate for various shortfalls, providing a better understanding of learning styles/challenges through a psychological profile and recommendations, and more. To this end, the three surveys asked a series of questions related to access to and need for school-based supports.

All three groups reported unmet needs for all school-based support referenced in the survey. These unmet needs were seen in terms of a lack of awareness of student needs by staff, lack of availability of the services and/or lack of their use within the school setting.

Overall, both parents and staff agreed on the degree to which needs are not being met and this attests to a precarious situation where a large number of students with disabilities are not receiving the assessments, interventions and supports they need to flourish in Manitoba’s education system.

Between parents and staff, the greatest unmet needs reported related to the provision of culturally relevant supports (79% unmet needs reported by parents, 60% reported by staff), followed by occupational therapy supports (42% and 46% reported by parents and staff, respectively). The level of unmet needs reported for all other clinical supports ranged from 30-41% for both groups. The least reported level of unmet needs related to the support provided by resource teaching staff/guidance counsellors. As the resource teacher is often the first point of reference for staff, parents and students when barriers to appropriate educational programming exist, it could be expected that these would be the least unmet need here.

When staff, parents and students were asked if there were other supports and services needed to help with educational programming for students with disabilities, some notable responses referenced the need to pay increased attention to the experiences of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, those who are French speaking, those with mental health concerns and those who come from newcomer families. Supports for these students should include qualified and accredited American Sign Language interpreters, greater resources

and knowledge about disability within the French school system and greater access for students with disabilities to French immersion programming.

Services at the post-secondary level

A smaller group of parents, staff and students participated in questions related to their experiences in the post-secondary education environment. These questions related to student connection to on campus supports and services enabling their participation in post-secondary programming.

Approximately 70% of students indicated they were connected to some kind of accessibility services department, while only 25% of parents were aware of this connection. As there is no obligation for students or post-secondary school staff to share information with a student's parents, this discrepancy is not completely surprising. Levels of satisfaction were reported with 50% of students indicating they were satisfied to extremely satisfied, and 43% indicating they were only somewhat satisfied. This left 7% not at all satisfied. Clearly, improvements in service provision is needed to support the right of students with disabilities to attend post-secondary education. In many cases increasing the awareness of the supports available through student accessibility services would be highly beneficial, while addressing negative attitudes among staff and students needs to be a priority.

Social Exclusion

“Schools in Manitoba are committed to providing safe and caring places for learning. Guided by Safe and Inclusive Schools legislation, Manitoba school boards are proactive in creating and sustaining safe schools. Amendments in 2013 to The Public Schools Act directed Manitoba school boards to update and implement policy in schools to provide safe and inclusive learning environments, including a policy on respect for human diversity and actions such as professional learning for staff on bullying prevention.”²¹

In 2014/15, Manitoba Education and Training released a report, “Tell Them from Me: Bullying and School Safety”²² that documented the findings of a series of student surveys relating experiences of bullying and exclusion.

In this report, at the Grade 7 to 12 level, 36% of students reported being bullied, while 7% felt excluded due to a disability. In the present surveys, 69% of student respondents reported experiencing bullying within the past 3 years. Although the number of students responding to this question was low (n=13), their perspective was reinforced by parents, 72% of whom reported their son/daughter had experienced

²¹ http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/whole_school/document.pdf

²² https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/ttfm/full_doc.pdf

bullying and staff, 68% of whom reported their students with disabilities had experienced bullying. These numbers are alarming. When coupled with the experiences of social exclusion in the school setting: 92% of student, 89% of parent and 77% of staff, this paints a bleak picture of school life for students with disabilities in Manitoba schools.

Some students with disabilities experience suspension and expulsion as a result of zero tolerance policies and challenges in the interpretation of the amendment to the Public Schools Act (2005) and how it applies to discipline, suspensions and expulsions. Reports of experience with suspensions within the past 3 years occurred with 38% student respondents, 23% parent respondents and 49% staff respondents. Expulsions were also reported with 8% parent respondents reporting them for their son/daughter and 11% staff reporting them for their students within the past 3 years. There needs to be a greater understanding of the unfair impact these zero tolerance policies have upon students with disabilities and increased capacity to work with challenging behaviour within the school system.

Barriers to Accessibility in Manitoba's Education System

The vast majority of respondents reported that they experienced a range of barriers that will need to be addressed to enable students with disabilities to take full advantage of an inclusive, appropriate, and high-quality education system.

“Nearly everyone faces hardships and difficulties at one time or another. But for people with disabilities, barriers can be more frequent and have greater impact.”¹

Often there are multiple barriers that can make it extremely difficult or even impossible for people with disabilities to function.

All survey respondents, from the ELCC level, through Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 and on into post-secondary, were asked about the experiences of students with disabilities with these barriers. Additional comments were collected under the “other” designation.

A startling 99% of parents reported their sons/daughters with disabilities had experienced at least one of the listed barriers while 89% of students and 83% of staff also reported this.

While there were high levels of experience with all barriers (all over the 50% level) listed in the survey, the top three areas reported from staff were:

1. Social (56%),
2. Programmatic (53%),
3. Information/Communication barriers (51%).

For parents, the top three areas reported were

1. Social (60%),
2. Programmatic (57%), and
3. Attitudinal (55%).

For students, the top three areas were:

1. Attitudinal (68%),
2. Social (66%), and a tie between
3. Policy and Information/Communication (both at 59%).

Closer attention to results across education levels showed those at the ELCC level reported significantly higher experiences with Policy barriers compared to the other two groups, while those at the Post-Secondary level reported significantly greater experiences of barriers related to Transportation, Information/Communication, Policy, and Attitude.

Because staff are working with a wide variety of students with disabilities, their responses could not be confidently compared according to the experience with each barrier according to the kind of disability, and student data was too small to generate meaningful data. However, parent data yielded some interesting results when disabilities were compared to the experience with each class of barriers.

Statistical analysis of these results indicated that those with physical and mental health disabilities were more likely to experience transportation barriers ($p < 0.05$), while those with physical disabilities were also much more likely to experience physical barriers ($p < 0.05$).

Many Manitoba schools are older and need to be renovated or retrofit to become physically accessible. This leaves many schools without ramps, elevators, automatic doors or accessible bathrooms. However, in some cases, oversights, such as placement of door switches and central control of those switches limiting access to the automatic doors presented another layer of barrier in the school building.

Staff training and awareness of the provision and use of physical accommodations was also referenced, especially when there are long line ups to use an elevator and no preference is provided to someone with mobility impairments, or bus drivers drop students off at an accessible door, but not understand the challenges associated with a ramp either leading up the doorway or just inside a doorway.

Other barriers that seemed to be experienced by particular disability profiles include the increased experience of policy barriers by those with higher functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) ($p < 0.05$) – given the history of special education dedicated to those with challenges in the academic realm and the increase in awareness and diagnosis of ASD among children, youth and adults, this speaks to the need to update policies and practices to better serve all students in Manitoba schools.

Those with ASD may function well academically but need assistance managing the social and organizational aspects of the school environment and these are recognized educational outcomes in school curriculum that need to be more specifically addressed for these students.

Those with learning disabilities, mental health conditions and higher functioning ASD also had significantly greater experiences with programmatic barriers ($p < 0.05$) compared to other disabilities. This group includes individuals who do not “qualify,” in the traditional sense, for an individual education plan and may have very limited access to various in-school support modalities (e.g. occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech language therapy, psychology, etc.). They could definitely benefit from additional programming and supports to get the most out of their educational experience.

This same group of students also experienced significantly great social barriers when it came to accessing education ($p < 0.05$). Again, given the nature of their disabilities, their success in the educational system is often hampered by challenges in navigating an environment where they may be missing out on key elements related to social cues and pragmatic skills, have difficulty with self-esteem, depression and anxiety, or are struggling with reading, writing and math skills.

Summary

The human right to an education is fundamental to enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, The Manitoba's Human Rights Code and the Amendment to the Public Education Act: Appropriate Educational Programming. This right applies to all of Manitoba's educational systems from early learning and child care, to Nursery/Kindergarten to Grade 12 schooling and to post-secondary education.

This report documents the results of surveys designed to identify barriers within and across these three levels that prevent or limit the full recognition of this human right for students with disabilities.

While ELCC and post-secondary education are not mandatory, progress has been made over recent years to increase accessibility to these services. However, not all centres and institutions are accessible to all children/students with disabilities. At the ELCC level, the ability to access qualified staff was seen to be very limited. In the present study, specific barriers cited by those within the ELCC system related to policy/communication issues – especially when working with school-aged children where open sharing of information between the child care centre and school is lacking. Many referred to an expectation that the child care centre address behaviour issues arising during the school day, rather than the school itself. Many also expressed concern regarding the limited funding available for extra support staff and being able to access them in a timely manner.

At the post-secondary level, students with disabilities who apply to and are accepted into programming may access Student Accessibility Services. Satisfaction with the level of services provided appears fairly good and most challenges cited by survey respondents referenced instructor/professor attitude, their knowledge of policy and provision of accommodations.

Clearly, at both the ELCC and Post-Secondary levels, more needs to be done to both inform and support staff, parents and children/students regarding accessibility and reducing barriers to participation.

The movement of students from ELCC to N/K to Grade 12 schooling and beyond should be guided by established, multi-departmental government protocols, like the Protocol for Early Childhood Transition and the Bridging to Adulthood protocol cited in the surveys, and yet results demonstrated not only a lack of awareness of these protocols, but also a lack of satisfaction with its process by those using it.

The N/K to Grade 12 system is mandatory for all children/youth in Manitoba, aged 7 to 18 years, with the option to extend age of school leaving/graduation to June of the year the student turns 21 years. As such, programming and supports for students with disabilities would be expected to be much more robust.

Results from the surveys used to assess staff, parent and student perspectives on accessibility in the N/K to Grade 12 system shed some light on areas where progress has been made (e.g. physical accessibility was cited least as a barrier to education) but there was widespread consensus that more needs to be done, especially when addressing attitudinal, social, policy and programmatic barriers. These barriers lead to profound social exclusion and vulnerability to negative consequences including bullying and must be addressed to ensure students with disabilities can gain an appropriate education that prepares them for further education/training and ultimately for competitive employment.

Certain disability groups reported greater challenges with specific barriers, including those with physical disabilities (physical and transportation barriers), mental health conditions (social, programmatic and transportation barriers), those with ASD (social, policy and programmatic barriers) and those with learning disabilities (policy and programmatic barriers).

One of the hallmarks of inclusive education is placement and programming within neighbourhood schools in the regular classroom with same age peers. Survey results showed specialized classrooms and programs are still in place within Manitoba's education system. What was particularly striking was the discrepancy between levels of their reported use between parents and staff. While parents reported significantly higher use ($p < 0.05$) when students presented with intellectual disabilities (54% of parents of students with an intellectual disability reported their son/daughter were in a segregated program), similar placement/programming rates were not reported by staff.

The survey results also document the reported and widespread inadequacy of many school-based supports required by students with disabilities. Moreover, both the providers and users of the system reported that students faced a wide range of many other barriers throughout Manitoba's educational systems. Most often reported were barriers related to attitude, social exclusion, programmatic limitations and policies.

The high rates of social exclusion (ranging from 68-72% among respondent groups) and bullying (ranging from 77-92% among respondent groups) of students with disabilities reported in the surveys was alarming.

Basic questions remain: In a province that supports the fundamental human right to education, endorses a philosophy of inclusion and promotes it through its own legislation and policy development, how are the experiences of students with disabilities and their families being monitored to ensure that barriers are effectively identified and addressed? How are barriers to this human right, especially those discussed in this report, being dealt with so that all Manitobans understand and appreciate the critical role that access to quality education plays in supporting a more equitable future for all?