

# Let's Chat... about *Inclusive Education*

*Hosts Gordon L. Porter, Jacqueline Specht and Diane Richler*



## **Guest: Steve Sider**

*Professor & Associate Dean  
Director, Centre for Leading Research in  
Education, Faculty of Education  
Wilfrid Laurier University,  
Waterloo, ON*

Dr. Steve Sider is a professor and associate dean in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, where he teaches courses in school leadership and inclusive education.

He was a school administrator, special education teacher and consultant, and classroom teacher for 15 years before joining the university faculty. He received his PhD in Educational Studies from Western University in 2006 after earlier academic study at Brock University and Laurier University. He is the inaugural director for the Centre for Leading Research in Education (CLRiE), an interdisciplinary research centre at Laurier. He is a Fellow at the Balsillie School of International Affairs and an associate of the Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education.

Dr. Sider currently holds three Canadian national research grants examining inclusive leadership practices of Canadian school principals. He is the 2019 winner of the Laurier Donald F. Morgenson Faculty Award for Teaching Excellence in the category of Excellence in Internationalization. He travels regularly to Haiti, Ghana, and Egypt where he is involved in school leadership and special education training and research.

Dr. Sider's research focus is at the intersection of inclusive education and school leadership in international contexts. Dr. Sider recently co-authored the book *Leadership for Inclusive Schools*. He holds multiple national and international research grants exploring competencies for inclusive school leadership. He is past-president of the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada and a member of Inclusive Education Canada's "Network of Associates".

## Key Issues in this Chat Session:

1. **The Soft Skills of Leadership:** Dr. Sider points out that “values and attitudes” are important factors in ensuring principals can be successful with inclusion. Principals who have had direct experience with students with disabilities appear more able to demonstrate these values and attitudes.
2. **Nurturing Principals’ Skills:** Leadership with a commitment to inclusion is critical and research must continue to be done on how principals develop their attitudes towards inclusion. Both “technical skills” (instructional strategies & individual planning) and “soft skills” (values, vision and attitude) are needed.
3. **Collaboration Between Leaders:** collaboration with school leaders from different schools and school districts can enable sharing and skill development and produce positive outcomes.
4. **Intersectionality:** Steve asserts that inclusion must not operate in silos related to a student’s particular challenge or barrier in learning. It is a grave error to consider a student’s needs from just one aspect of their identity (e.g., academic deficits, physical, behavioural). Effective inclusion strategies address a student’s unique and diverse needs.
5. **Segregation in Ontario Schools:** Special classes - and in a few cases special schools - are still far too prevalent in Ontario. In most respects it would seem to be related to a “failure of vision” or a lack of commitment by those in leadership positions.

## Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. What role do principals play in creating an inclusive school?
2. What skills or experiences does a principal need to be successful with inclusion?

## Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. How can networking and professional learning communities be established for school principals?
2. What strategies can be used to strengthen the “soft skills” of principals who have not had personal experience engaging with students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs?
3. What strategy might advocates use to move inclusion ahead and reduce segregation in schools?

# More from Steve Sider:

Sider, S., Maich, K., Morvan, J., Vilella, M., Ling, P., & Repp, C. (2021). Inclusive school leadership: Examining the experiences of school principals in supporting students with special education needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12515>

MacCormack, J., Sider, S., Maich, K., & Specht, J. (2021). Self-determination and inclusion: The role of Canadian principals in catalysing inclusive-positive practices. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 17(2). <https://journals.sfu.ca/ijep/index.php/ijep/issue/view/213>

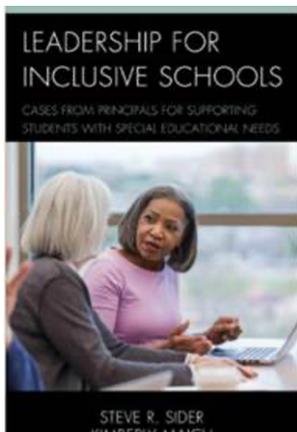
Sider, S. (2020). School principals and students with special education needs in a pandemic: Emerging insights from Ontario, Canada. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 48(2), 78-84.

Sider, S. & Ling, P. (2020). Setting the context for a conference to explore intersectionalities for school leadership and inclusion. *Exceptionality Education International*, 30(2), 4-11.

Maich, K., Sider, S., Morvan, J., & Smith, D. (2020). Making the unknown or invisible accessible: The collaborative development of inclusion-focused open-access case studies for principals and other school leaders. *Exceptionality Education International*, 30(2), 68-79.

Sider, S., Maich, K., & Morvan, J. (2017). School principals and students with special education needs: Leading inclusive schools. *Canadian Journal of Education*. 40(2).

Sider, S. (2016). Supporting a student with a vision impairment in secondary school. In K. Stegemann, & A. Aucoin (Eds.) (2016). *Inclusive education: Stories of success and hope in a Canadian context*. Toronto: Pearson



Sider, S. & Maich, K. (2022). **Leadership for inclusive schools: Cases from principals for supporting students with special educational needs**. Rowman and Littlefield. <https://amzn.to/3IDkSq3>



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada  
Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

