

DDRC

Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary

Inclusive Education

The aim of this position paper is to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity, worth and equal rights for all people. All citizens, including those with developmental disabilities, are part of their local communities and are recognized as having a rich contribution to make in the development and well being of the human community. Our vision is 'everyone belongs'.

As a resource centre for inclusion, and an agency that has a rich history, we believe we have a responsibility to share information including providing a counterbalance to historical negative perceptions, which if left unchecked, serve as a risk not only to individuals with developmental disabilities, but to the health and vitality of our community.

DDRC began as an organization in 1952 when several parents of children with developmental disabilities were denied access to their neighborhood school. While much has changed since this date, access to the neighborhood school and an inclusive education is still not always an option for all students. The DDRC believes there are many compelling reasons why inclusive education should be the norm, such as:

- Building on progress towards school inclusion in Canada and the United States, significant research, and DDRC's work with adults with developmental disabilities, we have learned that adults who have the opportunity to be genuinely included in both educational and social environments while growing up, achieve greater self determination and higher levels of success in establishing meaningful employment, social relationships, and overall connection in their communities.
- Research also reveals that inclusion not only benefits students who are on the margins, but contributes to the academic and civic success of students who are not excluded. Typical students derive benefits from sharing experiences and relationships with students with disabilities. Documented benefits include higher levels of self-acceptance, reduced fear of human differences, increased tolerance, increased understanding of fairness and equal treatment, and the development of relaxed and accepting friendships.
- Studies have concluded that inclusion is no more expensive than any other school model. In fact, we know that individuals with developmental disabilities, who have been fully included throughout their education have a higher rate of successfully finding and retaining employment, contributing to the community,

and leading fully productive lives, this is in the long run, a more cost effective approach.

- School inclusion improves the quality of teaching for all students. Having a student with a developmental disability in the classroom requires teachers to plan for diversity, think more objectively about their lessons and more creatively about the delivery of curriculum. As teachers are challenged by diversity they learn to be clearer about classroom goals and expectations that help many students be successful. Research has shown that the performance of typical students is NOT compromised by the presence of students with disabilities in their classroom.

Inclusive education, according to the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre (DDRC), is about creating environments of authentic belonging, where ALL students learn together, diversity is valued, personal growth enhanced, and equality is experienced, as a result of teaching practices that meet the needs of individually diverse learners. The DDRC is taking the lead to affect change in a positive way through collaboration currently underway with the Calgary Board of Education, a few private schools, and parents of children with developmental disabilities. In partnership, our work to date has resulted in:

- A decrease in requests for special placements of students with developmental disabilities by parents, teachers and administrators
- An increase in positive experience of students, parents, teachers and administrators who have embraced inclusive schooling
- An increase in requests by all parents for inclusive education.

Key Messages:

- Inclusive education, according to the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre (DDRC), is about creating environments of authentic belonging, where ALL students learn together, diversity is valued, personal growth enhanced, and equality is experienced, as a result of teaching practices that meet the needs of individually diverse learners.
- The aim of DDRC is to have inclusive education in Calgary be a feasible choice for all parents of children with developmental disabilities.
- School inclusion improves the quality of teaching for all students.
- Typical students derive benefits from sharing experiences and relationships with students with disabilities
- School inclusion is cost effective.

