Parent Perspectives of Inclusion

Inclusion Perspectives of Parents Who Have Children With and Without Exceptionalities
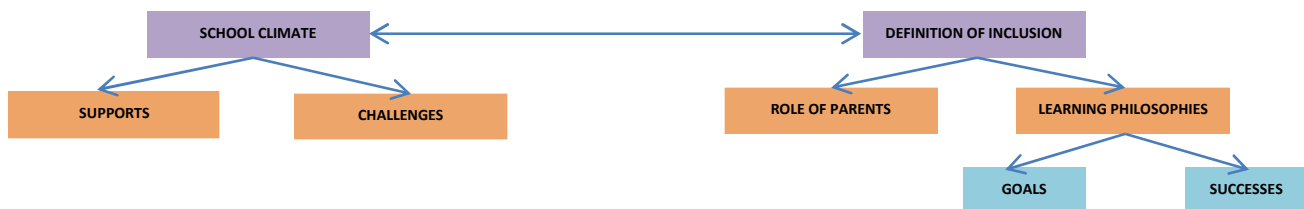
Pembina Hills Research Project

"To me, personally, it has nothing to do with children with disabilities and "including" them. I wouldn't even take into consideration that it wouldn't include children with disabilities. If I heard this is an inclusive school, from [our town], my first thing is they include every single one of those kids, and this is the [school] family. (Pembina Hills Parent)

Summary of Findings

Parents of Pembina Hills students who submitted a completed survey, report generally positive experiences with their children's inclusive school environment and links to the local community. However, agreement on all topics related to inclusive education was inconsistent. Some parents thought that certain students might experience greater success in special education placements. Differences in experiences between the parents of children with and those without exceptionalities were also reported. Interviews with parents explored these differences in a deeper way. Parents' perceptions of the **school climate** directly impacted the ways in which they **defined inclusion** and vice versa. Within the school climate, parents identified **supports** critical to their children's inclusion, as well as several **challenges** that, at times, got in the way of their children's inclusion. All parents identified school supports and transition supports as critical to their children's schooling. The parents of students with exceptionalities also focussed on disability-specific supports; while the parents of students without exceptionalities discussed broader community supports. Further, parents of students with exceptionalities described many more challenges to inclusion than the parents of students without exceptionalities. It seemed that parents of students with exceptionalities experienced more direct challenges; whereas parents of students without disabilities spoke about challenges that were theoretical or external to their experience. When describing their definitions of inclusion, the parents also described their **roles** within their children's education and their **philosophies** about teaching and learning. Parents of students with exceptionalities viewed their role as an advocate for their children; whereas parents of students without exceptionalities viewed their role as a guide and mentor. The philosophies of parents of students with exceptionalities reflected values and relationships, while the philosophies of parents without exceptionalities centred on placement and structure**.** The guiding philosophies seemed to direct the future **goals** the parents had for their children and the **successes** that they identified within their children's education. Parents of students with exceptionalities focussed on more non-academic topics (e.g., social skills, maturity, coping); whereas parents of students without exceptionalities focussed most often on academic goals and successes.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE  <------------------------------->  DEFINITION OF INCLUSION
   |        |                                        |              |
SUPPORTS  CHALLENGES                          ROLE OF PARENTS   LEARNING PHILOSOPHIES
                                                                  |           |
                                                                GOALS      SUCCESSES
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TOPIC	SUMMARY OF GROUP PERSPECTIVES		
	Themes common ONLY among Parents of Children **with** Exceptionalities	Themes common ONLY among Parents of Children **without** Exceptionalities	Shared themes common to **BOTH** groups of parents
SCHOOL CLIMATE	• Talented and dedicated staff	• Tolerance of differences • Some challenges	• Inclusive • supportive
DEFINITION OF INCLUSION	• benefits for the student with exceptionalities	• acceptance of students with diverse needs	• benefits for all
STUDENT SUPPORTS	• community agencies • life skills training • therapists	• community support • parent council • discipline	• program assistants • counselling • transition support
CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION	• bullying • diverse and complex needs of the students • conflict/misperceptions • parents find it difficult to "let go"	NO THEMES SPECIFIC TO THIS GROUP ALONE	• social/emotional/ behavioral challenges
ROLE OF PARENTS	• advocacy • school involvement	• set an example • give student some "say"	• community involvement • discipline
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY	• value all students • build relationships with the students • have high expectations of all students	• careful and thoughtful placement of students with exceptionalities • structured programs • teach using the virtues program	**NO SHARED THEMES COMMON TO BOTH GROUPS**
GOALS FOR THE STUDENT	• employment • some level of independence	NO THEMES SPECIFIC TO THIS GROUP ALONE	• attend higher level schooling • "perform to the best of their ability"
STUDENT SUCCESSES	• social gains • ability to cope • increased maturity	• academic success • motivation to learn	

Useful Resources

- Loreman, T., McGhie-Richmond, D., Barber, J., & Lupart, J. (2009). Parent perspectives on inclusive education in rural Alberta, Canada. *Exceptionality Education International, 19(2)*, 21-36.

- Parent/Professional Collaboration (National Centre on Secondary Education and Transition - http://www.ncset.org/topics/family/default.asp?topic=29

- Collaborating with Families Module (The Iris Centre) - http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/fam/

Special thanks to: