

Inclusion Saskatchewan's Position Statement on Inclusive Education



This document is Inclusion Saskatchewan's position statement on Inclusive Education and its application for classrooms across this province. This position statement is intended to help guide our work in advocacy, services & programming, and public relations as well as define our vision of inclusion and our understanding of the human rights of persons with intellectual disabilities.

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education ensures that all students, regardless of ability, learn together in regular classrooms in their neighbourhood schools. It provides the necessary supports so that every student can fully participate, contribute, and succeed.

Inclusive education is about removing barriers and creating learning environments that are accessible, respectful, and responsive to diverse needs. This means students with intellectual disabilities learn alongside their peers in shared spaces, such as classrooms, libraries, and playgrounds, rather than being segregated. The goal is to ensure that every student has equal access to quality education in a setting that fosters belonging, engagement, and academic success.

A Note on Language

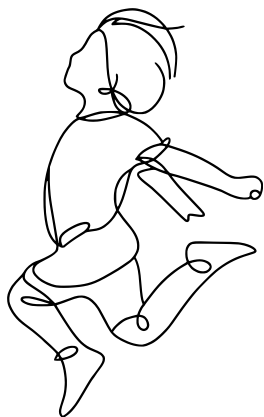
The terms **intellectual disability** and **developmental disability** are sometimes used interchangeably in Canada. At Inclusion Saskatchewan, we use the term intellectual disability, in alignment with our national and international federations. This is meant to be inclusive of both terms, and includes people who face challenges in learning and communication, and people with Autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or other neurodevelopmental conditions. An intellectual disability is something someone can be born with or it can be acquired later in life.

Additionally, our resources and documents use person-first language, meaning we say **person with a disability** instead of **disabled person**. We recognize and respect all language preferences, and we regularly consult with members of our community who have lived experience to understand their preferences. We believe that person-first is currently the preferred language of the majority of self-advocates we engage with.

People with intellectual disabilities have the right to equal access to education in Saskatchewan. However, many students requiring additional supports continue to face exclusion. The United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides a concise framework for the right to an inclusive education for all children with disabilities, and this convention was ratified in Canada. We hold that Saskatchewan’s education policies must align with this commitment, ensuring all students with disabilities can learn alongside their peers.

In the past few decades, Saskatchewan schools have made great strides towards the inclusion of all students within this framework however, many students with intellectual disabilities continue to be educated in segregated settings, forced to attend school part-time, or excluded from an education altogether. The Saskatchewan government, Ministry of Education, and school divisions must provide the necessary supports and funding to ensure every student can learn & succeed in regular classrooms with their non-disabled peers. This includes committing to equitable allocation of resources & funding and developing comprehensive standards so that all classrooms can be inclusive. This also requires school divisions with existing segregated programs to develop and implement strategic plans to end this practice. All school divisions must ensure that every student is well supported within their classroom and that all team members have access to the tools that they need to accommodate and support the success of every student.

Anonymized stories throughout this document shine a light on the barriers faced by Saskatchewan students with an intellectual disability in accessing education. All stories are true, but without identifying information in order to protect the privacy of the children who have encountered discrimination based on their disability.



Thomas’s Story

Thomas is 6 years old and has Autism. When starting school, he struggled with the sensory environment of a first grade classroom. As with many people with sensory issues, Thomas became uncomfortable with some of his clothing and attempted to take them off. Thomas’s school treated this as a voluntary and inappropriate behaviour and forced him to stay home from school for several weeks and get a thorough medical assessment, rather than accessing the school division’s occupational therapist for a sensory assessment to better understand & accommodate his sensory needs.

Ableism is a form of discrimination or prejudice directed against people with disabilities. In essence, it is the belief that non-disabled people are *normal* and that any person with a disability is of less value and worth. It can manifest in both obvious and subtle ways, including through conscious biases resulting in deliberate and intentional prejudiced beliefs or actions, and unconscious biases that influence our behaviour without us realizing it. These unconscious biases are often deeply ingrained in us due to historical & current societal norms, cultural backgrounds, or personal experiences. Ableism also involves harmful practices that undervalue and limit the potential of people with disabilities. It is systemic, meaning it is deeply embedded within our societal structure and institutions, including language and policies, and leads to inequality and exclusion.

The K-12 school system was designed to produce adults who are as skilled as possible and ready to pursue post-secondary education or employment. Historically, persons with intellectual disabilities did not have access to schools because it was assumed that higher education or employment would not be achievable for them. This is the ableist foundation upon which the current education system was built. The advocacy to alter that discrimination continues to this day.

In the beginning, students with intellectual disabilities were allowed to attend schools that fully segregated them from students without disabilities and only later, in segregated public school classrooms with little to no inclusion with their non-disabled peers. Even now, students in Saskatchewan with an intellectual disability will often be excluded from academic work, extracurricular activities, or leadership opportunities due to perceived limitations in their talents & abilities.

Often, exclusion happens regardless of whether appropriate accommodations can be put in place as perceptions about limitations are ingrained in an ableist perspective that the student simply cannot participate in the “typical” way. This prevents the student from receiving equal access to education and being supported in reaching their personal goals or highest potential. Students with intellectual disabilities continue to be discriminated against systematically through exclusion and segregated programming.

Students in Saskatchewan who have intellectual disabilities have their right to an inclusive education violated in different ways. Many are told that they must adhere to a modified schedule, attending fewer hours per day or fewer days per week than their typically-developing peers. Others are prevented from participating in certain classes, activities, or outings. Some are taught in a segregated setting, joined only by other students with disabilities, or attend school in complete seclusion from all other students. Finally, some students are barred from attending school at all, either temporarily or permanently, or mandated to attend courses online only. In an often less obvious way, many students with intellectual disabilities attend seemingly inclusive classrooms but are not provided with the supports they need to learn, succeed, and be meaningfully engaged in learning in their classroom communities.

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognizes that all persons with disabilities have the right to learn within a regular classroom, with peers their own age, and to receive the supports they need within that shared learning environment. Since Canada's ratification of the UNCRPD in 2011, all Canadian students with disabilities have this right.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees people with disabilities equal benefit of the law, and case law under the Supreme Court of Canada within Moore v. British Columbia affirms that appropriate and adequate supports must be provided to students with disabilities. Between Canadian law and Canada's ratification of the UNCRPD, inclusive education is the only acceptable path forward for Saskatchewan.

By definition, children with disabilities cannot receive a quality education when confined to segregated classrooms, though a right to an inclusive education does not equate to a guarantee of quality. Nevertheless, the regular classroom is the only place where a quality education can be achieved for students with intellectual disabilities.

The concept of a right to a quality education is problematic as quality is a function of the teaching practice, the curriculum, and the structure of the education system overall. For example, one cannot legislate a right to belong, but all children require a sense of belonging within their classrooms and school communities to be successful learners. Facilitating belonging, as but one example of dimensions of quality, needs to be a teacher responsibility so that a quality inclusive education can be realized.

Cam's Story

Cam is 12 years old and has Down Syndrome, Autism, and Intellectual Disability. He was happily attending school in an inclusive classroom where he had strong friendships and adequate support. It was recommended that Cam would be better suited for a segregated classroom, and was moved there by his school. In doing so he was cut off from his friends, and so his communication skills regressed dramatically from not having typical peers around him. His engagement in all academics and social activities dissipated and he became cut off from his community.



Merit of Inclusive Education & the Saskatchewan Context



There is no debate; both research and practice overwhelmingly support inclusive education, benefiting both students with and without disabilities. Some Saskatchewan school divisions have fully eliminated segregation, demonstrating that true inclusion is achievable. Schools and educators who have access to the tools that they need and a fundamental belief in human rights are successfully teaching all students together in inclusive classrooms, where every student is well supported and their rights upheld.

Students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive classrooms achieve higher academic outcomes, forge stronger social connections, and are twice as likely to pursue post-secondary education. Inclusive settings also reduce behavioral challenges and exclusionary disciplinary actions. Meanwhile, students without disabilities benefit through higher achievement, improved self-esteem, and reduced prejudice. Contrary to common concerns, inclusive classrooms do not reduce learning outcomes for non-disabled students.

Although Saskatchewan's Education Act guarantees the right to education, the province has yet to fully implement inclusive policies. While The Ministry of Education promotes inclusion, segregated programs persist, limiting opportunities for students with disabilities. These guidelines lack the specificity needed to ensure practices would meet the true definition of inclusion as stated in the UNCRPD and as articulated in this Position Statement.

Exclusion in education has lifelong consequences. Segregated programs often fail to provide academic credits, limiting future employment and post-secondary options. Students placed in part-time or modified schedules miss out on critical learning and social development, impacting their long-term independence and well-being. The province must commit to fully inclusive education by eliminating segregation and ensuring all students receive the support they need in regular classrooms.

What is Inclusion Saskatchewan?

As a provincial non-profit organization, Inclusion Saskatchewan has a mission to build and inspire an inclusive Saskatchewan by empowering and valuing people with intellectual disabilities. This is done through individual & systemic advocacy, support for employment & transitions to adulthood, building community for families, engaging with Saskatchewan employers, and empowering self-advocates with tools and opportunities for community-led initiatives.

To learn more about our work or to find support, please visit

www.InclusionSK.com

Our Calls to Action for Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education



Inclusion Saskatchewan calls on the Ministry of Education to:

1

Develop and implement a comprehensive, multi-year strategy rooted in Article 24 of the UNCRPD, ensuring access to an equitable inclusive education for all students with an intellectual disability in Saskatchewan.

2

Commit to providing effective inclusive education as the required pathway for all students with disabilities through equitable funding allocation that prioritizes inclusive practices over segregation or exclusion.

3

Develop comprehensive policies to ensure that the duty to accommodate is adhered to by all Ministry-funded programs, ensuring that supports are adequate, appropriate, individualized, and can be provided within an inclusive setting.



Izzy's Story

Izzy is a grade nine student with Autism and ADHD. She often repeats phrases that she hears on TV or movies (echolalia) and loves to share her knowledge about the things she is passionate about, often becoming too excited to remember to raise her hand or stay on topic. Her school decided that answering questions without raising her hand or repeating echolalic phrases during class was a noncompliant behaviour that violates the school's code of conduct, so she was often sent to the administrator's office and lost out on countless hours of class time.

Our Calls to Action for Decision Makers in the Education System



Additionally, we call on all decision makers in Saskatchewan's education system to:

1

Recommit to inclusive education by equipping your team members with the tools and support they need to be confident and successful as inclusive educators.

2

Advocate to the Government of Saskatchewan for funding frameworks that support inclusion through relocating designated funding for segregated programs to classroom supports that are needed for inclusive education.

3

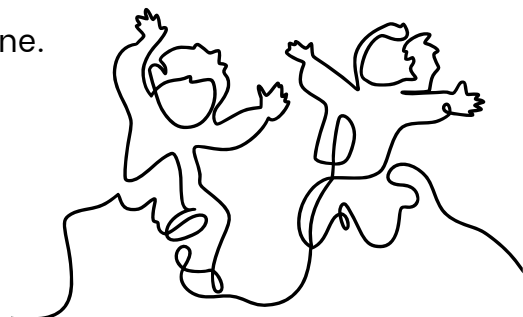
Foster a culture of inclusion; ensure that all students are genuinely welcomed in their neighbourhood schools, minimizing any barriers to inclusion that students with disabilities may encounter.

Allie's Story

Allie is 8 years old and has Autism and ADHD. She was provided a set number of hours per week with a resource teacher outside of her regular classroom. Each day, the resource teacher would announce in front of Allie's entire class that it was her scheduled resource time and question whether she actually needed it, then allow Allie to decide whether or not to go.

Feeling embarrassed, Allie would usually decline.

Allie lost out on individualized support for her academic development.



Our Calls to Action for Community Members



Finally, we invite self-advocates, educators, community members, organizations, and advocacy groups to:

1

Listen to self-advocates and the voices of people with lived experience. Learn through these perspectives and strive to support inclusion in all its facets.

2

Collaborate and share resources and knowledge to address the systemic barriers faced by students with intellectual disabilities in the education system.

3

Engage with children; teach them about ableism, neurodiversity, and inclusion. Model inclusive attitudes and practices at every opportunity and embrace the full spectrum of human abilities.

4

Strive to support your own neighbourhood schools in their efforts toward inclusion; celebrate their successes and address the inequities that you witness.

5

Partner with Inclusion Saskatchewan, an organization ready and willing to assist in all initiatives aimed at improving access to quality inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities.