



Exclusion in Education and Child Care/Out-of-School Care: Nova Scotia Findings from the National Exclusion Tracker 2025-2026

Report Prepared by Inclusion Nova Scotia

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The National Exclusion Tracker is stewarded by the Family Support Institute of British Columbia in partnership with Inclusive Education Canada



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ABOUT INCLUSION NOVA SCOTIA

Inclusion Nova Scotia (INS) is a provincial not-for-profit organization that supports people with intellectual disabilities and their families to lead as we work together advancing the rights and full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

We support families to lead, promote human rights, share practical information, and work for change so people with intellectual disabilities can live good lives in their communities.

Inclusion Happens when children and adults with intellectual disabilities fully participate in the same everyday experiences as everyone else. Their lives unfold no different than their peers without disabilities.

We use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to guide our work. The UNCRPD says that people with disabilities have the right to dignity, choice, opportunity, and full participation in community life.

We work to make sure people with intellectual disabilities can be included in everyday life. This includes home, school, work, recreation, relationships, and their local community.

People with intellectual disabilities are full and contributing citizens. They have skills, ideas, relationships, and goals that matter.

We help communities become more welcoming and inclusive. We support people to build relationships, take part in everyday activities, and have meaningful roles in their communities.

Inclusion Nova Scotia is part of a broader federation of Inclusion Canada and Inclusion International working to advance inclusion and the rights of people with intellectual disabilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is about more than being present at school. It means that all students have meaningful opportunities to learn alongside their peers, participate in all aspects of school life, build relationships, contribute and experience belonging every step of the way. Yet, this does not happen for every student.

Inclusion Nova Scotia regularly hears from families whose children with intellectual disabilities are left out of learning, activities or time with their classmates. Understanding when, how and why exclusion occurs is important to strengthening inclusive education. Making sure that all children can realize their right to education with the supports they need to participate meaningfully.

In Nova Scotia, we have a long history of working toward inclusive education. In 1987, the family of Luke Elwood, an elementary student with an intellectual disability, challenged a decision to place him in a segregated special education class. His family wanted him to learn at his neighbourhood school alongside his peers, with and without disabilities. The case led to a court-approved agreement that allowed Luke to stay in an integrated classroom with his peers. His experience became an important part of the movement for inclusive education and disability rights in Nova Scotia and across Canada. Almost 40 years later, the National Exclusion Tracker gives us an opportunity to ask: **What does education look and feel like for students with disabilities and their families today?**

The Exclusion Tracker was created in 2018 by BCEdAccess, a grassroots organization led by parents and caregivers of children with disabilities to document experiences of exclusion in British Columbia Schools. September 2025 marked the first time in the Trackers history that it started to collect responses from people with disabilities and families from across Canada, in partnership with the Family Support Institute of British Columbia (FSI), Inclusive Education Canada (IEC) and Inclusion Canada's provincial federation members to expand the Tracker across Canada. Families across the country are reporting similar experiences of exclusion, and the need for a coordinated, transparent national picture has never been greater.

For Inclusion Nova Scotia, joining this national partnership provides an important opportunity to systematically document experiences that are familiar through our work with families. Many of the issues of exclusion reflected in the tracker such as exclusion from classrooms and school activities, reduced attendance, a lack of meaningful supports and challenges navigating or resolving concerns are consistent with what we hear from families of children with intellectual disabilities across Nova Scotia every day. Inclusion Nova Scotia receives all responses from people who indicate they live in Nova Scotia.

Inclusion Nova Scotia helps people with intellectual disabilities and their families understand their rights, plan for what they want, work through challenges and advocate for inclusion. We believe every student has the right to have an ordinary school experience: learning with their peers, taking part in school life, building relationships, contributing, belonging and preparing for their future.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report has been created to share the experiences of 73 Nova Scotia families who completed the survey between September of 2025 and June of 2026. It will identify patterns related to exclusion in pre-primary to Grade 12 education and child care.

The intended audience includes, people with disabilities, families, advocates, educators, policymakers, researchers and community organizations.

3. HOW THE NATIONAL EXCLUSION TRACKER DEFINES EXCLUSION?

The National Exclusion Tracker allows families to shape the definition of exclusion because each child or youth's experience is different.

The Tracker broadly defines exclusion as any instance where a child or youth with disabilities and/or complex learning needs is prevented from fully participating in their education or care. This definition reflects how exclusion is experienced by families in practice, including situations that are temporary, informal or not documented through formal processes. Exclusion includes, but is not limited to:

- being placed on a gradual entry plan that is not applied class-wide
- being asked to stay home or being sent home from school or childcare
- experiencing shortened school days or partial attendance
- being excluded from field trips, classroom activities, extracurricular programs, or peer learning opportunities
- being denied access to childcare, out-of-school care, or transportation
- being educated separately from peers
- being subjected to seclusion or restraint, or
- having essential health, safety, or personal care needs go unmet, resulting in reduced or denied participation.

This definition recognizes that exclusion is not limited to formal suspension or expulsion. Many forms of exclusion occur through informal or discretionary practices that are rarely reflected in administrative records, yet have significant impacts on children, youth, and families.

Child care exclusions can come in the form of denied enrolment, waitlists and inequities in early learning settings.

By centering family and child/youth-reported data, the National Exclusion Tracker captures these lived experiences and provides a more complete picture of exclusion as it occurs across education and care settings.

4. ABOUT THE NATIONAL EXCLUSION TRACKER

The report draws on data submitted by respondents who indicated they live in Nova Scotia to the National Exclusion Tracker from September 2025 to June 2026.

The dataset includes 73 total survey responses, with analytic subjects used for specific questions depending on response completion.

87.50% of reports related to Pre-Primary to Grade 12 education, while **12.50%** related to child care or out-of-school care.

Data is collected through a voluntary, self-reported survey. Respondents include parents, caregivers, and, in some cases youth themselves. Not all respondents answer all questions. Percentages throughout this report reflect the proportion of respondents who answered a specific question unless otherwise indicated.

The 2025–26 school year is the first year the Exclusion Tracker has collected data nationally, meaning it is the first time responses have been collected specifically from Nova Scotia.

The Tracker was shared nationally through Inclusive Education Canada and Inclusion Canada. In Nova Scotia, Inclusion Nova Scotia also shared the Tracker through its social media, newsletter, and broader network of families and community partners across the province.

Participation was voluntary. The findings therefore reflect the experiences of people who learned about the Tracker and chose to respond. They should be understood as descriptive signals that help identify experiences and patterns of exclusion, not as estimates of how often exclusion occurs across all Nova Scotia schools or students.

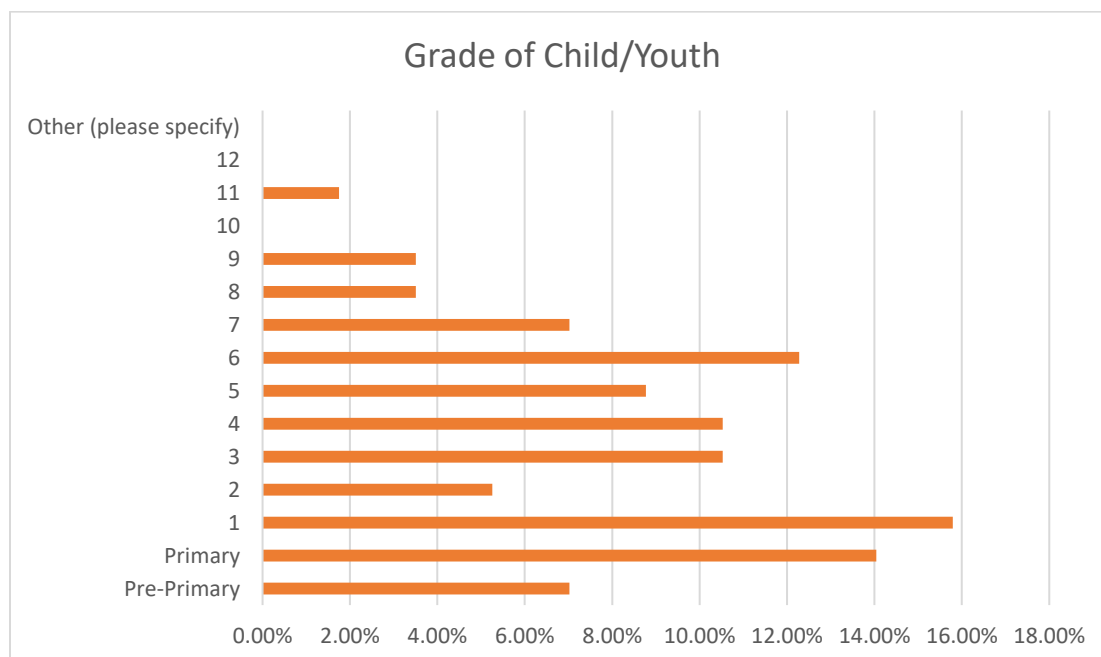
The findings help identify patterns and experiences that warrant attention, further investigation and action. The data can identify patterns in reported experiences: how exclusion happens, why families report it happens, how long it lasts, who is affected and what the impacts are.

5. PRE-PRIMARY TO GRADE 12 – UNDERSTANDING EXCLUSION

The Nova Scotia Exclusion Tracker captured a range of experiences, from formal suspensions and being sent home to less visible forms of exclusion that occurred while students remained at school. For many of the children and youth represented in the Tracker, these experiences were not isolated events.

The findings predominantly reflect the experiences of students attending Nova Scotia's public education system, with **94.74%** of respondents reporting that their child attended public school. **3.51%** attended a private or independent school and **1.75%** participated in home learning or homeschooling.

The responses also predominantly reflect the experiences of younger students. Among respondents who identified their child's grade, **84.21%** reported on students from **Pre-Primary through Grade 6**. Responses were received across grades through Grade 11, although students in the later grades were less represented in the Tracker.



5.1. EXCLUSION WAS MORE OFTEN ONGOING THAN ISOLATED

For many of the children and youth represented in the Nova Scotia Exclusion Tracker from grades Pre-Primary to Grade 11 exclusion was not described as a single event. Of the respondents who answered this question:

- **73.68%** described the exclusion as **ongoing**.
- **14.04%** reported a **single instance of exclusion**.

- **12.28%** selected “other” and provided additional information about their child's experience.

Among the respondents who reported a single instance of exclusion, 85.71% stated that it was for a full day, while 14.29% reported for a partial day.

“My son has been forced to do half days at school for the passed 2 months, they cannot accommodate his needs.”

Among the respondents who reporting exclusion as ongoing, 39.02% stated that it was for full days, 17.07% stated it was for partial days and 43.90% stated it was a mix of both partial and full days.

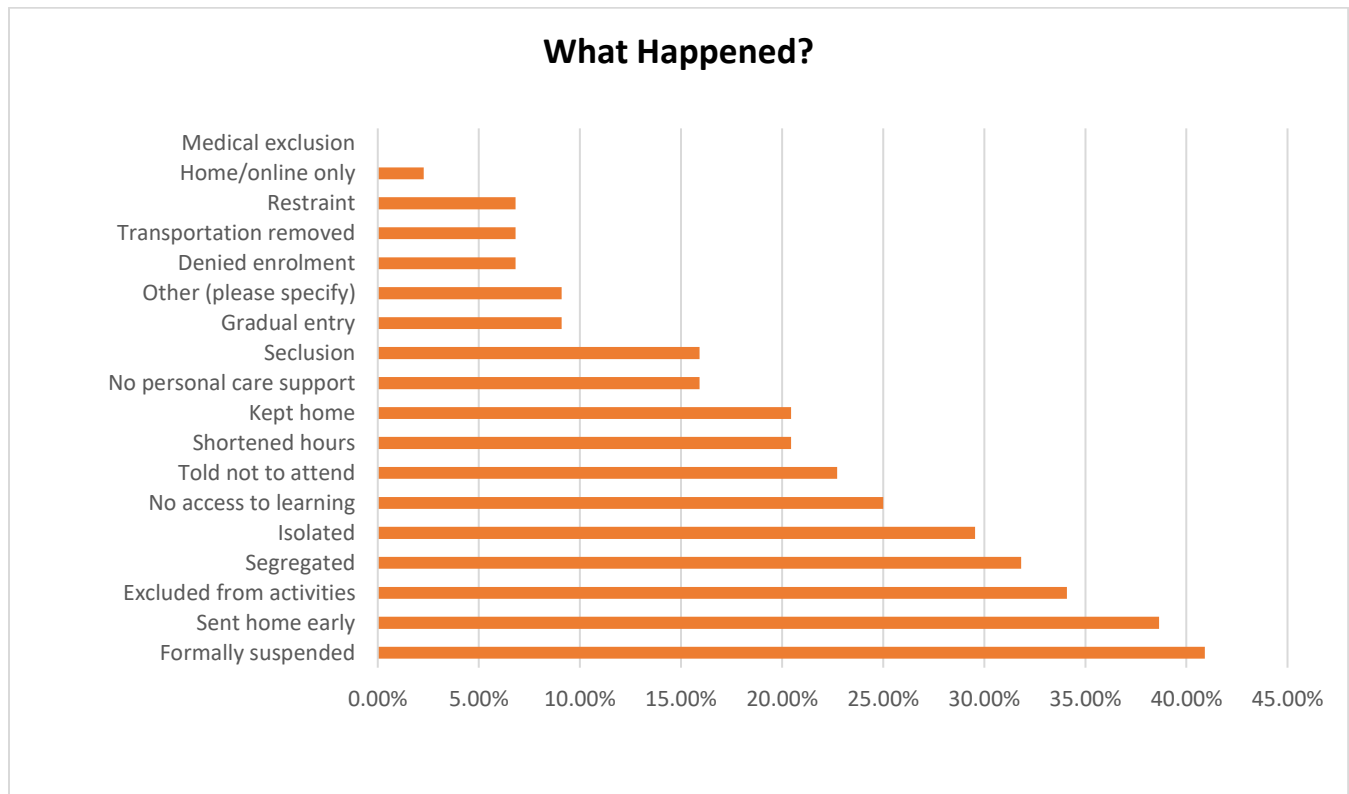
Several respondents who selected “other” described experiences involving repeated suspensions, multiple incidents of exclusion, reduced school days, lack of support, or exclusion extending over a period of weeks. For many of the families who reported to the Tracker, exclusion was not an isolated disruption to a child's education, it was an experience that continued or happened repeatedly over time.

For periods of ongoing exclusion, the dates provided by respondents further illustrate how long some experiences persisted. Among cases where both a start and end date were provided, **15.87% of respondents reported exclusion periods lasting more than one year.** Several extended across multiple school years, including reported exclusions beginning as far back as 2020 and 2021 and continuing into the 2025–26 school year.

When a student is repeatedly excluded the cumulative impact can extend well beyond the individual incidents. Each exclusion can mean lost instructional time, however repeated or ongoing exclusion can also mean lost opportunities to participate in classroom routines, develop relationships with classmates take part in school activities, and experience consistency and belonging within the school community.

5.2. FORMS OF EXCLUSION REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS

Respondents could select more than one form of exclusion, reflecting that a child or youth may experience multiple forms of exclusion at the same time or over the course of their experience and do not sum to 100%.



Formal suspension was the most frequently reported experience 40.91%, followed by being sent home early (38.64%). The findings also show that exclusion can happen even when students are physically present at school. Respondents reported students being excluded from activities (34.09%), segregated from their peers (31.82%), isolated and left without access to learning (25.00%). These experiences demonstrate that attendance alone does not necessarily mean a student has meaningful access to education, participation, or their peers.

Respondents described how exclusion could affect both where students spent their school day and how much of the school day they were able to access:

“Stuck in the learning centre and comes home an hour earlier than normal”

“Child was placed in a special learning area for weeks without discussing with me.”

“I just found out (after months) from a staff member that my son has been spending his entire day without peers in a room to work, [...] but his EPA is present”

“I’ve been trying since grade primary to get my son to go into his homeroom classroom for at least short periods of time instead of always in the Learning centre”

Others described exclusion extending beyond the classroom to important shared experiences with peers:

“Not able to go to Christmas concerts since grade primary. No field trips with her class or age group”

“My child is being kept away [from] his peers during lunch eating time (made to eat in the office alone) and not allowed to play at recess or lunch with all the other kids. He's only allowed to go outside with 2 other special needs children and an EA after all the other have come inside.”

“I know he missed time at recess and had to sit in time out, nothing documented no behaviors plan”

“Not allowed to have lunch with peers daily”

Families also described situations where exclusion was connected to supports or accommodations they believed their child needed to participate successfully:

“Refusal to offer a documented medical accommodation”

“... was excluded due to lack of interpreter ability, which means she sits in the classroom, not physically isolated from her peers, but socially because they cannot communicate with her.”

Findings highlight that exclusion does not always look like formal suspension or an absence from school. It can also mean less time at school, separation from classmates, missed learning, exclusion from activities or being unable to participate because needed supports or accommodations are not available.

Inclusion Nova Scotia's position on inclusive education emphasizes that inclusion is about more than being physically present at school. It means having meaningful opportunities to learn alongside peers, access to individualized supports, develop relationships and friendships, contribute to the school community and experience a sense of belonging.

5.3. SECLUSION AND RESTRAINT

Of the 44 respondents who chose to answer questions about seclusion and restraint, **27.27%** reported that their child or youth had experienced seclusion during the exclusion, while **11.36%** reported restraint.

There was also considerable uncertainty. **22.73%** were unsure whether their child had experienced seclusion, and **27.27%** were unsure whether restraint had occurred.

Qualitative responses provide broader context, including descriptions of students spending extended periods alone or separated from peers, sometimes without families being aware. Other responses described distress, communication barriers, and concerns about how incidents were understood and communicated.

“My child was asked to stay home or attend school for 1 hour a day in a secluded padded room with ventilation”

The findings raise important questions about transparency, documentation and communication with families, particularly when students may be unable to communicate what happened themselves. In Nova Scotia, seclusion may sometimes appear within an Individualized Education Plan as a support for a student. However, Tracker responses raise questions about how its use is documented, communicated to families and monitored, and whether families have meaningful involvement in decisions about its use. The Exclusion Tracker data is not exhaustive and cannot tell us how frequently seclusion and restraint are being used across Nova Scotia schools. However, the reported use of these practices, the number of families who were unsure whether they had occurred, and limited publicly available information about their use warrant further investigation and greater oversight. Concerns about seclusion and restraint extend beyond Nova Scotia. Across Canada, research, investigations and legal cases have raised concerns about their use with students with disabilities, including potential physical and psychological harm, trauma, inconsistent documentation, family notification, as well as gaps in oversight and accountability.¹ of the physical and psychological harm associated with these practices. Additionally, there are significant human rights considerations, including children's rights to dignity, safety, protection from harm and inclusive education.²

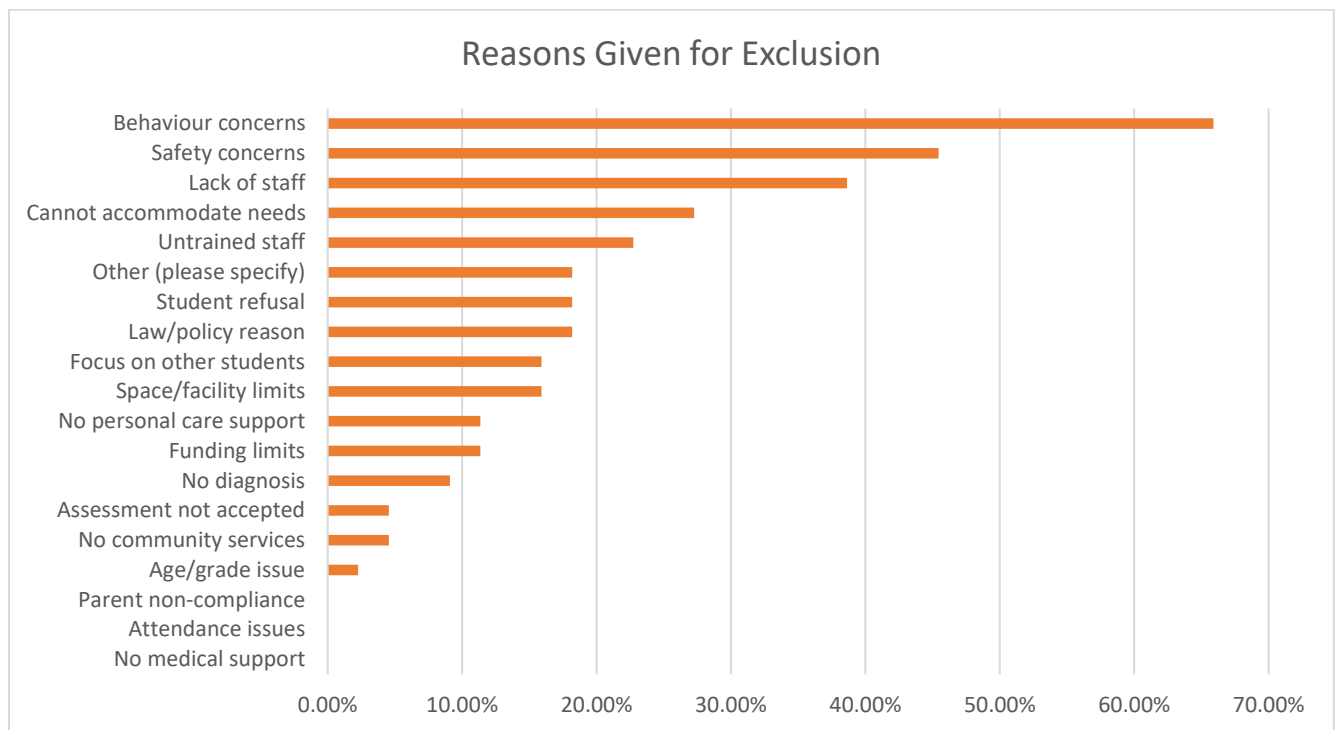
¹ See, for example, *GX v Yukon (Government of)*, 2026 YKSC 5, S.C. No. 22-A0097 (Supreme Court of Yukon, January 27, 2026), a representative action concerning allegations of holds, restraints, locked rooms and seclusion involving students and former students of Jack Hulland Elementary School; New Brunswick Child, Youth and Senior Advocate, *Isolated: How School Seclusion Rooms Became Accepted Practice Outside the Law* (December 2024), an investigation that identified concerns related to the legality, oversight and use of seclusion rooms in schools, including their disproportionate impact on students with disabilities and potential harm to students' psychological well-being.; Inclusion BC & Family Support Institute of BC, *Stop Hurting Kids: Restraint and Seclusion in BC Schools – Survey Results and Recommendations* (2013), which documented parent-reported physical injury, emotional trauma and concerns about families learning of restraint or seclusion from sources other than the school; Bartlett, N.A. & Ellis, T.F., "Interrogating Sanctioned Violence: A Survey of Parents/Guardians of Children with Disabilities about Restraint and Seclusion in Manitoba's Schools," *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 9(5) (2020), which documented frequent use, limited consent and lack of written notification; and Bartlett, N.A. & Ellis, T.F., "Physical Restraint, Seclusion, and Time-Out Rooms in Canadian Schools: Analysis of a Policy Patchwork," *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* (2020), which identified significant variation in policy and oversight across Canadian jurisdictions.

² See *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Articles 15, 16, 17 and 24; and *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Articles 19, 28(2) and 37.

6. WHY IS EXCLUSION HAPPENING?

The Exclusion Tracker asked families what reasons they were given by the school for their child's exclusion. Behaviour and safety concerns were most frequently identified, alongside reasons related to staffing, training, accommodations and the availability of supports. Looking at these reasons together provides important context for understanding the circumstances surrounding exclusion.

Respondents could identify more than one reason. These categories therefore should not be understood in isolation from one another.



The most commonly reported reason was behaviour concerns (65.91%) followed by safety concerns (45.45%). At the same time, families frequently reported system-level barriers that led to the exclusion:

- 38.64%**— lack of staff
- 27.27%**— unable to accommodate the student's needs
- 22.73%**— untrained staff
- 15.91%**— space or facility limitations
- 11.36%**— funding limitations
- 11.36%**— lack of personal care support

The Tracker cannot establish that these conditions caused individual exclusions. However, their presence across multiple reports is an important signal that exclusion cannot be understood solely through the characteristics or behaviour of individual students. When students lose access

to education because necessary staffing, training, accommodations or supports are unavailable, system capacity becomes an inclusion issue. The need for individualized support or accommodation should not itself become the reason a student has less access to education.

Although behaviour concerns was the most common reason, it does not tell the whole story. Behaviour may describe what was happening at the time of an exclusion, but it does not necessarily tell us what a student was communicating, what preceded the situation, what planning, support or accommodations were in place or why the school environment was unable to support the student to remain included. Families described situations in which previously successful supports were no longer available, accommodations were not provided, students spent limited time with their classmates, and families questioned whether staff had the knowledge or resources required to support their child. These experiences invite us to look beyond behaviour as an endpoint and ask what conditions surrounded it. Families also questioned how “student refusal” or behaviour was understood. Some felt that a student’s difficulty participating was interpreted as unwillingness rather than as a signal that different supports or accommodations were needed.

One respondent captured this distinction clearly:

“It’s not that he didn’t want to participate, they didn’t want to help him be able to.”

6.1.FROM MANAGING BEHAVIOUR TO BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR INCLUSION

When behaviour is identified as a reason for exclusion, school teams and education leaders should look beyond “What did the student do?” and consider: “What did the student need, what barriers were present, and what could have been done differently to support their participation?”

- Were the student’s communication, sensory, learning and regulation needs understood?
- Were appropriate accommodations and individualized supports in place?
- Had preventative and proactive approaches been identified and consistently implemented?
- Did educators and support staff have the training and knowledge they needed?
- Was sufficient staffing available?
- Was the student meaningfully included in learning and relationships with peers?
- Were the student and family involved in identifying what was working and what needed to change?

Safety and inclusion should not automatically be treated as competing goals. The challenge is to create the supports and conditions that allow students to participate safely and meaningfully.

The findings point toward an important shift in how exclusion is understood and addressed. If exclusion is viewed primarily as a response to an individual student’s behaviour, solutions are likely to focus primarily on changing or managing the student. For truly inclusive education, the measure of success is not simply how effectively exclusion is managed, it is whether schools

have the desire, relationships, knowledge, supports, and resources necessary to make inclusion possible.

6.2.CODE OF CONDUCT AND EXCLUSION

44.74% reported that the Code of Conduct was referenced in their child or youth's experience of exclusion. Families described situations where the Code of Conduct was applied in response to behaviour, dysregulation, safety concerns, or incidents occurring when students were struggling to participate. Some questioned whether disability-related needs, communication, accommodations, and the circumstances leading to the behaviour were sufficiently considered before disciplinary responses were used. Responses spoke about children feeling singled out, confused, "bad," or as though they did not belong, alongside reduced learning opportunities, increased distress, school avoidance, and separation from peers. Several respondents described how their child experienced the Code of Conduct:

"He feels singled out and feels like his presence is a burden. He feels the code of conduct and policies are only used against him and never used for him."

"He was made to feel he doesn't belong at school because he struggles with behavior"

"Less learning opportunities and chances to develop relationships with classmates"

"It was stated that my daughter was not at the same level as her peers and she was better off learning in a separate room with one other younger child"

"My child feels less important than others. He also feels confused"

"He was more agitated dysregulated and avoiding school"

These responses highlight the potential impact when a student experiences school policy primarily through discipline or exclusion. Feeling repeatedly singled out, treated as a problem, or as though one's presence is a burden can affect a student's sense of self, their relationships with school, and whether they feel valued and that they belong. It reinforces the importance of considering not only how policies respond to behaviour, but how their application affects the dignity, wellbeing, and inclusion of the student.

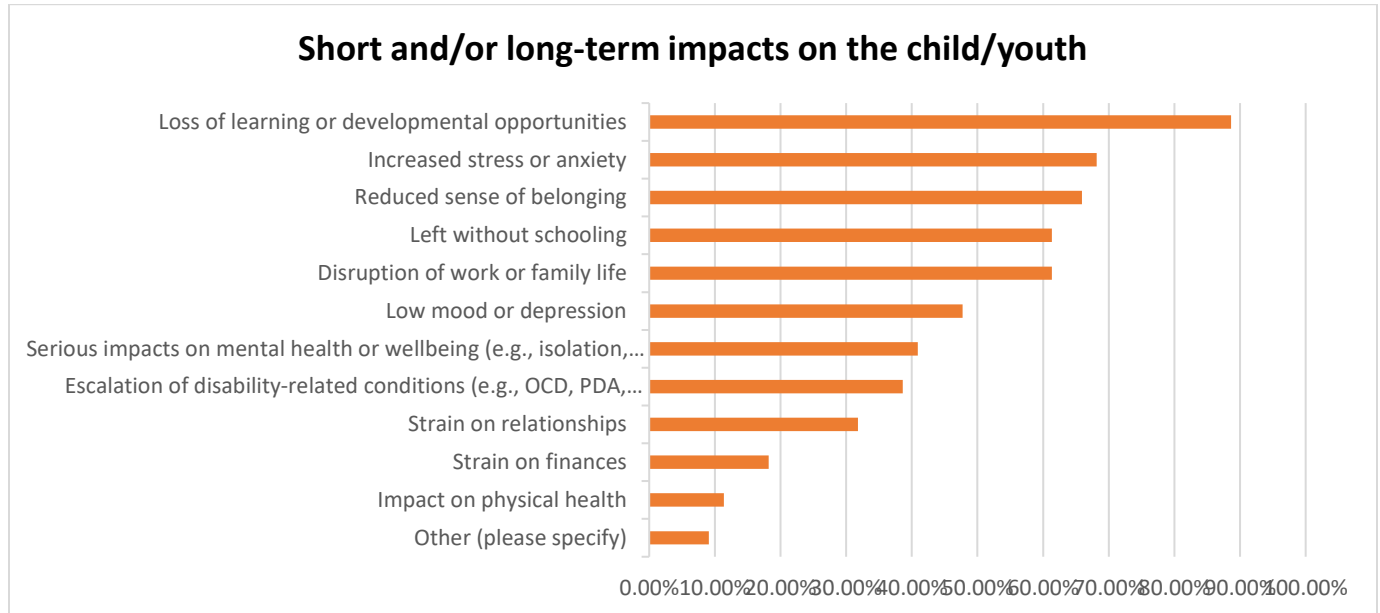
7. WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS?

7.1.IMPACTS ON CHILDREN/YOUTH

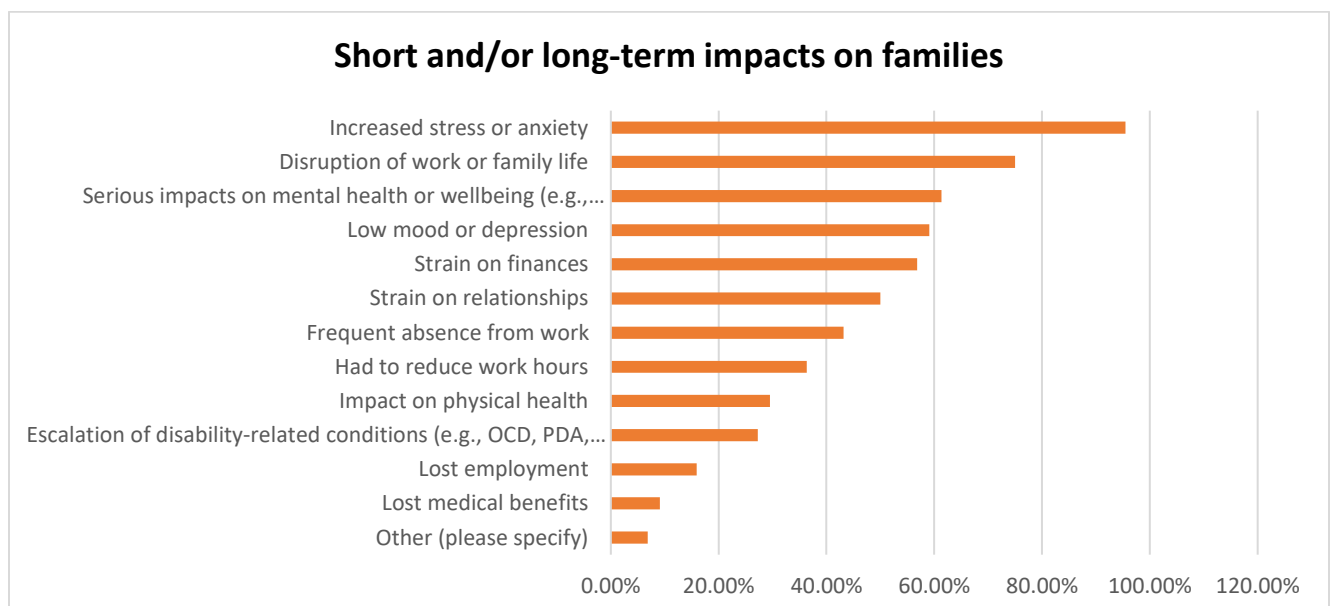
Respondents were asked to identify the short and long term impacts that exclusion had on their child or youth. Respondents could select more than one option. Percentages below reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each impact and do not sum to 100%.

The impacts of exclusion extended beyond missed time at school, affecting students' learning, wellbeing, belonging, and family life.

The impact of exclusion is not measured only in hours or days of missed school, the findings show that it can also be measured in lost opportunities to learn, develop relationships, participate alongside peers, and experience belonging at school.



7.2.IMPACTS ON FAMILIES



These findings demonstrate how exclusion can shift responsibility and its associated costs onto families. When a child is sent home, attends reduced hours, or is otherwise unable to access

school, families may have to leave work, reduce employment, arrange care, advocate for supports, and respond to the emotional impact on their child.

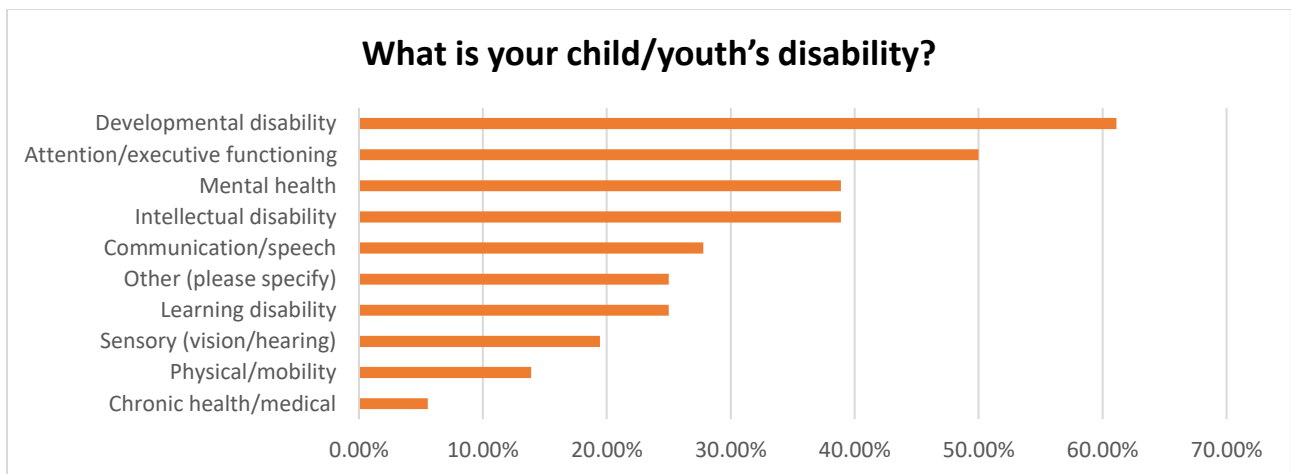
“Took leave from work”

“strain on family members to have to care for him”

8. WHO IS BEING IMPACTED?

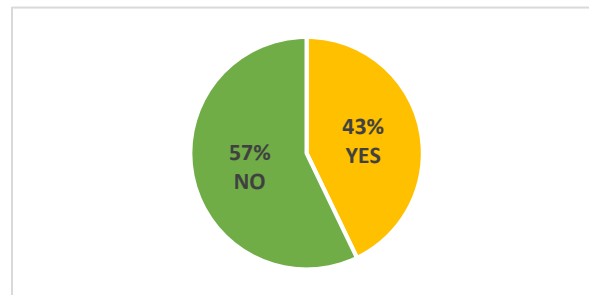
Participation in the Tracker was voluntary, and demographic questions were optional. The findings therefore reflect who heard about the Tracker, chose to participate, and chose to provide demographic information. The reach of the survey was also influenced by the networks and communities through which it was shared. Some families and communities may have been more connected to these networks than others. It also helps us understand who was reached through this first year of data collection and where broader outreach may be needed in future years. Percentages in this section are based on the number of respondents who answered each specific question, rather than all Tracker respondents. For questions where respondents could select more than one response, percentages do not total 100.00%.

Respondents were asked to identify their child or youth’s disability or support need and could select more than one category.



Because respondents could identify more than one category, some children and youth are represented across several of these groups. This is important when interpreting the findings: students may experience multiple and intersecting support needs rather than fitting neatly within a single disability category.

Parent/Caregiver identifies as having a disability



Educational exclusion can create additional pressures for families when children are unable to attend school for the full day or require a parent or caregiver to remain available.

Respondents also described a range of household caregiving structures:

31.43% — Single parent/caregiver household

57.14% — Two-parent/caregiver household

5.71% — Multiple caregiver, multigenerational or extended-family household

5.71% — Other

Household structure may influence how families are able to respond when a child is unexpectedly sent home, placed on a shortened school day, suspended, or otherwise unable to attend school.

9. RESOLVING EXCLUSION

Families were asked whether they and their child or youth were able to resolve the exclusion:

- 2.56% reported that they were able to resolve the exclusion
- 64.10% reported that they were not able to resolve it
- 33.33% reported that they were not given the opportunity to resolve it

Taken together, 97.43% of respondents did not report successfully resolving the exclusion with their child or youth.

This finding raises important questions about what happens after an exclusion occurs. An exclusion should not be treated only as an incident to manage but should draw attention to the student, the school team and families the opportunity to come together, to understand what happened, identify barriers and unmet needs, repair relationships where needed, and determine what must change to support the student's successful participation.

Meaningful resolution should consider whether the conditions that contributed to the exclusion have changed, including supports, accommodations, relationships, communication, staffing or other barriers to participation.

9.1. ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS EXCLUSION WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Most families reported trying to address exclusion within the education system. The findings also highlight that many families had to further escalate their concerns to seek support beyond the school system through advocacy organizations, government or rights-based processes. Within the school team, 79.49% of families communicated with the principal, 66.67% with resource or learning support teachers, 61.54% with classroom teachers, and 56.41% with educational assistants or support staff. More than one-third also took their concerns beyond the school, communicating with the regional centre (38.46%) or district level (35.90%). Only 5.13% reported communicating with no one within the school system.

These findings show that families were actively seeking solutions within the education system. A particularly important theme was the gap families perceived between inclusive education policy and its implementation in practice respondents throughout the narrative responses explicitly stated that the Inclusive Education Policy was not being followed, and others described decisions they believed resulted in progressively less access to classrooms, peers, learning and full-day attendance.

9.2. STUDENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING OF SUPPORTS

Of the tracker responses, 46 respondents described whether and how they were involved in the planning of supports with schools' staff before their child was excluded. Experiences varied considerably. Some families described regular meetings, communication and involvement in planning,

“We had a team meeting to create his Positive Behaviour Support Plan and the Vice Principal and resource teacher will notify me of problems and successes occasionally”

while others reported having to repeatedly request meetings or initiate efforts themselves:

“They had been absolutely no proactive outreach from the school for planning or communication. I have had to take the lead on primary prep, progress updates, support. I didn't even receive a report card for the first term until I requested it.”

“1 meeting in 5 years, with multiple requests.”

Several described participating in meetings but feeling that their suggestions did not result in changes to their child's experience:

“They've included me since the beginning, whether they execute is a whole other story.”

“Until recently, I was an active parent advocate on my child's IPP (IEP) team. However, it was made clear to me last year that although my input would be taken into consideration, “it is the school team that determines the plan with you as an important member”.”

A notable theme was families reporting that they were not included before decisions were made, sometimes learning about an exclusion only afterward:

“We usually only have meetings when he’s suspended for more than one day”

Others described attempts to problem-solve but felt their concerns were dismissed or that decisions had already been made. One respondent saying: *“I am there for meetings but they strong arm the decisions. They are made before I am ever in the meeting.”* Being invited to a meeting is not the same as meaningful participation. Consistent with Nova Scotia’s Inclusive Education Policy, students and families should be active partners in planning, with genuine opportunities to help shape supports and decisions before difficulties escalate to exclusion.

10. HEARING DIRECTLY FROM STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The National Exclusion Tracker also provided an opportunity for children and youth with disabilities, themselves to describe their experiences in their own words. While the number of student responses was small their perspectives provide an important perspective on what exclusion can feel like to the student being excluded. When asked what happened students described: being kept out of classrooms, missing school and school activities, being separated from friends, receiving different learning materials, getting in trouble, and feeling that adults did not understand or treat them well.

“Keep me out of the classroom, give me crafts or baby colouring sheets, not give me work to do when I asked to have the same work as the other kids in my class. My EA’s would get cranky with me when I wanted to stay in class with my friends but told me I had to go outside”

“I’m always in trouble and left out.”

“Wasn’t allowed to go skating or valentine party or be in my class”

Their responses also show that exclusion is experienced as more than lost instructional time. As they also spoke about being left out of the ordinary experiences of school, such as: being in class with friends, attending celebrations and activities, going outside, doing the same work as classmates, and attending school at the same time as siblings.

When students were asked what they hoped would happen next or what would help them feel more included, their responses were strikingly straightforward. They wanted to:

- go to school and stay at school;
- participate even when they were having a difficult day;
- be included in activities with their peers;

- learn, including having access to the same learning opportunities as classmates;
- be understood and treated kindly; and
- not be embarrassed or repeatedly suspended.

Their own words capture these priorities:

“Let me read and let me go outside”

“If they understand me and were nice to me”

“Not embarrass me in front of my classmates”

“I can go to school when my sister does”

“I can stay at school”

At the same time, some responses point to the longer-term consequences of exclusion. While some students hoped to return, stay longer or participate more fully, others said they wanted to stay home or never return to their school. These responses raise important questions about what repeated experiences of exclusion can do to a student's relationship with school and their sense that school is a place where they belong.

Most importantly, the student responses reinforce why student voice must be part of understanding and responding to exclusion. Decisions about inclusion should not only be made *about* students with disabilities. Students should be supported, in ways that work for how they communicate, to tell us what they are experiencing, what is important to them, and what would help them participate and belong. In students' own words, inclusion often came down to something very simple: let me come to school, let me stay, let me learn, let me be with my friends, and understand me when I am having a hard time.

11. CHILD CARE AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL CARE AT-A-GLANCE

Only **9 respondents (12.50% of all tracker responses)** reported on child care or out-of-school care. Given the small number of responses, these findings should be interpreted with caution and **should not be considered representative of child care experiences across Nova Scotia**. For this reason, child care findings are presented as an at-a-glance summary and are not explored at the same level of detail as the Pre-Primary to Grade 12 findings.

Child care and out-of-school care in this report refer to licensed or regulated early learning and child care settings for children prior to school entry, as well as supervised care for school-aged children outside of regular school hours, including before and after school programs and care during school breaks.

- 3 respondents stated that they were excluded from accessing available child care or out-of-school care
- 6 respondents stated that they were reporting an exclusion from their child youth's current child care or out-of-school care space.

Among those who described the type of exclusion 33.33% were reporting on a single instance of exclusion while 66.67% were reporting on an ongoing exclusion. Reported experiences included being sent home early (40.00%), being excluded from activities (40.00%) and being told not to attend (20.00%). The most commonly reported reasons families were given for their child's exclusion were lack of staff (60.00%), untrained staff (60.00%), safety concerns (60.00%), and behaviour concerns (60.00%). Families also reported funding limits (40.00%) and providers stating they could not accommodate their child's needs (40.00%).

Families described exclusion from ordinary activities and community participation. One respondent wrote, *"This is just a generally ongoing thing where he will be excluded from daily activities because they do not know how to include him."* Another reported that their child was *"unable to attend trips off site because of lack of staff."*

The most frequently reported impact on children was a reduced sense of belonging (80.00%). Families also reported increased stress or anxiety (60.00%), disruption to work or family life (60.00%), and financial strain (60.00%). Two respondents reported being left without a child care space. The most frequently reported impact to the caregiver and family were increased stress or anxiety (80.00%), low mood or depression (80.00%), disruption to work or family life (80.00%), strain on relationships (80.00%), and frequent absence from work (80.00%). Employment and financial impacts were also reported. 60.00% had to reduce their work hours, 60.00% reported losing employment and experiencing financial strain.

None of the respondents reported successfully resolving their child's exclusion from child care. 80.00% reported that the exclusion was not resolved, while 20.00% said they were not given the opportunity to resolve it. Because only 9 respondents reported on child care or out-of-school care, these findings are best understood as early signals that warrant further attention and continued data collection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the Nova Scotia Exclusion Tracker points to six priority areas that Inclusion Nova Scotia believes need strengthening in order to more successfully achieve inclusive education across the province. These recommendations focus on preventing exclusion before it occurs, responding quickly when it does, and creating the conditions students need to learn, participate, develop relationships, contribute and belong at school, like their peers.

These recommendations are grounded in a central shift in perspective. When a student experiences exclusion, the primary question can not be, “How do we manage this student?” It must instead start with “What needs to change in the student’s environment, supports or learning experience so they can participate and belong?” Exclusion like that documented in this report is a clear indication that the environment and systems are not meeting the needs of students. Prompt examination of the barriers around the student and concerted action to remove them is the Inclusive action, and a core principle of the Inclusive Education policy that informs our education system.

1. FULLY IMPLEMENT AND RESOURCE THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

The Province should maintain a single, coherent direction for inclusive education and address previously identified gaps in staffing, resources, professional learning and system capacity. While the Inclusive Education Policy was clear that every student should receive full-day instruction and be taught alongside similarly aged peers in a common learning environment, its commitments have not yet been translated into a consistent experience for all students.

The priority should therefore be to strengthen implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy through adequate resources, practical guidance, professional learning and accountability—not to introduce separate or new policies and frameworks that could fragment the province’s and communities well informed direction on inclusive education.

Implementation should be supported by a comprehensive provincial professional learning strategy for administrators, teachers, educational assistants, student services staff, specialists and other school personnel. This strategy should provide ongoing, role-specific learning, coaching and practical implementation support.

Core areas should include disability and human rights; inclusive pedagogy and universal design for learning; individualized planning and accommodations; supported decision-making and student voice; behaviour as communication; proactive responses to distress; meaningful family partnership; and practices that strengthen relationships, participation and belonging.

Professional learning should also connect inclusive education with Nova Scotia's broader transformation of disability supports under the Human Rights Remedy. Educational planning should prepare students for individualized, person-directed and inclusive lives in community, rather than reinforce pathways toward segregation or service dependence.

2. ESTABLISH CONSISTENT ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EXCLUSION

The Province should establish consistent definitions, documentation and monitoring of formal and informal exclusion. This should include suspensions, shortened days, early pickups, requests that students not attend, segregation or isolation, exclusion from activities, seclusion and restraint, and loss of access to learning while physically present at school.

Provincial and regional monitoring should capture the cumulative effects of repeated or partial exclusion—not only individual incidents. Regional Centres for Education should identify students experiencing repeated or prolonged exclusion and ensure these patterns trigger timely review, additional support and a plan for restoring fuller participation.

Clear provincial expectations should also govern the prevention, documentation, family notification, review and monitoring of seclusion and restraint, with the goal of reducing and preventing their use.

3. PROVIDE TIMELY, INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT BEFORE EXCLUSION OCCURS

Students should receive accommodations and supports based on demonstrated need. Assessment and diagnosis can inform planning, but students should not have to wait for a formal diagnosis to receive the support necessary to access education.

Schools should use Student Planning Teams and other collaborative processes early to identify barriers, understand the student's strengths and needs, implement supports, and assess whether those supports are working. Planning should begin before difficulties become repeated exclusion, crisis or reduced access to school.

When a student is distressed, withdrawing, dysregulated or having difficulty participating, school teams should understand behaviour in context and consider what the student may be communicating. Planning should examine relationships, communication, sensory conditions, curriculum, environment, accommodations and unmet support needs before relying on disciplinary or exclusionary responses.

Individualized plans must be understood by staff, implemented consistently, monitored in practice and adjusted when they are not working. A plan on paper should be reflected in the student's everyday experience at school.

When existing school resources are insufficient, schools should have clear and timely pathways to obtain additional expertise, collaborative problem-solving and resources from their Regional Centre for Education. Reduced access to education should not become the default response to unmet support needs.

4. MAKE PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND BELONGING MEASURES OF INCLUSION

Inclusive education means more than placement in a classroom, physical attendance or access to curriculum. Students should have meaningful opportunities to learn alongside peers, develop reciprocal relationships, exercise choice, contribute their strengths and hold valued roles throughout school life.

Schools should consider inclusion across the whole school experience, including classrooms, lunch and recess, field trips, clubs, sports, performances, leadership opportunities, school traditions and informal social life. Practices that routinely separate students from their peers should be reviewed for their effects on learning, friendships, identity, contribution and belonging.

School teams should regularly ask:

- Is the student participating meaningfully?
- Where and with whom do they spend their school day?
- Do they have opportunities to develop reciprocal relationships?
- Do they have opportunities to make choices and contribute?
- Are they known and recognized for their strengths?
- What barriers continue to limit their participation and belonging?

5. STRENGTHEN COLLABORATIVE PLANNING AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Inclusion should be understood as a whole-school and system-wide responsibility. Administrators should provide visible leadership, establish clear expectations for inclusive practice, and create the time and conditions staff need for collaborative planning, professional learning and problem-solving.

Teachers should remain the primary educators of all students in their classrooms, including students with disabilities. Educational assistants, resource teachers and specialists should strengthen teachers' capacity to provide individualized support and meaningful participation—not replace the teacher as the student's primary educator.

Students and families should be genuine partners in planning. Their knowledge should inform decisions before significant changes are made to programming, attendance, supports or participation. Students should be supported to communicate their preferences, experiences, concerns and goals in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them.

Regional Centres for Education should strengthen collaboration among schools, families, community organizations, health services and other partners where their knowledge or resources can support inclusive planning and successful transitions.

Families should not have to carry sole responsibility for identifying or resolving systemic barriers. Their role is to bring their knowledge, hopes and understanding of their child to the table. The education system's responsibility is to listen, collaborate and create the conditions for the student to learn, participate, contribute, develop relationships and belong.

6. ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATE

The Province should fulfil its commitment to establish a strong, independent Child and Youth Advocate with the authority, resources and mandate required to protect and advance the rights of children and youth, including students with disabilities.

The Advocate should be accessible to children, youth and families; amplify children's voices; provide individual advocacy; investigate systemic concerns within education; and make public recommendations to government.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

LEVEL	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES
Provincial government	Establish a coherent policy direction; provide adequate staffing and resources; set provincial standards; deliver a professional learning strategy; collect and publish data; strengthen oversight; and establish independent advocacy.
Regional Centres for Education	Monitor implementation and patterns of exclusion; intervene early; provide professional support, expertise and additional resources; and coordinate responses across schools and systems.
Schools and administrators	Provide whole-school leadership; initiate proactive planning; ensure accommodations are implemented; review exclusion promptly; support staff; involve students and families; and escalate unmet needs.
Teachers and school teams	Design inclusive learning; build relationships; implement individualized supports; understand behaviour in context; identify barriers early; collaborate with students and families; and seek additional support when needed.
Students and families	Participate meaningfully in planning and share their knowledge, experiences, preferences, aspirations and understanding of what supports participation and belonging.