

## **THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR AS INCLUSIVE MANAGER**

The school administrator is key to the smooth and effective running of any school. Particular challenges exist, however, for the administrator who ventures to guide a school in the direction of controversial reform, such as inclusive education. This administrator must understand implications of inclusion for every element of school management. This administrator must understand that all school staff need to be guided to inclusive pedagogy. Existing pedagogical practice, which sees students with disabilities as expendable wounded in the war to achieve, does not fit the inclusive ethic. Existing curricular beliefs, which regard mastery of curricula as the holy grail of typical classrooms, a grail accessible only to the gifted few, are not acceptable in inclusive classrooms. There are ways to view curricula as flexible servants of learning. Views of student development, which regard certain students as learners and others as non-learners, need to be replaced by those needed under Education for All theory. Every student is a powerful learner. Belief that school administrators are appointed to make all school decisions in Solomon-like fashion must give way to belief that decisions best are made in collaboration with others playing roles in education. Few administrators know everything. Leadership in inclusive education calls for a policy of thoughtful change aimed at bringing all students together in the learning community of the neighbourhood school. Policy is not mandated from the top, but nurtured from the bottom. This presentation will describe leadership principles and examples which stood the test of leading three Canadian schools from traditional practices, including assignment of students with disabilities to special settings, to inclusive practices, including assignment

of all students to typical classrooms. All while maintaining and increasing overall school quality.

Particular attention will be paid to how the school administrator:

- May set the school tone from the word “Go!”.
- May welcome parents as vital partners in education of their children.
- May respond to in the case of teachers who refuse to change.
- May work with support staff to support all students, not just those identified with disabilities.
- May work with senior administrators toward inclusion, though not all of these are inclusively minded.
- May find ways and means to ensure professional development when “there are no funds for that”.
- May change staff meetings from focus on administrivia to focus on professional development.
- May place every child with the school’s jurisdiction, without exception, in age appropriate classes.