

Greetings from

Dave Cooke

Minister of Education and Training

at

a Stakeholder Meeting to Announce

New Initiatives in Integration

Ontario Room South

June 9, 1994

10:15 a.m to 10:45 a.m.

"CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY"

Good morning.

- I'm pleased to have this chance to talk with you today.
- I know you have a full agenda and a lot of work ahead of you, but I wanted to take the time to confirm my ministry's commitment to the integration of exceptional pupils in regular classrooms, and share with you some new initiatives to support integration.
- As always, the primary goal is to ensure that the unique needs of each student are met.
- It is part of a larger social trend that encourages all members of society to participate as fully as possible. This government, and the Ministry of Education and Training are committed to equity for all Ontarians.
- Integration can help all students to understand diversity and to develop respect for others. And for some exceptional students, integration into a regular class could be the first step towards full participation in society.

- Therefore, we will be making changes to Regulation 305 to direct Identification, Placement and Review Committees, or IPRCs, to consider integration as the placement of first choice.
- There are very good reasons for integration to be the option of first consideration when the needs of an exceptional student are assessed through the IPRC process. These reasons were expressed very well during the consultations on integration.
- However, the need for a range of placements was also clearly expressed in the consultations. I recognize that there will always be some students whose needs cannot be met through integration. For these students, a range of other placements will continue to be available. These might be special education classes or provincial or demonstration schools.
- In the course of this extensive consultation process, I have also heard from parents.

- It is natural for a parent to want involvement in making decisions about their children's placement in education. They have a right to early and full access to information relating to their child's special needs.
- There is a very real desire among parents to have a stronger voice when decisions are made about their children's education.
- I think they have a right to be heard. Parents do need a greater role in the IPRC process, and so their role in the IPRC process will be strengthened through further changes to Regulation 305.
- Parents will become full partners in the IPRC's deliberations, and will have the right to bring an advocate to an IPRC meeting
- We have consulted widely on the integrations issue. Many of you here today participated in our consultations.
- We have also talked with our government colleagues in the ministries of Health and Community and Social Services.

- We will continue to collaborate with other ministries to develop sensible approaches for the delivery of health and social support services for exceptional pupils, using current resource allocations.
- In addition, we will be working on a series of other initiatives that will support integration. You will be provided with more information about these during the morning. These are initiatives you have helped to shape.
- For example, the categories and definitions for exceptionality will be revised to reflect recent changes to the *Education Act*, brought about by Bill 4. We will be seeking your input in the fall.
- Also in the fall, we will be circulating a draft of Regulation 305 for your comments.
- At the same time, school boards will receive revised guidelines for annual board special education plans.

- We will be enhancing the role of Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) by revising their operating procedures to involve greater community participation. The SEACs will be more involved in the preparation of the boards' annual special education plans.
- These initiatives will help address concerns about accountability that were raised in the Provincial Auditor's Report.
- Staff development is a very important part of this plan. Clearly, all staff must get the training and support they need to include exceptional students in regular classrooms effectively. Integration needs to happen in ways which make all students feel welcome and which allow all students to receive the attention and learning opportunities they need for success.
- To make sure that this happens, we have allocated nearly \$1 million for staff development.

- This afternoon, time will be devoted to finding the best way of providing staff development to support integration. Your ideas in shaping a framework for staff development are an important part of this initiative.
- Exemplary practices in integration will be recognized and shared to sustain staff development over the long term.
- In a moment, you will learn more about our initiatives to support integration. Just allow me to reiterate the importance of partnerships to these initiatives.
- We cannot, any one of us, do this alone. As we are all aware, this is a time of fiscal restraint, and to support integration, we will need to use ingenuity and cooperation.
- The government has set aside funding for staff development initiatives. This money can best be put to use through cooperative planning.

- Working with all of you, we hope to build the commitment necessary to make integration successful.
- For when all is said and done, what we stand to gain is a better education system – one where greater equity and access is championed for all our students who, together, help make up the diversity which is Ontario.

Thank you.