

Special Needs Initiative (SNI): Report Executive Summary

October 2017

Background

Working cooperatively with Louis Riel Teachers' Association, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and Manitoba Education and Training, Louis Riel School Division's Special Needs Initiative (SNI) discontinued student specific funding applications and forged an alternative model to funding students with special/additional needs. This re-imagining of resource allocation for service delivery to students with special/additional needs provided an opportunity for a broader examination of how students were supported in the division.

Eight school were involved in a pilot in 2016/2017, including Collège Béliveau, École St. Germain, Glenlawn Collegiate, Glenwood School, H.S. Paul School, Samuel Burland School, St. George School, and Windsor School.

Information was collected in Spring 2016 from the eight pilot schools as a baseline to document the current stage of implementation. This included a staff survey and interviews with Student Support Services Teachers (SSST) and the Student Support Services Leadership Team (SSSLT), as well as a SNI School Team consultation. These data collection methods were repeated in 2017, with additional interviews with administrators in each school.

Summary and Conclusions

The following summary statements and conclusions are supported by findings in a number of areas and through different lines of evidence:

- ✦ At time of data collection in 2017, there was **increased clarity around virtually all aspects of the SNI**, with the exception of resource allocation. Data collection occurred before discussions on resource allocation for the 2017/18 school year.
- ✦ While various **Class and School Profiles** documents and processes existed in some schools prior to the SNI,

these **were redesigned** and the processes of completing and using these documents were deepened.

- ✦ While all pilot schools were involved in the **Student, Class, and School Profiles**, the **sequence of these processes differed**, with schools having the flexibility that made sense in their contexts.
- ✦ **Tiers of Intervention were better understood and integrated into Class Profile planning.** This was believed to improve programming for all students.
- ✦ Survey respondents agreed that they were **aware of the supports available, knew how to access supports, and did access them to assist students.** Furthermore, staff also indicated that they felt supported to work with students with special/additional needs.
- ✦ The **SNI fostered collaboration** by supporting processes where all staff and parents/families were involved. Accessing release time surfaced during interviews as an important support for collaboration.
- ✦ **The anticipated outcomes** of the SNI - decreased labelling of students, adopting a more strength-based approach, and fostering inclusion - **were viewed as strongly linked and organically influencing one another.**
- ✦ Most survey respondents and those who were interviewed believed **schools met the needs of students in an inclusive manner.**
- ✦ By 2017, **staff had greater clarity and understanding around strength-based perspectives.**
- ✦ Findings from survey data and interviews indicate that staff believe **decreased labelling of students was fostered by the SNI.**
- ✦ The **new processes of student support were thought to be more flexible and responsive to student needs**, allowing for different and more timely support.

- ✦ The **SNI fostered school-based decision-making** and autonomy regarding how students could be supported.
- ✦ Findings from interviews reveal that **the work of classroom teachers and educational assistants was thought to have changed the most** as a result of the SNI.
- ✦ In 2017, over half of **Early/Middle Years classroom teachers believed their workload had not changed**, while over one in four indicated that it had increased. **High school classroom teachers' views on their workload were similar in 2016 and 2017**, with over one in three believing it had increased or were unsure in 2017.
- ✦ Overall in 2017, **almost half (46%) of the SSST's reported that their workload had increased** as a result of the SNI, up from 27% in 2016. Those who reported no change in their workload decreased to 29% in 2017, down from 40% in 2016.
- ✦ Most survey respondents believed **the SNI benefited parent/families, students, and teachers**. Students were thought to benefit most.
- ✦ Key informant interviews in 2017 revealed that most respondents believed that: the SNI had fostered **flexibility and expanded notions of student supports**; increased staff collaboration; decreased labelling of students; **fostered strength-based language and approaches**; supported positive relationships with parents/families; and classroom teachers and Educational Assistants experienced changes in their work.
- ✦ While the previous student specific funding application process was viewed as negative by all involved, **it took time for staff and parents/families in the pilot schools to understand what was replacing it**, and this process remained ongoing. Increased understanding of resourcing will deepen in the coming years.
- ✦ Not having to participate in funding applications helped forge more positive and **stronger relationships with parents/families**.

Lessons Learned

In examining all findings, lessons learned included:

- ✦ **Student, Class, and School Profiles were valued as living documents that should be revisited** throughout

the school year in order to ensure that they were adapted as needs change.

- ✦ Since the Class Profile process was less well established at the high school level, **high schools need more implementation time** to determine how Class Profiles can best be used in their settings.
- ✦ Although Student, Class, and School Profiles were standardized, each school adopted their own sequence to completing these. **The sequence of completing Student, Class, and School Profiles should be a school-based decision**, provided that divisional completion deadlines are met. School-based decision-making and autonomy was valued.
- ✦ The discontinuing of student specific funding, the implementation of a new resourcing model, and the re-imagining of student supports is a **considerable paradigm change**. Key informants believed the issues and **concerns facing the SNI were similar to those of any paradigm shift**.
- ✦ The SNI fostered fundamental changes around how students were supported and schools were resourced. This paradigm change takes time to foster, so **ensuring all those involved, including staff, students, and parents/families, have the time needed to understand and adjust to these changes** was important.
- ✦ Staff believed that the paradigm shift that resulted from the SNI **changed the work of certain staff groups**, particularly classroom teachers, Educational Assistants, and Student Support Services Teachers.
- ✦ Communication around the changes fostered by the SNI were valued by all those consulted. **Clearly articulated key messages supported implementation**.
- ✦ Key informants believed **professional development supported the SNI**. Staff articulated differences in professional development needs by level and role. **Including staff in all roles within professional development activities was valued**.
- ✦ Collaboration supported the SNI in various ways at the Student, Class, and School planning levels. **Providing as many opportunities as possible for collaboration supported implementation**.