



# Inclusive Schooling Review:

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## Final Report

Department of Education, Culture and Employment  
Planning, Research, and Information Management Division

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Government of Northwest Territories    Gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest



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## 1.0 Executive Summary

### 1.1 Background

In 2016, the *NWT Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling* (the Ministerial Directive, the Directive) was renewed with a focus on providing quality inclusive education to the diverse student population of the Northwest Territories (NWT). The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE, the Department) is responsible for the monitoring, evaluation, and overall accountability of inclusive schooling in the NWT. In 2020, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada *Report on Early Childhood to Grade 12 Education in the Northwest Territories* stated that ECE's monitoring of inclusive schooling did not provide sufficient information about whether students on individualized learning plans received the necessary support and services, or how this affected their outcomes. In response to this finding, ECE committed to conducting a review of inclusive schooling in the NWT.

To fulfil this commitment, ECE's Planning, Research and Information Management Division carried out the Inclusive Schooling Review from 2024-25 to 2025-26. The overall purpose of the review was to assess how NWT schools have met the Ministerial Directive and how effective the Directive has been in providing quality, inclusive education to NWT students. The objective of the review was to generate comprehensive information on inclusive schooling needs and practices, and to identify gaps and recommendations that can be used to guide changes to the NWT inclusive schooling system.

The project was completed using a phased approach. Phase 1, completed in Fall 2024, involved reviewing existing data, including a jurisdictional scan of inclusive schooling plan types, and a document review of education bodies' Inclusive Schooling Compliance Reporting Tools and Operating Plans/Annual Reports; and ECE's JK-12 Performance Measures Reports. Phase 2 involved primary data collection with inclusive schooling partners from April to June 2025, in person and virtually. This included surveys, interviews, focus groups, and data interpretation meetings. The review gathered feedback from support assistants, classroom teachers, program support teachers, principals, regional inclusive schooling coordinators, superintendents, and ECE Education and Early Childhood staff.

The review was guided by the following questions:

1. How can inclusive schooling be defined in the NWT?
2. To what extent are inclusive schooling practices in the NWT meeting the needs of NWT students?
  - a. What do students and families need, expect, and want from inclusive schooling practices in the NWT?
  - b. To what extent do students' and families' experiences of inclusive schooling practices meet their needs, expectations, and wants?
3. What are the successes and barriers to inclusive schooling planning, implementation, and monitoring?



- a. What are the successes and barriers to effectively planning and implementing student supports?
- b. What are the successes and barriers to effectively monitoring student supports?
4. To what extent are inclusive schooling practices in the NWT supported by Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding?

## 1.2 Results

### Question 1

Many participants agreed that the definition and vision for inclusive schooling included in the Directive reflected what inclusive schooling means to them. However, implementing inclusive schooling with this vision can be difficult to achieve in practice. Participants also expressed confusion around the concept of the "common learning environment," stating that students' needs might not always be best addressed within the classroom. Participants suggested expanding the definition and vision to include realities that are important for schooling in the North, such as the importance of mental health and cultural inclusivity.

### Question 2

With regards to the inclusive schooling needs, expectations, and wants of families in the NWT, while many parents and guardians described positive experiences and appreciation for the inclusive schooling programs and supports offered by the school, they also expressed that the available supports do not always meet the needs of their children. Several parents and guardians stated that their children were building strong relationships and receiving the support that they needed. In addition, parents and guardians experienced strong communication and opportunities to discuss their children's support plans and goals with educators. However, a lack of access to specialist services, systems navigation, and inclusive schooling resources were identified as gaps in meeting their children's learning needs. Parents and guardians want consistent access to rehabilitation services, classroom supports, inclusive spaces and activities, and opportunities for their children to grow and experience a sense of belonging at school.

### Question 3

The review found several successes and barriers related to inclusive schooling planning and implementation. Educators described seeing an increase in complexity and diversity of needs in their schools, which poses challenges to meeting students' needs. Collaboration among staff was identified as a strength for planning and implementing inclusive schooling; however, barriers such as a lack of time and a lack of understanding and clarity on inclusive schooling roles, responsibilities, and authority can get in the way of effectively collaborating to plan and deliver student supports. This was reflected in the document review of education bodies' Operating Plans/Annual Reports. Inclusive Schooling Staff knowledge of inclusive schooling was also identified as a barrier, with participants expressing a desire for more collaborative, inter-regional learning opportunities to build upon the strengths and knowledge that exist within the territory. The lack of access to specialist services in the NWT was identified as a significant barrier to address to ensure more consistent, timely, and integrated support for the diverse needs of the student



population. Clear processes for inclusive schooling plan types and transitions into, within, and out of the school system were also identified as priorities.

With regards to monitoring inclusive schooling, the review found that the existing mechanisms that the Department uses to fulfill its monitoring and evaluation responsibilities (education bodies' Operating Plans and Annual Reports) lack indicators to assess the quality or effectiveness of inclusive schooling practices across the territory. Participants described challenges with monitoring at the school and regional levels, including a lack of time and a lack of monitoring systems in place. Further work is needed to develop a monitoring framework and methods for inclusive schooling that are realistic and that capture the diverse perspectives of education partners, including students and families.

#### Question 4

Lastly, due to a lack of detailed data on Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative expenditures, the review team was not able to assess the extent to which these funds specifically support inclusive schooling in the territory. However, during engagement with educators and families, the review team heard that schools largely rely on these funds to support their inclusive schooling programs and services, and many are concerned about the impacts of cuts and/or changes to these funding programs. Participants also described concerns with the inclusive schooling funding formula provided by ECE and its ability to meet the needs experienced within NWT schools. Despite the large amount of funds accessed by education bodies from Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative, there are still gaps in the education system's ability to meet students' needs. In addition to addressing funding gaps, systems transformation is required to address the challenges identified by educators and families through this review.

### 1.3 Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation #1: Revise the inclusive schooling definition in the Ministerial Directive.** This should include clarifying the meaning and application of the "common learning environment," including its scope beyond the classroom, and integrating key elements identified by participants, such as mental health, life skills, and flexible learning environments.

**Recommendation #2: Develop resources and supports to aid parents and guardians with navigating inclusive schooling supports and services.** This could include the development of a plain-language guide to explain supports (for example, plan types, access to Support Assistants, and rehabilitation services) and establishing a systems-navigator to assist families and schools.

**Recommendation #3: Develop a territory-wide inclusive schooling staffing approach that better reflects the realities of inclusive schooling and ensures alignment between staffing levels and inclusive schooling expectations.** This should include establishing a minimum staffing ratio for inclusive schooling staff; clarifying inclusive schooling roles, responsibilities, and authorities; and contingency planning for staff turnover.



**Recommendation #4: Improve support and coordination for professional learning and capacity building in collaboration with Education Bodies.** This includes establishing opportunities for inter-regional collaboration to support educators through sharing inclusive schooling practices, challenges, and solutions that are grounded in NWT realities.

**Recommendation #5: Work with the Department of Health and Social Services and the NWT health authorities to improve access to specialist services (e.g., assessment and rehabilitation services) by focusing on integrated service delivery models and reducing wait times for assessments and therapies.** This includes working across the education and health systems to define roles, responsibilities and communication protocols for service referrals and follow-up, and explore platforms for tracking student referrals, assessments and service delivery.

**Recommendation #6: Revise inclusive schooling plan types and templates.** This includes removing or updating the MEP, developing clear guidelines for selecting appropriate plan types, and exploring territory-wide implementation of class support plans or class reviews.

**Recommendation #7: Develop inclusive schooling protocols to clarify pathways for students transitioning within and outside the school.** This includes strengthening early childhood screening and intervention to address learning challenges early on, and promoting a shared understanding of how support plans affect curricular achievement and graduation outcomes.

**Recommendation #8: Develop a comprehensive monitoring framework for inclusive schooling.** This includes developing a performance measurement plan (PMP) and logic model, identifying meaningful indicators to assess quality and effectiveness. Revise the reporting requirements in Operating Plans and Annual Reports as needed to ensure they are aligned with the PMP and logic model.

**Recommendation #9: Develop data collection methods and processes for monitoring and evaluation of inclusive schooling.** This includes researching and identifying methods that enable schools and education bodies to meaningfully monitor inclusive schooling in a way that is realistic, achievable, and not burdensome. This also includes identifying methods to capture student and family input.

**Recommendation #10: Conduct a financial needs assessment for inclusive schooling in collaboration with education bodies and the federal government.**

**Recommendation #11: Review and revise the inclusive schooling funding formula to reflect student needs and complexities.** This includes providing increased funding for inclusive schooling staff positions and flexible allocation of funds based on actual school needs.



## 2.0 Background

### 2.1 Inclusive Schooling in the NWT

The last comprehensive review of inclusive schooling in the NWT was conducted by an independent consultant in 2014. Following this review, in 2016, the *NWT Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling* was renewed with a focus on providing quality inclusive education to the diverse student population of the NWT. The purpose of the Directive is to ensure that schools in the NWT implement inclusive schooling as defined<sup>1</sup> and as mandated by section 7(1) of the *Education Act* (1996). The Directive sets out the vision for inclusive schooling in the NWT, “to ensure access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive” (2016, p. 2).

The objectives of the Ministerial Directive are:

1. To ensure that all students have access to quality education programs within a common learning environment in the community in which the student resides.
2. To ensure that education bodies have direction on how to administer inclusive schooling supports and programming.
3. To ensure educators are provided with in-servicing to deliver inclusive schooling supports and programming.
4. To ensure financial accountability for inclusive schooling funding.
5. To ensure monitoring, evaluation and reporting of inclusive schooling supports and programming.

The Directive outlines the range of inclusive schooling supports that education bodies are required to provide. This includes the development, implementation and monitoring of various types of support plans for students who require them. The different types of support plans used in the NWT are as follows:

Type of support plan	Description (from the Ministerial Directive, 2016)
<b>Modified Education Program (MEP)</b>	A modified Education Program is developed for students who are documented as working significantly above or below grade level in one or more subjects, yet retains the learning outcomes articulated in NWT curricula. The curricular learning outcomes are selected from the working grade level and used to guide instruction for the Modified Program. The Modified Program is based on student strengths, needs and interests and may include modified individualized learning goals, instructional methods, methods of practice and evaluation procedures, consistent with the principles of differentiated instruction. The Modified Program is recorded in a Student Support Plan (SSP).
<b>Student Support Plan (SSP)</b>	A record of supports for learning which documents accommodations or modifications required for a student to best experience success with their programming. The SSP may change at any time to best reflect student needs and successes. Different kinds of Student Support Plans

<sup>1</sup> The Directive defines inclusive schooling as: “students access the education program, and required supports, in a common learning environment in the students’ home community.” (2016, p. 4)



	exist: Regular Education Program with Accommodations for Difficulty (JK-12); Regular Education Program with Accommodations for Enrichment (JK-12), Modified Education Program – Above Grade Level (JK-9).
<b>Individualized Education Program/Plan (IEP)</b>	An individualized Education Program is student-specific program outlined in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This plan is a comprehensive written education plan with annual student outcomes and shorter-term objectives, determined through a collaborative process, driven by the strengths and needs of the student; it may or may not include learning outcomes articulated in NWT curricula. A student on an IEP usually requires supports, accommodations, facilities, resources and/or equipment required beyond those required by his/her peers.

The Directive also identifies the specialized inclusive schooling staff for which ECE provides funding and position information to education bodies. These include:

<b>Specialized inclusive schooling staff position</b>	<b>Description (from the Ministerial Directive, 2016)</b>
<b>Regional Inclusive Schooling Coordinator (RISC)</b>	RISCs provide administrative and programming leadership at the regional level to support inclusive schooling based staff (Program Support Teachers and Support Assistants) support classroom teachers in meeting the needs of students.
<b>Program Support Teacher (PST)</b>	The PST is an experienced and skilled teacher who provides direct collaborative support to classroom teachers as they develop and use instructional strategies to meet the needs of students.
<b>Support Assistants (SA)</b>	Support Assistants work in the school to support teachers in meeting the needs of students.

Inclusive schooling extends beyond the responsibility of these specialized inclusive schooling staff. The *Guidelines for Inclusive Schooling: Supporting the NWT Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling (2016)* (the Inclusive Schooling Guidelines, the Guidelines) outline the responsibilities of the principal, other school-based staff members, classroom teachers, superintendents, and ECE staff as they relate to inclusive schooling in addition to the above-mentioned specialized positions. The Guidelines also acknowledge the role of Health and Social Services system supports, community supports, and parents and families in meeting inclusive schooling needs.

## 2.2 Inclusive Schooling Funding

ECE provides education bodies with funding for inclusive schooling that must be used for the sole purpose of supporting students and teachers in accordance with the Directive. Education bodies must provide audited financial records to ECE showing how inclusive schooling funding was spent on a yearly basis, according to financial reporting regulations.

Education bodies also draw upon external sources of funding to support inclusive schooling, including Jordan’s Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding. Jordan’s Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative are federally funded programs that provide access to health, social, and



educational products, supports, and services for First Nations and Inuit children, respectively. Education bodies in the NWT apply for these funds to support a range of student needs, including inclusive schooling-related expenses.

### 2.3 Inclusive Schooling Accountability and Reporting

Sections 9.6.2 and 11.2.2 of the Directive state that the Department is responsible for:

- the overall accountability of inclusive schooling,
- monitoring and evaluating inclusive schooling in the NWT, and
- ensuring that inclusive schooling is functioning according to the Directive and an associated accountability plan.

To fulfill this, an Inclusive Schooling Compliance Reporting Tool was launched alongside the Ministerial Directive in 2016 to monitor implementation and compliance with the Directive and its associated guidelines. This tool was used to monitor increasing levels of compliance over a three-year period as the education system began implementing the Ministerial Directive. In 2018-19, inclusive schooling monitoring and reporting was transitioned into a dedicated section of education bodies' Operating Plans and Annual Reports through the Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Planning and Accountability Framework (JK-12 PAF).

In 2020, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) Report on Early Childhood to Grade 12 Education in the Northwest Territories (OAG Report)<sup>2</sup> stated that ECE's monitoring of inclusive schooling did not provide ECE with sufficient information about whether students on individualized learning plans received the necessary supports or how this affected their outcomes. Some of the recommendations from the OAG Report included a review of inclusive schooling practices and spot checks on individualized learning plans.

With regards to monitoring and reporting on inclusion beyond the JK-12 education system, ECE commissioned a review of inclusive education practices in early learning and child care settings in the NWT<sup>3</sup> by an external evaluator in 2024. ECE published a government response<sup>4</sup> to this review in February 2025.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/nwt\\_202002\\_e\\_43522.html](https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/nwt_202002_e_43522.html)

**“Recommendation:** The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should strengthen its monitoring of inclusive schooling. This should include conducting reviews of inclusive schooling practices, including spot checks on individualized learning plans; analyzing information (including information related to students' needs for specialist services) to assess whether students' needs are being met; making necessary adjustments to the education system.” (OAG Report, 2020, line 65)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/2025-02\\_-\\_malatest\\_final\\_report\\_-\\_eng\\_0.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/2025-02_-_malatest_final_report_-_eng_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/2025-02\\_-\\_gov\\_response\\_to\\_elcc\\_inclusive\\_education\\_practices\\_-\\_eng\\_0.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/2025-02_-_gov_response_to_elcc_inclusive_education_practices_-_eng_0.pdf)



## 3.0 Purpose of the Review and Methods

### 3.1 Purpose, Rationale, and Scope

This review falls within a broader scope of work aimed at improving inclusive schooling and its associated policies, regulations, and legislation supporting it. The purpose of the review was to assess how NWT schools have met the Ministerial Directive and how effective the Directive has been in providing quality, inclusive education to NWT students. It also fulfills ECE's commitment to conduct a comprehensive review of inclusive schooling practices in response to the 2020 OAG Report on Early Childhood to Grade 12 Education in the Northwest Territories.

The objective of the review was to generate comprehensive information on inclusive schooling needs and practices, and to identify gaps and recommendations that can be used to guide changes to the NWT inclusive schooling system. This may include changes to the Ministerial Directive, regulations, policies, or otherwise. The work of developing and implementing those changes and updates is outside the scope of this project.

### 3.2 Review Questions

The review sought to answer the following questions and sub-questions:

1. How can inclusive schooling be defined in the NWT?
2. To what extent are inclusive schooling practices in the NWT meeting the needs of NWT students?
  - a. What do students and families need, expect, and want from inclusive schooling practices in the NWT?
  - b. To what extent do students' and families' experiences of inclusive schooling practices meet their needs, expectations, and wants?
3. What are the successes and barriers to inclusive schooling planning, implementation, and monitoring?
  - a. What are the successes and barriers to effectively planning and implementing student supports?
  - b. What are the successes and barriers to effectively monitoring student supports?
4. To what extent are inclusive schooling practices in the NWT supported by Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding?

### 3.3 Principles and Standards

The review adhered to the *Program Evaluation Standards*<sup>5</sup> developed by Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE) and the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) *Guidance for Ethical Evaluation Practice*.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, all reporting activities are compliant with the NWT's *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (ATIPP).

<sup>5</sup> Yarbrough et al. (2011). Sage Publications. See: <https://evaluationcanada.ca/career/evaluation-standards.html>

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Evaluation Society (2023). <https://evaluationcanada.ca/career/ethical-guidance.html>



### 3.4 Approach

ECE's Planning, Research and Information Management (PRIM) Division led the review, using a phased approach. PRIM met internally with a project team made up of ECE JK-12 Education System Services (JK-12 ESS) and Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC) staff throughout project planning for contextual information and guidance. Phase 1 of the review focused on reviewing existing data to assess compliance with the Ministerial Directive; strengths and challenges; and gaps in information and monitoring. Based on the results of Phase 1 and input from key education partners, Phase 2 focused on conducting engagement to hear perspectives directly from the field. The engagement approach, methods, and questions were shaped by input from the NWT Superintendents Association (NWTSA), Education Leaders, Regional Inclusive Schooling Coordinators, and ECE Education and Early Childhood staff, as well as consideration of the findings from the 2024 Review of Inclusive Education Practices in Early Learning and Child Care settings in the NWT. Recommendations were developed by the PRIM team based on the themes that were identified during data analysis.

Appendix A provides an overview of the review timeline and key engagements with education system partners.

### 3.5 Methods

The review utilized the following methods to answer the overarching review questions:

- Jurisdictional scan of inclusive schooling program types;
- Document review of education bodies' Inclusive Schooling Compliance Reporting Tools and Operating Plans/Annual Reports, and ECE's JK-12 Performance Measures Reports;
- Interviews with a sample of principals, including those early in their careers through to highly experienced administrators, and representing a range of school sizes;
- Interviews with a sample of parents/guardians of students on support plans, including a range of grades and community sizes represented;
- Focus groups with a sample of Program Support Teachers (PSTs), Support Assistants (SAs), and Regional Inclusive Schooling Coordinators (RISCs), including diverse lengths of service and experience across education bodies;
- Electronic survey sent to all classroom teachers via email; and
- Data interpretation meetings with Student Support Subcommittee (RISCs), NWT Superintendents Association, and ECE Education and Early Childhood programs staff.

The OAG Report suggested that ECE's approach to monitoring inclusive schooling did not adequately assess the level and impact of support provided to students on support plans.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>[https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/nwt\\_202002\\_e\\_43522.html](https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/nwt_202002_e_43522.html)

"We found that the department did not sufficiently monitor whether schools were creating, monitoring, and updating individualized learning plans for students, as required by the Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling. Its monitoring of inclusive schooling did not provide it with sufficient information about whether students on individualized learning plans received the necessary supports, including specialized services, or



Therefore, this review sought to address that gap by prioritizing engagement with families of students with MEPs, SSPs, and IEPs. Targeted engagements with parents/guardians were coordinated with the assistance of RISCs, principals, and PSTs. RISCs also aided the review team with the coordination of SA and PST focus groups. A random sample of principals was invited to be interviewed via email. Participation in the survey, interviews, and focus groups was voluntary.

Engagements (interviews, focus groups, and data interpretation meetings) took place using a mix of in-person, phone, and virtual formats. In-person engagements took place in Behchokò, Fort Providence, Inuvik, and Yellowknife. With the inclusion of virtual formats, the engagement included participants from all education bodies. The engagement with educators (i.e., classroom teachers, principals, PSTs, SAs, and RISCs) included representation of a range of years of experience in their respective roles (e.g., both new and experienced principals), as well as a range of grades taught, school sizes, and community types (e.g., small communities and regional centres).

As the primary operational leaders of the education system, superintendents informed both the planning and findings of the review through meetings with the review team during NWTSA meetings at multiple points throughout the project (see Appendix A).

The following table summarizes the participation in the survey, interviews, and focus groups:

<b>Participant Type</b>	<b>Engagement Format</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Classroom teachers</b>	Online survey	110
<b>Parents/guardians of students on support plans</b>	In-person and virtual/phone interviews	21
<b>Principals</b>	In-person and virtual/phone interviews	9
<b>Program Support Teachers</b>	In-person and virtual focus groups	60
<b>Support Assistants</b>	In-person focus groups	55
<b>Regional Inclusive Schooling Coordinators</b>	In-person focus group	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>267</b>

The review team acknowledges that in the NWT, people wear many hats in their communities, and this includes the school community. For example, some PSTs also teach classes; principals who simultaneously play the role of PST; and education staff who are also parents. Therefore, in many cases, participants spoke to a range of experiences and perspectives given the multiple roles that they play in the school community. Hearing these multiple perspectives strengthened the review by providing deep insights into the realities of the NWT inclusive schooling system. The review team thanks all participants who took the time to share their perspectives to inform this work.

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how this affected their outcomes. This meant that there was a risk that students were not benefiting fully from these plans.” (OAG Report, 2020, line 60)



Qualitative data from engagements were analyzed using thematic analysis in NVivo 15 software. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel. The use of data interpretation meetings<sup>8</sup> with key education system partners, including RISCs, superintendents, and ECE Education and Early Childhood staff, provided contextual insights during the analysis, helping to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the NWT inclusive schooling context and realities.

### 3.7 Risks and Limitations

The risks and limitations that impacted the reliability and validity of the evaluation findings, as well as their mitigation strategies, are summarized in the table below.

Risk or Limitation	Mitigation Strategy
As one part of the broader NWT education system, there are many external factors and other ongoing initiatives (e.g. Education Act Modernization, JK-12 Curriculum Renewal) outside of the scope of the Ministerial Directive that may impact performance outcomes and the experiences of educators and families as they relate to inclusive schooling.	Data interpretation meetings with Superintendents, RISCs, and ECE Education and Early Childhood staff (see Appendix A), as well as reflective discussions among the review team enabled the consideration of how external factors may influence the evaluation results. External/contextual factors considered are noted throughout the report where appropriate.
Given the timeline, budget, and capacity for this review, it was not possible to engage all individuals who play a role in or are impacted by inclusive schooling in the NWT (e.g., families of students not on support plans; former students and educators) and groups (e.g., specialist service providers; non-government organizations with a vested interest in inclusive schooling).	To ensure a breadth of perspectives were represented, the review incorporated data from multiple sources (e.g., existing documents and primary data collection). The review team revised the Phase 2 Plan following feedback from superintendents and education leaders to incorporate the perspectives of a wide range of education staff in addition to families. The review team worked with RISCs to facilitate engagement with a purposive sample that reflects a range of experiences across the NWT.
The review process did not include hearing directly from students on support plans.	Parents and guardians of students on support plans were invited to bring their children to the engagements with the review team to hear their perspectives; however, the review team did not end up hearing directly from any students. The review team acknowledges this limitation and recommends further work to develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that capture the perspectives of students.
Insufficient financial data limited the ability to answer Review Question 4 ( <i>To what extent are inclusive schooling practices in the NWT supported</i> )	To mitigate this limitation, the review team discusses feedback from families and education staff related to Jordan’s Principle and Inuit Child

<sup>8</sup> Data interpretation meetings involved the review team presenting preliminary findings to key education system partners and discussing those findings as a group to hear further input and context. Following these meetings, the review team incorporated meeting notes from the discussions into the in-depth analysis of qualitative data. See Pankaj & Emery (2016). <https://www.the-evaluation-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Pankaj-Emery-article.pdf>



by Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding?).

First Funding, and acknowledges this limitation within the report.

## 4.0 Results

### Review Question 1: How can inclusive schooling be defined in the NWT?

The NWT Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling defines inclusive schooling as “*students access the education program, and required supports, in a common learning environment in the student’s home community.*” The vision of the Directive “*to ensure access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive.*”

To ensure this definition and vision continue to meet the needs of students, families, and educators in the NWT, we asked participants if these statements accurately reflect what inclusive schooling means to them. The following themes summarize what we heard from the engagements with regard to defining inclusive schooling in the NWT.

#### Reality of Accessing the Required Supports in the Student’s Home Community

*“The required support, sometimes we don’t have it in the NWT. It’s not there, it’s not available, so then what do we do to try to meet that need or requirement to the best of our abilities? And not only that, it goes down to also the skill set of existing staff in the building.”*

-Principal

Many participants agreed that the definition and vision accurately represent what inclusive schooling means to them; however, many participants also noted that the definition and vision are difficult to achieve in practice. For example, participants appreciated that the definition and vision are student-centered and inclusive of all students. Yet, given factors such as access to funding, resources, health services, training, equipment, and technology, the inclusive schooling definition and vision do not necessarily reflect the reality of what inclusive schooling looks like and how inclusive schooling supports are experienced in the NWT.

#### Desire for Clarity on the “Common Learning Environment”

The Ministerial Directive defines common learning environment as “*an inclusive environment where instruction is designed to be delivered to students of mixed ability and with their peer group in the community school, while being responsive to their individual needs as a learner, and used for the majority of the students’ regular instruction hours.*” Many participants expressed confusion around the concept of the “common learning environment.” Educators expressed a need for clarity on whether the common learning environment refers to the classroom or the school as a whole.

*“We want to know what the common learning environment is, because from our understanding we believe that inclusive schooling is having the student*



*in a classroom, but that's not necessarily inclusive schooling just because they're in a classroom with their peers. What the student needs may be something outside of the classroom."*

-Program Support Teacher

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Some participants noted that having all students in the same classroom with their peers helped build communication skills and connections between students. However, they also shared mixed feelings about whether the classroom as the common learning environment is what's best for meeting students' learning needs. For example, meeting some students' needs might involve focused one-on-one support, sensory breaks, or work experience to build life skills outside of the classroom. Students may experience stigma when certain one-on-one support or interventions are implemented in the classroom. Educators also stated that having all students in the classroom as the common learning environment had, at times, led to disruptions or safety concerns if the classroom was not sufficiently supported to meet students' diverse needs. To address this challenge, educators suggested considering the whole school as a common learning environment, stating that this expands the context and makes it more likely for students' learning to be supported within and outside the classroom environment and by the whole school team.

### **Additional Feedback on Defining Inclusive Schooling**

Some educators noted difficulty with implementing the inclusive schooling definition and vision in the high school context, stating that it can be challenging to fulfill the vision of effectively meeting students' diverse needs while also meeting the curricular outcomes of senior secondary courses. It was suggested that more can be done to provide a clear definition of what inclusive schooling looks like in the high school setting.

In sharing what inclusive schooling means to them, several participants noted a desire to expand upon the inclusive schooling definition to reflect the realities of today's school system, including elements such as mental health, cultural inclusivity, and trauma-informed practice. It was also suggested that the definition should be in plain language for clarity.

**Recommendation #1: Revise the inclusive schooling definition in the Ministerial Directive.** This should include clarifying the meaning and application of the "common learning environment," including its scope beyond the classroom, and integrating key elements identified by participants, such as mental health, life skills, and flexible learning environments.

### **Review Question 2A: What do students and families need, expect, and want from inclusive schooling practices in the NWT?**

Parents and guardians shared a range of their needs, expectations, and wants to meet the unique strengths and needs of their children. The suggestions are summarized below.



- Student-centered approaches to planning and implementing inclusive schooling (e.g., developing support plans, setting students' goals) that include figuring out what the student's unique needs and strengths are.
- Consistent access to rehabilitation services such as speech language pathology, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy, integrated with school-based supports.
- Consistent access to supports both in and outside the classroom, such as resources and technologies (e.g., mental health resources, effective learning strategies, self-regulation and sensory tools, communication technologies), trained support staff, and one-on-one support as needed.
- Inclusive spaces within the school, such as sensory rooms.
- Inclusive sports and activities beyond the classroom to promote a sense of belonging in the whole school community.
- Support for their children to grow and achieve; to gain confidence, courage, life skills, and independence; and to feel like they are a part of the school and community.
- Strong communication with the school to receive feedback on how their child is doing in school and to be kept informed of changes that may impact their child. This also includes being able to learn about their child's needs and to implement strategies their child receives from school at home.

*"One of the things that I'm really hopeful as a parent is that the [support plan] is being honored and that in the classroom, the teachers are using the plans in order to support all the students in a good way."*

-Parent

### **Review Question 2B: To what extent do students' and families' experiences of inclusive schooling practices meet their needs, expectations, and wants?**

Many parents and guardians expressed positive experiences and appreciation for the hard work that educators put in to meet their children's needs. Several parents and guardians felt that their children were building strong relationships and receiving the supports that they needed (e.g., strong literacy supports, personalized planning, celebrating their unique skills and gifts). Several parents and guardians also reported experiencing strong communication with the school via phone, email, and in-person meetings. Parents and guardians appreciated receiving frequent updates from



the school and opportunities to discuss and provide input on their children’s support plans and goals.

*“It’s such a great energy to be in the school as a parent to see the connection that the staff have with the students inside and outside the school, it really makes the world of a difference.”*

-Parent

*“I feel good about [my child] being on a support plan because it gives us a vision and goals, and also it’s going at his pace.”*

-Parent

*“I definitely feel like there’s excellent communication to keep us informed and in the loop.”*

-Parent

However, many parents and guardians also expressed that their children’s needs were not being met. Lack of access to assessment and rehabilitation services, such as educational psychology, physiotherapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy, was the main gap identified by parents and guardians in having their children’s needs met. The long wait times to access services and the lack of integration of services with the school system were identified as barriers to meeting students’ needs. Parents and guardians described their challenges with navigating the school and health systems, and needing to advocate for their children to access the supports they need, which can be an overwhelming experience for many. Parents/guardians and educators alike were concerned that families with less systems knowledge or capacity to advocate were less likely to receive supports and services (such as access to assessments and one-on-one support). Parents and guardians expressed a need for more support with understanding and navigating inclusive schooling supports and systems.

Some parents and guardians also expressed concerns about the inclusive schooling supports offered within the school. This included concerns about the time it takes to implement supports, support plans holding their children back from meeting academic standards and graduating; and staff turnover impacting the consistency of supports.

Parents and guardians identified that in some cases, the school may not be in the best position to support their child due to being under-resourced. For example, many parents and guardians drew attention to a lack of funding as a potential reason why their children were not receiving supports such as one-on-one support from a Support Assistant or up-to-date technologies.

While many parents and guardians expressed gratitude for their experiences with inclusive schooling and staff’s efforts and responsiveness; the gaps, needs and concerns described by parents



and guardians indicate that improvements to inclusive schooling are required to further meet the needs of NWT students and their families.

**Recommendation #2: Develop resources and supports to aid parents and guardians with navigating inclusive schooling supports and services.** This could include the development of a plain-language guide to explain supports (for example, plan types, access to Support Assistants, and rehabilitation services) and establishing a systems-navigator to assist families and schools.

### Review Question 3A: What are the successes and barriers to effectively planning and implementing student supports?

Six key themes were identified in the data regarding successes and barriers to effectively planning and implementing student supports. The relevant successes and barriers identified through the review are discussed under each theme.

#### Increased Complex Needs and Lack of Time and Capacity to Address These Needs

Many educators described seeing an increase in complex needs and an increase in the diversity of needs among the student population in recent years. This includes a range of social-emotional needs, cognitive and physical disabilities, behavioural needs, medical needs, and mental health needs.

Given the volume and diversity of needs increasing, educators reported that there is an increasing number of students requiring individualized programming and accommodations. This is often not feasible because teachers require more skills, knowledge, and time to plan and implement strategies to address these needs.

In the survey of classroom teachers, when asked what challenges and barriers they face when implementing support plans, the most commonly selected challenges were managing classroom complexity (selected by 75% of respondents), workload (64%), and lack of time (also 64%). This was echoed by other educators during the interviews and focus groups. Many participants described that in their schools, the volume of needs exceeded their staff capacity, which leads to SAs and PSTs focusing on addressing urgent needs, such as demanding behaviours and safety concerns, and therefore lacking the capacity to deliver academic supports.

*"I think one of the hardest parts is how to make sure that the teacher followed the support plan... it's almost like a superhero person who's trying to put all of those things within the classroom, and we're expecting one person to do the job of multiple people. So realistically, I'm not too sure it's feasible, you know, not without more bodies."*

-Principal

Participants identified several factors that they felt were contributing to the issues of increased needs and class complexity. Some participants noted that while in the past, families of children with complex needs may have moved out of the NWT to be able to access the supports they needed, we



are now seeing more of these families staying in the North. Some participants noted a shift towards larger class sizes, which further amplifies the issue of class complexity and teaching to a wide range of needs and abilities within a single class. Some also noted that the new NWT adapted curriculum, which no longer involves streaming students into different courses at the high school level, contributes to increased class complexity as well. Education staff also noted that low attendance impacts the ability to implement inclusive schooling practices, provide supports to students, and maintain continuity in implementation. Overall, participants expressed overarching concerns with regard to student wellbeing (i.e., mental health) and community wellbeing (i.e., violence and drug-related crime) and their impacts on inclusive schooling. The document review of education bodies' Operating Plans/Annual Reports also identified that events in recent years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and evacuations, have led to increased needs within schools (e.g., need for more mental health supports) and have posed challenges for educators' abilities to plan and implement supports.

Given this multitude of factors contributing to increased needs within the schools, educators reported feeling spread thin. The increased workload and lack of capacity and time to address the needs presented within the school cause significant concern for educator burnout. Many respondents expressed a need for more inclusive schooling staff (e.g., SAs and PSTs) to be able to meet all students' needs within the classroom.

Some participants also drew attention to the importance of investing in early learning and early intervention to address the issue of classroom complexity by identifying and addressing students' needs early on. Participants also expressed a desire for improvements to the physical environment of the school, such as safe rooms/sensory rooms/quiet rooms, inclusive playgrounds and outdoor spaces, equipment and resources for inclusive schooling, and storage space for this equipment and resources, to better accommodate inclusive schooling needs.

### Collaboration Among Staff and Understanding of Roles

*"I think collaboration, and people coming with a collaborative, problem-solving mindset, works really well."*

-Program Support Teacher

A strength identified by many participants that facilitates the planning and implementation of inclusive schooling is strong collaboration among staff. Educators identified that the school team being on the same page and working towards a common goal of supporting students is essential for effective inclusive schooling planning and implementation. The document review of education bodies' Operating Plans/Annual Reports also identified strong collaboration, openness, and leadership among School-Based Support Team (SBST) members as a strength for inclusive schooling planning.

Conversely, many participants also reported experiencing challenges with collaboration and supporting other staff. Staff reported not having enough time to properly plan and work with colleagues on inclusive schooling supports. Further, some participants noted that collaboration can be challenging when other staff are not open to collaboration, mentorship, or co-teaching, whether



that is due to a lack of understanding of inclusive schooling, a lack of willingness to try new approaches, or being overwhelmed with their current workload.

Both the document review of Operating Plans/Annual Reports and engagement with educators identified logistical challenges with carrying out SBST meetings, including a lack of time, scheduling challenges, and a lack of substitute teacher/staff coverage for educators to be able to attend SBST meetings during the school day.

Participants also expressed a lack of clarity and understanding around roles, responsibilities, and power structures within the school system as barriers to effective collaboration among staff and implementation of inclusive schooling practices. Participants stated that in order for members of the school team to be on the same page and have strong working relationships, a common understanding of roles, responsibilities, and expectations as they relate to inclusive schooling is required, especially when it relates to developing and implementing support plans. Staff turnover was identified as a factor that likely impacts the consistent understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Further, participants noted that a lack of authority assigned to certain roles makes it challenging to fulfill their inclusive schooling responsibilities and ensure implementation of inclusive schooling practices. For example, PSTs are responsible for supporting and coaching teachers, yet they do not have a supervisory role or authority to ensure that teachers are receptive to coaching and follow through with planned student supports. RISCs are responsible for working with principals to ensure that school staff know and use effective inclusive schooling practices, and ensuring that required reporting is completed and submitted on time. However, RISCs do not have authority over principals, and therefore their ability to fulfill these tasks is dependent on the school leadership's openness to collaboration, inclusive schooling buy-in, and understanding of roles and responsibilities.

PSTs in particular described challenges with a lack of clarity on what their role entails. The Inclusive Schooling Guidelines include a priority time-use chart for PSTs, which indicates that PSTs should dedicate 60% of their time to supporting teachers and strengthening instruction; 25% to supporting students; and 15% to planning and organizational duties. However, many PSTs described that this does not reflect the realities of their roles. PSTs described spending more time supporting students than the guidelines allocate. This includes spending a significant amount of time addressing immediate needs happening within the school, such as responding to students' safety, self-regulation, and mental health needs. PSTs also described spending more time on planning and organizational duties within and outside their scope of work. This includes onerous amounts of paperwork involved in developing support plans, time spent liaising with specialist services, time spent on tasks added to their plates that are outside the scope of their positions as described in the Guidelines, e.g., supporting the rollout of the new adapted NWT curriculum. Thus, PSTs described having little time available to support teachers and engage in co-teaching.

Overall, participants drew attention to the importance of school and education body leadership understanding and supporting inclusive schooling. This includes having a clear understanding of



inclusive schooling roles and responsibilities, showing support for staff training on inclusive schooling, and prioritizing time for staff to collaborate on inclusive schooling planning and implementation (such as dedicating time for SBST meetings). As one principal described:

*“I think as principals we should all have a very solid understanding of what inclusive schooling is in order for it to live in our schools. If we don't support it through leadership, then it's not going to come alive in the school.”*

-Principal

**Recommendation #3: Develop a territory-wide inclusive schooling staffing approach that better reflects the realities of inclusive schooling and ensures alignment between staffing levels and inclusive schooling expectations.** This should include establishing a minimum staffing ratio for inclusive schooling staff; clarifying inclusive schooling roles, responsibilities, and authority; and contingency planning for staff turnover.

### Staff Knowledge of Inclusive Schooling and Training

Participants noted that there is a learning curve when it comes to inclusive schooling. Educators described a lack of knowledge on specific complex needs that they are seeing in the schools (such as autism, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and ADHD), a lack of training on how to develop support plans, and a lack of knowledge on concrete strategies and accommodations to implement in practice.

Many classroom teachers reported feeling unprepared to support diverse needs and implement inclusive schooling in their classrooms. In the survey of classroom teachers, 58% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the training they've received on inclusive schooling has prepared them to support the diverse needs of students in their class. Further, 61% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the training they've received on inclusive schooling has prepared them to implement inclusive schooling practices that suit the grade level(s) they teach.

Participants expressed a desire for training that is tailored to the NWT context, and for support with transitioning learnings from training into practical applications.

SAs expressed a desire for increased training opportunities on topics such as trauma-informed practice, supporting students' mental health, staff safety and wellness, and training on the specific needs of the students they support. Participants also noted the importance of ensuring that SA training aligns with that of classroom teachers to support a shared understanding of how to best meet students' needs within their classrooms.

*“I think one of the best trainings we've had is when we had time to speak to a behaviour specialist. We had the time to ask questions specifically related to what we're doing at the time. That's really what you need... Like, here's a situation that I'm dealing with right now, that I'm having a hard time with, do you have any ideas to make this better? I found that to be one of the most useful.”*

-Support Assistant



Despite these training needs and gaps in knowledge identified, there are also experienced educators across the NWT who hold a wealth of knowledge with regard to inclusive schooling in the NWT context. Participants identified getting to learn practical applications from colleagues and being able to ask questions and talk through situations and challenges as a strength that supports them in their inclusive schooling roles. More collaborative time and hands-on experiences were identified as ways to support this learning. Participants also expressed a desire for more inter-regional collaboration between education bodies to learn from other NWT educators and schools about what works well with regard to inclusive schooling in the NWT context.

**Recommendation #4: Improve support and coordination for professional learning and capacity building in collaboration with Education Bodies.** This includes establishing opportunities for inter-regional collaboration to support educators through sharing inclusive schooling practices, challenges, and solutions that are grounded in NWT realities.

### Access to Specialist Services

A significant concern expressed by all groups that participated in the review was the lack of access to specialist services such as mental health counselling, speech language pathology, occupational therapy, educational psychology, audiology, and social work services. The lack of service providers in the territory and wait times to access services is a barrier to planning and implementing inclusive schooling supports for students. This barrier was also identified by education bodies in their Inclusive Schooling Compliance Reporting Tools and Operating Plans/Annual Reports.

Parents and guardians described seeing fewer services available as their children grow older. They described waiting multiple years between assessments (if they are able to access an assessment), making specialists' recommendations less relevant as time passes. Some felt that their children were not able to access the supports they needed at school due to not having a timely assessment done by a specialist. Some parents and guardians took it upon themselves to access private services through their personal insurance or through applications to Jordan's Principle; however, this also led to challenges with coordinating between private services providers and the school. As described under Review Question 2B, parents and guardians expressed the need for support with navigating the education and health systems to access the supports their children need. For example, clearer information on who to contact to access assessments and services, plain language explanations of assessments and services and how they impact their child's school-based supports.

Educators stated that communication between the health and education systems posed challenges for accessing and implementing student supports. PSTs described the significant time investment that goes into coordinating specialist services and filling out the required paperwork. However, many PSTs stated that services are often not available when they put in referrals for students. PSTs described feeling like they had to put in referrals for services to demonstrate the need for those services, while knowing that those services were likely not to be delivered. Participants described that, given the lack of service, schools had to be creative in order to find ways to meet students' needs. Participants also noted that in the past, the Department of Health and Social Services trained



education staff on how to support students with medical needs. However, this service is no longer available, and it is falling on schools or parents/guardians to coordinate and deliver.

Educators also described that when services are available, they are often recommendations for schools to implement and are not consistent for students. Following through on implementing these recommendations is challenging given the time, capacity, and training challenges previously described.

*“We are doing as best we can with the information we have, but we are not speech therapists, and we are not occupational therapists, and we are not behavior specialists. And so, even if we can access those supports to some degree, they usually come in the form of recommendations rather than direct therapy... We don’t necessarily have the skills or knowledge to provide that direct therapy based on recommendations only, or based on our best guess if we can’t access the services.”*

-Program Support Teacher

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Some educators noted that they would prefer to use virtual services if it meant longer-term and more consistent supports. Some parents and guardians suggested that they would prefer to travel down south to access services rather than wait for services to be provided in the NWT. Many, however, noted the importance of increased service availability in students’ home communities, as reflected in the inclusive schooling definition.

**Recommendation #5: Work with the Department of Health and Social Services and the NWT health authorities to improve access to specialist services (e.g., assessment and rehabilitation services) by focusing on integrated service delivery models and reducing wait times for assessments and therapies.** This includes working across the education and health systems to define roles, responsibilities and communication protocols for service referrals and follow-up, and explore platforms for tracking student referrals, assessments and service delivery.

### **Inclusive Schooling Plan Types**

Educators expressed a need for further clarity on inclusive schooling plan types to improve planning and implementation. Some participants described difficulty with knowing which plan type (MEP, SSP, or IEP) was best suited to each student. Participants also described that changes to plan types and templates over time could be difficult to follow, and that differing understandings and expectations among school staff, including school leadership, led to confusion and inconsistencies. Some participants also experienced inconsistencies with who has access to student plans (e.g., SAs not seeing or being involved in plans for students that they provide one-on-one support to).

Some participants noted concerns with the MEP and its fit within the curriculum and among other plan types. Some PSTs described feeling that there is a mismatch between the MEP and the NWT’s



transition to using the British Columbia’s curriculum. Other participants, however, noted that there were already concerns and confusion with MEPs when the NWT previously followed Alberta’s curriculum, such as a lack of consistent use of the MEP across schools and education bodies. The jurisdictional scan of inclusive schooling plan types in Phase 1 of this review found that neither British Columbia nor Alberta use MEPs.

Educators expressed a desire for clear guidelines and concise templates to strengthen plan development. A success experienced by multiple regions was the development and implementation of class support plans or class reviews to support teachers in viewing student supports at the class level and determining what the whole class needs. Participants shared that, given the high number of individual support plans on a teacher’s or PST’s workload, class support plans can be a fruitful way to consolidate information for easy reference, and a valuable tool for collaborative planning. Participants noted that class support plans can help to improve the allocation of resources across classes, follow-through with student supports, and universal design for learning.

*“The IEP itself, I like that it is strength-based for sure. I like that there’s a lot of information to get to know the motivation for the students. I like that the parents have a copy of it at home so they can fill in what they feel. I like the positive meetings to discuss those.”*

-Parent

*“I think once you form a team that has the same goal... I think the barriers become less and less. It's not like we don't necessarily see barriers, but we try to think in solutions and really work hard at seeing kids through their strengths.”*

-Principal

Another success identified by participants was the importance of using strengths-based approaches when it comes to planning and implementing inclusive schooling, including the planning and implementation of support plans. Educators and parents/guardians alike shared the positive impacts that identifying and celebrating students’ strengths can have on their school experiences and outcomes. Educators described that the increased use of strengths-based and competency-based IEP processes in recent years has helped staff to strengthen relationships with families and incorporate strengths-based thinking into other inclusive schooling processes, such as training and SBST meetings as well.

**Recommendation #6: Revise inclusive schooling plan types and templates.** This includes removing or updating the MEP, developing clear guidelines for selecting appropriate plan types, and exploring territory-wide implementation of class support plans or class reviews.



### Transitions Into, Within, and Out of the School System

Participants drew attention to transitions into, within, and out of the school system as an important component of inclusive schooling supports. With regards to transitions into the school system, participants discussed the importance of early childhood intervention and the need to develop better relationships with the health system for schools to be able to hear about students' unique needs before they enter school, rather than relying on classroom teachers to identify needs during the school year.

Within the school system, participants again drew attention to the lack of specialist services as a barrier to implementing students' transition plans through grades. With regards to transitions out of the school system, participants identified a need for more concrete and realistic pathways for high school students to develop work experience and life skills in preparation for life beyond the JK-12 system. Education staff also expressed concerns about being able to communicate to ensure parents/guardians understand how the different types of support plans impact their child's education path, such as the ability to obtain a high school diploma. As described under Review Question 2A, parents and guardians want their children to gain life skills and independence as they move through the JK-12 school system. Parents and guardians also described the importance of seeing a pathway and goals for their children to transition into the community following their JK-12 education.

**Recommendation #7: Develop inclusive schooling protocols to clarify pathways for students transitioning within and outside the school.** This includes strengthening early childhood screening and intervention to address learning challenges early on, and promoting a shared understanding of how support plans affect curricular achievement and graduation outcomes.

### Review Question 3B: What are the successes and barriers to effectively monitoring student supports?

The document review in Phase 1 of this project identified limitations with existing Operating Plan and Annual Report data that ECE receives from education bodies annually. Limitations include a lack of consistency in reporting over time and across education bodies, and a lack of indicators to assess the quality or effectiveness of inclusive schooling practices.

During the Phase 2 engagements, principals and RISCs shared the current processes they use to monitor inclusive schooling in their schools and education bodies, which include but are not limited to:

- Academic assessments to monitor student success
- Monitoring behaviours through an incident tracking system
- Feedback from parents through meetings or surveys
- Feedback from teachers through discussions/meetings or surveys
- Talking to students
- Talking to SAs



- Collaborative meetings and discussions among members of the school team
- Reviewing and revisiting support plans multiple times per year
- Classroom observations/walkthroughs
- Inclusive schooling experts coming into the school to support monitoring through check-ins and debriefs with educators
- Conducting an audit of support plans

Strengths that support monitoring include the use of class support plans or classroom profiles, and having school and education body leadership that are knowledgeable about inclusive schooling to support monitoring efforts.

Challenges with monitoring, as reported by principals and RISCs, include not having a monitoring system in place, a lack of time to dedicate to monitoring, and challenges with bringing members of the school team together for meetings. At the high school level in particular, it can be difficult to monitor and track support plan goals due to the number of different educators who work with a single student. Participants expressed a desire to identify and establish monitoring systems to be able to better respond to the needs of students, and to engage in more inter-regional conversations to enable the sharing of ideas and what works well for continual improvement.

**Recommendation #8: Develop a comprehensive monitoring framework for inclusive schooling.** This includes developing a performance measurement plan (PMP) and logic model, identifying meaningful indicators to assess quality and effectiveness. Revise the reporting requirements in Operating Plans and Annual Reports as needed to ensure they are aligned with the PMP and logic model.

**Recommendation #9: Develop data collection methods and processes for monitoring and evaluation of inclusive schooling.** This includes researching and identifying methods that enable schools and education bodies to meaningfully monitor inclusive schooling in a way that is realistic, achievable, and not burdensome. This also includes identifying methods to capture student and family input.

#### **Review Question 4: To what extent are inclusive schooling practices in the NWT supported by Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding?**

Beyond funds provided by ECE for inclusive schooling, education bodies in the NWT access external funding, including Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funds to support inclusive schooling-related and other expenses. Education bodies, or families themselves, apply directly to Indigenous Services Canada to access these funds. As of the 2024-25 school year, education bodies in the NWT have collectively accessed over \$211.9 million in federal funding from Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative since 2018.<sup>9</sup> This includes funds for a wide range of health, social, and educational products, services, and supports.

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<sup>9</sup> Standing Committee on Social Development Public Briefing on Education Supports.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9ZAILcVvfs&t=2s>



Originally, this review sought to determine to what extent education bodies in the NWT rely on Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding to support inclusive schooling through a programmatic cost analysis. However, upon reviewing education bodies' audited financial statements and requesting further data from Indigenous Services Canada, the review team found that the available data did not provide sufficient detail to assess how much of the funds accessed from Jordan's Principle go specifically towards inclusive schooling expenses. Additionally, while this review was underway, Indigenous Services Canada announced changes to Jordan's Principle that would impact education bodies' ability to access funds for school-related supports through the program. Outside of the scope of the review, ECE is taking action to mitigate the impact of these changes.

Despite not being able to draw conclusions about the monetary value of Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative that specifically supports inclusive schooling in the NWT, the review team heard input through engagement with educators and families regarding the extent to which these funding programs are relied on. Principals and superintendents indicated that schools largely rely on Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative to support inclusive schooling, including expenses such as rehabilitation services, lunch programs, staff training, support staff (e.g., community liaisons, coaches, interventionists), and a significant number of SA positions. Teachers, PSTs, and leadership further expressed concerns about the impacts that cuts to Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative, such as the loss of several SA positions, would have on the ability to meet students' needs, provide supports, and maintain a safe school environment. We also heard from parents and guardians who have applied for Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative funding directly, demonstrating that both schools and families have identified gaps in inclusive schooling supports that required accessing external funds.

Despite the large amount of funds accessed from Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative by education bodies since 2018, the review team heard from many participants that students' needs are still not being met. Participants expressed further need for more SAs to support the volume of needs in their schools, and that specialist services are still significantly lacking. The short-term nature of the funding also makes it challenging for education bodies to retain and provide secure, long-term employment opportunities for SAs.

In addition, participants expressed concerns with the reliance on Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First funding to support inclusive schooling, given that these funds are specifically intended to support First Nations and Inuit children, yet inclusive schooling needs are experienced by the diverse population of the NWT. In addition to addressing funding gaps, systems transformation is required to address the challenges identified by educators and families through this review.

Beyond discussion of Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First funding, participants expressed concerns with the funding formula provided by ECE. Participants described that the existing funding formula does not meet the current needs of schools, given that it provides funding based on school population, and not the volume of or complexity of needs experienced within the school.



Participants expressed a desire for more SA and PST positions to support inclusive schooling needs and more flexibility within the funding formula.

**Recommendation #10: Conduct a financial needs assessment for inclusive schooling in collaboration with education bodies and the federal government.**

**Recommendation #11: Review and revise the inclusive schooling funding formula to reflect student needs and complexities.** This includes providing increased funding for inclusive schooling staff positions and flexible allocation of funds based on actual school needs.

## 5.0 Conclusion

This review of inclusive schooling in the NWT highlights needs, expectations, strengths, challenges, and possible future directions for making changes and improvements in order to better meet the needs of NWT students. Through reviewing existing data on inclusive schooling through a jurisdictional scan and document review, and hearing from a range of inclusive schooling partners, including parents/guardians and education staff, the review explored strengths and barriers relating to inclusive schooling, including time and capacity to meet students' complex needs; collaboration among staff and understanding of roles; staff knowledge of inclusive schooling; access to services; inclusive schooling plan types; and transitions. While the review faced limitations in its ability to assess the extent to which education bodies rely on external funding from Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First Initiative for inclusive schooling expenses, perspectives shared by inclusive schooling partners indicate a need to address funding gaps and systemic barriers to strengthen the inclusive schooling system in the NWT. Going forward, the development of an inclusive schooling monitoring framework will help the department to fulfill its responsibilities with regard to monitoring and evaluating inclusive schooling.

## Appendix A: Review Timeline

