

Canadian School Programs for Students with Emotional/Behavioural Disorders:

A Decade of Programs, Policies, and Practices

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## Canadian school programs for students with emotional/behavioural disorders: A decade of programs, policy, and practice

The purpose of this project was to examine programs and services for students with emotional/behavioural disorders (E/BD) across Canada. It is a replication of a survey undertaken a decade prior intended to examine similarities and differences in Canada's provinces and territories, as well as exploring overall changes to policy and process in this period of time. Nine jurisdictions participated in this 2014 iteration of the cross-Canada electronic survey requesting information on services, policies, and practices for students with E/BD in the K-12 school systems from key stakeholders in jurisdictional ministries. Overall themes were captured, as well as unique highlights in each participating jurisdiction. Continued movement away from diagnosis, identification, and categorization is evident; however, little consistency has been attained across the country. Key issues are discussed along with recommendations moving forward.

Keywords: emotional behaviour disorder, school, Canada, inclusive education, special education

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## **Introduction**

In 2004, Dworet and author1 conducted a cross Canada analysis of the policies and programs in place across Canada for students with emotional and behavioural disorders (E/BD). Since education in Canada is typically a provincially and territorially governed and funded platform, inconsistencies were found in most areas surveyed, including differences in definitions, diagnosis, identification, prevalence, eligibility, placement, services, administration, funding, and teacher training. Strong evidence of trends toward non-categorization and inclusion were found. Based on the conclusions from this preliminary work (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007), the current 2014 study re-examines the state of these policies and services for students with E/BD ten years later. This research project focused on current program and service provision information for students with emotional/behaviour disorders from all provinces and territories, which may again underscore a need for consistency in servicing students with E/BD across Canada. Specifically, a comprehensive overview of policy and practices, as reported, was undertaken.

In recent Canadian literature, students with E/BD needs have been identified as being the most vulnerable out of any other special needs category due to the intense nature of social, emotional, and behavioural issues they experience (Armstrong, 2012; BC Ministry of Education, 2013; Chung, 2017). The multifaceted challenges experienced by students with E/BD have been found to have profound effects on their overall health, wellbeing, and their ability to achieve academically in a school setting and later on in life (BC Ministry of Education, 2013; Chung, 2017; Lee, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Since such students demonstrate a breadth of atypical

internal and external behaviours including withdrawnness, aggression, and hyperactivity, students with EB/D are more likely to have difficulty making and maintaining friendships, fail classes, and they have the highest school drop-out rate than any other group of students with exceptionalities (Armstrong, 2012; Gravener et al., 2012; Lunk and Merrell, 2001).

## **Literature Review**

Since students with behavioural needs are the most at risk for harmful behaviours, social isolation and school failure, research points to the need for current and consistent definitions as well as appropriate interventions to help such students cope and manage their own emotions and behaviours (Chung, 2017; Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007). Currently, there is no universal definition of E/BD, yet many existing definitions include the above-mentioned characteristics, as well as characterizing the difference between behavioural and emotional responses with social norms, which can also negatively impact academic performance (Dworet and Rathgeber, 1998; Mundschenk and Simpson, 2014; Walker, Yell, and Murray, 2014). To better understand this controversy over defining E/BD, it is important to examine the past and current policy development and practices specific to students with E/BD.

### ***Background on E/BD research in Canada***

The examination of policy and service regarding students with E/BD in Canada dates back to the seminal work of Csapo (1981) who noted that definitions for students with E/BD were 'vague, judgmental, and in some cases almost circular' (p.146). Over the past few decades, Canadian researchers have continued to examine the definitions and provision of services for students with E/BD (Dworet and Rathgeber, 1990; 1998; Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007; Shatz, 1994; Winzer, 2005). Despite findings that there was not a universal definition for E/BD and services continued to vary from province to

province, the availability and eligibility for specialized services was evident across the country.

A decade ago, Dworet and AUTHOR 1 (2007) found vast inconsistencies: some provinces and territories had firm definitions and others avoided a definition of E/BD. Rather than moving toward a desired, consistent definition, non-categorization was a common trend, which the authors identified as not conducive to establishing consistent services for students across Canada (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007; Wishart and Jahnukainen, 2010). Along with inconsistent definitions or non-categorization, most jurisdictions employed different funding models for services where services consisted mainly of paraprofessional supports and in-class teacher support (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007). All jurisdictions had limited to no requirement for teacher training regarding teaching students with E/BD and segregated classrooms were only used as an alternative setting after inclusion had been deemed as inappropriate by an administrator or committee (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007). Dworet and AUTHOR 1 (2007) also found that of the 13 jurisdictions in Canada, only five reported having any guidelines for determining the effectiveness of school-based programs aimed at students with E/BD. The most common finding from this research that has resurfaced in the literature over the last decade involves the non-categorization of students with exceptionalities, namely those with E/BD.

### ***Identification and Categorization***

Globally, the identification and categorization of students with characteristics of E/BD within schools, continues to be debated due to challenges in naming characteristics that impact education and indicate essential funding (Carlisle, 2011; Cloth, Evans, Becker, and Paternite, 2014; Green, 2010; Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007; Willmann, 2012; Wishart and Jahnukainen, 2010). Despite a belief held by many scholars that consistent

definitions lead to more accurate identifications and subsequent interventions, there continue to be inconsistencies within ministries of education around the world (Cloth, et al., 2014; Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007; Walker, Yell, and Murray, 2014). In Canada, non-categorization has been a growing trend. Due to the use of inclusive education models based on a needs model or variations in clinical professionals, Dworet and AUTHOR 1 (2007) found that four provinces/territories indicated the intentional absence of any definition for E/BD and two others utilized clinical, medical diagnostic information rather than educational definitions.

Many scholars feel the under-identification of children and youth should be addressed, yet without clear guidelines for identification, it is difficult to determine whether students with E/BD are receiving appropriate educational intervention (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007; Chung, 2017). In Ontario for example, of the 8593 students identified with E/BD, only about half of them were receiving special education support in 2014/15 (Brown, Parekh, and Marmureanu, 2016). This does not consider the 112 710 students receiving special education services who were not identified (Brown et al., 2016).

Recently, Alberta adopted the use of a method for coding students with E/BD according to the learning difficulties associated with E/BD which are coded or categorized to access appropriate funding and programs (Wishart and Jahnukainen, 2010). According to Wishart and Jahnukainen (2010), these current coding practices favour a medical model where students tend to be over- and mis-identified in order to access higher levels of funding. For example, it is more financially desirable for a student to be coded with severe E/BD based on chronic or extreme behaviours and requiring constant adult supervision and intensive support services to function in an educational setting and receive the highest level of funding. However, as with many

funding models across Canada, funding for students with E/BD is provided to school boards or districts, and are not student specific. This means the funding must be used to support special education but there is no requirement as to *how* this is done (Wishart and Jahnukainen, 2010).

Although the United States has a federal definition in place for emotional disturbance as part of their legislation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (IDEA, 2004), similar issues arise in literature around the notion of a common definition and access to services for students with E/BD. IDEA has two separate definitions including Emotional Disturbance (ED) and Emotional/Behavioural Disorder (EBD) in which ED is the more severe of the two with the ability to access more services. Walker, Yell, and Murray (2014) considered the challenges and barriers posed by the implementation of this type of definition are not unlike the discussions in the Canadian context around E/BD. Walker et al. (2014) discussed the role of stigma in accounting for the low referral rates to special education for students who fell under the ED definition. Another factor that related to the challenges in Alberta's coding system was an identification based on false positives and false negatives. They further identified challenges with ignoring co-morbidity issues when applying the definition especially related to overlapping characteristics around the severity levels of behavioural and emotional characteristics between ED and EBD thus unqualifying some students for the services they need (Walker et al., 2014). Despite the challenges they expressed around these federal definitions, they supported the importance of the definition of ED in IDEA and its importance in the special education eligibility process (Walker et al., 2014).

### ***Prevention and Intervention***

Currently, the most common services and interventions for students with E/BD are special education classrooms, educational assistant supports, and intervention programs (Kwiatkowski, 2016; Lee, 2012; Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007). Although many of these types of supports have positive outcomes for some students, challenges remain for many others. For example, McBride (2013) examined special education policy in Canada and questioned whether programs are being implemented according to the current provincial legislation and guidelines for students with exceptionalities. She found that there is not sufficient data to support if IEPs are being developed and implemented to meet students' needs (McBride, 2013). This finding identifies challenges for documentation and evaluation of intervention programs and other supports.

Furthermore, challenges with coding in Alberta in relation to accessing funding involved an increased focus on pathologies and deficits of what the child *cannot* do rather than a strength-based model or a focus on the whole child. While this may have attained the highest level of funding, the recommendations and interventions did not meet the overall needs of the child (Wishart and Jahnukainen, 2010). Students placed in special education classrooms for intense intervention based on funding dollars may not do well due to an incorrect focus of the program. Berry (2012) found that there was little relationship between the level of special education instructional support and the academic achievement in reading and math of students with E/BD. He found that students with the highest level of special education support did not do better academically (Berry, 2012). These findings support the common theme that there is more work to do to best meet the needs of students with E/BD in Canada. Wishart and Jahnukainen (2010) recommended that special education funding would better serve students who are diagnosed with E/BD if there was a base level of funding provided that



was not attached to coding. Schools would not have to engage in extensive, time-consuming categorization and coding processes to access needed resources and could better serve the needs of the students.

## **Materials and Methods**

The purpose of this project was to obtain and analyze cross-Canada provincial and territorial educational policy and practice information about programs, services and definitions of students with E/BD, to continue to examine the presence and/or need for a national approach to defining students with E/BD in Canadian classrooms, and to provide updated recommendations for future educational policy development. This survey-based descriptive research encompasses the last decade of time in cross-Canada programs and practices; it is an update of the 2004 survey research completed a decade ago (2004-2014) (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007), in order to provide a current snapshot using purposive sampling (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003). The research questions continued as per its 2004 iteration: What similarities and discrepancies exist in jurisdictional policies and services across Canada? Have previous concerns in policies and services been addressed and/or resolved? What issues in policies and services emerge? What changes are evident over time?

Following research ethics clearance, a preview postcard was prepared and sent to the directors of special education services with responsibility for programs in E/BD for each of 13 Canadian jurisdictions (10 provinces and three territories) by traditional mail, noting that a research opportunity invitation would be forthcoming. An invitation and electronic survey were then sent for completion. These document-based surveys were comprised of 16 multi-part questions with a combination of open-ended, forced-choice, yes/no, and checklist question types, focused on programs in publicly-funded schools. For example: For educational purposes, what is your provincial/territorial

definition of students with E/BD? Non-responding jurisdictions were followed up by email and/or phone with a maximum of four prompts. All correspondence was available in English and French.

This questionnaire updated Dworet and AUTHOR 1 (2007), which was built on previous, similar data collection tools from Hirshoren et al. (1970), Csapo (1981), and Dworet and Rathgeber (1990). As 9 of 13 jurisdictions participated, the rate of return was 69%, a reasonable result for surveys disseminated without a personal connection (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003). See Table 1 for a detailed breakdown of participating jurisdictions.

According to Creswell (2012), this research project is categorized as an embedded design, with qualitative data the primary data collection, and some limited quantitative data as the secondary form in a “supporting role” (p. 544): QUAL + quan (Creswell, 2015). Helpful for a diverse geographical area, a mail-out questionnaire-based survey research design was used to examine trends in practices, policies and/or programs from a cross-sectional perspective in order to discover “current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices” (Creswell, 2018, p. 377). The manifest content of jurisdictional responses to each question was collated and either examined for common patterns across jurisdictions or seminal information on an intra-jurisdictional level. As above-noted, some limited quantitative information was collected and analyzed using basic descriptive statistics (e.g., prevalence rates).

[insert Table 1]

## **Results**

Surveys were returned by jurisdictional directors of special education services or their delegates, including titles of director, coordinator, specialist, or manager of special education, learning services, or student support / support services / achievement.

Returned surveys ranged in length from eight to 23 pages of electronic text. The following results represent the nine jurisdictions that participated and are descriptive in nature. Survey responses were organized into the following parameters to address research questions: definition and identification, prevalence, placement and services, and funding.

### ***Definition and Identification***

Definitions of E/BD range from no definition (NB, NT, NS, NU, SK) to broad definitions (MN, ON); to including specific traits and behaviours (BC, AB).

For those jurisdictions who do not define E/BD, some examples of further rationale include: Nova Scotia reported that, ‘We rely less on terms and more on descriptors of behaviour’; Northwest Territories uses a broader context of inclusive schooling for all students; Nunavut does not label children; and Saskatchewan focuses on a needs-based model of providing individualized supports and services. The jurisdictions that have broad definitions of E/BD have some key behavioural similarities that occur consistently over time and include: difficulties with mood, fear or anxiety; disruptive or aggressive behaviours; and failure to make meaningful relationships; all of which affect the ability to learn. In more depth, Manitoba described E/BD as:

Severe emotional/behavioural disorder(s) characterized by significant behavioural excesses or deficits which disrupt the student's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. Beyond the emotional impact, the student's physical, social and cognitive skills may be affected. These behaviours continue over a period of time. The student requires student specific programming and supports with ongoing formal interagency involvement.

Nova Scotia includes E/BD as a category or identification to delineate when and for whom special education funding may be used. More specifically, it focuses on co-

morbid behaviours associated with ‘children and youth with multiple challenges, complex mental health and health needs, and/or severe behavioural needs, with issues of safety for themselves, other students, and staff.’

Ontario identifies students under the category of behaviour; its categorical description includes one or more issues that affect performance and ability to learn: maintaining interpersonal relationships, fears and anxieties, compulsive reaction or an inability to learn that cannot be traced to other factors (health, intellectual or sensory). Alberta and British Columbia differentiate between the severities of the behaviours exhibited, with mild and moderate treated differently than intensive or extreme. In British Columbia students require moderate behaviour support if they have one or more: aggression and/or hyperactivity, social problems such as delinquency, neglect or substance abuse, the frequency or severity of behaviours disrupts the classroom or relationships, in more than one setting with more than one person. In Alberta, mild to moderate includes: difficulties in relationships, general unhappiness or depression, inappropriate behaviour or feelings, difficulty coping with the learning situation despite intervention, physical symptoms or fear, difficulty accepting responsibility /accountability, and physical violence or destructiveness. For intense or extreme behaviours: British Columbia stipulates that students are eligible for the intensive behavioural intervention special education funding category if they exhibit behaviours that are antisocial, extremely disruptive in most environments (e.g. school, family and community) and are consistent and persistent. In Alberta, severe E/BD is described as:

Chronic, extreme and pervasive behaviour requiring constant adult supervision and high levels of structure and other intensive support services in order to function in an educational setting. The behaviours significantly interfere with

both the learning and safety of the student/ECS child and other students/ECS children.’

Diagnoses include:

Conduct disorder, schizophrenia or bi-polar disorder, obsessive/compulsive disorders, or severe chronic clinical depression; and may display self-stimulation or self-injurious behaviour. In the most extreme and pervasive instances, severe oppositional defiant disorder may qualify; or for ECS children has either a diagnosis or a statement by a qualified professional indicating that the child experiences severe behavioural difficulties.

Most responding jurisdictions do not allow any modifications at the board / district level from these stated definitions of E/BD (where applicable) or stated that modifications are unnecessary (AB, BC, NS, NT, SK); however, Ontario noted that boards interpret definitions but cannot modify them. In Manitoba and New Brunswick, school boards are entitled to modify the definition of E/BD, and do not have to inform the ministry or department of such changes, but AB, BC, SK, ON, NT, and NS school boards cannot. In Saskatchewan, for example, pupils with intensive needs are assessed at the board level and Nova Scotia has targeted funding for this population.

Most surveyed jurisdictions do not demand psychiatric evaluations where applicable, for labelling students with E/BD. Yet, British Columbia and Alberta do - for both levels of identification. In Alberta, a clinical diagnosis is required, but does not necessarily fulfil a school-based identification:

A clinical diagnosis of a severe emotional/behavioural disorder by a psychiatrist, registered psychologist or a developmental paediatrician is required, in addition to extensive documentation of the nature, frequency and severity of the disorder

by school authorities [however] a clinical diagnosis of a severe emotional / behavioural disorder is not necessarily sufficient to qualify under this category.

In British Columbia, a psychologist can provide related diagnoses; in Nova Scotia and Manitoba, school psychologists can diagnose or identify behavioural needs; in Ontario, other professionals determined by boards can support diagnoses. Both Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan again emphasized that a diagnosis is not required: ‘We do not have specific requirements and do not have specific programs or placement options for students with diagnosis’ (NT) and ‘a diagnosis is not required to access services and supports’ (SK).

***Prevalence Who Are the Students with E/BD? How Many Students Are There?***

Few jurisdictions shared prevalence rates specific to E/BD, excluding British Columbia and Ontario. Nunavut explicitly stated that they do not keep data on prevalence rates for EBD since they do not identify students under this category. The regions that do keep data on the prevalence of students with E/BD measure them differently. In British Columbia 1.27% of students required intense behavioural intervention due to being severely multiply impaired, and 0.99% require moderate behavioural supports or have mental illness. In Ontario, 189 090 students were formally identified, 4.9% of which had a behavioural exceptionality.

Where applicable, local collaboration was key in determining eligibility for special education services for students with E/BD (BC, MB, NS). BC explained: ‘planning is done collaboratively by relevant school and district staff, parents and, when appropriate, relevant professionals, service providers, or agencies and the student.’ Nova Scotia noted that ‘programming and services are decided upon by a program planning team consisting of school administration, teachers, other core professional staff, and parents ... other services providers [may be] involved.’ Saskatchewan

alternates between local collaboration and school division support, depending on level of need. However, some jurisdictions have more explicit policies. In Ontario, for example, ‘Decisions about transitions from one mode of program delivery to another are made by local school boards which have the responsibility for determining the programs and services appropriate to a student’s needs.’ Alberta also makes these decisions at the school board level. In Manitoba and New Brunswick, the ‘superintendent in collaboration with district ESS teams’ make such decisions. Northwest Territories responded that, ‘We do not have specific requirements and do not have specific programs or placement options for students with diagnosis.’

Most surveyed school boards (AB, NB, MB, NS, ON, SK) place students using local team-based decision-making. Alberta explains this as:

- a. Ensur[ing] that educating students with special education needs in inclusive settings in neighbourhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with parents, school staff and, when appropriate, the student
- b. Determin[ing] the most enabling placement in a manner consistent with provincial special education policies, in consultation with parents, and based on current assessment data.

New Brunswick and Saskatchewan did not report specific procedures for determining eligibility and placement (AB, BC, NS, ON, MB all answered affirmatively). Some provinces/territories have very specific procedures (BC, ON, NS), and some are less stringent (AB, MB). In British Columbia, for example, general eligibility criteria are outlined in their special education manual which is then utilized by school boards in determining local eligibility; students’ IEPs may outline the need more specialized services (such as placement in specialized learning environments).

Ontario uses an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) that is appointed by the school board, informed by Ontario's regulation 181/98 to help with identification, placement, review and appeal procedures for exceptional pupils. Nova Scotia uses a program planning process outlined in their special education policy manual. Alberta and Manitoba have more general procedures. For example, Alberta usually requires a clinical diagnosis from a psychiatrist, registered psychologist, or developmental paediatrician; documentation (nature, frequency, severity of the disorder) from the school board; and a description of how the disorder affects the student's functioning at school. Manitoba responded that schools and divisional teams can simply apply for extra funding for the students that have the highest needs for home and school.

### ***Placement and Services***

Seven jurisdictions completed a requested checklist of services (MB, NB, NS, NU, NS, ON, SK). All seven offer these services: in-class teacher support and educational assistants / paraprofessionals. Most provinces and territories (6/7; 86%) offered guidance counselling; alternate transportation to school; many offered (5/7; 71%): alternative schools; itinerant teacher support; academic tutoring; school-based social work services; and school psychologist services. For some, a checklist of services was not applicable. For example, Alberta responded, 'Not applicable as school boards determine what services are provided to their students' and New Brunswick stated that, 'We are fully inclusive and do not offer some of these specific services.' Nunavut noted that withdrawal services are prohibited. Nova Scotia provided the most specific numbers (e.g., 866 Resource Teachers within 8 boards with a ratio of 1:139 students; 11 650 hours of paraprofessional support per day). To support service provision,



jurisdictions varied from acceding responsibility to individual boards, to provincial or territorial-wide practices (e.g., education legislation, ministry guidelines).

Some jurisdictions did not report the option self-contained classrooms (NU, for example). However, within those that offer such an alternative, the standards that dictate how they determine criteria, laws, or rules for determining where students are placed vary widely. For example: the rules for placement in Alberta and Saskatchewan were at a school division or board level. Similarly, Ontario did not have province-wide standards for placement; however, students who were placed in self-contained classrooms (including students identified as 'Behaviour') were identified as exceptional through an IPRC. BC promoted an inclusive atmosphere:

Students with special needs are fully participating members of a community of learners. Inclusion describes the principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs. The practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with full integration in regular classrooms, and goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and the promotion of interaction with others.

New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan use feedback, collaboration, and planning to make decisions on student placement. Specifically, New Brunswick works with the alternate site, the district staff, and parents. Nova Scotia uses a program planning process whereas Saskatchewan assesses needs at least twice a year for their Individualized Program Plan. In Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario placement is determined by school boards or districts. Similarly, Manitoba and Saskatchewan use a local team-based, decision making process for placement of students identified with EB/D. In Northwest Territories (an inclusive province), students are given additional

supports (e.g. support person, extra teacher training) where needed to continue to participate in the regular classroom environment.

Issues around staffing—such as caseloads—are typically either not applicable (AB), deferred to the board level (BC, ON, SK), or do not exist (MB, NU). NB, however, has ‘recommended ratios’ (Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools document) such as 1:160 for resource / withdrawal teacher, 1:400 for guidance counsellor, and 1:550 for School-Based Crisis Intervener. NT responded that, ‘Our Territory does not keep track of the number of students with emotional/behavioural disorders, therefore, does not have specific information regarding ‘caseload’. As per the 2006 Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling, students are provided with individual support, as required.

Home instruction, another service example, is rarely an overt option. Manitoba did not offer this service, but others—the majority— responded with home instruction as a possible option that may be provided (BC, ON, NS, NT, SK). The sole administrative organization for service provision noted by all participating jurisdictions participants is local school boards. However, Manitoba further clarified that an interdepartmental wraparound committee is available to support cooperation for students with the highest level of need.

When it comes to determining student readiness to leave specialized programs, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario indicate that the procedures to determine when students are ready to leave specialized programs (where applicable only) is left to local boards’ discretion. Alberta stipulates that there must be: planning, assessing, and monitoring to improve education quality; monitor/evaluate effectiveness of programs and services; and report expenditures and achievements as part of the

annual planning and reporting cycle. While Manitoba has few specialized schools or classrooms, specifics for determining entry and exit is developed by school divisions.

#### *How Is Program Effectiveness Determined?*

British Columbia, Ontario, Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan reported that they do not have any guidelines to determine program effectiveness particularly for students with E/BD. Nova Scotia and Manitoba reported the presence of guidelines to determine special education program effectiveness specific to students with E/BD. Most jurisdictions were similarly unable to estimate of the percentage of children in their specific education programs for students with E/BD who have returned to regular classes or have a reduction of services during the school year. For most, this question was either not applicable, or information was not available (not applicable- AB, and, not available- BC, MB, NS, ON, SK). Only the Northwest Territories provided a quantifier: 100%, indicating all students return to a regular class or have a reduction of service within a school year.

#### *Funding*

In most participating jurisdictions, funding for special education students is disbursed to school boards and/or districts, where districts *must* direct the funds for special education purposes (ON, MB, NB, NS, NT). In Ontario, for example, ‘Special education funding is enveloped, and must be spent on special education. School boards may use other Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding to increase the amount spent on special education to meet the needs of their students with special education needs.’ In British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, school boards / districts *may* direct the funds for special education purposes.

#### *Who Teaches students with E/BD?*

In regard to teacher training and professional development for educators working with students with E/BD, Manitoba and Nova Scotia reported that initial teacher education includes mandatory studies in special education. New Brunswick, Nunavut, and Ontario identified general teacher certification which *may* include studies in special education. New Brunswick also included graduate studies or specific in-servicing about E/BD, and Nova Scotia reported graduate studies in special education in-servicing leading to certification in special education and that ‘grad-cohorts [are] developed collaboratively with universities.’ Northwest Territories responded negatively, and although Alberta noted that specific E/BD training is not applicable; they indicate that ‘School boards must: make available, as early as possible, training for staff that will enhance the school board’s ability to identify and program for students with special education needs.’

British Columbia responded that,

... with sufficient training and experience, classroom teachers will be capable of including most students requiring behaviour and mental health supports and providing a program in which they can be successful, provided that support is available when needed. In-service training opportunities and a collaborative team approach are recommended to support and encourage the development of skills required.

Most boards do not permit the hiring of teachers for students with E/BD if they are not trained according to required jurisdictional standards (MB, NB, NS, SK)—or they responded that this question is not applicable (AB). British Columbia deferred this question and noted that ‘staffing concerns are the purview of each of the 60 local boards of education.’ Only two jurisdictions responded positively (ON, NU) but neither reported collecting related data, rather, they gave detail around the conditions under which such educators would be hired. In Ontario, “School boards hire teachers and they

are responsible for providing qualified teachers to teach their students. These qualifications may include a ‘Teaching Students with Behavioural Needs’ additional qualifications course offered by the Ontario College of Teachers.’ And Nunavut: ‘If a school is not able to staff a teaching position, then a person may be hired to teach on a Ministerial letter so that the position is staffed.’ In all of these cases, specific training for E/BD is not mandatory.

## **Discussion**

This data provides insight and a point for comparison for how Canadian jurisdictions are doing in relation to each other currently and ten years ago. Key issues arise regarding what is necessary to ensure best practices for identifying, and meeting student needs, including definitions of E/BD, placement and inclusive practice, prevalence of students with E/BD and access to support, and teacher education and training. These key issues are discussed in relation to the research questions; What similarities and discrepancies exist in jurisdictional policies and services across Canada? Have previous concerns in policies and services been addressed and/or resolved? What issues in policies and services emerge? What changes are evident over time?

## ***Definition and Identification***

As in 2004, individual jurisdictions continue to have provincial and territorial autonomy. No federal definitions are currently available or desired—it seems. Further movement *away* from definition and categorization is evident in the last decade. In 2004, only 4/13 (31%) jurisdictions provided no definition for students with E/BD; ten years later, 5/9 reported a needs-based, inclusive approach that is non-categorical (56%). In 2004, 2/13 (15%) deferred definitions to professionals outside the education system; ten years later, this practice was discontinued.

Defining and identifying students with E/BD continues to be a key issue for education systems not only across Canada. Walker et al., (2014) discuss the challenges of working with federal definitions of ED and E/BD where identification rates are on the decline due to the rigid nature of the definition. They estimate that up to three million students are being denied services and/or support due to these definitions (Walker et al., 2014). Conversely, Alberta is struggling with a rating system of identifying without a definition and experiencing similar issues with high numbers of students not receiving support (Wishart, and Jahnukainen, 2010). It is clear, that categorization and non-categorization continue to cause challenges when it comes to ensuring students with E/BD are getting the supports and services they require to be successful at school. The key issue that remains is: which model best serves the needs of our students in the current socio-economic time and geo-political place?

Although cross-Canada research outcomes around school-based disability services are rare, McCrimmon, Altomare, Matchullis, and Jitlina (2012) described similar variance around students with the Asperger's Disorder in school-based practice: 'each Canadian province differs with regard to policies and practices pertaining to delivery of services to children with exceptional learning needs' (p. 329). Perhaps a consistent adoption of a child-centered, needs-based approach such as modeled by several provinces in Canada (NU, NT) is needed. This approach reports that all students are provided with the best outcomes overall as with supported from their level of need--rather than based upon a category of identification.

### ***Placement***

In alignment with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the key principle of 'inclusion first' continues throughout Canada. Since all jurisdictions (7/7; 100%) who completed a provided chart of potential areas of service provision shared

the common presence of in-class teacher support and educational assistants / paraprofessionals—it is significant to recognize that these are in-class supports. This finding is consistent with recent Canadian data involving the implementation of the wraparound model, where community schools utilize interdisciplinary collaboration and integrated supports for students with EB/D to remain in their classrooms (Bartlett, 2016). It is positive to see that inclusive or inclusively-focused models are being supported by in-class services as indicated. However, this does not tell us if the level of services is essential—just that these services exist. It is critical to understand how inclusion functions and with what degree(s) of support necessary for success. More information regarding the number of students with EB/D who access, and are successful with this support is needed.

On the other hand, as identified by some but not all jurisdictions, and in the related literature, special education classrooms are one of the most common services for students with E/BD (Kwiatkowski, 2016; Lee, 2012). Although some jurisdictions do not have special education class placements for students with EB/D, of those that do, students will continue to be placed in these classes. Inconsistent placement and support options for students with EB/D identified in this study, lead back to the notion of having a unified definition and support structure for this group of students. Since many provinces indicated leaving placement decisions up to the individual school boards and/or school districts, how these inclusive supports are implemented vary from place to place. Despite some methods in place to evaluate the effectiveness of supports as well as the overall outcomes for students, these jurisdictions do not have the data (or did not share the data) to come to any clear conclusions about current best practices for placement and support.

### ***Prevalence***

It is important to point out that the varied and under-reported prevalence rates shared in Dworet and AUTHOR 1 (2007) have continued along a similar path towards non-categorization along with non-enumeration. Dworet and AUTHOR 1 stated that:

The under-identification of school children and youth should be addressed, but it appears that this is not a priority for most Canadian educational jurisdictions in this trend toward non-categorization. It is very difficult, then, to determine whether students with E/BD are receiving appropriate educational intervention. Whatever definition provinces and territories use, it is evident that in most jurisdictions, a large percentage of students who need assistance because of E/BD may not be having their needs met. (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007, p. 40)

Ten years ago, 8/13 (62%) jurisdictions reported a specific prevalence; in this current study, only 2/9 (22%) jurisdictions reported a prevalence. Even these prevalence rates are differently constructed and are difficult to compare meaningfully. If there is little in policy and practice around labelling students with E/BD, then it is less possible—and indeed desirable—to count these students certainly saving time and resources that accompany such labelling practice (Wishart and Jahnukainen, 2010). However, the terminology that is used, and the prevalence rates that are measured continue to vary across the country. One might also wonder the likelihood of effective matching between students and intervention supports, services, and/or interventions when many of the latter are diagnostic- or identification-specific. The question remains, if students with E/BD are not counted, are they still receiving necessary supports? We know, for example, that students with E/BD have higher rates of victimization, including bullying (Blake et al., 2016; Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, and Frerichs, 2012). If we cannot identify or measure students with E/BD, it is more difficult to take a proactive approach to avoiding victimization and other interventions.



A recent analysis of US prevalence data for students with E/BD or at risk of E/BD indicated that despite the very low 1% of students enrolled in school who are identified E/BD, a prevalence rate of 12% to 25% may exist (Forness, Kim and Walker, 2012). This finding is similar to one Canadian jurisdiction—Ontario--where 2.8% of all identified students are labelled E/BD, and where identified students make up just over half of the student population receiving special education services (Brown, Parekh, and Marmureanu, 2016). These discrepancies lead us to question whether identification is necessary to ensure students with E/BD are receiving the support they require, or, if through non-categorization and student need (such as in Saskatchewan) support will be more readily accessible for students with E/BD?

### ***Teacher Education***

Another key issue that has emerged in the current study and literature around E/BD is teacher training. In 2004, Dworet and AUTHOR 1 (2007) noted no jurisdictional requirements (excepting NL) required specific education for teaching students with E/BD, and that expectations and approaches have been unclear for these students. They recommended that ‘teacher certification requirements should include increased special education content in general teacher preparation programs, and greater opportunity should exist for teachers working with students with E/BD to have a thorough background.’ While teachers are being educated for inclusive classrooms and a diverse student population, it appears that education for the field of E/BD, where available, is deferred to post-certification teacher training—academic and/or professional. Farmer, Reinke and Brooks (2014) identified ‘real world’ professional development as being essential in supporting teachers working with students with E/BD. To provide teachers with opportunities to access real-time mentorship and in- service opportunities to best facilitate their individualized learning needs based on their current students, Conroy,

Alter, Boyd and Bettini (2014) suggest online or web-mediated instruction. If school boards, universities and ministries of education could collaborate to provide these opportunities, teachers would have access to expert problem solving as needs arise in their day to day practice rather than waiting for a professional development opportunity or reading about something in a book. MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) found that teachers who had additional in-service training also had more positive feelings around students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, Shillingford and Karlin (2014) concluded that increasing knowledge around students with E/BD is necessary for increased self-efficacy in teachers, and Kutcher, Wei, McLuckie, and Bullock (2012) found that mental health literacy training led to higher knowledge and better attitudes in educators.

In a similar vein, no participating jurisdictions in this current project reported specific pre-service training requirements for teaching students with E/BD. The fact that each province maintains requirements for teacher education programs creates yet another inconsistency which ultimately affects the outcomes for students with EB/D. If inclusive classrooms with support are the desired placement for students with EB/D, then pre-service teacher training should include specific training requirements on the topic of EB/D as recommended by Dworet and AUTHOR 1 ten years ago.

Encouragingly, Ontario has recently adopted an enhanced two-year teacher education program, where teacher candidates are exposed to at least twice as much course focused training on special education, as well as more work placement experience. With an increased focus on initial teacher training as well as more appropriate and accessible professional development, teachers will be better equipped to effectively include students with E/BD.

### ***Intrajurisdictional Highlights***

Moving through our northernmost territories, and then from west to east across the southern most provinces from British Columbia to the Atlantic provinces, some intra-jurisdictional highlights stand out:

***The Northwest Territories.*** Support, not removal. The Northwest Territories reported that, in 2014, 100% of students are returned to regular classes or have a reduction of services during the course of the school year. In 2004, a percentage was not reported. They also shared that, at the time of this survey, withdrawal self-contained classrooms, and alternate schools are unavailable.

***Nunavut.*** Outcomes, not numbers. In 2004, the estimated prevalence for students with E/BD in Nunavut was not reported. In 2014, it is ‘unknown’ but instead this territory reports that they have ‘the highest rate of suicide in Canada [which] is 11 times the national average.’

***British Columbia.*** Collaboration, not isolation. British Columbia makes decisions about eligibility for special education services specific to E/BD collaboratively: ‘planning is done collaboratively by relevant school and district staff, parents and, when appropriate, relevant professionals, service providers, or agencies and the student,’ in an approach similar to 2004.

***Alberta.*** Conditions of identification. Of the 9 participating jurisdictions, only Alberta and British Columbia require psychiatric evaluation for identification of an E/BD.

***Saskatchewan.*** Needs, not labels. In 2004, Saskatchewan deferred their definition of E/BD to professionals outside the education system, but in 2014, it is no longer defined; instead, referencing a movement away from a medical model to a needs-based approach.

**Manitoba.** Changing teacher training. Aligned with several jurisdictions, general teacher education training in Manitoba must now include studies in special education; however, this was not required in 2004.

**Ontario.** Inclusion, with options. Ontario reports offering a range of options for support within a significant inclusive model—including those mentioned by Northwest Territories—but did not (in 2004) and does not now collect data on return to classes or reduction of services.

**New Brunswick.** Inclusion, not segregation. As leaders in inclusion, New Brunswick states that ‘we are fully inclusive and do not offer some of these specific services’ (e.g., self-contained classrooms, resource withdrawal), reflecting practices also reported 2004.

**Nova Scotia.** Training, before or after? Nova Scotia’s general teacher education training must include studies in special education. In 2004, it was permitted but not required. Manitoba likewise now requires this for all educators but did not in 2004.

### **Limitations**

Some limitations to this survey research exists. Although key stakeholders in each jurisdiction were provided with a mailed postcard preview, an initial contact with an invitation to participate, and three follow-up reminders by phone and/or email, two jurisdictions declined, and two were non-responsive. Given that this level of contact was the most intrusive cleared by research ethics according to the voluntary nature of research participation, for these four jurisdictions, publicly available policy documents were consulted posted on each ministry of education’s website.

It is important to recognize that as a national bilingual country, having a common definition of E/BD remains a challenge in finding consistent terminology within both French and English. This is perhaps a barrier to this research when

considering provinces that are predominantly French speaking and what their current definitions are. Further examination of this challenge is warranted.

It is also important to consider the percentage of non-participatory jurisdictions and how that is a factor in the information garnered in this study (Fowler, 2014).

## **Conclusions**

It is clear from this updated cross-Canada data that change is ongoing and that this change continues to be in the direction of inclusion and non-categorization. This directive is noted as preferable in similar research, such as this call for needs-based support: ‘Canadian educational systems are strongly encouraged to adopt novel approaches to identification of student need that do not rely solely on formal diagnosis’ (McCrimmon, Altomare, Matchullis, and Jitlina, 2012, p. 330). It seems that this movement is indeed happening in the field of school-based supports for students with E/BD.

These data also highlight other important key issues which continue to challenge the way we serve and support students with E/BD and prompt reflective action. Not only is a consistent identification approach important to ensure appropriate supports are accessible for students with E/BD, but, current challenges to inclusive practice including prevalence and teacher training must be considered. If in fact the shift toward inclusion as documented here becomes common practice for students with EB/D and is implemented effectively, the results are two-fold. Firstly, students with EB/D will experience decreased stigma as associated with previous models of support (self-contained class, pull out model). Students will have an increased sense of belonging and greater expectations for success if given the necessary in-class supports (Kwiatkowski, 2016). On the other hand, educators are faced with a new challenge of differentiating

and programming for students with EB/D. Professional training that is timely and specific to EB/D will be a key component to successful inclusion across the country.

At this time, there has not been a similar movement made towards a call for consistency across Canada (Dworet and AUTHOR 1, 2007). With over ten years of comparative findings around challenges with the inconsistencies that exist with identifying and programming for students with EB/D, it is evident that a definition or set of guidelines that is universal is desirable. It is important to keep in mind that inclusion is far more than semantics or placement, and that its success depends on a range of factors for all students, including those students diagnosed, identified, or labelled with E/BD or with E/BD-related needs. Although trends are moving toward a focus on student-centred approaches, consistent guidelines based on student need for inclusive practice would be ideal in ensuring all students who require support receive it.

Finally, further iterations of this survey should be adapted somewhat to include an assumption of pervasive inclusive approaches, as well as federally funded educational programs provided by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada for students living on First Nations reserves. Overall, a call for a more complete picture of the landscape of how students with EB/D are recognized and served across Canada is needed.

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Table 1. Jurisdictional Responses

Jurisdiction	Participation
<b>Alberta</b>	Yes
<b>British Columbia</b>	Yes
<b>Manitoba</b>	Yes
<b>New Brunswick</b>	Yes
Newfoundland and Labrador	Declined
<b>Northwest Territories</b>	Yes
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	Yes
<b>Nunavut</b>	Yes
<b>Ontario</b>	Yes
Prince Edward Island	No
Quebec	No
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	Yes
Yukon	Declined