



Discrimination By The Numbers: A BCEdAccess Exclusion Tracker Report

February 26th, 2021

Introduction

BCEdAccess is run by and for families of students with disabilities and those who are complex learners. Exclusion has always been the number one topic in our private parent/guardian forum. Many of us were told that our circumstances were rare or unusual, and if we could just be patient it would be resolved - but how could that be, when so many of us were talking about it daily? In 2018, this led to the creation of our Exclusion Tracker, to provide a place for parents/guardians to create “incident reports” regarding the exclusion of disabled &/or complex-learner children and youth.

While our Tracker has evolved over the years, this past summer, it underwent some robust improvements with input from the community forum. These exclusions have always been discriminatory. Parents also noted experiences of retaliation and we were asked to capture this aspect of their experience as well.

Pursuing the resolution of discrimination is such a challenge in all systems. It wears parents and guardians down in so many cases. Many seemingly small incidents can happen through a school year, which may be easily passed off as innocuous, taken on their own. Death by a thousand tiny cuts.

We all have our implicit biases to work through. As uncomfortable as it is, both recognition and “putting in the work” are required in order to overcome our “isms” (ableism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, etc) moving forward.



Denying Information

In our [September](#) snapshot, we asked if the school-based teams had made the families aware of the BC Ministry of Education's direction which states, *"Students who require more support in school must have full-time, in-class instruction available without any delays."*

Approximately 85% of our respondents stated NO, their school teams had not provided them this information. **This has not significantly changed (currently 82.4%).**

Denying access Without Incidents

We also asked if there had been any incident which caused the child to be excluded at school.

As of February, 51.1% said there had been no incident, and 8.4% did not know. Parents reported that aggression towards others (19%) and disruptive behaviour in the classroom (16.8%) were the reasons given to them as the cause of exclusion. It is important to note that despite the recognition by staff of distressed behavior from students, this did not automatically trigger more support (such as additional EA hours, Functional Behavior Assessment, etc) moving forward.

Some parents did choose to elaborate on this in the optional comments section. Many noted that their educators had asked for the student to stay home for a few days in order to give them time to formulate a plan, but reiterated that it was not a suspension. Others noted that exclusion was being used punitively for poor behaviour. The students themselves are frequently relieved to escape an environment that is not inclusive and the parents feel stuck between safeguarding their children's mental health and being able to continue to work during school hours to provide for their family.



Under-supporting Students

We asked if the student had a usual support person, and if that person was absent. So far, 52.7% of respondents said that the usual staff was present and that their child was still excluded (for an increase of 4% since the [2019-20 year-end report](#)). This speaks to the pressing need for [EA Standards](#) of Practice and comprehensive training (see also: [Recognition & Respect](#), 2009)

35.9% of respondents said that their child has no usual support person (for an increase of 5.4% since the 2019-20 year-end report).

(Annual) Support Hours Reduction

This year, we started asking questions about EA support hours. While each District has their own process for allocation, generally speaking, these numbers will be determined annually in the Spring, with the goal of being completed before the Job post & fill process takes place over summer. Incumbent support personnel who own their postings will be notified of the hours and decide to stay or move on - and in a system where they are already [chronically underpaid](#), even a couple of hours difference per week can make a role acceptable or not.

With this in mind, we asked:

- 1) If the student's support hours had been reduced,
- 2) If the reduction was in line with specialist recommendations,
- 3) If yes, reduced by how much,
- 4) If the parent had been able to get those hours reinstated.

Distressingly, 15.6% of respondents reported that yes, the hours had been cut and that this was against the team's recommendations. Out of 128 respondents to this question, only 4 people (3.1%) said that they were OK with the hours reduction.

Only 4% had already managed to get those hours reinstated when they filled out the Tracker. 11.3% of our respondents said they were still working on getting these hours reinstated - after the post and fill process, after the start of the new school year, and indeed, closer to the next round of hours allocations than not.

While not specifically part of our tracker, we know from our community members that applying for [Continuity](#) with their child's Education Assistant has also become a [grueling](#), [traumatic](#) year-round process as well. This was noted as a "familiar question" in Inclusion BC's



[A Parent Handbook on Inclusive Education](#), and the author noted that the question had been posed 12 years previously at that point (approximately 2002 - “Rahim’s Legacy” starts on page 29).

Monitoring support hours, dealing with exclusion incidents, ensuring our children have their legal right to access an equitable education upheld has become a tedious, year round job for many parents. There is an underlying feeling that is sometimes stated outright within the parent/guardian forum that the constant advocacy required is deliberate, in order to “wear us down”. Other parent/guardian advocates within the community have cited experiencing similar tactics as they support their family member in [transitioning](#) to the adult support system.

37 respondents noted that support hours for their child or youth had been cut, on average from 29 to 16 hours per week.

Denied Access to School

We asked how much time the student had missed. Nearly half (45%) of our respondents said that their child had missed the full day of school. This is a substantial increase from previous years (32% full day for 2019-20, and 26% full day for 2018-19). **This is a distressing increase in just two years.**

The next highest two categories were half day (13%) and 4 hours (12.2%). While the BC government regulates total [hours of instruction](#) provided for the school year instead of a set schedule, the average elementary student attends approximately six hours per weekday.

It goes without saying that as a public service, our children should be given an equitable opportunity to access their education. However, many of our respondents noted that they had been told their student’s access to education was dependent upon good behaviour for the length of an arbitrary “gradual entry” period. It is important to note that if a child is being excluded for a full day, they have not even been given the opportunity to have a “good day”.



Summary of Types of Discrimination:

Individually, it may be easy (and convenient to our individual biases) to rationalize away any one of these findings. But collectively?

- 82.4% of parents were not told their children could be in school full time without delays
- 51.1% of exclusions happened with no preceding incident
- 45% of exclusions reported were full days missed, meaning the child was not presented with an opportunity for success
- 52.7% of the time, the regular support personnel were present and exclusion still happened
- 35.9% of the time, the student had no regular support (which may indicate an unmet need)
- 15.6% of respondents reported that their child's support hours had been reduced, against the recommendations of the team who knows them best
- 11.3% of parents were actively still working on getting those support hours reinstated, making advocacy a continuous, year-round process

The unfortunate conclusion is that our schools are managing their workloads by considering the education of some students as expendable. It may not be a conscious decision. But our children are under-supported, then punished for being under-supported.

Restraint & Seclusion

The most [damaging](#) action by schools is the involuntary [restraint or seclusion](#) of another person. It is an international issue and we have joined International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion to encourage governments around the world to ban this practice. We have included this question since our first survey, and after feedback from the community, we included the Ministry definitions on our Tracker for clarity.

Already, in the 2020-21 school year, 8 students (6.1% of respondents) this year have been restrained, secluded or both.



Last year, our survey showed 27 students were physically restrained or secluded (10% of respondents). This was an increase of 7% over what was reported from 2018-19 (15, or 3%). As we have noted before, it is possible that the increase was due to providing the definition and removing any remaining ambiguity for parents and guardians.

Also concerning is that 14.5% of respondents communicated they are 'not sure' if their child was restrained. With some children being nonspeaking or having other communication challenges, parents should never be unsure if the school is providing information about the treatment of their child.

Inclusion BC has done 2 reports on this issue – [Stop Hurting Kids 1 and 2](#).

Their surveys indicate that not only does seclusion and restraint still happen in BC schools but that there has been no great change over a 7 year period. As a member organization of theirs, we would like to highlight the fact that this still requires urgent attention in BC.

Switched Schooling

This was a new question we added this year. We knew from our August co-survey that many people were [considering their options](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Roughly 50% (649 of 1,294 respondents) of that survey's respondents were considering leaving the public education system, and 9% (120 respondents) already had de-registered from the public system for the 2020-21 school year. This could have a tremendous impact on public education, and so we were keenly interested in the follow-through.

This year so far, 3.8% of our respondents cited retaliation by staff as the reason they were switching schooling. 15.3% cited "other" - some of which included more details that we consider retaliatory. Many were told, and believed, that the schools would do more to accommodate their disabled and/or complex learner than had been done in the Spring of 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic.

As we have discussed in previous reports and presentations, parents are keen to work collaboratively with their school teams. Parents are also unwilling to leave their children in an environment they deem unsafe. This is why we have made such a point of emphasizing that Exclusion is never "in agreement" with parents - only compliance.

One of the options on our question about retaliation on this year's Tracker is "I'm being guilted into accepting less for my child, because it will take away from another student." **This rang true for 21% of our respondents.**



As noted in previous reports, a number of our parents have been told directly that the schools “do not receive enough funding” for our children to attend full time. This is especially true for students who are [pending assessment](#), have a provisional diagnosis, or their designation does not bring in much (or any) supplemental funding despite the needs of that student. Parents and guardians who are not connected with a support network of other families of disabled students or other community resources will often believe what they are told without questioning. Others just don’t have the energy to pursue it.

Other issues raised were “personal information distributed without consent” at 8.8%, and “school staff has become hostile to me or my child” at 8.8%.

The most extreme types of retaliation were MCFD complaints (4.4%); 911 being called on students (2.6%); and improper [Section 177](#) (1.8%).

Intersectionality: Indigenous, disabled and complex-learner Students

As part of our June snapshot, we asked respondents to provide race-based data. Indigenous children and youth were the second largest group families reported exclusions for at 10.2%. This is especially significant because Indigenous people represent [5%](#) of BC’s total population, indicating a disproportionate impact on this population.

At this time, 8.6% of our respondents are Indigenous parents. Last November, there was a report titled “[In Plain Sight](#)”, written by former judge Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond after her investigation into the BC healthcare system. She found rampant prejudice and racism against Indigenous patients. Our Minister of Health, Adrian Dix was quoted: "Racism has made B.C.'s health-care system an unsafe place for many Indigenous Peoples to access services and the care they need."

The [Alone and Afraid](#) report written last year by the Representative of Children and Youth (RCY) chronicles an Indigenous, autistic child falling through the cracks of multiple government systems, including education.

We cannot ignore the disproportionate impact that exclusion is having on Indigenous students in BC who are disabled or who have complex learning needs.

Conclusion



Finally, we offered in the Tracker this year to connect our respondents to Inclusion BC for advocacy support. Despite the wealth of knowledge available in our private parent/guardian forum (now numbering nearly 3500), we recognize caregiver burnout.

Almost 39% have asked to be connected to Inclusion BC for advocacy support. Another 20.6% requested their handbook for more information. This speaks to the overwhelming pressure too many families are feeling.

We would also be remiss if we did not include the RCY report "[Left Out: Children & Youth with Special Needs in the Pandemic](#)". This report is not specific to education, but gives more of a full picture of our community at this point in time.

A reminder:

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- 45% of exclusions reported were full days missed, meaning the child was not presented with an opportunity for success
- 52.7% of the time, the regular support personnel were present and exclusion still happened
- 35.9% of the time, the student had no regular support (which may indicate an unmet need)
- 15.6% of respondents reported that their child's support hours had been reduced, against the recommendations of the team who knows them best
- 11.3% of parents were actively still working on getting those support hours reinstated, making advocacy a continuous, year-round process
- While not included in our Tracker, we know that requesting Continuity has also become a continuous, traumatic annual process as well
- Parents are facing retaliation, violation of privacy and open hostility
- Almost 39% have requested support from InclusionBC, and another 20.6% have requested additional information be sent to them

The unfortunate conclusion is that our schools are managing their workloads by considering the education of some students as expendable. It may not even be a conscious decision by some staff. But the inevitable result is that our children and youth are under-supported, then punished for being under-supported by exclusion.



Quotes from our Respondents: Speaking for Themselves

"Child not feeling comfortable with the teacher; threats made to my son if he doesn't regulate that teacher will call principal stated out loud for whole class to hear.No EA support. Resource Teacher, Principal and School Counsellor check in when they can."

"It started with her school requesting she only attend 2 classes/day and has gone on for several months. We are now keeping her home even though she has a designation because they seem unable to manage her in school."

"I'm being told this will be a standing policy - that my son has to make sure everyone feels safe or he won't be allowed to go to recess. This is coming from the principal, not the classroom teacher."

"My son is in an [REDACTED] classroom with 7 staff to 5 kids, and still is being asked to only be at school for 2 hours a day. They will gradually add 15 minutes a day every 2 weeks for "good" behaviour. At the beginning of this school year he was being sent home just about every other day, with a one day suspension following the day he was sent home. I have already engaged Inclusion BC."

"Although I was kindly asked to keep my son home for the afternoons in the month of December, and I said yes, I also feel if I had said no, the environment would become increasingly negative. I don't want my identity to be shared with the school."

"I do have concerns about potential damage to the current relationship with the school. We have been told several times that because his designation is provisional, his supports are coming from budget designated for other students."

"The principal has decided to limit time at school for the transition. She has unilaterally prescribed a timeline and is not responding to child's requests to attend for longer time. She flatly refuses to provide classroom support in order to lengthen time at school."

"Just got a call from the school secretary asking me to pick up my 6 year old [DIAGNOSIS REDACTED] because he is "Having a rough day." No other information couldn't tell me any details. I asked her to have someone call me to discuss what the issue is. My child's teacher calls and says "He needs to come home because he is having a rough day." Okay... I got that but what is actually happening? He's not focusing on his work, he isn't participating in quiet reading and he's bouncing around the class so she told him he had a choice to participate in class or go home 🙄. Of course he is going to choose coming home! This option just undid every single thing we have been building on since kindergarten..."

"We have been previously guilty that his support is coming out of other children's funding because we don't have a diagnosis. We don't have a previous relationship with the IST as she was new to the school in January. I don't know how hard we can push without damaging our relationship with the school..."