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Inclusive Education: County schools get more support from province

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"We have come a long way in terms of adding inclusive education support professionals to the education system. Now, it is time to integrate these professionals into the classroom so that students, teachers, and families can fully realize the benefits. We are collaborating with school sites to support the diverse needs of students and seamlessly implement wraparound supports," said Augy Jones, executive lead for inclusive education. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The Department of Education said they recognize that for students to succeed they need the support that nurtures their wellbeing.

Therefore, the province said they will continue to enhance that support by hiring more staff and specialists for classrooms by acting on recommendations from the ongoing review of inclusive education.

Speaking with the Strait Regional Centre for Education's Communications coordinator, Deanna Gillis, about what this

means specifically for Inverness County schools, she said that the SRCE is very pleased with the inclusive education supports in schools provided by the province "as part of their ongoing review of inclusive education to better support the diverse learning needs of students."

For this school year, the province is funding an additional 277 inclusive education positions to better support students' diverse learning needs.

These positions include teacher assistants and school counsellors; autism and behavioural support specialists; school psychologists and speech language pathologists; and African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq student support workers.

Wanting to know how many of the 277 positions would be in this county, Gillis explained that, for this school year, 2021-2022, an additional 14 positions have been allocated to the SRCE.

"They are as follows and please note we have indicated if any of the positions are providing services to schools in Inverness County," said Gillis.

-English as an Additional Language

teacher (one fulltime equivalent (FTE) position):Tins is a regional position supporting all schools.

Reading Recovery teacher (0.5 FTE):Reading Recovery is offered in all SRCE schools which have grade one students.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Early Intervention/Communications specialist (one FTE):Recruitment for this position is ongoing. -Career practitioner (0.5 FTE) in partnership with Nova Scotia Works:This position serves Dalbrae Academy, Inverness Education Centre/Academy, and Cape Breton Highlands Education Centre/Academy. -Adapted Behavior analyst (1 FTE):Recruitment for this position is ongoing. -SchoolsPlus facilitator (1 FTE):This position enabled us to create a new hub site serving students and families in Inverness South (Whycocomagh Education Centre, Bayview Education Centre, and SAERC) and allowed us to enhance support that schools were previously receiving.

-SchoolsPlus Community Outreach workers (two FTEs):One of these positions was added to the Inverness South

SchoolsPlus hub site.

-Child and Youth Care practitioners (three FTEs):Recruitment for these positions is ongoing.

-Assistive Technology supports (two FTEs):These are regional positions serving all schools. Recruitment for one of these positions is ongoing. -Assistive Technology and Augmented Communication lead (1 FTE):Tins is a regional position serving all schools in the SRCE.

-Mi'kmaq Student Support worker (1 FTE):This position has been added to Dalbrae Academy.

Gillis added that staff in these positions are working in partnership with other teachers and administrators to enhance services for students throughout the SRCE to support student wellbeing, achievement, and overall success.

“We are focussed on ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed.” said Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Becky Druhan.

“Inclusive education supports the mandate of the Students First report. Tins is about building a strong network around students, teachers, and families so that everyone has the opportunity to thrive,” added the minister.

The education system is adapting its inclusive education work plans based on the findings of the research team who are conducting a three-year review of Nova Scotia’s Inclusive Education Policy.

The team has completed its Year 1 interim report.

The researchers, led by Jess Whitley and

Andy Hargreaves at the University of Ottawa, have found widespread support for the policy. They have suggested better collaboration inside schools and clearer communications across the school system related to inclusive education.

Nova Scotia’s Inclusive Education Policy was created in response to a recommendation from the Commission on Inclusive Education and has been in place since September 2020.

“We are immensely appreciative of the deep engagement of families, school staff, educational leaders, community associations and unions in this evaluation. Their voices are key to successful implementation of the policy. A passion for inclusive education that can ensure the success of all students in Nova Scotia has emerged in every conversation we’ve had. We look forward to further collaboration with Nova Scotians as we continue to gather evidence to inform the successful realization of inclusive education in the Province of Nova Scotia.” -joint statement from Jess Whitley and Andy Hargreaves, lead evaluators of the inclusive education review team.

"Addressing the needs of students with disabilities continues to remain a top priority for Inclusion Nova Scotia. We are pleased that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has been following the recommendations of the Students First report to add new staff positions to support students with disabilities. There are additional improvements needed which we expect to be revealed as a result of the current review, and we look forward to our continued collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to ensure all stu-

dents, regardless of ability, are given the opportunity to reach their full potential.” said Patricia Neves, executive director. Inclusion NS. In total, the province has funded 890 inclusive education positions since 2018.