

International Association of Special Educators Summit Conference IASE:

The State of Special Education in Canada



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Special education in Canadian public schools is currently facing a complex landscape, marked by both notable successes and significant challenges.



What is Working Well?

Many school boards across Canada have developed specialized programs to cater to diverse student needs. For instance, Edmonton Public Schools offers a variety of special education programs, including those for students with behavior disabilities, cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities, and academic delays. These programs are designed to provide tailored support to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.



Challenges Facing Special Education

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist:



Underfunding and Understaffing:

Educators and parents have expressed concerns about inadequate funding and staffing. In the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), there are reports of schools being underfunded and understaffed, leading to insufficient support for students with special needs. This situation has resulted in many students being placed in mainstream classrooms without adequate assistance, undermining the goal of inclusive education.



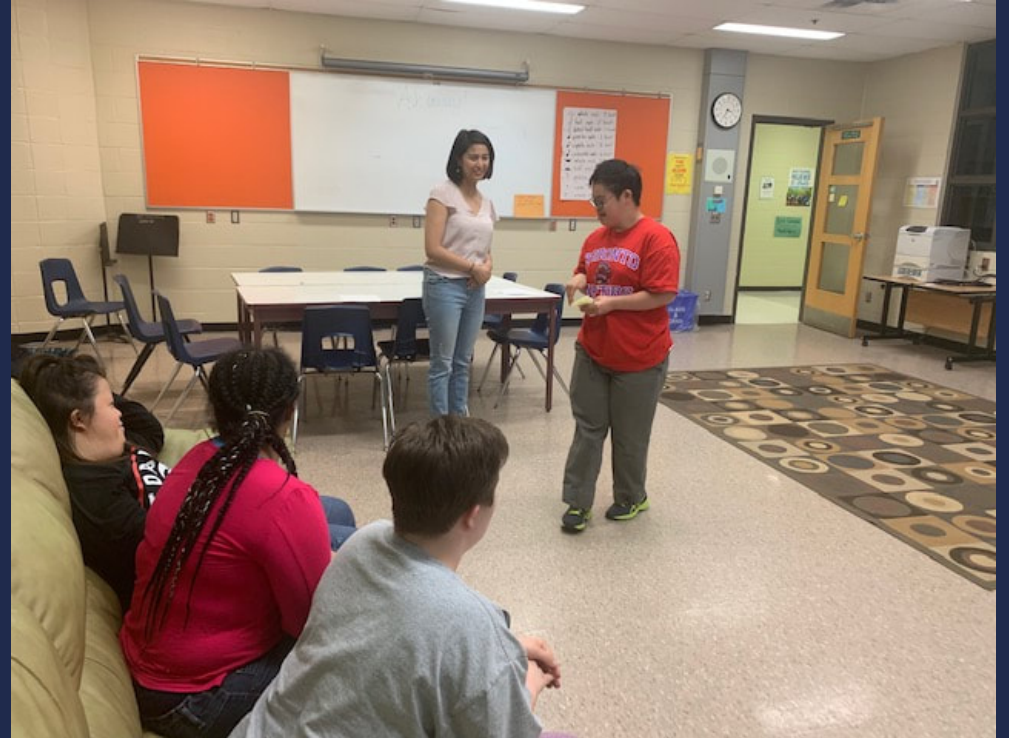
Resource Disparities:

Access to specialized resources varies, with schools in low-income neighborhoods often lacking essential services. For example, in Ontario, elementary schools in low-income areas are less likely to have access to psychologists compared to those in high-income neighborhoods, affecting the quality of support available to students.



Program Reductions:

Some school boards have reduced specialized programs due to budget constraints. The Peel District School Board's decision to cut communication classes that offered specialized literacy support is a case in point, leaving parents and educators concerned about the impact on students who rely on these services.



Behavioral Challenges:

Teachers are facing increasing behavioral challenges in classrooms, including incidents of violence and property destruction. This situation has sparked discussions about the effectiveness of fully inclusive classrooms and the need for specialized settings to address the diverse needs of all students.



Teachers have voiced
several concerns:



Inclusion vs. Specialized Support:


There's an ongoing debate about the efficacy of inclusive education. Some educators feel that placing students with significant behavioral issues in general education classrooms without adequate support can be detrimental to both the affected students and their peers. They advocate for specialized classrooms that can better address sensory needs and provide a safer environment for all students.



Safety and Support:

The rise in classroom violence has led to calls for more robust support systems. Teachers highlight the need for additional resources and training to manage challenging behaviors effectively, ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment for all students

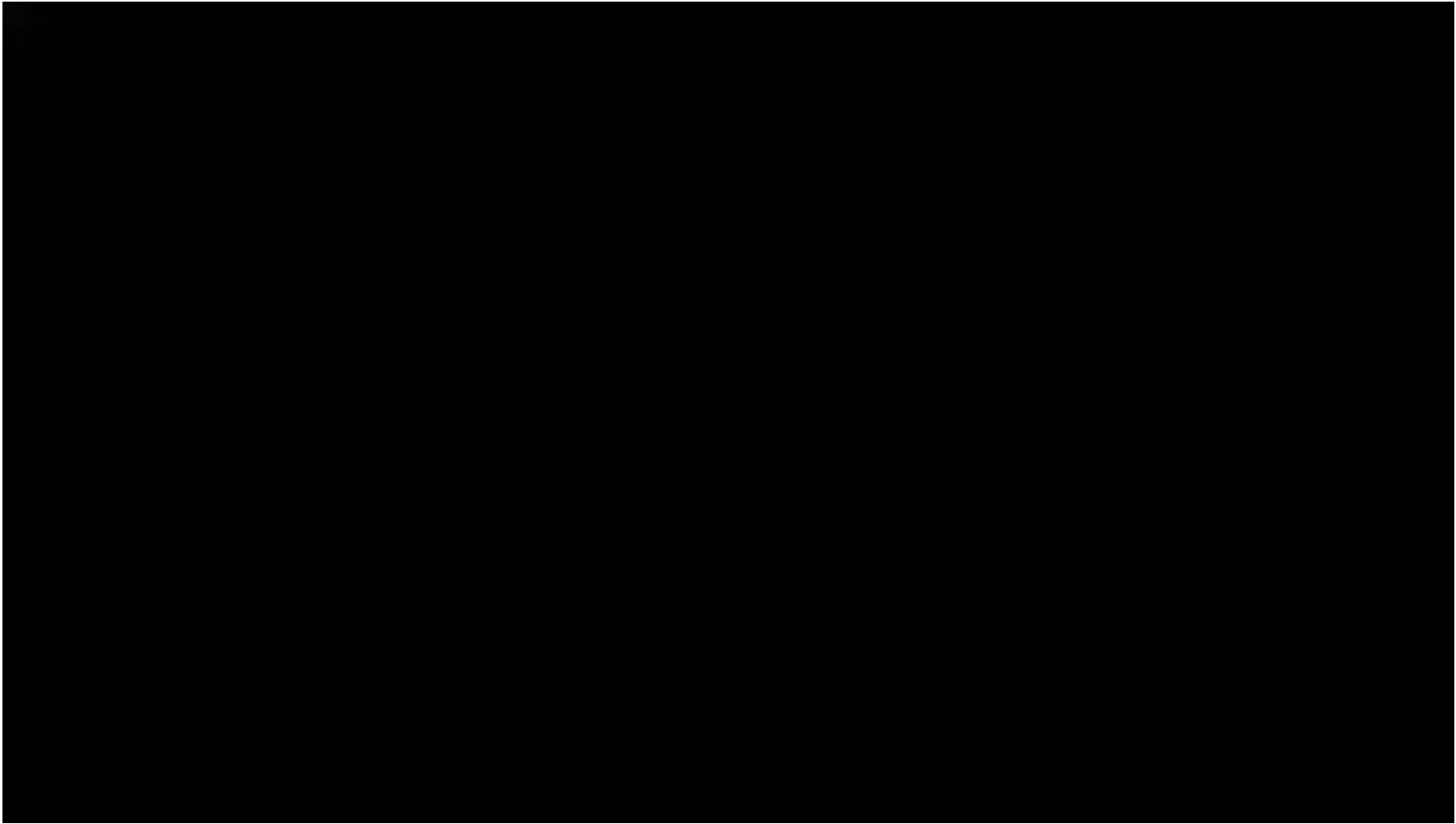




In summary, while Canadian public schools have made strides in developing programs for students with special needs, challenges such as underfunding, resource disparities, program reductions, and behavioral issues continue to impact the effectiveness of special education. Addressing these concerns requires a balanced approach that considers the diverse needs of all students, ensuring that both inclusive and specialized educational settings are adequately supported.



All Pictures Collected from GEM
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