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# Addressing Student Differences: Setting a Direction

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A Discussion Paper

September 1996



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## PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

In November 1995, the Ministry of Education circulated *Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences: A Working Paper* to school districts and representatives of partner groups. The purpose of the paper was to stimulate discussion and to get an initial indication about the key issues relating to students who are experiencing difficulties with prescribed learning outcomes. The response deadline for the working paper was April 30, 1996. A summary of responses is provided in Appendix I of this paper.

A working committee with representatives from key partner groups was established to analyze responses to the working paper on *Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences* and make recommendations about a possible provincial policy. Because of the complexity of the issue, the consultation process was extended for one year.

This paper, *Addressing Student Differences: Setting a Direction*, builds on feedback about the November 1995 working paper. It is designed to broaden the discussion on six key issues: common curriculum K-10, Grade 11 and 12 provincial course options, curriculum packaging, reporting and credentialling, teaching strategies, and systemic issues related to provincial policies, local policies, funding, inservice, and preservice.

Consultation with partner groups will begin in the fall of 1996, using this paper as a focus for discussion. Areas to be addressed include:

- possible policy on modification of provincial curriculum;
- use of the In Progress (IP) letter grade in grades 8-12; and
- the future status of Mathematics 9A, 10A, 11A, and Communications 11/12.

Based on the responses, a policy framework will be developed in the spring of 1997, with implementation potentially beginning in September 1997. In January 1997, the working committee will review feedback related to the future status of Communications 11 and 12 and Mathematics 9A-11A.

Schools may continue to offer Communications 11 and 12 in 1996/97 and Communications 12 in 1997/98. Schools may continue to offer Mathematics 9A, 10A, and 11A through 1997/98. The status of Mathematics 9A-11A and Communications 11 and 12 after 1997/98 will be determined by the spring of 1997.

You are encouraged to discuss the key issues identified in this paper with your colleagues, and to provide feedback as an individual or as part of a group.

Thank you for supporting this policy discussion.

Please forward responses to this paper by December 15, 1996, to:

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# Addressing Student Differences: Setting a Direction

## THE ISSUE

### Background

In the fall of 1994, the government announced the *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan*. This plan states that the aim of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 program is for all students to graduate from school with a sound education that is relevant to their lives. The commitment to providing a high quality education applies to all students, regardless of their abilities, goals, or career aspirations.

According to the K-12 Education Plan, most students do well on the provincial curriculum, and schools are particularly effective in preparing young people to go on to post-secondary studies. There is a need to maintain and support this success. On the other hand, provincial learning assessments indicate that in some areas of learning, approximately 20 per cent of the students tested are not meeting basic expectations for their grade level. This document deals with the group of students who are having difficulty, and with the need to examine different ways of organizing curriculum and delivering instruction to meet their needs.

The provincial curriculum identifies the learning outcomes students are expected to achieve. Teachers use a variety of strategies to deal with the growing diversity in classrooms. Because students learn in different ways and at different rates, teachers often use different teaching strategies and learning materials to assist students to achieve the provincial learning outcomes, or they provide students with additional time.

However, students continue to experience considerable difficulty with the standard curriculum, even after adaptations designed to assist them to achieve the learning outcomes. Policies and legislation were developed to address the needs of students with special needs and those receiving English as a second language services, who are unable to demonstrate their learning in relation to the prescribed learning outcomes. Teachers sometimes have other students follow a modified curriculum, with learning outcomes which diverge substantially from those in the provincial curriculum, although there is no official policy to support this practice. Teachers are unclear about the status of modified curriculum and about what to do when students are following a curriculum that has been partly or wholly modified. The ministry has been asked to clarify this issue.

Policy Circular 95-07 (Student Reporting) states that "There is a question of how to report progress for students on modified curriculum. The Ministry will consult with the field regarding the possibility and appropriateness of a policy on modified curriculum and reporting. After December 31, 1995, schools will inform parents on the written report if their child is following a modified curriculum."

### Students Experiencing Difficulties

This paper applies to students who are having difficulties in learning. Many of them receive neither special education nor ESL services. They may have difficulty learning because of social, emotional, behavioural, health, or

developmental or learning differences that become barriers to participation and success. In some cases, these factors affect students' motivation. In other cases, students may find the school program unchallenging. Students may be in regular classrooms but following programs designated as "Minimum Essentials" (ME) or they may be in separate classes alongside students with special needs or other students who are not working toward the provincial learning outcomes. They may be in alternate schools, on pre-employment programs, following Pathfinder or New Start programs, or receiving learning assistance services or some kind of one-to-one assistance.

The major focus of this paper is on policy options for students who are having difficulties in learning, but are not students with special needs and are not receiving ESL services.

### **Current Policy**

Students with special needs who are unable to demonstrate their learning in relation to prescribed learning are exempted from the Ministerial Order which specifies curriculum requirements for students (Required Areas of Study in an Educational Program Order: M295/95). ESL students must follow the provincial curriculum, except where modifications are required to address their English language proficiency. For other students, there is currently no provincial policy to support the practice of modifying curriculum at the school level.

In some cases, teachers at the secondary level indicate that the provincial course options currently available in mathematics and language arts meet the needs of students who would have difficulty in 'regular' mathematics and English courses. Some teachers indicate that if courses such as Mathematics 9A/10A/

11A and Communications 11/12 are not offered provincially, curriculum will increasingly be modified at the school level, and students will not be eligible to receive a Dogwood Diploma.

The ministry reporting policy states that students are to be evaluated in relation to the prescribed learning outcomes (except when students with special needs or students who are receiving English as a second language services are unable to meet the prescribed learning outcomes of a course). In grades 4-7, when a student is making progress but it has been determined that additional time is required to meet the prescribed learning outcomes, an *IP* (In Progress) letter grade is assigned and a written plan is developed in accordance with the requirements. Use of *IP* is optional for grades 8-12 in 1996/97. Teachers have asked for additional information about the *IP* letter grade and its use is being monitored in schools which have chosen to implement it, so that successful strategies and challenges can be identified.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS**

The following vision, guiding principles, and definitions provide a foundation for policy discussion.

#### **Vision of the Paper:**

Through an education that is relevant to their interests and plans, all students will develop their individual potential and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for success as citizens in the community and workplace.

#### **Goals of Education:**

The prime goal of public schools is intellectual development—supported by the family and community. Human, social, and career development are goals that are shared among schools, the family, and the community.

## Principles of Learning

Three principles support the foundation of the education program and are intended to guide all aspects of educational practice:

- learning requires the active participation of the student;
- people learn in a variety of ways and at different rates; and
- learning is both an individual and a group process.

## Assumptions

The following assumptions emerged through the process of reviewing responses to *Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences* (November 1995):

- All students, with the exception of some students with specific special needs, can achieve the learning outcomes prescribed in the provincial curriculum and can attain a graduation diploma, provided the students are motivated to learn and teaching methods, learning resources, sequencing, and the amount of time allocated to a subject are adapted when necessary.
- The educational needs of all students, with the exception of some students with specific special needs, can be met through a common provincial curriculum K-10<sup>1</sup>, provided the students are motivated to learn and teaching methods, learning resources, sequencing, and the amount of time allocated to a subject are adapted when necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> A common curriculum refers to a common core of learning in Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics. It also includes Physical Education, Personal Planning/Career and Personal Planning, Fine Arts, Information Technology, and Applied Skills.

- All students can succeed and can benefit from their school experience and find their study of curriculum interesting, relevant, and appropriate to their prior experience and state of readiness.
- Students learn best in a school environment where all students are valued and where there are high expectations for all students.
- Appropriate instruction, and early intervention to deal with students' learning difficulties, are more successful than responding to accumulated deficits by modifying the prescribed learning outcomes at a later date.
- Students are most successful when evaluation identifies strengths, provides information to assist in planning and continued learning, and provides opportunities to promote learning rather than just rendering final judgments.
- Significant improvement in meeting student learning needs may be achieved through better utilization of existing resources and strategies (what we have and know).

## Definitions

The following distinction between adaptation and modification is consistent with the definitions in *Special Education Services—A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* (Ministry of Education, 1995).

The examples of adaptations and modifications provided on the following pages are based on examples in a resource document prepared by the Special Education Branch (*Teaching Students with Learning and Behavioural Differences—A Resource Guide for Teachers*, Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1996).

## *Adapted Program*

An *adapted program* retains the learning outcomes of the prescribed curriculum, but is adapted to accommodate different abilities or learning needs.

An adapted program may include adjustments to instruction, assessment, or the amount of time allocated to specific studies to help the student achieve success. Students on adapted programs are assessed using the standards for the course or program and can receive credit toward a Dogwood Diploma.

The following are some examples of how programs are adapted. Teachers:

- provide instruction and activities which recognize different learning styles and learning paces (e.g., some students learn best by reading about a topic, some students learn best through “hands-on” experiences; some students grasp new concepts quickly, some students require extended practice time with new concepts);
- differentiate essential elements of a course to meet student needs and interests (e.g., change the activities and topics without changing the prescribed learning outcomes);
- use advance organizers to help students follow classroom lectures;
- provide extra time for assignments or tests;
- permit use of audio tapes or a peer helper to assist with assigned readings;
- reduce the number of projects or assignments required to demonstrate understanding of the concepts;

- provide a variety of topics, activities, and assignments to give students opportunities to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes, and evaluate the extent to which the student eventually demonstrates achievement of the learning outcome;
- permit use of a computer to facilitate the completion of written assignments;
- offer alternatives to written assignments to demonstrate understanding (e.g., oral presentations, concrete applications, audio-visual presentations, and graphic displays);
- provide a separate setting for the student to write tests and exams, or offer supervised breaks for tests and exams.

## *Modified Curriculum*

A *modified curriculum* has learning outcomes which are substantially different from the prescribed curriculum.

Modifying curriculum involves changing or deleting significant numbers of the learning outcomes in the provincial curriculum so that low-achieving students can achieve success. This includes the practice of having students follow a modified curriculum at the elementary level, as well as providing students with modified programming within a regular class or in a separate modified course at the secondary level. Courses modified at the school level are not counted as credit toward a Dogwood Diploma.

The following are some examples of modifications to curriculum:

- A Grade 3 student is learning how to identify letters of the alphabet and differentiate a single word from a sentence or paragraph, while other students are reading a story.

- Only portions of the prescribed learning outcomes are used for a specific student or a group of students. For example, in a Grade 7 science class, a student with learning differences is required to complete the learning outcomes in only two curriculum organizers (ecology and astronomy), while the provincial curriculum requires the completion of learning outcomes in six curriculum organizers.
- A student in Grade 9 Mathematics is learning how to identify coin names and values and how to make change, while other students are introduced to Algebra.
- A Grade 10 student is placed in a class called English ME. The student is provided with adaptations so that the student can achieve some of the prescribed learning outcomes in English 10. In addition, a significant number of other prescribed learning outcomes in English 10 are substantially changed so the students in the class can achieve success. In this case, the students are receiving both adaptations and modifications.
- A student in a secondary social studies class is given assignments and/or tests which are reduced in conceptual difficulty so that they are appropriate for the student's level. While other students are asked to evaluate and discuss historical factors underlying current events in Canadian provinces, the student on the modified curriculum is asked to state the names of the provinces.

### *Daily/Weekly Accommodations to Meet Student Differences*

In some circumstances, despite adaptations made to help the student achieve success, a student may continue to have difficulties attaining the provincial learning outcomes. The student may *not* require learning outcomes which are substantially different from the prescribed curriculum, but it may be necessary to alter some learning outcomes as part of a short-term remediation strategy, with a view to returning the student to the regular curriculum upon completion. This is the type of accommodation that teachers make on a daily and weekly basis, in recognition of different student needs, abilities, learning styles, and sequences of learning. It is only when a student is working on learning outcomes which are *substantially* different from the prescribed curriculum that the student is considered to be following a modified curriculum.

## **ADDRESSING STUDENT DIFFERENCES**

### **Examples of Provincial and School/District Level Responses**

The *School Act* sets out the duties, rights, and responsibilities of students, parents, teachers, school principals, school boards, the community, the ministry, and other relevant groups and agencies. On the following pages are examples of how student differences can be addressed in ways that support the broad responsibilities identified in the *School Act*.

*The Ministry of Education, Skills and Training* addresses student differences by:

- ensuring that curriculum and education policies for diverse learners reflect the principles of learning;

- developing education policy that focuses on success for all students, removes barriers to quality education, and avoids separation of students;
- providing provincial curriculum that is relevant to diverse students' needs and that reflects realistic expectations of what students should know and be able to do as they progress through school;
- ensuring that schools are aware of a variety of effective educational strategies and practices; and
- assisting in the implementation of inclusive education programs.
- informing parents and students about the criteria used to group students in schools, and about any implications related to graduation; and
- consulting parents about their child's attendance, behaviour, and progress in school, including information about the plan for further development when the student requires additional time and/or assistance to meet the expected learning outcomes for a course, subject, or grade.

### **Assessment and Evaluation Strategies**

*School Districts and Schools* address student differences by:

- adapting learning resources, teaching strategies and the amount of instructional time to help students achieve the provincial learning outcomes;
- giving students opportunities to succeed on an adapted program before modifying curriculum—matching programming or placement to individual needs;
- working closely with ministries and community agencies to provide integrated service delivery for students at risk;
- grouping students as appropriate for instruction, but avoiding practices that separate students by ability on a permanent basis (avoiding “dead-end” courses);
- consulting with parents about opportunities for community-based strategies to help students who have problems achieving in the standard school setting, or about opportunities for students to receive alternate programming;

Prescribed learning outcomes provide the basis for the development of learning activities and assessment and evaluation strategies. It is important to remember that it is the learning outcomes, not the practice activities or example topics, which are prescribed, and on which students should be evaluated.

Students benefit most when evaluation is criterion-referenced and is provided on a regular, ongoing basis. In criterion-referenced evaluation, a student's performance is compared to established criteria (prescribed learning outcomes) rather than to the performance of other students.

The new Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) provide teachers with information about how to use criterion-referenced evaluation. Students, particularly students with learning differences, are more successful when:

- they are involved in establishing criteria and levels of performance for the unit and activity. (In this way they understand what is expected of them.)
- they participate in learning activities that allow them to practice the skills and acquire required knowledge.

(Practice exercises help students meet the criteria and achieve the expected level of performance. Results from practice exercises support the student's learning, but should not contribute to the term evaluation or final grade).

- they are given opportunities to represent their learning in a variety of ways. (Assessment data can be collected through tests, teacher observations, conferences, student self-assessments, written assignments, portfolios, and performance tasks.)
- evaluation of their performance is based on the assessment data collected and is compared to the established criteria.

## KEY QUESTIONS

This document builds on feedback received on the earlier discussion paper (*Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences: A Working Paper*, November 1995), and is designed to broaden the discussion on six important issues. The ministry requires information to make policy decisions about four of the issues (common curriculum K-10, Grade 11 and 12 provincial course options, curriculum packaging, and reporting and credentialling). The other two issues (teaching strategies; systemic issues) have implications for implementation support at the district and school level.

It would be appreciated if you could provide suggestions about the key issues identified on the following pages as they relate to the assumptions and principles of learning. You are welcome to provide comments on any related issues which you feel are important.

## 1. Common Curriculum K-10

**Assumption:** The educational needs of all students, with the exception of some students with specific special needs, can be met through a common provincial curriculum K-10, provided the students are motivated to learn and teaching methods, learning resources, sequencing, and the amount of time allocated to a subject are adapted when necessary.

**Issue:** The current practice of having different provincial pathways in mathematics for grades 9 and 10 may be seen as inconsistent with the above assumption.

Please comment on the appropriateness of different provincial pathways in mathematics (Principles of Mathematics 9 and 10, Applications of Mathematics 9 and 10, Mathematics 9A and 10A).

## 2. Grade 11 and 12 Provincial Course Options

**Assumption:** All students, with the exception of some students with specific special needs, can achieve the learning outcomes prescribed in the provincial curriculum and can attain a graduation diploma, provided the students are motivated to learn and teaching methods, learning resources, sequencing, and the amount of time allocated to a subject are adapted when necessary.

**Issue:** Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) for Principles of Mathematics 11 and 12, Applications of Mathematics 11 and 12, English 11 and 12, and Technical and Professional Communications 12 were designed to accommodate student differences.

Please comment on the extent to which you expect the Grade 11 and 12 IRPs will accommodate student differences. Do you think there will be a need for Communications 11 and 12 and

Mathematics 11A to continue to be available as courses which will satisfy graduation requirements?

### 3. Curriculum Packaging

**Principle:** People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates.

**Issue:** Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) identify learning outcomes by grade cluster for K to Grade 3 (K-1, 2-3) and by grade for grades 4 to 12. The set of learning outcomes in each IRP includes the knowledge, enduring ideas, issues, concepts, skills, and attitudes for the subject.

Is it important to recognize that some students cannot achieve the learning outcomes in the sequence and grade specified in the provincial curriculum? If so, what process should be used for these students, if they require some of the material in IRPs to be repackaged?

### 4. Reporting and Credentialling

**Assumption:** Students are most successful when evaluation identifies strengths, provides information to assist in planning and continued learning, and provides opportunities to promote the learning rather than just rendering final judgments.

**Aim:** *The Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan* (September 1994) states that the aim of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 program is for all students to graduate with a sound education that is relevant to their lives.

**Issues:**

a) The current reporting policy (Student Progress Report Order: MO 191/94) indicates that student progress reports must be written in relation to the prescribed learning outcomes set out in the provincial curriculum. In grades 4

to 12, letter grades are to be used according to the requirements.

Please comment specifically on the appropriateness of this policy for students who are unable to demonstrate their learning in relation to the prescribed learning outcomes (but are not special needs students and are not receiving ESL services).

b) In grades 4-7, when a student is making progress but it has been determined that additional time is required to meet the expected learning outcomes, an *IP* (In Progress) letter grade is assigned and a written plan is developed in accordance with the requirements. Use of *IP* is optional for grades 8-12 in 1996/97. *IP* was designed to be a tool or strategy for providing a more positive experience for students who haven't been successful.

What might be some other approaches to meet these students' needs? What are some challenges and successful strategies related to the use of the *IP* letter grade?

c) IRPs provide information about ways to use criterion-referenced evaluation. The IRPs suggest that students benefit most when teachers use criterion-referenced evaluation, in which a student's performance is compared to established criteria (prescribed learning outcomes), rather than to the performance of other students.

What additional information would assist teachers to use criterion-referenced evaluation more effectively?

- d) Does the current system for issuing credentials meet all students' needs?<sup>2</sup>

If not, comment on possible changes.

## 5. Teaching Strategies

**Assumption:** Appropriate instruction, and early intervention to deal with students' learning difficulties, are more successful than responding to accumulated deficits by modifying the prescribed learning outcomes at a later date.

**Issue:** It is important to give students opportunities to succeed in an adapted program before modifying curriculum—matching programming or placement to individual needs.

Which teaching strategies have you found to be particularly effective in helping students to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes?

## 6. Systemic Issues

**Assumption:** Significant improvement in meeting student learning needs may be achieved through better utilization of existing resources and strategies (what we have and know).

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<sup>2</sup> -All Grade 12 students receive a Transcript of Grades, which is an official record of all the courses a student has successfully completed in grades 11 and 12. It lists the credits earned and indicates achievement levels and completion dates. It also states whether or not provincial requirements for graduation have been met. It provides prospective employers and post-secondary institutions with relevant information about students' accomplishments.

-All students who have met the goals stated in their Student Learning Plans are awarded a Provincial School Completion Certificate. This is a statement of personal achievement and reflects the goals a student has accomplished in grades 11 and 12.

-Students who successfully complete the prescribed provincial graduation requirements are awarded a Dogwood Diploma. These requirements reflect society's expectations for secondary school graduates.

## Issues:

- What are some systemic barriers to implementing the vision and guiding principles on pages 2 and 3 of this paper, and how could they be addressed?
- What do you see as the next steps in advancing this direction document? What aspects would you like to see included in a policy framework? What timelines for implementation would be most appropriate?

## 7. Other Issues Related to Student Differences

- Please feel free to comment on issues related to student differences, which may not have been addressed in the key questions.

## APPENDIX I: Background

### A. Research Base

A research paper was used as a starting point for development of *Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences* (November 1995). The research paper was updated to facilitate the development of this direction document.

If you would like a copy of the research paper, *Different Abilities in the Classroom: A Selected Review of the Literature and Current Practice—A Working Draft* (September 1996), please contact:

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### B. Summary of Responses to *Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences—A Working Paper* (November 1995)

#### **What was the purpose of *Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences—A Working Paper* (November 1995)?**

The purpose of the paper was to gather information about how school districts are responding to the needs of students who do not fall into the categories of special needs or ESL, but who continue to have serious difficulties attaining learning outcomes prescribed in the provincial curriculum. The paper was not designed as a policy proposal, but as a starting point for discussion and planning about issues related to student differences and the use of modified curriculum.

Responses to the paper contributed to planning for broader consultation about the issues.

#### **How many responses were received?**

Eighty responses were received: 69 from school districts and 11 from organizations. Some of the responses were individual while others were collective responses representing much larger populations of teacher/administrator teams. Thus, the response rate from districts was actually larger than numbers would indicate. The responses came from assistant superintendents, superintendents, district staff, individual teachers, teacher groups, specialist groups, community organizations, and parent groups.

#### **Who are the students following modified curriculum?**

They may be students who have difficulty learning because of social, emotional, behavioural, health, or developmental problems that become barriers to participation and success. They may have none of these problems, but simply find school un motivating. They may be in regular classrooms but following programs designated as Minimum Essentials or they may be grouped together with other low-achieving or special needs students in separate classrooms. They may be in alternate schools, on pre-employment programs, following Pathfinder or New Start programs, receiving learning assistance services, or receiving some kind of one-to-one assistance.

## **Do we know how many students are following a modified curriculum?**

Modified courses are not provincially authorized courses and school districts are therefore not required to report the numbers of students enrolled. The ministry does collect data on the number of students enrolled each year in Mathematics 11A, Communications 11, and Communications 12, which are provincial courses designed to address the needs of students who may have difficulties with regular Mathematics 11 and English 11/12. In 1995/96, 1,942 students were enrolled in Mathematics 11A; 4,296 in Communications 11; and 3,534 in Communications 12.

To try to estimate how many students follow curriculum which has been modified at the school level, the paper *Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences: A Working Paper* asked respondents to estimate percentages, excluding students with special needs and those receiving ESL services.

## **What are the findings of the working paper?**

Responses to the working paper were reviewed and analyzed according to school district, level (district, elementary, secondary), and respondent (elementary teacher, secondary teacher, district staff, elementary administrator, secondary administrator, parents, organizations). A variety of responses was received in each category.

Overall, however, two different philosophical views on the issue emerged. One viewpoint is that the vast majority of students are able to demonstrate at least satisfactory performance in relation to expected learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade. The focus is on teachers establishing criteria based on the expected learning outcomes and then varying instructional and assessment strategies,

materials, and time allocations to assist students to achieve at their optimum level.

The other viewpoint is that many students are unable to meet teachers' standards by achieving the level expected on class assignments and tests, so the students should be in a modified course. The focus here is on changing or deleting some of the provincial learning outcomes so that students can achieve more success. In these cases, respondents are concerned about increasing relevance for students and improving students' self-esteem. They worry that students will become frustrated in regular courses, and will be at risk of dropping out. Many respondents indicate that students who are following a modified curriculum should receive letter grades, based on their achievement of individual objectives.

## **Question 1—What works?**

Respondents to the working paper were asked to identify the strategies they considered to be most successful in dealing with students who are experiencing difficulties.

- There was support for Learning Assistance, parental involvement, adjusting teaching strategies, team teaching, modifying courses where necessary, courses such as Math 9A—11A, and Communications 11/12, using resource rooms, computer-assisted learning, one-to-one help and small ability-groupings for specific purposes, peer tutoring, and having specialists to assess learning difficulties and provide ongoing evaluation. Many pointed out the cost implications of providing this kind of support.

- Some suggested an individualized learning approach within regular classes rather than modified courses.
- There were some comments about the need to clarify how to use the *IP* (In Progress) letter grade, and some comments that *IP* is useful for very specific problems (particularly in elementary programs) and in situations where there is strong parental support.

### **Question 2—What are the inservice needs?**

Respondents indicated that more inservice is needed in the areas of understanding and planning for student differences, adapting teaching strategies, modifying lessons rather than the whole curriculum, writing IEPs, and dealing with different levels of ability within a single classroom.

### **Question 3—What should be done?**

The respondents were asked what they felt should be done to help students who are not achieving the provincial learning outcomes.

- Of the various options suggested for dealing with students who are not achieving the expected learning outcomes, the option of having modified courses with modified learning outcomes was the preferred one, especially at the grades 8-10 level. Supporters of this option emphasized the need for clear reporting to parents and favoured the use of letter grades. Many also recommended having adjusted school-leaving certificates for these students.
- Next in popularity was the option of using condensed IEPs with the intention of returning students to the regular curriculum.
- Some respondents stated that modified courses are a fact of life in their schools

and that they wished to be allowed to retain the practice.

- Many respondents supported retaining Communications 11/12 and Math 9A, 10A, and 11A. These courses were considered essential for certain students to successfully complete their programs and obtain a Dogwood certificate.

Note: At the time of responding, individuals would not have had time to become familiar with the English 11 and 12 IRP, Technical and Professional Communications 12, or the Mathematics 11 and 12 IRP.

- There was little support for retention or repetition of grades or courses or for extending the time for using the *IP* letter grade for students.
- There was strong support for giving all students letter grades, including students on modified courses and students with special needs on IEPs, and explaining to parents exactly what course structure their children are following. Several commented that having a blank space on a report card where other children had letter grades was a painful experience for a child.

### **Question 4—How many students are following a modified curriculum?**

Most respondents did not provide answers to this question. Of those that did, the estimates ranged from 0-73 per cent. The responses indicated that the practice of modifying curriculum varies widely. The most common response was 20-25 per cent. Many respondents commented on the question but did not provide an estimate. Elementary schools often adapt teaching strategies and time allotments to suit particular needs. Modified courses are frequently offered in grades 8 to 10.

Labels such as Math 8X or English 9ME are sometimes used to denote modified courses. Schools in some districts reported no need to modify courses at all, while some others in less economically advantaged areas or in inner-city regions commented that they could well provide some form of program modification to just about everybody.

Respondents indicated that without provincial course options such as Mathematics 11A and Communications 11 and 12, more students would be forced to follow locally developed modified courses in grades 11 and 12, and would not satisfy the requirements for a Dogwood Diploma. Some respondents indicated that provincial courses at the Grade 9 and 10 level (e.g., English, Science) are more difficult than some provincial course options at the Grade 11 and 12 level (e.g., Communications 11/12, Science and Technology 11) and indicated that this results in the need for modification in grades 9 and 10.

#### **Other Recurring Themes:**

- there was considerable recognition of the seriousness of the issue as well as support for the discussion paper and the process of consultation;
- some respondents urged that caution be used in issuing policy on modified curriculum; some indicated the ministry should not issue policy on modified curriculum but should leave the decision up to schools; and some indicated they would welcome policy from the ministry to clear up confusion;
- some respondents indicated that teachers need more time to do paperwork and adapt to change;
- some respondents suggested that the ministry should review prescribed learning outcomes to determine if they are appropriate for the majority of students;

- some respondents recommended IRP learning outcomes should be written to reflect different learning levels (e.g., core, adapted/modified, enriched);
- many respondents indicated the ministry should clarify the use of the *IP* (In Progress) letter grade; and
- some respondents said the current system places too much emphasis on organizational needs and not enough on the needs of the individual child.

## APPENDIX II: Acknowledgments

Many people contributed their expertise to this document. The Ministry of Education, Skills and Training would like to thank all who participated in the process, including ministry personnel and our partners in education.

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The following ministry branches are involved in the working group on Modified Curriculum and Individual Differences, and liaise with other branches about key issues: Policy, Field Services, Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, and Special Education.

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