

MEMORANDUM

TO: Executive Members
FROM: Gail Bannister-Clarke, Vice-President
DATE: April 25, 2019
RE: Special Education Contained Classroom Teachers Focus Group

In March of 2019, the PETL Local conducted focus groups with Special Education teachers to examine various areas of improvement to enhance the working conditions of our members.

Facilitators:

Gail Bannister-Clarke and Katelyn Marciniak

Participants

Participants had a wide range of positions:

PJ DD/ASD, Intermediate DD/ASD x2, Intermediate DD x2, PJ DD medically fragile x2, Primary Interval, Primary/Junior intensive support, PJ GLD, IGLD, PJ ASD, JI COM, PTP

Participants shared their experiences and views on various theme based questions.

1. What supports do you have? (Discuss what admin support looks like, professional judgment, parent involvement/concerns, TAs- do you have them? Are they enough? Discuss issues with relationship?)

Board Level Support

Members felt that SERTs, Itinerants, and board personnel were knowledgeable. Because they had a huge case load, it was challenging for them to meet the demands. Receiving support meant an increased work load on the classroom teacher as there were many forms to complete. Instructional time is not given to complete the forms. Meeting with board personnel is also done during lunch. Some of the strategies like “first/then”, work but aren’t sufficient for the day to day issues. Increased communication is needed regarding IPRC dates. Teachers aren’t consistently advised of the dates of IPRCs. Coordinating schedules for case conferences and meetings can be challenging as the teacher tries to coordinate various individuals’ schedules. Lastly, many of the senior staff in the board’s special education department had changed over the last few years, and this brought additional challenges.

In School Support

Because the classroom teacher “knows” their students, they were often called while on planning times and nutritional/lunch breaks to support students who were experiencing difficulties. Members shared that it can feel like planning time isn’t self-directed due to various administrative duties they must complete. Although many

principals were supportive, many don't have the experience needed to support teachers through the challenges that arise in a contained classroom. Administrators have Spec Ed training, but they may not have taught a contained class and therefore didn't have the experience needed to truly support the contained classroom teacher. There was often a disconnect between the advice given by the ISSP teacher and the principal and in most of their schools, the ISSP teacher primarily supports the regular classroom teacher and not contained classroom teachers.

Supervision Duty

Members spoke of the challenges of having supervision duties that are unrelated to the contained classroom. Because of the needs of the students, they often find themselves doing extra supervision because they are called before the instructional day to meet their students at the bus or the end of the day. If a crisis occurs during break times, they are called to assist.

TA Relationships/Managing other adults

Managing the relationships of the adults in the room can be challenging. Most conflicts can be resolved with better communication, but conversations take time. TAs are a great support and a central part of the program. They work hourly which can be challenging because it's hard to meet and plan together. It is also challenging managing the relationship between the teacher and TAs. Sometimes there are multiple adults in the room. Although teachers aren't the TA's supervisor, the teacher directs the program. Trying to balance giving direction to TAs in order to run an effective program, while not supervising the TA's behaviour, is difficult and at times causes tension between the teacher and the TAs.

2. What training did you receive for this position (Is it sufficient? Do you get on-going training? Board PD?)

Board Level PD

Much of the PD given by the board isn't specific to the work they do. Not all teachers are trained in SIS. There was debate about the positives and negatives to having that access.

Although all teachers in the contained classroom had Spec Ed. 1, and some have their Specialist, they didn't feel there was adequate training to do the job. AQs aren't consistent from school to school and are designed to meet the needs of high school as well as elementary teachers even though the actual classroom programs are very different. Often principals attend the PD when it would be beneficial for the teacher to attend. Many times teachers feel isolated and overworked as they have to program specifically for each child. The PD where they get to meet in groups specific to the identifications they deal with is very enriching, but isn't offered enough.

Fail to Fills

TA unfilled jobs get supported by Lunchroom Supervisors (LRS). LRSs are not trained to handle the lifting needed nor are they trained to handle the behaviours of the students. TAs are often pulled to support mainstream students. Teacher and TA burnout is high due to the increased stress and workload of the unfilled jobs.

Planning time coverage

Planning time teachers often don't feel equipped to manage or program for the contained classroom. The homeroom teacher may be asked to plan for the PT teacher when this is not the homeroom teacher's job. There were concerns shared that sometimes placing teachers in the contained classroom may be used as a way to get a teacher to leave the school when the teacher hasn't expressed a desire to teach the contained class. Because

the job is so demanding in the contained classroom, teachers may burn out, but are not given the opportunity to teach in another area because they get labeled as the “spec ed teacher” or no one else wants the job.

Is release time given for IEP writing? SIP claims?

Release time is not given to write IEPs or SIP claims. ISSP teachers are able to cancel their classes to create IEPs but contained classroom teachers are not able to cancel classes yet have to write in-depth IEPs. ISSP support is often not allocated to contained classroom teachers. There are also various technical issues with the computer program used to write IEPs.

3. Tell us about any HS concerns/violence/behaviours that occur in the classroom and how it is addressed. Do you have safety plans? Are reassessments of risks completed? Who creates safety plans? Created in timely manner?

There were a variety of approaches for writing safety plans. Some wrote them on their own, with support, and others provided no input at all to writing the safety plan. Site based CPI training is inconsistent in delivery from site to site. Competing rights and needs of the student can be challenging. Violence was a huge issue and stressor for the classroom teacher.

4. How can the PETL support/advocate for you?

- Advocate for release time for SIP claims
- Administrators to have experience with contained classes
- Spec Ed committee at the local. Could a released officer have a Spec Ed focus? Maybe assign a VP for contained classes, so it's someone with better understanding/perspective of the issues
- New teachers need to be educated on their rights
- Workshops to address the rights and responsibilities of the teacher
- Hard cap for classes for staff/student ratios for safety - don't pull TAs
- Release time for paperwork
- Empathy from Administrators
- Teachers need to know when to call the Local (Challenging to balance the need for support with not wanting to get your principal in “trouble” because they are doing the best they can to be supportive
- ½ day per month would be amazing for meetings/collaborations