

# **PUSHED OUT:**

## **The Harmful Effects of Partial Day Schooling**

*February 2025*

**National Survey  
and Report**



This survey and report are a joint initiative of Inclusive Education Canada and Inclusion Canada.





[Inclusive Education Canada](#) (IEC) is an initiative of Inclusion Canada that aims to ensure that individuals with intellectual disabilities are fully included in educational settings from early childhood to post-secondary levels. IEC connects a network of experts who promote quality inclusive education by collaborating with families, teachers, school districts, parent groups, and education ministries.

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[Inclusion Canada](#) is a national federation of people with intellectual disabilities, their families, allies, and organizations working to advance their full inclusion and human rights. It leads the way in building an inclusive nation by strengthening families, defending rights, and transforming communities into places where everyone belongs.

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Thanks to members of the Inclusive Education Canada Network of Associates who have assisted us with this project.

## **Summary of Report on Partial Day Attendance Practices and Their Effects on Students with Disabilities and Their Families**

This report underscores the significant challenges faced by students with disabilities and their families due to partial day school attendance practices. “Partial day” means repeatedly dismissing children from school with no access to education. Families often feel overwhelmed as they navigate advocating for their children’s inclusive education. It ranges from managing urgent childcare when partial days occur unexpectedly, repeatedly taking time from work, or giving up their jobs altogether to support their child at home when they should be in school.

The report reinforces the critical need to address these systemic barriers to support inclusive education, including adequate support outside of school hours and the challenge of navigating these support systems. It emphasizes the shared responsibility of families and advocacy organizations, where they exist, to challenge partial days and advocate for inclusive environments. It also highlights the onus on schools, school divisions, and governments to minimize this practice, including having resources and protocols to support full days. By combining individual advocacy with systemic action and government responsibility, these groups can work toward ensuring all children receive equitable education and opportunities.

The report acknowledges families' feelings of being overwhelmed. Collaborative strategies can ensure that families are not alone in their efforts. They do better with support from advocacy organizations and school officials in creating meaningful change. This approach fosters a sense of shared commitment and partnership. It reduces the strain on families to ensure that schools provide the same hours of instruction in an inclusive environment to students with disabilities as they do for every other student.

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## Introduction

In recent years, Inclusion Canada has organized roundtable discussions with federation members to identify the best ways to support inclusive education efforts nationwide. These discussions revealed a troubling trend: students with disabilities often face restrictions on their school attendance. Insights from our members indicate that this “partial day school attendance” issue is becoming increasingly prevalent nationwide. A [recent report](#) released by New Brunswick’s Child and Youth Advocate echoes these concerns.

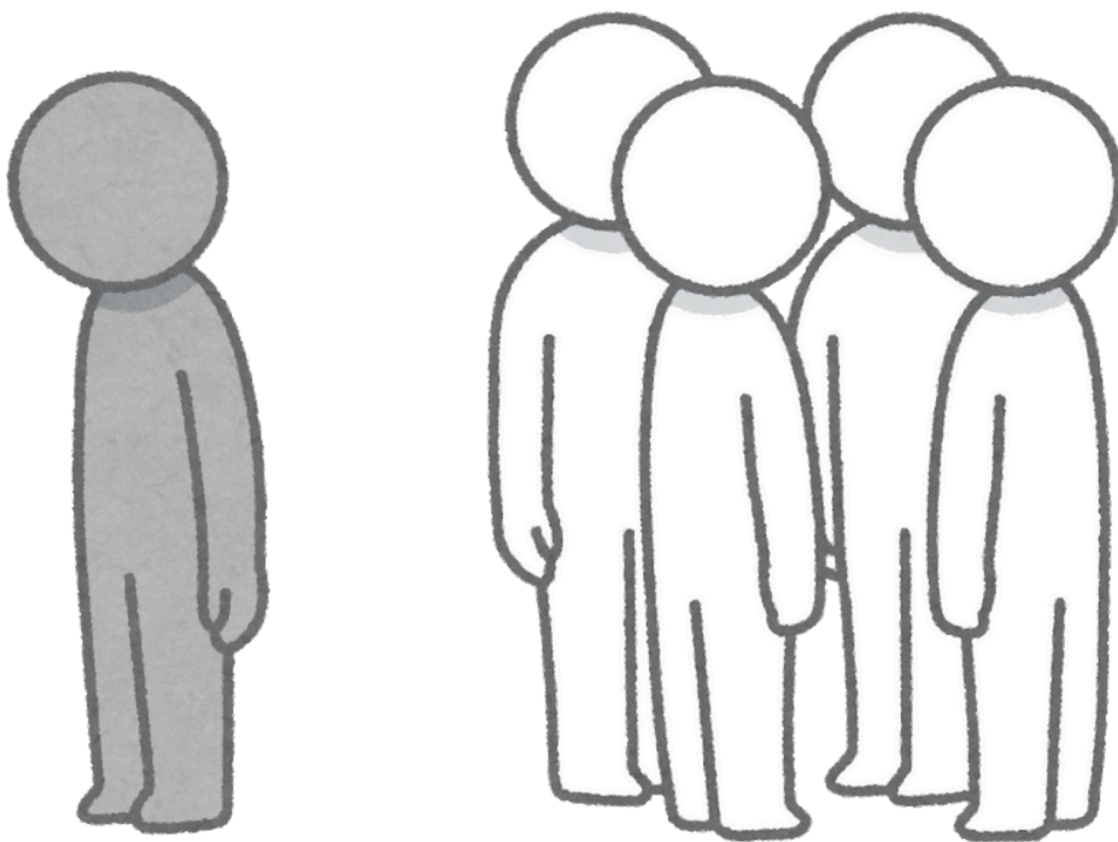
In June 2024, Inclusive Education Canada hosted an in-person and [virtual roundtable](#) to investigate these challenges further. Limited data exists regarding the prevalence and impact of partial days for students with disabilities in Canada. To address this gap, Inclusive Education Canada launched a national survey to uncover the factors driving the use of partial days and their consequences for students and their families.

Partial days are typically imposed by schools, formally or informally, on students with disabilities and students with behavioural challenges whereby these students are denied their right to an education. Inclusion Canada and its federation members have identified this as a growing problem, harming both students and families.

A school imposes formal partial days by informing parents that their child is only welcome at school for as little as one hour a day. This is usually due to the child’s behaviour, a medical condition and in many cases, what the school attributes to a lack of resources. Schools fail to accommodate the student, thus preventing attendance for the prescribed hours of instruction mandated by policy and legislation in each province/territory. Schools also impose unplanned partial days on a sporadic, ad hoc basis, typically demanding that parents immediately pick their child up and remove them from the school. Parents also report that their child cannot participate in school-organized field trips, social events and other activities outside regular school hours. Some schools suspend students repeatedly on an informal basis contrary to provincial/territorial policy and legislation.

Whether formally or informally imposed, exclusion often continues for inordinate periods with no readily available resolution for parents or students. Students are thus punished by exclusion due to their disability or learning challenges. They are negatively impacted by the loss of opportunities to learn and participate, as well as the emotional impact of being excluded and blamed. This occurs without any consideration of the impact on the family of having to leave work, quit work, or not be employed.

This report presents our national survey findings, outlines key themes, and proposes a path forward. It is designed to inform and empower families and disability advocates with insights to challenge partial days as a form of systemic exclusion. Educators and policymakers will also find this information valuable in advancing inclusive education practices.



## About the Survey

The survey was developed using SurveyMonkey, an online platform, and made available in both English and French. It remained open for nine weeks, from late May 2024 to early August 2024. Promotion occurred through the networks of Inclusion Canada and Inclusive Education Canada, including newsletters, social media platforms, and outreach via federation members. It should be noted that partial days are defined differently across school districts nationwide and can be informal and formal. When we launched the survey, we left it to families to self-identify whether their child is attending partial days formally or informally and didn't differentiate between situations where a consistent partial day "plan" had been established versus informal or spontaneous partial days, such as situations where parents are called for early pick-ups.

### **The survey consisted of nine open-ended questions focusing on the following topics:**

- Factors leading to the decision to place the student on a partial day school schedule
- Supports or accommodations implemented before reducing the student's school day
- References to the 'student code of conduct' in justifying the decision
- Consideration of 'disability-related behaviour' in the decision-making process
- The student's experience and coping with partial day attendance
- Challenges the parent faced in adjusting family routines
- Observed negative impacts on the student's well-being or behaviour due to reduced attendance
- Whether the school adequately addresses the student's needs during their time at school
- Parental concerns or fears regarding the student's long-term education and social development

The survey concluded with optional demographic questions.

## Who Answered the Survey?

One hundred sixty-four (164) people responded to the survey, representing all provinces and territories except Nunavut, Newfoundland, and Labrador. The lack of participation in these regions remains to be discovered and would require further investigation.

Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Ontario had the highest response rates, while the territories and Atlantic Canada provided the fewest responses. It is still being determined whether this reflects a higher prevalence of partial days in specific regions or whether the survey was distributed more widely in those areas.

Province/Territory	Number of survey responses
Alberta	32
Manitoba	25
British Columbia	23
Ontario	21
Quebec	15
Saskatchewan	14
Prince Edward Island	11
New Brunswick	9
Nova Scotia	6
Yukon	4
Northwest Territories	1



## Nature of the Child’s Disability

The survey asked parents to identify their child’s disability, allowing them to select multiple options. The most commonly reported disabilities included Autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, mental health-related disabilities, and intellectual disabilities.

Initially, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) were not included as response options. However, these options were later added based on feedback from early survey participants.

Disability type	Number of survey responses
autism	111
attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	61
learning disability	55
mental health-related disability	47
intellectual disability	44
physical or mobility disability	11
vision disability	9
“I think my child may have a disability, but they have not been given a label or diagnosis”	5
pain-related disability	4
hearing disability	4
fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)	4

## Survey Demographics and Limitations

Over half of the parents surveyed (57%) indicated their children were enrolled in elementary school. The responses also included preschool-aged children (3%), middle school-aged children (26%), and high school-aged students (11%).

The majority of students in the survey are male (77%). Additionally, 16% are racialized, 13% are Indigenous, and less than 3% are newcomers to Canada.

The survey had several limitations:

- It was published only in English and French.
- It was available exclusively online.
- It was primarily promoted through Inclusion Canada and Inclusive Education Canada networks.

Future research could benefit from expanding data collection methods to include additional languages, formats, and communities. This would help us better understand the intersections between gender, race, disability, and the use of partial days.

## What We Heard in the Survey

We reviewed all open-ended survey responses. Each response was categorized to identify common issues and determine which concerns appeared most frequently. These issues were then organized into six main themes and subcategorized by where the impact lies:

The Student:

- Behaviours at School
- Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being

The Student's Family:

- Family Dynamics
- Financial Implications

Schools and Education Systems:

- Lack of Resources in Schools
- Educational challenges, barriers, and quality

**The following sections will explore each theme in detail.**

## 1) The Student: Behaviours at School

Behavioural issues were the most frequently reported reason for only allowing students to attend school for a partial day. These behaviours included physical actions like hitting and throwing objects, as well as other expressions of distress such as running away, screaming, crying, swearing, and meltdowns (often described by parents as tantrums). Many parents indicated that the disability component and underlying causes of the behaviour were not acknowledged or addressed. Behaviours are a means of communication, and functional communication assessments and proactive positive behaviour support plans are necessary to accommodate students.

— ” —

They said they needed to address his misbehaviour before they could even consider his disability.

— ” —

Parents and students often felt shamed and blamed for these behaviours. Some described a narrative in which their child was viewed as 'choosing' to misbehave or as 'non-compliant.' Ineffective curricula and instruction can contribute to behaviour challenges; these issues do not all reside in the student. While many parents acknowledged that schools and staff wanted to help, they lacked the staffing and training to support their children. Consequently, recommendations from professionals or families to address behaviours were frequently not implemented.

— ” —

The school recommended reduced days due to behaviours they were unable to support due to resource constraints. We also supported the reduced days because the only solution to behaviour challenges was isolation in a "calming room," and he has been hurt during those isolations.

— ” —

Some schools justified implementing partial days by referencing bullying and harassment policies or a student code of conduct. Parents were told the decision was necessary to maintain a safe learning environment for all students.

## 2) The Student: Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Parents responding to the survey expressed significant concerns about the treatment of their children in schools. These concerns include:

- Use of segregated settings
- Use of seclusion rooms
- Threats to contact the police
- Threats to involve child protective services

One parent shared their experience:

— ” —

They wanted me to sign a form that they could contact police or Child & Family Services if there was an 'incident' without calling me first. My child was 8.

— ” —

Some families have reluctantly accepted partial days out of fear for their child's safety and well-being. Others have been left forced to "choose" alternatives such as homeschooling, distance education, or private schools due to experiences of abuse, seclusion, or the sense that their child no longer feels welcome or safe in the school environment. This is a forced choice.

— ” —

I fear for the psychological trauma and damage that he will suffer attending schools in a system that does not want him, cannot tolerate his attendance, and makes him and our family feel unwelcome, unwanted, and like we do not belong.

— ” —

Regardless of whether students remain in school or pursue other options, the effects on their mental health, social isolation, and peer relationships have been profoundly detrimental for many families.

## Social Isolation

The decline in the overall health and mental well-being of children experiencing prolonged isolation or exclusion from school is increasingly evident. Parents report alarming changes, including rapid weight gain, heightened anxiety, and signs of depression, such as extreme loneliness. One of the most troubling trends is the escalation of anxiety and a significant drop in self-esteem. Many children begin to view themselves negatively, believing they are “not good enough” or “bad.”

A parent shared their child’s painful experience of internalizing these feelings, recounting their child’s harmful self-talk:

— ” —

**I am a bad boy. I am a mean boy. I am an idiot. I am stupid.**

— ” —

Children required to leave school early often feel embarrassed and insecure, perceiving themselves as incapable of learning or being “normal.” One parent explained:

— ” —

**My son has internalized the message that he was a bad kid who did bad things.**

— ” —

These harmful messages have lasting effects, causing children to feel unwanted, lonely, and inherently flawed. The exclusionary practices reinforce false beliefs that children do not deserve the same opportunities as their peers.

For some children, social and emotional struggles can escalate into severe behaviours, such as expressions of suicidal thoughts or self-harm. Feelings of confusion about being excluded, paired with a disinterest in school and community activities, exacerbate their emotional turmoil. In some cases, children struggle to process their anger and sadness, which can lead to violent outbursts at home.

Parents describe this impact as devastating, noting that their children have become “a shell of themselves,” losing trust in authority figures and developing a deep fear of school. Another parent explained their child’s perception:

— ” —

He believes he's too bad to be at school.

— ” —

These exclusionary approaches to discipline can embed damaging beliefs about a child's behaviour, fostering negative self-talk, anger, and fear. Without adequate support, these struggles risk manifesting into self-harm.

Exclusion often profoundly and lastingly impacts students. It heightens their anxiety about the future, deepens their emotional pain, and reinforces their fears about their path ahead. As children grapple with rejection and isolation, the resulting emotional burden can significantly hinder their personal growth and overall well-being.

## Peer Relationships

Exclusion significantly intensifies the social isolation that students with disabilities experience, further complicating their ability to develop essential social skills. Limited opportunities for meaningful social interaction deny these students the critical experiences needed to learn how to engage with others and navigate social situations. This exclusion can have long-term impacts, including struggles in building and maintaining relationships in the future. Being excluded from regular school activities often amplifies the sense of being "othered."

— ” —

I can see the alienation and isolation starting at school. The socialization he is missing will put him behind.

— ” —

Many parents share concerns about their child's social development, reporting that their children lack friendships, struggle with social skills, and are often left out of social invitations, such as birthday parties. Students required to arrive late, leave early, or be excluded from group activities may feel scrutinized by peers, leading to feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness, and a sense of being "different" or "weird." One parent noted how their child internalized these experiences as negative, profoundly affecting their self-esteem.

— ” —

The children at recess all see [my son] leave and call to him goodbye and the children will ask me where he is going and why.

— ” —

In some cases, students are only allowed to engage with peers during recess or social events if their behaviour is deemed acceptable, reinforcing the harmful belief that social interaction is a privilege to be earned. Such conditional access to social opportunities deprives students of learning critical social behaviours through interaction. When excluded from field trips, group projects, or other bonding activities, they lose chances to connect with peers and develop trust in others.

The lack of supportive teacher-student relationships further hinders their ability to feel safe and connected within the school environment. As a result, some students with disabilities develop limited social engagement patterns, such as only knowing how to interact one-on-one rather than in group settings. These missed opportunities can compound challenges in developing the social skills needed for healthy, meaningful relationships in the future.



### 3) The Student's Family: Family Dynamics

Families are constantly adjusting, struggling to meet the demands of partial school attendance. Parents often must leave work early or remain on standby to pick up their children, forcing them to adjust their work schedules and daily routines. These disruptions can have serious financial consequences, affecting the family's ability to provide necessities. In some cases, families have considered moving to more affordable areas, including small towns, to manage better repeated early pickups and unexpected calls from the school to come and get their child.

The impact of these challenges extends beyond work lives, affecting personal well-being and family dynamics. Parents spend significant time and energy advocating for better support for their children and navigating the complexities of the educational system. This advocacy is time-consuming and emotionally exhausting, leaving families feeling stretched thin and overwhelmed by additional responsibilities.



*Juggling childcare, advocating for my child, attending countless assessments and meetings, feeling like a failure as a parent, and having difficulty managing my child's emotions. The best support was other families going through similar things.*



The isolation children experience from limited school schedules further exacerbates family strain. Parents report that family dynamics break down under pressure, with increased stress caused by the inability to work full-time and the financial burden of arranging extra support for their children during the hours they should be in school. Many families face difficult choices, such as changing jobs, taking on multiple part-time positions, or quitting work to accommodate their child's irregular school schedule. These adjustments make it incredibly difficult to maintain a stable income.

For some families, these challenges lead to relying on social assistance to make ends meet. Parents often experience heightened levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, which can impact their ability to provide appropriate support for their children. In extreme cases, these emotional struggles have led to physical health issues, such as anxiety, depression or chronic illness. To cope, some parents have turned to medication, including antidepressants and anti-anxiety treatments, to manage their emotional well-being.



— ” —

I've had to regularly explain to my other child why their sibling was being treated unfairly. I had to quit my job to stay home with my son. I have no supports, and my own mental health has gotten worse.

— ” —

## The Search for Childcare and Its Impact

When partial days are used, parents' jobs are at risk, meaning they either must leave work or find childcare during school hours. However, finding reliable and affordable childcare for children unable to attend school has proven to be a significant challenge, further increasing financial strain on families. Not everyone has an extended family able to support them at these times, or the family may not be able to afford private child care. Parents have been forced to make sacrifices, including scaling back or eliminating their other children's activities, to ensure they can support their child with a disability.

As a result, the family dynamic has often shifted, with many parents describing a constant state of chaos and unpredictability. One parent expressed frustration over the school interrupting their workday to bring their child home for lunch because the child was excluded from the school lunch program.

These ongoing disruptions have led to profound exhaustion and emotional strain as families struggle to navigate an educational system that fails to accommodate their children's needs.

— ” —

Childcare was a huge problem, which eventually led to me not being able to keep my job because I'd have to leave at a moments notice. The stress that created was unbearable. I couldn't focus on my job because I was worrying about her and on edge because I didn't know when the phone would ring next.

— ” —

## 4) The Student's Family: Financial Implications

The need to pick up their child early from school has significantly disrupted parents' employment and financial stability. For many families, this has meant quitting their jobs to provide care for a child who should otherwise be in school. The resulting loss of income has been devastating, forcing parents to reduce their working hours, take part-time positions, or take prolonged time off work. Single parents are especially vulnerable financially as they often have fewer options, such as working less or taking extended leaves from work without jeopardizing their employment or even seeking employment in the first place.

The financial strain of caring for a child with a shortened school day has pushed some families to the brink, leading to the loss of savings and financial security. One parent expressed the severity of their situation:

— ” —

We suffer financially due to our child not being able to be in school.

— ” —

This highlights the profound economic consequences of school exclusion, which leaves many families unable to afford necessities and deepens feelings of isolation and financial insecurity. In some cases, families have been forced to allocate limited resources to pay for support needed at home when their child is not in school due to shortened school days, further increasing their financial burden.

Another parent shared their personal experience navigating this strain:

— ” —

I was a single mother at the time with no local family support. I went on disability leave because I was afraid I'd lose my job, which in the end happened anyways.

— ” —

These stories underscore the ongoing challenges families face. When schools deny their children their right to an entire school day, parents often must request work accommodations, such as reduced hours, to meet the demands. Balancing financial concerns with the demands of supporting a child during the hours they are supposed to be in school has left many families feeling overwhelmed.

The combination of reduced income, mounting expenses, and constant juggling of responsibilities creates a situation in which families struggle to maintain financial stability while ensuring their children's needs are met.

## 5) Schools and Education Systems: Lack of Resources in School

A significant other reason for partial days was the lack of school resources and training to support students. This was often connected to insufficient human resources, such as the need for more educational assistants.

— ” —

The school tells us they do not have the resources to support him - our child wakes up so distressed at the thought of going to school that we either cannot get them to go or determine that they will get sent home anyway, so we decide to keep them home.

— ” —

Some schools attempted to provide support or accommodations before implementing partial days. The most common solution was assigning an educational assistant so the child had one-on-one support. However, parents reported this support was often temporary or removed due to budget constraints.

— ” —

The teacher cannot handle 28 kids when mine needed the most help. He would start hurting himself when frustrated. Eventually, he got an Educational Assistant, which has been since taken away due to budget cuts.

— ” —

Additional supports mentioned in the survey included:

- Providing a "safe space" for the student in crisis or isolating the student while at school
- Offering frequent breaks during the school day
- Engaging professionals such as a psychologist, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist, counsellor, or behaviour interventionist
- Using a sensory room or sensory equipment

The issue of isolation was also raised by parents in the survey responses as something that was attempted before partial days were implemented. Some families described providing a 'safe space,' but it was unclear whether students had the choice to use this space or were placed there. Other families reported schools placing their children in or confining their children to seclusion rooms, segregated classrooms, and separate lunch and recess periods.

— ” —

Even when in school at 2 hours per day, they must work in isolation in a makeshift work area in a storage closet with no windows.

— ” —

Schools sometimes use psychologists, occupational therapists, or speech-language pathologists to address student needs. However, parents frequently report paying out-of-pocket for these services when schools lack funding. Students often go without support if neither the school nor the family can access these resources.

Sensory rooms or sensory equipment, such as stationary bikes or exercise balls, were also mentioned as strategies. A few parents noted that seclusion rooms had been converted into sensory rooms. However, the implementation of sensory support varied, ranging from the classroom to isolated spaces.

— ” —

We removed him from school since the Occupational Therapist recommended he be placed alone in the sensory room the entire day. He had developed a fear of going to school. Our son hid under the bus to escape going into school.

— ” —

Many respondents reported that partial days were introduced as a temporary measure. However, promises to gradually extend the school day often went unfulfilled. The lack of sufficient resources was a primary factor in maintaining partial days. While some parents expressed acceptance of partial days, mainly due to how their child was negatively treated at school, others indicated it was presented as the only option.

## 6) Schools and School Systems: Educational Challenges, Barriers, and Quality

Survey responses highlighted several barriers that contributed to schools implementing partial days. Many mentioned that an overstimulating school environment is a common barrier, leading to dysregulation in children, a response not inherent to their nature. Parents also reported that their children struggled to meet school expectations or requirements due to inadequate support.

— ” —

The administration specifically referenced that they expect a 9-year-old to be able to act appropriately for their age without acknowledging that his disability precludes him from doing exactly that.

— ” —

Parents explained how dysregulation, not inherent to the student but rather a result of an unsupportive environment, made accessing a quality education challenging for their children. In many cases, dysregulation led to early school pickup calls, which often became a recurring pattern that resulted in implementing partial days.

Some families noted that they continued receiving calls for early pickup, even after formalized partial days were implemented. Over time, this environment caused some students to avoid school altogether.

— ” —

She used to love school, and now, (with) the stress of that environment, she wants to stay home. She becomes dysregulated right before going to school or becomes dysregulated within 15 minutes of being at school.

— ” —

## Challenges in Traditional School Environments

Many parents reported that traditional school environments often fail to accommodate or support students with diverse abilities, focusing primarily on compliance rather than learning. Students with disabilities must have the same access to learning as other students, which could mean learning at a different pace or following a modified curriculum. This emphasis on behaviour management over academics has had a significant negative impact on children's education. It has lasting effects on immediate learning, creating gaps that compound in subsequent grades.

— ” —

Schools have yet to update from their compliance behavioural driven expectations and models of learning to ones that are neurodiverse affirming and connection based.

— ” —

Due to limited time at school, or no time at all, students with disabilities experience significant gaps in their learning as they are not granted the same access. This has a discriminatory and harmful effect. For some students, these disruptions have had a long-term impact. One parent shared a particularly distressing case where their child "stopped speaking," highlighting the emotional and academic toll this situation can cause.

In addition to being excluded from the school environment, some parents noted that their children were further impacted by the school's refusal to provide work for home learning. This lack of support prevented students from accessing classroom instruction and the activities and experiences that promote personal growth in the school environment. Parents emphasized that failing to provide these opportunities contributed to even more marginalization.

— ” —

At age 12, she has yet to experience school as a positive and nurturing learning environment, which is not only sad but also puts her and others in her position at huge risk for the rest of their lives.

— ” —

## Lack of Opportunities to Take Advantage of All Aspects of School Life

In addition to academic exclusion, many students with disabilities are denied access to vital school activities such as field trips, sports teams, clubs, and extracurricular programs. These activities are crucial for fostering well-rounded skills beyond the classroom and fundamental to an appropriate education.

— ” —

My son also can't join the class on field trips and outings unless I follow the bus and stay nearby if they are out of our community. They are afraid he will act up on the bus although he never has.

— ” —

Exclusion from these activities deprives students of meaningful learning and development, reinforces feelings of isolation, impacts emotional well-being, and limits their potential to discover strengths and passions outside academics.

— ” —

My child did suffer - he was kept from school outings, was not able to be in school concerts or even school pictures. He lost friendships that were very difficult to make in the first place. Because of missing so much time he got very behind in academics.

— ” —

## Lack of Support for Educators and Paraprofessionals

Parents highlighted a significant challenge as the lack of support and resources available in schools for students with disabilities. Educators and paraprofessionals need training in strong inclusive educational practices and access to professionals such as resource teachers, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, behaviour mentors, and others. The lack of support and resources often results in schools being unable to provide the necessary support, leading to students being removed from the classroom altogether.



The school does their best - I truly feel lucky in the support we receive from them. The biggest hurdle is the lack of funding to adequately train and staff the classrooms for the support these kids need to succeed. There continue to be funding cuts while the number of children needing support only grows.



The issue is exacerbated by teachers and educational assistants (EAs) who, due to insufficient training, struggle to support students with disabilities effectively. As a result, these students may receive:

- No education at all, or
- Instruction that is not suited to their needs.

Sometimes, educators refuse to work with students who demonstrate challenging behaviours. They fail to use accommodations or address the lack of support and resources. Parents informed us that educators might also recommend transferring students to a segregated class or even a segregated school.



My son was sent to a specialized school, so he is separated from the community. The board refuses to return (include) him to the community's regular classroom and provide support and accommodations there.



## Transition Challenges

Another key issue was the lack of substantive transition planning when students transition between elementary, middle, and high school. Parents explained that a child's needs are often not communicated to the next teacher, leaving educators unprepared to offer the appropriate support.



## What This Information Means for Families

The survey results highlight the fact that students with disabilities across Canada, are (increasingly) being denied their right to education and inclusion, by being forced to have shorter school days than their peers without disabilities, despite detrimental effects on them and their families. and their families.

In Canada, education issues are often approached through the lens of human rights. While this approach, after decades of advocacy, finally resulted in children with disabilities acquiring a right to a free and public education; it has been limited beyond that achievement. The right to education is not the concern. Instead, it is the right to inclusive education, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Canada ratified in 2010.

Article 24 of the CRPD and its corresponding General Comment 4 states, among other key principles, the following:

States Parties shall ensure that:

- Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
- Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
- Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
- Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
- Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

One of the challenges in Canada is that education and educational rights are not the Federal government's responsibility but are under the jurisdiction of the thirteen individual provincial and territorial governments. As such, securing and advancing rights, particularly those of students with disabilities, which cuts across every dimension of human identity, including race, ethnicity, and gender, requires families, as the frontline advocates, to address systemic educational discrimination and the right to an inclusive education within the context of 13 governments.

The primary unresolved rights issue is the right of children with disabilities to an inclusive education and the end to discriminatory practice of partial days, and segregating and congregating students with disabilities in separate schools or classrooms. The majority of Canadian students with disabilities are denied their right to an inclusive education, thus subject to discrimination, exclusion and devaluation (day after day) through the entirety of their school years.

The principles of equality—recognizing the inherent and equal worth of every student—and equity—allocating resources based on individual needs—are not consistently upheld across Canadian schools and school districts. Adherence to these fundamental Canadian principles are essential to ensuring students with intellectual disabilities of their right to a high quality, inclusive education. It is fundamental to know, to the very depths of their being, that every school day is one of belonging, learning and being valued and for parents to know schools honour and welcome their responsibility to provide a full day of schooling to each and every child.

## The Legal Landscape

There are Supreme Court Cases, many human rights tribunal decisions, and Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms that lay out the clear legal obligations of schools and school systems to provide an inclusive, quality education for students with disabilities on an equal basis with others. As emphasized in "A Policy of Giving Up: How New Brunswick Schools Illegally Stopped Educating Hundreds of Children, [A Policy of Giving Up: How New Brunswick Schools Illegally Stopped Educating Hundreds of Children and Why Government Needs to Protect Vulnerable Children](#)", governments need to abide by these legal obligations and by their own legislation, by holding school districts accountable. When governments ignore laws and fail to ensure the rights of any child on the basis of disability and those of their parents, they undermine the rights of everyone.

## We define inclusive education as follows:

Inclusive education recognizes and celebrates the diversity and equal value of all students. Students are welcomed at their neighbourhood schools where all learners, regardless of ability or background, participate with age-appropriate peers in a regular classrooms and all the schools' common learning environments (e.g. gyms, libraries, playgrounds, field trips etc) so they can succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. Students and their teachers are provided the necessary support and resources to succeed, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to their local school community. A quality inclusive education serves as a foundation for essential life opportunities, including:

- Building meaningful friendships, relationships, and community;
- Developing skills and interests;
- Pursuing a career and achieving financial security;
- Nurturing self-esteem, confidence, and independence;
- Teaching and celebrating diversity, leading to a more inclusive society;
- Ensuring equal access to a beneficial quality of life.

Students with a disability are entitled to an education that offers these opportunities, no different than any student without a disability. However, partial days deny students this right, limiting their ability to thrive academically, socially, and personally; doing so in the most critical years of human development. Parents, feel powerless against a system that does not value and embrace their child, as it does other children. The time for systemic change is now, before one more child's dreams of a promising future are limited by exclusion in any form.

— ” —

I see the effects cascading as he gets older and am afraid he will hit a point that he can never catch up and his adult life and career options will be seriously curtailed - and his ability to be a member of the community with a satisfying life. It keeps me up at night.

— ” —



## Turning Insights into Action

Addressing the harmful impact of partial day school attendance on students with disabilities requires urgent, targeted action. It is essential to challenge the misuse of policies such as bullying, harassment, or safety regulations, often cited as justifications for these restrictive schedules. These policies shift responsibility to students with disabilities, diverting attention from the real issues—insufficient support and unmet needs. Advocacy strategies must be tailored to specific provinces/territories and local school districts, recognizing the variations in legislation, policies, and available resources.

Ensuring that inclusion is maintained without compromising safety is also a critical balance to strike, especially when harmful practices like seclusion or unnecessary interventions are involved. At the same time, addressing the significant resource gaps, including the need for adequately trained staff and adequate funding, remains fundamental. Ultimately, families, advocacy organizations and educators must take a stand against systemic exclusion, advocating for comprehensive, equitable education that fully supports students with disabilities by addressing the following:

## **1 Challenging Policies That Justify Partial Day Schedules**

Schools frequently misuse bullying, harassment, or safe school policies to justify partial day practices. This justification shifts responsibility onto students with disabilities while overlooking the root causes of their behaviour and the inadequate support systems students and their teachers require.

## **2 Provincial/Territorial Specific Advocacy Strategies**

Advocating for inclusive education requires families to deal with specific province/territory and local school district policies and systems. Approaches must be tailored to reflect variations in legislation, policies, available supports, and gaps in inclusive education frameworks.

## **3 Balancing Inclusion with Student Safety**

Advocating for inclusion while ensuring students are safe at school can be challenging, especially when harmful practices like seclusion rooms, forced isolation, police intervention, and child protection services are involved. Strategies to address these challenges need to be developed.

## **4 Addressing Resource Gaps in Schools**

The ongoing need for more human resources (e.g., trained staff) and financial resources in schools is a significant barrier to inclusive education. To ensure students with disabilities receive the necessary support strategies to prevent partial day practices, systemic funding and capacity building in individual schools must be strengthened.

## **5 Challenging Systemic Exclusion and Partial Days**

The use of partial days often perpetuates the systemic exclusion of students with disabilities by denying them full access to education. Families, educators, advocacy organizations and local school districts are critical in challenging these practices and pushing for equitable solutions.

## Conclusion

Partial day school attendance practices pose significant challenges for students with disabilities and their families. Families often feel overwhelmed as they advocate for their children’s educational needs, manage the lack of childcare options, and sometimes leave their jobs to provide care. These challenges highlight the critical need for systemic changes to support inclusive education. Individual schools and the education system must address these systemic barriers.

A first step in further supporting families is acknowledging their feelings of being overwhelmed and recognizing the immense strain being placed on them. Inclusion Canada and Inclusive Education Canada will develop a resource to identify strategies to challenge partial days and advocate for inclusive environments.

Ending partial day practices requires a coordinated effort from families, educators, school administrators, policymakers, and advocacy organizations. Schools must commit to removing systemic barriers, ensuring that students with disabilities receive the same instructional time in a common learning environment alongside their peers. Policymakers must prioritize funding, training, and accountability measures to prevent exclusionary practices from being normalized. Most importantly, a cultural shift is needed—one that recognizes inclusive education as a fundamental right, not an option. By holding schools and governments accountable, we can create a system where every child, regardless of ability, is valued, included, and supported in achieving their full potential.



## More Resources

For more information and resources about inclusive education for both parents and educators, please visit the following websites.



[Inclusive Education Canada](#) (IEC) is an initiative of Inclusion Canada that aims to ensure that individuals with intellectual disabilities are fully included in educational settings from early childhood to post-secondary levels.



[Source for Inclusive Education](#) provides foundational, concise and practical information on inclusive education strategies and practices in Canadian schools and classrooms. It is designed to serve teachers, school leaders and parents/families.



[Inclusion Canada](#) is a national federation of people with intellectual disabilities, their families, allies, and organizations working to advance their full inclusion and human rights. It leads the way in building an inclusive nation by strengthening families, defending rights, and transforming communities into places where everyone belongs.