

# SUPPORTING SCHOOLS & ADDRESSING COMPLEXITY



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Introduction	3
Catholic Permeation through Holistic Well-being	3
Conditions for Inclusive Learning	4
A Continuum of Supports and Services	5
Division Supports in Action	6
Cross-Ministry Collaboration and Community Partnerships	23
Early Intervention and Early Years	26
REACH: Intensive Multidisciplinary Support for Complex Needs	27
Conclusion	28

---

# INTRODUCTION

Creating and sustaining optimal learning conditions is foundational to student success, staff well-being, and system coherence. As classroom complexity continues to increase by diverse learning needs, mental health considerations, and evolving social contexts, schools require coordinated, responsive, and proactive supports to ensure environments where every student can belong, learn, and thrive.

This report outlines the conditions, structures, and collaborative practices that support optimal learning conditions across schools and that have been put in place to address complexities. It highlights how inclusive design, multidisciplinary collaboration, and timely access to expertise strengthen classroom environments and reduce barriers to learning. Through intentional alignment of people, processes, and resources, the system is working to ensure that learning conditions are not left to individual classrooms alone but are supported through shared responsibility and collective capacity.

Together, these conditions reflect a commitment to equity, belonging, and excellence, recognizing that when learning environments are predictable, safe, and responsive, both students and staff are better positioned to succeed.

---

## CATHOLIC PERMEATION THROUGH HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

---

Optimal Learning within ECSD is grounded in the belief that we educate the whole person; body, mind, and spirit. When students feel emotionally safe, spiritually nourished, and physically cared for, they are better able to learn, grow, and thrive. Well-being and Catholic spiritual formation are not add-ons but are woven into the fabric of daily school life through a holistic, coordinated approach that supports emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual wellness. Students experience environments that are intentionally designed to be welcoming, inclusive, and calm, where relationships are rooted in trust, dignity, and care. Through intentional faith experiences, reflection, restorative practices, and the explicit teaching and modelling of Catholic virtue such as Faith, students deepen their moral awareness, develop resilience, and grow as discerning believers and seekers. As staff model Gospel values and foster strong partnerships with families, students learn to regulate emotions, resolve conflict, care for one another, and act with empathy and integrity. In this way, well-being becomes the soil in which deep learning takes root, supporting focus, engagement, ethical decision-making, and a sense of purpose, while affirming each learner as a sacred gift who is seen, valued, and loved.

## CONDITIONS FOR INCLUSIVE LEARNING

Increasing classroom complexity requires intentional system conditions that ensure all students and staff experience learning environments that are safe, inclusive, respectful, and responsive to diverse academic, social, emotional, and behavioural needs.

Classrooms reflect increasing learner variability including differences in academic readiness, well-being, and behaviour, requiring thoughtful and coordinated responses.

To respond to this complexity, Edmonton Catholic Schools has established strong conditions that support inclusive learning environments. A focus on inclusive design and preventative supports reflects the Division's commitment to sustaining student engagement and learning success.

Schools are supported in designing learning environments that anticipate learner variability. Educators and support staff are equipped to plan inclusive classroom structures and instruction using approaches such as:

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Reframing Autism
- The Collaborative Response Model
- Culturally Responsive Teaching

Together, these approaches reduce barriers to participation and support student well-being and academic engagement.

Complementing the focus on inclusive design, Creating Communities of Belonging (CCoB) supports schools in implementing school wide restorative practices, including proactive circles and restorative conferencing. Alongside Positive Behaviour Supports and trauma informed practice, these approaches promote predictable, supportive learning environments that strengthen regulation, relationships, and a sense of belonging.

By centering the voices of students and staff, restorative processes support early identification of emerging concerns and enable proactive, constructive responses. This allows school teams to adjust instruction, classroom supports and learning environments to better respond to student needs while sustaining engagement in learning.



## A CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Across the Division, multidisciplinary teams including inclusive consultants, behaviour specialists, speech-language pathologists and mental health professionals work collaboratively to provide wraparound supports for students experiencing increased challenges.

These coordinated supports strengthen educators' capacity to respond to complexity while maintaining classrooms where students feel safe, supported, and included.

The Integrated Health and Well-Being Framework guides this work, emphasizing shared responsibility, evidence-informed practice, and a tiered continuum of supports (universal, targeted, and individualized) to promote student well-being and learning success.

TIER	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE STRATEGIES
Tier 1 Universal Health Promotion	Promotes well-being, belonging, and readiness for learning for all students and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe, welcoming school environments (Safe &amp; Caring Schools, Communities of Belonging)</li> <li>Mental health promotion and literacy (curriculum resources, PD, shared language)</li> <li>Spiritual well-being practices (daily prayer, faith celebrations, service, reflection)</li> <li>Wellness Champions and leadership messaging</li> <li>Regular movement, physical activity, and predictable routines</li> <li>Comprehensive School Health Framework aligned to school needs</li> <li>Access to Indigenous Learning Services to support Indigenous student leadership</li> </ul>
Tier 2 Targeted Prevention & Skill-Building	Support whole classes with emerging or situational needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom-based mental health and SEL learning</li> <li>Targeted staff PD (trauma-informed, neurodiversity-affirming, regulation strategies)</li> <li>Small-group supports (EBS, OT, SLP, FSLW)</li> <li>Use of Student Mental Health Survey data to guide school level priorities</li> </ul>
Tier 3 Targeted Skill-Building	Provide small-group support within the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) collaboration (MH, OT, FSLW, EBS)</li> <li>Small-group counselling (regulation, grief/loss, anxiety, self-esteem)</li> <li>Self-paced programming (Cardinal Collins Centre)</li> <li>Flexible programming and social work supports for young or expecting parents (Our Lady of Grace)</li> </ul>
Tier 4 Individualized & Coordinated Supports	Provide intensive, individualized support for students with complex needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1:1 mental health counselling (individual sessions, risk assessments)</li> <li>MDT coordination across learning, mental health, behaviour, and family supports</li> <li>Clear referral pathways to Division services and community agencies</li> <li>Support referrals to external specialists (e.g. Recovery Alberta)</li> </ul>

Collectively, these approaches guide responses to behaviour in ways that emphasize accountability, relationship building, and learning rather than punitive responses particularly for students experiencing increased complexity.

Alongside these relational approaches, collaborative school teams engage in proactive planning and access specialized expertise to support diverse learner needs.

At the same time, the Division holds a responsibility to maintain both psychological and physical safety for students and staff, ensuring learning environments remain calm, predictable, and inclusive. As we continue to strengthen partnerships and multidisciplinary collaboration, the Division is better able to design proactive, inclusive responses within classrooms and schools.

This emphasis on inclusive design, anticipating and responding to diverse needs through universal, targeted, and specialized supports, enhances the Division's ability to sustain engagement in learning while fostering environments where all students and staff experience belonging, safety, and the conditions necessary for success. The following sections highlight how this work is enacted across the Division.

## DIVISION SUPPORTS IN ACTION

### One World...One Centre

One World...One Centre (OWOC) plays a critical role in responding to increasing cultural, linguistic, and socio-emotional complexity within classrooms by serving as the primary entry point for newcomer students and families in Edmonton Catholic Schools.

The Centre establishes the first connection between home and school, ensuring that families are welcomed, understood, and supported from the outset of their educational journey. Through comprehensive intake processes, including language assessments aligned with Alberta Education benchmarks and individualized family meetings, OWOC ensures that schools receive the necessary information to respond effectively to each student's learning and settlement needs. This early, intentional intervention reduces barriers to entry, supports appropriate programming, and sets the foundation for student success and belonging.

A key strength of OWOC in addressing classroom complexity is the work of its Intercultural Liaison staff, who provide culturally responsive, relationship-based support both at the Centre and within schools. These staff bridge communication between families and schools by offering interpretation, translation, and cultural brokering, ensuring that parents can actively engage in their child's education regardless of language or background. Their role extends beyond communication to advocacy and system navigation, connecting families to community resources, settlement services, and mental health supports. In doing so, they help address broader social determinants that impact student learning.

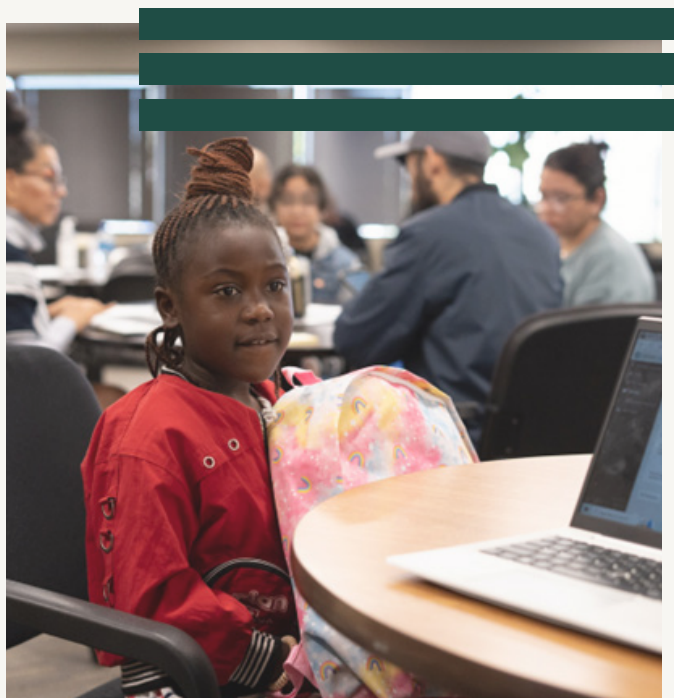


By building trust and understanding, Intercultural Liaisons help reduce stress for families, prevent misunderstandings, and support educators in responding to diverse cultural contexts within their classrooms.

In September, OWOC further supported newcomer families by hosting a Parent Information Evening, attended by more than 250 parents. The event provided families with opportunities to learn about Edmonton Catholic Schools, including available programming and strategies to support their children's success. To ensure equitable access, sessions were offered in multiple languages, and childcare was provided on-site. The evening also brought together 14 community organizations, creating a welcoming space for families to connect directly with local supports and services. This collaborative approach strengthened understanding of the education system while reinforcing a sense of belonging and community.

OWOC strengthens a system-wide response to complexity by fostering partnerships with community agencies and supporting schools through ongoing resources and outreach. Through connections with settlement agencies, cultural organizations, and school-based supports such as Settlement Workers in School (SWIS), OWOC ensures that newcomer families receive coordinated, wraparound services that extend beyond the classroom. This integrated approach enhances family stability, promotes student well-being, and increases engagement, all key priorities in responding to classroom complexity.

Together, this work ensures that newcomer students and their families are not only welcomed, but fully supported to thrive within Edmonton Catholic Schools. This, in turn, helps mitigate classroom complexity.



## English as an Additional Language (EAL)

In Edmonton Catholic Schools, English language learners (ELLs) represent a significant and growing portion of the student population. The increasing number of ELLs reflects a key dimension of classroom complexity. Currently, ECSD serves approximately 12,000 English language learners out of the total student population, accounting for just under 25% of all students. These learners are distributed across all grade levels, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners are not a homogenous group; students arrive at different ages, with varied prior schooling experiences, diverse first languages, and a wide range of English proficiency levels. Regardless of when they enter ECSD or their level of English, all English language learners are expected to engage with and meet the outcomes of the Alberta curriculum.

As the EAL population has increased in both size and complexity, ECSD has evolved its supports to respond to these changing needs. Student success requires a comprehensive and multi-layered approach that includes tracking students' language development over time, establishing specialized roles to support instruction, and providing teachers with practical strategies for planning, teaching, and assessing English language learners within inclusive classroom environments. Central to this work is a strong belief in the importance of early and sustained support for multilingual learners. Research consistently shows that without targeted support, English language learners are at greater risk of

academic challenges, disengagement from school, early dropout, and limited post-secondary or career opportunities. Conversely, when appropriate supports are in place, multilingual learners thrive, demonstrating strong problem-solving abilities, critical thinking skills, and a capacity to contribute meaningfully to increasingly diverse and global communities.

Within classrooms, teachers are responsible for addressing the needs of all learners, including students who are developing proficiency in English. In practice, this often means incorporating instructional strategies such as the use of visuals, gestures, simplified or scaffolded instructions, and the intentional pre-teaching of key vocabulary. Assessment practices are also adapted to reflect students' language development; for example, beginner language learners may demonstrate understanding by pointing to images, responding orally, or using supported alternatives rather than completing traditional paper-and-pencil assessments. Importantly, these approaches are not exclusive to EALs. The strategies used to support language development align with effective teaching practices and benefit all students by increasing clarity, engagement, and access to learning for all students.



## Behavioural Therapy

The Behavioural Therapy works closely with students, teachers, and administrative teams to respond to increasing behavioral and social-emotional complexity. Students across the Division present a wide range of learning, behavioural, social-emotional, and mental health needs. The Behavioural Therapy team addresses this complexity by focusing on the conditions that help students and staff feel safe, included, and supported. Through collaborative, proactive, and preventative approaches, the team works alongside school staff from more than 90 schools to design inclusive learning environments where all students can participate and succeed.

Through the use of environmental checklists and classroom reflection tools, the team supports schools in assessing and enhancing learning environments to better meet diverse student needs. This work is grounded in a Division-wide continuum of supports and a Pyramid of Intervention framework, ensuring that students receive the appropriate level of support while remaining included in their school communities whenever possible. Additionally, the Behavioural Therapy team develops documents to help teachers create safe and inclusive classrooms and provide the team with strategies that support the student.

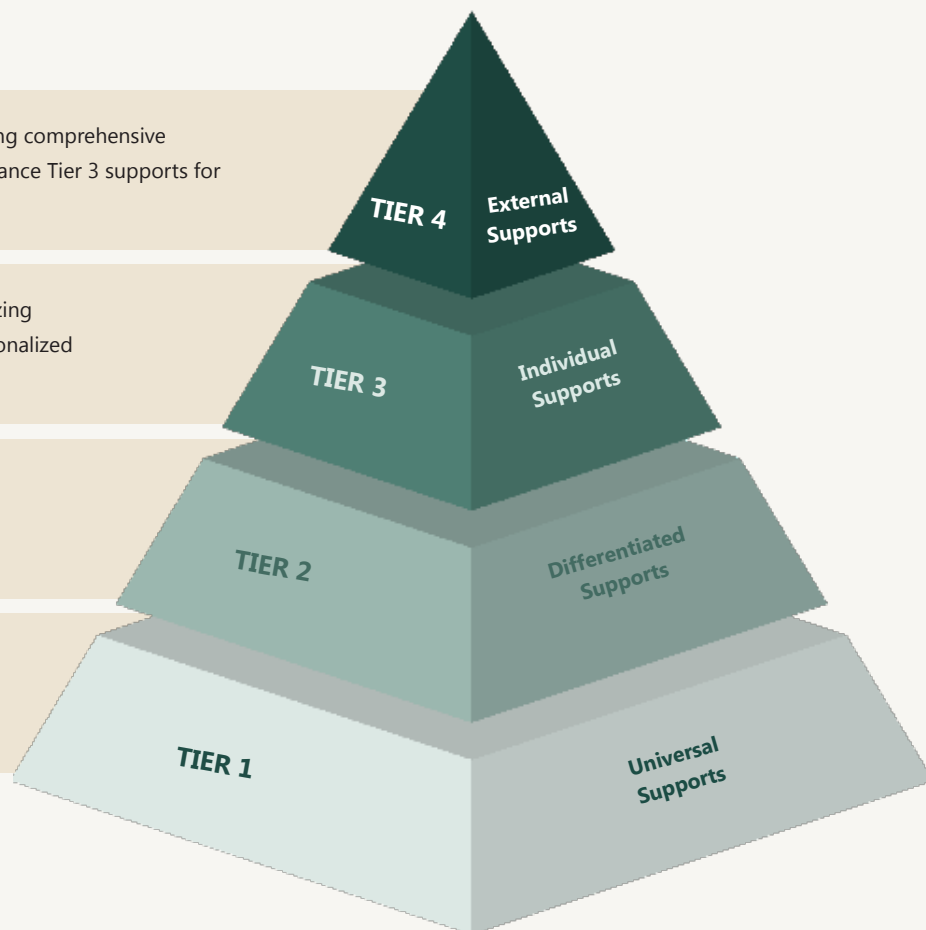
## The Pyramid of Intervention

Interventions offer intensive support via MDT, involving comprehensive assessments to develop individualized plans that enhance Tier 3 supports for complex needs.

Support plans are tailored for each student, emphasizing behaviour intervention, structured routines, and personalized instruction.

Targeted supports like small-group instruction, self-regulation coaching, and flexible work spaces for students requiring more than Tier 1 strategies.

Supports for all students is achieved through proactive measures based on the UDL framework.



At the universal level (Tier 1), Behavioural Therapy supports inclusive and preventative practices such as clear expectations, positive reinforcement, and Universal Design for Learning. These approaches establish strong foundations for learning, belonging, well-being, and a sense of safety and predictability across entire school populations.

At targeted and specialized levels, the team works alongside school staff to respond to students experiencing increased or complex needs, providing flexible and responsive supports that adapt to changing circumstances.

Students are supported through Tier 1 strategies that contribute to their individual success. With Behavioural Therapy support present across more than 90 schools, these universal practices extend to entire school communities.

## Targeted and Specialized Supports

To support students experiencing increased complexity, Behavioural Therapy collaborates with multidisciplinary teams to implement a range of individualized and targeted interventions.

### Behaviour Support Plans

Behaviour Support Plans are developed for students requiring Tier 3 support. These plans are individualized, aligned with IPP and teacher goals, and created collaboratively with the teacher, MDT, and families. They focus on building student strengths to support meaningful participation in inclusive learning environments.

---

### De-escalation Support Plans

De-escalation Support Plans are designed for students who may experience behaviours that pose a risk to themselves or others. Grounded in Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (NVC), these plans emphasize proactive strategies that support regulation and reduce the need for physical restraint.

NVCI techniques are used to ensure safety. The team also supports staff by promoting predictable routines, inclusive classroom strategies, and providing resources such as protective equipment when needed.

---

### Routine Support Plans

Routine Support Plans provide structure and predictability by outlining clear expectations, transitions, and daily routines. These supports reduce uncertainty and help students regulate and engage more effectively in learning. Routine Support Plans are tailored to individual needs and may include visual supports and step-by-step guidance that help students navigate their day with confidence.

---

### Targeted Small Group Interventions

Small group interventions provide focused, structured support for students with specific, complex learning or behavioral needs. These settings allow for more individualized attention, targeted instruction, skill development, and opportunities to practice strategies in a supportive environment.

These supports also provide consistent routines which help students build confidence, transfer learning into the classroom, and participate more fully in their school community.

## Specialized Roles

The Behavioural Therapy Team is composed of specialized roles that work together to provide, layered, responsive supports:

### Emotional Behavioural Specialists (EBS)

Provide targeted intervention and consultation to support students experiencing emotional and behavioral challenges. EBS staff work directly with teacher and school teams to develop strategies that promote regulation, engagement, and inclusion.

---

### Therapeutic Assistants, Behavioural Therapy (TABT)

Provide hands-on, day-to-day support to students by implementing strategies and interventions. TABTs support skill development, emotional regulation, and participation within inclusive classroom environments.

---

### Board Certified Behavioural Analysts (BCBA)

Conduct assessments and design individualized behavior support plans using evidence-based practices. BCBA's provide specialized expertise for students with complex behavioural needs and promote positive outcomes for students.

---

### Crisis Prevention Specialists

Support schools in developing safe, proactive, approaches to crisis situations. They provide training and guidance in de-escalation, helping staff respond effectively while maintain safety for students and staff.

---

### EBS Mentors

Provide coaching and mentorship to EBS staff, strengthening consistency and capacity across the system when responding to complex student needs.

---

### REACH Team (BCBA, OT, SLP, FSLW)

A multidisciplinary team that provides two-week, intensive, school-based support for students with complex needs. Referrals trigger targeted in-school support to stabilize learning environments and build capacity within schools teams.

---

Together, these roles ensure that supports are coordinated, responsive, and aligned across universal, targeted, and specialized levels.

Building staff capacity is essential to sustaining inclusive learning environments in the face of increasing complexity.

The Behavioural Therapy Teams supports professional learning and capacity building by offering the following training for staff:

- Non-Violet Crisis Intervention (NVCI) training
- Introduction to disengagement skills and Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS)
- Restorative Practice training to support positive school climate and conflict resolution
- Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) training
- On-site professional development for school staff by EBS staff on topics such as Positive Behaviour Supports, Setting Boundaries and Limits, ADHD Practical Class Accommodations, and Universal Design for Learning

---

## Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapists (OTs) advance ECSD's vision by strengthening the system's response to addressing student complexity. Through a developmentally informed lens, OTs address the neurological, emotional, sensory, and environmental factors that impact students' access to learning. By supporting regulation and participation, building functional skills, and adapting learning environments, OTs reduce barriers associated with complex needs. This work directly supports ECSD's Learning Conditions by promoting autonomy, sustained engagement, and inclusion across K–12 contexts.

OTs provide comprehensive assessment of factors that impact participation in learning, including motor skills, self-regulation, sensory processing, executive functioning, assistive technology, visual perceptual skills, self-care skills, life skills, and physical and social environments.

OTs also support families with system navigation, including access to family doctors and specialized health services to address factors that impact participation at school, such as sleep patterns, nutrition, chronic health conditions, medication, and home supports.

For students with complex regulation needs, behaviours are often an outward expression of unmet developmental, neurological, sensory, or environmental factors. Behaviour-only approaches are often ineffective when these underlying needs are not addressed. OTs contribute essential expertise by identifying and addressing root causes of dysregulation, supporting regulation, access, and participation through a whole child, function informed approach.

In partnership with families, OTs consider broader developmental factors, including sleep, nutrition, chronic conditions, and experiences of stress or trauma, allowing for more responsive and sustainable supports.

Formal and informal assessment data informs both individualized intervention and universal supports. Through purposeful intervention, occupational therapy supports the development of student competencies and contributes to the Portrait of a Graduate.

## Autism Working Group and Micro-Learning Spaces

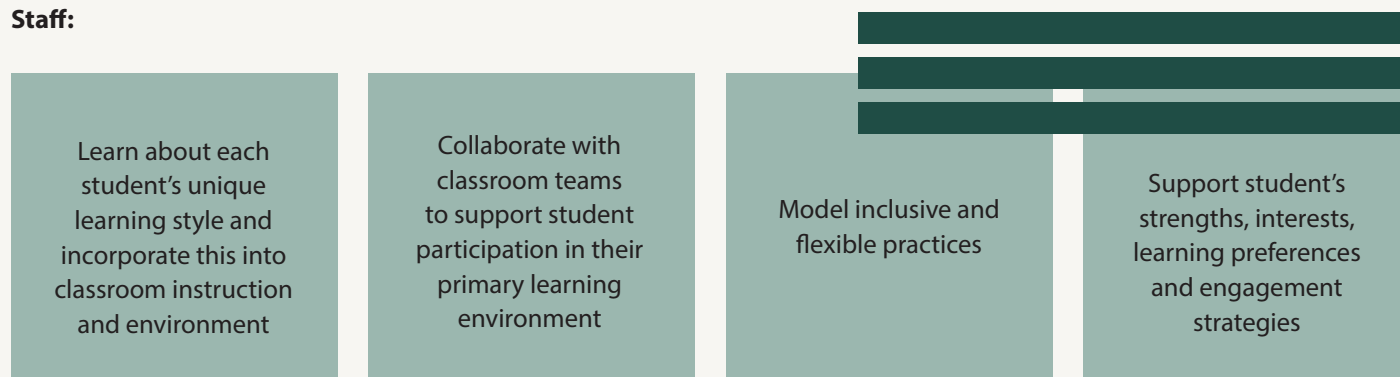
Under the guidance of the OT management team, the group developed guidelines for micro-learning spaces within schools. To foster belonging, safety, and respect for each student's unique way of learning, several schools have created micro-learning spaces that support diverse learning styles and encourage social interaction and exploration of special interests.

These spaces are intentionally designed to shift the focus away from structured academic tasks toward exploration, social connection, and emotional resilience. This reduces the pressure to perform and replaces it with opportunities to engage meaningfully with materials and peers. While created with neurodiverse learners in mind, the benefits of these spaces enrich learning for all students by nurturing curiosity, creativity, and community.

Capacity building for staff supports understanding how to use these spaces to balance student needs with environmental demands.

In these spaces:

### Staff:



### Students:



The Occupational Therapy teams support system capacity through targeted professional learning for school teams, support staff, and Learning Services personnel.

Since September 2025, OTs have delivered professional development to over 500 Educational Assistants and 60 Therapeutic Assistants (TAOT).

Professional learning topics have included:

- Sensory spaces
- Reframing autism and neurodiversity-affirming practices
- Self-regulation supports
- Printing and assistive technology
- Sensory-based interventions
- Trauma-informed practice
- Supporting students with selective mutism

These sessions emphasize developmentally informed, preventative approaches that move beyond behaviour-focused responses and instead address regulation, environmental fit, and participation. This supports consistency of practice, strengthens staff confidence, and reduces escalation and crisis driven responses.



## Speech Language Pathology

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) play a critical role in addressing increasingly complex learner needs related to communication, language, regulation, and social participation. Through evidence informed, classroom embedded practices, SLPs reduce barriers that impact students' access to instruction, peer interaction, and engagement across all curriculum areas. Their work supports students with language delays or disorders, behaviour communication intersections, and self regulation challenges, with particular attention to learners who are non speaking, Deaf or hard of hearing, or learning English as an additional language. In the post pandemic context, SLP supports have intensified to respond to heightened complexity, ensuring equitable access to learning and meaningful participation within inclusive school environments.

The Speech Language Pathology (SLP) team addresses increasing classroom complexity by providing early, layered, and collaborative supports that reduce barriers related to communication, language, regulation, and participation. ECSD's universal kindergarten speech language screening—unique in Alberta—enables early identification and timely, evidence informed responses, preventing escalation of needs and supporting equitable access for young learners.

As students' needs become more complex across grades, SLPs work in partnership with educators to strengthen classroom practice through consultation, professional learning, and targeted strategies aligned with Individualized Program Plans (IPPs). Students with language delays or disorders are supported to access instruction, engage socially, and participate meaningfully across curriculum areas. For students with complex communication needs, including those requiring Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), the SLP team coordinates specialized supports that enable consistent access to learning and classroom participation. Through shared responsibility and embedded service delivery, SLPs support schools in responding effectively to diverse and intersecting needs within increasingly complex classrooms.

The following information highlights three key areas of support that the Speech-Language Pathology Team has provided to address complex needs.

### Augmentative & Alternative Communication Support

To effectively support the over 250 ECSD students who require Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems, the division prioritized system wide capacity building through extensive AAC and communication partner training. More than 800 Educational Assistants and Therapy Assistants received targeted instruction on supporting AAC users from our SLP team, strengthening consistent, responsive communication supports across schools. Multilingual Parent AAC Nights offered in Spanish and Ukrainian further extended this support beyond the classroom, recognizing that AAC systems are most effective when used consistently at school, at home, and within the community. Through partnerships with the intercultural liaison team, families accessed information in their first languages, fostering shared responsibility, belonging, and continuity of support, all key conditions for Optimal Learning and meaningful participation for students with complex communication needs.



## Reading Intervention

There is a strong, well-established link between the ability to read, behavior regulation, and mental health across childhood and adolescence. This year, the SLP team was trained to deliver explicit, planned, and sequential instruction in how sounds (phonemes) connect to letters and letter patterns (graphemes) to support early reading development using Alberta Education's Systematic Guide to Phonics Intervention. Under the guidance of our Reading Specialists, twenty-two Therapeutic Assistants for Speech-Language have worked with over 200 students in small groups and 1-1 to deliver this program. Results of the intervention will be tracked through teacher administered pre and post screens.



## Inclusive Peer Supports

This year, the Speech-Language Pathology team partnered with school administrators and classroom teachers at five sites to implement a Peer Support Network Project. This project created structured peer groups where students first learned about neurodiversity and were then supported to communicate, play, and learn with their autistic classmates while being taught to respond to varied communication, social, and sensory needs. The Peer Support Network Project addresses classroom complexity by intentionally creating responsive learning environments that recognize and value learner diversity and connects to Alberta Education's learning outcomes of building healthy relationships, fostering friendships, and helping students understand and value differences. By embedding support within daily classroom interactions, the project reduced barriers to student engagement and participation and ensured that learning environments were adapted to meet the strengths, needs, and identities of all learners. By intentionally building peer-capacity to support communication and participation, the project reflects ECSD's commitment to inclusive school communities grounded in shared responsibility and belonging.

## Physical Therapy

The Division's physical therapists provides assessment and intervention across all schools for students with mobility and gross motor needs. With a caseload of 46 students, physical therapists work alongside occupational therapists to support student access, staff safety, and barrier-free learning environments

This role includes assessing student mobility, training staff in the safe use of specialized equipment and lifts, supporting community referrals (e.g., Glenrose Hospital seating clinic), and recommending environmental modifications to ensure accessibility. Examples of environmental accommodations include classroom seating adaptations, accessible entrances, parking accommodations, bathroom equipment (e.g., change tables), and furniture layout adjustments.

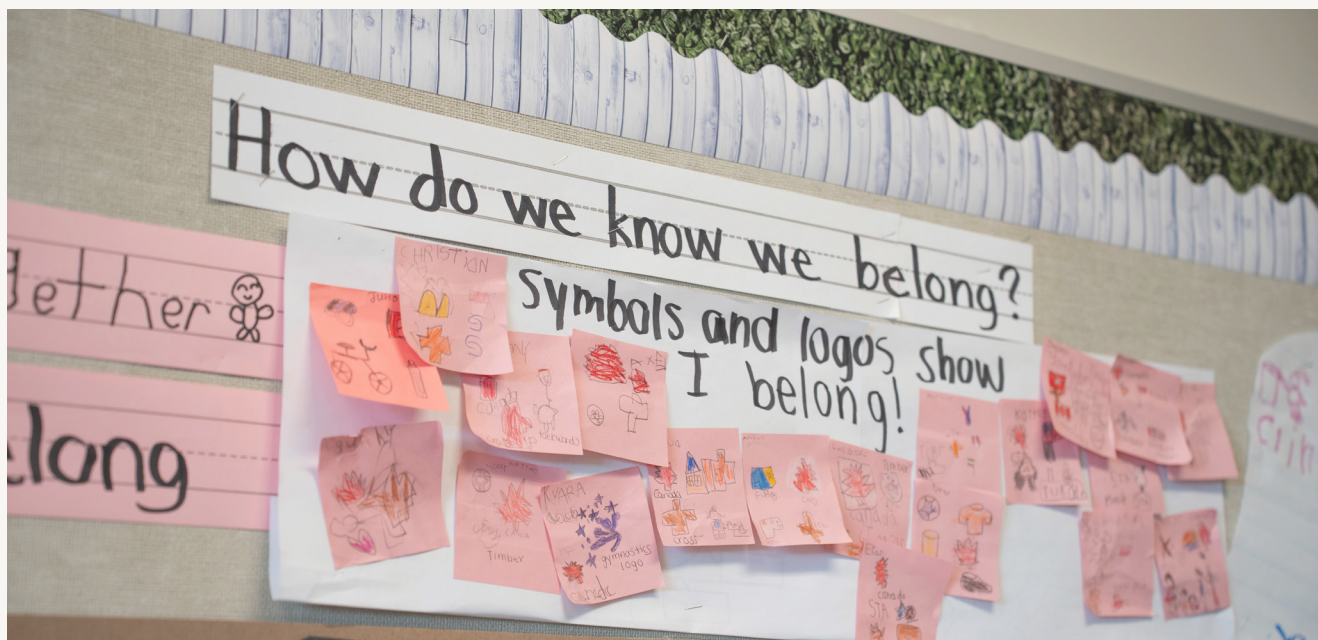
Environmental adaptations provide opportunities for full participation in activities with peers. For some students, school may be the primary setting where they can access adapted equipment or mobility supports that may not be available at home. These opportunities support independence in mobility, as well as relationship-building with peers and staff.

### School-Based Mental Health Support

Mental health therapy adds value to the Division's response to student complexity by addressing the emotional, relational, and psychological factors that impact attendance, regulation, and readiness to learn. This includes supporting needs that may not present as observable behaviour, such as anxiety, school avoidance, and internalizing distress.

Guided by the Division's Plan for Continuous Growth and the Integrated Health and Well-being Framework, the Mental Health Team supports a holistic evidence-based approach to student well-being, integrating mental, spiritual, physical, social and emotional development within school environments.

Through a renewable three-year partnership with Recovery Alberta, Mental Health and Addictions, the Division ensures that students and families can access mental health specialists who work directly within schools. These specialists build trusted relationships within school communities and support students and families in navigating and accessing mental health services beyond the school setting.



## Access and Service Delivery

Mental health specialists work alongside school teams to build capacity through professional learning and universal supports. This helps reduce stigma and ensures that students, staff, and families can access mental health support in both school and community settings.

Consistent access to mental health specialists supports increased awareness, stronger relationships, and greater comfort in seeking support. When access is reduced, referrals decrease and there is limited capacity to monitor students who were previously receiving support.

All schools have access to a mental health therapist. Some schools have a resident therapist, while others access support through a mobile mental health team. In addition, schools have access to a School Risk Team that responds to immediate, in-the-moment crises.

## Tiered Mental Health Supports

Using a multi-tiered system approach, mental health support is provided in the following ways:

### Psychoeducation



Short, accessible presentations for staff and students, delivered through staff meetings, announcements, or classrooms

### Long-Term Strategies



Resources designed to coach and promote long-term mental health development across age groups

### 1:1 Counselling



Individual support for students experiencing mental health challenges, trauma, or family-related concerns

### Community Referrals



Collaboration with Family School Liaison Worker to connect students and families with external agencies and mental health services

International and national guidance recognizes schools as a primary access point for child and youth mental health services, particularly for students who face barriers to community-based care. Sustained access to school-based mental health specialists strengthens prevention, builds staff and family capacity, and supports long term student wellbeing, making these services a critical component of inclusive learning environments.

## Family School Liaison Workers

Family School Liaison Workers (FSLWs) play a key role in schools across the Division by supporting students and families with complex needs through a holistic, relationship-based approach. The work focuses on the social, emotional, behavioural, and environmental factors that impact student engagement, well-being, and learning, to reduce barriers and strengthen connections between school, home, and community.

FSLWs provide direct support to students through individual and group work that supports emotional regulation, coping skills, social skills development, and problem solving. They build safe, trusting relationships where students feel heard and supported. For students experiencing trauma, mental health concerns, or family instability, FSLWs use trauma-informed and strength-based practices to help students regulate, build resilience, and engage more successfully at school.

FSLWs also work closely with school teams, including classroom teachers, administrators, and Inclusive Learning staff. They contribute to collaborative planning, share relevant social emotional and family context, and help develop responsive, student-centered supports. As part of multidisciplinary teams, FSLWs assist with identifying concerns, assessing risk, and supporting implementation of plans that reflect the unique needs of each student.

A significant part of the FSLW role is supporting families. FSLWs engage families in a respectful, culturally-responsive way, meeting families where they are and recognizing their strengths. They provide guidance, advocacy, and connections to community support, including mental health services, housing resources, and child and family services. This helps promote continuity, reduce service gaps, and ensure coordinated support for students and families.

Advocacy is central to the FSLW role. FSLWs advocate for student and family voice, equitable access to support, and inclusive practices within schools. They also fulfill mandated reporting responsibilities when concerns for student safety arise, while continuing to support families through those processes whenever possible.

Overall, FSLWs strengthen relationships between students, families, schools, and community partners. Their work supports student well-being, enhances school-based capacity, and contributes to caring, inclusive learning environments where students with complex needs can succeed.

Family School Liaison Workers play a key role in supporting cross-ministry collaboration within schools:

- Providing information, liaison, and referral to community agencies (Alberta Children's Services, Alberta Justice, Edmonton Police Services, and Alberta Health Services)
- Supporting system navigation across education, health, and social services
- Coordinating supports and facilitating communication between families and schools
- Crisis intervention and prevention, short-term solution-focused counseling, and support
- Participating in case conferences and shared planning

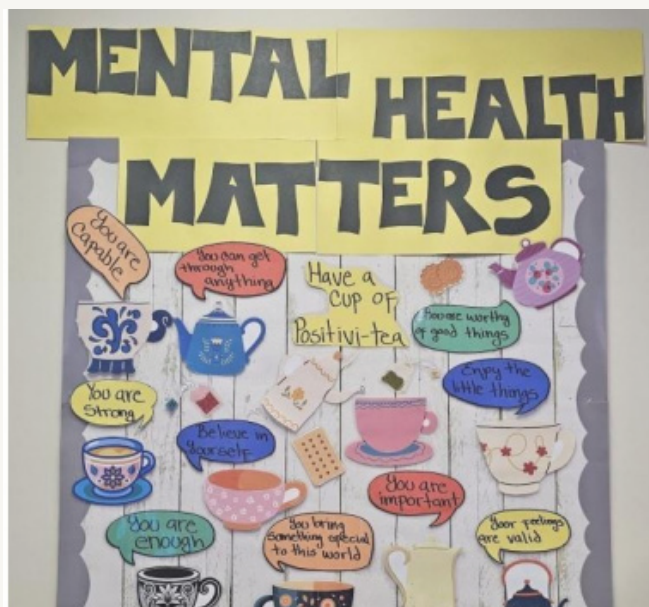
Through this work, FSLWs help ensure that every students' needs are addressed holistically.

## Practice in Action

A Grade 3 student presents with high anxiety, frequent somatic complaints, and difficulty separating from caregivers at the start of the school day. Attendance is inconsistent, and the student often becomes overwhelmed in busy or unstructured environments. The family is experiencing housing instability and financial stress, which has increased the student's anxiety and impacted routines at home.

The FSLW begins by building a connection with both the student and caregiver, establishing consistent check-ins and providing reassurance and predictability. Using a trauma informed and developmentally appropriate approach, the FSLW supports the student with simple regulation strategies, emotional language, and gradual transitions into the classroom to reduce morning distress.

The FSLW consults with the classroom teacher and school team to support preventative strategies that increase the student's sense of safety and belonging. These supports may include a consistent arrival routine, visual schedules, access to regulation tools, and adult check-ins during high stress times. The FSLW helps ensure responses remain consistent and supportive as the student builds coping skills.



Recognizing the impact of family stress, the FSLW works closely with the caregiver to provide practical support, education, and connections to community resources for housing, financial assistance, and mental health. The FSLW helps bridge communication between home and school, ensuring expectations and supports are realistic and aligned.

As the student's needs evolve, the FSLW participates in school-based team discussions to share context, monitor progress, and adjust supports as needed. When concerns arise, the FSLW supports problem-solving and advocacy while maintaining a relationship-based, strengths-focused approach.

With ongoing FSLW support and collaboration, the student demonstrates improved attendance, reduced school anxiety, and increased participation in classroom activities. The family reports feeling more supported and connected, strengthening the partnership between home and school and promoting long term student success.

## Reframing Curriculum Community of Practice

The Reframing Curriculum Community of Practice (COP) is built on the belief that all students, especially neurodivergent and autistic learners, have the right to access quality education and curriculum.

This COP is led by the collaboration of curriculum and inclusive consultants from Learning Services. This collaboration allows for specific and intentional curriculum planning that is inclusive and meets the needs of all learners. Consultants are responsive to the complexity of diverse classrooms by providing professional learning guided by feedback from teachers and data collection. In-class model lessons are taught by consultants where teacher participants are invited to observe practical application of professional learning and strategies.

The Reframing Curriculum COP has provided teachers with many tools and strategies specific to Math, English Language Arts and Literature, Science and Social Studies. Teachers can design grade-level, curriculum-aligned learning experiences that support the learning of all students. Consultants, instructional coaches and teachers work side-by-side to address specific complexities in the classroom by using the resources shared. Professional learning is an ongoing process at school sites with consistent check-ins from consultants.

This year, two groups participated in the COP, consisting of 40 classroom teachers and instructional coaches from various elementary schools.

Sessions include:

- professional learning in all 4 core subject areas
- school spotlights and tours
- model lessons
- planning time with consultant support available



REFRAMING CURRICULUM SESSIONS		
SESSION TITLE	SESSION OVERVIEW	BIG TAKEAWAYS
Welcome to Reframing Curriculum	<p><u>English Language Arts</u>: ELAL consultants shared templates and exemplars of comprehensive literacy routines. These routines use the same text over several days to provide repetition with variety, which supports all learners.</p> <p><u>Spaces EDU</u>: Participants were guided through an introduction to Spaces EDU, an assessment platform that showcases evidence and progression of student learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to neurodiversity</li> <li>• Literacy routines</li> <li>• Literacy planners</li> <li>• Digital portfolio to show progression of student learning</li> </ul>
Planning with Meaning: Competencies, Verbs and Sparked Interests	<p><u>Spaces EDU</u>: Participants were guided through Spaces EDU profiles of real ECSD students. The information posted about each student helped participants see the value of different forms of assessment and how the platform can create a window into the classroom for families.</p> <p><u>Curriculum</u>: Participants reviewed Alberta Education's Competency Progressions and explored how these can be connected to the skills in the curriculum to create access points in lessons for diverse learners. Planning tools and strategies were also provided to support planning based on student interests and strengths.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding Alberta's new curriculum structure and layout</li> <li>• Showcase of digital portfolios of autistic students at Father Micheal Mireau School</li> <li>• Planning based on student interests and strengths</li> <li>• Utilizing Alberta Education resources to provide access for all students</li> </ul>
Crunching Numbers, Everyone Can Do the Math	<p><u>Descriptive Teaching</u>: Participants learned that descriptive teaching is a strategy used with students who use AAC devices. This approach helps students develop understanding of academic vocabulary, which is not typically included in AAC systems.</p> <p><u>High Impact Practices</u>: Participants explored the high impact practices outlined in the ECSD's Math Framework. These practices were then observed in action during the model lesson included this session.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted strategy supports for students with complex communication needs</li> <li>• Highlighting ECSD's Math Framework to build foundational math skills</li> </ul>
Hands-On, Minds-On and The Science Assessment Toolkit	<p><u>Backwards Design Prompts</u>: The Division's assessment consultants shared their Backwards Design Prompts, which help teachers use Co-Pilot to plan curriculum-aligned learning experiences for students with complex needs.</p> <p><u>Science Assessment Toolkit</u>: Participants learned about the Science Assessment Toolkit and how it can support assessing diverse learners' understanding of concepts in Science.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving assessment practices in science</li> <li>• Modeling hands on learning to increase engagement for all learners</li> <li>• Supporting teacher planning through the use of digital tools</li> </ul>
Unlocking New Social Studies: Entry Points from Crates to Verbs	<p><u>Planning</u>: The Division's social studies consultants provided a framework to help teachers to plan for their complex learners using the Division's curriculum crates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the new social studies curriculum for Grade 4-6</li> <li>• Creating accessible lessons for the K-3 Social Studies curriculum</li> </ul>



## CROSS-MINISTRY COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The growing complexity of student needs underscores the importance of cross-ministry collaboration, particularly with mental health and addiction partners, to ensure comprehensive and seamless support for children and youth. System-level partnerships strengthen shared responsibility for student well-being and enhance the effectiveness of school-based responses.

This collaboration strengthens continuity of care for students and families, supports timely access to services, and enables schools to respond more proactively rather than relying on crisis-based interventions.

Cross-ministry collaboration is supported through partnerships with:

- Alberta Health Services (AHS)
- Mental health and addiction services
- Community agencies and cultural organizations
- School-based mental health clinicians
- Mental Health Literacy project partners

These partnerships strengthen access to services and support continuity of care for students experiencing complex needs.



### Nutrition Program: Supporting Student Readiness to Learn

Edmonton Catholic Schools' Nutrition Program is a foundational strategy in responding to increasing classroom complexity by ensuring that students' basic needs are met as a prerequisite for learning.

Grounded in a commitment to student health, well-being, and dignity the program supports positive food experiences and access to nutritious meals, recognizing that hunger directly impacts engagement, behaviour, and academic success.

Through a multi-faceted approach, including nutrition education, community partnerships, and access to healthy food, students are better able to engage in learning with improved focus, energy, and overall cognitive functioning.

### Scale and Impact Across the Division

The scope of the Nutrition Program reflects its critical role in addressing socio-economic complexity across the Division.

- 28 schools currently provide universal breakfast and/or lunch programs
- 46 additional schools offer snack programs

This universal approach reduces stigma and ensures equitable access for all students, particularly those experiencing food insecurity.

By addressing hunger proactively, schools are able to mitigate its impact on:

- attendance
- behaviour
- emotional regulation

These are key factors influencing both classroom environments and student success.



### Partnerships and System Alignment

The Nutrition Program reflects a strong, collaborative model aligned with broader wraparound supports across the Division. Partnerships include:

- Edmonton Food Bank
- Breakfast Clubs of Canada
- e4c
- PC Children's Charity
- Edmonton Catholic Schools Foundation
- Rotary Club
- University of Alberta

These partnerships enhance the program's sustainability and impact, while also connecting students and families to additional community resources. Funding from Alberta Education and the Canadian Federal Government also play a key role in sustaining and expanding access to nutrition supports.



## EARLY INTERVENTION AND EARLY YEARS

Early intervention is a critical lever in responding to increasing classroom complexity, as it supports the early identification of learning and well-being needs and enables timely, responsive intervention. Focused attention in the early years strengthens learning trajectories and reduces the need for more intensive supports over time.

Increasing complexity is being observed in the early grades, highlighting the importance of coordinated transitions from ECS into school settings and strong family engagement early on. ECS and Kindergarten to Grade 3 environments serve as key leverage points, where early identification and responsive, multi-tiered supports can be implemented to support student development.

### Early Childhood Educators and Extensions Programming

Early Childhood Educators support children in 100 Voices by offering small group and individual play experiences that consider each child's developmental growth and social-emotional learning needs. Children engage in music and rhyme activities, active and outdoor play, and interest-based experiences that support exploration and participation.

Educators focus on building relationships through play-based engagement and by facilitating peer-to-peer interactions. These experiences are grounded in the dispositions to learn outlined in *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*, supporting children to seek, participate, persist, care and be playful.

Early childhood educators also support Kindergarten through extension opportunities in schools with identified high needs. These programs provide additional opportunities for play-based learning that support social-emotional development, relationship-building, and a sense of belonging within the learning community.

Programming is intentionally designed based on children's interests and developmental needs, supporting interaction with peers, positive relationships with adults, and the development of citizenship within their community. This work is delivered through a strength-based lens and aligns with *Flight* as a guiding framework.



## REACH: MULTIDISCIPLINARY SUPPORT FOR COMPLEX NEEDS

The REACH team directly supports the learning conditions required for effective teaching and learning by strengthening the environments in which students and staff operate. By addressing complexity through coordinated, multidisciplinary, and capacity building approaches, the REACH team enhances conditions that allow learning to occur consistently, safely, and equitably across schools.

### Stabilizing Learning Environments

The REACH team supports schools in responding to complex behavioural, mental health, and social emotional needs in ways that promote safety, dignity, and belonging. Through early intervention, de-escalation support, and trauma informed planning, the team helps stabilize learning environments, reducing disruption and fostering conditions where students and staff feel supported and secure.

### Inclusive and Equitable Access

By working with schools to respond to diverse and intersecting student needs, the REACH team strengthens inclusive learning conditions that prioritize access, participation, and equity. Supports are designed to maintain students in their community schools whenever possible, reinforcing inclusive practice and ensuring that complexity does not become a barrier to learning or belonging.

### Collaborative Practice and Shared Responsibility

The REACH team reinforces learning conditions that value collaboration and collective efficacy. By integrating multidisciplinary perspectives into school-based problem solving, the team ensures that complexity is addressed through shared understanding and coordinated action, rather than isolated decision making. This strengthens instructional coherence and consistency across classrooms and schools.

### Staff Capacity and Well Being

Sustainable learning conditions depend on staff who feel competent, supported, and well resourced. The REACH team builds school capacity through coaching, consultation, and strategy development aligned with evidence informed practice. This support reduces staff overload, enhances professional confidence, and contributes to healthier learning and working conditions.

### System Responsiveness and Coordination

The REACH team contributes to learning conditions by improving system responsiveness and predictability. Clear pathways for accessing support, timely intervention, and alignment with broader Inclusive Education and Mental Health structures ensure that schools can respond proactively to emerging complexity rather than relying on reactive measures.

In summary, the REACH team strengthens learning conditions by creating stability, fostering inclusion, building capacity, and promoting collaboration in the face of increasing complexity. Their work ensures that learning environments remain responsive and supportive, enabling both students and staff to succeed.

# CONCLUSION

Responding effectively to growing complexity in schools requires more than individual interventions; it requires strong system conditions that sustain optimal learning environments. When roles are clearly defined, supports are coordinated, and expertise is mobilized early, schools are better equipped to maintain learning conditions that support engagement, regulation, and academic growth for all students.

This report demonstrates that optimal learning conditions are strengthened when inclusion is understood as a shared responsibility supported through multidisciplinary collaboration, aligned processes, and leadership structures that prioritize well-being alongside learning. These conditions not only respond to immediate needs, but also build long-term capacity within schools.

By continuing to invest in consistent system supports, collaborative teams, and inclusive practices, the Division reaffirms its commitment to learning environments where students feel supported, empowered, and ready to learn, and where staff are sustained in their vital work of nurturing the whole child.

