

Remote Learning and the Six Principles of Special Education in West Vancouver

Chris Kennedy, Michelle LaBounty, Sandra-Lynn Shortall

University of Kansas

Introduction

What a difference several months makes. When we last met in-person, we were drafting our paper on the 6 principles in relation to the day-to-day work ongoing in the West Vancouver School District. We discussed how the principles were actualized in our classrooms, schools, and district. We were ready to reflect and to think together when the world changed, and our lives were quickly turned upside down with the new realities of living in the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time, we have redesigned education in ways never imagined before and we are continuing to shift educational practices by the nano-second as we proceed with teaching through realities of living through a global pandemic.

Our focus in this paper is to look at how the West Vancouver School District is approaching the 6 principles of special education during this time of global crisis. On March 17, 2020, under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), the provincial government directed all Kindergarten to grade 12 schools to immediately suspend in-class instruction until further notice. This suspension propelled school districts to begin reviewing and planning remote learning opportunities for students. While in-class instruction has been suspended, the BC Ministry of Education has tasked school districts with developing plans to ensure on-going instruction, as well as services and support for the children of essential service workers and vulnerable students. Each school district in BC has been directed to develop plans that respond to the needs of their local community and to put in place learning opportunities for all students.

These directives from the provincial government resulted in the swift evolution of remote learning and the creation of continuity of learning plans in the West Vancouver School District. Before delving into the relationship between the 6 principles of special education and the corresponding development of remote learning, it is first important to contextualize our work in West Vancouver Schools in relation to what the province of British Columbia is doing. Our

province has created four guiding principles in an attempt to support a coordinated approach for all 60 public school districts and independent school authorities in response to COVID-19. The Ministry of Education has taken the approach that they will set the large vision and tenets, then each respective school district will have the ability to operationalize them in our districts. The province's four guiding principles (in priority order) are:

1. Ensure a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.
2. Provide the services needed to support children of our essential workers.
3. Support vulnerable learners who may need special assistance.
4. Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

For this paper, the third priority will be most crucial to our discussion.

It has been an interesting process working through these priorities in sequential order. Many, of course, wanted to fixate on the fourth priority as that is typically of what we see as the business of schools. And the challenge with the third priority is that “vulnerable” is such a huge and subjective topic. We know, for example, we have hundreds of International students from around the world, most of whom have now returned to their home countries, with little or no support to finish their schooling for this year and they are now living in a time zone that may be 8-10 hours different. In our neighbouring school districts, we see breakfast and lunch programs continuing for students and families with daily deliveries and pick-ups being made. In West Vancouver these programs are currently not required due to our socio-economic make up but in light of the harsh economic landscape resulting from the ongoing pandemic, we are closely monitoring this as a potential emerging need in our community. We see teachers prioritizing students in jeopardy of failing as a first priority and we see thoughtful attention being paid to the dramatic shifts in our economy that sees many of our parents now unemployed. And with all of

this, we also have those who more traditionally we see as vulnerable learners - our special education students.

The Six Principles of Special Education Policy

During the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts and independent school authorities are to “ensure that students with disabilities and diverse abilities have access to the same level of on-going learning as other students” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 5). Specialized supports are expected to continue, and school districts are tasked with considering models of alternative service delivery. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are to also continue and the previously identified learning goals for students are to be a part of all remote learning plans. Special education teachers are currently continuing to work on continuity of learning plans for our designated students. These efforts have required creative and innovative approaches to addressing the challenges of remote learning and the realities of balancing the PHO directives related to health and safety in face-to-face student instruction.

Special education policy provides our special educators with a lens to guide programming priorities. This has proven to be especially important as special education teachers continue to navigate the complexity of education in the current landscape. The six principles of special education policy help “frame and focus” (McCall, 2018, p. 1) instructional decisions as special educators establish and maintain continuity of learning plans for students with disabilities or diverse abilities during the pandemic. Ensuring equitable access to learning for our special education students is crucial and, in most cases, increasingly complex during the COVID-19 crisis. The six principles of special education serve as important reference points in the ongoing planning processes for our students with diverse learning needs. The following sections will explore each

principle in relation to the landscape of remote learning during the current landscape of providing continuity of learning for special education students in a pandemic.

Principle #1 - Zero Reject

Like all BC public school districts, our schools in West Vancouver must ensure equitable access to learning for all students. This means that all students with diverse or complex learning needs or disabilities have a right to public education and must receive the necessary educational services to ensure access to learning. The unique needs and vulnerabilities of these students must be an active, ongoing consideration in all areas of educational programming at both the district level and in our classrooms. During the current pandemic situation, the zero-reject principle is directly linked to our Ministry of Education's third guiding principle of supporting vulnerable learners.

In West Vancouver the zero-reject principle has driven our on-going work as we continue to build in-person instruction opportunities for students with special needs who are deemed not to have current equitable access to learning in our remote learning context. These students are now returning to their 'home' schools for half-day learning sessions with their teachers and education assistants. School and district teams are having conversations daily about who these students are and how we can ensure their equitable access to learning is continued during the COVID-19 crisis. Robust academic and behavioural supports are being put into place. Staff are participating in health and safety training prior to each in-person instruction session begins. Learning environments have been physically adjusted to meet all PHO directives and students are front-loaded prior to attending their in-person instructional sessions to build new understandings about school safety protocols during the pandemic. It is truly a new landscape for special educators as

they work to ensure that the unique protections are in place so all of our students can have equitable and safe access to learning during the pandemic.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education's 2016 Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines for Special Education outlines expectations regarding inclusion in our school system. This manual provides schools and school districts with guidelines to follow related to students with unique needs. It is important to note that these guidelines remain in place and must be adhered to during the current pandemic. This manual promotes:

An inclusive education system in which students with special needs are fully participating members of a community of learners. Inclusion describes the principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs. The practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with full integration in regular classrooms and goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and interaction with others (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 2).

Provincial policy is to then transcend into local policies and practices at the school board level. All public school districts in British Columbia are mandated to have either board policies or administrative procedures that outline the practices and processes related to special education and inclusion (BC Ministry of Education, 2016). These inclusion and/or special education practices are to address the barriers to accessing curriculum and to participation for students with disabilities, English as a second language and/or other diverse learning needs.

By policy, all students are included in our B.C. public schools and we have inclusive classrooms in the West Vancouver School District. In day-to-day practice, there may be some limitations on full-time placements or participation for students with unique needs. These

limitations are not driven by exclusive practices but the realization that at times students may need small group or one-on-one instruction in alternate settings. Such instructional practices should be specified in the IEP based on the student's current goals and objectives. An example of this could be related to the instructional practices of a life skills program involving sensitive goals related to personal hygiene or toileting. Such goals in a student's IEP are critically important and require sensitivity but should not preclude a student's participation in inclusive learning environments; the reality is that these types of goals will require the provision of individualized learning opportunities. There will be times when some IEP goals may need to be respectfully addressed privately and such situations are expected to be discussed and agreed upon by the student's learning support team and family. A focus on human dignity and personal safety drives special education programming and placement for our students.

During "normal times" there are very few reasons that allow for the exclusion of students. The enactment of Section 91 of the B.C. School Act gives a Principal, Vice-Principal, Director of Instruction or the Superintendent of Schools the authority to exclude a student from attending school because of health issues, physical or mental, that would endanger students or staff. In West Vancouver Section 91 is rarely used, usually only once or twice per school year. When Section 91 has been enacted in our community, it is usually for a short period of time with a student's return to school depending on a family's willingness to engage with required medical or social services and supports. Fortunately, there are many resources available to students and families on the North Shore which alleviate the necessity of using Section 91 in our school district.

"Normal times" have a new reality in the midst of a global pandemic situation and we are now faced with the challenge of ensuring the equitable access to learning in a remote context. Currently in the West Vancouver context, the delivery of the continuity of learning plans is

primarily through digital platforms. A remote learning context has been established where teachers outline daily/weekly lessons and digitally communicate expectations with students. Now at six weeks into this new remote learning landscape, synchronous and asynchronous online communication and instruction are happening simultaneously across our school district. New feedback cycles and communication strategies are emerging as our school teams work alongside our families to ensure that our students with special needs remain connected to both the learning experiences and their school communities. Teachers and EAs are now engaging in daily two-way communication with students through platforms such as Google Meet and Microsoft Teams. Our district specialists are working alongside school teams to build online social skills friendship groups with peers through Google Meets to address the complexity of social communication goals during a remote learning context. Everyone in our school system is working and learning together as we move through the transitional processes of pandemic education.

It now seems like a long time ago when our school teams did their initial reach out to students and family initially for students with designated special needs, at both the elementary and secondary levels, by phone. In these initial conversations, staff were asked to assess how students and families were doing while at the same time contributing to a district priority scan of who are the most vulnerable at this time. It is incredible to consider how much the instructional landscape has shifted over the past five weeks. Teachers and Education Assistants are still expected to be actively reaching out to every student on their current caseload. We have confirmed on-going contact with every single student and family in the West Vancouver School District. These conversations have continued, for many students with special needs the digital platforms are proving to be incredibly successful but there is a sizable group of students for whom this is not working.

These initial steps have afforded us with significant insights to guide individual instruction, to create remote learning plans based on students' current IEP goals and to ensure the practices of inclusive education are upheld. For many students with IEPs the use of a digital platform should not create a barrier to inclusion. West Vancouver has very limited synchronous learning, so students have the opportunity to learn at their own place with flexible timelines. This flexibility alongside the use of the digital platform to continue with IEP instructional delivery has provided ample opportunities for inclusion and equitable access to learning for many students with special needs in this new 'school' landscape.

Yet, it is crucial to note that there are students with complex learning needs who will not benefit from remote learning plans or the use of digital platforms. These students continue to require innovative, creative programming and in-person instruction. In these cases, school districts are activating in-person service delivery as part of their instructional planning. In these cases, the principles of zero reject will need to continue to be creative to ensure the delicate balance between students' equitable access to learning and educators' health and safety is protected.

Principle #2 - Nondiscriminatory Evaluation

West Vancouver Schools have a robust district screening process where students' needs are assessed and reviewed by several multidisciplinary teams prior to receiving special education services. Prior to the district screening, ongoing school-based team meetings first occur at the school level. These regular school-based team meetings consist of school-based personnel and district student support services staff. According to the BC Ministry of Education (2016), the intention of the school based team is to serve as “a problem-solving unit in assisting classroom teachers to develop and implement instructional and/or management strategies and to coordinate support resources for students with special needs within the school” (p. 6). This is an important

structure as it is the beginning of a formal evaluation process in our public schools to determine whether students may need additional assessments. In West Vancouver Schools, our district school psychologists work alongside school-based personnel such as counsellors, administration, and classroom teachers in the school-based team meeting process. Frequently, district student support services staff such as our speech language pathologists, board certified behaviour analysts, gifted teachers, occupational therapists, vision/hearing resource teachers and other specialists will attend these meetings to ensure that the appropriate, non-biased perspectives are considered at this early point. District specialists are expected to attend school-based team meetings, school teams are asked to circulate agendas in advance to ensure that the appropriate district staff are in attendance. District specialists are expected to bring a broad view and possible context to school teams who may be struggling with the day-to-day needs and complexities of particular students. The presence of district specialists at school-based team meetings has proven to be effective and important. School based team meetings are coordinated by the school-based learning support teacher/special educator with a school administrator present as an equal participant. These are all critical threads required to weave together a tightly managed referral process prior to further formal assessments. Parents are notified of this process and parental permission is requested by the classroom teacher for the school-based team to proceed with reviewing a student's case at the school-based team level. Parents are not part of the school-based team meeting as these meetings are intended to be internal problem-solving structures for the school team based on resources and educational personnel. Parents are part of the follow up recommendations as teachers and staff then activate possible school resources and district staff to further support students.

After student cases are reviewed at the school-based team, referrals for further formalized assessments to the district screening committee may be made. Each month, the district screening

committee meets to review the student cases referred by school teams. The district screening committee consists of four district school psychologists, one district counsellor and a director of instruction. School based staff are also welcomed to attend these meetings to present their individual student cases, if there are significant areas of complexity. The district screening committee reviews each case using the BC Ministry of Education Category Checklists prior to confirming either the need for a psychoeducational assessment or confirmation of a designation status. This system works efficiently through a series of steps monitoring student progress and ensuring that all existing evaluation is accurate and relevant. Parents are involved in the process as they must first consent and then contribute to the completion of their child's psycho-educational assessment. Upon completion of the assessment and district screening processes, parents are notified and engaged in a conversation with the district and school team to review support required.

In more complex cases involving mental or physical health, a District team, comprised of relevant personnel, will also meet with outside agencies at the local health authority to review the assessment findings and recommendations to ensure that supports are in place to maximize student success. Parents, caregivers and home teams would also be fully involved in these meetings.

There have been questions from both school and district personnel about how we will proceed with these important structures in the current context of remote learning. While in-person special education assessments are currently paused, the school-based team has remained an important structure as we continue to coordinate support systems for students with special needs during the pandemic. School-based teams are making referrals for students who are not able to equitably access learning through remote learning and requesting that in-person instruction is established. They are scanning their school communities to actively assess and prioritize the greatest needs to ensure all students are cared for during the pandemic.

The district screening committee continues to be a vital structure. This committee has begun to morph during the COVID-19 crisis and has become an active advisory structure for school teams as we focus on collaboration and coordination of necessary support for students with special needs. Most importantly, the district screening committee will need to play an important role in consulting with school teams to ensure that nondiscriminatory approaches to remote learning are established for designated students with IEPs.

Principle #3 - Individualized and Appropriate Education

This third principle will be critically important as we continue to explore ways to ensure that our most vulnerable learners continue to be appropriately supported during the COVID-19 crisis. The Ministry of Education has clearly stated that the learning goals identified in a student's Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) will continue to be part of their learning. IEPs are to be followed as part of the planning for on-going remote learning. In 'normal' times, the IEP is a tool to manage the implementation of direct services and personnel responsible for instructional delivery in the school environment. The IEP is a legally binding document that serves as an accountability structure informing ongoing instruction. In coordination with school personnel, the family and other outside agencies the IEP should guide all program planning including necessary adaptations, modifications and required supports for designated students. During this time of global crisis, the BC Ministry of Education Special Needs Students Order M150/89 and the Individual Education Plan Order M638/95 remain as legislated regulations that schools are to follow. IEPs are to continue and schools are responsible for ensuring that the learning supports provided align with the goals identified in the student's IEP.

Interestingly, some school districts are engaging in the process of rewriting IEP goals to address the current shifted instructional context from the school into the home environment. Rewriting IEP goals in a time of crisis is an interesting notion. The message from West Vancouver Student Support Services to school teams has been very clear that for right now, during crisis-mandated remote learning, the focus for students with an IEP should initially be on a singular IEP goal. Teams are asked to consult with families to prioritize what is most important right now and then program delivery should reflect these urgent needs. With no clear guidelines yet from the Ministry of Education around assessment, how IEP goals will be assessed and reported on is still unknown. Teams will need to continue to be creative as they address the realities of remote learning for students with special needs. Now that we have activated in-person instruction for some of our students with special needs we will be able to get a better handle on progress which will in turn guide instructional planning.

In order to ensure equitable access to learning, there are some cases where in-person service delivery is required. All possible in-person instruction has been carefully monitored and managed to ensure that all PHO guidelines are followed. We have created clear district health and safety protocols to ensure staff are properly trained and physical environments are manipulated to meet the required physical distancing requirements. Initially we considered a centralized model for possible in-person IEP ‘check-ins’ during the COVID-19 crisis. As we have learned more about the transmission rates between children and adolescents, we have shifted away from this model so that students can return to their home-schools for regular in-person instruction. From a ‘best’ practice perspective this ensures that students are returning to familiar learning environments and has eased their return to school after spending weeks in their home-environments. This has also

created a sense of comfort and normalcy for school teams as they return to their classrooms to welcome back our most vulnerable students.

During the COVID-19 crisis we have discovered that the barriers of adult fear related to the transmission of this virus can block a school team's willingness to activate in-person instruction for vulnerable students. While these emotional responses are completely understandable, we have a responsibility to ensure equitable access to all of our students. This has required on-going district leadership messaging and support around the imperative of supporting vulnerable learners in the least restrictive environment. Significant time has been invested in working alongside school teams to build safe work protocols and to prioritize the importance of in-person instruction for our most vulnerable students in their 'home' school context.

Principle #4 - Least Restrictive Environment

The fourth principle is the least restrictive environment (LRE) which mandates that students with disabilities should be educated with peers without disabilities. The Salamanca Statement (1994) is a critical point of reference for inclusive practices in education and the importance of LRE in today's educational context. This statement is considered to be an international breakthrough for inclusive thought in education and it promoted a whole new way of looking at special educational issues. Its focus is that schools should be built on inclusion principles and that segregation in education should be eliminated. The guiding principle that informs the framework of the Salamanca Statement (1994) is:

Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from

linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups (p. 6).

Inclusion is understood differently in different contexts, therefore the Salamanca Statement attempted to address this reality by formulating the term ‘the inclusive school’. “The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, whenever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences that they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education” (UNESCO, 1994, p.11). This quote is important on many levels. It refers to the importance of high quality educational experiences and the provision of the least restrictive environment for all students.

During the current pandemic, the hope is that most students with disabilities or diverse learning needs will be able to complete their work, like the majority of students, remotely in the home environment. There are Google Meets and other on-line formats where teachers are bringing their students together remotely, all students have been part of this and our parents of students with special needs have expressed repeated gratitude for these continued connections. School districts followed the direction of the public health officials (PHO) in British Columbia and suspended all in-school instruction with the exception of our Essential Service Worker School, which is providing care for our children of first responders, health care professionals and others deemed to be working in the essential service areas of the pandemic. To stop the spread of COVID-19 the PHO clearly stated that the most important thing that people can do is to stay home as much as possible and to limit contact with other people. Yet, the challenging reality has been that some students, because of their specific learning needs will require some level of in-person instruction from school staff in order to have equitable access to learning. School districts were therefore

permitted to build in-person instruction into their continuity of learning plans for students with diverse needs.

Facilitating in-person learning opportunities is not just important but necessary to ensure equitable access to learning for students with complex learning needs. The reality of accessing learning remotely for these students may not be appropriate or even realistic. In-person instruction is therefore now being offered in most of our West Vancouver schools to vulnerable students. It is important to note that the reality at this current time is that these are not ‘normal’ school environments. Our classrooms are empty and in-person instruction is beginning on a very small, individualized scale. While students will have access to school personnel and to their school environment, they will not be educated with their peers without disabilities while in-class instruction for the majority remains suspended. The reality is that the least restrictive environment principle will be compromised in this new educational landscape of social distancing and PHO directives limiting human contact. LRE is therefore currently compromised by its nature which “requires that students with disabilities be educated with peers without disabilities to the greatest extent possible” (McCall, 2018, p. 10), as sadly at this moment in the COVID-19 landscape there are limited peer possibilities at this time.

Principle #5 - Procedural Due Process

Inclusive education is fraught with landmines if trusting relationships between school teams, parents and home teams are not established. There is a clear process for problem solving and for receiving complaints for all families in West Vancouver Schools. At the school level, it is expected that complaints go first to the teacher(s) involved and then to the school administration. In our context most situations can be addressed by the school staff under the skilled direction of

the school principal or vice principal. If problems continue, then the conversation is to then move the concern to the district level. At this time, it is critical to ensure that all parties engage in active listening. This will also involve appropriate documentation and establishing visible steps towards resolution. This process is guided by the Director of Instruction of Student Support Services/Special Education. Most issues should be resolved at this level, but if not, complaints may next go to the Superintendent of Schools. After this point, if issues remain unresolved, then under Section 11(2) of the B.C. School Act parents can challenge a decision of an employee of a Board “which significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student”. An appeal process is then established, and the board is obliged to render a decision within 45-days.

There are also external advocacy groups, such as Inclusion BC, who may also become involved as a support system for families as they attempt to navigate systems at the school and community level. In the Inclusion BC Parent Manual (2014), parents are reminded that “establishing good communication with the school can often prevent problems from arising or keep them from escalating” (p. 14). This is important, and from a system perspective appreciated, as we work together to support families of students with special needs. During the ongoing pandemic, local advocacy groups have been providing important support for families who are struggling and not receiving active support from schools. Fortunately, in West Vancouver Schools, this is not a current pressure point as we established our in-person instruction opportunities swiftly to support our students and families but what is emerging in other jurisdictions has been important to observe and learn from. The results of the BCEdAccess survey on April 8, 2020 were eye-opening and alarming. At that time, it was reported that only 27.5% of families who responded had heard from their Education Assistants. While in the presentation of this survey’s results BCEdAccess acknowledged the complexity of the pandemic situation and

expressed appreciation for the hard work of teachers and educational teams, the message was clear that school systems are being closely watched to ensure that equitable access to learning is provided to all.

Currently in this new context of remote learning, West Vancouver School District students who were already designated will continue to be supported through collaborative planning between their classroom teacher and respective specialist teachers (Special Education/Learning Support, ELL, Counselling, Gifted) on at least one goal of their IEP. Students requiring additional support, who have not had the opportunity to complete Psychological Educational Assessments with a District psychologist, will continue to be supported to the best of their classroom teachers' abilities, given that the COVID-19 guidelines around social distancing have compromised the ability to appropriately complete assessments.

The current reality is that many traditional special education procedures and processes are on hold. What we are seeing emerge in different districts is that those who have strong relationships are having success, but those that typically relied on process to make progress are seeing their divisions exacerbated. In West Vancouver Schools, we have tried to get ahead of these frustrations by personally reaching out to our most vulnerable learners and their families. This direct contact by the phone has allowed learning support teachers and district specialists to gauge the frustration level in our community and to prioritize in-person instruction. They have been directed to continually prioritize based on the greatest need and to utilize our crisis support systems to ensure we are responsive to emerging problems rather than reactive during the pandemic. Our human relationships guided by the ethic of care, compassion and professionalism are critical right now to ensure that our system does not add to the pressures that families may be feeling. The sensitivity of our school and district teams complemented by our long-standing

positive home-school relationships is continuing to afford us with the gift of time as we reboot our educational programs in the pandemic learning landscape.

Principle #6 - Parent Participation

According to the BC School Act, section 7(2) parents should be full collaborative partners in educational programming for our students with special needs. The delicate navigation of this requires the skillful implementation of appropriate individual educational plans alongside positive relationships with our families of students with special needs. The rights of parents in the educational process are significant and critical for all educators to be aware of. The advocacy of parents and parent communities is an important driver in ensuring that our school systems are ensuring the various rights and procedural safeguards are described in ways that parents fully understand.

During the first weeks post the COVID-19 pandemic ‘return to school’ we relied on the good will of the families of children with special needs to support their children, and in some cases to provide full programming for their children. This was both a challenge and an opportunity. For some families who are already well connected to their child’s school and their program, this is presented as a continuation of the learning in a new setting. For some, though, this has proved to be incredibly overwhelming and near impossible. It is these parents, those who feel the stress and burden of remote learning and may have other challenges as a result of the pandemic, that we continue to be the most concerned for. Never have parents been greater partners in learning for all students than now during remote learning.

Teachers across our school district have reached out to communicate in a universal fashion that staff are here to not only support students, but also their families. Special Education Teachers

and Educational Assistants continue to reach out to families by phone on a daily basis, checking in on ways to support learning and ensuring that the personal connections that we have worked so hard to establish between schools and families are not only maintained, but strengthened. In-person instruction and the transfer of care of our most vulnerable students during in-person instruction returning to our schools requires direct, open and on-going communication between our families and teachers. Parents have important information to share about how life has been during the pandemic for their children. As educators we must listen and learn from their experiences. We must take their lead and then build our in-person instruction accordingly based on the areas of current greatest need. These partnerships will continue to be critical in the weeks ahead as the stress of a pandemic situation continues.

Conclusions

There are real and continued concerns for our vulnerable learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. The inequalities that exist in society have the potential to be amplified during the remote learning context. What we are seeing after six weeks of remote learning, is that while typical planning decisions are made for all learners, our students with special needs and vulnerabilities need more. The activation of in-person instruction has not only been effective but a gift of tremendous joy for all involved as we have welcomed students back into our schools. The spotlight on the instructional decisions we are making for our most vulnerable students is shifting the school district conversations in British Columbia.

The COVID-19 crisis has elevated the importance of equitable access to learning for all. We are now being overt as we place the priority for at-risk learners above that for all learners; our conversations are now different. There is a distinct possibility that we will adopt many of the new practices that have emerged during this time of remote learning and they will continue after the

pandemic. It is refreshing and exciting to see how students with unique needs are now being prioritized around all decisions in our school system. This will hopefully be one of the true silver linings of this very difficult time as we continue to navigate and create meaningful and equitable educational practices during a global pandemic.

References

- B.C. Ministry of Education. (2020). *Frequently Asked Questions on Continuity of Learning*. Retrieved from https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/bc-ministry-of-education-questions-and-answers-continuity-of-learning-k-12-education_system.pdf
- BCEdAccess. (2020). *COVID-19 Inclusive Education Survey*. Retrieved from <https://inclusionbc.org/covid-19-inclusive-education-survey/>
- BC School Act. (1996). Part 2 - Parents and Students. Retrieved from http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96412_02
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2016). *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*. Retrieved from https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/inclusive/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf
- Inclusion BC Parent Handbook. (2014). Retrieved from <https://inclusionbc.org/our-resources/parent-handbook/>
- McCall, Z. (2018). Chapter 2: The evolving nature of special education. In Y. Bui, E,

Meyen (Eds.), *Exceptional Children in Today's Schools: What teachers need to know* (5th Ed.) (p. 17-36). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

UNICEF (2006). *Inclusive Education: Understanding Article 24 of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved from

https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org/eca/files/IE_summary_accessible_220917_0.pdf

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Ministry of Education and Science Spain (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action: On Special Needs Education*. Retrieved from

http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF