



*Regina Public School Division  
Student Support Services Branch  
Program & Service Delivery Review  
2007*

*Phase 1  
Stakeholder Focus Group Research*

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# Executive Summary

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In alignment with the Regina Public Schools ongoing commitment to the “Continuous Improvement Plan 2006-07: *Planning For Student Success*”, the Student Support Services (SSS) Branch initiated a review process designed to examine current support services programs and related service and delivery models. Through this process, opportunities for improvement and gaps in delivery were identified, with a series of recommendations to follow in Phase 2 of the research.

Phase 1 research supported specific areas of interest as defined in the Student Support Services Review Committee “Expression of Interest” document including:

- Review of Student Support Service programs and service delivery models incorporating internal and external stakeholder input and perspectives
- Evaluate program and service delivery models for students with special needs

Approximately 45 focus group sessions and one-on-one meetings were held beginning in late March 2007 and extending until June 2007. Focus group sessions were targeted at both internal and external stakeholders, including parents and outside (to the Regina Public School Board) agencies. Session participants were encouraged to share openly and comments were captured with an acknowledgement of anonymity where requested.

Analysis of focus group research identified a number of key areas of concern that have been compiled into the following categories:

## **Communication:**

- Internal - within branch, division, and school;
- External - with Saskatchewan Learning. Concerns related to minimal consultation or validation of policy decisions, operational changes, and new concepts with front-line employees.

## **Transitions:**

- Ad hoc transition planning; Consistency of case management and coordination of care

## **Resources:**

- Shortages in specific areas and schools (Ed. Psych; OT; Speech Language Pathologists; Social Workers)

## **Process:**

- Processes inconsistencies between schools; Accountability and lines of authority.

## **Information Technology (IT):**

- Access issues (to IT software/hardware); Procurement of technology
- Support for IT;

## **Equity:**

- General program access issues and issues arising out of familial support variances

## **Program Gaps:**

- A number of concerns relating to specific needs were raised in this area (e.g.: Autism Spectrum Disorders)

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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**Question:** What do you see the role of the SSS Branch/your role, from your perspective?

Internal stakeholders reported that they view the role of SSS as the provision of wide range support, and is not limited to direct program delivery. The current research also suggested that conflict often exists in terms of where priorities lie with respect to delivery of services to teachers, students, and families. Prioritization of services tends to differ between consultants and appears to be often based on a triage methodology as opposed to a longer term strategic approach or pre-defined process.

The provision of support to the classroom teacher (as opposed to the student directly) was identified by most internal stakeholders as a priority. The rationale seemed to be that through enhanced teacher support, student support is created.

Internal stakeholders also suggested that the SSS role should include resourcing equipment and classroom tools in addition to meeting curriculum needs. Specific areas of focus included the following:

### **Classroom Support:**

- Development of differentiated instructional techniques
- Curriculum Development including creation of adaptive approaches
- Creation of ready to use materials
- Provision of staff education
- Meet equipment needs
- Teacher Assistant (TA) Supervision
- Team member delivering an interdisciplinary program
- Working across departments to advance inclusive education

### **Student Support:**

- Education - Academics/Socialization
  - Teach kids life strategies
  - Provision of child focused service that makes educational sense
  - Teaching self-advocacy
  - Focus on student needs as opposed to professional (staff) needs
- Provide “whole person” care
  - Addressing medical need
  - Case Manager/Coordination of care
- Placement activities
  - Testing – this was identified as a significant role that SSS plays, however it is interesting to note that this function has primary relevance to placement and to a much lesser degree monitoring
  - PPP development and management
  - Provide referrals to community organizations for additional support
  - Prepare kids for work/society

# Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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## **Family Support:**

- Facilitation of a connection between family, school, and community
- Support parents in provision of general care and discipline strategies
- Mentor children; Mentor families/guardians; work with the family on social and academic skills

## **General:**

- Crisis management; meeting critical needs
- School <sup>PLUS</sup> all in one place
- Meet the challenge of diversity in schools and hold true to diversity

## **Accountability:**

Focus Group consultation identified that inconsistency with respect to lines of responsibility and accountability adversely impacts program delivery. The overriding message with respect to accountability was that although direct reporting relationships exist, actual functional lines of accountability were inconsistent and often unclear. SSS Branch employees identified the following comments regarding indirect reporting relationships:

- We report to parents, social services, and other agencies
- We are caught in the middle (between SSS and School Admin; RPSB and Sask. Learning); frequent changes in direction
- Directives from Sask. Learning can be unclear and changing; lack of continuity within the various directives and messages
- We have the authority to remove students from programs but not to assign placement
- Teachers are obliged to participate but do not necessarily follow through
- Parents have the clout and often the “squeaky wheel” gets the grease

## **Role Definition:**

The current research suggested that the role of the SSS Branch is somewhat ambiguous and often misinterpreted. A number of stakeholder groups were unable to clearly define the role that SSS plays, and only on probing were they able to articulate some key responsibilities.

The parent external stakeholder group voiced expectations with respect to the role however it became evident that there was a clear lack of information/understanding regarding what SSS could actually do for them and their child.

Parent external stakeholders expressed a general view that the role of SSS should be primarily one of education from an academic and social perspective. In addition, the transitioning of children between grades 8/9, and from grade 12 into society are key responsibilities that the SSS branch should be managing.

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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Typical external stakeholder responses included the following (quotes):

- SSS should assist with adapted and modified curriculum
- SSS needs to facilitate transition at the high school level
- SSS should be getting the right services for the right students across the system; typically they respond in a ‘knee jerk’ manner
- Link with community agencies with a view to supporting all aspects of the child
- Provide a structured environment
- Help with peer problems
- Facilitate transitions
- Provide clear information regarding:
  - Student needs
  - Services available
  - Options
  - Providing the right information at the right time
- Provide services within a cultural context.
- Provide support for “at risk” students
- SSS has a role in - early identification of *potential* problems before it turns into a problem.

Interestingly, RPSB Administration articulated a clear perspective on the role that SSS should play, and in fact shared a number of the same areas raised by the external stakeholder group. Focus group responses suggested that there is a distinct gap between the expectations of the RPSB Administrative group and the perceptions of the service recipients in terms of the role of SSS Branch.

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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**Question:** What are your perceptions of the (your) SSS Branch? What has your experience been with the SSS Branch – are they effective?

Respondents to this question articulated a consistently high level of support for the current programs and services being offered by the Student Support Services Branch. In terms of program delivery and effectiveness from a discreet program perspective, stakeholders were confident in the service and professionalism of the staff currently in place.

Notwithstanding the obvious support for SSS programs and staff, concerns regarding resource availability and access to programs were raised by the majority of the respondents. Typical responses targeted access to testing, specialized services, placement, the sharing of information, and a lack of time to coordinate and plan for a sustainable outcome.

The following comments taken from focus group interviews is representative of the concerns raised:

**Resources:**

Focus Group comments suggested consensus surrounding a need to increase support to both students and classroom teachers, with an acknowledgement that the issue is further challenged by finite resources.

From this perspective, internal stakeholders stated the following (quotes):

- (SSS) not meeting expectations because of limited resources
- Certainly on the same page regarding needs, however issues really relate to funding
- LRT are bursting in terms of work load
- Disconnect between resource allocation
  - 10 LRT in High Schools
  - 43 LRT in Elementary Schools
- Early intervention is the key, but depending on the program, it (intervention) may not take place until Grade 5/6
- Sometimes the kid is tested and needs a different program, but due to space issues they are not able to move
- Waiting list for referrals:
  - Psych can take up to a year
  - Similar issues with OT
- Allied Professionals/Support:
  - We are often limited by the support we get from other agencies
  - Do not get consistent support from social services

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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Coordination of resources and effort is often tied closely to leadership and strategic direction. In that context a number of stakeholders raised issues relating to information sharing and interaction with leaders within the system and at a government level.

It is important to note that despite issues in this area, the majority of internal stakeholders reported receiving high levels of support and information from direct superiors. Many SSS Branch employees described strong relationships that “made the difference” in their ability to cope with day to day decisions and workload.

In terms of leadership and performance, the following comments are representative of those shared by internal stakeholders (quotes):

### **Leadership:**

- Communication is inconsistent and often “very broken”
- Leadership is somewhat ambiguous when it comes to Sask. Learning and the School Board
- Lack of direction and goals as they relate to our roles
- We don’t feel that the board administration really listens to us on the front line

### **Performance:**

- We have multiple lines of accountability – both the Board and the school principal
- Support from school administration is inconsistent – they need to do more observation to find out what we do.

When interviewing SSS Branch employees regarding overall Branch effectiveness, feedback suggested that many individuals felt that they were ineffective in meeting expectations. Further, many expressed significant guilt surrounding the triage approach that is currently used to prioritize day to day work.

### **Effectiveness:**

In terms of effectiveness in their particular role, the following comments are representative of internal stakeholder opinion (quotes):

- We are not effective
- Access to programs is through formal measurement – but not standardized; some kids are able to do provincial testing, but not consistently
- We track our work, but there is no real requirement for documentation
- Standardization would be good – standards exist for regular programs, but no real defined standards within ours (ESL). We use regular curriculum benchmarks to assess progress
- We don’t know if we are meeting the standard for our program – it isn’t measured
- We often take on roles that don’t belong to us (nursing needs; physio)
- Too much paperwork – no additional prep time – we do much more report writing/paper work than other program areas
- We (teachers) feel like we are being dumped on!

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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- Adaptation sheets are required for the programs – teachers don't like completing them. They don't know the use/value
- In some cases, we are not following 'best practise' guidelines
- Lack of cohesion – varies between schools and administrators
- Duplication of services

### **Communication**

The effectiveness of communications was another issue raised by the internal stakeholders. Issues were identified regarding the consistency with which information is shared as well as their level of involvement in overall student care.

The following comments are representative of those shared by respondents:

- We often find out things about our kids after the fact
- Sometimes we are purposely excluded
- There is a definite difference between what colleagues expect (SSS perception re: our role) and what we really do
- Authority:
  - As professionals, we should be making decisions regarding our students, yet others seem to have the authority that we need in order to be effective
  - Classroom teachers decide whether or not we are in-classroom or out
  - Expectation is set by teacher – they decide who goes where, when
- No balance – professionalism is not recognized

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### **Question: How often do you access branch programs/services?**

Depending on the perspective of the stakeholder, access to SSS Branch programs and services varied greatly and ranged from daily contact to crisis response only.

In evaluating program effectiveness frequency of access is perhaps less relevant than ensuring that appropriate interaction occurs between stakeholder and SSS, and that lag time between a request and a response is acceptable. In many cases it appears that, ad hoc processes have replaced “best practise” approaches due to the lag time involved. Typically, this type of situation occurs when some level of assessment or testing is required.

Further, many stakeholders (external to SSS) expressed frustration regarding attempting to access SSS for day to day issues:

*“Regular issues do not command a very quick response – it’s primarily a resource issue, but it isn’t great that the squeaky wheel gets the grease...”*

*High School Vice-Principal*

This comment is representative of feedback from other internal stakeholders. Those stakeholders suggested that in many cases, an anticipated lack of (timely) response is built in to the decision making process, and often a choice will be made without consultation with relevant SSS Branch consultants. This type of situation serves to increase levels of role ambiguity, lack of accountability, and the ‘powering up’ that often occurs when someone needs something and isn’t feeling acknowledged (squeaky wheel).

*“Students are often assigned to programs by the school administrator – we are told to take them”*

*SSS Branch Employee*

Other internal stakeholders indicated that they view the SSS program situation as “very unstable – a change in administration can result in the dismantling of program elements”. Focus Group feedback supported the perception that there is inconsistency between schools in terms of SSS programs. Program efficacy appears to be dependant upon the support for the program by the school administration.

### **Internal Perspective**

Not unlike the comment noted above that was made by the High School Vice Principal, other stakeholders also expressed frustration with the delays in response to service requests as is demonstrated by the following comments (quotes):

- On occasion, we have an issue and contact main office only to find that the message manager is full!
- Do not feel that psychologists provide adequate support

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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- Huge testing backlog – testing is necessary in order to be designated and to access LD
- Q: What is the Administrator role? We are very frustrated – nothing happens
- Curriculum Support services – we only interact 2 or 3 times a year. SSS operates in a very ‘discreet’ manner. There is very little collaboration between the branches
- OT is very slow – 5-6 month wait for an assessment
- We try to access SSS services all of the time, but the availability isn’t always there (Elementary LD)
- OT – takes 18 months for an assessment
- No access to Social Workers at the High School level – why?
- Need exceeds availability

### **Communication**

As mentioned previously, communication issues generated concerns for all stakeholders. The following sampling of comments is representative of overarching themes identified in this area (quotes):

- Major disconnect between the curriculum branch and SSS
- We need to know about curriculum changes/initiatives in order to direct kids to specific programs
- No (collaborative) work between curriculum and any SSS area
- Role definition is ambiguous
- Responsibility for continuity of care varies for - not formal – but we often get it by default
- Role for continuity of care should fall with someone who connects with the child on a daily basis (LRT/Principal)
- Outside agency – we are the point of contact, yet we can’t reach out to access information
- We don’t really know what SSS does (teacher stakeholders)

### **Parent Feedback**

Parents have perhaps the most vested interests in accessing SSS for information and support, yet it appears that very few do so unless specific issues arise. It is interesting to note is that several program areas felt challenged by situations in which familial support was minimal or absent as many program outcomes are impacted by (external) support levels. Given the limited availability of program resources, these issues were especially difficult to address.

In large part, the parent external stakeholders expressed a lack of understanding with respect to the role that the SSS Branch plays and what they might expect in terms of programs, support, and services. This was further reinforced by the discussions that ensued between parents as each question was posed. The sampling of comments noted, supports a need to communicate more effectively to this stakeholder group (quotes):

- Access to resources is not enough - speech pathologist resources are insufficient
- I don’t really know what SSS is?
- My child has behavioral issues due to anger at not hearing. We need more dedicated, knowledgeable teachers

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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- Is there any accountability for SSS teachers?
  - How do we know if teachers are doing well?
  - What are the checks and balances?
- My child fell through cracks, waiting for speech – I thought he was on list – it turns out he wasn't
- My child needs testing to get in to LD but I can't afford it – it costs \$1000
- I assume things are going well unless I hear otherwise...
- SSS – needs to use a holistic approach to help families and engage families.
- We need preschool division/focus
- I am worried that my child not being challenged enough.

The stakeholder research suggested that some of the children within SSS programs face significant social issues and may lack familial support and structure. In situations where parental capacity to advocate and communicate is diminished, program access and student achievement may be negatively impacted. The current research suggests that defined processes do not currently exist to address this situation.

Addressing parental capacity issues is currently dependant upon the initiative of the internal stakeholder (SSS Branch) and therefore is not examined consistently.

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### **Question: What do you need from SSS in terms of support, service, and/or programs?**

Responses from internal stakeholders (SSS Branch) varied slightly from the comments provided by individuals external to SSS Branch but employed within the schools, although a few commonalities were identified in almost all cases. Specific areas of concern included resourcing and communications. SSS Branch employees further identified needs surrounding support – both financial and human resource, as well as a need for clear direction and role clarification.

External stakeholders (outside of SSS Branch) focused on information respecting programs, expectations, and the role of SSS in general. Their comments reflect a need for orientation and information sharing.

Stakeholder focus Group discussions identified the following key requirements necessary to increase the effectiveness of SSS programs and service:

### **Resources:**

SSS Branch internal stakeholders a need for additional human resources, but recognized that funding would always be a concern. A number of groups expressed interest in understanding funding mechanisms and how they impacted their specific program area.

One case in particular is that of the English as a Second Language (ESL) group. Teachers expressed frustration with the initiatives promoted by the federal government surrounding immigration. Specifically, they wanted to understand why additional funding was not directed to educating these new immigrants and providing support for the issues they bring with them.

Other concerns raised were related to having the proper tools to operate a program. Comments included (quotes):

- We do not have the tools to do our jobs
  - **If a specific item is included in a PPP goal, we should not have to fundraise to facilitate the activity!**
  - Huge issues with computers (5.5 months to fix); access to testing software; presentation software; etc...
  - No textbooks (or not enough) – Scott
  - No microscope yet attempting to teach biology curriculum
  - Insufficient resources – human and material
- One social worker/counsellor per school? – Too few!
- Manpower in the classroom
- Need the Board Office to support ESL with materials and access to age appropriate resources

A number of SSS respondents spoke to the issue of Information Technology (IT) and the support requirements that accompanied various products in use. Comments ranged from limited satisfaction with the available IT support to extreme levels of frustration. Complete satisfaction in terms of IT technical support was not identified by any stakeholder interviewed.

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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Despite reported perceptions of resource deficiencies, many SSS internal branch stakeholders stated that when they asked for items, they were never/seldom turned down. Although this seems somewhat contradictory, responses suggested that often SSS internal stakeholders were ‘filtering’ their requests based on their knowledge of available resources, thereby limiting the number of refusals. Work-around strategies are currently employed by many stakeholder groups to address immediate requirements.

### **Communication & Information:**

Communication and information sharing were identified as significant concerns for both internal and external stakeholders interviewed. Internal groups typically identified gaps in information provided relating to role, strategic direction, new policies, and new Government initiatives (in particular Saskatchewan Learning).

Privacy legislation issues were raised on a number of occasions during the internal stakeholder meetings. Stakeholders tended to rely on their own personal perceptions regarding the sharing of student information to guide them in terms of what they can request and/or share with other parties. Clarification surrounding privacy legislation is necessary, as the current research suggested that many of these individuals consider privacy legislation to be an insurmountable barrier. Consequently with this in mind, some fail to initiate or participate in consultation with other practitioners.

The lack of engagement of regular classroom teachers and administration was also identified as a barrier that exists relating to information sharing. Regular teachers reported a lack of understanding of the SSS Branch in general and a need for a formal orientation to the programs and services available. They simply did not appear to know what SSS Branch does. This lack of understanding seems to have contributed to an overall inconsistency in how school administration managed the SSS programs and student needs. The following examples serve to demonstrate the lack of understanding of both the student needs and the program mandate (quotes):

- Student in Deaf Hard of Hearing (DHH) Program:
  - Participates in regular classroom activities watching programs on TV or video. The television (and in some cases the video) does not have closed captioning.
  - Regular classroom teacher refuses to wear a microphone despite the value to the DHH student.
- Student in ESL program:
  - Teachers are unprepared for the severe emotional issues that can emerge – PTSD: School alarms go off and the child thinks that a bomb has exploded; elevators resembling gas chambers; the issues that come with Mothers Day for kids with no moms

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### **Meeting Needs:**

In terms of SSS Branch program delivery, internal stakeholders articulated frustration with trying to meet student needs given the existing limitations. Concerns often revolved around timeliness and the resources required to perform effectively in their roles. The following comments are quotes taken from focus group meetings:

- We focus on knowledge but we don't have enough time to share info and/or liaise with our stakeholders
- We are too busy just keeping on keeping on to meet needs adequately
  - We spend a lot of time putting out fires
  - Lack of collaboration
  - Students that are best and brightest also fall through cracks.
- Staff morale is an issue due to inadequate support
- Modified programs are optional and based on the individual school, and level of administrative support
- TRIAGE system – re-testing is a real problem – we need to be re-evaluating rather than re-testing
- No PD time during the year
- We need timely assessments and placements
- Transportation issues – kids are in a cab for sometimes 1 hour - cab drivers need training
- Scott kids – community coordinator to help students connect with social services is good, but we could use 4 or 5 more
- Somehow we need SSS to bridge us into community service organizations
  - Forging new partnerships is very important (C&Y/etc)

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### **Question: Which programs have you found to be most valuable to you?**

When asked this question, (internal and external) stakeholders consistently articulated that all programs were valuable, although it was noted that some were more effective in service delivery than others.

Interviews suggested that despite delivering quality programs, timing means everything. Concerns expressed by stakeholders focused on ensuring that appropriate resources are available when the student needs them.

Of the programs identified as most valuable, the areas responsible for assessment (OT and, Psychology) were viewed as critical paths. Many groups identified issues with the availability of these two services. It was reported that the wait lists for both these services exceed one year and in the case of Occupational Therapy, no new cases are currently being accepted.

As many SSS programs have limited space/enrolment, historically the method identified to screen applicants has been some form of testing. Despite the value of testing as a screening mechanism, mandatory testing has reportedly created severe bottlenecks and has had significant implications for students in terms of their academic life.

From an operational (classroom teacher) perspective, LRTs were identified as key resources to keep students in the regular classroom setting. In addition, the use of Teacher Assistants was seen as critical to maintaining the existing level of service within the SSS program area.

Internal stakeholder comments were also directed at specific program areas as follows (quotes):

- Speech Language Pathologists
  - SLP – lots of direct support and service
  - They often provide useful materials
  - Insufficient time to fully service our kids
- Adaptation facilitation is a very good model

Discussions around response time and access resulted in many more comments and expressions of frustration on the part of stakeholders from within the RPSB system and externally. The following is a sample of typical comments (quotes):

- Access to SSS on a routine basis is not good – day to day isn't working
- Response is excellent in crisis....
- We seem to spin out new programs in elementary schools but no real support in High Schools
- SSS needs to ID priority (VPs)
- Guidance Counsellors in community schools are invaluable but are they meeting needs of SSS kids in the high schools?
- If we could access programs they would be more valuable
- Resources are not equal between high school and elementary
- Trickle down – things fall off rails

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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- ARC: We have inconsistent access to all of these professionals

From a parent perspective, most articulated respect and value for all of the programs offered. They were cautious in their comments, likely for fear of compromising an existing service. The general consensus was that SSS programs worked well for their children however several parents identified areas of concern or gaps in service delivery.

Specifically, children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. Some parents felt strongly that current programs do not address the needs of these unique groups. In these situations, there is a perception that SSS is forcing a child to fit into a program simply to place them, at a cost of the child's potential.

# Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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**Question:** Are there programs/resources that are not available that you would like to see delivered?

**Do you have any concerns that you feel must be addressed within this review?**

*Note: Many stakeholders chose not to comment as they had expressed their views about program gaps in response to the previous question regarding concerns*

Most stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the programs currently in place. However, many also identified support and operational issues that they felt needed to be addressed in order to truly maximize the benefits of the program. The following sampling of comments is reflective of the tone of the responses (quotes):

## **General Support:**

- Increased support (and training) for teachers is needed:
  - SSS kids are typically well supported – kids that function at a slightly higher level are at the mercy of the abilities of the classroom teacher
  - Give us something we can use – not more forms to fill out
- Improved access is needed to :
  - Public health
  - Child & Youth Services information/assessments
  - Section 10 worker/space
  - Facilities in the community for kids living on their own. Current facilities are not intended for kids (YMCA etc...) – they are for adults and not good for kids.
- Professional Development is needed:
  - We need it and want to select the most appropriate training (rather than having school administration select for us)
- It was suggested that it is important to consider the establishment of minimum skill requirements and core training for Teacher Assistants given the high needs and vulnerable students whom they serve. They are currently the least trained of the professional groups within the school system working with the most challenging population.

## **Resource Issues:**

General Resource Requirements:

- Textbooks; pictures; software; etc...

Specialized resource requirements:

- Grade 1 readers don't work for our kids (ESL)
- Physical accessibility – wheelchair access, etc.
- Vehicles to transport kids
- Showers to allow for washing and delousing when necessary
- “Feeder schools are designated ‘community schools’ but the high school isn't?” - Hunger/Poverty issues are not consistently addressed in high school

# Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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## Program Issues:

- Asst. Superintendant issues: who are the consultants really accountable to?
- Make SSS and the school administrators accountable
- SSS can sometimes be very territorial; could improve communication/structure (Curriculum)
- Gaps at high school:
  - What is the role of the guidance counsellor; There is also quite a disparity in service in the guidance department
  - We need drug awareness counsellors
  - How does high school address special needs in partnership with the community
  - What happens to kids without advocates?
- Resource officer is more reactive than proactive
- Why is it that I can see signs that others (Admin) don't see – e.g. a “filthy child” needs SSS support, but VP won't initiate the referral
  - I don't think it is because SSS doesn't want to be involved – it is very dependant on the initiative of the administrative staff.
- Disparity between the number of LRTs at the elementary and high school levels
- Use less critical staff to do psychometric testing
- **Speech pathologists are very under-funded and it takes** forever to access their services
- Our students do not participate in any provincial testing; No standardized testing for our kids

## New Program Opportunities:

- Life skills orientation with a focus on the realities of living in a western capital based society – how to deal with credit; cell phones; banking; etc.
- Layer of professional staff is missing – counsellors; therapy; addition of professional staff qualified to provide therapy and counselling who's primary function is to work directly with students and families”
- Music Therapy - developmental classroom kids would really benefit from this. The level of support in this area is not as good as previously
- Life centred career education
- Tools to deal more effectively with communication Disorders – kids with dysfluency; apraxic; unintelligible speech
- Autism Spectrum Programs - one on one teaching for autistic needs, specific classrooms for autistic needs.
- IQ~80 – is a no mans land. These kids don't fit ARP or LD – they might get LRT at 2-3 hour blocks every week but it isn't sufficient
- More behaviour classrooms but not at the SLC level
- Alternative classrooms in the majority of high schools instead of sep. Locations (Normalizes behaviour – creates opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular activity)
- Drug/Alcohol training for kids/teachers
- Hire a V.P. through Admin Services to function as a liaison with SSS instructional leadership is needed.
- Secretarial support for programs (especially scheduling team meetings) – SLP; Psych; OT

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### **Do you have any concerns that you would like addressed?**

- SMART goals & PPP:
  - We are teaching kids for ½ a day and trying to set goals based on this limited time. It can take a lot of time to develop the goals and parents do not understand that it isn't going to be an instant fix
  - The SMART and PPP are supposed to be living documents. We need to be able to refer back, but often by the time we get back to them the goals are redundant
  - Goals have to be achievable and measurable
    - Not everything we do can be quantified - we know when a child is making progress
    - Sask. Learning is trying to use a 'one size fits all' approach and it doesn't work in our setting
    - We are still comparing back to grade level measures
- Lack of value for parents:
  - We need to recognize the challenges they (families) face
  - Sometimes they can't even manage the cost of taxi; babysitting; bus tickets; etc.
  - Real equity issues
  - Lack of funding available for providing support to parents

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### **Question: Do you find that coordination of care for the student is working?**

The Saskatchewan Learning School <sup>PLUS</sup> program speaks to the importance of the coordination of care (case management) of student needs. In the case of School <sup>PLUS</sup>, individual initiative appears to play a significant role in the ultimate success of the program for the individual student. To a large degree, internal stakeholders expressed uncertainty regarding their role with respect to the program and its implementation.

Coordination of care within this context, equates to management of the 'whole child'. Specifically, it addresses the need to examine all relevant aspects of the student and their life in order to determine the best possible option(s).

Most stakeholders were unclear as to whether or not they should be involved in coordination of care. Several groups claimed responsibility for this role, although through discussion it became apparent that there is a lack of understanding with respect to what the role actually does. To that end, the management of student information from a case management perspective appears to be rather "hit and miss".

Many stakeholders indicated that in their opinion standard case management does not currently occur. This situation appeared further complicated by the revelation that many internal stakeholders interpreted privacy legislation in a way that prohibited sharing of information even within the 'circle of care'.

Typical responses included addressing needs at a discreet program level and not from a holistic perspective. The following represents a sampling of internal stakeholder responses to this issue (quotes):

- No real team meetings with everyone together
- Time is an issue
- No real coordination of care
- Child and youth want us to provide information/reports but the information sharing isn't necessarily reciprocated
- There is a real gap in care at the senior level
- Parents often advocate for kids
- With foster kids – lots of history; loss of access to files. Barrier – prevents sharing of information
- No one takes the lead
- Team meetings at some of the schools – depends on process in place – administration decision
- We really aren't involved in this...
- Coordination of care is typically the responsibility of the core leader
- Sometimes the LD teacher or the Guidance Counsellor are responsible
- Guidance counsellor/LRT/administration work together to coordinate care
- The practise of team approach is fairly consistent between schools
- Big concern – too time consuming

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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- High School VP - Student coordination of care is our job: we coordinate, but do not execute
- Teacher assistants actually go to court with the student to try and ensure that they understand what is happening. They work with the social worker and the lawyer on behalf of the child
- We don't know who does it?
- Coordination of care is really based on parent driven advocacy – it's down to them
- It's not happening
- We don't train teachers to deal with this
- Administration should be coordinated
- Service is very inconsistent
- Difficult question – every organization looks at themselves as the case manager
- Very tough – who has jurisdiction as the case manager
- SSS has a large stake in coordination of care – most influence over kids; level of student engagement in schools makes it easier or more difficult

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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**Question: How do you see your child transitioning into society upon graduation? Is there a role that SSS could play in ensuring this transition is seamless?**

In terms of transition planning and execution, many stakeholders (both Internal and External) indicated that the need is *inconsistently* met. Stakeholder comments ranged from SSS had direct involvement to no involvement at all, in facilitating transitions for students.

Many individuals expressed concern regarding Student Support Services (SSS) discontinuing its involvement with the student at the transition point - “We drop them once they leave the program”. Most stakeholders (internal and external) identified a need for some form of planning however when asked about where they believe the responsibility should lie, the responses were very inconsistent.

Several stakeholders indicated that Guidance Counsellors managed the role of transitions. When the Guidance Counsellor internal stakeholder group was interviewed, they indicated that much of their role involved assisting students with transitioning to post-secondary institutions (including scholarship applications). Transitioning of SSS students into the work world and/or into post secondary training appeared to occur as necessary, however it was not identified as primary responsibility of this group.

Typical internal stakeholder responses regarding the issue of transitioning students included (quotes):

- In my role – not so much; If I have involvement, it is usually very indirect
- I may pick up on things that may have been missed
- It should be part of the Sask. Learning role
- Transition to post grade 12 is dependant on individual teachers
- Next step often isn’t there...
- Kids need re-assessment in order to access psych services after graduation. We have a responsibility as a school division to help kids move on
- Transition planning is really dependant on the individual initiative of the teacher to collaborate with the High School
- “Transition to high school stinks”
- SSS – has a limited role in this process – most often the guidance counsellors deal with transitioning
- Transition planning only occurs if the kid is trying to get into SIAST or University
- SSS should have a role, but what is it?
- Promote self advocacy – teach them to fight for what they need
- Provide connections with agencies outside
- Social workers are partly supposed to be doing this – social workers appear to be only serving the transition needs of elementary school students
- It is a very fragmented process
- If we want it to happen, we have to do it
- We drop them once they leave the program
- Transition is coordinated with Guidance Counsellor

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### PARENT STAKEHOLDER RESPONSES:

- I don't know what they actually do (referring to SSS Branch)
- I believe it should be a shared responsibility – We all have a role
- SSS is not set up to do this – SSS role should be to provide support to age 22 then it isn't the school divisions problem
- Transitioning really should be a parent role.
- Not really the role of SSS
- Responses were received which indicated that in some cases parents do not see it as an eventual outcome that their children will graduate. It is anticipated that most will drop out.

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

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### **Question: Tell me what the concept of inclusion means to you?**

The concept of inclusion is somewhat amorphous in that each stakeholder defined it in terms of his or her own reference points and experiences. For this reason, it is difficult to determine whether or not the principles of inclusion are being adopted consistently and used effectively. That having been said, an overarching theme supported the principle of creating a sense of belonging and community regardless of the life situation of the student.

The following is a sample of respondent comments to this question (quotes):

- Specialized classes may be required
- Kids should feel like they belong in the school and community
- Not just integration
- The kids should feel welcome in the school environment – dances, games, lunches
- Sexual orientation/race/religion/class – all should feel a part of the school community
- We can't be writing kids off or modifying programs simply because the child exhibits behavior/symptoms related to poverty – poverty issues are not academic
- We try to develop a sense of community and belonging
- What ever the kid needs to be successful
- To participate and feel valued
- It is community
- Inclusion is not a placement, it is a philosophy that applies to everyone
- You accept and appreciate everyone
- Just because they are in the classroom does not mean that inclusion is present – it depends on the teacher
- Teachers need to take more ownership

From an opposite perspective, a few stakeholders reported that they viewed inclusion as similar to integration and struggled with differentiating the two concepts (quotes):

- Great idea but parents need to provide support
- People see it as a way to get kids into the classroom with less support
- We need resources to make it happen
- Usher – the culture really accepts this concept
- Integration at Knoll is working well
- Inclusion deals with belonging and self-esteem. It isn't integration (more individual)
- More social than academic
- Peer-support model is different because of time limitations scheduling is very difficult
- Don't want to have to do something for nothing

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

### Demonstrated Success

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Within *every* focus group session, respondents expressed genuine gratitude for the programs and services provided by the Student Support Services (SSS) Branch. Focus group stakeholders (both internal and external) shared very positive comments regarding their perceptions of the SSS Branch and current programming.

Comments from internal stakeholders indicated that the autonomy and freedom that is encouraged by SSS Branch Heads creates a supportive work environment on the whole. Many respondents also spoke to a high level high level of job satisfaction based on an environment of trust and respect.

From an operational perspective, internal stakeholders commented that established procedures and processes are excellent (when utilized). In general, procedures designed for crisis management were seen as particularly effective, as is the response in these types of situations.

Internal and external focus group respondents also commented that human resources within the SSS Branch have high levels of expertise and capacity. In general, remarks suggested that services provided by the branch are seen as effective with an overarching acknowledgement of resourcing issues (and the potential for these to compromise effectiveness). The following comments are quotes taken from focus group sessions:

*“Incredible professionals”*  
*“Skills are amazing”*  
*“Best of the best!”*  
*“SSS are rich in willingness”*

*Focus Group Responses 2007*

In terms of SSS programs, both internal and external respondents indicated high levels of satisfaction with existing offerings and the content within the various program areas. Specific comments have been compiled (and summarized) from the focus group sessions and are captured in the following statements:

**SUBJECT: SSS PROGRAMS AND SERVICE DELIVERY GENERAL COMMENTS**  
(compiled from all focus group sessions)

- SSS has a very difficult job because of it's diverse clientele – we really appreciate the support
- Pro-active work – conflict management with kids
- Willingness of staff to try to accommodate the needs of the students
- High degree of accountability
- We find the best options/commitment
- Individuals in SSS find their passion and grow it!
- Diversity of programs

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

### Demonstrated Success

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- **Willingness to challenge the status quo – care and compassion**
- Teachers and teacher's aids that really get it are delightful.
- SSS seen to have a good sense of which adults do well with which kids – matching.
- More flexible for individual needs.
- Different solutions.
- Programs work really well
- Rubrics are working well
- Our kids are involved – taking part in public speaking moments. It is wonderful to see!
- This Council (Elders)
- Teacher Assistants - save my day.
- Staff here, are very approachable.
- Quick service; very responsive to working collaboratively (Child and Youth Services)
- Collaboration is very good
- Relationships and strengths; familiarity with the individuals in SSS building trust/comfort (Young Offenders)
- School PLUS is good!
- **Great decrease in red tape and bureaucracy**
- They've (SSS) never said no – it's refreshing and positive!
- Trust us to do our jobs without hanging over us
- We never feel put on the spot
- We support each other
- We feel respected from the professionals we work with – they consider us (and treat us) as equals
- Wonderful people to work with – no bickering – we like each other
- High school crisis intervention is handled very well!
- When SSS were called – they tapped into to other resources

#### **SUBJECT: GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS PROGRAM AREA COMMENTS**

- Good support network among us
- Guidance Counsellors become corporate memory – as administrators change, we help with the transition
- We have good partnerships with the university

#### **SUBJECT: ESL PROGRAM AREA COMMENTS**

- SSS is supportive; caring
- Other teachers in school are receptive to our kids
- Listening to the kids – the thank-you(s) that we receive (is working well)
- We are a friend and confidante for the kids and they trust us!
- They often call, even after they've left the program
- It is a joy and privilege to work with these kids
- ESL – integrated with science 10 with sheltered tutorial worked exceptionally well!
- Other support from teachers is great (LD working with our kids)

## Stakeholder Focus Group Key Categories

### Demonstrated Success

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- Zero reduction support/opportunity center – kids work in library with peer support
- We integrate kids into extracurricular programs – choir. It keeps kids ‘gainfully employed’ in the school

#### **SUBJECT: PARENT COMMENTS**

- I ask for meetings and people responded
- Attentive teacher.
- Lots of communication.
- That we are here (is working well for me)
- Actions (are good)
- We are met with tons of challenges and we seem to come together really well
- PPPs are being met over time
- Small school with strong admin. Support
- Caring community is working well

## Key Issue Analysis - Communication

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To varying degrees, the majority of stakeholders identified issues concerning communication. Typically, internal stakeholders reported feeling uninformed especially when it came to the implementation of Saskatchewan Learning directives and other new initiatives. It is noted that the strategic direction of the organization appeared to have little significance/relevance for front line employees which is problematic as it impacts directly on their ability to meet the strategic objectives. Frontline employees identified a lack of clarity around their role in the larger strategic plans of the organization.

A level of dissatisfaction was expressed by internal stakeholders regarding a perceived lack of consultation and validation of new concepts ideas. (Saskatchewan Learning initiatives were highlighted as a particular area of concern). Respondents in the internal stakeholder consultations, (which included classroom teachers), suggested that historically, implementation issues seemed to be often disregarded, leading to a sense of apathy and lack of support towards new initiatives on the part of the front line employee.

The issue of “Inclusion” is one area of educational policy that appeared to spark considerable interest in terms of how this concept is communicated to the field. Responses to the question of the meaning of inclusion varied. One respondent stated

“It means being involved”

Another commented:

“Inclusion is an ‘extra’ because they are designated to a program already”

In order to effectively implement inclusionary concepts, inclusion should be defined in terms of what Sask. Learning and/or the RPSB mandates. Leaving the definition to the discretion of the individual raises the risk of inconsistent application and outcome.

Many teachers expressed frustration surrounding the role they should or do play in the area of inclusion. They reported feeling “dumped on” (presumably by SSS and the RPSB) which appears to have been the result in large part because of insufficient information. Individual opinions regarding inclusion appeared to be based upon personal experience, personal perspectives, and in-service education provided by the RPSB. Support for inclusion also appeared to be significantly dependant upon the level of “buy-in” at the Principal and Vice-Principal levels.

Beyond communication relating to specific initiatives (inclusion), the issue of timely communication was another area of concern/dissatisfaction noted by the internal stakeholders. Although information flow between SSS branch office and the “field” was reported to have generally been good, the same however was not expressed in terms of the flow of communication from Sask Learning to the front line.

Communication regarding the SSS branch, its mandate, and its role was also identified as an issue. It became evident during the external stakeholder consultations that many of the focus

## Key Issue Analysis - Communication

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group participants (including some internal SSS members) did not actually know what Student Support Services is, or the role that they play. While perhaps surprising, it is somewhat easy to see how this lack of understanding could have come about. Stakeholders noted that the SSS branch appears to be working at capacity and to be committed to providing a high level of direct service, which unfortunately means that there is little time or resources left for broad communication efforts that may offer little in terms of quantifiable return.

Parent respondents expressed a genuine interest in understanding the role that the branch plays and the programs and services that it has to offer. Teachers within the system also indicated a lack of understanding for the role/responsibilities that the SSS branch assumes. In order for the SSS branch to gain support from school administration, teachers, and parents, it appears to be important that these partners understand what they can expect from the area.

Moving forward, it will be important for SSS to continue to monitor the effectiveness of its communication strategy and to consider introducing mechanisms that lead to communication on a more regular basis with their stakeholders. Clarification of the SSS role and communication of information regarding the various roles within SSS will be an important element in ensuring that stakeholder expectations fall within the scope of SSS responsibility and the branch has the ability to provide the service.

## Key Issue Analysis - Equity

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Equity issues were raised by a number of internal stakeholder groups. Despite the varied comments, it appears that many issues can be linked to resourcing concerns raised previously.

A particular area of concern related to a perceived inequity in terms of student ability to access programs and services. Specifically, some program areas (e.g. Speech Language Pathology) depend upon support available in the home in order to effectively implement a program for a particular student. In situations where support is absent and/or capacity does not exist within the home to provide support, program resource allocation can be challenging.

In situations where support is absent and/or capacity does not exist within the home to provide support, program resource allocation can be challenging. Determination of appropriate resource allocation takes into consideration a number of factors including anticipated outcome. Although perhaps somewhat contentious, this evaluation was identified as necessary in light of limited resources and time. Some internal stakeholders were embarrassed by this admission and some chose to deny it altogether. Most interestingly was the fact that other stakeholders (external to the SSP program) also identified this practise, so one might reasonably conclude that it is in fact in place.

In terms of parental/familial/guardian support, some internal stakeholders spoke to working assumptions that the RPSB appear to have, and the detrimental effect these assumptions can have on the student. For example, parents who do not engage in ongoing communication with teachers are often perceived to have less interest in the needs of the student. The reality of this situation may in fact have nothing to do with a lack of interest in the student and their progress, but rather to a lack of a phone and/or transportation. External stakeholder - parents echoed this sentiment and expressed concern regarding a lack of support provided to those families (not just the student) in desperate situations.

For students and families experiencing poverty, other equity issues emerge as children are often moved to schools outside of their home area to receive services. Providing food for children within community schools has been noted as an effective tool to increase the potential that the student has the best possible environment in which to learn.

*“Poverty and hunger can overshadow skills and capacity.”*

*Focus Group Response 2007*

The reality of moving students from community schools to other geographic areas for programs is that this basic support is removed and may only be replaced if teachers in the new facility identify the need and develop the resources.

From a program perspective, issues were raised with respect to elementary versus high school and the difference in resource allocation between the two.

One area of particular interest relates to an apparent difference in the allocation of Learning Resource Teachers between elementary and high schools. Sentiments expressed by both internal and external stakeholders suggested that students are unlikely to experience sudden improvement

## Key Issue Analysis - Equity

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in skills/competence between Grade 8 and 9, yet the support to these students is often significantly diminished in high school. There may be value in communicating the intent behind this allocation policy to ensure that perceptions are addressed and concerns alleviated.

Lastly, the equity issue was also raised by some of the internal SSS branch employee stakeholders. Concerns relating to respect for professional knowledge, space allocation, and access to support resources were also voiced. Although these concerns were subjective, it is important to note that they point to the emergence of discontent within SSS. The consistency (or lack of consistency) with which consultants and other professionals are managed is important, and being noted by those involved.

## Key Issue Analysis – Gap Identification

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Much of the information provided by both internal and external stakeholders suggested that things are working very well. The sentiment seemed to be especially strong in relation to the effort and quality of programs currently in place.

That having been said, there were a number of concerns raised that the Student Support Services (SSS) Branch may wish to consider in planning for the future. The concerns ranged from addressing specific student needs to meeting employee health and safety needs.

### **PROGRAMS**

Parent and teacher stakeholders alike voiced comments of concern regarding programs for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The general sentiment appeared to be that these students are falling through the cracks in terms of assessment and programming.

Meeting the needs of this diverse group appears to be challenging within the existing framework. Stakeholders suggested that most often the students were placed in a ‘best fit’ program which necessitated further tailoring of the program in order to meet the students’ academic and social needs. Some situations were noted to have been more successful than others. Both teachers and teacher assistants expressed frustration with a lack of support in addressing the complex needs of these students (e.g. tools and education).

A second area of concern raised related to meeting the needs of children with intensive health concerns. The teacher and teacher assistant internal stakeholders identified that the health concerns of these students often changed and increased over time. Conversely as the needs of these students increased, the teachers’ and teacher assistants’ corresponding knowledge about how to teach and manage the students did not. It was noted that on a day-to-day basis some SSS employees deal with health issues surrounding personal care, toileting, tube feeding, and the administration of medications. Many employee internal stakeholders indicated that they do not feel that these responsibilities have been appropriately placed given their lack of training in this area. These stakeholders reported that they generally felt unprepared and somewhat at risk when dealing with this particular population.

A third area of concern noted among internal stakeholders was that of students with mental health issues and the increasing number of such students. Some populations were identified to be at particular risk in terms of the development of mental health issues, yet the teacher and teacher assistant internal stakeholders indicated that they felt that they lacked the skills/training to deal with these students and the mental health issues effectively (Deaf/Hard of Hearing).

Teachers appear to be in need of support and assistance in addressing the mental health needs of students. The SSS branch has the expertise to address these concerns of students within the system at least at a preliminary level. Having said that, however time and resource availability, limits the capacity of SSS branch to address these concerns and to do so effectively. A team based approach utilizing outside service resources may be the most reasonable and available solution in the short term. The identification of mental health as a legitimate school based issue, resource allocation, and the development of a focused strategy in this area may be required to adequately and effectively address this need over the long-term.

## Key Issue Analysis – Information Technology

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The use of Information Technology (IT) within the Student Support Services (SSS) Branch varies significantly between program areas. In some areas, technology is a critical component of program delivery (i.e. students with communication disorders). Other situations depend on technology as a secondary (supplementary) tool to assist in program delivery (i.e. computer scoring of psychometric assessments).

Internal stakeholders identified that in general IT is not fully leveraged, in large part because of a lack of training and/or support for the tool(s) in place.

### **PROCUREMENT**

Procurement of technology is an interesting area worthy of consideration by SSS Branch Administration. Internal stakeholder feedback suggests that much of the technology in place was purchased as a result of an identifiable need put forth by an individual consultant and/or an individual front-line employee, as opposed to a program identified need. This type of process, although timely, can cause significant issues in terms of training and operational support – as is evidenced by comments shared during meetings.

A “best case” situation, would be one in which an organization has a clearly defined procurement processes specific to IT. Such a procurement plan may include the following elements:

- Business case – to ensure the appropriateness of the tool (i.e.: assistive technology); to research other options; to ensure that “Return on Investment” is identified; compatible with post-secondary institution technology; etc...
  - The issue of compatibility with the technology used in post-secondary institutions is an important consideration. In some cases, it can take months or years for a student to become adept at using a specific tool, only to discover that the post-secondary institution which they will be attending requires a different tool altogether. The more coordination in this area, the more likely there will be a positive outcome for the student.
- Alignment with corporate Information Technology Architecture/IT strategic plan
- Compatibility with desktop systems in place. RPSB currently utilizes two desktop systems)
  - One respondent expressed frustration that the technology required for the program in which they worked is not compatible with Mackintosh (MAC) systems so the program is forced to ‘make do’ without the technology. (Discovery Classroom)
- IT support requirements are identified and assigned
- Training plan for users of the IT
  - Front line technology users (end user)
  - Help desk
- Implementation strategy
  - Front line user documentation
  - Communication plan
- Post-implementation evaluation

## Key Issue Analysis – Information Technology

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These elements constitute an ideal IT situation, and will help to mitigate risk for the organization in terms of IT system failure, end user confusion, insufficient use of technology, etc.

### **SUPPORT**

Probably the number one concern raised by internal stakeholders when examining the issue of Information Technology (IT) was a perceived ongoing lack of support within the RPSB for existing tools in place.

System support is critical in ensuring that an IT tool is used to capacity and/or that it does not adversely affect other technology in place. Internal stakeholder feedback indicated that despite help desk efforts to provide support, most issues go unresolved. The result tending to be that the “end user” typically has to contact the manufacturer directly in order to obtain the necessary information to resolve the problem

A second major concern identified was a lack of “end user” (front-line user) training. Effective user training generally leads to a reduction in the need for IT support over the long term. Many users expressed dissatisfaction with the training they received with the introduction of a new piece of technology. In some cases, the extent of user training was limited to reading the manual and experimenting with the tool first hand. Although both approaches have value, an additional strategy may be the introduction of a ‘train the trainer’ process whereby one user receives enhanced training and they establish training for the remainder of their work area.

### **SUMMARY**

The benefit of technology is clearly the enhancement of service delivery and business processes. In the case of students it may be the critical factor in whether a student experiences success or not. A more strategic approach to procurement of technology including the use of a consistent plan (IT corporate architecture plan) for the organization as a whole, would be in the best interests of the SSS Branch and the students that they serve. Further, the SSS Branch may want to consider making some existing tools available across the branch - which may trigger increased uptake, added value in terms of service delivery, and increased skill set on the part of the end user.

## Key Issue Analysis – Process

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### **PROCESS & AUTHORITY:**

The vast majority of internal stakeholders identified issues pertaining to “process” and the ability to deliver effective programs and/or meet stakeholder needs given the fluid nature of some processes in place.

Process is a key determinant in program effectiveness and delivery. Research suggests that despite having well defined processes in place, a supportive framework must be present to ensure effectiveness and accountability, from an operational perspective. If a process has not been validated or lacks administrative support, the outcome becomes unpredictable.

In the case of Student Support Services (SSS) programs, the “framework” is in large part dependant upon the support provided by school administration, which the current research suggests tends to vary between individuals and schools. Further, the influence of administrative leadership sets the tone for the school teaching staff and their corresponding support for programs and services. In situations where administrative support is minimal or absent, internal stakeholders suggested that efforts to identify such barriers often go unresolved. This necessitates the introduction alternative strategies or “work around” processes that circumvent lines of authority. Accountability in terms of issue resolution appears unclear for those involved.

Focus group research also suggests that there is the potential for school administration to create barriers to service delivery that are insurmountable from a ‘front-line staff’ perspective. Many internal stakeholders commented that without the advocacy and support of school administration, SSS programs and program delivery are significantly compromised. As program support is tied closely to the perspective of the individuals(s) in charge, schools may have different (perceived and real) levels of effectiveness despite having similar programs in place. The perception of internal stakeholder is that consistency between schools (in terms of administrative support for SSS programs) is lacking. External stakeholders expressed frustration with a perceived difference in level of support for students and programs between individual schools.

For many areas of SSS, program accountability is directly tied to school administration. With this accountability structure, school administrators may find themselves placed in a conflict of interest situation when decisions regarding SSS program delivery/support contradicts with the needs of the general operation of the school. Undeniably the school administrator has a responsibility to the school community as a whole and must make decisions in the best interest of the organization as opposed to its individual units. With this in mind, it is important to note that level of administrative support appears to be a strong predictor of outcome in terms of SSS program effectiveness from the perspective of the SSS front line staff.

School Administration also establishes the leadership model for the school. This model may or may not be collaborative, which impacts the ability of SSS to meet the needs of the student population. Specific areas of concern were raised by many focus group respondents surrounding the concept of “coordination of care” for the student. Coordination of care in this context relates to understanding and addressing the needs and issues of the whole child – not just the student in the classroom.

## Key Issue Analysis – Process

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In some schools a team approach to student management is utilized. In these situations, the school Principal typically takes the lead in ensuring that all professionals involved in the care of the student participate in team meetings to discuss plans and track progress. In schools where team meetings are standard practise, internal and external stakeholders articulated high levels of satisfaction in terms of program effectiveness and student support. That having been said, the structure around team meetings and process also varies between schools which can lead to inconsistent outcomes. Despite this, all schools utilizing regular team meetings in general expressed higher overall levels of satisfaction with student progress and management.

### **COLLABORATION**

Other process issues related to SSS from an overall branch perspective. A number of external (to SSS) stakeholders voiced disappointment with the lack of professional collaboration between themselves and the branch.

Many opportunities for collaboration were identified such as: the development of curriculum, leveraging external resources and partnerships, and team problem solving. In general it was felt that it would be beneficial if SSS could participate more in collaborative efforts however it was also acknowledged that they are limited by the availability of resources and time.

SSS employee internal stakeholders also raised issues relating to collaboration. Many SSS employees expressed frustration with a lack of time to collaborate with peers and allied professionals. Most stakeholders identified value in establishing regular opportunities to connect and develop plans for students together however they identified time constraints as a significant barrier to such collaboration.

At the time of interview, most SSS employee internal stakeholders indicated that there was insufficient time to transfer information between colleagues (debrief) and therefore they tended to work in isolation. Paperwork PPP assessments, and SMART Goals were identified as time consuming and of limited value. It is important to note that despite the apparent lack of support for these tools, much of the frustration appeared to be linked to the time required to complete these tools and not the perceived merits of the actual tools.

Despite the potential value of the Cumulative file, it was not seen as an adequate or sufficient tool to ensure the continuity of care from one year to the next, or to ensure that adequate planning occurred due to limitations (whether real or perceived) in terms of what information can be shared through the file.

### **PROGRAM DELIVERY – PARTNERS, AND COMMUNICATION**

Process issues were also identified relating to the SSS programs themselves. Specifically, both internal and external stakeholders suggested that the RPSB is “program driven” and thus students are required to ‘fit’ programs as opposed to programs being modified to fit student needs. This sentiment was expressed numerous times over a number of groups.

## Key Issue Analysis – Process

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Specific concerns were also raised regarding access to information held by partners (Child and Youth; Department of Community Resources worker; Intake workers), access to relevant information from Saskatchewan Learning, and the timely sharing of information from the RPSB. In many cases, communication appeared to be dependent upon individual initiative as opposed to a defined process.

Significant frustration was expressed on the part of internal stakeholders regarding the communication by Sask. Learning of new policies and procedures. Internal stakeholders suggested that change seemed to be constant and lacking clear detail and purpose. Consequently non-compliance and passive resistance appeared to have resulted on the part of staff.

Internal stakeholders also suggested that information sharing between partners was restricted by provincial and federal privacy legislation. There appears to be a gap in knowledge in the area of privacy legislation as there are provisions under the applicable privacy legislation to permit the sharing of information under specific conditions. Increasing the knowledge surrounding privacy legislation may improve the ability for partners to work collaboratively.

### **BENCHMARKS, TESTING, & (TESTING) MATERIALS MANAGEMENT**

Concerns surrounding the management and control of copyrighted test materials were raised by a number of internal stakeholders. Specific areas of concern related to the potential for use of outdated test materials; ensuring the use of current norms; and the maintenance of test protocols and reports.

Upon further probing, internal stakeholders reported that testing tools are centrally maintained however there does not appear to be a system in place to ensure that the most current version of the tools are being utilized. In one particular case, an individual learned through the focus group discussion, that they had been using an outdated set of norms for testing. This highlights a need for coordination of these resources in terms of access and maintenance of documentation (version control).

In addition to concerns around testing materials, a number of SSS employee internal stakeholders suggested that the area most vulnerable to a lack of standardization is that of benchmarking student progress. Based on focus group feedback, it appears that standard benchmarks for students in the SSS programs are difficult to define and are often tailored to the abilities of the child. Because the students are unique, the PPP typically defines the benchmarks for success.

In the case of specific demographic groups, some respondents suggest that testing has limited value and can often lead to inappropriate placement of students. As an example: High potential autistic child with communication issues may not be receiving sufficient academic challenge.

The challenge for SSS Branch Administration is how to determine if SSS programs are meeting expectations. Outcome measurement would be valuable in ensuring that progress or regression is noted and addressed. Quantifying program effectiveness will allow SSS Administration to weigh the relative value of one program over another and in turn, allocate funding in the most appropriate and beneficial way.

## Key Issue Analysis – Process

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### **SUMMARY**

To summarize, appropriate lines of authority combined with standardization of processes, tools, and benchmarks are all key elements in ensuring that providers meet stakeholder expectations consistently. In terms of the SSS Branch, it appears that some standardized practises currently exist; however they appear to be inconsistently applied and modified as necessary in order to meet the challenges of the day.

# Key Issue Analysis – Resources

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## ROLE DEFINITION & ACCOUNTABILITY

Leadership approach and strategic direction are key influences when attempting to define roles within an organization. At the Division Office level, the role of the Student Support Services Branch should be clearly articulated defined by the RPSB. At a school level, school administration, (Principal/Vice-Principal) typically provides guidance to their staff regarding strategic direction and role definition. In order for employees to meet expectations, clear direction in terms of individual roles must be articulated and monitored.

Front-line SSS employee internal stakeholders expressed a need for clear role definition in order to appropriately allocate their time and resources. In many cases, these individuals suggested that their role is impacted by their reporting relationship with the school administration and his/her understanding of the defined role of the SSS consultant/teacher

When asked to contrast their role as defined by the SSS Branch with the expectations of their role as expressed by the school principal (i.e.: Are you meeting expectations?), most respondents expressed frustration and stress around the lack of congruence in this area.

Although structurally SSS employees have direct accountability to SSS branch heads, however their indirect accountability to school principals and teachers can often supersede the direct relationship. This situation cannot help but create confusion from an operational perspective. SSS employees must balance the expectations of the branch with the needs expressed within the school setting. In some cases there may be disparity between the two perspectives – further identifying a need to **clarify** and **communicate** roles and lines of accountability.

## RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The issue of resources tended to be a consistent point of concern for all stakeholders when examining the relevance and effectiveness of SSS programs and service delivery. Resource challenges identified ranged from basic textbook and microscope needs to larger issues surrounding human resources.

Within the school system, internal stakeholders identified specific areas of concern in terms of resource availability. The following areas were identified as having critical access issues:

- High School - Social worker/counsellors
- Staffing in the classroom
- Program space
- “2 years in LD is not sufficient – these kids don’t just get better by high school”
- Speech Language Pathologists
- Psychological Assessment (testing)
- Occupational Therapist
- Disconnect between resource allocation
  - 10 LRT in High Schools
  - 43 LRT in Elementary Schools

## Key Issue Analysis – Resources

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Not unlike the comments shared by SSS Branch employees, other internal stakeholders (Principals/Vice-Principals/teachers etc...) also expressed frustration with resource availability and time delay to response as evidenced by the following comments:

*“On occasion, we have an issue and contact main office only to find that the message manager is full.”*

*“We try to access SSS services all of the time, but the availability isn’t always there.”  
(Elementary LD)*

*“Huge testing backlog which is frustrating because testing is necessary in order to be designated and to obtain access to LD.”*

*“Do not feel that psychologists provide adequate support.”*

*“What is the Administrator role? We are very frustrated – nothing happens.”*

*“SSS operates in a very ‘discreet’ manner. There is very little collaboration between the branches.” (Curriculum Support services)*

*“OT – takes 18 months for an assessment.”*

*“No access to Social Workers at the High School level – why?”*

*“Need exceeds availability.”*

Most internal SSS and many external stakeholders identified a need for additional human resources, but also recognized that funding would always be a concern. A number of internal stakeholder groups expressed interest in understanding funding mechanisms and how they impacted their specific program area.

In particular, the English as a Second Language (ESL) group expressed frustration with initiatives promoted by the federal government surrounding immigration. Specifically, they are seeking to understand why additional funding was not directed to educating these new immigrants and providing support for the issues they bring with them.

Lastly from a resource allocation perspective, a number of internal SSS Branch stakeholders identified a growing need for administrative support. This issue relates in part, to a team approach to managing student care and the scheduling requirements that arise. Other groups identified the benefit of being able to reassign scheduling and basic administration tasks thereby freeing up considerable time to focus on their particular area of speciality.

# Key Issue Analysis – Resources

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## **TOOLS**

Other concerns raised by internal stakeholders related to having the proper tools to deliver a program. Tools ranged anywhere from actual physical materials to system support and training (professional development). It was apparent from the consultations that needs in this area varied substantially between schools. A significant mitigating variable in whether a program is sufficiently resources appears to be the level of engagement/support on the part of the school administration.

Most internal stakeholders raised Professional Development (PD) as a critical factor to ensuring quality program delivery and effectiveness. When probed about the level of support for PD, most reported a limited ‘standard’ level of support. Typical responses suggested that if a topic of interest \ did not appear in the ‘Blue Book’ it did not receive approval. Further, Blue Book programs were identified as deficient in terms of the specialized knowledge required by SSS Branch employees and consultants.

From a student needs perspective, several stakeholder (external to SSS) groups expressed disappointment with having to fundraise to support activities tied to PPP goals. Others suggested that limited tools necessitated work around solutions that were simply not practical (e.g. sharing computers between students with communication disorders that need the laptop to function effectively in the classroom).

With respect to technology, issues extended beyond that of basic hardware and software purchasing. Concerns were raised regarding support and service available to teachers for products currently in place. Internal stakeholders indicated that service desk resources do not currently have the capacity to provide adequate support and are often unable to help them. Comments ranged from limited satisfaction to extreme levels of frustration. Complete satisfaction in terms of IT technical support was not identified by any stakeholder interviewed.

This raises an important issue surrounding the need to align the purchasing of software with ongoing support requirements. Consultation suggests that the current purchasing of software and hardware appears to lack any strategic coordination. Essentially it appears that purchasing is driven by need and is not consistently evaluated from an organizational Information Technology perspective.

## **SPECIALIZED RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS**

Several SSS internal stakeholder groups identified a desire to have funding in place to meet specialized resource requirements. In some cases, limited and/or ad hoc funding may be present. In others situations SSS program teachers felt left to their own resources to meet the needs they identified.

Specialized resource requirements include such items as:

- Grade 1 readers don’t work for our kids (ESL)
- Physical accessibility is an issue within the school building – wheelchair access, etc.

## Key Issue Analysis – Resources

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- We need vehicles to transport kids – especially since the activities they are involved in are tied to the PPP
- Showers – we often need to provide a place for students to wash hair (lice) and/or bathe
- Feeder schools are designated ‘**community schools**’ but the high school isn’t? We deal with hunger and/or poverty issues on a daily basis

### CONCLUSION

One of the overarching concerns raised by most if not all, internal stakeholders is that the branch (SSS) is not meeting expectations largely due to resourcing issues. It is important to note that the resources in place are highly trained/skilled professionals who appear to be working at capacity.

Acknowledging that even with ‘best efforts’ they are still falling short of expectations is frustrating and a source of ongoing stress for this group, and clearly is a concern for the RPSB and SSS. Despite this, many internal SSS branch stakeholders indicated that when they asked for “things”, they were never/seldom turned down. Although this seems contradictory, it was noted that often these individuals were ‘filtering’ their requests based on their knowledge of available resources, thereby limiting the number of refusals. In addition, many stakeholder groups employ alternate “work-around” strategies. (i.e.: lack of textbooks led to photocopying of books for an entire classroom) that seem to be helping them address immediate need.

## Key Issue Analysis – Transitions

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The concept of “transitions” raised significant interest from both internal and external stakeholders interviewed.

Transitioning to high school from grade 8 intuitively generates some level of support given the age/level of ability of the students in place. Classroom teachers, SSS consultants, allied service providers may all be involved in supporting the student in his move to the next facility. That said, the current research suggests that planning tends to occur on an ad-hoc basis, without the benefit of a standardized approach.

There appears to be a need to develop a standardized process for transitions that establishes policy and procedures to ensure that student needs are not overlooked. Inconsistency or an absence of a transition plan impacts the ability of the receiving school to prepare adequately to meet the student needs.

When considering the move from a high school setting to society, the need for careful planning becomes more significant. Many SSS stakeholders (both internal and external), identified situations in which students were not adequately prepared and/or did not want to leave the security of the school setting. Self-sabotage on the part of the student in terms of progress, was identified as a common strategy to delay transitioning.

SSS students moving into society often have greater needs for ongoing and future support. The responsibility for securing this support is often seen as the role and responsibility of the parent/family/guardian. Although theoretically this appears reasonable, it is important to acknowledge that there are many situations in which family/parents/guardians do not exist or simply do not have the ability/resources (internal and external) to assist with this planning effort.

A number of stakeholders suggested that at the high school level transition planning should fall within the scope of the responsibilities of the guidance counsellor. From a logical perspective this appears to make sense, however in practical terms this may not be a viable solution. The guidance counsellors interviewed identified this responsibility as part of their role, however also noted that ongoing student needs within the general population often exceeded the available time and thus planning became a low priority. In essence, unless specific student needs were raised, time did not allow for much in terms of pro-active planning.

In terms of students moving on to post-secondary training (i.e.: SIAST/University of Regina), an academic gap appears to exist between the curriculum taught in high school and the entrance requirements of the facility. It appears crucial for this issue be directly identified and addressed to ensure that students and parents have the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding the student’s move into the future, and to offset any potential problems when this inconsistency is noted too late.

# Research Opportunity Summary

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*Note: Bulleted items are comments taken from focus group session responses*

## **Saskatchewan Learning**

### **Saskatchewan Learning General Opportunities:**

- Communicate the role of Sask. Learning to stakeholders
- Introduce regular communication opportunities between Sask. Learning and front-line employees
  - Creation of policy/legislative consultation groups (advisory committees)
  - Validate concepts with front-line focus groups prior to finalization
- New programs and concepts:
  - Forecast and communicate expected outcomes/define success
  - Ensure stakeholders understand their role
  - Measure outcomes
  - Report back to stakeholders to reinforce program merits

Current research suggests that there is a break in communication between Saskatchewan Learning and the front line teacher/employee. This appears to be due in part, to the time available (on the part of the teacher) to receive information, conceptualize implementation, and actually introduce new programs/ideas. Many individuals expressed hesitation to make a big effort to introduce something they don't understand and/or see little value in.

In the same vein, many respondents did not have a clear appreciation of the mandate and role of Sask. Learning. Individuals spoke with a degree of frustration regarding the 'directives' that seem to come from government with limited advance notice, consultation, and/or instruction regarding the introduction of concepts and policies. Whether reality supports this perception or not, the outcome is the same – inconsistent implementation and limited 'buy-in' on the part of the classroom teacher despite the merits of the policy or program.

Validation of this perception is noted somewhat in the responses received to the question surrounding the definition of inclusion. Most respondents had similar interpretations of this concept however a significant number had their own perceptions around inclusion and its value to the student. With this difference, the integration of inclusionary concepts within the schools and/or classrooms took a number of different approaches, with varying levels of success.

Perhaps even more interesting is the feedback received by the 'Outside Agency' group. The expressed a need to coordinate initiatives with Sask. Learning and create consistency between the various schools and school divisions.

*“Collaboration between front line (employees) and government is missing”*

*Outside Agencies Focus Group 2007*

Opportunities exist to improve perceptions around the role that Sask. Learning plays and their value to the education system. In turn, the level of buy-in and respect should improve with the end result being more effective implementation of policy/concepts on the front line.

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Accountability

### Accountability Opportunities:

- Place fitting authority to guide program decisions with the appropriate role:
  - SSS staff report to SSS Consultants, however programs are overseen by school administration who also have a legislated responsibility to assign the duties of teaching staff (S175(b) *The Education Act, 1995*)
  - SSS service levels differ between schools – lack of consistency is due primarily to administrative processes in each location (Government Agencies)
  - Inconsistency in level of receptiveness at high school level
  - Risk assessment re: space; need to help administration understand our needs
- Create accountability with respect to modifications, adaptations, inclusion, etc...

Many respondents commented that many leaders within the school system have the ability to change programs. Student Support Services staff report directly to the SSS Branch Consultants however there exists an indirect reporting relationship with school administration. This indirect relationship can raise challenges when defining objectives, role, and ultimately the operation of a program area.

There appears to be considerable value to be gained in ensuring that accountability for SSS Branch programs is appropriately placed. The specialized nature of the services offered, requires a strategic view that should be communicated by the branch itself. Program delivery that is dependent on individual perceptions and preferences regarding merit can be precarious. Feedback suggests that this may indeed be the case in some schools. Inconsistent program delivery appears to be linked closely to the level of engagement on the part of school administration.

Respondents indicated that perhaps the most frustrating element of this reporting situation is that SSS teachers are accountable for program delivery the way the SSS Branch has defined it, and in some cases, it is not possible to meet expectations within the existing framework.

A change in classroom teacher should not have the ability to impact the delivery of program elements such as adaptations. Feedback suggests that this is the current situation and there is limited onus, responsibility, or consequence tied to following through with existing or future requirements (such as adaptations). This is very problematic for all stakeholders – including external parties with expectations surrounding service delivery.

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## **Role Definition**

A number of respondents indicated that they want more involvement with decisions made 'downtown'. They feel that their front-line experience can add value to assessment of new opportunities and ideas. The following opportunities were articulated by focus group respondents:

### **Role Involvement Opportunities:**

- We would like more involvement at the downtown level – decisions should be made in consultation with us, not just the principal
- Determine who is making placement decisions currently
  - Involvement in student placement in high school
- Meeting opportunities with other school districts to 'talk shop' once a year
- Our roles are not clear – we know what we need to do, but sometimes we can't do it because of lack of support from within the school
- **People do not know what SSS does – raise the profile of the branch!**

### **Role General Opportunities:**

- There is a definite difference between what colleagues expect (SSS perception re: our role) and what we really do
- Teachers don't know what we do; Parents don't know either
- Role of Psychologist pamphlet
- Create education regarding our role
- Cost Benefit Analysis on programs
- 'Teaming is a real weakness'; no standard process – who; role; goals; etc...
- Opportunity to define goal of program/team
- Continuity between schools and levels of support

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Measuring Success

### Measuring Success Opportunities:

- Common philosophy in SSS is missing (Government Agencies)
- How do we measure our student growth/success? Develop standardized model?
- Evaluation metrics? Centralization of resources?
- Define success in these programs – may be more qualitative rather than quantitative
  - Expectations between schools is inconsistent – delivery of service is inconsistent (Guidance Counsellors)

Many analysts will argue that “if you don’t measure it, it doesn’t count....” In the case of the Student Support Services Branch program measurement is an area of opportunity.

When asked about defining success, respondents had trouble articulating what success in their particular program area looked like. Most could speak clearly to student needs, and the methods used to address those needs. However, when trying to determine if they were in fact, meeting needs they struggled because standards (for successful program delivery) were not clearly understood. Respondents commented that “they knew that they were busy and doing all they could with what they have available”.

Evaluation metrics may be more qualitative than quantitative, but nonetheless equally valuable. Metrics will establish benchmarks for individual and program performance that can be used by SSS to create accountability.

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Support

Support takes many forms and surprisingly enough, although most focus group respondents spoke to the value of added human resources, they also emphasized the need for basic tools to improve the way they do their jobs.

### Support Opportunities:

- Materials
  - Access to materials is not consistent – people don't know what exists
  - Asset reporting is not currently in place - how do you forecast an appropriate replacement cycle?
- SSS Administrative Staff
  - Voice mail would be very beneficial
  - Why are we still using Fiche versus electronic files?
  - Quiet space would be helpful (Dictaphone work)
  - Confidentiality in open areas is a concern
    - CUME files entered into system by SSS (and files sit in boxes until they are completed) – Is this task appropriately placed?
- We don't have sufficient support (High School VAP/FIAP)
  - We need to do fundraising to support PPP related activities
  - Space issues exist
  - Very limited and/or no access to other SSS staff
- Training issues for parents:
  - Help parents transition their children in a way that doesn't create dependency
- Nurse Therapists/Dev. Classroom:
  - Need transportation funding for extended learning opportunities; 50-80% of our activities are community based
  - Allow carryover of unused bus trips
  - Need track system in all classrooms for lifting

From a purely materials perspective, there does not appear to be a common understanding of what exists and what can be shared. Perceptions exist surrounding access itself and a need to “demonstrate real need” before being allowed to “touch another areas stuff”. There appears to be an opportunity to consider opening the access door fully and leverage the materials currently in place as opposed to allowing access to select areas of the branch.

Other respondents indicated specific requirements (as noted above), which may merit further consideration/evaluation.

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Teacher Assistant (TA) Role

### TA Opportunities:

- Role:
  - Floating TA's to help kids who can be settled in classrooms before being sent to our programs! (Research Saskatoon model for concepts)
  - Teacher Assistants for ESL
  - Go and meet families ahead of time – both new and returning students
  - Go and observe/talk to prior year teacher before the student arrives at new school
- Recruitment:
  - Principal role – re: performance of TA's
  - Include teachers in interviews with perspective assistants
  - Establish education/training requirements for teacher assistant positions
- TA's are working with the highest need students (as opposed to the teachers)

The need for teacher assistants appears to be overwhelming, with some respondents suggesting that the TA's made the difference between program delivery or not. Although this comment was intended to be supportive, it has other more concerning implications.

Many respondents expressed some concern with the fact that TA's are working with the highest need students, yet have only minimal training and education. Recruitment of these individuals is typically driven by seniority first, followed by skills/education. This makes 'hiring for best fit' very challenging. Further, given that many students in the SSS programs do not adapt to change well, the insecurity of the temporary TA does not bode well for consistent program delivery year over year.

Student Support Services has an opportunity to establish academic/experiential criteria for TA staff, and introduce minimum (demonstrable) behavioural competencies necessary to work with students in this area.

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Resources

In terms of resources, a number of opportunities were raised that may help mitigate existing issues as well as identify ways to fully leverage existing resources. Summaries of these opportunities/comments are listed below and contain some arguments to support the particular position noted:

### Resource Funding Opportunities:

- Create transparency in funding
  - No (extra) \$ support for high schools – it is dependant on what each principal can designate
- Funding issues: very inconsistent
  - High school (H/S) w 25 kids gets \$3500
  - H/S w 70 kids gets \$4500; H/S w 44 kids gets \$750; H/S w 42 kids gets \$1000
- Standardization: opportunity to standardize placement requirements within the program area
- ESL:
  - Explore federal funding options for immigrant related education
  - Can tuition be allocated towards ESL in any way?
  - Evaluate budget for additional resources (this year there was a one time allocation of ~\$300 per school, which worked very well)
  - Can funding from VISA students be allocated to ESL (they pay ~\$7400/year – where does it go?)
  - Premier Calvert’s 8.5 M allocation to immigration – can/is any of the funding be further allocated to education?

### Resource General Opportunities:

- Examine criteria for testing allocation per school
  - Consider options regarding outsourcing Psychometric testing (contractors)
  - How can we define the number of tests we can do each year – what do we do when we run out?
  - Is IQ ‘best practise’
- Can a pre-screening matrix (non test driven) be used to facilitate initial placement – and expedite processing?
- LD:
  - LD@3 schools – Introduce FT and PT float resources?
  - LD costs vs. benefits... redeployment of resources?
- Speech Language Consultants (SLC):
  - Occupational Therapist (OT) & Speech Therapists: issue regarding resource availability
  - SLC students are not counted in PTR; if they count ARP students, why not SLC?
  - Ideally – one FTE per school, specialized in age groups
- One Adaptation Facilitator per subject area would be excellent
  - Could assist with creation of differentiated curriculum
  - Good option would be 0.5 FTE LRT (to work with student) and the other 0.50 FTE could be AF
- Regular teachers need more ‘ready to use’ materials

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Coordination of Services

This area contains many valuable opportunities for SSS to consider. Among them is a concept of 'coordination of care' and dealing with whole person care for the student. Although many respondents indicated some level of coordination (of student information), much of this work was dependant on school administration and their corresponding level of interest in this approach.

External stakeholders expressed considerable interest in coordinating efforts with SSS, to reduce redundancy and in turn improve service delivery to the student. Other more specific opportunities were identified as follows:

### Coordination of Services Opportunities:

- Establish a mechanism to address non-attendees/truancy
- Duplication of services – could be addressed using a “Coordination Resource” in each school (also provides a primary contact for external agencies)
  - Coordination of care is missing - Centralize responsibility for case management
  - Extreme differences between elementary and high school – Establish a ‘go to’ person for us. (Outside Agencies)
- Team Meetings/Collaboration:
  - Explore opportunities to meet more regularly – with each other; with home room teachers
  - Establish standards for team meetings
    - Define participants
    - Attendance requirements
    - Define process
- Disbursement of ESL city wide with smaller programs; Elementary school – should have a minimum of 2 ESL trained teachers
  - Transition ‘disconnect’ between elementary and high school
  - Partnerships – Create partnerships with internal/external organizations to aide in transitioning & service delivery
  - We don’t spend time developing relationships with our partners
  - We need more overlap between curriculum services and SSS
    - Bridge with community service organizations
    - Discuss options with University
  - Need coordination of care Child and Youth information sharing agreement
  - Standardize an ‘exchange of information release’ document
  - Access Child and Youth to conduct re-assessments?
  - Access to public health
  - Access to a section 10 worker
  - Counsellor presence in the building all day
  - Resource officer for school (not part-time)
  - Create a joint partnership between the school and a bus/transportation agency
  - Improve connection with ARC
  - ABI kids are being placed in programs with no academic remediation – In turn, it defines the potential for the child (which may be a mistake)

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Education for Teaching Staff

Many respondents indicated strong interest in partnering and collaborating with colleagues both within the RPSB and the province. This collaboration can occur through scheduled opportunities (meetings/conferences) as well as through professional development programs as described below:

### Education for Teaching Staff Opportunities

- Share training resources with other districts
  - Time off without pay should not be considered as PD time
  - Current levels of PD are insufficient
- PD/Blue Book Session Ideas:
  - Training re: Incorporation of adaptations
  - Workshop re: what is inclusion?
  - Hearing Impaired Students
  - Drug and Alcohol training
  - WRAP
  - Suicide Assessment
  - Provincial and Federal privacy legislation
  - Diagnosis/terminology
  - Need tools to deal with behaviour issues
  - PD for administrative staff – example: Dealing with difficult clients
  - We need PD time and funding (beyond what currently exists)
  - Extension teaching re: Braille
    - Programs to train in Braille/"VI" Program options– correspondence and/or on-site
    - No standards re: Braille use in the division and with respect to our role
- Visually Impaired - Encourage regular classroom teachers to identify lab time early in the semester so that Teacher Assistant time can be allocated (science; woodworking; etc...)
- ESL:
  - Defined program metrics – involve ESL teachers in the process
  - Long term strategy
  - Education for teachers regarding ESL roles
- Task list; guidelines; checklist for PPP's (ensure consistency)
- Orientation for SS Branch
  - Program orientation for assistants, teachers, students, parents, etc.
- Create mentorship for teachers
- Not everyone knows what 'modified' means

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Program Issues

Respondents from specific program areas also identified a number of opportunities based on their individual program needs:

### Program Opportunities:

- LD – Manage versions for standard normal ranges for tests
  - Standardize versions and testing tools
  - IQ 80 is a ‘no mans land’
  - Needs Assessment forms are misleading for our kids – we need a different mechanism to identify LD student needs
- ESL – need policy to protect immigrants
  - We don’t know what the school board sees as a vision for ESL students – objectives?
  - Our role is unclear
  - We need access to age appropriate resources designed for ESL use
  - It would be beneficial to have one full-time settlement worker per school
  - Introduce volunteer mentorship
- Review program organization and age breaks
  - Discovery PS kids have to move at age 6 to access FIAP
  - More behaviour classrooms are needed (not at SLC level)
  - Placement without meeting criteria by default (no other options)
    - Timing of placement information is poor (too late in year)
- DHH – “Plato” program is excellent – can we access it?
- Testing:
  - Determine if medical model is still relevant
  - Hire externally (non-professional) to conduct psychometric testing
  - Time and timely access to other professionals is an issue
  - Psychiatrist on retainer would be excellent
- Communication disorders insufficiently addressed
- Poverty issues are not being addressed directly (indirectly, classroom teachers are attempting to meet needs)
- Needs of gifted learners are being missed
- SMART and PPP are not very useful - Although we identify goals, we are still comparing back to grade level measures

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## Inclusion

As mentioned previously, the definition of Inclusion was varied depending on the school and individuals involved. There is a strong opportunity to develop a consistent message in terms of Inclusion - what it means, how it should be implemented, and who does what.

### Inclusion Opportunities

- Education for teachers regarding a common definition for inclusion
- Prepare teachers for inclusion concept/modifications (eliminate/mitigate fear)
  - TV/Video should all have closed captioning (DHH)
  - Wearing microphones (DHH Program) should not be optional
- Flexibility with entry and exit options is important – entry at 12+ days after a semester begins guarantees that the student won't pass the course

## Technology

From a technology perspective, SSS and RPSB have some clear opportunities that merit consideration. Effective use of technology requires a sound framework for operation, including testing and support of new and existing tools. Within the SSS Branch, technology issues and concerns are apparent based on stakeholder feedback. Some of the opportunities identified include:

### Technology Opportunities

- Develop (or review existing) IT strategic plan. Build alignment with corporate IT architecture
- Check into the support agreements purchased with the software
- We need to be able to try out equipment prior to purchasing...
- Not leveraging all of the functionality available in the existing technology because they have received any software training
- Intellitools
- University of Regina – regarding software and compatibility with RPSB tools
- LD – we need computers for our kids
- Technology tools are not meeting our needs (Nurse Therapists/Developmental Classroom)
  - All Developmental Classrooms should have the same programs – if they use it in elementary school, why would we think they don't need it in high school?
  - **Both the MAC & PC use wax based ink on printers – it melts when we laminate it**

# Research Opportunity Summary

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## General

### General Opportunities

- Have administrative support available:
  - Scheduling meetings
  - Completion of forms and scholarship applications (Guidance Counsellors)
  - Compiling of information; exams; SAT testing etc...(Guidance Counsellors)
- Teachers do not seem to know the impact of their participation
- Fee for service with separate system
- LD and LRT resources have the opportunity to 'block' their time in other school districts and it works well (US stats)
- Teachers at Scott are focused on relationship building – yet they are subject to the board transfer policy...is there an opportunity to do something about this?
- SSS Admin. Needs to be here once in a while so that the kids get to know them and we feel in the loop