

2017 NATIONAL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AWARDS

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GOVERNMENT HOUSE
Fredericton, NB

Teaching team at Keswick Ridge School honoured for innovative co-teaching style

Picture this. Four classrooms along a corridor, each filled with kids ranging in age from Kindergarten to Grade Two. Five teachers, who periodically move from one area to another, as do the students. The buzz of children actively learning fills the air, yet the atmosphere is relaxed and happy.

No, you're not in Australia or New Zealand, where multi-age classrooms are becoming more and more prevalent. You're in Keswick Ridge, New Brunswick. Specifically, you're at Keswick Ridge School, a public school in Anglophone School District West, and you're witnessing something unique, the only multi-age classrooms in the entire province.

"This scenario exemplifies the concept of inclusion on multiple levels," said Krista Carr, Executive Director of the New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL), when she introduced the Keswick Ridge School's K-2 teaching team as recipients of a 2017 National Inclusive Education Award.



The team – Karen Howland, Melissa Chetwyn, Heidi LeBlanc, Michelle Boreland and Celinda Crandall – received the award at a ceremony today at Government House, hosted by the Honourable Jocelyne Roy Vienneau, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick and the honorary patron of the New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL). NBACL organizes the annual celebration on behalf of CACL, and this year chose six recipients from New Brunswick.

"The term 'inclusive education' means treating each student with dignity and respect; taking into account each student's learning style; having high but realistic expectations for each student, based on the student's strengths and weaknesses; and developing appropriate learning goals, related to those expectations that the student finds useful and interesting," said Krista Carr when presenting the award recipients. "It also means that each student experiences a positive and supportive learning environment at all times."

That's exactly what you find in the K-2 hub of classrooms at Keswick Ridge School (KRS), according to the team's nominator and those who wrote letters in support of the nomination.

"These five individuals are the perfect example of the synergy that results when a team is focused on one goal: 'All kids can learn,'" wrote Doug Richardson, Principal of KRS, in his nomination. "This team puts a period at the end of that statement; there are no qualifying additions."

Catherine Preston, chair of the KRS Parent School Support Committee and a parent of two of the team's students, wrote a letter of support for the nomination, stating:

"Our K-2 team teachers demonstrate a level of commitment for their students at the collective and individual levels that is both inspiring and an exemplar of all that inclusive education seeks to be.

"Their philosophy is founded upon a simple premise: make every student perform to the very best of their abilities, grow their strengths and support their development. The inclusivity that they convey in their

approach to the students is reflected in the way that they do not acknowledge boundaries to facilitating the best learning environment for a particular child. As an exceptional team, they demonstrate a holistic attitude to how they perform, seamlessly bringing each other's strengths to the fore to best serve the needs of their students. They take the performance of the whole K-2 Level as a collective responsibility and decide how they, as a team, can bring their skills to bear to best effect."

Ms. Preston added: "They have created an atmosphere [where] students feel a sense of welcome and belonging, irrespective of which member of the team is in the role of their teacher at any particular time. The performance and potential of individual students are discussed across the team [to] formulate the best ways to bring students into the life of the school in as meaningful a way as possible."

The teachers who lead these multi-age classrooms do so by choice, and have been for over a decade. When it looked like the school would need to add another Kindergarten class to accommodate an increase in enrolment, the teachers instead decided to include the extra K students in their existing multi-age classrooms and add a fifth member to the team as co-teacher to better serve the diverse learning styles and needs of the children.

"The sheer professionalism and trust required to create this type of working relationship is exceptional," Doug Richardson wrote "These teachers have gone from 'my' kids to 'our' kids. [They] have gone from, 'The kid isn't getting this' to 'I may not be the one to reach this child,' from 'What does the curriculum state?' to 'What does the child need to be successful?'"

In another letter of support for the nomination, Le Farris, President of the Keswick Ridge Home and School Association, wrote: "As a parent of two children who have gone through the K-2 class system, and knowing first-hand how the teachers work together to recognize the 'teach- ability' of each child, I am privileged to have these teachers instruct my children and see them thrive beyond the required level of curriculum. [These teachers'] constant encouragement and recognition of the students goes over and above what any parent would expect."

"These are five exceptionally progressive, talented and committed teachers," Krista Carr commented in her remarks. "In the true spirit of inclusion, they address each child's academic and social abilities and work together as a team to ensure that every child reaches their fullest potential.

"They are truly helping every learner, every day, in every way. As Catherine Preston so aptly put it, 'They are an outstanding example of what is possible when kids' needs are put first by teachers working as a team, providing an atmosphere that is truly nurturing and enables kids to be their best.'"

The Canadian Association for Community Living has been recognizing the outstanding inclusive practices of individuals working in Canada's education system annually since 2006, with local provincial and territorial community living associations charged with accepting nominations and selecting recipients.

The New Brunswick Association for Community Living has proudly organized the New Brunswick presentation of the awards since their inception. The awards ceremony has become the focal point for celebrations marking National Inclusive Education Month.

Founded in 1957 by parents whose children were not legally allowed an education in our public schools, NBACL has evolved and grown over the past 60 years and now works on initiatives that touch almost every aspect of the lives of people who have an intellectual disability.

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