Why Implement an NSC in Your School?

Why Consider Alternative Support Spaces Within a School?

It is unrealistic to believe that inclusion is solely the responsibility of classroom teachers. Today's rapidly changing society brings increasing diversity in student needs within classrooms, which can challenge our current school structures.

Inclusion requires teamwork, with everyone playing a role in supporting teachers in their responsibilities.

Students with more complex or intensive needs require collaborative practices and coordinated support from multiple adults to ensure their well-being and success.

Students can continue to learn and progress even when responsibility for their support is shared. When a student's needs increase in frequency or intensity, it may be appropriate for the various stakeholders to come together and consider a more individualized response, of which the Nurturing Support Center (NSC) could be one component.

This support structure therefore complements, rather than replaces, existing classroom practices and other levels of support available within the school.

Why Implement an NSC Rather Than Another Type of Support Space?

The NSC differs from other supervision and support spaces previously introduced in secondary schools (PASS, reflection rooms, resource rooms, Oasis, etc.) in several important ways:

- **Its underlying philosophy**: The fundamental belief that the presence of grounded adult posture, ongoing co-regulation practices, and caring attachment relationships with significant adults, combined with appropriate support measures, will gradually create the conditions necessary for development to unfold. Behavioural change is therefore understood as an outcome of adjustments in adult approaches and service delivery, rather than the primary objective or the sole responsibility of the vulnerable student.
- **A shared understanding of its theoretical foundations**: The entire school team receives awareness-building and professional learning related to the theoretical foundations of the NSC, with the goal of strengthening classroom management practices by placing greater emphasis on relationships and responsive, developmentally sensitive approaches. The core NSC team, in turn, develops deeper expertise in these theoretical frameworks through more sustained professional development.
- **Collaborative practices that ensure high-quality implementation**: These include strong connections between the classroom and the NSC; shared responsibility within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework; dedicated NSC team consultation time; clear referral and access procedures; the use of action plans incorporating preventive and systematic measures; and coordination with the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), parents, and community partners.

- **Academic support and continuity**: Students accessing the NSC receive educational support, with ongoing communication between the NSC team and classroom teachers to promote consistency and continuity in learning.
- **Intentional use of physical spaces and resources**: The physical environment and available materials are thoughtfully selected and organized to maximize students' well-being and growth.

Positive Impacts of Inclusive Practices and the Conditions Necessary for Success

Inclusive educational practices are grounded in the principle that all students can learn and develop when they are supported within safe, structured, caring and well-adapted environments. Research indicates that inclusion, when implemented intentionally, consistently, and sustained over time, can generate positive outcomes for students with additional needs as well as for the broader school community.

From a social-emotional development perspective, research conducted in Quebec, particularly by the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (2017), along with studies conducted in French-speaking educational contexts, including those of Fortin, Plante, and Bradley (2011), highlights that emotional safety and the quality of the relational climate are essential conditions for student engagement and school perseverance.

These studies emphasize that students experiencing behavioural or psychosocial difficulties, or developmental vulnerabilities, are particularly sensitive to predictability, consistency in adult responses, and the quality of relationships. These factors directly influence their sense of belonging and readiness to learn (Perry, 2006; Siegel, 2012).

By placing relationships and students' developmental needs at the centre of educational practices, inclusive approaches help reduce stigmatization, strengthen self-confidence, and support continuity and stability throughout students' educational journeys.

Scientific research also indicates that inclusion can have positive effects on academic learning when supported by consistent instructional practices and a structured school environment.

The meta-analysis conducted by Kalambouka, Farrell, and Dyson found that 81% of the outcomes examined were positive or neutral, challenging the assumption that inclusive education negatively affects academic achievement.

Furthermore, research suggests that when school organization and teaching practices reflect an inclusive approach—particularly through clear work structures, organized professional collaboration, and adapted instructional strategies—this is associated with improved academic performance for all students (Bakoč et al., 2024).

Recent institutional research reviews also confirm that, over several decades, most studies have reported positive to neutral effects, particularly in reading and mathematics. These findings highlight that the quality of implementation remains a central factor in the effectiveness of inclusive education.

Inclusive school environments are also associated with reduced reliance on punitive measures, such as removal from classrooms, suspensions, and exclusions.

Among others, research from the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* (2017) and the *American Psychological Association* (2008) demonstrates that punitive disciplinary approaches tend to exacerbate behavioural and relational difficulties. In contrast, schools that prioritize preventive, collaborative, and relationship-based practices foster safer school climates, reduce challenging behaviours, and support students' readiness to learn.

However, these positive outcomes can only be achieved when certain essential organizational conditions are in place. Research from Quebec and internationally consistently highlights the importance of:

- **A strong Tier 1 instructional foundation**: Grounded in evidence-based practices such as explicit instruction, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and a stable, supportive relational climate. Without this foundation, complementary support measures cannot reach their full potential (Hattie, 2009, 2012).
- **A shared professional culture**: Built upon a common understanding of child and adolescent development, the effects of trauma, neurodiversity, and the impact of stress on behaviour.
- **Strong and mobilizing school leadership**: Leadership that promotes consistency in practices, innovation, collaboration, and ongoing professional development.
- **A collaborative team-based approach**: An organizational structure in which responsibility for inclusion is shared and formal opportunities for consultation allow interventions to be continuously reviewed and adjusted.
- **Preventive and graduated interventions**: Supports aligned with the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework to avoid the premature use of unnecessary intensive interventions or exclusionary measures.

In summary, inclusive practices are not simply about organizing services differently; they reflect a school culture, a professional adult posture, and a collective commitment to the well-being and success of all students.

When supported by coherent and shared organizational structures, inclusive practices become a powerful means of creating school environments that are safe, effective, and deeply humane, allowing every student to develop at their own pace and according to their individual potential.