

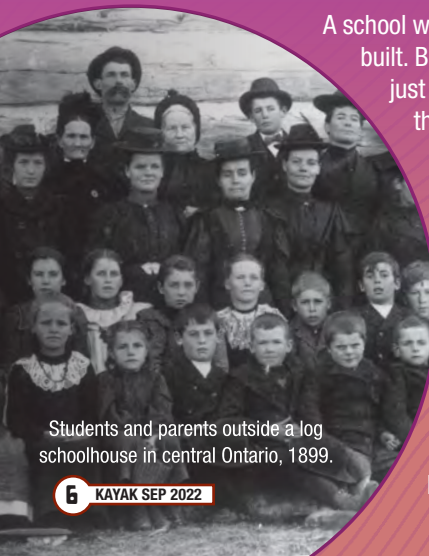


Stettler, Alta., 1913

# LEARNING FOR ALL

**Kids with disabilities and their parents fought a LONG time for fairer treatment at schools.**

Picture a tiny one-room schoolhouse from, say, 200 years ago. Who do you think would be sitting in the desks? Do you see any kids using sign language or Braille? Is there anyone besides the teacher to work with kids who need help to learn? Is there space for a wheelchair or a quiet spot for kids who need it?



Students and parents outside a log schoolhouse in central Ontario, 1899.

A school was often one of the first things European settlers built. But kids who had any kind of disability mostly just didn't get an education. Many people didn't think there was any point trying to educate kids with disabilities. They helped around home, but anything they learned had to come from hard-working parents or older kids in the family.

Even at bigger schools in towns or cities, kids with disabilities weren't welcome. Teachers didn't know how to teach them. Schools weren't built for them to get around in easily. Kids who needed help to look after themselves were often sent away to live in hospitals, which had even less interest in helping them learn.

## DIFFERENT Needs

All of us need things to help us learn. Some of us get these things, known as access needs, met more easily than others. Needs that may be less common or even disapproved of usually get met less often. Examples of different access needs include extending learning time for kids who learn slowly, quiet learning space for kids who get distracted in noisy environments, and ramps and wide doorways for kids who use wheelchairs and assistive devices to move around. For most of the time that settlers have been in Canada, many kids with access needs have just been ignored by schools.



Singer Alma Faye visits a school for children with disabilities in 1977.



Library and Archives Canada, Halifax Public Library

By the late 1800s, people were starting to think that maybe it was important for kids with disabilities to work and earn money. To do that, they needed an education. The first school here for kids who were deaf opened in Quebec City in 1831. Halifax opened the first school for the blind (shown above) in 1871. Kids with disabilities were still rarely able to go to school. Students who learned more slowly were often made fun of and punished. Well into the 1900s, kids with disabilities were seen as a hardship for their families and a problem to be kept away from other students.





Some of the teachers at a Manitoba school for deaf children, 1908.

**In 1833, Quebec's Antoine Caron became the first deaf person to teach deaf kids in Canada.**



## SPECIAL SCHOOLS

For students who were deaf or blind (or both), there were good parts to having their own schools where they both lived and learned. Kids met and made friends with others like them. Instead of having a limited life at home, they could learn in a way that was better for them. They learned skills that would help them get jobs and be part of their communities. Sometimes, though, teachers and other staff in these schools treated students badly, from cruel comments to beatings. These students also had to live away from their families for long stretches of time. But in one big way, special schools were very important. They helped kids with disabilities realize that they weren't alone, and that they deserved to be treated like other people, with fairness and respect. After they graduated, young people who had gone to schools for the deaf started joining together to fight for their rights. They described themselves as Deaf — people who couldn't hear but had their own language and culture.



Children who are deaf exercise outside their Manitoba school, 1905.



Starting in the 1950s, more students with disabilities began going to regular schools for what was known as special education. They were usually stuck in separate classes away from other students, though. People thought that if kids with disabilities were in regular classes, they would slow down learning for others. By the 1970s, that idea was being proven wrong. Over the next two decades, schools gradually welcomed students with disabilities into the same classrooms as other kids. Instead of shutting kids with disabilities away, schools started making plans to help them learn alongside everyone else. Today, although students with disabilities aren't always treated fairly, they are usually not sent away or refused an education. Canadian schools try to give all kids a chance to learn in the way that works best for them.

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**HOW DOES YOUR SCHOOL  
MAKE SURE ALL STUDENTS  
GET THE SUPPORT THEY  
NEED TO HELP THEM LEARN?**

