



## **K to 12 Review Submission**

The Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada, CADDAC, a national not-for-profit organization that provides leadership in education, awareness and advocacy for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) organizations and individuals with ADHD across Canada.

### **Students with ADHD in the British Columbia Education System**

Up-coming proposed changes to the special education funding model in BC, away from a model of designation to a prevalence based, inclusion, model may benefit students with ADHD or cause continued inequities. Much will depend on the recognition of these vulnerable students' needs moving forward. Since they were not adequately recognized and serviced in past funding and designation models, extra care must be taken during this transition to ensure that these students be better understood and recognised as students with special learning needs.

In the fall of 2016 the new BC Special Education Guidelines draft was shared with CADDAC. We were encouraged to see that ADHD was to be added under the category of Learning Disabilities. This made sense since the DSM5 recognizes ADHD as a neurodevelopmental disorder just like learning disabilities and Autism. CADDAC was then informed in the spring of 2017 that students with ADHD were to be recognized in a stand-alone category. Either option was acceptable to CADDAC. Although these categories would not be tied to additional funding, it would at least be a step forward in recognizing that these students have a disability, causing impairments, resulting in serious learning risks.

However, with the change in government everything was put on hold. During a meeting with Minister Fleming on December 4<sup>th</sup> 2017 CADDAC was assured by the Minister that the Ministry was not considering changes to these guidelines and that ADHD would not be removed as a category. CADDAC was also told that when consultation occurred CADDAC would be notified. CADDAC did not hear back during the year of 2018. After an e-mail exchange requesting clarification on changes to the funding model at the end of 2018 a meeting occurred on January the 30<sup>th</sup> with Kim Horn. During this meeting CADDAC learned that due to proposed changes the fate of these guidelines was unknown. Unfortunately the move away from the use of designation categories and these guidelines could also mean that the clear message that ADHD was a disorder that warranted additional supports and resources for students to be able to

meet their potential as learners might be lost, again leaving these student's needs unrecognized and under serviced.

This is of particular concern because ADHD is the most prevalent neurodevelopmental and psychiatric childhood seen in childhood. Without support we see much lower rates of academic achievement; significantly higher rates of high school drop-out; 8 to 10% lower levels in literacy and numeracy, even without the presence of additional learning disorders; and fewer students going onto higher education. But when given adequate support students with ADHD can be successful learners and many will be able to go onto post-secondary education.

In 2010 CADDAC published a report on ADHD and special education across Canada "2010 Provincial Report Card: ADHD in the School System" This report graded provinces on if and how students with ADHD were recognized as having learning needs and whether or not students with ADHD had equitable access to educational resources. BC received a failing grade due to fact that its designation system failed to recognize ADHD. So will moving into a system away from designation be an improvement? Perhaps, but this report card and [later papers](#) also highlight serious concerns with systems of inclusion and the recognition of the learning needs of students with ADHD. To meet a special learning need, you must be able to recognize the need.

Due to an abundance of research, ADHD was re-conceptualized as a neurodevelopmental disorder just like learning disabilities and Autism and removed from the behaviour disorder category in the DSM5. However, many educators still perceive ADHD as a disorder of "bad behaviour." Principals and educators who misunderstand the behaviours they see as miss behaviour, laziness, a lack of motivation or defiance, will not flag a need for additional learning resources. Few educators in our Canadian education systems are adequately trained in ADHD impairments. They spend their time trying to improve compliance and on task behaviour rather than supporting cognitive impairments through teaching strategies, which research informs us will actually also improve behaviour. Therefore for students with ADHD, the system of inclusion has also resulted in inconsistency and inequity in access to accommodations of their disability. What will the BC Ministry of Education do to ensure this does not occur after the transition to the inclusive model?

School boards also need to be made aware that students with ADHD do not require psychoeducational assessments for their impairments to be considered legitimate. A [2015 CADDAC paper](#) demonstrates how few, if any, of the standardized tests (performance based) accurately quantify the nature of the cognitive or academic impairments that characterize ADHD in post-secondary students. An up-coming paper will further demonstrate how it is also unacceptable for schools boards to rely on these tests to indicate that impairments are sufficient to qualify a student with ADHD for additional resources. Doing so would be

discriminatory and would thereby open these boards to legal challenge. CADDAC has recently developed [tools](#) to assist physicians with the writing of more detailed reports on their patient's impairments for schools.

CADDAC has also developed [tools](#) to help educators understand common ADHD symptoms, how they present as impairments in the school setting and appropriate classroom accommodations and teaching strategies.

Spending up to 20% in paperwork and administration is clearly not acceptable. But, while a designation does not necessarily guarantee services a designation does at least offers the "right" to receive resources and that right follows the student to the end of their high school years. With a designation and IEP becomes a legal must. This does not necessarily occur in the inclusion system.

The Ontario funding model was often referred to in the review discussion paper. It must be noted that while Ontario's funding model may be superior to what BC has now, Ontario still has a system of designation which excludes ADHD. While Ontario appears to be trying to move away from a system of designation towards a system of inclusion for students with ADHD, these students still do not receive equitable access to education as outlined in our 2017 paper, [Inequitable Access to Education for Canadian Students with ADHD](#).

In the Ontario system a student with ADHD receiving an IEP is solely at the discretion of a school principal. School boards are allowed to independently dictate which students are "impaired enough" to meet a board's criteria as having a disability that qualifies them to receive educational accommodations. This bar of impairment seems to alter from board to board, and school to school and sometimes even student to student. This has led to great inconsistency and inequity across the province, and even within school boards.

A funding system of prevalence must also make sure that school boards are held accountable; funds they receive for special education must be shown to be spent only on special education. Ontario implemented a system of board documentation to ensure that this was occurring.

A prevalence funding model in Ontario has also resulted in a push towards a fully inclusive classroom model. Problems resulting in this have recently been highlighted in the media in Ontario. Full inclusion of all students, regardless of their impairment level, in main stream classrooms without additional funds for support in those classrooms has just resulted in the dumping of special needs students into general classrooms. This has led to many, many issues with more and more principals resorting to simply excluding these students from a full day of education.

CADDAC requests that in the process of moving forward with the prevalence based funding model and the inclusion system of special education the BC Ministry of Education ensure that students with ADHD will receive equitable access to education by:

1. Officially stating that students with ADHD are to be recognized as students with a disability resulting in learning and self-regulation impairments and by providing examples of diverse ways these students can express these special learning needs.
2. Providing and encouraging education for educators on ADHD learning and self-regulation impairments, appropriate classroom accommodations and teaching strategies.
3. Ensuring that sufficient funding for additional resources is provided to support an inclusive classroom model.
4. Holding boards accountable for providing additional resources to classrooms with a heavy load of special needs learners.
5. Truly holding boards accountable for meeting these students' needs.
6. Holding boards accountable that the funding they receive for special education is actually spent on special education.

In summary, with the implementation of changes to the funding and education system the BC the Ministry of Education is in a position to put policies in place that will ensure that students with ADHD receive equitable access to education and have the right to reach their academic potential.

If you have questions or would like to discuss any of these issues or suggestions please contact Heidi Bernhardt at [heidi.bernhardt@caddac.ca](mailto:heidi.bernhardt@caddac.ca).