

2010 Provincial Report Card: ADHD in the School System

CADDAC

The Centre for ADHD/ADD Advocacy, Canada

The Centre for ADHD/ADD Advocacy, Canada (CADDAC) is a national, not-for-profit organization providing leadership in education and advocacy for ADHD organizations and individuals with ADHD across Canada. CADDAC's mandate is to take a national leadership role in networking all organizations, professionals, patients, caregivers and other stakeholders involved in ADHD related issues, and to then support those people through education and advocacy.



Executive Summary

It can be quite difficult to understand all the special education systems across the provinces and territories in Canada, especially when considering what they mean to students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In reviewing the attached national report card developed by CADDAC, it will become very apparent that there is little consistency or equity on how students with ADHD are recognized and receive services across the country.

Most parents of students with special education needs would agree that having additional education support for their children, implemented on an ongoing basis, requires continuous advocacy throughout the child's academic career, no matter what province or system they are in. While this issue exists, it is not the issue that we are addressing at this time. The following report compares special education systems across Canada and documents if and how these systems offer students with ADHD access to the resources and accommodations required to reach their academic potential.

Primary Goal

The main goal of this exercise was to ascertain whether or not students with ADHD have equitable access to educational accommodations, across all of Canada, as do other students with impairments such as learning disabilities. With this in mind, CADDAC spent time this summer speaking with every provincial Ministry of Education in Canada, except for Ontario. We also spoke with the Ministry of Education for the Northwest Territories. Each Ministry provided information on how its systems worked for students with ADHD. Without this assistance, a full understanding would not have been possible and we wholeheartedly thank them for this.

Although we received letters acknowledging receipt of our previous policy paper from the Ministries in Ontario and the Yukon, a meeting did not occur. The Yukon Ministry representative offered to speak to us, however frequent attempts to contact her to set a date failed. The Ministry of Ontario did not contact us after our second letter outlining the scope of this project and our wish to speak to all the ministries. However, in all fairness more than one face-to-face meeting has occurred with the Ministry of Ontario prior to 2010 where their system of identification of special education students, and how it impacted students with ADHD, was specifically discussed. They most likely did not feel a follow-up meeting to discuss the same information was required.

This overview was done with the hope that we would be able to compile easy to understand information on how Canadian Special Education Systems recognize, identify and service students with ADHD in elementary and high schools. We would like to stress that our aim was not to denigrate particular provinces, or educators, but rather to inform parents and other stakeholders about significant differences in the systems.

Method

Each Ministry of Education that we spoke to provided us with their chosen contact person(s). In some cases three representatives of a Ministry joined us on the call. After our discussion the information was documented and sent back to the Ministries for their clarification and approval. All edits were in the words of the Ministries; however in one case we were unable to include the entirety of the text due to its length. Links for further clarification will be available if supplied by the Ministry.

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The aim was to condense the material for it to be reader friendly. We ask for the Ministry's understanding on this issue.

A "Report Card" was developed comparing the systems, outlining the strengths, weaknesses and our concerns. Rankings were assigned to the systems. The report card has an accompanying document of introduction which will be helpful to those who are not familiar with special education terminology. This introduction also provides more extensive information on why we have concerns with some of the systems.

Results

Five of the provinces received a "Satisfactory" grade with a variety of concerns expressed. It must be noted, that for three of the provinces, only potential concerns exist. For the other two, that received a grade of "Satisfactory with concerns," the lack of formal identification as a student with special needs is an issue. Also, when the decision of needs required rests with the school team the educators' level of knowledge of ADHD becomes paramount.

Using the terminology of provincial report cards, three provinces received a grade of "Unsatisfactory" however; we would like to go so far as to say they are actually failing to provide access to services. The systems in these provinces can actually bar students with ADHD from being recognized as students with a disability, thus preventing them from accessing special education services unless they have a co-existing diagnosed disorder that fits into the definitions of one of the categories. We also feel that labelling students with ADHD as "Students at Risk" does not go far enough. Not surprisingly, the three provinces that received the failing grade are the jurisdictions that CADDAC receives the most parental distress calls from.

Three provinces received a grade of "Good". All three identify students with ADHD as exceptional students under categories that allow for a proper understanding of ADHD as legitimate neurobiological disorder. One has made changes to improve its system by increasing the number of identification categories to ensure that students with ADHD can be officially identified. The other two already have systems in place for identifying students with ADHD, and are making changes to their systems in the hope of including all students in the greater school community, but not necessarily placing them all in a regular classroom. Again, the success of these changes will depend on how the system is actually implemented and if the students' rights to special education are preserved.

Conclusion

It is clear that the task of ensuring that students with ADHD receive accommodations for their disability, which will assist them in reaching their full academic potential, is a complex but important one.

It is our hope that this valuable research will shine a light on the issues facing students with ADHD across Canada. Further, it is our hope that this report will stimulate the Ministries of Education across Canada to review the policies and practices that impact students with ADHD to ensure that ALL students with ADHD, regardless of where they live in Canada, are able to receive the appropriate accommodations and resources required to allow them to meet their full academic potential.

Please refer to "2010 Provincial Report Card: ADHD in the School System" for details as to how each province and territory fared.

Preface

Special Education Systems

To fully understand the comparison chart of special education systems across Canada, we have provided some initial explanation of the different special education systems and terminology.

The Identification System

Most provinces and territories use a system of formal “Identification”. This process usually entails a review of medical or psychological documentation and a discussion of the student's level of success and perceived needs by a committee or school team. This team then decides whether the student meets the outlined criteria for being deemed an exceptional student. Formal identification can be tied to specific funding allotted for the student's needs, it can simply allow them to qualify for special accommodations and resources, or it can do both.

This formal identification then follows the student through their educational career, allowing them to access special educational resources, instructional, environmental and assessment accommodations and modifications to the curriculum, if required. It is this identification which gives the student his/her “rights” to these resources and accommodations and makes an individual learning plan a “must”.

The Inclusion System

Other provinces use a system of “Inclusion”. This term refers to funding for additional resources and access to accommodations without the required identification as an exceptional learner. The “Inclusive Educational Model” refers to a system where all students receive their education in the regular classroom setting. A province that uses the “Inclusion” system does not necessarily use an “Inclusive Educational model”.

Both systems can result in outcomes that are positive or negative depending on how they are implemented. Both systems can fail if teacher training is not sufficient, or a “wait-to-fail” approach is in place. Educators would not be able to access or monitor a student's needs if knowledge of the disorder is not adequate, and if the student is required to prove their level of difficulty before resources are implemented, it may be too late.

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Strengths and Weaknesses

The Identification System

The “Identification” system, when designed to ensure that all students with special needs can be identified, provides the student with the “right” to receive resources and accommodations for their disability for their entire academic career. Unfortunately, at this time, several provinces have categories of “exceptionality” with definitions that bar some students with ADHD as being officially identified. While students with ADHD might fit into the definition of an identification category due to a qualifying coexisting condition, students with ADHD alone do not. When this situation occurs an insurmountable wall immediately blocks the students' rights to recognition as an exceptional learner and halts all advocacy efforts for the accommodations required.

If the student receives identification due to a coexisting condition (such as behaviour), that condition itself often becomes the focus of the educational plan and not the accommodations required for ADHD. While some school boards within a province will allow individual education plans to be put in place without a formal identification, most do not. Even if they do, the plan can be pulled at the school's discretion since the student has no official “rights” to resources and accommodations.

This lack of recognition of ADHD can also influence an educators' belief in ADHD as a legitimate disorder that impacts a student's learning. Nothing could be further from the truth as shown in numerous studies. (see CADDAC's policy paper, **Equitable Access to Education for all Canadians**)

The Inclusion System

The “Inclusive” model, when used to define funding and resources, can also work well in theory. Boards are given a lump sum of funding for special education and charged to ensure that all students receive the resources they require to meet their needs. The success of the system depends on how boards and schools interpret the students' needs. If educators are trained in the most current scientific medical research on ADHD, they will understand that most often behaviours expressed by students with ADHD stem from a neurological disorder, rather than a lack of discipline. In some cases this level of knowledge is present, in others it is not. Without this level of knowledge, a special education need is not recognized and is instead interpreted as a need for increased consequences.

The totally “Inclusive” classroom model presents its own concerns. Without adequate funding and resources this system can result in an overwhelming load placed on the classroom teacher. Students with sensory issues or extensive needs may not be able to cope in a regular classroom setting.

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Glossary of Terms:

Identification: Identification as an exceptional student opens the pathway for receiving rights to accommodations, adaptations and modification for a disability.

Inclusive Education: A system that offers students accommodations, adaptations and modifications without an official system of identification as an exceptional student.

Inclusive Educational Model: Students are serviced in a regular classroom setting.

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, the current name for what used to be called ADD and ADHD. There are three subcategories, Primary Inattentive (formerly ADD), Primarily Hyperactive (extremely rare) and Combined, having all three symptoms, difficulty regulating attention, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

LD: Learning Disability

Modifications: Generally used to note modifications to the student's curriculum (curricular modifications), but some provinces also use the term to describe classroom modifications

Accommodations, Adaptations: Changes to the environment, teaching process or process used to evaluate a student's performance meant to reduce the effect of the disability. There is no change in curriculum or expectations of students.

IEP: Individual Education Plan – also known as;

SEP: Special Education Plan

IPP: Individualized Program Plan

SSP: Student Support Plan

ISSP: Individual Support Services Plan

All provinces, except for Ontario and one Territory graciously responded to our request for a conference call. Although we received letters acknowledging receipt of our policy paper from the Ministries of Ontario and the Yukon, a meeting did not occur. The Yukon Ministry representative offered to speak to us, however frequent attempts to contact her failed. Face to face meetings and correspondence occurred with the Ministry of Ontario prior to 2010.

Current Identification System

Presently students with the diagnosis of ADHD are usually reported using Code 58 Medical Disability (mild/moderate), however some are also reported under code 54 Learning Disability. Funding for special education is provided to school boards. Recently (2006) a resource on ADHD was published for educators.

Proposed “Made in Alberta Inclusive Education System”

A shift from a dual system of mainstream education and special education to a system that takes responsibility for all students has been proposed. The emphasis will shift from special education programs to achieving outcomes for all students. Students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of their choice. Inclusion means students will be included in the greater school community, not necessarily placed in a regular classroom.

Strengths

Having ADHD identified under the “Medical” category allows students to receive accommodations and recognizes ADHD as the medical condition that it is.

Potential

Flagged designated successes with review can lead to constantly improving accommodations.

Concerns

If the official designation process is withdrawn, some legal documentation of a disability should remain to ensure the student's legal rights to access of accommodations.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Grade: Unsatisfactory/Fail

Current Identification System

ADHD by itself can not determine the appropriate special needs category.

There are twelve categories of identification. Students with ADHD may be reported under any category, depending upon the intensity of the disability, but are most often reported under the categories of, learning disabilities, moderate behaviour supports/mental illness or intensive behavioural interventions / serious mental illness depending on their needs.

However, students with ADHD must be able to fit into the definitions of these categories to meet the criteria.

For moderate behaviour support needs, the criteria for reporting includes demonstration of behaviours such as aggression (of a physical, emotional or sexual nature) and/or hyperactivity.

Strengths

Some students who have additional coexisting disorders, can be identified under the category that applies to that disorder.

Weaknesses

If the student with ADHD does not have a coexisting Learning Disability or does not display significant disruptive behaviour, they will not be identified.

Students with ADHD and no diagnosed LD may be excluded from receiving accommodations for their academic disabilities.

This lack of recognition encourages educators to believe that ADHD is not a legitimate disability.

Recognition under behaviour can lead to academic weaknesses not being addressed and the students being stigmatized.

Inclusive System

The belief base is that schools have an obligation to provide suitable programming required by the student.

There is no official identification process or funding categories. Funding levels are only tied to the severity of disability.

Documentation of individual needs, adaptations and accommodations need not be in an IEP format, but some documentation is required if the accommodations are on-going.

Students obtaining curricular modifications and special needs funding must have an IEP.

Strengths

A belief base of obligation to provide programming and lack of categories can be beneficial if it truly leads to the implementation of accommodations.

Concerns

Without an official designation process, some legal documentation of a disability should exist to ensure the student's legal rights to access accommodations.

Identification System

ADHD is recognized under the “Behaviour” category regardless of the presentation of disruptive behaviour. This is currently under review.

An inclusive educational model exists.

No behavioural classes exist.

Implementation of universal accommodations, such as sound-field systems, extra time, and special seating, do not require an SEP

It is the Superintendent or his/her designate that is responsible for making the decision of exceptionality.

Strengths

Universal accommodations would allow educators to quickly put in place accommodations required by the student.

ADHD under the “Behaviour” category can lead to identification and access to accommodations.

Concerns

If education for teachers and adequate access to resources is not available teachers may be overwhelmed in the inclusive education model.

Recognition under behaviour can lead to academic weaknesses not being addressed and the students being stigmatized.

NEWFOUNDLAND – LABRADOR

Grade: Good

Identification System

ADHD is recognized as an exceptionality under the category, emotional, mental health, and/or behavioural disorder.

A student whose ADHD has been diagnosed by and is under the continuous care of a mental health professional, and for whom the disorder is affecting his/her ability to function will be considered to have an exceptionality.

Identification leads to resources/services rather than funding. The level of supports is geared to the student's needs.

Students with ADHD may receive programming supports within any of the Pathways, depending on other needs.

Students with ADHD are identified under four different codes:

1. ADHD with LD receiving only accommodations
 2. ADHD without LD receiving only accommodations
 3. ADHD and LD receiving multiple pathways.
 4. ADHD without LD receiving multiple pathways
- The Ministry is moving towards a more flexible inclusive model to allow for earlier intervention.

Strengths

A belief base of obligation to provide programming and lack of categories can be beneficial if it truly leads to the implementation of accommodations.

Potential

The possibility of earlier intervention would be a benefit.

Concerns

If moving towards a more flexible inclusive model of early intervention, it will be important to ensure that some official documentation of a disability exists to ensure legal rights to on-going accommodations.

Identification under the behaviour category alone would be discouraged.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Grade: Satisfactory with concerns

Inclusive System

District Education Councils/Authorities (DEC/A) (equivalent to a school board) are charged (empowered) in providing the resources and accommodations the students require with the “block” funding for inclusive schooling that the Ministry provides.

Students with needs would receive either an IEP or SSP. Most students with ADHD would receive an SSP that would outline the accommodations and adaptations. Accommodations would have to be documented for the student to receive them.

IEPs are reserved for low incidence disabilities that require the school to move beyond normal curriculum outcomes.

A school team would decide whether a student would receive an SSP.

Strengths

A belief base of obligation to provide programming and lack of categories can be beneficial if it truly leads to the implementation of accommodations.

Concerns

Without an official designation process, some legal documentation of a disability should exist to ensure the student's legal rights to access accommodations.

When the decision of the need for an SSP rests with the school team, up-to-date knowledge of the disorder is imperative because ADHD behaviours can be misinterpreted as intentional and not stemming from a need or disability.

Inclusive System

Nova Scotia does not have categorized funding, however, exceptionalities are identified for which funding can be applied. ADHD falls within these categories.

Classroom teachers may develop and implement adaptations for students but a program plan team meeting may be needed if the student's needs are not being met through adaptations. When it is determined that an Individual Program Plan (IPP) is required, it has annual individualized outcomes.

The Special Education Policy was updated in 2008. Reviews in 2001 and 2007 identified the need for additional funding and teacher education.

Strengths

Categories are only applied for additional funding purposes. ADHD falls within these categories.

Input from outside specialists and parents is allowed in the program planning process.

Concerns

Without an official designation process, some legal documentation of a disability should exist to ensure the student's legal rights to access accommodations.

Identification System

Five categories of exceptionality exist, however students with ADHD can be identified under the categories of “Behaviour”, “Communication” or “Physical” only if an additional disability qualifies them as meeting the definition of that category.

The “Behaviour” category is only used if the student's behaviour is significantly disruptive.

Some school boards allow IEPs for students who are not identified as exceptional, however others do not.

IEPs are considered legal documents, however without being tied to an official identification they can be removed by the school at any time.

Strengths

Some students who have additional coexisting disorders can be identified under those disorders.

There is the possibility of an IEP in some boards, however if and how long it remains in place is at the discretion of the school.

Weaknesses

If the student with ADHD does not have a coexisting Learning Disability or displays significant disruptive behaviour, they will not be identified.

This means students with ADHD will be excluded from receiving accommodations for their disability.

This lack of recognition encourages educators to believe that ADHD is not a legitimate disability.

Recognition under behaviour can lead to academic weaknesses not being addressed and students being stigmatized.

There is no consistency or equity built into the system.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Grade: Satisfactory with concerns

Inclusive System

An inclusive system with a continuum of appropriate support exists. Resources and funding are not contingent on diagnosis, but rather on the special educational needs of the student.

Schools can be alerted to possible requirement of special needs by the physician's diagnosis, but it is the school team working with the student who will decide if an IEP is required.

Schools are encouraged to take ownership of all students' needs and educational success.

School-based service teams decide on the need for and level of adaptations (accommodations) and modifications.

Strengths

Identification not being tied to resources and funding would allow students with ADHD to receive special education services.

Concerns

Without an official designation process, some legal documentation of a disability should exist to ensure the student's legal rights to access accommodations.

When the decision of the level of need and adaptations required rests with the school team, up-to-date knowledge of the disorder is imperative because ADHD behaviours can be misinterpreted as intentional and not stemming from a need or disability.

Identification System

There are two ways that students with special education needs can be labeled; “Coded” for a specific disability or deemed “At Risk”. Students with ADHD are only deemed “At Risk” and are not recognized as having a disability or impairment.

Students with ADHD in the "At Risk" category can receive an IEP.

The content of the IEP is discussed at a meeting. The school's principal, teachers, professionals, parents and sometimes the student are all invited to attend.

The “Behaviour” category is not used for ADHD.

Strengths

Some students with ADHD may be able to receive an IEP.

Weaknesses

Students with ADHD and no additional disorder will not be identified as having a disability.

When the decision of the level of need and adaptations required rests with the school team, up-to-date knowledge of the disorder is imperative because ADHD behaviours can be misinterpreted as intentional and not stemming from a need or disability.

This lack of recognition can lead to educators not recognizing ADHD as a legitimate disability.

Identification System

Students no longer require a medical diagnosis to qualify for intensive supports. A previous list of five low incidence categories was increased to twelve, including another (diagnosed and undiagnosed conditions) category in order to ensure the inclusion of students.

There is no Behaviour category, but a Mental Health impairment category exists.

ADHD is identified under the Categories of “Other: diagnosed disorders” and Other: undiagnosed disorders”

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The criteria also states that the required level of supports from the school team, the school division team and an interagency team are accessed to support the child.

Strengths

An increase of categories to ensure the number of disabilities that could be included has provided the possibility that students with ADHD to be recognized.

Not having a behaviour category ensures that ADHD will not be identified under this misleading category.

Concerns

The required documentation of school performance needing to be adversely affected may lead to brighter students not receiving accommodations for their disability.

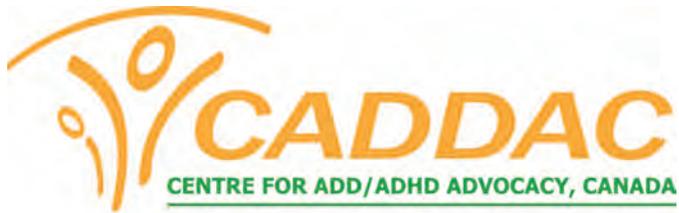
Assessment Criteria

| Assessment Criteria | Provinces | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|
| | AB | BC | MB | NB | N&L | NT | NS | ONT | PE | QC | SK |
| All ADHD students with learning needs are officially identified as exceptional learners. Official documentation of a disability exists to ensure rights to accommodations. | * | | | * | * | | | | | | * |
| Students with ADHD are identified under an appropriate category of medical, mental health or other, (not “Behaviour” alone) OR Learning accommodations are accessible to all students who require them without identification | * | | * | | * | * | * | | * | | * |
| Students with ADHD receive official identification as an exceptional learner if a co-existing disorder meets the required definition. | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * |
| Students with ADHD and an additional co-existing disorder can receive learning accommodations. | * | | * | * | * | * | * | ? | * | ? | * |
| Students' needs and their requirement of an individualized educational plan does not rest with the school team. | * | | * | * | * | | * | | | | * |
| No concerns | | | | | | | | | | | |
| “?” Possibility of an educational plan without identification in some areas and under some conditions | | | | | | | | | | | |

Grading Criteria

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Excellent | 5 stars with no concerns |
| Good | 5 stars with minimal concerns |
| Satisfactory | 4 stars with one concern |
| Satisfactory with Concerns | 3 stars with more than one concern |
| Unsatisfactory/Fail | 2 or less stars – system bars some students with ADHD from receiving accommodations |

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CADDAC

40 Wynford Drive
Suite 304B
Toronto, Ontario
M3C 1J5

Phone: (416) 637-8584
Fax: (416) 385-3232

www.caddac.ca