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## **Students with ADHD Ignored as Boards Review Effect of Covid**

### **Parents can prevent this occurring in the future by having their voices heard.**

Students with ADHD, and others unrecognized as having a disability by the Ontario Ministry of Education, will be excluded from research investigating the impact of covid, online schooling and quad systems. Unlike students with other neurodevelopmental disorders, such as learning disabilities and Autism, data on students with ADHD is not tracked by the Ministry, or boards.

Why is this important? In this situation, students with ADHD could be considered the canary in the coal mine. Students who are impaired in attention regulation will be dramatically impacted if expected to stay attentive to a screen for long periods of time or remain engaged in two and a half hours classes. Students with ADHD, often impaired in working memory and processing speed, as well as organization, time management and self monitoring will be the ones who fail when their in-class supports are removed, routines altered and subject material and assignments compressed into a shortened semester.

The Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada, [CADDAC](#), has been receiving calls and emails from distressed parents for the past year and a half. A mom of a struggling high schooler put it very succinctly, “While it is a blatantly unrealistic expectation that the majority of neurotypical high school students can adequately pay attention for 150 minutes, when it comes to students with ADHD, I suggest that it is, in fact, discriminatory.”

During the last year, news stories of students struggling with anxiety and depression have been abundant. For the Ministry and school boards to increase challenges while removing supports for students with ADHD, who already have increased rates of anxiety and depression, and then ignore them when studying the impact of these changes, is truly discriminatory. Whether this is a calculated decision, or simply a result of the antiquated and discriminatory system of categories of exceptionalities is irrelevant.

The good news is that the Ministry of Education, after years of advocacy work by the AODA and other disability organizations, committed to enact an Education Accessibility Standard. An advisory committee, the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee, which includes representatives from the government and the disability community (excluding ADHD) recently released their [initial recommendations report](#).

The report’s recommendations are focused on eliminating barriers that students with disabilities (including those with ADHD) face in accessing education. Currently Ontario’s special education system is specifically designed to meet the needs of students who have a condition that falls within the Ministry of Education’s definition of “[exceptionalities](#)”. During a recent national communication project, CADDAC

spoke with all ministries of Education, except Quebec, and confirmed that Ontario is one of the only remaining provinces or territories to use this type of inequitable and discriminatory system.

To their credit, the Ministry has asked for public feedback on this report by September the 2<sup>nd</sup>. CADDAC is strongly urging parents of all children with disabilities, and especially those with ADHD and other disabilities excluded from the Ministry's categories of exceptionality, to take a few minutes to provide this critical feedback. To assist parents, CADDAC has developed [easy to follow instructions](#) and [key messages](#) focused on the needs of students with ADHD for parents to access.

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