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Three Provincial Education Systems are Failing Students with ADHD

A national report comparing provincial and territorial special education systems found that three provinces failed the grade in providing equitable access to education for students with ADHD.

The Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada, or CADDAC, a Canadian ADHD charity supporting those with ADHD, spent most of last year researching, corresponding and meeting with Ministries of Education across Canada to better understand, if and how, their systems recognize and support students with ADHD. CADDAC's new [2021 Report Card: ADHD in the school system](#) is an update on the first report published in 2010. CADDAC strongly encourages parents and educators of children and adolescents with ADHD to access this report to better understand issues within their school systems and how their province or territory rates in comparison to others.

CADDAC evaluated each individual provincial and territorial system grading them as good with minimal concerns, satisfactory with two or three concerns, or unsatisfactory/fail. No system received a grade of excellent since no system included training for educators on ADHD and appropriate teaching strategies and accommodations, which CADDAC believes is essential.

The three failing provinces all have systemic barriers that discriminate against students with ADHD, making access to supports for their disabilities a significant challenge. Of these three provinces, Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, only one, BC stated their intention to alter these existing barriers. These three provinces require students' disabilities to fit into a list of categories to be officially recognized as having a disability. Other neurodevelopmental disorders causing similar impairments, such as, learning disabilities and Autism, sometimes coexisting with ADHD, are included in these categories.

In correspondence and during meetings the Ontario Ministry of Education, they denied any discrimination stating that students with ADHD and other disabilities not recognized under a category could receive supports through an individualized learning plan or IEP, if their learning is impaired. However, since this is at a school or board's discretion, with the Ministry being unable, or unwilling, to hold boards accountable, total inconsistency and inequity of supports for these students exists across Ontario. In fact, recently school boards are compounding the issue by developing policies aimed at reducing the number of IEPs for students not identified under a category.

Heidi Bernhardt, the Director of Education and Advocacy for CADDAC, and author of this report shares her concern and frustration, "After years of advocacy work, meetings with Ministries and school boards, countless calls from desperate parents, mostly in BC and Ontario, it is disheartening that we need to report that there has been no change in the three largest provinces to-date. We are hopeful that BC will eventually move forward with their stated changes, however in Ontario things are deteriorating rather

than improving. All students with ADHD can learn, most can go onto post-secondary education, where accommodations are accessible and become successful in their chosen careers, but we have to be able to get them through high school first.”

The report also highlights that since 2010 more provinces, (New Brunswick, Alberta, BC, Saskatchewan) have transitioned, or state they are in the process of transitioning, from a system of identifying students with exceptional needs to simply mandating schools to meet those needs. However, parents in several provinces and territories have expressed concern that a lack, or change, in documentation such as IEPs, which are considered legal documents, reduces their ability to hold their child’s school accountable.

During meetings, all provinces and territories spoke about moving into an inclusive education model, which in practice means all, or most students, regardless of their level of need would remain in a community classroom. While not apposed to this change, CADDAC’s 2010 Report cautioned that moving to a system of “inclusive education”, without additional resources in the classroom, supported by additional funding, would lead to overwhelmed educators and under serviced students. This has occurred in at least one province, New Brunswick, that is now rethinking how this system was implemented.

To arrange for Interviews:

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