



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Toronto, Ontario, March 11, 2019

Autism Ontario Responds to Ontario Ministry of Education’s News Release “Enhancing Education Support: A Plan for Students with Autism”

Autism Ontario is committed to supporting families through this province-wide program change and will work with the Autistic community to find solutions to this process.

Today’s announcement by the Ministry of Education does not address the fundamental concerns and worries that parents of students with autism express to us daily at Autism Ontario. Many of the announced resources today remain thin on details and scope of impact or implementation requirements. This announcement makes no mention of how to resolve the gap that remains between coordinating ABA services between school and the community. With many children expected to experience a loss in service because of [autism program changes](#), and who will enter the school system for the first time shortly, parents are likely to have little confidence in their children’s classroom experience.

Autism Ontario knows the antiquated Education Act does not adequately support the learning needs of students on the autism spectrum. The Ministry of Education has not invested in sufficient professional resources and currently, pre-service autism training or professional development is optional rather than mandatory. Research repeatedly shows that adult learning and anticipated behaviour change does not occur through in-service or on-line training modules unless it occurs simultaneously with direct oversight from trained professionals within school settings.

Left with this outdated, old policy, families are being faced with approaching the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario as the only choice remaining to get their child’s education needs addressed within school settings. Not only is this process wildly unfair, it is disruptive and harmful to both the student and their family. Time spent in court is time spent away from the classroom or work. This process is both emotional and financially costly and often results in families feeling separated from their school communities for simply asking for what is fair.

Without proper pre-service training, we will continue to hear stories where the police are called, or where dangerous behaviour techniques are used. Unfortunately, we also hear stories of students who are excluded through suspensions and soft suspensions; a technique often used to keep students home from school on days when the staff have insufficient resources.

Without appropriate funding, students on the autism spectrum will not have access to the required resources to be successful in classroom settings. The allotted \$12,300 announced for each student is not new, and while it might help to ease the financial burden at a board level, it will not guarantee that people hired have the necessary qualifications to support autistic students.

There are many solutions. We need every school to have Registered Behaviour Technicians (RBTs) who are directly supervised in their work. If the student's educational assessment and Individual Education Plan (IEP) identifies ABA support needs (as required in PPM-140), there must be a BCBA overseeing the identified learning objectives and outcomes.

We need to collaborate efforts across Ministries rather than through protective or silo-ed approaches to helping children to learn and that contribute unnecessarily to stress on families, on educators, and most importantly on the learning outcomes for children that have prompted families to pull their children out of school due to these challenges.

This announcement tells us that Minister Thompson is paying attention to influx of students on the autism spectrum entering schools in response to changes to the Ontario Autism Program announced MCCSS in February. However, with the exception of the after school programming, and the commitment to the Connections process, which are welcome; it has only left us with many questions and concerns for the well-being of our autistic students.

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has a 46 year history of representing thousands of families and people with ASD across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has formal parent representation in all areas of the province through our 25 Chapters. We advocate on behalf of all people with ASD and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit www.autismontario.com

Vision: Acceptance and Opportunities for all people with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Mission: To ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.

New to Autism? Find help for navigating the system after a diagnosis, school issues, and other ASD information; please contact your local **Family Support Coordinator** [here](#).

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