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For immediate release

Autism Ontario Calls for Immediate Collaboration on Special Education Support in Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board

[Toronto, Ontario] Autism Ontario is deeply concerned about the recent decision by the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board (SMCDSB) to proceed with the fall term without adequately addressing the critical need for Educational Assistants (EAs) for autistic students. This decision is contrary to both the Education Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code, which guarantee students the right to necessary supports during school hours.

It was openly acknowledged during SMCDSB's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) meetings that the number of EAs budgeted for the last school year (2023-2024) was significantly insufficient. Despite an unexpected increase in enrollment in September 2023, which is expected to continue this fall, the SMCDSB did not adjust the allocation for EAs in the 2024-2025 budget. The Special Education Budget was not shared with the SEAC until June 13, 2024, and the allocation for EAs remained unchanged from the previous year.

The SEAC expressed their concerns and submitted recommendations the following day, highlighting the need for increased EA support. In addition to sufficient EA support, Autism Ontario emphasizes that staff training, resources to assist families in navigating the special education system, and ensuring that students are able to access their right to education and have their needs met are critical for proper support. The SMCDSB received a 3.9% increase in Special Education funding for the 2024-2025 school year, which the SEAC recommended should be used to address the shortfall in EA allocations. However, these recommendations were neither acknowledged nor considered.

The disregard for the SEAC's recommendations marks a significant departure from the collaborative approach expected for these decisions. School administrative staff, too, voiced concerns upon receiving their EA allotments for September.

"All educational enterprises must rest on the fundamental belief that everyone belongs and can learn. This must be communicated from the top down, in informed leadership and collaboration with outside experts; and it has to be informed from the bottom up — in the many voices of students, parents, teachers and administrators who live the reality every day" (Autism Ontario, 2021).

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Students have the right to education and support. This decision by the SMCDSD is not only a violation of the Education Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code but also a clear example of exclusion. Moreover, it violates O.Reg 464/97 in the Education Act, which mandates the SEAC to be consulted, not merely informed. Autism Ontario urges the SMCDSD to rectify this situation by restoring a collaborative relationship and decision-making process with SEAC. Immediate action is also needed to alleviate the stress experienced by families who are now anxious about what the upcoming school year will bring.

As a leading collective voice representing the autism community, Autism Ontario provides SEAC representation to support school boards across the province in meeting the diverse needs of students. Collaboration between school boards and SEACs plays a crucial role as a vital check and balance within the education system. This strengthens SEACs' capacity to effectively serve, benefiting students and school boards across the province.

For more information, please email Autism Ontario's media team at media@autismontario.com.

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Resources

- [K-12 Committee Report 2021](#)

About Autism Ontario

[Autism Ontario](#) is the province's leading source of information and referral on autism whose mandate is to build a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism. It provides autistic individuals and families across their life course with community-based access to meaningful supports, social learning opportunities, information, and connections. The organization's commitment to significantly and positively impacting the autism community is driven by its vision: Best life, better world, making autism matter!