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For immediate release

Autism Ontario Urges Inclusive Consultation in SMCDSB Special Education Budget Process

[Toronto, Ontario] Autism Ontario acknowledges the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board's (SMCDSB) recent decision to revisit the proposed special education budget, which includes increased funding for Educational Assistants (EAs) and Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs). However, Autism Ontario is troubled by the exclusion of the SMCDSB's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) from the consultation process, leading to significant equity.

[Last week, Autism Ontario voiced deep concern over the SMCDSB's initial decision to proceed with the fall term without addressing the critical need for EAs.](#) This move contradicted both the Education Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code. The SEAC had highlighted the insufficiency of EAs during the 2023-2024 school year and the need for increased support amidst rising enrollment. Despite a 3.9% increase in Special Education funding from the Ministry of Education for the 2024-2025 school year, the SEAC's initial recommendations on staffing levels were not implemented nor acknowledged.

The exclusion of the SEAC resulted in decisions that discriminated against autistic students, violating the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Education Act. The initial plan to enroll students without adequate support jeopardized the well-being and safety of both students and staff. These issues underscore the need for meaningful consultation with the SMCDSB's SEAC, as required by O. Reg 464/97 of the Education Act.

"The Board's recent steps towards providing increased supports for children to thrive in the classroom are a necessary step in the right direction," expresses Carmela Diano, SEAC Vice Chair and Autism Ontario representative. "However, it's important to recognize that these measures still fall short of the Board's own identified needs. For instance, even with the decision to run a deficit to hire extra staffing, it is unclear if this will be sufficient to meet the current needs considering ongoing population increases."

The Board's lack of timely consultation with its SEAC is also deeply worrisome. The delayed sharing of budget information until June 13, long after budget discussions typically take place in March or April, reflects a significant disregard for SEAC's vital advisory role. This exclusion undermines SEAC's function and the quality of support children receive. It is crucial that SEAC is involved in these discussions from the outset to ensure that all decisions are made transparently and with the best interests of our students in mind.

Autism Ontario strongly encourages the SMCDSB to rely on the guidance and expertise of its SEAC to prevent any further decisions that would violate the rights of students. By collaborating closely with its SEAC, the SMCDSB can ensure that the voices of parents, educators, and experts are heard, leading to more informed and effective decisions. Autism Ontario is

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committed to working with the SMCDSB to improve outcomes for students and uphold the highest standards of equity and safety in schools.

Autism Ontario looks forward to collaborating with the SMCDSB to ensure the best outcomes for all students.

The Autism Ontario SEAC Team comprises passionate volunteer education advocates who work closely with our staff team. SEAC representatives make a significant difference by directly impacting the lives of autistic individuals and helping to shape a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students. Join us in our mission to create a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism:

[Contact](#) your local Autism Ontario SEAC Representative to share your questions or concerns.

[Apply](#) to volunteer as an Autism Ontario SEAC Representative.

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

[Make a meaningful donation today](#). Your support makes a difference.

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!