



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

933 Alice Street, Woodstock Ontario N4S 2J9
Phone (519)290-1763 Website: www.oafccd.com

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Ministry of Education Consultation on Class Size

The Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders (OAFCCD) provides information and support to families of children with communication disorders. Members of OAFCCD include families of children with speech and language disorders. Parent volunteers of the association are members of school board Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC). Almost all students with communication disorders require speech-language pathology services.

We are writing to you regarding the impact of class size on the ability of students with communication disorders to succeed in school. The ability to communicate effectively is essential for success in school, as oral language skills (listening and speaking) are the foundation on which literacy, numeracy and social skills develop. Kindergarten and the primary grades are especially important for this communication development.

Typically, between 6 and 10 percent of school aged students have a speech and/or language disorder. The rate of children at risk for speech and language disorders and delays is much higher in kindergarten with studies showing up to 30% of kindergarten students have a speech and language delay or disorder. Children challenged with communication disorders require extra support from their educators. The educators must be able to identify oral language needs and provide evidence-based strategies to support speech and language development. The school-based Speech-Language Pathologist is an important member of the educational team to support these skills.

In the kindergarten years, oral language is the focus of early learning so that children learn to make connections between what they hear, say, read and write. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are all interrelated, with growth and development in one area supporting development in the others. Because children enter the kindergarten years with very different levels of language development, recognizing, supporting and enhancing these skills is an essential and overarching component of the curriculum, a component which is necessary for continued learning success in the primary grades.

Young students with delayed language skills require extra time, prompting and modeling from their educators so that they can understand the language of school, be able to express themselves and participate in learning. Children with speech difficulties or who are non-verbal require significant support from adults to help make themselves understood. In addition, adult mediation and support is needed for these students so that they develop peer relationships and social skills, and so that communication breakdowns do not result in behaviour issues or withdrawal.

We understand that caps on the number of students that are allowed in Ontario classrooms help to support quality teacher-student interactions. Kindergarten classes are currently capped at 29, and grades 1, 2, and 3 have a cap of 23 students. This ratio of teachers/educators to students can make it a challenge for teachers to provide students with the number of one-to-one communication interactions that support the development of language skills, especially for those with communication disorders. Further increases in class size, especially in the primary grades, would further diminish the number of quality one-to-one interactions possible for students with special needs.

Thank you for consideration of this submission.