



**ONTARIO
AUTISM
COALITION**

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Education Issues Parent Survey Findings—Summary

October 25, 2017

In September 2017, the Ontario Autism Coalition (OAC) conducted an online survey of parents who have school-age children who have autism and related exceptionalities, with 166 respondents received from across Ontario. Key findings are summarized below under relevant themes.

School Placements

- 72% felt that their child does not receive support at the level that they need at school.
- 40% said that their child's potential placements were not thoroughly explained to them.
- 57% indicated that they did not feel they had a choice when it came to their child's placement.
- 97% said that their child had an IEP in place last year. Of these, 30% of respondents felt that they were not given meaningful input into their child's IEP; 47% felt that the IEP goals were not measurable; and just 27% indicated that their school collects data to measure their child's IEP progress. Further, a mere 17% of parents reported that their school shares this data with them on a regular basis.
- Only 45% of respondents indicated that a safety plan one was in place for their child, and just 29% reported they were invited to give meaningful input into such a plan.
- When asked if parents know of their right to have a friend or advocate attend IEP meetings with them, only 18.5% indicated they were told this, 32% indicated they already knew, and 49% said they did not know about this. Only 33% of parents indicated that someone in the school explained that they had the right to refuse to sign an IEP or IPRC placement if they disagree with it.
- 11% of students had been placed in a "section 23" class because of their special needs. Just 19% of parents agreed with their child's placement (either in or out of this special class). Importantly, 29% felt pressured to accept the placement, and just 28% felt that ultimately, their child had received the right placement.
- One parent noted: "My son was placed in a classroom where the teacher talked through a loudspeaker. The loudspeaker continuously produced feedback as it was not properly mounted. My son became so distressed by the constant noise that he stopped attending school. The following year, he was again placed in the class with the loud speaker so he did not attend school that year either. He is still terrified of loud speakers."

EA Support

- 75% of parents, indicated that in the last year, they had advocated for their child to receive support from an EA; of these, 46% had their request granted, and 54% had it refused. The most common reason provided was that their school did not have enough money to provide this support.
- 57% indicated that had been told by a professional that their child required one-to-one support by an EA assigned exclusively to them. Despite this, only 17% of respondents who indicated this were actually assigned this full EA support; 39% had no EA; while the remainder of respondents' children shared an EA either with other students or other classrooms.

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The Ontario Autism Coalition is a non-profit Ontario corporation dedicated to advocacy and political action on behalf of people with autism.

www.ontarioautismcoalition.com

2— OAC Education Issues Parent Survey Findings

Missed School

- Many parents reported that their children missed school due to inadequate resources to support them.
- *33% of respondents were asked to take their child home early from school because they had challenging behaviour or a “meltdown”*
- Many parents expressed their frustration with this system. For example, one respondent noted: “School cut his education to one hour a day. My child stayed home for two months.” Another indicated that their child got sent home early “pretty much every day.”
- *26% of respondents indicated they were asked to keep their child home during a field trip or event because the school could not provide the proper supports*
- *13% of children were asked to stay home for an extended time until an appropriate placement could be found.*

Communication and Resolution of Problems

- While 52% of parents felt that they had good communication with their children’s educational team, the other half noted concerns.
- *54% of parents had to contact people beyond the school level to help resolve a problem occurring at school.* One noted: “I have contacted trustees and met with the Superintendent of special education twice – not because the school staff was unhelpful, but because of the systemic problems beyond the schools control. I was wholly unsatisfied with the superintendent and his dismissive attitude towards parents.”
- *About 29% of parents had filed a complaint with an outside agency because their child’s needs were not being met by the school, with the most common entity being the school board.*

Restraint and Segregation

- 29% of parents indicated their child had been handled or restrained by school staff in the past year, some close to 100 times, with 14% indicating that their child had sustained injuries due to these actions. Only 15% of these parents knew that the staff members who had done this had received proper training, while 9% knew for a fact that they did not, and the remaining weren’t sure. Just 8% of impacted respondents received an incident report following the altercation, 52% did not, and the remaining 40% said it was inapplicable.
- One parent commented: “Our son would come home with bruises behind his knees...from being restrained in a chair. Beginning in kindergarten...he was restrained in a chair...when he did not complete his work....he was (also) restrained in a time out chair if he did not come to the carpet when he was called...the restraint went on for at least 15 minutes. He has also had bruises on his arms from being dragged. He has had bruises all over his body from the staff holding a door closed and then letting go of the door so that he falls back into the furniture.”
- 60% of respondents said their child had been placed in a room for segregation. While some parents suggested this was done appropriately, to help calm an overstimulated child for example, others voiced serious concerns: “The school never told us but we learned about it from our son and a parent volunteer that they would keep him in a padded room while he cried on the floor. This was after they would carry him in by his wrists and ankles.”
- 16% of parents indicated that their child had been placed in a room such as a closet, storage room, office or a washroom in order to “keep them safe” without parents’ prior permission. The vast majority of affected parents felt that professional behaviour services could help to minimize such incidents, yet they were not utilized.

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Violence

- 32% of parents indicated that within the past year, they had received a call regarding a violent incident involving their child.
- Just 27% of parents felt that their child was safe at school all of the time, while 11% of parents felt that their child was “hardly ever” safe at school. The rest felt that their child was safe some or most of the time.
- 53% indicated their child had experienced bullying in the past year, with 40% suggesting this occurred on multiple occasions. Bullying included verbal, social, and physical assaults. 29% indicated their child had been the victim of violence from another child, with 7% having to seek medical help for the injuries. Most parents felt that the bullying was a direct result of their child’s exceptional needs (44%) or weren’t sure of the cause (32%).
- 33% indicated their child witnessed violence in the classroom.
- About 47% of parents were satisfied or very satisfied with school responses to the bullying, while 40% were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. Only 44% of parents felt that the school staff believed them or their child about the bullying incidents. Examples:
 - “They...encouraged my child to exclude herself from activities/clubs/events to make things easier for the other kids.”
 - “Even when I told them I witnessed the bullying, my testimony was disregarded repeatedly. My child is traumatized from elementary school.”

Safety for Wandering Children

- Ensuring safety for children who are prone to wandering was a major concern for parents.
- *30% indicated that in the last year, their child was found wandering in the halls*
- *Nearly 20% suggested their child left school property without appropriate supervision.*
- Parent quotes: “The EA was occupied with another student. The gym and school front doors were open because it was hot and there was a delivery being made. My son was found...about to wander into the parking lot which is also next to a busy road”
- “He is (wondering) this year. It scares me.....makes my day full of anxiety.”

ABA Therapy and Transitions into School.

- 12% of parents had been told they had to choose between school and the receipt of ABA services.
- 54% of parents said no transition planning had been done to prepare their child to enter the school system, while just 36% said they had received a written copy of a transition plan. About half of parents had been invited to a meeting to discuss a transition plan.
- Twenty percent of respondents had received transition support through the Connections Program. Of these, only 15% were satisfied or very satisfied with the program, while 24% were “very unsatisfied” with it. Just 21% of parents were “absolutely” satisfied with the transition to school, while 23% were “not at all satisfied” and 29% were “not really” satisfied.

Effective Learning, ABA and Autism Expertise

- When asked if an ABA therapist who worked with a child outside of school was allowed into the classroom to work with the child there, only 10% of parents said this was the case, while 26% said they were denied such a request, 28% had a therapist allowed only for observing or sharing information, and the remaining never made such a request or didn’t work with therapists outside of school.
- For those who were allowed, the experiences were generally positive. For example, one commented: “We are with a private Christian School and last year they allowed his therapists to come into the classroom and do therapy with him in a natural school environment. It was wonderful and the teacher found it very helpful and informative as she learned to work with our son.”

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4— OAC Education Issues Parent Survey Findings

- Tracking, measuring and responding to data is an essential component of ABA techniques. Yet just 29% of parents reported data being collected about their child in the past year, and of these, only 40% said that the data was used to inform decision-making about their child's programming. Only 12.5% said they had received support from a behaviour therapist in the classroom (of these, most didn't know what certification the behaviour therapist had), and 37.5% said they had received support from an autism consultant.
- 63% of parents felt that their child's teacher did not know enough about autism to effectively support their learning, and only 46% of parents had the same feeling about their child's EA (for 20% the EA was not applicable). Examples:
- "My child lost one year of education just because of lack of support and resources. He hated the school due to school staff lack of knowledge about ASD."
- "They have pulled all my son's support this year and have been putting him in the library to draw."
- Parents felt passionately that further access to autism and ABA specialists in the schools would be essential for their children's education. Examples:
- "Allow ABA therapists at school, either for therapy, or as shadow, or both if necessary. School staff should not be so quick to segregate kids or remove a child with autism from the classroom for minor issues. Inclusion means inclusion."
- "(There is) no support for children that have no behaviour issues or flight risk. Support should not be about babysitting, it should be about helping achieve the potential in academics and functional skills that they will need later in life.... Lots of children on the spectrum develop mental health conditions ...and struggle to become independent because of the lack of the meaningful evidence-based support. Parents' only hope is to be lucky next year and get a teacher who would at least understand some of the information about the child's needs and required support, so that at least the child doesn't regress."

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