



**ONTARIO  
AUTISM  
COALITION**

23 Rathfon Crescent, Richmond Hill, Ontario, L4C 5B6 (416) 451-8315

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Minister of Education’s “Autism Announcement” Is Too Little, Too Late**

The Ford government is creating one crisis after another for children and youth with autism. Education Minister Lisa Thompson’s announcement regarding school supports for students with autism is far too little, coming far too late. 8,400 kids will be kicked out of the Ontario Autism Program starting on April 1, and will be thrust into the school system which is unprepared to address their needs. This announcement does nothing to offer meaningful support in time for their arrival.

The Ontario Autism Coalition (“OAC”) was not consulted prior to this announcement. The OAC first requested a meeting with the Minister to address autism supports in schools, including behaviour training for education assistants, shortly after she was sworn in. We requested a meeting again in December, 2018, to address the issue of student exclusions. Aside from a brief meeting with Sam Oosterhoof in the fall, our request that the Minister open her doors to stakeholders and meet with us have been ignored.

The OAC has already taken issue with the Ministry’s flawed pilot programs for EA training and after-school programs. It is mystifying why this Minister would extend those programs, launched by her Liberal predecessor. Similarly, the Connections for Students program already exists and re-announcing it is nothing new.

Additional qualification training for teachers and a single professional development day miss the mark in terms of preparing classroom staff to use Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) in classrooms. Teacher and President of the OAC, Laura Kirby-McIntosh, says, “*expecting teachers to take on the responsibility of picking students up after they’ve been kicked out of intensive therapy is unrealistic and potentially dangerous. You cannot effectively train teachers to use ABA through an online course any more than you can teach someone to become a pro baseball player by showing them videos of ball games*”.

Janet McLaughlin, Associate Professor of Health Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, teaches and researches in the area of autism policy. She cautions that: “*This announcement by no means makes up for the problems associated with overhauling the Ontario Autism Program. It does not address the lack of transition plan for students exiting the OAP—some children have only been given a couple of months’ notice. Many children with autism thrive on predictable routines, and this is not a sufficient amount of time to prepare them for an abrupt transition. It also appears the funding is only for the 1,105 [new](#) children entering the system, when the majority of the children currently in the OAP are already attending school part-time, but will not receive additional supports in order to attend full-time. Furthermore, providing \$12,300 per new student actually represents an [extension to the deadline of existing supports](#), rather than a new investment.*”

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# **#AutismDoesntEndAtFord**

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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.  
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Likewise, economist [Mike Moffatt concludes](#): “Most of the statement was a re-announcement of things that the government is already doing, designed to generate headlines making it look like these are new initiatives. In a nutshell the plan is: Cancel therapy, put those kids into school full-time instead, make teachers watch a webinar about autism and pocket the savings. A webinar isn’t a replacement for therapy. It’s not good for those kids, nor is it good for their classmates or teachers. Children will be hurt by this, all to save a few bucks”

Once again, the Ontario Autism Coalition calls on Doug Ford and his ministers to re-think his misguided plan for children and youth with autism.

**For further information, contact:**

Laura Kirby-McIntosh, President  
416-315-7939

Bruce McIntosh, Past President  
416-451-8315

Scott Corbett, Parent  
613-617-0240

Janet McLaughlin, Researcher/Parent  
[jmclaughlin@wlu.ca](mailto:jmclaughlin@wlu.ca)

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