



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Ministry of Education Announces Pilot to Improve School-Based Supports for Students with Autism

Program that aims at improving capacity to support students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in classrooms is a step in the right direction for families looking for the best educational outcomes for their children

One of the most significant issues about ABA programming in Ontario is the challenge of access to excellence in ABA-based supports in Ontario's publicly funded schools. This announcement is welcomed news for families impacted by the gap that remains when coordinating ABA services between school and the community.

During this 2017-18 school year, the Ministry of Education, as part of a pilot project in 18 school boards across the province, is committing to improving school-based ASD supports through the hiring of Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBA) to aid in the seamless transition of ASD students across home, school and community service environments.

Furthermore, the focus on training Educational Assistants (EAs) in best practice around ABA supports while also researching and comparing with alternative training and delivery models is welcome news. Educational Assistants and other support staff play a large and important role in school life so it is imperative they have access to professional training and development.

Also encouraging is the commitment from the Ministry of Education in asking for accountability from participating school boards to report on their equity-based inclusive practices. For too long, parents have felt a sense of deep mistrust, frustration, and despair when having to "fight" for what is right in their school board. This pilot contains a built-in reporting system, helping to improve communication between ministry and school board administration and an external researcher to evaluate all components of the pilot with the goal of to inform future program directions.

According to our recent Autism Ontario province-wide survey, families from across the province highlight a lack of resources and adequate supports, and specifically a lack of knowledge about ASD within the school system.

“This pilot is wonderful news for families who have been asking for improved school-based ABA supports when autism services and supports are evolving as part of the new Ontario Autism Program. Well-planned, collaborative transitions across community programs and into school environments mean parents and caregivers can trust in best practices that focus on learning outcomes.

Janet Culliton, President, Autism Ontario

Although there has been progress in ASD awareness and understanding in Boards of Education, and the PPM-140, Autism Ontario knows that school issues remain one of the top concerns expressed by parents of students on the autism spectrum. Although this pilot is a step in the right direction, emphasis must remain on the creation of supportive school environments and well-planned transitions to services that provide optimal participation, inclusion and success of the child or adult on the autism spectrum. Moreover schools need, more ASD-trained educators, behaviour and communication therapists, mental health practitioners with access to ongoing ASD training so they may better understand, intervene and support people with ASD at all ages and stages of development and life. This pilot is a step in the right direction if parents are to have confidence that their children will be able to achieve their full potential.

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has a 44 year history of representing thousands of families and people with ASD across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has formal parent representation in all areas of the province through our 25 Chapters. We advocate on behalf of all people with ASD and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit www.autismontario.com

To access Autism Ontario’s **Education Position Statement and Education Advocacy Supports**, please click [here](#).

New to Autism? Find help for navigating the system after a diagnosis, school issues, and other ASD information, please contact your local **Family Support Coordinator** [here](#).

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