



The Family Support Institute (FSI) supports families who have family members with disabilities and mental health challenges. FSI is unique in Canada and is the only grass roots, family-to-family support organization. FSI believes that families are the best resource to support one another, and the strongest voice for their family members. FSI supports all families, with children of all ages, disabilities, and concurrent conditions. FSI's supports are **free to any family**. FSI maintains a network of over 300 peer volunteers who proudly support others by sharing experiences, acting as guides or emotional connections, mentoring, attending meetings, or being a facilitator. FSI has diverse experience, wisdom and expertise and applies culturally safe, trauma-informed and family-centered practices to all supports we offer.

Over the 36 years that FSI has been operating, one message that we have consistently heard from families is that Educational Assistant (EA) supports for their children are essential to their success in school. This is not just any EA support, it is qualified EA support with an understanding of disability, inclusion, the education system, family centered practice and many other critical aspects of the supports that go into making the role of an EA as robust as it is. At FSI the number one call we receive out of the 8500 calls (on average) per year is the challenges families face with the education system. This has remained constant for over 20 years. While we know that there are policies and practices in place that support inclusion, it is clear to us that Standards of Practice for Education Assistants is a major missing component. This is where the next step needs to be in order to see significant positive shifts in our education system. Clarification of the role of the EA's is urgently required.

We believe that the only way to do this is to embrace standards of practice that will enable our province to consistently and effectively train, hire, and retain Education Assistants in the K-12 system. This will promote increased understanding and collaboration with all partners that work with children, enable every person working in schools to be honored for the skill set they bring to the team, and focus on having all children thrive in school. The time is now to implement EA standards of Practice.

FSI is proud to be a part of this working group. It is a diverse, vast group filled with wisdom and breadth of experience. All partners are willing to work through the thick political fog to get to what's best for children and youth in our schools, and this is heartening to experience as FSI sits at the table alongside them.


FSI calls on the BC government to create provincially mandated standards of practice for Education Assistants. Educational Assistants are working with our most vulnerable students during the most important years of their lives. We need to ensure that the people who are working with school aged children are skilled, qualified and have a set of practice standards we can count on.


Sincerely,

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