

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

<http://www.oafccd.com>

History of the Speech and Language Services in Ontario Schools

INTRODUCTION:

Members of the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders have been concerned for many years about the inadequacy and inconsistencies in the provision of speech and language services for children. Services for preschool children have improved in recent years with almost twenty million dollars in service enhancements. However, services for school aged children remain inadequate despite recent education reforms. Some of the problems stem from variable interpretations and implementation of Policy/Program Memorandum 81. OAFCCD members are hopeful that this review will resolve many of the long standing problems and that families will not have to continue fighting year after year.

1980 Bill 82, an amendment to the Education Act, passed and all children with disabilities become entitled to attend publicly funded schools by the end of a five year implementation period.

1984 Policy/Program Memorandum 81, an inter-Ministerial agreement, developed to establish who would be responsible for provision of health services in school settings

1985 Guidelines for the Provision of Speech and Language Services developed to clarify responsibilities for speech and language services in schools

1988 Interministerial Guidelines for the Provision of Speech and Language Services produced as a revision to the previous Guidelines. Intent was to assist in decision making at the local level and determine respective roles in the provision of

services in schools

1990 Ministry of Community and Social Services support Oxford County Planning Groups to survey parents and agencies about children's services. Study by Dean Darnell indicates that many services, including speech and language services, are inadequate and poorly co-ordinated.

1991 Oxford County Speech and Language Task Force established to bring stakeholders together to discuss how speech and language services can be improved for children. Sharen Heath, a parent volunteer member of group.

School boards faced with revenue shortfalls and local tax payer resistance to spiralling education costs, consider reducing or eliminating special education services that are not mandated.

At April Budget meetings Oxford and Perth County school boards decide to eliminate a number of special education services, including speech and language services.

Parents and professionals rally to fight special education cuts. Sharen Heath and Genese Warr-Leeper, Professor in Communicative Disorders at the University of Western Ontario make presentations to Trustees and Special Education Advisory Committees. Trustees respond that it is not their fault, indicating there is no mandate for the services and that funding problems stem from the Provincial government

Parent delegation meet with Minister of Education, Marion Boyd at Queen's Park. Minister indicates that decisions on the provision of school services are local decisions and the responsibility of the school boards.

Oxford M.P.P., Kimble Sutherland, offers to intervene and invites the Inter-Ministerial Advisory Committee for School Health Supports to meet with parents, school board representatives and local agencies involved in the delivery of speech and language services.

1992 Inter-Ministerial Advisory Committee advises the groups to keep talking and find a locally acceptable solution. The Oxford County Speech and Language Task Force expanded and requested to develop a county model of service.

Oxford Task Force designs alternative service delivery models. But it seems impossible to get agreement amongst agencies. Parents realize that the PPM 81 and Inter-Ministerial Guidelines are not helpful as they are not enforceable.

Provincial Coalition for Equity Education formed by groups concerned about cuts to education services. Sharen Heath attends, representing Oxford County parents and learns that speech and language services are especially vulnerable to cuts because no organization has a mandate to provide the services.

At the Coalition meetings Sharen Heath connects with professionals and parents from Halton who are also concerned about inadequate services and proposed cuts to speech and language services.

Start to hear from parents across the province frustrated with inadequate school board and School Health Support Services (SHSS) speech and language services. Although only 4-6% of students eligible for SHSS but Home Care Program not adequately meeting needs.

1993 As the Ontario economy deteriorates, the NDP government reduces funding to public sector agencies, including school boards and hospitals

Coalition for Equity Education continues to meet but as the extent of cuts to special education services increases the group becomes overwhelmed and loses focus.

Oakville-Trafalgar Hospital decides to eliminate all speech and language services for children. Parents learn that hospitals do not have a mandate to provide speech and language services to children. Other hospitals start to consider cutting services.

Sharen Heath and Halton representatives attend meeting of Tri-Ministry Committee on Services for Children and Youth and try to get support for the need to mandate speech and language services. Told that the legislation can not be re-opened and that solutions must be found locally.

Parents realize that a provincial solution is needed. Key individuals consider founding a provincial organization to represent the interest of children with communication disorders and hold a meeting at Sharen's home in Tillsonburg.

1994 Application for Legal Incorporation of a provincial organization, the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders (OAFCCD), started. First formal Board Meeting of OAFCCD held in April.

First Chapters formed in Oxford, Halton and Huron in response to announcements of speech and language service cuts by school boards and hospitals. Inaugural Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Oakville

Legal Incorporation approved in November. Application submitted to Revenue Canada for Charitable Status

Mary Lou Souter-Hynes seconded, from Ministry of Education and Training, to review school speech and language services across the province and prepare report for the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists. (OSLA)

1995 OAFCCD members meet with Jill Hutcheon, Assistant Deputy Minister for Ministry of Education and Training (MET) to discuss concerns about cuts to speech and language services.

Information packages about OAFCCD and the importance of speech and language services mailed to all school boards in Ontario. Presentations made to many school boards who were considering reducing or eliminating speech and language services. A lot of work for parents with limited success.

Second OAFCCD Annual General Meeting held with presentations made by representatives of three Ministries to try and clarify the role of each Ministry in provision of speech and language services.

1996 OAFCCD develops a Provincial Model of Speech and Language Services for Children. Model recommends that services be mandated, a single Ministry be responsible for provision of services to all school aged children regardless of diagnosis, and that funding, based on a minimum SLP ratio, be protected for speech and language services.

OAFCCD presents Provincial model to representatives from Inter-Ministerial Committee on Services to Children and Youth. Committee makes it clear they can not change legislation and that only the Ministers can call for a review of current policy.

OAFCCD shares model with other key organizations, representing families of children with disabilities or providing services to children. Several Ministry of Health funded organizations raise objections to model as it may jeopardize jobs. OAFCCD argues that only by having a single Ministry responsible for provision of speech and language services will the current fragmented system be able to meet the needs of all school aged children.

Provincial education and hospital funding reduced and more school boards and hospitals plan service cuts. Families frustrated as speech and language services seem to be easy target for funding cuts, and they have to fight year after year to maintain services.

OAFCCD members make presentations to school board and hospital trustees across the province. OAFCCD members frustrated as they fight to maintain services.

Provincial government announces establishment of Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) to replace Home Care Programs. Included in reform is the planned divestment of therapists and the introduction of a Request for Proposal (RFP) process for CCAC contracts, including speech and language therapy services.

Provincial Government announce \$20 million for preschool speech and language services. District Health Councils (DHC) start community planning process for preschool speech and language service improvements.

OAFCCD develops position paper on Preschool services and mails provincial model to all DHCs. OAFCCD members invited to participate on many Preschool planning committees across the province.

OSLA presents "Speech-Language Pathology Services in Ontario Schools" report and recommendations to the Minister of Education and Training

1997 Ontario government announces major reform involving schools. Responsibility for education funding moved off property tax, exchange of municipal responsibilities, amalgamation of school boards from 174 to 69

OAFCCD members meet with senior representatives of Ministry of Education and Training and make a presentation on the importance of Speech and Language services in the school. OAFCCD develop documents supporting their position and estimating cost of a Speech-Language Pathology ratio.

OAFCCD requests that PPM 81 be reviewed by the Ministry as part of the development of new education funding model.

Announcement by Premier of first approved Preschool Speech and Language Service Plans in Peel, Ottawa, and Lanark

Government announces details of education reform and establishes Education Funding Model Task Group

1998 Ministry of Education announces new education Funding model and nine major grants.

Ministry of Health makes series of announcements regarding funding approvals for Preschool service enhancements

OAFCCD representatives meet with Minister of Education and Training, Dave Johnson and requests designated funding for speech and language services based on a ratio for Speech-Language Pathologists and that Policy/Program Memorandum 81 be reviewed.

Implementation of new funding model demonstrates that protected special education funding not sufficient to cover existing services or to address gaps.

Implementation of Request For Proposals process and divestment of therapists by CCACs create uncertainty and unsettled working conditions for therapists, including SLPs and result in shortages of staff with necessary pediatric expertise for School Health Support Programs.

Parents of children receiving preschool speech and language services become concerned when they realize that there may be little or no service when the child starts school.

OAFCCD receives letter from Minister Dave Johnson indicating review of Policy/Program Memorandum 81 (PPM 81) to commence shortly.

1999 School boards develop first Special Education Plan and budgets for amalgamated school boards. Reductions and changes to service delivery models proposed by many boards. Speech and language services reduced in many of the new school boards with existing staff expected to cover larger caseloads..

Steering Committee for Review of PPM 81 commences work and Ministry of Education host first meeting of Task Groups involved in the review of PPM 81