



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER November 2021

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Communication Diversity Under the OAFCCD Umbrella

A child with a communication disorder struggles to speak, listen, read or write. This explanation, although simple, may not be immediately helpful to parents and caregivers. After all, it's not a diagnosis; it's a description. The parent may say, "I know my child cannot speak; he has Cerebral Palsy" or "I know my child cannot listen with a level of understanding similar to her classmates; she has "Autism" or "I know my child cannot read; they have a language disorder that is associated with their Intellectual Disability."

For these parents, in addition to knowing their child's medical diagnosis, also understanding their child's communication diagnosis is key to understanding their child's needs. Receiving a communication diagnosis is powerful in this regard. If you watch videos of parents on the website [RADLD \(Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder\)](#), you will witness testimonies to this effect. For some parents, receiving a diagnosis of DLD validated years of observing their child's struggle with oral language, social interactions and/or academics in the absence of any explanation as to why this was happening or where they could turn for help.

'Communication Disorders' is an umbrella term for a wide range of disorders and disabilities that impact a person's ability to speak, listen, read or write. The prevalence of Communication Disorders is approximately 15% of the population and reflects a diverse group. Language-Based Learning Disability, Rett Syndrome, Hearing Loss, Down Syndrome, Childhood Apraxia of Speech and Fluency Disorder (Stuttering) are some examples of disorders and

disabilities that fall under the umbrella of a Communication Disorder.

Receiving a medical diagnosis helps parents to begin learning about their child's needs and anticipate a trajectory of growth in their child's development. However, a medical diagnosis does not guarantee that parents can or will learn about relevant speech, language and literacy services related to their child's communication needs. If parents become involved in a disability support group, like OAFCCD, membership in this group may provide support and access to information about you can help your child at home.

Joining with other families in OAFCCD can also provide a forum for advocacy. OAFCCD has been advocating for adequate publicly funded speech and language services for many years. OAFCCD is recognized by the government as voice of children with communication disorders and their families. OAFCCD family members have a range of disabilities, but all of need speech and language services.

Regardless of diagnosis, all families of children with a communication disorder are welcome under the umbrella of OAFCCD.



Parents and guardians are able to access diagnosis-specific information through a Google search. They can also join a parent advocacy group associated with their child's medical diagnosis. So, why is it important for them to **also** identify their child's disability as a communication disorder? The answer is that when we share our respective stories we expand our understanding of shared needs and visions. This knowledge, in turn, builds equity and neuro-diversity in our advocacy for improved accessibility for children with communication disorders and improved access to robust communication services both locally and provincially.

Consider sharing a copy of this newsletter with parents who may or may not be involved in a parent advocacy group representing their child's disorder or disability. Let's gather under the umbrella of "Communication Disorders" so that together we can have a voice in improving the funding and services our children need to communicate through speaking, augmentative and alternative communication, listening, reading and writing.

Be the Voice for Students with Communication Disorders

Advocacy is hard. As a parent, you are the expert on your child and you rely on the expertise of professionals to inform your advocacy efforts. But what happens when you don't know how the system works? How do you know where, when and how to direct your advocacy efforts? Here is a breakdown of what you need to know about funding, service delivery and advocacy opportunities for school-age children with communication disorders.

There are two different provincial ministries that fund speech and language support as mandated by PPM 81, Provision of Health Service in School Settings and related [Inter-Ministerial Guidelines for Speech and Language services](#).

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services funds speech therapy for stuttering, speech sound disorders and disorders of the voice. Therapy is delivered at school by speech language pathologists (SLP) and communication assistants

employed by Children's Treatment Centers. *Students with speech disorders represent approximately 5% of all students.*

The Ministry of Education provides funding to school boards for special education. Speech language pathologists may be employed through this funding, but speech language pathology services for students with language disorders are not mandated and therefore not awarded protected funding. Fortunately, many school boards choose to employ speech language pathologists to support students with language disorders. Of those school boards who hire SLPs, there are some who also employ communication assistants to provide direct language intervention. *Students with language disorders represent approximately 10% of all students.*

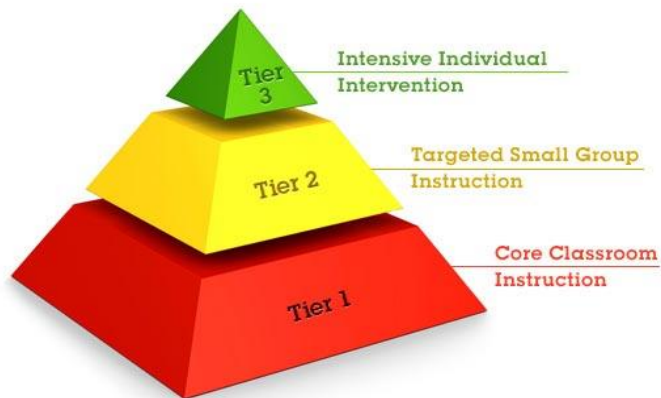
Speech and language intervention in schools is delivered as tiered support.

Tier 1: School Board SLPs support all students including children with communication disorders by providing preventive services (eg. kindergarten screening) and capacity building (eg. in-services, webinars, resources). They support educators in understanding and implementing instructional practices for speech, language and literacy that are supported by research.

Tier 2: School Board SLPs support groups of students with similar needs through targeted intervention for language, augmentative communication and/or literacy. Support may be directly delivered by SLPs and communication assistants or through the teacher. School board SLPs provide support integrated within Board Improvement Plans and aligned with the Ministry of Education document Learning for All. SLPs employed by Children's Treatment Centers may also provide speech therapy for small groups of students, referred by the school board SLP.

Tier 3: School Board SLPs provide individualized assessment and support for language, augmentative communication and literacy needs. Tier 2 and 3 supports are provided by school board SLPs for students with communication needs impacting

classroom participation, social skills, academic achievement and literacy outcomes. Children Treatment Centre (CTC) SLPs provide Individualized speech therapy through School Based Rehab Services. Another branch of the CTC provides augmentative communication services including multi-disciplinary assessment and prescription of Assistive devices for students with complex communication needs.



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The provincial ministries are reviewing PPM 81, the policy which fragmented speech and language services

Over the last three decades, OAFCCD has advocated extensively on behalf of families for the unification of speech and language services. The current fragmentation of speech and language services, as a result of PPM 81, is costly and ineffective and causes confusion for parents. Speech and language difficulties are not mutually exclusive, with each having an impact on educational access for students. The Ministry of Education, acknowledged this reality in a memo to school boards, provincial demonstration schools, Children's Treatment Centres, and Community Care and Support Services dated October 29, 2021. The Deputy Ministers of Education, Health and Children, Community and Social Services wrote "School boards and children's rehabilitation service providers have identified the delineation between speech and language services as a service delivery challenge that is not aligned with best practices". The Ministry of Education, Ministry of

Children, Community and Social Services and Ministry of Health have jointly initiated a review of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 81 (PPM 81), *Provision of Health Support Services in School Settings* during the 2021-22 school year. The OAFCCD, is an important stakeholder and will seek to provide input in the review process.

SEAC Volunteers Needed

Another way to advocate for improved speech and language services for students with communication disorders is to join SEAC.

Every school board in Ontario must have a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), that includes parent volunteers representing different associations. This is mandated by the Ontario Education Act Regulation 464/97. SEAC members include representatives of local associations who are affiliated with a provincial parent association, such as, for example, OAFCCD. School board trustees and non-voting school board staff are also on the Special Education Advisory Committee. SEAC representatives play an important role in providing advice to the trustees about special education programs, services and the annual special education budget.

The Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders is the only community of parents who advocate for speech and language services for children with communication disorders.

If you are a member of OAFCCD, contact us to find out about becoming a SEAC representative for your school board. Your voice represents the needs of children across a diverse spectrum of communication needs. Each SEAC meets ten times a year, usually monthly from September to June. SEAC members have the opportunity to learn about the special education programs and services provided by the school board and provide advice as plans are reviewed and when changes are being considered. Working on SEAC will provide you with insight into how decisions are made about special education and will help you to become an active advocate for

students with communication disorders. As a volunteer for OAFCCD, you will be provided with training and orientation on the role of SEAC. You can also visit the Provincial Parent Advisory Committee on SEAC ([PAAC on the SEAC](#)) website for three short videos about SEAC membership and roles. These information videos take a light-hearted look at SEAC and provide valuable information.

To be eligible to be a SEAC member or an alternative, you must be a Canadian citizen, over the age of 18, a resident within the school board jurisdiction and an elector for the local school board, and not an employee of the school board. If you enjoy committee work and are interested in helping students and youth with communication disorders, please contact Alison Morse at alison@oafccd.com.

What can you do to advocate for children with communication disorders?

If you are not already a member, join the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders. Membership gives you access to information about provincial funding and policy, gaps in service and opportunities for advocacy. OAFCCD participates in the Ministry consultations and partners with other provincial parent associations to advocate for improvements in special education programs and services for students. Sharing your concerns about speech and language services, will enable OAFCCD to advocate for you at the highest level of provincial advocacy. To join OAFCCD download the [Membership Application](#) and pay your \$25 membership fee.

E-Transfers for Membership Fees and Donations

OAFCCD Can now accept E-transfers sent to alison.morse@outlook.com. OAFCCD receives 100% of the funds. Tax receipts can be issued within 30 days.

October was an important month for many of our children with communication disorders:

- [International Stuttering Awareness Day](#): On October 22, 2021 the international stuttering awareness day theme was “Journey of Words- Resilience and Bouncing Back
- [Augmentative and Alternative Communication month](#) - In October 2021, the International AAC Awareness Month theme is, “Get Out, Speak Up and Break through the Screen in a Recovering World.”
- [Raising Awareness for Developmental Language Disorders](#) On October 15, 2021 the International community celebrated DLD Awareness Day using social media #Think Language, #Think DLD and Light up events around the world
- [Learning Disabilities Awareness month](#) In October 2021, the Learning Disabilities Associations of Ontario promoted awareness and the reduction of stigma with “Don’t Dis my Ability” and “Making the Invisible Visible”

GIVING TUESDAY on November 30, 2021

Giving Tuesday is a **global movement for giving and volunteering, taking place each year after Black Friday**. Known as the “Opening day of the giving season,” it’s a time when charities, companies and individuals join together and rally for favourite causes. In the same way that retailers take part in Black Friday, the giving community comes together for Giving Tuesday.

After the mad rush of Black Friday shopping, please consider a donation to your favourite charity. OAFCCD can issue tax receipts for donations that are paid with E-Transfers, or donations can be made through [CanadaHelps](#) with an instant tax receipt.

