



December 16, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Ministry of Education 5th Floor  
438 University Ave.  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Lecce,

At the December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) of the Halton District School Board (HDSB) the following motion was carried unanimously:

*“That the Chair of the HDSB Special Education Advisory Committee write a letter to the Minister of Education requesting that Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) be included in the list of categories of exceptionalities”*

ADHD is a neurobiological disorder that affects 5-12% of the population, more than 100,000 elementary and high school students in Ontario. ADHD impacts focus, impulse control, planning, and other executive functions, all skills which are required to succeed in a school setting. ADHD is recognized as a neurodevelopmental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the DSM-5), in the same category as Learning Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders. It is a life-long condition and is often genetic in nature.

ADHD has a neurobiological cause. It is thought to be related to an imbalance of neurotransmitters in the affected individual’s brain and a lag in the development of the brain’s pre-frontal cortex of up to 30% versus peers. This equates to up to approximately 3 years of lag in executive functioning skills in elementary students and up to 6 years in high school students. It can have a profound impact on a student with ADHD’s physical health, academic and occupational success, and socio-emotional and mental well-being.

Many students with ADHD experience significant difficulty at school. Focus and executive functioning skills are vital in any student’s life and are more closely linked to academic outcomes than intellect. Unfortunately, these essential skills require long-term explicit teaching, and cannot be remediated through the use of technology. To be successful, our students need access to specialized executive functioning programming and to be accommodated in the regular classroom

Without this support, ADHD “is associated with poor grades, poor reading, and math standardized test scores, and increased grade retention. ADHD is also associated with...relatively low rates of high school graduation and post-secondary education” (Loe et al, 2007). This lack of academic success for students with ADHD “may affect a child’s emotional well-being in several ways, including feelings of anxiety, lower self-esteem, poorer psychosocial health, and poorer overall quality of life” (Peasgood et al, 2016).

The Education Act identifies five categories of exceptionalities for exceptional students: behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical, and multiple. None of these categories specifically include ADHD. While the memorandum, “Categories of Exceptionalities,” issued by the Ministry of Education on December 19, 2011, provides further guidance to

school boards on supporting students with ADHD, the lack of inclusion of ADHD as an exceptionality, in its own right, has led to inconsistent support for students with ADHD in Ontario.

In passing this motion, the Special Education Advisory Committee of the HDSB is asking you to consider adding ADHD as a separate exceptionality in the same category as learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. This category could then be more appropriately renamed Neurodevelopmental exceptionalities, rather than Communication, with Deaf and Hard of Hearing being moved into Physical Disabilities.

The inclusion of ADHD as an exceptionality would:

1. Increase the ease of access by students with ADHD to the specialized programming and appropriate accommodations they need to be successful
2. Ensure more consistent service for students with ADHD within different school boards. Currently, a child with ADHD may obtain a “Behavioural” identification in one board and a “Communication” identification in another board. Transfer between boards then becomes difficult.
3. Decrease the stigma felt by students with ADHD and their parents that often comes with the Behavioural identification required to access support.

Until ADHD is included as an exceptionality, we also recommend that the Ontario College of Teachers’ programs include education and resources on supporting students with neuro-diversities, including ADHD, as part of the curriculum and pre-service training.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. The members of the HDSB SEAC believe this change would allow the educational community to better serve students with ADHD and their families in Halton, and across Ontario, and create a more supportive and inclusive environment for all.

Yours Sincerely,



Alison Brindle  
Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee, HDSB

Works Cited:

*Irene M. Loe, MD, Heidi M. Feldman, MD, PhD, Academic and Educational Outcomes of Children With ADHD, Journal of Pediatric Psychology, Volume 32, Issue 6, July 2007, Pages 643–654,*

*Peasgood, Tessa et al. “The impact of ADHD on the health and well-being of ADHD children and their siblings.” European child & adolescent psychiatry vol. 25,11 (2016): 1217-1231.*