

# Fact Sheet

## Programming Changes Affecting Blind and Partially Sighted Youth

### What is the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)?

*“The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) is an interprovincial co-operative agency established in 1975 by joint agreement among the Ministers of Education of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.”*

[\(Who We Are | APSEA\)](#)

APSEA provides services to students who are blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing, and deafblind. It is governed by a board of directors consisting of each of the Deputy Ministers of Education from the four Atlantic provinces, plus two representatives appointed by each province.

APSEA is a legislated entity under the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority Act in the province of Nova Scotia.

APSEA has a campus in the south end of Halifax consisting of a school building and six-story residence. This campus was formerly the Sir Frederick Fraser School.

### What programs have been removed?

APSEA informed families they will no longer provide in-person short-term programs at their Halifax campus. They will also no longer offer assessment services.

### What are short-term programs?

Short-term programs, sometimes referred to by families as ‘placements’ are one-to-two-week, intensive training interventions. During a short-term program, students stay at APSEA’s Halifax campus and receive ‘nine to nine’ instruction in specific blindness-related skills.

Each day includes a six-hour school day where students work with specialists such as an orientation and mobility instructor, independent living skills instructor, or assistive technology specialist. Time each day is allocated to keeping up with work from the student’s home school. Outside of school time, residence staff reinforce skills taught during the day by integrating those skills into evening activities.

Skills taught at short-term programs are tailored to the student’s needs. Specific programs are based on the expanded core curriculum, a set of nine competencies identified as essential for blind and partially sighted youth to achieve success following high school.

Examples of these skills that may be taught at a short-term program: how to cross a complex multi-lane lighted intersection; how to safely use a stove or oven; how to effectively clean without sight; how to plan a trip and use public transportation; and how to interpret social interactions without visual cues.

APSEA provided transportation, meals, and accommodations for students and families travelling to Halifax for short-term programs.

More information about the expanded core curriculum: [The Expanded Core Curriculum | Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired \(PRCVI\)](#)

## What are assessment services?

APSEA's assessment services were comprehensive assessments for blind and partially sighted or deaf and hard of hearing students. These assessments were traditionally offered at APSEA's campus in Halifax, although assessments were sometimes provided in students' home communities. APSEA provided transportation, meals, and accommodations for families travelling for assessments.

APSEA's assessment services included (where appropriate) psychoeducational assessments performed by psychologists and teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) specializing in assessing students who are blind or partially sighted. Students often received assessment in other areas such as orientation and mobility or independent living skills in addition to a psychoeducational assessment.

APSEA's psychologists further provided consultative support to families in helping their children navigate the unique emotional challenges that blind children may face – such as self-acceptance, and not being able to drive, which are challenging for some young people with sight loss.

## What replaced these programs?

In several meetings, APSEA's senior leadership informed families that their new service delivery model would consist of itinerant services; virtual programs; and regional in-person programs. Intensive short-term programs are no longer offered.

APSEA informed families that psychoeducational assessments will now be performed by psychologists working for school districts.

## What is the impact on students?

These programming changes have had a devastating impact on students who are blind or partially sighted. Blind and partially sighted students in rural communities have even less access to training in essential skill areas.

Students in need of psychoeducational assessments are sitting on long waitlists in a system that is not equipped to support the unique needs of students with sight loss. Parents have experienced several instances of private psychologists being unwilling to assess their blind or partially sighted child, citing concerns that they don't have the training to make an appropriate assessment of the child's needs.

**Refer to our website, <https://blindstudents.ca/> for detailed information on the issues, the impact, and for written testimonials from students, parents, alumni, and former APSEA staff.**