

# Media Release

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## Atlantic Canadian families of blind children call on Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority; provincial governments to reinstate vital training and assessment services

Families served by the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) are once again calling on the authority and the governments of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the vital short-term intensive training opportunities and assessment services previously offered by APSEA.

The loss of these vital services has and will have a devastating impact on current and future students who are blind and partially sighted.

Short-term programs provided intensive training for students in skills blind and partially sighted children require to be successful after high school and achieve full inclusion in their home communities.

Lacking intensive training opportunities, children with sight loss, particularly those living in rural areas, are missing essential skill development in the most crucial years of their lives.

“These cuts have had a devastating impact on Atlantic Canada’s blind and visually impaired children,” says Caelin Lloyd, recent APSEA student, and first year student at Mount Saint Vincent University. “Before COVID-19, students were offered access to intensive training in a peer supported learning environment. Now APSEA has abandoned this model for a less effective virtual learning environment. While the pandemic created new ways of learning for all of us, it will never replace hands on learning for skills such as reading braille, safely using kitchen appliances, effective cleaning strategies without sight, or learning how to navigate safely throughout streets and sidewalks.”

Ellen Venner-Hiltz has two children who receive services from APSEA, both are partially sighted. “*Both my boys in grades 10 and 12 are APSEA students. My oldest grew up attending short-term programs, learning among peers. Due to his age my youngest did not have that opportunity before the programs were cut,*” says Hiltz. “*He [my youngest] has little connection to other visually impaired peers and has not developed the same level of skill and confidence my oldest had at the same age.*”

Families have nowhere to turn when their child needs a psychoeducational assessment. Rick and Meaghan Mamy are parents of, a third-grade student with sight loss. Their son is in desperate need of a psychoeducational assessment. No private psychologists have been willing to assess him, sharing they lack the professional knowledge of the unique ways in which children with sight loss learn and develop, therefore their assessment may be inappropriate.

“APSEA used to provide vital psychoeducational assessments pre-pandemic by a team of highly qualified professionals with experience assessing children with sight loss.” Says Meaghan. “Now that APSEA no longer offers assessments, we have nowhere to turn. This leaves our son struggling in the classroom. Its not just about assessments; it’s about ensuring he can thrive academically despite his visual impairment.”

After four years, it’s time APSEA are responsive to the needs of students and facilitate a swift return of short-term programs and assessment services.

Families call on the Atlantic Canadian provincial governments; Ministers Becky Druhan (NS), Bill Hogan (NB), Natalie Jamieson (PEI), and Krista Lynn Howell (NL) to mandate that APSEA reinstate these essential programs, so our kids are not left further behind.

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## Additional Quotes

*“There have been many instances where [my daughter] Olivia has felt with her visual impairment. Short-term programs gave her an opportunity to see/hear that there are many others with similar visual impairments. It was only after she attended her short-term program that I realized that she was learning, in her peer group, crucial living skills and self advocacy skills that she could use back in her home environment.”*

-Michelle O’Brien, mother of a middle-school aged child with sight loss; Cornwall, PEI

*“I live in a rural area in New Brunswick. I need short-term programs in a big city, Like Halifax, to learn mobility skills. My community doesn’t have large intersections, traffic lights, or sidewalks to practice on. Short-term programs have been my only effective way to learn these skills. Teaching mobility skills through a screen I can’t see does not work.”*

-Alexis Hatheway, a grade 11 student who is blind; Perth Andover, NB

## About our advocacy

Families of students serviced by the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) are advocating against recent services delivery model changes that are affecting children who are blind and visually impaired. These cuts have had a devastating impact on Atlantic Canada’s blind and visually impaired children and youth. Learn more about the issues and our important work at <https://blindstudents.ca>.

## Media inquiries

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