

Strategic Alliance for Alberta Students with Learning Challenges

“Moving Our Students Forward”

Strategic Alliance for Alberta Students with Learning Challenges is a grassroots group concerned that students with learning challenges are not receiving timely, appropriate or adequate supports and resources to maximize their learning potential.

Approximately 11% of Alberta students are currently coded for special education needs (Special Education Statistics, Diverse Learners. 2014/2015. Alberta Education). These are the most vulnerable students in our education system and it is critical that these students be adequately supported. This is not only important for them to reach their full academic potential but also for them to reach their lifelong personal potential.

If their needs are not addressed, it has been shown that these vulnerable children will cost society more in the future in the form of under/unemployment, increased mental and physical health challenges. This ultimately increases their involvement with social services, health care and the criminal justice system. If given the right interventions early, these children will become successful, productive, contributing members of society.

We are advocating for increased resources for students with learning challenges, accountability and the implementation of the Standards for Special Education, Amended June 2004 (Standards), and to enhance teachers' professional development in learning challenges faced by students.

To work towards these goals, we believe the following must be done:

1. **Mandatory early screening for learning and developmental challenges.**
2. **Enhanced teacher training specifically for all learning challenges.**
3. **Class composition must be considered when determining class sizes, specifically in core subject areas. Implementation of the Learning Commission's classroom size recommendations.** Every child learns. Every child succeeds. 2003. Report and recommendations Alberta's Commission on Learning.

We believe that implementing the above strategies would have an **immediate, positive impact on all Alberta students** and their learning.

If you require additional information, please e-mail info@strategicalliance4abkids.ca or visit our website at www.strategicalliance4abkids.ca

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Sincerely,

Strategic Alliance for Alberta Students with Learning Challenges

All Students Matter

Special Education Statistics

For 2012-15: In Alberta, 14.1% to 14.2% children of total school enrolment, including ECS, were identified as have learning challenges. Over the last five years there has been a 6% increase in special education students. These challenges include but are not limited to autism, cognitive delays, gifted and talented, learning disabilities, physical/medical disabilities, selective mutism, visual and hearing disabilities, mental health and behavioural challenges. This does not include those individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or those who do not meet districts' criteria for identification.

Early Screening

“...deficits in phonological awareness, rapid automatized naming, verbal working memory, and letter knowledge have been shown to be robust precursors of dyslexia in children as young as 3.” (Puolakanaho, et. Al. 2007)

~ Nadine Gaab, Ph.D., *It's a Myth That Young Children Cannot be screened for Dyslexia.*

Teacher Training

In today's reality, every classroom teacher has become a special education teacher!

“The need for teachers who have both knowledge and the ability to teach special education students is more crucial today than ever before.... But training programs are doing little to prepare teachers.... general education teachers.... reported taking an average of 1.5 courses focusing on inclusion or special education compared to...11 courses for special education teachers.”

~ Jackie Mader, The Hechinger Report March 8, 2017. *Is Teacher Preparation Failing Students with Disabilities?*

Class Composition

“It is now clear that both class size and diversity matter. Coping in such diverse classrooms goes beyond class size and raises the hidden issue of 'class composition'.”

~ School Consulting Paul W. Bennett November 16, 2016. *Inclusion and Class Composition: What's the Real Impact on Teaching in the Classroom?*

If strengths are not recognized and challenges are not addressed appropriately there are ramifications for students, their families, teachers and for society.