



British Columbia
School Trustees
Association

July 11, 2019

The Honourable Judy Darcy
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
PO Box 9672, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9P6

The Honourable Rob Fleming
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

The Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
PO Box 9050, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

The Honourable Melanie Mark
Minister of Advanced Education, Skills & Training
PO Box 9080 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Judy Darcy, Minister Adrian Dix, Minister Rob Fleming and Minister Melanie Mark,

Subject: Mental Health Supports for Students with Intellectual Disabilities and/or Autism

At the most recent Annual General Meeting of the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA), our membership passed the following resolution requesting additional professional development for counsellors and educators:

That BCSTA advocate to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Advanced Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to provide professional development and expertise in the field of mental health for school-based counsellors and educators to help support students living with intellectual disabilities, neurological disorders and/or autism.

Providing additional professional development and learning opportunities, focused on mental health and well-being, and aimed specifically at those working directly with children and youth afflicted with the difficulties outlined in the resolution, will undoubtedly provide a stronger foundation for both learners and educators.

As indicated in the resolution's rationale, "research shows that people with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience higher rates of psychiatric disorders, such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, eating disorders, etc." Counsellors will benefit strongly from additional training and supports that will further allow them to emphasize and understand children who have difficulties communicating their thoughts and feelings. The training would allow staff to also build awareness of mental health issues and challenges, as well as promote inclusion within schools.



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Thank you for considering the request outlined above. We look forward to any future dialogue on this important issue that you might consider. Your support in bringing the various provincial government ministries together in support of this important initiative is critical to any future success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephanie Higginson", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Stephanie Higginson

President

British Columbia School Trustees Association

Enclosure: Original motion rationale (please note, final resolution was amended as presented in the letter)

8. Mental Health Supports for Students with Intellectual Disabilities and/or Autism

Category: Students

Submitted for Consideration at: AGM 2019

Submitted by: SD 44 (North Vancouver)

Motion as Adopted:

BE IT RESOLVED:

That BCSTA advocate to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Advanced Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to provide professional development and expertise in the field of mental health for school-based counsellors and educators to help support students living with intellectual disabilities, neurological disorders and/or autism.

Motion as Presented:

BE IT RESOLVED:

That BCSTA advocate to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to provide university courses, professional development and expertise in the field of mental health for school-based counsellors and educators to help support students living with intellectual disabilities and/or autism.

Rationale:

This motion is needed because locally, nationally and internationally, there is recognition of the impact of mental health challenges on our society. The province and school districts are doing great work in supporting students with mental health issues. However, research shows that people with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience higher rates of psychiatric disorders, such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, eating disorders, etc. Mental health issues often go unrecognized in this population as they are overshadowed by cognitive, sensory or physical disabilities. Mental health issues can manifest in various ways, including irritability, fight-or-flight response, aggression and self-harm. Having an understanding of how to recognize symptoms and having the tools to support students with Intellectual Disabilities and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder would be of great benefit for the school system and families. This training for school district staff would build awareness of the mental health challenges experienced by the full continuum of the population. This would be an ultimate expression of inclusion and the society we wish to develop.

Reference(s):

[Dr. Emily Simonoff, Research Snapshot – Rates and Risk Factors of Psychiatric Disorders in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)

[Elisabeth Dykens et al, "Psychiatric disorders in adolescents and young adults with Down Syndrome and other intellectual disabilities," 2015 March 1 Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders](#)

[Eric Emerson and Chris Hatton, "Mental health of children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Britain," the British Journal of Psychiatry December 2007 Volume 191 Issue 6, pp. 493-499](#)



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[Stewart L. Einfeld et al., "Comorbidity of intellectual disability and mental disorder in children and adolescents: A systematic review" Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability Volume 36, 2011, Issue 2.](#)

This is an action motion and does not change or contradict any existing Foundational or Policy Statement.