



# Media Statement - May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021

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## **Online Education Transition Leaves Autistic Students & Learners with Disabilities on the Sidelines**

*Autism Nova Scotia's Response to the Province's School Closure Announcement*

On May 19th, 2021, the province announced Nova Scotian students will not be returning to their classrooms for the rest of the school year, instead completing the year via online learning. This announcement has left many in the autism community concerned.

Since schools were closed earlier this spring, students with complex needs have been sidelined while their peers have transitioned to online learning. These students no longer have access to speech language therapy, occupational therapy, learning centre/resource time, or any additional specialized resources. This is a significant time in which great progress could be made with the right plan in place.

"We are deeply concerned for Autistic students and students with disabilities who require specific supports" states Cynthia Carroll, Executive Director of Autism Nova Scotia, "The gap in all these services have fallen on families and caregivers who are inadequately equipped to deliver the same quality of educational services. This action stands directly against the government's commitment to provide inclusive education opportunities in the province".

While Autism Nova Scotia appreciates the absolute necessity of prioritizing public health protocols as the province experiences the third wave of COVID-19, we insist a strategy must be developed to safely accommodate these students with complex needs and be supported by Public Health.

Autism Nova Scotia asks the Premier, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Public Health to collaborate on a plan to allow this small percentage of students to safely return to their school environments so they can continue to access education and specialized supports. If Ontario, among other jurisdictions have been able to do this, then Nova Scotia should be able to learn from our neighbours and implement this in Nova Scotia.

If a decision has been made that this plan is not possible, we request a detailed outline from the province to address how they will step up to accommodate these students and their families for the remainder of the school year.

"We, at Autism Nova Scotia, are committed to working collaboratively with Public Health, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and across all government departments on a solution that prioritizes the needs of students in the disability community," adds Carroll.

In Canada, it is estimated that 1 in 66 people are on the autism spectrum, including more than 20,000 Nova Scotians plus their families.

### **Media Contact**

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**About Autism Nova Scotia:** Autism Nova Scotia is a national leader in providing social, educational, and employment supports for people on the Autism Spectrum, their families, caregivers, and professionals. Our vision is a world where autism is understood, accepted, and everyone is living their lives fully. This vision informs our day-to-day operations and provides a philosophy that revolves around person-focused supports, strength-based approaches, and community-oriented learning opportunities.

Autism Nova Scotia delivers programming in Halifax and in 10 locations across Nova Scotia through our Regional Autism Centres. Our three program divisions are: Social & Community Inclusion; Employment Support; and Family and Caregiver Support.