Report on the Review of the Service Delivery Model for the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)

Prepared for:
Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)

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Table of Contents

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Marian Fushell and Bob Gardiner

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a review of APSEA's Service Delivery Model. The evaluation, conducted by Marian Fushell and Bob Gardiner, was carried out from November 2021 to April 2022.

Methodology

This review investigated APSEA services as described in the following terms of reference:

- Ascertain the extent to which APSEA programs and services meet the needs of its learners and their families in each of the four Atlantic Provinces;
- Ascertain the extent to which APSEA programs and services are accessible and equitable for all learners;
- Ascertain the extent to which APSEA programs and services recognize cultural and linguistic diversity of its learners; and
- Assess the degree to which APSEA programs and services align with the inclusive education policies and practices of the four Atlantic Provinces.

The evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative methods to inform the report and subsequent recommendations. Information was gathered from documents, jurisdictional reviews and through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with stakeholders.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were held with members of the APSEA Senior Leadership team, the executive committee of the Board and the Program Advisory Committee (PAC). These interviews focused mainly on leadership, achievement of intended outcomes, strengths of the service delivery model and opportunities for improvement, and opportunities for improved collaboration across Atlantic Canada to support student learning. The interview/focus group guides are found in Appendix A.

Surveys

A series of surveys was developed and formatted for online administration. The surveys were administered to different stakeholders to solicit their opinions and perspectives on the extent to which APSEA programs and services meet the needs of its learners and their families, and the extent to which equity, accessibility, cultural and linguistic diversity, and alignment with provincial inclusive education policies and practices are realized.

A small number of respondents field tested the surveys and the results of these field tests were used to finalize the surveys. Surveys were sent to all stakeholders in the following groups:

- Learners
- Families
- Itinerant teachers (BVI and DHH)
- School-based personnel

- Community partners
- District/regional staff
- Non-teaching APSEA staff
- APSEA provincial supervisors

Survey instruments and results are found in Appendix B.

Focus Group Discussions

The survey results were reviewed and used in the development of discussion guides for focus groups. The stakeholder groups who received the surveys were also invited to meet with the reviewers. These guided discussions focused on services for students who are blind or visually impaired (BVI), those who are Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) and those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the extent to which their needs are met and the topics included in the key informant interviews.

Document Review

Documents and websites related to the APSEA services were reviewed to inform the review. These included, but were not limited to:

- APSEA 2017-2020 Strategic Plan;

- APSEA 2021-2024 Strategic Plan;

- APSEA 2020-2021 Annual Report;

- 2004 APSEA Administrative Structure – A Review;

- 2013 Report on the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of APSEA's Service Delivery Model; and

- Provincial Inclusive Education Policies and Practices.

Jurisdictional Review

This review focused on examining the service delivery models for students who are blind or visually impaired and Deaf or hard of hearing in the four Atlantic provinces and a review of each province's inclusive education policies and practices. The examination for each province included provincial websites, policy documents, and interviews with key informants with knowledge of the program areas. Documents, policies, and practices from other jurisdictions were also reviewed and considered.

Context for the Evaluation

What is APSEA?

APSEA is an interprovincial cooperative agency established in 1975 by joint agreement among the Ministers of Education of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. It originated from the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, established in Halifax in 1856 (renamed the School for the Deaf in 1913) and the Halifax Asylum for the Blind, which opened in 1871 (renamed Halifax School for the Blind in 1884).

There were many changes with respect to operations of both schools and the decision was made in 1994 to consolidate them. Students were then educated in mainstreamed settings or in day classes throughout the province, with various supports provided by APSEA (including itinerant services), and they came to the APSEA Centre for assessments and short-term placements.

Today, APSEA provides educational services, programs, and opportunities for persons from birth to 21 years of age who are Deaf/hard of hearing (DHH), or blind or visually impaired

(BVI). APSEA also provides support to provincial-based services for students with autism through the Autism in Education Partnership (AIE). APSEA is governed by a Board of Directors with representation from each Atlantic province, including the Deputy Ministers of Education, who serve as permanent members, and two others from each province appointed by their respective provinces for two-year terms.

Overview of APSEA Services and Supports

The level of direct APSEA support varies across provinces with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia relying primarily on APSEA for DHH and BVI services and programs for students and pre-schoolers, as well as their families. Prince Edward Island has a similar structure for BVI services; however, services for students who are DHH, pre-schoolers, and their families is the primary responsibility of the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning and the Public Schools Branch (PSB), with support from APSEA. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Education, through school districts, has responsibility for DHH and BVI services provided to students and families with support from APSEA for orientation and mobility services; however, NL is closely connected to the organization and its expertise. The connection for BVI has long been established and for DHH has increased over the past four to five years.

The Autism in Education Partnership (AIE) was established in 2010 with the intent to provide support to provincial-based services and facilitate the sharing of expertise, resources, and information on evidence-based practices and interventions for supporting learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The reach and impact of Autism in Education continue to grow as increasing numbers of educators and partner professionals across all four provinces engage with the professional learning, supports and resources provided by AIE.

APSEA Itinerant Services

APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff offer direct and consultative services for pre-schoolers and students who receive services from APSEA. They support areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) through school teams and student programming, participate in program planning school-based team meetings, and provide the school team with

materials and professional learning regarding a student's hearing level and/or vision loss and the associated educational implications. Since the services are needs-based, APSEA program staff are responsive, maintain regular communications with the school team, and have flexible schedules. For students receiving direct service, APSEA itinerant teachers manage the APSEA service plans and share the plans with the school team. They also teach the Virtual Learning Series (VLS) programs, designed to address ECC outcomes, to participating students across Atlantic Canada.

Services for Students with Vision or Hearing Loss or ASD

In addition to itinerant teacher services, APSEA provides a broad range of services for students who are blind or visually impaired and students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. APSEA also provides teacher professional learning related to students with ASD. Services include: educational interpreting services, provision of digital modulation (DM) and wireless systems for classrooms, ASL specialists and Deaf mentors, mentors for students who are BVI, assistive technology, a database for student information and support for teachers, centre-based short-term programs (STP), virtual learning series (VLS), partnerships to support summer camps, assessments, orientation and mobility (O and M) services, professional learning, APSEA Connect, professional expertise, library services (including alternate format materials), braille transcriptions, equipment provision and repairs, and financial support through trust funds. Each province also provides services to these students, as well as professional learning and resource materials to teachers and others who work with the students.

Previous Reports

In 2004, APSEA commissioned a review of its administrative structure. In their report, Jones & Murray (2004) identified many issues that have persisted over subsequent reviews. These include cost effectiveness of program delivery, including: short-term programs and assessments; limited capacity-building among the provinces; a centre-based model requiring students and families to travel to Halifax; the independent nature of the work of the itinerant teachers; and the limited interaction between APSEA and the provinces.

In 2013, an evaluation of the effectiveness of APSEA's service delivery model as well as

its staffing models and the budget process was conducted. Like the 2004 review, some of the findings from the 2013 review are still relevant and are therefore important to acknowledge and referenced in this report. Below is an outline of these findings by topic.

Service Delivery

"The service delivery by itinerant teachers and their relationship with students and parents are recognized as its [APSEA's] greatest strengths."

"Under the current delivery model, provinces and districts are turning responsibility for programs to an educational partner rather than incorporating these program areas into the work of the departments and districts."

Short-Term Programs

"The short-term placements provide support to meet student needs in situations where the itinerant teachers are unable to do so. The centre-based teachers have time to prepare and be ready. Having this time is the most important element of the placements. The expertise at the centre may not be higher but the time is there."

The 2013 report also referenced travel as a concern for participation in short-term programs… "many students who require short-term placements are those who also need to maximize their instructional time. Students who are most vulnerable are losing instructional time to participate in the placement and for the time to travel."

"Parents have also indicated their desire for more opportunity for BVI and DHH children and their parents to come together to meet, talk, and learn. While the centre is set up to accommodate these events, other locations might also be feasible."

Communications

"Few connections between APSEA and the departments of education."

"Planning for short-term placements and assessments requires more collaboration between centre-based staff and the field staff."

"Meetings between program directors at the centre and provincial supervisors need to be more strategic and inclusive."

"Parents also identified communication as an issue… "many indicated that they were

unaware of many of the services offered through the centre.""

Use of Technology

At the time of the 2013 report, the average annual distance travelled by an itinerant teacher was 1600 km, with some travelling up to 3000 km. Itinerant teachers reported that time was always a pressure and the time required for travel, team meetings, and paperwork limited the time to work intensely with students. To address this issue, it was recommended that a protocol for the use of technology for APSEA be established, and include procedures for providing direct services to students, consultations with school-based and centre-based staff, consultations for pre-school children, and professional learning. Time saved on travel could be translated into time at a school, providing the intensive training and instruction that would typically be completed through a short-term placement.

APSEA's response to these issues and associated recommendations included:

- Challenges were experienced with supervision, transportation and location options for regional learning opportunities;
- A more regional approach has resulted with the introduction of the Virtual learning Series (VLS);
- Regional in person learning opportunities for students in small groups or in one-on-one settings are being explored with O and M for the 2022/23 school year; and
- A protocol for remote teaching was developed in 2020 to facilitate instruction for students in their school and/or home as well as to enhance the possibilities for professional learning.

Timing of this Review

This review was commissioned in 2021, in response to a goal in the APSEA 2021-24 strategic plan. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the closure of the APSEA residence in the spring of 2020 and provided the impetus to develop and implement a wider range of virtual programs and services. These had been in place long enough for the review to evaluate, at least to some extent, the effectiveness of virtual approaches compared to traditional methods of program delivery and support. This is significant, as there is an opportunity to continue virtual

offerings into the future, after the pandemic is no longer an issue, should they be judged to be effective. An unfortunate consequence of the timing of this review, however, was that some informants expressed a concern that what had been provided as an emergency response would continue as a cost-saving measure, and that expertise available at the APSEA Centre would be lost.

The reviewers considered the timing of this review to be fortuitous, in that all modes of APSEA programs and service delivery, both traditional and new, could be included, and recommendations could reflect consideration of what best meets the needs of learners receiving services from APSEA in all four provinces going forward.

The APSEA model

APSEA is well established in Atlantic Canada, providing leadership and expertise for students who are BVI and/or DHH and those with ASD, and support to school districts/regions and departments responsible for education. The services to students and schools are available throughout the provinces and standards of practice are maintained. Teachers benefit from teacher professional learning that is available for BVI, DHH and ASD and there is a good relationship with the centre and among the provinces. Families view the services they receive as positive and report that they have a positive impact on their child's learning.

The APSEA program staff (e.g., itinerant teachers, interpreters, O and M specialists) and their relationship with the students and families is the face of APSEA. Their service delivery is consistent across regions and includes: connections and relationships with families, long-term support from pre-school to the end of high school and beyond, monitoring student progress, support for classroom and resource/instructional support teachers, and professional learning for teachers and other school-based professionals.

Directors, supervisors, librarians, and other programming staff are available for consultations on issues related to programming, technology, and training. These employees are up-to-date on assistive technology and programming for students who are BVI and DHH. The technicians work with APSEA itinerant teachers to address technical issues with specialized equipment and the teachers help families understand how the equipment works. The pre-school consultant for BVI provides expert support to students and APSEA itinerant teachers and

other program support staff. The provincial supervisors have expertise in hearing levels and vision loss and APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff report directly to them.

Inclusive Education Policies and Practices in the Provinces

Throughout the past decade, Nova Scotia (2020), Newfoundland and Labrador (2014), and New Brunswick (2013) introduced inclusive education policies and implemented learning models that provide a multi-tiered approach to academic, behavioural, and social-emotional health supports. Prince Edward Island is currently developing new inclusive education policies having recently rescinded its previous policy. Policy documents in NS, NL and NB reveal many common elements including goals, objectives and guiding principles.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the starting point for any student is the regular classroom and instruction is offered in the least restrictive, most inclusive environment respecting the dignity of the student. NL's policy states that the following beliefs are central to inclusive education and are necessary for implementation:

- All students can learn;
- Students are the responsibility of all teachers;
- The regular classroom is the expected setting for every student;
- A student is removed from this setting only to the extent required to meet his or her needs; and
- Programming is to be offered in the most inclusive, least restrictive environment, respecting the dignity of the student.

Nova Scotia's policy states that inclusive schools are equitable, and culturally, linguistically, and socially responsive and have structures, processes, and practices that are student-centred, appropriate and collaborative. The following guiding principles describe what all partners in education should achieve.

- Every student can learn with enough time, practice and equitable and responsive teaching.

- Every student, including those with special needs, should receive full-day instruction every day, with flexibility based on the student's individual strengths and challenges.

- Every student should be taught within a common learning environment (e.g., a classroom) with students of similar age within the community school, with flexibility that is based on, and responsive to, the student's individual strengths and challenges.

- Inclusive education values, draws upon, and includes student voices and choices to assist students in achieving their goals.

- Every student deserves to belong (affirmed, validated, and nurtured), be safe and feel welcomed in all aspects of their daily experience.

- Inclusive education is a commitment to honour and respect each student's cultural and linguistic identities and knowledge systems.

- Inclusive education practices use evidence of students' strengths and challenges to determine a system of supports and monitor the effectiveness of those supports.

- All partners are committed and empowered to work collectively to identify and eliminate barriers that interfere with students' well-being and achievement.

The goals and principles of New Brunswick's Policy 322 state that inclusive education:

- recognizes that every student can learn;

- is universal – the provincial curriculum is provided equitably to all students and this is done in an inclusive, common learning environment shared among age-appropriate peers in their neighbourhood school;

- is individualized – the educational program achieves success by focusing on the student's strengths and needs, and is based on the individual's best interest;

- is requiring school personnel to be flexible and responsive to change;

- is respectful of student and staff diversity in regards to their race, colour, religion, national origin, ancestry, place of origin, age, disability, marital status, real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity, sex, social condition or political belief or activity; and

- is delivered in an accessible physical environment where all students and school personnel feel welcome, safe and valued.

All provinces engage in partnerships with other government departments to support students' strengths and to help address their challenges. These partnerships also exist at the school level as instructional resource and classroom/subject teachers work together to support students' diverse learning needs, and within the school community as families work with teachers and other school staff to establish the best way to support students.

The three provinces also advocate an approach that is student-centred, needs-based, and collaborative with different teams in place to deliver programs and services. Each has a multi-tiered continuum of programs, services, and settings to provide all students with appropriate assessment, instruction, interventions and learning spaces. The different policies reflect student and staff diversity that includes but is not limited to race, colour, religion, disability, and gender identity. Policies also include statements on safe and caring schools.

While there is commonality across the three provinces regarding their goals, objectives and guiding principles, the provinces have slightly different approaches to implementation and use different language to describe their policies and practices. Nova Scotia, for example, specifies success for students who are historically marginalized and racialized (e.g., African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaw). Newfoundland and Labrador clarifies the partnerships among instructional resource and classroom/subject teachers by explaining three processes inherent in these partnerships: collaboration, co-teaching, and pull-out instruction.

Tiered Learning Model

Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador implement their inclusive education policies through a three-tiered system. In Nova Scotia, this is referred to as a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), and in Newfoundland and Labrador it is known as responsive teaching and learning (RTL). In both provinces, the model provides academic, behavioural, and social-emotional supports at three levels:

1. classroom: universal core curriculum and core instruction for all students;

2. small group: supplementary/individual/small group interventions for some students; and

3. individual: intensive interventions for a small percentage of students

In both NL and NS, all students at Tier 1 are instructed in the core curriculum; teachers monitor student progress; and academic, behavioural, and social-emotional mental health issues are identified as they appear. Teachers work collaboratively with support teachers to differentiate instruction in response to diverse student strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles.

Both provinces apply the same principles to Tier 2. Students who are at risk of not meeting grade-level expectations receive targeted, evidence-based interventions for specific academic, behavioural, and social emotional mental health challenges. The scheduling of both Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction and intervention is coordinated between classroom and specialist (NS)/instructional resource (NL) teachers. Interventions are provided to students in settings within and outside the classroom.

In both Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, at Tier 3, intensive, individualized intervention is provided to address severe and persistent needs. Where possible, these students continue to access Tier 1 core curriculum and instruction. These daily interventions are provided to small groups of one to five students over extended periods of time. At this level, professionals from other government departments may be involved. These interventions, if required, may occur in a learning setting outside the classroom. A learning setting outside the classroom is used only when it has been demonstrated that the learning cannot occur in the regular classroom.

The final component of the model is a team (Teaching Support Team (NS), Teaching and Learning Team (NL)) that is established to support students and teachers. The focus of the teams is to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate on developing strategies to meet the needs of their students.

In New Brunswick, foundations for a similar multi-tiered approach, Response to Intervention (RTI), are established. A common learning environment for all students is used for universal instruction. The common learning environment applies student-centred learning

principles such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and considers accommodations and their implementation. A variation of the common learning environment may be necessary to address the needs of a student. Similar to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, the decision to deliver an intervention outside the common learning environment is based on evidence that the alternative learning environment is essential to meet the needs of the student and all reasonable efforts to provide support and accommodation have been exhausted. New Brunswick will soon be releasing a revised policy.

EVALUATION FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Survey Results by Respondent Group

APSEA Personnel

A survey was sent to all APSEA personnel (N = 166) with an overall response rate of 47.6 per cent (79 respondents). The largest number of respondents were itinerant teachers for BVI (22/27, 81.5%) and itinerant teachers for DHH (25/36, 69.4%). Other respondents included: supervisors/managers (10); educational interpreting staff (7); programming support staff (6); and other positions, (joint supervisor team, finance and administration, alternate format materials/library,14 total).

Communication, cultural and linguistic identities, pre-school, accessibility, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, staff effectiveness, equity and accessibility, responsiveness

More than two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that APSEA engaged in ongoing communication and collaboration to support students, showed respect for diverse cultural and linguistic identities, provided support for pre-school children, saw accessibility as a priority, and provided professional learning opportunities on culturally and linguistic responsiveness. Between half and two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that APSEA provided the tools to enable staff to be effective; that APSEA services are equitable and accessible; and that APSEA provides an environment that is flexible and responsive to change for personnel.

Itinerants' views on efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, equity, accessibility

Fifty-two per cent of itinerant teachers for DHH reported being provided the tools to be efficient and effective in their roles as compared to 66.7 per cent of itinerant teachers for BVI. When asked about APSEA creating an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change, 56 per cent of itinerant teachers for DHH agreed or strongly agreed; however, only 40 per cent of itinerant teachers for BVI agreed or strongly agreed. In reporting on APSEA's services being provided in an equitable and accessible manner, 76 per cent of itinerant teachers for DHH agreed or strongly agreed that this is the case; however, only 40.9 per cent of itinerant teachers for BVI were positive with respect to this question.

Communication and collaboration, support for diverse cultural and linguistic identities

Overall, 75.3 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communications and collaboration to support educational outcomes; however, for some personnel groups, fewer than 20 per cent agreed with this statement. When asked about the current service delivery model supporting learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities, overall, 66.7 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case; however, supervisors and managers (N = 10) were split 50/50 on this. Note that these results reflect the current demographic of APSEA staff and families, and that there may be communities that require service but for whom APSEA is not accessible.

Effectiveness of specific services

According to the survey results, the majority of APSEA personnel are of the view that the programs and services that best support children/students and their families are short-term programs (STP), assessments, and itinerant services. Others identified assistive technology, ASL/deaf mentor supports and virtual learning. Services that are viewed as less effective are virtual learning, off-site assessments, ASL supports, and transition planning. It is important to note that some services were referenced as both strengths and challenges. Further investigation is required to determine why these services are seen by some to be strengths and challenges by others.

Suggested changes

APSEA personnel were also asked about three changes that could be made to APSEA's service delivery model that could enhance the learning of children/students. Common themes that emerged are short-term programs, assessments, ASL/deaf mentors, and more integration with schools (e.g., lack of awareness of APSEA services, APSEA itinerant teachers disconnected from school teams).

Barriers to effective service

The survey for APSEA personnel asked about barriers present for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services and strategies to address these barriers. The most frequently referenced barriers are "red tape", required travel for itinerant services, short-term program challenges (e.g., travel, cost, loss of regular class time), availability of appropriate assessments, staffing (e.g., lack of staff, recruiting challenges), available technology (in school and for virtual learning), availability of information for families, and communication with staff. Suggested strategies to address these barriers include: having assessment staff travel more frequently and the use of a blended model, including asynchronous material.

Collaboration across services

Increased collaboration across APSEA services to enhance service delivery was also an area of interest. In the survey, APSEA personnel referenced the need for professional learning and team building and noted that most collaboration between APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff was incidental and ad hoc. There is consensus that while DHH, BVI and AIE are unique, and need to be focused on their targeted area, the opportunity to collaborate is important to ensure comprehensive service delivery. The lack of knowledge of the AIE partnership and its role among APSEA program staff responsible for DHH and BVI was identified. Survey results show an appreciation and support for the work being done through AIE; however, many respondents said that they did not have a good understanding of AIE and how it has an impact on the DHH and BVI programs.

In-class support, pull-out support, virtual learning, home visits

APSEA personnel were also asked about successes and challenges with respect to: in-class support, one-to-one pull-out support, online/virtual learning and in-person home visits. Responses to these successes and challenges are summarized below.

In-class support

Successes:
- Allows for inclusion; total integration
- Real life environment for student in the classroom
- Opportunity for classroom teacher to observe work of itinerant teachers
- Opportunity for itinerant teacher to see how the student functions in the classroom
- Opportunity for itinerant teachers to model for teachers and EAs
- Collaboration with classroom teacher/supporting teacher in strategies
- Building relationships

Challenges:
- Scheduling
- Difficulty in teaching some aspects of ECC
- Not conducive to intensive teaching or working on targeted goals
- Classroom teachers not always comfortable with others in their classroom
- Noisy environment

Pull-out support

Successes:
- Allows students to learn and master skills
- Useful for introducing new concepts and skills
- Opportunity to build a rapport with students
- Greater opportunity to interact with student

Challenges:
- Loss of classroom time
- Finding an appropriate space
- Leads to student isolation
- Less interaction with classroom teacher/staff
- School teams not involved
- Scheduling

Virtual learning

Successes:
- Opportunity for students to connect and communicate with other students
- Students comfortable with speaking up
- Ability to reach more students
- Access to students at home

Challenges:
- Short attention span of students
- Technology/internet issues
- Scheduling
- Challenges with visual learning

Home visits

Successes:
- Ability to model for families
- Relationship building
- Comfortable environment for student
- Student's natural environment

Challenges:
- Home environment not alwaysconducive to visits/ safety
- Working parents/scheduling
- Travel

Role of school teams, other emerging themes

The final question for APSEA personnel dealt with participation and their role in school team meetings to develop and monitor programs for children/students supported by APSEA. Responses generally indicated that attendance at school team meetings was school dependent and related to the relationship with school personnel. While it is recognized that services provided by APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff are important, it was noted that participation in team meetings for APSEA staff is often overlooked.

Respondents also provided commentary on other themes including: a need for enhanced parent programming; an organized way for staff to connect, including for professional learning opportunities; the importance of the relationship and collaboration with school teams and how to build capacity within schools; increased capacity to meet the needs of francophone students; a need to bring students back to the centre for in-person programming; the importance of psycho-educational assessments relevant to the student clientele; and the importance of communication, especially from a change management perspective.

School Based Personnel

School based personnel were identified through the APSEA database (N=165). There were 65 responses (39.4% response rate) with all but two responses coming from NS (39) and NB (24). Sixty-three per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good understanding of the services available from APSEA. The responses to all other questions resulted in greater than 70 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements, which included topics dealing with: availability of APSEA personnel to attend meetings; APSEA goals for students being integrated within school plans; learning experiences valuing and respecting diverse cultural and linguistic identities; the accessibility and equitable nature of APSEA services and the alignment of APSEA's programs and services with provincial inclusive education policies and practices.

APSEA support for learning plans, current and suggested

When asked how APSEA supports the educational learning plan for students, respondents indicated that the greatest supports were: itinerant teachers/APSEA program staff (e.g., one-on-one intervention/assessment, collaboration with and support of APSEA program staff) and the provision of resources (e.g., assistive technology, other materials). With respect to what could be done to enhance APSEA's educational planning and support for students, the most referenced suggestions included: more collaboration and communication with classroom teachers (e.g., coaching/modeling) and better communication regarding APSEA services. The provision of services in French was referenced in a number of cases; however, the limited reference may be due to the smaller number of respondents impacted.

Alignment with inclusive education policy and practice

School based personnel were also asked about the alignment of APSEA's service delivery model with inclusive education policies and initiatives in the provinces (i.e., how well they align as well as how they could better align). There was no clear consensus as to how APSEA's service delivery model aligns with provincial policies; however, the supports provided by APSEA (e.g., assistive technology, suggested adaptations and enhancements) are seen as being positive and allow for better inclusivity for the student in the classroom. In some cases, the responses indicated that APSEA and provincial service delivery models are not aligned. Suggestions as to how the service delivery model could better align include increased communication and more in-class support.

Autism in Education, barriers to access APSEA services

In response to a question concerning how autism in education (AIE) could support educational personnel, 50 per cent of respondents indicated that the question was not applicable to them, they were unaware of the program, or it was not a service they used. Those aware of AIE spoke positively of its benefits and would like to see services expanded to provide direct supports to students. In response to barriers for students and families receiving services

from APSEA, the most noted were a lack of awareness, scheduling and the contact time for students.

Educational Partnerships

Relationship and alignment with APSEA

The educational partnership survey was sent to 109 individuals with 91.3 per cent of respondents indicating they work for the school district (NB, NL), Regional Centres for Education (NS) or the Public Schools Branch (PEI). In total, there were 23 responses (21.1 % response rate) with 36.8 per cent of responses coming from NB and the remaining responses split equally between NL, NS and PEI. The reported areas of collaboration with APSEA services were 61 per cent DHH, 65 per cent BVI, and 48 per cent AIE. More than 82 per cent of respondents indicated that they agree or strongly agree that: they have a good understanding of APSEA services (83 %); services value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities (86 %); services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner (83 %) and programs and services align with inclusive education policies and practices of the province (91 %).

Collaboration, suggested improvements to APSEA services

In response to how the educational partners collaborate with APSEA, the most referenced themes were meetings and professional learning. Other areas included the technology department, short-term programs, and consults/assessments. In terms of improving APSEA services, respondents indicated the importance of professional learning for school staff as well as in-person services for students (e.g., short-term programs, assessments).

Alignment with inclusion policy, barriers to accessing services

Questions were also asked about how APSEA's service delivery model aligned with provincial inclusive education policies and initiatives as well as how they could better align. There were limited responses to these questions; however, there was reference to the work of APSEA making the classroom more accessible. There was also reference to APSEA services being more aligned with Tier 3 services and the need to examine APSEA services to align closer to Tiers 1 and 2.

Respondents noted that travel was the greatest barrier for children/students and their families who receive services from APSEA. Virtual learning was also cited as a challenge from both a technology perspective as well as the limitations in comparison to in-person contact. Suggestions for strategies to improve services included a resumption of short-term programs as well as more regional in-person programming.

Community Based Partners

Understanding of and support from APSEA, barriers to access

There were 17 contact groups identified as community-based partners (e.g., health authorities, CNIB, associations for the Deaf). There were 25 responses, 24 of which came from NS partners. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents indicated they have a good understanding (agree/strongly agree) of the role of APSEA, and 62 per cent indicated they have a good understanding of the services provided by APSEA. Only 42 per cent of respondents indicated that the current APSEA service delivery model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities; however, 50 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.

When asked about barriers for APSEA services, respondents cited the challenges in delivering services to remote/rural communities and access to technology/internet services. As to how APSEA could improve its services, there was no predominant theme.

Families and Learners

Surveys were sent to families and learners (N = 1400+); however, surveys had low response rates; 2.2 per cent and 1.8 per cent respectively. With so few responses, it is not appropriate to make any generalizations and as such results are not reflected in this report.

Findings from Focus Group Discussions, by Topic

The APSEA Model: Strengths

All participants in this review recognized the specialized expertise of APSEA personnel and its support role in the education of children who are BVI, DHH and those with autism, and saw value in there being one central body with expertise serving the four Atlantic provinces. The strengths of the APSEA service delivery model include: trained staff and their connection to

provincial teams; early intervention after diagnosis; bringing children and families together, both in-person and virtually; having staff with lived experience; facilitation of connections with outside organizations; specialized programs at the centre, in the regions and offered virtually; professional learning; support for students (e.g., interpretation, assistive technology) and their families; opportunities to build capacity at district/region and school levels; opportunities to foster relationships among students; expertise and support for itinerants and other program staff; assessments; programs to support the transition from high school to the workplace and postsecondary education, especially for students in rural areas; support provided at the school level for students who are BVI and DHH; outreach to children and families; the quality of autism webinars and resources; funding for scholarships and technology for home, work, and postsecondary study; the library; and responsiveness to requests for technology, technology repairs, library resources and other student needs.

Communication and collaboration were also identified as strengths, facilitated by the governance model with executive members representing the four Atlantic provinces, as well as the Program Advisory Committee. It was noted that one stakeholder missing at any decision-making table is the student. Further to that, it was suggested that consideration be given to having a high school student become part of APSEA decision making. The provinces and APSEA share a commitment to supporting students who are DHH/BVI or who have ASD. Opportunities for consultation with APSEA staff and personnel from other provinces were noted as valuable.

The establishment of mentors for DHH and BVI allows lived experiences to be shared and for these voices to be at the table when planning for students. Similarly, ASL specialists are leading the language programming recommendations for Deaf students, rather than having programming be determined by hearing teachers. The model of APSEA works well in that there are staff with specialities in education, ASL, assistive technology and staff with lived experiences, all within the same organization; allowing APSEA to collaborate well internally and provide a cohesive level of professionalism. It also permits effective use of staff talent and moving people into the positions for which they are best suited. This organizational model also works, in that each part knows why each other part is important, and all personnel have access to colleagues of whom they can ask questions and gain professional learning, as opposed to a

more decentralized model in which each component is acting independently and there is no coordinated professional learning or vision.

Top on the list of valued APSEA services, for both students who are BVI and DHH, is the support provided by the APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff. They were described as having been "a life saver" and "amazing", and one parent would like to see itinerants be more empowered in their work with students. Orientation and mobility training for students who are BVI at the APSEA Centre, and training to develop independence skills were also highlighted as valuable services. As one person working at a district said, "Everything they do they do well."

The APSEA model: Challenges/Opportunities

While the strengths of the APSEA model are widely recognized, review participants raised a number of significant issues. The capacity at the district/region and school level to provide services for students who are BVI and DHH as part of their program planning process and to provide direct services when the APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff are not in the school is limited. In many cases, provinces and districts/regions turn to APSEA to take responsibility for programming, rather than incorporating these program areas into the work of the departments and districts/regions. Because APSEA provides the service and has expertise in these areas, there is limited motivation for teachers, school/guidance counsellors, or school/educational psychologists to become trained in BVI/DHH, or for schools to take on more responsibility. Having two separate program plans, the school-based plan and the APSEA plan, compound the problem.

In addition, the APSEA model of providing service to students in four provinces, each one with different student support policies, protocols and approaches, poses limitations. Participants noted that APSEA staff are not always familiar with these differences. There are also challenges in establishing and maintaining connections between APSEA personnel and personnel in departments of education and early childhood development/lifelong learning, districts/regions, and schools. The greatest challenges are the perception of APSEA as a Halifax-based centre and the divide at the school and district/region levels between "APSEA students"

and other students with similar needs. The pandemic has helped to shift this perception of APSEA to being a service that can be integrated with homes, schools, systems, and communities.

Equity and Accessibility

Generally, participants reported that they view APSEA services as equitable and accessible; however, challenges exist as noted below.

- For students in rural schools' distance is a barrier to accessing services at the APSEA Centre in Halifax.

- Students who live in rural areas travelling to Halifax for short-term programs must miss time from school and for assessments, parents may need to take leave from their workplace.

- Students from low-income families also face difficulties. They can receive financial assistance for travel and accommodation to travel to Halifax; however, for families who do not work outside the home, there may be other children or family members requiring care and for parents who work outside the home, options regarding leave from work may be limited.

- Providing services to pre-school children can be difficult if the parents are working outside the home. It is often not possible to get into homes during the workday and it is difficult to provide service in a child care setting. Support is not effective without the participation of the parent.

- APSEA services are not offered outside school hours.

- There are limited offerings for francophone students and French sign language.

- Access to the provincial curricula for Deaf learners who have not acquired a first language is limited.

- There is an interpreter shortage, a key to equity for students who are DHH.

Some components of the expanded core curriculum are delivered to students by their itinerant teachers, the orientation and mobility specialist, and the assistive technology specialists. Other components are delivered through short-term programs and the virtual learning series (VLS). VLS was introduced in 2020 in response to the limitations imposed by the

COVID-19 pandemic. As can be seen from the data presented below, the reach of VLS is much greater than the previously offered short-term programs; however, the benefits of VLS need to be assessed with respect to the benefits of in-person contact.

Student Enrolments

Short-Term Programs (STP)/Virtual Learning Series (VLS)

		DHH		BVI	
		STP	VLS	STP	VLS
		2016-2020 4-year average[*]	2020-21	2016-2020 4-year average	2020-21
NB	Pre/K-6	7	29	4	6
	7-9	8	22	4	16
	10-12	7	10	4	7
	Total	22	61	11	29
NS	Pre/K-6	16	42	13	28
	7-9	12	12	11	27
	10-12	11	12	11	26
	Total	39	66	34	81
NL/PEI	Pre/K-6	1.5	13	1.5	24
	7-9	1	4	2.8	11
	10-12	0	4	2.25	20
	Total	2.5	21	7.25	55

[*] 2 year average for NL/PEI

The access for students in NB, NL and PEI supports the concept that travel and time away from school is more of a barrier for students in those provinces than those in NS. The ability of more students to access APSEA services addresses, to some extent, accessibility and equity but does not determine how well VLS is meeting the needs of learners. As noted earlier, more research is required to determine the right balance between in-person and virtual

programs. While the importance of short-term programs has been recognized, the benefits of VLS, and what it can accomplish from an academic and use of technology perspective, cannot be dismissed.

Other suggestions to improve accessibility and equity to students include making the referral process less cumbersome, establishing an accessibility advisory committee, doing more work virtually, providing more regional in-person programs, and providing flexible support for families that is not restricted to school hours.

Short-Term Programs

Opportunities for shared experiences for BVI and DHH children/youth by having them come together with other students in the region are seen as valuable. In addition to their academics, short-term in-person programs offer many benefits for students, including: teaching life skills such as preparing meals, teaching specific skills related to the students' challenges, promoting personal growth, providing role modelling and mentoring, fostering independence, supporting socialization, building confidence, and developing relationships with others who have similar life experiences. Occupational therapy services also favour in-person instruction. Many participants referred to the incidental learning that occurs when the students come together.

Participants in the review stated that the most valued short-term program for blind and visually impaired students is orientation and mobility training, as it is critical to their ability to function in postsecondary settings and in life generally. Students in rural areas and small communities, for example, do not have suitable opportunities to learn how to travel, cross busy streets, or use public transportation. It was also noted that it is difficult to teach braille using virtual methods and that in-person instruction is most appropriate.

Research also supports the provision of opportunities for students who are DHH to meet both in person and virtually. The Calgary Board of Education conducted a Deaf & Hard of Hearing Program Review in 2015 and the report states: *"Provide opportunities for students to meet other D/HH peers. Examples: encourage use of technology to communicate with D/HH peers (email, text, FaceTime); work with organizations that promote peer interaction by disseminating information on their behalf (bowling, picnics, movie nights); create short-term*

programs for students which also supports meeting D/HH peers."

Similarly, the 2010-11 review conducted by St. Clair Catholic District School Board in Ontario recommended, *"To provide focused congregated opportunities for students with the Deaf/Hard of Hearing exceptionality to interact with Deaf/Hard of Hearing peers quarterly."*

Proponents of short-term programs contend that the intensity of the programs with instruction during the day, which is then reinforced during the evening over a four-to-five-day period, leads to greater student success than other approaches. Further to that, participants stated that the benefits for students with severe needs cannot easily be replicated at the local level. Short-term programs for students with significant hearing loss and who are ASL signers promote the development and use of ASL. However, a review of the schedule of classes and activities for some of the short-term programs indicates that the duration of learning is actually similar to what is provided through the APSEA program staff.

One suggestion for improving short-term programs is establishing longer programs to be delivered over the summer. Another is a post-graduation program with intense O and M training, which could be done in partnership with a university and help students stay on track with postsecondary studies.

Other participants spoke of the benefits of in-person school-level programs and support. When the itinerant teacher is providing support for students at the school level, the student and other teachers benefit. It builds understanding and opportunity to share resources. Having an APSEA presence in the school brings together the program planning process. Services at the school can create a culture of active engagement for students who are BVI and DHH in the school community. For example, programs in school where students who are DHH can meet or where other students can learn ASL or providing teacher professional learning on how to work with an interpreter align with inclusive education policies and nurture a supportive community for students who are DHH. Some itinerant teachers felt that for students with mild hearing levels the disadvantage of losing a week of school outweighs the benefits of centre-based programs; they do better with school-based or online programs.

Regional in-person programs have also been proposed as an option that would provide the benefits of participation in programs at the APSEA centre without requiring as much travel

time. It was also suggested that APSEA work with other organizations in the community (e.g., CNIB) as they have a lot of resources, programs and services that would benefit students. The cooperation would create a better and more comprehensive service.

Virtual Learning

Online and virtual program offerings have made programs more accessible to students in all areas of the four provinces, effectively reaching students in remote areas, and enabling APSEA to offer more programs and services. Virtual learning provides programming outside of school hours and daily access to programs. Students can remain in their schools while also making connections with other students who have vision or hearing loss. Virtual program offerings are seen to level the playing field: through time and cost savings they reduce the impact of poverty that some families experience; students do not have to miss class time in their own school; online/virtual programming can reach students no matter where they live; and offer specialized instruction for all students, regardless of type of need. Further, they can be delivered over the course of a full school year, maintaining connections among students, and between students and instructors. Virtual/online approaches can also increase access to specialists and interpreters and allow families to develop connections with other families. APSEA Connect and the Virtual Learning Series are addressing the need for linguistic and cultural diversity through programs that bring together learners and families from across all four Atlantic provinces to collaborate with each other, get to know various specialists, learn from staff who have specific skill sets, and meet the Deaf community.

Virtual platforms also have advantages for APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff. It has facilitated meetings with school planning teams, collaboration and professional learning among colleagues, and coaching school teams to build capacity at the school level. Virtual/online learning provides opportunities for APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff and school staff to visit the online classroom. It also gives APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff scheduling flexibility as they can meet with high school students outside regular school hours (e.g., bad weather days or lunch time) so they do not miss regular class time. It can also reduce travel time. In 2019 there were 93 itinerant teachers/supervisory staff who travelled more than 500 km, with an average of 9,961 km

traveled for the year. There were 20 individuals that traveled more than 15,000 km in the year, with the highest mileage being 28,931 km. For comparison, the data for 2021 are: 84 individuals with an excess of 500 km for the year with the annual average being 7,218 km and the highest mileage being 26,908 km, and there were 10 individuals who travelled more than 15,000 km for the year.

While virtual/online programs/platforms have extended the opportunity for students' learning and supports, and for teacher professional learning, there are elements of in-person programs (e.g., the incidental learning that occurs, fostering of independence, social benefits) that cannot be replicated with virtual programs. Learning through virtual/online programs can also present challenges. Students need in-person instruction regularly to make connections within the different curriculum areas and they need people at the school to provide the day-to-day support. Further, the intensity and duration of virtual/online programing is less than in-person programs: virtual/online programs vary from one hour a week for six weeks to year-long programs, compared with up to 55 hours of continuous interaction (based on the current nine-to-nine model) with short-term programs. For virtual/online programs to be successful, preparation at the school is required, a quiet space for the student to work must be identified, equipment must be set up and a support person must be available to monitor the virtual experience and/or supervise the student. There are also limitations for students doing virtual programs at home: they must have a reliable internet connection, which is not available in all rural areas of the Atlantic region; and students require access to an internet connection at home, which is not always possible for families living in poverty. Program issues raised by participants included the quality of some of the programs, poor student engagement and the attrition rate.

All participants stated that a hybrid approach is the most effective way to meet the learning needs of the students. They recognized the potential for maintaining and improving virtual/online services and programs and at the same time delivering in-person programs. Many noted that once students have benefited from in-person programs, virtual/online programs are effective for maintaining learning and continuing connections with other students. Extending virtual/online offerings to asynchronous delivery was suggested as a means for students and

APSEA staff to have access to recorded sessions on their own time. It was also mentioned that reviewing NL's Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) and other effective delivery models can provide insights for improving virtual/online services and programs. It was suggested that developing virtual/online programs or services for adults could fulfill a need, expressed by parents, to connect with each other. A similar service could be established for APSEA itinerant teachers to connect with other teachers.

Assessments

Canadian National Standards for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired states students who are blind or visually impaired requiring psycho-educational assessment should be assessed using tests designed specifically for this population of learners or that are adequately adapted, and that the teacher of the student who is BVI acts as a resource to the school psychologist when determining the validity of assessment tools or individual test items.

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) (2011) also has guidelines for the administration and interpretation of psycho-educational assessment for blind and/or visually impaired students. One of the issues addressed is the specialized training required. The guideline states: "*Those administering tests need specialized training in theory of assessment and test construction, as well as child development and communication methods of individuals who are blind and visually impaired.*" APH noted that evaluators must have training in constructs of intelligence, child development, test development, administration with both general and special populations, and interpretation. Since most school psychologists are not trained or experienced in evaluating individuals who are blind and visually impaired, they must incorporate the expertise and experience of visual impairment professionals and collaborate with them during all parts of the evaluation process.

Best practices, based on Canadian standards and American guidelines, recommend a team approach with a school psychologist, a visual impairment professional, and a speech pathologist working together to evaluate the individual. All members of the team bring their areas of expertise, and evaluators must provide adaptations based on the input of the expertise of others while maintaining the integrity of the assessment. The presentation procedures and

instruments used must be accessible to the individual who is blind or visually impaired. During report writing all collaborators must work to provide information that is supported by the data obtained and supported by the professional knowledge of each member of the team. Planning, conducting, and interpreting the evaluation requires a time commitment to help ensure valuable information is gained and conveyed regarding the individual being assessed.

Traditionally, assessments for students who receive support from APSEA were conducted by APSEA psychologists and specialists. One of the challenges with this approach is that students typically traveled to Halifax for the assessment. However, the psychologists in the provinces do not necessarily have expertise in administering assessments to students who are BVI or DHH. Administering assessments virtually for children with weaker language skills was identified as a challenge, as students had difficulty listening while watching a computer, following directions, and staying on task. APSEA no longer has an school/educational psychologist.

In the focus group discussions, participants offered different perspectives regarding the best way forward. All recognized that to have reliable assessments, specialists and interpreters who are trained in assessment questions are necessary. Some participants called for a re-instatement of these positions and a return to the earlier assessments practice. Others suggested different approaches: a regional approach, in which the assessment team travels to an area and conducts assessments by region; a consultative approach, with some direct psychological service and some consults with a psychologist; or a collaborative approach, where an APSEA specialist could support a local psychologist during the entire process. The last suggestion, a collaborative approach, is one that research supports. Adopting this requires training and professional learning for district/region, school based and APSEA staff.

Transition Planning

Parents reported that transition planning is not adequate, particularly for the transition from junior to senior high school, and that families need to understand how to plan for this transition early. It was also noted that some students need support for the transition from high school to life, and others need support for the transition from high school to postsecondary education. It was suggested that there be a bridging semester for high school graduates who

are going on to postsecondary study, in collaboration with a Halifax university. Students could receive life skills instruction at the APSEA centre and take one or two university courses, with credits transferable upon course completion.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Work related to the provision of services to students and families who come from other cultures and countries, and whose first language is not English is in its infancy. It is however recognized that with a larger number of newcomers to Atlantic Canada each year, APSEA will be called upon to provide services to a proportion of these families. To be effective in its delivery of services, APSEA requires access to information held by schools about students' backgrounds. In addition, personnel ought to understand the experiences/perspectives/needs of the families of students they are working with and involve families in decision making. To help develop this understanding, professional learning to foster a greater awareness and understanding of biases and cultural sensitivities that can have an impact on the services APSEA provides is an important consideration. This professional learning can extend to understanding the needs and circumstances of children from generational poverty. For Indigenous students and families, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations can serve as a guide, and professional learning regarding the recommendations was suggested. In NB, APSEA teachers have already started this work.

The APSEA staff already view cultural and linguistic diversity as part of their everyday experience. They reported that their work with families requires being family-centred, meeting families where they are and using different approaches depending on the situation. In the pre-school years, APSEA staff work in the children's homes with the family and, when necessary, with an interpreter. By working with families, APSEA staff are more aware of cultural and linguistic issues. They also work with multicultural associations and YMCA settlement workers, sometimes during after-school hours.

Other suggestions for appropriately responding to APSEA's diverse population included creating greater cultural and linguistic diversity among APSEA staff, improving services for French students, conducting a review of APSEA library holdings to make the collection more

diverse, working more collaboratively with community-based organizations, and having more first language ASL signers and personnel with lived experience.

DHH itinerants reported working with few students who are not Canadian; however, as different cultures embrace hearing loss differently, they need to know more about a student's first language skill set and have training in second language acquisition. Linguistic goals and instructional content need to be appropriate.

Alignment with Provincial Inclusive Education Policies and Practices

APSEA services are integrated with schools' program planning processes to varying degrees. In PEI, APSEA program staff are integrated with the student services team and are involved in local Individual Education Planning (IEP) meetings but move their own plan forward. In NB, APSEA program staff are members of the school-based Education Support Services Teams. APSEA supervisors regularly participate in meetings with Department of Education and Early Childhood Development staff and this information is then shared with relevant APSEA staff. NL benefits from consultations with APSEA personnel and has a BVI specialist who is involved in school-level program planning meetings; however, gaps exist. A key issue is that APSEA education plans for individual students are seen as distinct and not necessarily integrated into the local educational program for the student. Participants reported that APSEA and the provinces (NB, NS) view their respective services as separate responsibilities rather than a shared responsibility.

Participants stated that there is a need for more collaboration and enhanced team building, and that roles and responsibilities, as well as an understanding of both the APSEA structure and provincial inclusive education policies and tiered models, need to be clarified. To better align with these provincial inclusive education policies and practices, procedures and protocols could be developed so that APSEA is involved as a partner, not an "add-on". For example, APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff are part of the school team planning process but are not always invited to team meetings, mainly through lack of awareness, especially among less experienced resource/instructional support teachers. There is not always an awareness that some of the APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff who provide services in schools are teachers. It was suggested that the role and

capabilities of APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff are not always understood. This lack of understanding creates a breakdown in the planning process. To build connections so that APSEA program staff are both considered and treated as part of the planning process requires a greater awareness of their work. Participants also noted a gap in understanding of APSEA's role at the district level and a lack of transparency regarding the working relationship between APSEA and the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development/Life Long Learning.

The APSEA service plan describes the individualized programs and services that students receive from APSEA and is developed in collaboration with the student's itinerant teacher, the school team, and other APSEA personnel. At the same time, each student also has a school-based individualized program plan developed by the student's school team in consultation with the APSEA itinerant teachers. In some instances, the learning goals and interventions for the students are common and in others there are unique learning goals and interventions, especially for expanded core curriculum outcomes. Participants stated there is a need for greater integration: at present students are seen as "APSEA students" rather than local students who receive services from APSEA, and structures are parallel rather than combined. APSEA program staff report to a different system.

There are varying levels of interaction with schools with more involvement at the elementary level as students have fewer teachers compared to students at junior and senior high schools. At the high school level, teachers are primarily subject area specialists; however, students may need language support to be able to access the curriculum. It is helpful when schools are welcoming, know what the role of the itinerant teacher and other APSEA program staff is, and provide an appropriate workspace that is quiet and has room for materials. The school's leadership team and the resource teacher make a difference as well, particularly for students with additional challenges. Opportunities for flexible instructional settings are important, so that students can have individual attention in a quiet setting when appropriate, and support from the itinerant teacher in the classroom with other students to practise what has been learned.

Online/Virtual learning in response to the pandemic has also affected the planning process. In some instances, it has meant no team meetings with staff, and APSEA has provided programming without the planning process with the schools. In other instances, planning remained collaborative with the school and APSEA; however, the strength of the process depends on the collaboration and communication skills of both partners.

A project in NS and NB is exploring the practice of having a common service plan for students who receive support from APSEA. In the focus group discussions with district-based staff, APSEA supervisors, and other APSEA personnel, participants reported that this project is working well and allows for better integration of the students' school plans and their APSEA plans. However, instances where the APSEA itinerant teachers were not invited to program planning meetings, access to the school plan was unavailable, and changes were made to the APSEA plan were noted. Participants stated that having common learning plans, in which APSEA documentation is included in local program plans, would result in improved service, as would having APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff involved with local teams. It is acknowledged that this model requires more time, including time for classroom teachers to collaborate, an increased awareness of how the APSEA plan is required for student success, and professional learning.

It was suggested that APSEA itinerant teachers and the classroom teacher or the school-level program planning team go through the whole curriculum in a planning day at the beginning of the year. This would make it possible to see where APSEA support could be most helpful. The school needs to understand the adaptations. Working collaboratively with the classroom teacher is important, particularly as sometimes students learn skills in a separate setting and not all students have an individualized program plan. NB is currently developing an infrastructure to support the planning process. The province has started focus groups, surveys, and discussions with staff to ensure needs are understood and processes are developed to meet them.

Parents reported that they struggle to get the resources their children need. They cited many specific issues: having the APSEA plan presented as a separate plan rather than having it incorporated with the school plan; getting school support for APSEA services; annual changes in

teacher assignments at the school; lack of availability of options for alternative learning environments, including at-home; unwillingness of school personnel to listen to families; difficulties in engaging the principal and teachers in planning; lack of awareness of the psycho-social elements of a child who is DHH or BVI; a lack of support for ASL; a lack of awareness of services provided by APSEA; a shortage of ASL interpreters and having to share interpreters among students; a lack of support for ASL in the pre-school years; the way assessments are conducted; and a lack of clarity on policies.

Supporting Students with ASD

APSEA services for autism are more recent and are focused on professional learning for educators and partner professionals, and support to ASD consultants/specialists. Specific suggestions for improvement include providing direct services for children, as is done for students who are BVI and DHH; making connections with students who are BVI and DHH who have autism, as well as students with complex needs; and improving cross-program collaboration.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation investigated the extent to which APSEA programs and services meet the needs of its learners and their families in each of the four Atlantic Provinces, are accessible and equitable for all learners, recognize cultural and linguistic diversity of its learners, and align with the inclusive education policies and practices of the four Atlantic Provinces. Through a review of relevant documents, consultations with stakeholders, and information obtained from surveys, it has been determined that there is a high level of satisfaction with APSEA as an organization and with the services it provides. A summary of the evaluation findings for each topic of interest together with associated recommendations are presented below.

Meeting the Needs of Learners and their Families

The results from both the surveys and the focus group discussions indicate satisfaction with the extent to which APSEA meets the needs of learners and their families, with APSEA itinerant teachers at the core of student learning. The effectiveness of their work is widely

recognized. The time that APSEA itinerant teachers spend at their schools meeting their students face-to-face, delivering programs, and establishing relationships with students and other teachers cannot be overestimated. Travel time is an issue for many of them and in the review, it was noted that in some instances it is extensive. Consideration must be given to what outcomes can be addressed virtually/online and the extent to which they can be achieved. A team approach with support at the school level when virtual/online connections are made has potential for success.

In the review, other areas of work where a combination of in-person and virtual/online sessions has benefits were identified. To establish relationships between APSEA staff and district/region/school colleagues, and to benefit from current thinking and research by working with an identified scholar, in-person meetings are preferred; however, the benefits of virtual/online professional learning for APSEA staff and district/school colleagues are considerable and must be considered. Maintaining connections between APSEA staff and school teams and/or district /regional colleagues can also be achieved using technology.

It is therefore recommended that

1. APSEA articulate targets for reduced travel time for APSEA itinerant teachers (e.g., 10 per cent reduction per year over a five-year period).
2. APSEA itinerant teachers each develop a plan that incorporates face-to-face and virtual sessions so that travel time is reduced by their pre-determined target.
3. APSEA develop an overall professional learning plan that includes annual/biannual opportunities for APSEA staff and district/regional/school colleagues to assemble, complemented by virtual learning opportunities.

The research on the administration of psycho-educational assessments for students who are DHH and BVI is clear: a qualified psychologist with appropriate materials adapted for the sensory loss of the student and working with a DHH or BVI specialist are the requisites. The team must work collaboratively through all phases of the assessment. In the review, concerns regarding the qualifications of test administrators and how these assessments should be

undertaken was raised. Securing personnel with expertise in educational psychology in conjunction DHH, BVI and ASD expertise is a challenge; a collaborative approach will work best.

It is therefore recommended that

4. APSEA work with the Executive Committee to seek an arrangement to have at least one school/educational psychologist in each district/region assigned as a lead person for psycho-educational assessments for students who are DHH and another for students who are BVI.

5. APSEA adopt a collaborative model for the administration of psycho-educational assessments with a team comprising the school based/district/regional school/educational psychologist, APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff, a speech language pathologist, and other professionals as required.

APSEA's services for students who are DHH and BVI are well recognized and support for the AIE partnership is highly valued. During the review it was suggested that APSEA consider adding areas of student services (special education) to its mandate.

It is therefore recommended that

6. APSEA conduct a needs assessment to determine if there are other areas of student services (special education) that can be addressed effectively, using a model similar to its AIE partnership.

Equity and Accessibility

Research speaks to the importance of providing opportunity for students who have either a vision loss or a hearing loss to meet in person, to socialize, and to develop relationships with other students who have similar lived experiences. APSEA provides this opportunity through its short-term programs (STPs). In its current form, there are accessibility and equity issues with this service.

Based on information gleaned from the review, it is apparent there are both positive

aspects and challenges for short-term programs (STP), assessments and the virtual learning series (VLS). The merits of short-term programs — making connections, incidental learning, and intensive learning of specific skills — were clearly described. However, the current service delivery model for these programs is inadequate to meet the needs of most learners. Accessibility, travel time, loss of instructional time and parents' ability to get time off work were identified as issues. Travel, especially for students and families in rural communities, is a barrier to participation in these programs. The virtual learning series has received mixed reviews. Participation numbers in these programs have been high demonstrating increased access to programming. However, concerns were raised regarding the ability to achieve Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) outcomes virtually, the quality of some programs, program length, student engagement, attrition, and limitations with respect to opportunities for student connections.

It is therefore recommended that

7. The outcomes for expanded core curriculum (ECC) that are not delivered by the APSEA itinerant teachers be examined to determine those that are best achieved through in-person learning and those that can effectively be delivered virtually.

8. The current STP and VLS programs be reviewed with a view to having a high-quality program that supports student learning in all ECC outcomes. Elements of the review can include but not be limited to: coherence with the outcomes, duration, intensity, age- and grade-appropriateness, placement, and delivery mode.

9. Once a review of ECC and the current programs (e.g., STPs, VLS) has been completed, establish a new program/model that provides diverse and multiple opportunities for students to experience both in-person and virtual programming relevant to their needs.

10. APSEA provide in-person program offerings (APSEA Centre, regionally, summer camps, post-graduate transition extended program) to ensure students who are DHH and BVI can connect and socialize with other students with similar experiences.

11. In extenuating circumstances when travel and community isolation prevent a student's participation in an in-person program, APSEA avail of the technology, to the extent possible, to allow the student to engage virtually.

Marian Fushell and Bob Gardiner

Transition for students from school to work and postsecondary education was raised as a concern, in particular orientation and mobility training for students who are BVI and are moving from a rural area to a more urban setting, and access to ASL for students who are DHH. The itinerant teachers, other APSEA program support staff, the school planning team, and families are most knowledgeable about the students' degree of preparation for making the transition to work and/or postsecondary education.

It is therefore recommended that

12. APSEA itinerant teachers and other program support staff, as appropriate, collaborate with school personnel and meet with graduating students and their families to evaluate the readiness of the student to move into a workplace or postsecondary education.
    a. If the student is ready to move forward, APSEA itinerant teachers, in collaboration with school personnel, set up a meeting between the receiving workplace or postsecondary institution to facilitate the transition.
    b. If the student is not ready to make the transition, APSEA itinerant teachers, in collaboration with school personnel, review options and develop a transition plan.

APSEA provides services and programs for pre-school children and their families. Home visits make it possible for families and APSEA itinerant teachers to develop a relationship and provide support at an early age; however, in the review it was noted that access is a challenge. Parents are often working, and APSEA itinerant teachers work on a school schedule. Attempts at providing programs at the child's pre-school program have met with limited success since the families are not part of the programming.

It is therefore recommended that

13. APSEA provide flexible scheduling options for programs for pre-school children and their families.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

During the review, it became clear that many participants seek a greater awareness of cultural diversity, and an understanding of how biases and cultural sensitivities can have an impact on the services APSEA provides. For some APSEA staff, working directly with families has given them a broader perspective on cultural and linguistic issues. For other staff, diversity is a relatively new concept as it relates to their work.

It is therefore recommended that

14. In future hirings, APSEA continue to strive for cultural and linguistic diversity among APSEA staff.

15. APSEA carry out a review of its library holdings with the goal of making its collection more diverse.

16. APSEA work collaboratively with community-based organizations, first language ASL signers, and francophone school districts to provide improved services.

Alignment with Provinces' Inclusive Education Policies

The findings indicate general agreement that APSEA programs and services complement provincial policy yet there is a disconnect between the services provided by APSEA staff and the services provided for students at the school/district/regional level. In NS and NB, there is a project exploring the utility of a common service delivery plan; however, in many instances, there are two different educational plans. One plan addresses the educational needs of students, and consideration for APSEA services is considered separately. There is the APSEA plan and the school plan; APSEA itinerant teacher is responsible for the APSEA plan while the school is responsible for the school plan. APSEA staff are often forgotten when meetings are scheduled, and in some cases, students receiving APSEA services are thought of as "APSEA students" and have a different status in the school. More collaboration and communication between APSEA and the provincial school authorities, and greater understanding of each others' roles is needed for a more integrated approach.

Services provided by APSEA are not necessarily considered in conjunction with provincial policies and practices. In many cases, APSEA services are outside the service delivery

model described by the tiered models in the different inclusive education policies. Providing services to the four Atlantic provinces requires understanding of and adherence to the different provinces' policies and practices.

Given that the Board of Directors is composed of provincial representatives and that the executive committee is composed of the Deputy Ministers responsible for Education for the four provinces, and considering the governance structure for education in place in each province, integration of APSEA and provincial services can be achieved.

It is therefore recommended that

17. Provincial representatives (department and district/regional) together with APSEA senior staff (i.e., superintendent, directors, supervisors) establish a process for the development, implementation, and monitoring of school-level program planning for students who receive support from APSEA that includes:

    a. the inclusion of APSEA staff at program planning meetings for students;

    b. professional learning to clarify understanding of both the APSEA structure and the provincial inclusive education policies and tiered models; and

    c. a communication strategy for parents and community partners.

18. APSEA monitor the outcomes of the common service delivery plan project started in a number of locations with a view to adoption of best practices.

19. APSEA senior management provide all APSEA staff with information about provincial inclusive education policies and practices, and use staff meeting time to help ensure understanding with respect to how to align APSEA's service delivery model with provincial inclusive education policies and practices.

Other Areas of Concern

While outside the scope of the review, two issues that seem to be paramount in people's minds were communications and staff shortages. Presented here for consideration is a summary of what was heard, but no recommendations for these matters are offered.

Communications

Participants stated that the last several years has been a time of change, leaving some staff feeling insecure and others worried that APSEA services will be absorbed into the school system. While most support change, it is felt that students, families, staff and other stakeholders need to understand the purpose for any change and the process for implementation. In the absence of such transparency, a negative culture has settled in and must be addressed. Many maintained that for change to be successful all must be involved, and a coordinated approach is essential. There is resistance too when staff feel they are not being given full information. It was also recognized that change is needed. For example, it was referenced that some APSEA policies are outdated and no longer match changes in the field. As part of change management, children, youth, and families need to have an opportunity to state what they want from APSEA, and as a principle, changes that occur should benefit the students and their families. A change management plan was suggested as one solution.

Staff Shortages

Staff vacancies in BVI, DHH, autism, and other professionals was cited as a pressing issue. The provinces noted that the growth in needs every year for funding and people makes it difficult to have a sustainable system. More support for Deaf culture was also identified as an issue. One suggestion to address shortages is a promotion plan for people to be trained in BVI and DHH.

LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

In the data gathering for the review, participants were not asked to identify membership with any group or ethnicity. While APSEA may be supporting Indigenous students and families, as well as students and families of African descent or other origins and/or who may identify as 2SLGBTQ+, these data were not collected. Thus, the results and interpretations of the review do not, specifically, reflect the perspectives of these groups.

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Appendix A
Key Informant Interviews/Focus Groups

Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)
2021 Review of Its Service Delivery Model

Preamble for all interviews/focus groups

APSEA is conducting a review of its programs and services to evaluate how well they meet the needs of its learners and their families. Specifically:

- Ascertain the extent to which APSEA programs and services meet the needs of children and their families who receive services from APSEA in each of the four Atlantic Provinces
- Ascertain the extent to which APSEA programs and services are accessible and equitable for all learners.
- Ascertain the extent to which APSEA programs and services recognize cultural and linguistic diversity of its learners.
- Assess the degree to which APSEA programs and services align with the inclusive education policies and practices of the four Atlantic Provinces.

For this review, the researchers will be gathering information from various groups involved with APSEA including teachers, centre-based staff, learners and their families and other partners. The purpose of this meeting is to get your views /opinions on the services provided, what's working effectively and opportunities for improvement. The researchers are committed to protecting the privacy of any personal information you provide. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, any notes or recordings from this meeting will not identify individuals and once the review is complete, the data will be deleted and/or destroyed.

Interview Questions

Senior Leadership

1. What do you see as the primary function of APSEA as it relates to its programs and services?

2. What are the strengths of APSEA's current service delivery model?

3. What limitations prevent APSEA from providing programs and services to the four Atlantic provinces?

4. What changes are needed for APSEA services to better align with provincial inclusive education policies and practices?

5. What changes are needed for APSEA to improve accessibility and equity to students in the four provinces?

6. What changes could be initiated by APSEA to improve the system for learners with respect to the cultural and linguistic diversity among its learners and their families?

7. What do you think is the future use of APSEA online/virtual program offerings?

8. Overall, how can APSEA improve its programs and services?

Executive Committee

1. What is the main advantage of your partnership with APSEA?

2. Do you see any disadvantages with your partnership with APSEA?

3. If APSEA no longer provided programs and services to your province, what capacity does your province have to deliver these programs?

4. To what extent do APSEA services align with your provincial inclusive education policy and practices?

5. How do you think APSEA could better facilitate supporting these provincial policies?

6. To what extent does APSEA provide accessible and equitable programs and services to the students in your province?

7. To what extent does APSEA recognize cultural and linguistic difference for the learners in your province?

8. What do you think is the future use of APSEA online/virtual program offerings?

9. How can APSEA improve its programs and services?

Program Advisory Committee

1. How is the program planning process integrated with the services provided by APSEA?

2. Which APSEA services for BVI/DHH students and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder does the province use?

3. To what extent does each service used meet the needs of students?

4. To what extent do APSEA services align with your provincial inclusive education policy and practices?

5. What provincial programs for BVI/DHH students and those with Autism Spectrum Disorder do you offer?

6. Do these duplicate or complement APSEA programs and services?

7. What direction and supports does the Department provide to schools to support BVI/DHH students and ASD?

8. What training does the Department provide? Require?

9. Are there unmet student needs in your province?

10. How has the online/virtual program offerings improved access for your students and teachers?

11. Comment on each of the following as it relates to APSEA and its programs and services:

    • Relevance

    • Accessible and equitable for all learners

    • Cultural and linguistic diversity

12. In what ways can APSEA improve its programs and services?

13. What is the main advantage of your partnership with APSEA?

14. Do you see any disadvantages with your partnership with APSEA?

15. If APSEA no longer provided any programs and services to your province, what steps would be required for you to provide the necessary programs and supports?

DHH and BVI Itinerant Teachers

Questions for Discussion
1. What school setting allows you to give maximum support to your students?
2. How have the absence of STPs impacted opportunities for students and how have online/virtual opportunities improved student access?
3. How does the school planning process inform your work with respect to APSEA's programs?
4. How does APSEA align with your province's inclusive education policies and practices?
5. How do you support your students' cultural and linguistic differences?
6. Concluding comments about improving programs and services.

APSEA Supervisors
1. How do you integrate the school planning process into your work and do you see the work of APSEA complementing the process?
2. What are the benefits of APSEA's in-person and virtual/online services?
3. In what way can APSEA improve its programs and services?
   - Alignment of APSEA programs and services with provincial policy and practice
   - Extent of APSEA's programs and services being accessible and equitable to learners
   - Extent of APSEA's programs and services recognizing cultural and linguistic diversity of its learners and families
4. Based on the children you work with, are there unmet areas of need and are there any services you provide that are under-utilized?
5. Can you comment on APSEA's current practice with respect to an environment for personnel that is flexible and responsive to change?

APSEA (Non-teaching Personnel)

1. How do you integrate the school planning process into your work and do you see the work of APSEA complementing the process?

2. In what way can APSEA improve its programs and services?

   - Alignment of APSEA programs and services with provincial policy and practice

   - Extent of APSEA's programs and services being accessible and equitable to learners

   - Extent of APSEA's programs and services recognizing cultural and linguistic diversity of its learners and families?

3. Can you comment on APSEA's current practice with respect to an environment for personnel that is flexible and responsive to change?

Community Partners

1. What is the main advantage of your partnership with APSEA and the main disadvantage of your partnership?

2. Can you please comment on communications with APSEA?

3. To what extent do APSEA programs and services align with your inclusive education policies and practices?

4. To what extent does APSEA provide accessible and equitable programs and services to your clients?

5. How can APSEA improve its programs and services?

School and District Based Personnel

1. What is working well with the programs and services provided by APSEA?

2. What changes could be made to improve programs and services?

3. How well does the delivery of APSEA's programs and services fit with your province's inclusive education policies and practices?

4. How can programs be made more accessible?

5. Can you comment on the extent to which APSEA's programs and services value and respect cultural and linguistic diversity.

6. Are there any services not provided?

Families

1. Which APSEA services have supported your child's learning the most?

2. How well do the APSEA services support your child's school programming?

3. How has the online/virtual program delivery helped your child's learning?

4. What learning needs do you have, that may be met by APSEA; however, currently these needs are not being met?

5. In what ways does APSEA recognize your cultural and language differences?

6. In what ways can APSEA improve its services?

Learners

1. How well do the APSEA services support what you do at school?

2. How has the online/virtual program delivery helped you as opposed to short-term programs?

3. What learning needs do you have, that may be met by APSEA; however, currently these needs are not being met?

4. In what ways does APSEA recognize your cultural and language differences?

5. In what ways can APSEA improve its services?

Appendix B
Surveys and Results

APSEA Staff Survey (overall)

N = 166
Response Rate = 47.5% (79 respondents)
Response Rate by Role:

	N	Respondents	Rate (%)
BVI itinerant	27	22	81.5
DHH itinerant	36	25	69.4
Educational Interpreting	26	7	26.9
Programming Support	8	6	75.0

Other respondents included supervisors etc. (10), joint supervisor team (3), finance and administration (5), alternate format production/library (2) and other (4)

Overall	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	N/A (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communication and collaboration to support educational outcomes for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services.	75.3	2.6	21.8
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	66.7	2.6	30.8
I am provided with the tools to be efficient and effective in my role at APSEA (e.g., professional learning, resources)	65.4	2.6	32.0
The support to children/students and their families accessing APSEA services, before they begin school, is effective in facilitating a smooth transition into school.	71.0	14.5	14.4
APSEA provides flexible early childhood programming which respects the home culture and beliefs of children/students and their families.	75.0	17.1	7.9
APSEA has accessibility as a priority.	76.9	1.3	21.8

APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for all children/students and their families.	59.2	2.6	38.1
APSEA creates an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change.	52.6	2.6	44.7
I have been provided with professional learning opportunities in how to create a culturally and linguistically responsive environment for all children/students and their families that access APSEA supports.	72.3	5.3	22.4

BVI Itinerants	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	N/A (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communication and collaboration to support educational outcomes for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services.	77.3	0.0	22.7
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	68.2	0.0	31.8
I am provided with the tools to be efficient and effective in my role at APSEA (e.g., professional learning, resources)	66.7	0.0	33.3
The support to children/students and their families accessing APSEA services, before they begin school, is effective in facilitating a smooth transition into school.	90.9	0.0	9.1
APSEA provides flexible early childhood programming which respects the home culture and beliefs of children/students and their families.	95.4	0.0	4.6
APSEA has accessibility as a priority.	77.3	0.0	22.7
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for all children/students and their families.	40.9	0.0	59.1
APSEA creates an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change.	40.0	0.0	60.0
I have been provided with professional learning opportunities in how to create a culturally and linguistically responsive environment for all children/students and their families that access APSEA supports.	71.4	0.0	28.6

DHH Itinerants	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	N/A (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communication and collaboration to support educational outcomes for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services.	88.0	0.0	12.0
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	76.0	4.0	20.0
I am provided with the tools to be efficient and effective in my role at APSEA (e.g., professional learning, resources)	52.0	0.0	48.0
The support to children/students and their families accessing APSEA services, before they begin school, is effective in facilitating a smooth transition into school.	84.0	4.0	12.0
APSEA provides flexible early childhood programming which respects the home culture and beliefs of children/students and their families.	84.0	4.0	12.0
APSEA has accessibility as a priority.	88.0	0.0	12.0
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for all children/students and their families.	76.0	4.0	20.0
APSEA creates an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change.	56.0	0.0	44.0
I have been provided with professional learning opportunities in how to create a culturally and linguistically responsive environment for all children/students and their families that access APSEA supports.	76.0	4.0	20.0

Educational Interpreting Staff	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	N/A (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communication and collaboration to support educational outcomes for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services.	71.4	14.3	14.3
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	66.7	0.0	33.3
I am provided with the tools to be efficient and effective in my role at APSEA (e.g., professional learning, resources)	85.7	0.0	14.3
The support to children/students and their families accessing APSEA services, before they begin school, is effective in facilitating a smooth transition into school.	33.3	50.0	16.7
APSEA provides flexible early childhood programming which respects the home culture and beliefs of children/students and their families.	16.74	83.3	0.0
APSEA has accessibility as a priority.	66.7	0.0	33.3
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for all children/students and their families.	66.7	0.0	33.3
APSEA creates an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change.	83.3	0.0	16.7
I have been provided with professional learning opportunities in how to create a culturally and linguistically responsive environment for all children/students and their families that access APSEA supports.	83.3	0.0	16.7

Programming Support Staff	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	N/A (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communication and collaboration to support educational outcomes for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services.	16.7	0.0	83.3
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	66.7	0.0	33.3
I am provided with the tools to be efficient and effective in my role at APSEA (e.g., professional learning, resources)	66.7	0.0	33.3
The support to children/students and their families accessing APSEA services, before they begin school, is effective in facilitating a smooth transition into school.	66.7	33.3	0.0
APSEA provides flexible early childhood programming which respects the home culture and beliefs of children/students and their families.	50.0	33.3	16.7
APSEA has accessibility as a priority.	50.0	0.0	50.0
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for all children/students and their families.	33.3	16.7	50.0
APSEA creates an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change.	50.0	0.0	50.0
I have been provided with professional learning opportunities in how to create a culturally and linguistically responsive environment for all children/students and their families that access APSEA supports.	66.7	0.0	33.3

Supervisor/Managers	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	N/A (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communication and collaboration to support educational outcomes for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services.	80.0	0.0	20.0
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	50.0	0.0	50.0
I am provided with the tools to be efficient and effective in my role at APSEA (e.g., professional learning, resources)	77.8	0.0	22.2
The support to children/students and their families accessing APSEA services, before they begin school, is effective in facilitating a smooth transition into school.	66.6	11.1	22.2
APSEA provides flexible early childhood programming which respects the home culture and beliefs of children/students and their families.	88.9	11.1	0.0
APSEA has accessibility as a priority.	70.0	10.0	20.0
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for all children/students and their families.	55.6	0.0	44.4
APSEA creates an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change.	44.4	11.1	44.4
I have been provided with professional learning opportunities in how to create a culturally and linguistically responsive environment for all children/students and their families that access APSEA supports.	88.9	11.1	0.0

Joint Supervisor team/Finance and Administration/Alternate Format Production/Library/Other	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	N/A (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Members of the APSEA team engage in ongoing communication and collaboration to support educational outcomes for children/students and their families accessing APSEA services.	69.2	7.7	23.1
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	57.1	7.1	35.7
I am provided with the tools to be efficient and effective in my role at APSEA (e.g., professional learning, resources)	69.2	15.4	15.4
The support to children/students and their families accessing APSEA services, before they begin school, is effective in facilitating a smooth transition into school.	38.5	30.8	30.8
APSEA provides flexible early childhood programming which respects the home culture and beliefs of children/students and their families.	61.5	30.8	7.7
APSEA has accessibility as a priority.	85.7	0.0	14.3
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for all children/students and their families.	61.6	0.0	38.4
APSEA creates an environment for personnel which is flexible and responsive to change.	46.2	7.7	46.2
I have been provided with professional learning opportunities in how to create a culturally and linguistically responsive environment for all children/students and their families that access APSEA supports.	58.3	16.7	25.0

Open ended questions:

List up to three services provided by APSEA that give the BEST support to children/students and their families.

List up to three services provided by APSEA that are not as effective as they could be for children/students and their families.

List up to three changes to APSEA's service delivery model that could enhance the learning of children/students.

List up to three barriers that are present for children/students and their families accessing services and for each barrier, list one specific strategy or support that APSEA can provide to address the barrier.

State up to three ways that increased collaboration across APSEA services (i.e., DHH, BVI, AIE, other) can enhance service delivery for learners accessing APSEA services, and their families.

With consideration for Autism in Education's (AIE) role in providing support for educational personnel, list one way AIE can support you in your work with children and youth accessing APSEA services

For each support listed for learners on your caseload, please provide commentary on both successes and challenges for each type of support and outline potential strategies to address the challenges.
A. In-class support
B. One-to-one pull-out support
C. Online/virtual learning
D. In-person home visits

School Based Personnel

N = 165
Response Rate = 39.4% (65 respondents)
Respondents by Province:

NB	24
NL	2
NS	39
PEI	0

Respondents by Classification:

Classroom Teacher	25
Resource teacher	36
Other	5

I work collaboratively with the following APSEA service areas (select all that apply):

Deaf and Hard of Hearing	39
Blind and Visually Impaired	31
Autism in Education	5

I meet (e.g., in person, by phone, virtually) with APSEA personnel:

Once a week	19
2 – 3 times a month	8
Once a month	6
Once each reporting term	10
Twice a year	9

Once a year	13

	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
I have a good understanding of the services that are available from APSEA.	63.1	23.1	16.8
APSEA personnel are available to attend planning meetings to support the educational learning plans for students.	72.3	21.5	6.2
The goals created by APSEA for each student are integrated into the school based educational learning plan.	75.4	20.0	4.6
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	73.1	22.2	4.8
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for students receiving those services.	75.4	12.3	12.3
The goals created by APSEA support the student's school based educational learning plan.	78.5	15.4	6.2
APSEA programs and services align with the inclusive education policies and practices of my province.	86.2	12.3	1.5

List up to three ways that APSEA supports the educational learning plan (e.g., IEP, IPP, PLP) for your student(s).

State up to three ways that APSEA could enhance educational planning and support for your student(s)

Provide up to three ways how APSEA service delivery model is aligned with inclusive education policies and initiatives in your province.

Provide up to three ways how APSEA's service delivery model could better align with inclusive education policies and initiatives in your province.

With consideration for Autism in Education's (AIE) role in providing support for educational personnel, list up to three ways AIE can support you in your work with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

List up to three barriers that are present for students and their families receiving services from APSEA.

Educational Partnership

N = 109
Response Rate = 21.1%
Response Rate by Province:

	N	Rate (%)
NB	19	36.8
NL	40	17.5
NS	34	17.6
PEI	16	18.8

- 91.3 % of respondents worked for the school district (NB, NL), RCE (NS), or PSB (PEI)

Area of collaboration with APSEA	%
DHH	60.9
BVI	65.2
AIE	47.8

	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)
I have a good understanding of the services that are available from APSEA	82.6
The current Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities (N=22)	95.5
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner for students and families receiving services from APSEA	82.6
APSEA programs and services align with the inclusive education policies and practices of your province	91.3

Open ended questions:

Provide up to three ways you collaborate with APSEA.

Provide up to three ways that APSEA can improve its services to children/students and their families.

Marian Fushell and Bob Gardiner

Provide up to three ways how the APSEA Service Delivery Model is aligned with inclusive education policies and initiatives in your province.

Provide up to three ways how the APSEA Service Delivery Model could better align with inclusive education policies and initiatives in your province.

Provide up to three barriers that are present for children/students and their families who receive services from APSEA.

Provide up to three strategies that you think could improve service delivery to children/students and their families (please address the identified barriers stated above) who receive support from APSEA.

Community Based Partners

17 contact groups
25 respondents
24 of 25 respondents were from Nova Scotia

	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
I have a good understanding of the role of APSEA.	69.2	19.2	11.5
I have a good understanding of the services that APSEA provides.	61.5	23.1	15.4
The current APSEA Service Delivery Model supports learning experiences that value and respect diverse cultural and linguistic identities.	42.3	50.0	7.7

Open ended questions:

State up to three barriers that may prevent children/students and their families from accessing APSEA services.

State up to three ways that APSEA can improve its services to children/students and their families?

Other comments to inform the Service Delivery Model review

Families

N = 1404
Response Rate = 2.2% (31 families)
Respondents by Province:

NB	11
NL	2
NS	17
PEI	1

My child starting receiving support from APSEA at:

0 to 12 months old	8
1 to 5 years old	12
6 to 12 years old	11
13 to 21 years old	1

My child receives: (choose all that apply to your child)

Direct services from APSEA personnel: (choose all that apply to your child)	17
In-person one-on-one	18
In-person small group	4
Online/virtual one-on-one	6
Online/virtual small group	8
Indirect services (i.e., APSEA personnel work with school personnel to support your child but do not work directly with your child.)	15

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	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	Does not Apply to Me (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
I understand how APSEA supports my child's learning.	93.6	0.0	6.5
APSEA's online/virtual learning sessions have provided valuable learning experiences for my child.	35.5	58.1	6.5
APSEA's in-person learning sessions have provided valuable learning experiences for my child.	71.7	25.8	3.2
Learning experiences with APSEA value and respect our family's culture and/or language.	83.9	16.1	0.0
APSEA's in-person home visits during the pre-school years helped prepare our child for school entry.	51.6	41.9	6.5
APSEA's online/virtual home visits during the pre-school years helped prepare our child for school entry.	9.7	90.3	0.0
APSEA services are provided in an equitable and accessible manner.	96.7	0.0	3.2

Identify the challenges which prevent you and/or your child from using APSEA Programs and Services (select all that apply) (21 respondents)

They are only offered during work hours only	2
They are not reflective of our culture and/or language	0
I am not familiar with APSEA's programs and services	3
I am not familiar with APSEA's referral for services process	3
APSEA's referral process takes too long	2
I have limited internet access	0
I have limited access to technology devices	1
Other	13

To be completed by families of pre-school children only. What is your preferred choice of the options for pre-school visits/meetings? (3 respondents)

To be completed by families of pre-school children only. During the pre-school years, our family would prefer: (5 respondents)

Open-ended questions

Give up to three examples of the services/programming your child receives from APSEA that had a positive impact on their learning.

Suggest up to three ways that APSEA's services/programming could help with your child's unmet learning needs.