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Concerned
About
Classrooms
Coalition



Experts warn of learning problems associated with noise in classrooms

Introduction of Classroom acoustics standards a must!

OTTAWA (January 16, 2009) - During a press conference on Parliament Hill today, the Concerned About Classrooms Coalition urged the federal government to show leadership in our children's education by encouraging provincial governments to implement acoustical standards for Canadian schools.

With children back in school for a new year, audiologists and speech-language pathologists warn that noise conditions in Canadian classrooms are far from ideal. Children, who primarily learn through listening, need a learning environment in which they can fully hear and understand the teacher's instructions, particularly children with learning disabilities, hearing loss or those learning in a second language.

"No legislation regarding standardized classroom acoustics currently exists across Canada," stated Linda Walsh, President of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA). "The government needs to make sound decisions to protect our children's learning environment and that begins with implementing province-wide classroom acoustic standards."

The Acoustical Society of America has developed a classroom acoustics standard which has been approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Consistent with long-standing recommendations for good practice in educational settings, the standard sets specific criteria for maximum background noise and reverberation time for unoccupied classrooms. The Concerned About Classrooms Coalition believes that Canada is in need of a similar set of standards, and suggests adopting the American standards.

Canadian studies show that many classrooms have poor quality acoustics and that children are often working in sub-standard classroom listening conditions. Results from a Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network study (Bradley, 2005) show that one in six words is not understood by the average Grade 1 student due to excessive background noise and poor acoustics in Canadian classrooms.

"Teachers are also affected by the poor acoustic conditions in the classroom," explained Walsh. "When the classroom background noise is high, the teacher speaks in a louder voice, causing inevitable vocal strain over time. Teacher absences due to voice problems not only interrupt the learning process for students, but are also costly for our education and health care systems."

The coalition warns that decision-makers need to be aware that noisy classrooms have the potential to negatively affect children's learning, but more importantly, that acoustics in classrooms can be improved, relatively inexpensively, to maximize learning. Sound-field enhancement systems, which project the teacher's voice around the classroom, is one possible solution, and simple steps such as installing hypo-allergenic carpeting, curtains, or felt pads on the bottoms of chairs, can further improve the classroom acoustic environment.

"Our government needs to take responsibility for our children's education and implement acoustic standards. All new schools should be built with consideration of classroom acoustics and existing schools should be assessed and improvements made to address acoustics" said Walsh.

Please visit www.caslpa.ca for more information on sources of noise in classrooms, as well as simple tips and tricks to improve classroom acoustics.

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Concerned About Classrooms Coalition is a group of organizations whose goal is to enhance the learning environment of millions of children and the vocal health of Canadian teachers.

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