



EQUITABLE EDUCATION

FOR STUDENTS WITH READING DISABILITIES

A REPORT



QUOTE

Meaningful access to education, which includes learning to read, is not a privilege. It is a human right. Reading plays a vital role in our children's educational progress and has a lasting impact on their lives. This report, and the ensuing systemic initiative, provides an opportunity to make significant changes in our province that will help build a better, more equitable future in which no child is left behind.

TRENA SIKORA
CHIEF COMMISSIONER



The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission is mandated to forward the principle that every person is free and equal in dignity and rights without regard to religion, creed, marital status, family status, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, colour, ancestry, nationality, place of origin, race or perceived race, or receipt of public assistance.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, 2018 prohibits discrimination based on these personal characteristics.



BACKGROUND

In September 2023, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission released a report entitled "Equitable Education for Students with Reading Disabilities."

The creation of this report was initiated by a group complaint filed in June 2020 on behalf of 29 families, all with children who have been professionally diagnosed with dyslexia. The families alleged that eight school divisions discriminated against their children on the basis of disability (dyslexia and other disabilities) and that the school divisions violated their children's right to fair and equitable access to education.

The families expressed their desire for a systemic investigation into the identification, treatment, and accommodation of students with reading disabilities in Saskatchewan.

SHRC RESPONSE

Given circumstances of the allegations, and the number of parents supporting the complaint, the Commission determined a systemic approach was appropriate. A systemic approach allowed the Commission to take a broader view of the issues and present better options for resolutions. The scope of the systemic initiative included the review of the parent submissions, conducting stakeholder interviews and meetings, the preparation of a legal summary, and capturing the comments, feedback, and input of individuals with reading disabilities, their families, and advocates, as well as educators and other professionals.

The resulting "Equitable Education for Students with Reading Disabilities" report is intended to focus stakeholder engagement and to help address the concerns of those affected by reading disabilities in Saskatchewan schools.

“EQUITABLE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH READING DISABILITIES” REPORT

Reading is an important skill for nearly all areas of life. Addressing systemic barriers that exist for students learning to read has the potential to improve the lives of many individuals and the communities in which they live. Students with word-reading disabilities such as dyslexia and other learning disabilities, students from lower-income backgrounds, racialized students, and Indigenous students are all at a higher risk of falling behind their peers when it comes to early reading.

The report emphasizes the need for an early, universal screening strategy; individualized reading interventions; professional assessments; and, accommodations for students; as well as the desire for curriculum and reading-instruction pedagogy that is directly supported by scientific research.



The Commission sees the “Equitable Education for Students with Reading Disabilities” report as an initial piece in a broad and ongoing initiative to work with stakeholders to ensure legal obligations and standards are adhered to according to the Saskatchewan Education Act (2015) and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code (2018).

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code requires all school divisions to accommodate students’ disabilities to the point of undue hardship. The effective implementation of learning accommodations requires procedural and substantive measures. There is a high threshold for satisfying the legal duty to accommodate.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, 2018 requires equitable access to education for students with disabilities, including reading disabilities. The long-term goal of this systemic initiative is to ensure compliance with the Code and to address the needs of those most affected by systemic discrimination, in this case, the students with reading disabilities.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

The combination of community and stakeholder consultation, research, and surveys the Commission used to inform the report have yielded significant insight into the lived experiences of students, families, educational professionals, and medical professionals that support those with reading disabilities.

Some of the most consistent themes demonstrated throughout the report are:

1. Negative impacts of reading disabilities on students and families, emotionally, socially and financially;
2. Insufficient screening for reading disabilities;
3. Complicated processes and systems for parents to navigate;
4. Inadequate reading instruction and specialized intervention;
5. Inconsistent accommodation;
6. Long waits for professional assessment;
7. Lack of teacher training and professional development regarding reading disabilities;
8. Disproportionate reading outcomes for Indigenous students;
9. Lack of supports and limited resources.

The Commission recognizes that the very nature of this subject is deeply complex, multi-faceted, and that there is not a singular solution to the concerns raised in our report.

Our report is a step toward engaging collaboratively and cooperatively with relevant organizations and individuals, raising awareness of this issue to the public, the legal obligations to support children with reading disabilities and that the legal right to quality education remains the primary focus for all involved in this long-term process.



SASKATCHEWAN
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION

**READ THE FULL REPORT
ONLINE AT:**

<https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/systemic-advocacy/equitable-education-for-students-with-reading-disabilities/>