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Supporting Students with FASD.

NEAFAN

Northeast Alberta FASD Network

Approaches and Support Systems for Educating Students with FASD

The issue paper titled "Current Strategies and Educational Supports for Students with FASD" explores the current educational challenges and necessary supports for students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD is a developmental disorder that affects individuals in various ways, impacting communication, social behavior, academic performance, and executive functioning. While there are no physical markers of FASD, the behavioral and learning difficulties experienced by students often go undiagnosed or are misidentified, complicating the implementation of effective educational strategies.

The paper emphasizes the importance of individualized program plans (IPPs) and educational supports such as teachers, educational assistants, and repetitive visual and verbal cues. These strategies aim to improve learning outcomes for students with FASD, yet the existing supports in many school systems are insufficient. Teachers often rely on outdated methods and lack access to current resources, resulting in inadequate individualized plans for students. This gap in support places students at risk for negative outcomes such as school dropout, involvement with the criminal justice system, mental health challenges, and substance abuse issues.

One of the key challenges highlighted in the paper is the difficulty in diagnosing FASD. Students with FASD often exhibit normal IQ scores but struggle with specific cognitive and behavioral issues, making the disorder harder to detect. This discrepancy can lead to delays in diagnosis and the development of appropriate interventions. Additionally, a lack of understanding among teachers and caregivers about the symptoms of FASD can result in frustration and feelings of failure in handling these students' unique needs.

The paper also addresses the underreporting of FASD in the school system, which is exacerbated by the stigma attached to the diagnosis. Teachers may hesitate to raise concerns about FASD due to fear of backlash or criticism. As a result, many students with FASD go unrecognized and unsupported. Provincial and territorial policies in Canada also vary in their recognition of FASD as a fundable disability, further limiting access to the necessary resources for students.

The report highlights three key factors that contribute to insufficient educational support for students with FASD: inadequate functional assessments, insufficient teacher education and training, and a lack of cohesive communication among stakeholders. Functional assessments, which are used to diagnose FASD and guide the creation of IPPs, are often too generalized, focusing on students' weaknesses rather than their strengths. Psychoeducational reports summarizing these assessments are frequently too technical for teachers to understand, leaving them to rely on their own experience rather than the student's specific needs.

Teachers' lack of education and training on FASD compounds the problem. Most teachers have not received adequate training on FASD, resulting in a reliance on general strategies that may not address the specific learning styles and behaviors of students with FASD. Educational assistants, often tasked with supporting these students, also tend to lack the necessary training, further contributing to ineffective support.

Disjointed communication between educators, psychologists, administrators, and parents is another major issue. Teachers, caregivers, and other stakeholders are often not consulted during the diagnostic process, and their insights are undervalued. This lack of collaboration leads to fragmented intervention plans that do not meet the complex needs of students with FASD.

In summary, the paper advocates for enhanced strategies and support for students with FASD, emphasizing the need for improved diagnostic tools, more accessible psychoeducational reports, better teacher training, and increased communication among all involved parties. By addressing these issues, educators can create more effective learning environments for students with FASD, leading to better academic and personal outcomes.

Read Issue Paper

FASD for School Staff Level II

Practical Strategies for the School Environment is an advanced training course designed for educators and school staff working with students affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Building on the foundational knowledge from the Level 1 course, this training incorporates perspectives from individuals with FASD and their caregivers and is evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the needs of educators. It covers a range of essential topics, including a review of key points from the foundational course, characteristics of an FASD-friendly school environment, teaching strategies, and the importance of collaboration between educators and caregivers. Additionally, the course offers practical guidance on instructional, environmental, and assessment strategies, as well as managing transitions for students with FASD. Participants who complete the modules receive a certificate, and the course is discounted by 25% for residents of several Canadian jurisdictions. With the support of the Alberta Gaming, Liquor, and Cannabis agency (AGLC), Alberta residents can access the course for free. Enroll Now.

FASD RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS REVIEW

Children with FASD often face neurodevelopmental, behavioral, and physical challenges that can disrupt their schooling experience. Unfortunately, educators frequently lack adequate knowledge or the necessary resources to address these challenges effectively. This review sought to close this gap by evaluating the availability and quality of existing resources designed to support students with FASD in school settings.

It identified a variety of formats such as guides, books, videos, podcasts, and other educational tools. While the majority of resources focused on behavioral and learning support, very few provided guidance on referral pathways for diagnosis, a crucial need expressed by both educators and experts in the field. Experts and educators consulted during the review emphasized that although resources are available, they are often scattered across various platforms, making them difficult for time-constrained teachers to find and use.

It was also noted that most of the available resources were focused on supporting students' behavior and learning in the classroom. Only a limited number of resources offered tools to help educators identify FASD indicators, such as neurodevelopmental and behavioral signs. Text-based materials, including longer guides, factsheets, and books, were the most common type of resource, accounting for more than half of those identified. Other resources included videos, podcasts, and a few specialized screening tools. Most of these materials were accessible for free, and many were designed to be user-friendly for educators working under tight schedules.

Despite the broad range of resources, experts expressed a strong need for more centralized and accessible platforms where educators could easily access high-quality, evidence-based materials.

The review also highlighted several challenges. These included limited awareness of FASD among educators, difficulty accessing credible resources, and a lack of referral guidance for cases where educators suspect a student may have FASD. Although the resources identified provided valuable classroom strategies—such as structured environments, positive feedback, caregiver involvement, and multisensory learning approaches—these strategies are not yet widely integrated into formal teacher training materials.

While many resources exist to support educators working with students affected by FASD, significant gaps remain in terms of accessibility, quality, and comprehensiveness. Few resources have been rigorously evaluated, and there is a clear need for more accessible, evidence-based materials

Additionally, educators require better tools for making referrals when they suspect a student may have FASD. Addressing these gaps through the development of centralized repositories and short-format, high-quality resources will enable educators to more effectively support students with FASD, ensuring they receive the tailored support necessary for academic and social success.

Read Issue Paper here.

FASD Awareness and the Drive for a National Strategy.

At the 2024 FASD Day Awareness event hosted by the Northeast Alberta FASD Network, Laila Goodridge, Member of Parliament for Fort McMurray-Cold Lake, was warmly received by NEAFAN staff. Laila is proud to have called Fort McMurray home for her entire life and was appointed Shadow Minister for Addictions, as well as serving on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. Her presence at this event highlighted the importance of political advocacy in raising awareness and preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Over 90% of individuals with FASD face mental health challenges, and they are significantly more likely to struggle with substance use issues. The condition is often misdiagnosed, making it difficult for affected individuals to receive appropriate care. FASD intersects with multiple sectors, including healthcare, education, criminal justice, and social services. It carries heavy social stigma, impacting not only those with the disorder but also their families and mothers who consumed alcohol during pregnancy. Although Canada is a leader in FASD research, this research is not consistently reflected in national policy.

By amplifying the FASD Day initiative, MP Laila Goodridge demonstrated the vital political support needed to advance our cause, particularly in advocating for Bill S-253, which seeks to establish a national FASD framework. Her involvement highlights the essential role of government representatives in championing legislation that aids individuals and families affected by FASD. A coordinated national response, like the proposed framework in Bill S-253, would standardize prevention, diagnosis, and intervention efforts while fostering collaboration among government sectors to support individuals with FASD throughout their lives.

Let's Talk

The Prevention Conversation

It's time to talk about alcohol and pregnancy

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Amy Tobin, B.Ed, is the FASD Prevention Conversation Facilitator with NEAFAN (Northeast Alberta FASD Network) and an adoptive mother of two. Prior to motherhood, she was an elementary school teacher with the Fort McMurray Public School District for six years. Her passion for FASD, and its prevention, began nine years ago when she became a mother through adoption and was introduced, personally, to the beauty and perplexity of parenting those with prenatal alcohol exposure. Since then, she has dedicated much of her time to learning about, and educating others, on the effects of alcohol during pregnancy and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Her approach is one that takes into consideration the complexities that adoption, generational, and cultural trauma can play within FASD.

Prevention Conversation

The Prevention Conversation program aims to raise awareness of FASD and Prevention among target populations including Healthcare and Social Service Providers, Women of Childbearing Age(18-45), Partners, Families and Friends.

The Project is geared towards highlighting the importance of screening all women in child bearing age for alcohol use and risks associated with FASD, improve supports for these women and promote involvement of community members and primary care providers.

The Prevention Conversation is aimed at encouraging a community wide awareness of FASD and prevention, developing the skills within the community to engage in non-judgmental, empathetic conversations about alcohol use during pregnancy. The Prevention Conversation is centered around increasing our knowledge of FASD, training service providers on the use of screening tools to engage women in the Prevention Conversation.

To book a Prevention Conversation presentation, please contact:

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