



Dear Minister Cardy and Members of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly

We write to you as representatives from School Psychology and Clinical Psychology training programs at Mount Saint Vincent University, Acadia University, and Dalhousie University to voice our strong opposition to Bill-35 (An Act Respecting Empowering the School System) that would amend New Brunswick's Education Act. We are particularly concerned about the following sections:

11.1(1) A teacher who holds a master's degree approved by the Minister and completes the training approved by the Minister may administer a test prescribed by regulation, score the test and interpret and apply the results of the test, for the purpose of developing a personalized learning plan for a pupil.

11.1(2) This section and the regulations made under paragraph 57(1)(o.1) shall supersede all other provisions in the Psychologists Act and any regulation made under that Act

25.1 For the purposes of section 11.1 of the Act, the test that may be administered is the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-V)

As previously noted by the College of Psychologists of New Brunswick (CPNB), the New Brunswick Association of School Psychologists (NBASP), the Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick (LDANB), and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), the administration, scoring, and interpretation of standardized tests requires knowledge of psychometrics, advanced statistics, and cognitive processes (e.g., learning, memory). Additionally, knowledge of typical and atypical human development, behavioural principles, psychopathology, and their effect(s) on test performance and results is needed when conceptualizing results, formulating diagnoses, and developing an intervention plan. Currently, this knowledge is developed through at least six years of university training, multiple placements under the supervision of licensed/registered psychologists, several years of post-degree supervision, and a series of written and oral exams prior to becoming a licensed/registered psychologist. Teachers, even those with master's degrees and several years of specialized teaching experience, do not possess the level of expertise necessary to administer, score, and/or interpret standardized tests such as, but not limited to, the WISC-V.

Allowing teachers who lack necessary training to administer the WISC-V and/or other measures of cognitive functioning could put them and the children they assess at serious risk. Even with "training approved by the Minister," teachers will not be competent to administer, score, and interpret the WISC-V; doing so will put them at risk of misdiagnosing a child or recommending an intervention that could be unhelpful (further wasting valuable educational time and resources) or even harmful.

Furthermore, it is extremely concerning that the legislation only mentions one assessment instrument. The WISC-V is not meant to be used as a stand-alone measure, and the interpretation of this measure cannot be reduced to a series of numbers; it must be administered, scored, and interpreted in the context of a full psychoeducational assessment that includes a developmental and family history along with other assessment instruments necessary to answer the referral question. Teachers do not have the training or experience with case conceptualization and differential diagnosis to properly interpret the WISC-V in

context, nor can they accurately determine when WISC-V scores may be invalidated by an individual's background or circumstances (e.g., developmental trauma or other mental health difficulties/disorders) or by other factors which can occur during an assessment. Additionally, there are times when the WISC-V is not the appropriate measure of cognitive functioning, when the administration must be modified to meet the needs of a specific child or when additional measures must be added to the assessment battery to answer a specific question; teachers, unlike psychologists, do not have the training to make these complex assessment decisions. From a liability perspective, we believe putting teachers in this position is not only clinically irresponsible, but it could also be legally precarious, should a child be misdiagnosed or not provided with adequate services because of improper assessment.

There are multiple practical factors that do not seem to have been addressed before making the decision to allow teachers to administer the WISC-V. Specifically, it is not clear who will provide the extensive training needed to administer, score, and interpret the WISC-V, and who will purchase the tests, since test purchasing is restricted to those with graduate training in school and/or clinical psychology. We also wonder whether an integrated psychoeducational report detailing the results of testing will be provided to parents and students, as is the case when an assessment is completed by a psychologist. Communicating the results of psychoeducational testing, both orally and in writing, is a skill that requires several years of graduate training and supervision, and we question whether a teacher would have the necessary skills to produce an *integrated* report. We are also concerned about how files containing assessment information and reports will be stored and who will have access to them, given that they must be retained for 15 years after a student's 19th birthday.

We recognize that the impetus for the proposed changes to service provision in schools stems from difficulty with recruitment and retention of psychologists. Psychologists working in New Brunswick schools have consistently raised concerns about working conditions, especially when compared to their colleagues in other provinces. Rather than disadvantaging students and families, we urge the New Brunswick government to engage in meaningful discussions with CPNB, NBASP, and local training programs to address shortages and to find solutions that do not place teachers and students in risky and potentially harmful positions. We would also argue that school staff with specific expertise should be allowed to use it where they are best suited to do so; that is, teachers, especially specialists such as Resource teachers, should be allowed to prioritize instructional time with struggling students rather than adding another responsibility to their jobs. School psychologists should be permitted to use their considerable training and expertise to provide assessment and intervention services to students requiring them.

Sincerely,



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