



# Ontario Institute for Education Leadership

*Ontario Leaders Collaborating  
for Student Achievement, Equity and Well-being*

## STRENGTHENING EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AWARENESS

### Are you Listening to Students who are Non-Speakers?

A family, new to your community, has enrolled their 13-year-old daughter who is a non-verbal child with autism. The girl has been identified as autistic and so her parents expressed concerns about whether your school will be able to offer her the specialized programming she needs as set out in her Individual Education Plan (IEP). Based on the girls' first few days at the school, they brought forward additional concerns:

- As a non-verbal child, they do not want their child being forced to use Mouthspeak.
- The teacher is using a "reward system" and a visual schedule with their daughter, even though she is reading above grade level, and is a high performing student.
- The way in which the use of their daughter's Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device is being managed.

The parents have also shared that their daughter does not feel her teachers understand her when she tries to communicate. She is very concerned that she will not be able to use the washroom unless she is forced to use Mouthspeak.

The parents' discussed their concerns with the Special Education teacher who informed them that, he is following the School Board Team recommendation which are to use Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) strategies. In addition, Oral communication is one of the goals indicated on the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). The teacher assures the principal, he has the best interests of the child in mind. This teacher has many years of experience helping students with autism.

#### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. How will you approach this situation? What steps will you take?

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2. How does a school team decide what "best practice" is for each individual child?

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3. What relationships must be considered?

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4. What larger questions emerge from this scenario about educational policies/procedures as they pertain to communication differences?

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5. Who are the “experts?” Are there board personnel and/or community supports who need to be consulted?

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6. What new opportunities for learning could emerge from this situation?

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