

Developmental Language Disorder: An Appeal for Increased Government Support in the Schoolboard Setting

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Introduction and Goals

- ▶ My background
- ▶ My aims
 - ▶ Raise awareness about Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) among Ontario policymakers
 - ▶ Highlight the lack of public awareness about this disorder
 - ▶ Tie discussion into broader conversation around schoolboard SLP funding and staffing



What is DLD?

- ▶ A communication disorder causing difficulties across language domains (Kuiack & Archibald, 2019)
 - ▶ Persistent (Bishop et al., 2016)
 - ▶ Significant negative impact (Bishop et al., 2016)
 - ▶ Any domain
 - ▶ In school age: most significant at sentence or discourse level (Tomblin & Zhang, 2006)
 - ▶ Production and Understanding
 - ▶ Across modalities (writing, reading, speaking, listening)
- ▶ CANNOT be explained by existing biomedical condition associated with language disorder (Bishop et al., 2017)
 - ▶ If existing: Language disorder associated with X
- ▶ Can co-occur with condition that does not typically involve language disorder (Bishop et al., 2017)



Wide-Ranging Impacts of DLD

- ▶ Academic difficulties throughout development (St Clair et al., 2023)
- ▶ Lower academic qualifications in young adulthood (St Clair et al., 2023)
- ▶ Higher rates of reading and spelling difficulties, as well as math difficulties (McGregor, 2020)
 - ▶ Struggle most with high verbal demand math tasks (e.g. counting, arithmetic) rather than low verbal demand math tasks (e.g. number lines, magnitude comparison)
- ▶ Boys more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours; girls more likely to experience sexual abuse (McGregor, 2020)
- ▶ Higher rates of anxiety and depression (St Clair et al., 2023)
- ▶ Adults more likely to face unemployment (McGregor, 2020)



Prevalence of DLD and Lack of Awareness

- ▶ Prevalence: 7.6% (Norbury et al., 2016)
 - ▶ 7 times more prevalent than autism (McGregor, 2020)
 - ▶ ~Equal prevalence to ADHD (8%) (Ayano et al., 2023)
- ▶ Australian internet survey: Very low public awareness of DLD (19.9%) compared to autism (97.4%), ADHD (97.7%), and dyslexia (98.5%) (Kim et al., 2023)
 - ▶ Those who had heard of DLD had limited understanding of its characteristics (Kim et al., 2023)
- ▶ Confusing labelling practices may contribute to this (McGregor, 2020)
 - ▶ Situation improving but still ongoing
 - ▶ Increased public education can help
- ▶ Study in Europe focusing on concept - awareness up to average of 59% across countries, but still lower than for other conditions
- ▶ Canada likely faces similar struggles
- ▶ Australian study of teachers: Many did not have high level of understanding regarding traits of DLD
 - ▶ Increase teacher training to increase likelihood of catching at-risk children



Intervention in Ontario Schools - Approach and Benefits

- ▶ Tiered intervention approach in Ontario (Terreberry et al., 2021) - increased individualization and specialization with increased need (Ebbels et al., 2019)
- ▶ Approach supported by evidence - demonstrated effectiveness of non-SLP led intervention in Tiers 1 and 2
- ▶ More need for SLP at individualized service level (Tier 3)
- ▶ Targeted intervention of language impairment effective in children with DLD (Rinaldi et al., 2021)
- ▶ Classroom-based intervention alone not enough; individualized intervention needed
 - ▶ Requires sufficient resources and specialized staff to provide

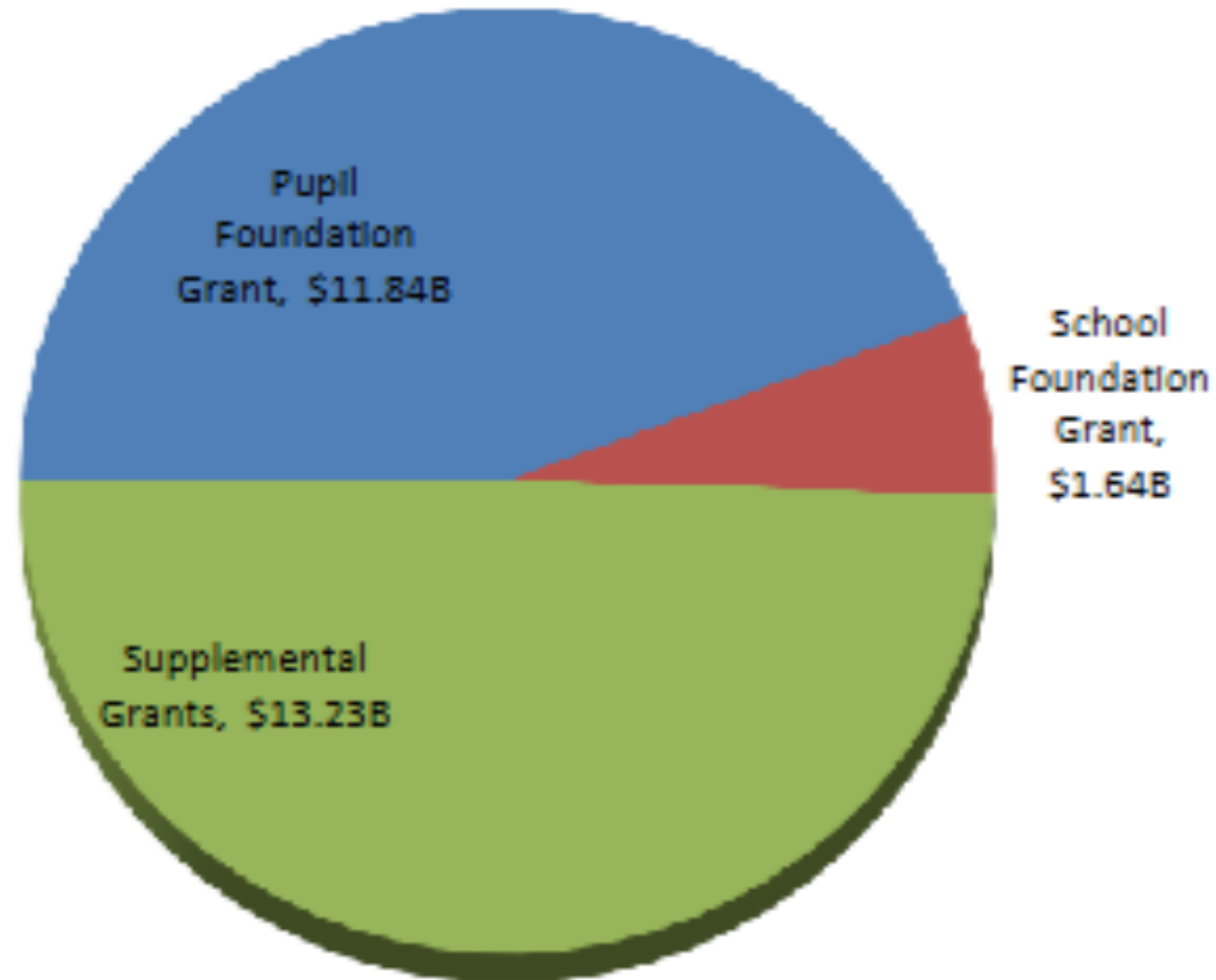


Funding, Staffing, and Caseloads



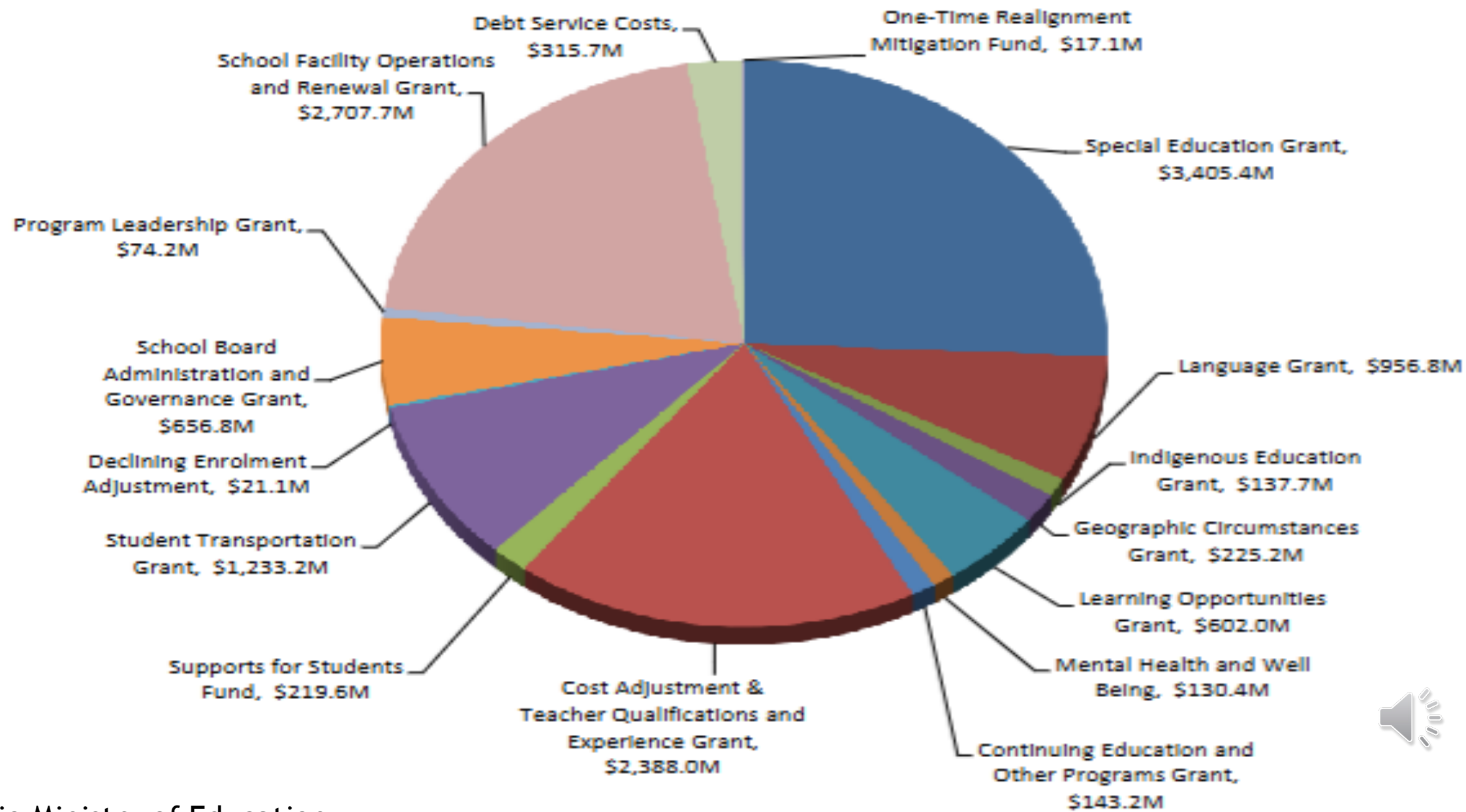
2023–24 Projected Grant Allocations

Total: \$27.08B.¹



(Ontario Ministry of Education,
2023)

Supplemental Grants



(Ontario Ministry of Education,
2023)

Funding, Staffing, and Caseloads

- ▶ Special Education funding - allocated at schoolboard discretion to special education areas - no funding guaranteed for SLP services (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023)
- ▶ Funding split with other professionals supporting special education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023)
- ▶ Study of Ontario schoolboard SLPs (Terreberry et al., 2021)
 - ▶ Challenges with personnel and time
 - ▶ Funding perceived as limited by many
- ▶ Low staffing and high caseloads (OSLA, 2021)
 - ▶ SLP:Student ratio in Ontario - 1 SLP per 3182 students
 - ▶ Improving, but not near recommended minimum ratio of 1:1500
- ▶ Caseload: 160-240 children per school per year
 - ▶ Caseloads of 40 or fewer recommended
- ▶ Issues compounded in DLD due to lack of awareness previously discussed



Takeaways

- ▶ Challenges faced by children with DLD are numerous
- ▶ Awareness surrounding DLD is low - more advocacy and training needed
- ▶ Limited funding and staffing of SLPs in schoolboard setting
- ▶ Greater funding of SLP services and advocacy/training efforts would be step towards ameliorating lives of children with DLD in Ontario
- ▶ Thank you for your time.



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