

Speaking notes for *Concerned About Classrooms Coalition*

Press Conference - January 16, 2009

Speaker 1 – Linda Walsh, CASLPA

Speaker 2 – Maureen Clarke, CAEDHH

- Good morning. My name is Linda Walsh and I am the President of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, also known as CASLPA.

- I am here today with
 - Maureen Clarke, a certified Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing who is representing the Canadian Association of Educators of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing;
 - Carole Willans, President of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association;
 - And Chantal Kealey, Director of Audiology and Supportive Personnel with CASLPA.

- Our message will follow in French.
- Together, we are **18** organizations, who make up the *Concerned About Classrooms Coalition*.
- This coalition is a group of organizations made up of audiology and speech-language pathology professionals as well as teachers and organizations focused on hearing health whose goal is to enhance the learning environment of millions of students and the vocal health of Canadian teachers.
- Now that our children are back in school for the new year, the *Concerned About Classrooms Coalition* is calling for the federal government to demonstrate

leadership and urge the provinces/territories to implement acoustical standards for Canadian schools.

- No legislation regarding standardized classroom acoustics currently exists across Canada. Noise conditions in Canadian classrooms are far from ideal.
- Children, who primarily learn through listening, need a learning environment in which they can fully hear and understand the teacher's instructions, particularly children with learning disabilities, hearing loss or those learning in a second language.
- Canadian studies show that many classrooms have poor acoustics and that children are often working

in classrooms with sub-standard listening conditions.

- Results from a Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network study show that **one in six words** is not understood by the average Grade 1 student due to excessive background noise and poor acoustics in Canadian classrooms.

Bradley, John. Does the Classroom Assist or Impede the Learning Process? Educational Leadership, Feb, 2005 ---

- Sources of this background noise can be:
 - Lighting ballasts
 - Heating and air conditioning systems
 - Computers and electrical appliances
 - Outdoor noise such as traffic and playgrounds
- Difficulty hearing in the classroom due to excessive background noise and poor acoustics can lead to:

- Poor understanding of the speech signal
 - Decreased performance
 - Reading deficiencies
 - Delayed language acquisition
- and many other negative consequences
- In a noisy classroom environment, **teachers** are also affected by the poor acoustic conditions in the classroom.
 - When the classroom background noise is high, the teacher must raise his or her voice, causing inevitable vocal strain.
 - In fact teachers constitute the highest percentage of voice related cases in speech therapy clinics across our country
 - Teacher absences due to voice problems not only interrupt the learning process for students, but are

also costly for our education system as well as our health care system.

- While there are many factors that can interfere with a child's academic development, poor acoustical conditions in classrooms are preventable. These need to be optimized to support learning.
- The *Concerned About Classrooms Coalition* warns that decision-makers need to be aware that noisy classrooms have the potential to negatively affect children's learning, but more importantly, that acoustics in classrooms can be improved, relatively inexpensively, to maximize learning.

***** **Maureen** *****

- The Acoustical Society of America has developed a classroom acoustics standard which has been approved by the American National Standards Institute, commonly referred to as ANSI.
- Consistent with long-standing recommendations for good practice in educational settings, this standard sets specific criteria for maximum background noise and reverberation time for unoccupied classrooms.
- The *Concerned About Classrooms Coalition* believes that Canada is in need of a similar set of standards and suggests adopting the American standards for the construction of new schools.
- While school building codes vary from province to province, it is essential that every province

examine their building standards to consider proper acoustics.

- New schools must be built with proper soundscape designs in mind and building standards must be revised to include classroom acoustics so that this is accomplished.
- In existing schools, sound-field amplification systems, which project the teacher's voice around the classroom, is one possible solution, and simple steps such as installing hypo-allergenic carpeting, curtains, or felt pads on the bottoms of chairs, can further improve the classroom acoustic environment.
- Our government needs to take responsibility for our children's education and push the provinces to implement building standards for schools.

- Provincial governments need to make sound decisions to protect our children's learning environment and that begins with implementing province-wide classroom building standards that include classroom acoustics.
- All **new** schools should be built with consideration of classroom acoustics and **existing** schools should be assessed and improvements made to address acoustics.
- Acoustically sound classrooms can help maximize children's learning potential for life.
- Thank you for listening to our message.

********Followed by French.********