

# The Welland Tribune

## Background noise gets failing grade in schools;

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Page: C2

Section: Lifestyle

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Dateline: TORONTO

A coalition of speech and audiology professionals are raising their voices to help dial down excessive background noise and improve poor acoustics in Canadian classrooms.

Concerned About Classrooms Coalition, which also comprises teachers and organizations focused on hearing health, is seeking to enhance the learning environment of students and vocal health of teachers across the country. The group is calling on Ottawa to show leadership by urging the provinces and territories to implement acoustical standards for Canadian schools.

The Acoustical Society of America has developed a classroom acoustic standard that sets specific criteria for maximum background noise and reverberation time in an unoccupied classroom, said Linda Walsh, president of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists. The coalition believes that Canada should follow suit.

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 the Canadian classroom. Sources of this background noise can include lighting ballasts, heating and air-conditioning systems, computers and electrical appliances, as well as outdoor noise from traffic and playgrounds.

"Children who primarily learn through listening need a learning environment in which they can fully hear and understand the teacher's instruction, particularly children with learning disabilities, hearing loss or those learning in a second language," Walsh said.

Difficulty hearing as a result of excessive background noise and poor acoustics can lead to decreased performance, reading deficiencies and delayed language acquisition in students, she said.

"While there are many factors that can interfere with a child's academic development, poor acoustical conditions in classrooms are preventable," she said. "These need to be optimized to support learning."

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