

# Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23





Chair and Board of Directors  
Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority

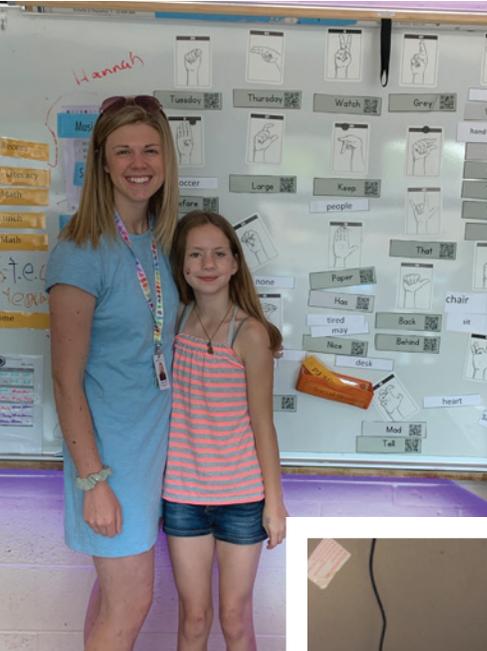
In accordance with Regulation 43 of the APSEA Act, I submit herewith this report on the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) for the school year ending 31 July 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Doucet". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Doucet  
Superintendent

# ABOUT APSEA



## Mission

APSEA, in collaboration with our partners, provides culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive, equitable, and accessible educational services and supports to children and youth who are blind or visually impaired and/or Deaf or hard of hearing and their families.



## Vision

The children and youth that we support reach their highest potential for an independent, self-sufficient, and fulfilling life.

## Guiding Principles

APSEA is child-focused, family-centred, research-based, collaborative, and inclusive.



# Message from the Superintendent



Dear Friends of APSEA,

It is with great pleasure that I share with you the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) 2022/23 Annual Report. This past year brought us back together after a multi-year pandemic, allowing us to engage with each other on important work that will shape the future of APSEA and how we better serve learners.

APSEA operates as an inter-provincial co-operative agency by joint agreement among the Ministers of Education/Education and Early Childhood Development/Early Years of Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. We work collaboratively with families, school teams and education and community partners, and this report shares some highlights of the past year.

In 2022-23, a considerable focus has been on implementing the recommendations of the Service Delivery Review and redesigning our service delivery by developing the Responsive Teaching and Learning Model. It will strengthen our ability to provide responsive, inclusive, equitable and accessible programs, services, and support.

The organization, leadership and Board of Directors remain focused on the same vision of supporting children and youth to reach their highest potential for an independent, self-sufficient, and fulfilling life. To the many learners and families we support, it is a privilege to work with you and I am grateful for your ongoing support and confidence in APSEA. Thank you to all employees and Board members who have contributed to APSEA's accomplishments over the past year. Your dedication to APSEA's mission and to our learners enriches the educational experience of those we support across Atlantic Canada.

Sincerely,

Lisa Doucet, Superintendent

# PROGRAMS & SERVICES

## Overview by Region

### Children and Youth Who Receive APSEA Services (2022-2023)

#### PROVINCIAL TOTALS

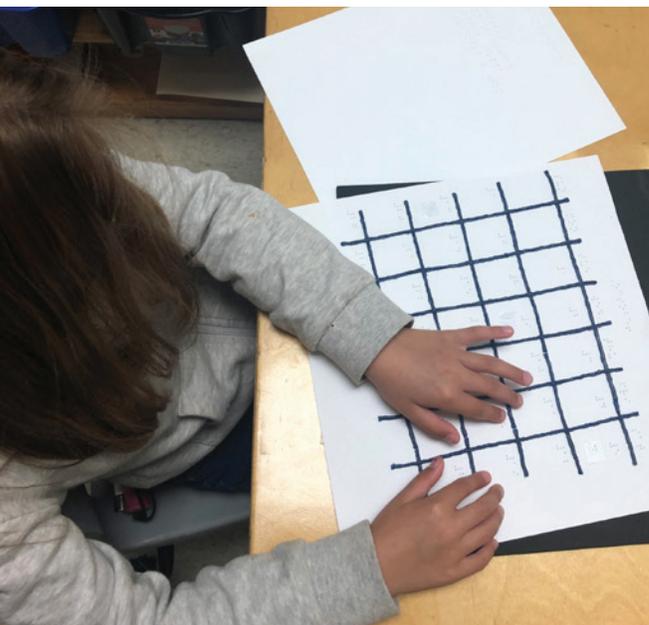
	BVI	DHH	Total
New Brunswick	111	312	423
Newfoundland and Labrador	44	18	62
Nova Scotia	230	591	821
Prince Edward Island	63	2	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>1371</b>

\*In Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island children and youth who are Deaf or hard of hearing receive support from school district employees. Children and youth who are blind or visually impaired in Newfoundland and Labrador receive support from district employees. These numbers reflect learners who received services from APSEA Orientation and Mobility staff, American Sign Language (ASL) specialists, Deaf Mentors, Mentors for Students who are blind or visually impaired, Speech Language Pathologist, and/or participated in the APSEA Virtual Learning programming in 2022-2023.

## Early Learning

APSEA's early learning programing is designed to serve the individual needs of children who are Deaf, hard of hearing (DHH), and/or blind or visually impaired (BVI) and their families during the critical development years of birth to age five.

Through regular home visits and support in preschool or early learning settings, APSEA employees work with family members, caregivers and other support professionals to create a program plan for learning and skill development for each child, including preparing for the transition to school.



## School-Age Children

APSEA provides students who are Deaf, hard of hearing (DHH), blind or visually impaired (BVI) with either consultative or direct service, depending on student and programming needs.

# AUTISM IN EDUCATION

Autism in Education (AIE) works to promote and develop collaborative initiatives that support province-based services for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through dissemination of information and professional learning, training, and capacity-building for educational professionals who support learners with ASD across Atlantic Canada. Here is a summary of some of AIE's key initiatives from the past year:

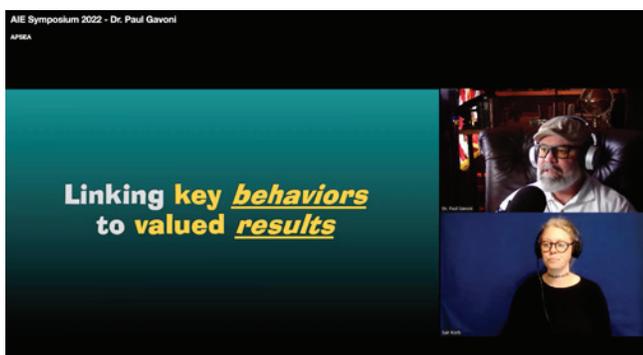
- Autism in Education hosted its annual Autism in Education Professional Learning Symposium early in the school year, with nearly 400 educators and educational partners from across Atlantic Canada participating. It focused on The Role of Assent, Choice, and Compassion in Supporting Autistic Learners/Learners with Autism and Behaviour Challenges. Presentations were delivered by expert researchers and practitioners who have made it their priority to support learners and families in a way that emphasizes compassionate care and learner assent. A highlight of the conference was a presentation by Shane Pelletier, from New Brunswick who shared his experiences as a former student with autism navigating the public K-12 school system. Shane is now a computer scientist, and he shared his perspective with conference attendees on what worked for him as a student, what did not work, and what he wishes his teachers

had known and had incorporated to support him on his journey through the school system. All conference presentations are available on the APSEA website: <https://apsea.ca/aie/webinars-and-presentations/symposiums/2022>

AIE continued to support professional learning throughout the school year by continuing the annual AIE Webinar Series and adding a new professional learning offering – AIE Mini Courses.

## AIE webinars included:

- Two-part series on Classroom Pivotal Response Training presented by Amber Fitzgerald, Project Manager for the Autism Intervention Research Network on Behavioural Health at the University of California – Davis.
- A Spectrum of Clinical and Practical Applications Derived from Behavior Analysis, presented by Dr. Patrick Friman, Vice President of Behavioral Health at Boys Town, Nebraska, and a Clinical Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Nebraska School of Medicine.
- Supporting Executive Skills for Autistic Learners / Learners with ASD, presented by Colin Guare, co-author, with Peg Dawson and Richard Guare, of Smart But Scattered book series on executive skills, and contributor to other publications on the subject of executive skills and ASD.



The new AIE Mini-Courses offered an in-depth exploration of a specific topic and ranged between three and eight sessions spread over a series of weeks. Sessions were prescheduled and hosted virtually after school and offered on a voluntary basis to any interested educator in Atlantic Canada. Small-group professional learning workshops consisted of a maximum 15 - 20 participants per group, depending on the topic.

**AIE Mini-Courses included:**

- **An Introduction to Verbal Behaviour:** This three-session series focused on the various functions of communication, and provided participants with strategies to help learners build communication skills in the classroom and school context.
- **Supporting the Development of Social Skills in the School and Classroom:** This three-session series was designed to support educational personnel with specific strategies to help learners with ASD and diverse needs build social skills in the classroom.
- **Deliberate Coaching:** This four-session series was based on the book *Deliberate Coaching: A Toolbox for Accelerating Teacher Performance* by Dr. Paul Gavoni and Dr. Nicholas Weatherly. This professional learning opportunity is designed to support educators and leaders adding to their coaching toolboxes by building and expanding their skills in areas such as setting a team up for success; the A-B-Cs of behaviour change; training vs. coaching; identifying and overcoming barriers to effective performance; SMART pinpoints; and purposeful coaching.
- **Everyday Behaviour Tools:** This seven-session series provided in-depth training on seven specific tools to help educational personnel address and reduce problem behaviour in the classroom. The tools include strategies to help strengthen behaviour, maximize relationships; pivot (away from “junk behaviour” and toward desired behaviour); engage in a non-reactive response (to avoid escalating behaviour); interrupt and redirect; set expectations; and use a written contract.

# VIRTUAL LEARNING & APSEA CONNECT

Virtual Learning encompasses APSEA's online programs for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired and/or Deaf or hard of hearing. The programs are designed to provide students with opportunities to meet and connect virtually with peers, as well as benefit from accessing the expertise of a diverse group of APSEA specialists and educators.

With culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive, equitable, and accessible programs designed to target areas of the DHH and BVI Expanded Core Curriculums, Virtual Learning reached students of all ages across all four Atlantic provinces in the 2022 – 2023 school year. Programs covered a wide range of topics with offerings in American Sign Language (ASL) and English. The online platform helps us reach more learners, enabling more peer connections and access to the best expertise for students wherever they are in Atlantic Canada.

APSEA Connect is an online resource for families, APSEA staff, educational and community partners. Throughout the year such participants are extended invitations to join online presentations, discussion and forums introducing professional and community agencies, as well as highlights of supports available to children and youth who receive APSEA services.



## PRODUCTION AND LIBRARY SERVICES

Production and Library Services (PALS) support the instructional needs of learners on the APSEA caseload by providing curriculum material in accessible formats. They also maintain a collection of professional resources available to APSEA employees.

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Professional Learning

In partnership with Doctor Wanda Thomas-Bernard and APSEA's DEI Consultant, Hailey Thomas, APSEA has made remarkable strides in promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) through a series of ongoing professional learning initiatives. Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, APSEA conducted a series of DEI workshop sessions, addressing critical themes such as Unconscious Bias, Microaggressions, and Authentic Allyship. APSEA staff also received valuable training on more specific topics such as 2SLGBTQIA+ and gender identities, Anti-Racism, and workshops focusing on identity, privilege, and actionable strategies for change in the DEI sphere.

The core purpose of this professional learning was to raise awareness and understanding among APSEA staff, ensuring comprehension of the significance of identifying, examining, and combatting unconscious bias, and the importance of allyship. We aimed to enhance cultural and linguistic awareness and enable the recognition of the diverse and intersecting identities of the students and families we serve, as well as our staff's unique diversity. These workshops and learning sessions are pivotal to the continuous progress of APSEA in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion. They are instrumental in educating and empowering all our employees, reinforcing our commitment to DEI.

APSEA, with input from the DEI committee, is creating a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy that conveys APSEA's commitment to: the principles of diversity, equality, and human dignity; the values of fairness, equitable treatment, inclusiveness, respect, collegiality, integrity, honesty and ethical behaviour; the importance of a sense of belonging; and diversity as one of the foundations of excellence in teaching and learning, engagement, research and discovery. APSEA will exemplify its commitment to the policy through its mission, vision, values, strategic plan and DEI framework.

## APSEA Diversity Bursaries

APSEA recognizes that there are a disproportionate number of individuals belonging to equity denied groups who face barriers while pursuing post-secondary programs in the specialized fields supporting individuals who are blind or visually impaired (BVI) and/or Deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). APSEA aims to reduce barriers and create a more inclusive professional body by offering four bursaries to individuals from equity denied groups. These bursaries were created with the support of APSEA's DEI Advisory Committee.

# CAMPS

## Brigadoon Village

Brigadoon Village is the largest pediatric medical camp in Canada. It provides a full camp experience so children living with the same illness or life challenge can attend a camp that is designed to accommodate their needs. APSEA partners with Brigadoon Village to offer Camp-See Ya (BVI) and Camp Whatcha Say (DHH) to its learners. This year, an APSEA family weekend camp took place in June. In the summer of 2023 Camp See-Ya and Camp Whatcha Say took place and during these one-week camps, campers took part in a wide range of activities (which are adapted to be accessible to them and ensure they can be successful). Brigadoon Village provides a rich learning and social experience giving campers the opportunity to make meaningful connections and friendships while building skills that will last a lifetime.



## Camp Canak

APSEA continued its partnership with Camp Canak in New Brunswick to host a weekend getaway designed to empower both learners who are Deaf or hard of hearing and their families. With a mix of structured activities and downtime, participants had opportunities to meet other families, chat with the Deaf mentors, and build connections and make lasting memories.

# EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

## Retirement and Long-Term Service

In June, APSEA held its annual retirement and long-term service celebration. APSEA employees from across Atlantic Canada gathered virtually to congratulate and acknowledge the honourees on great service and wonderful careers.

2023 retirees:

Mike Phelan  
Joanne Hodgins  
Sandra Mihan  
Sue Ley

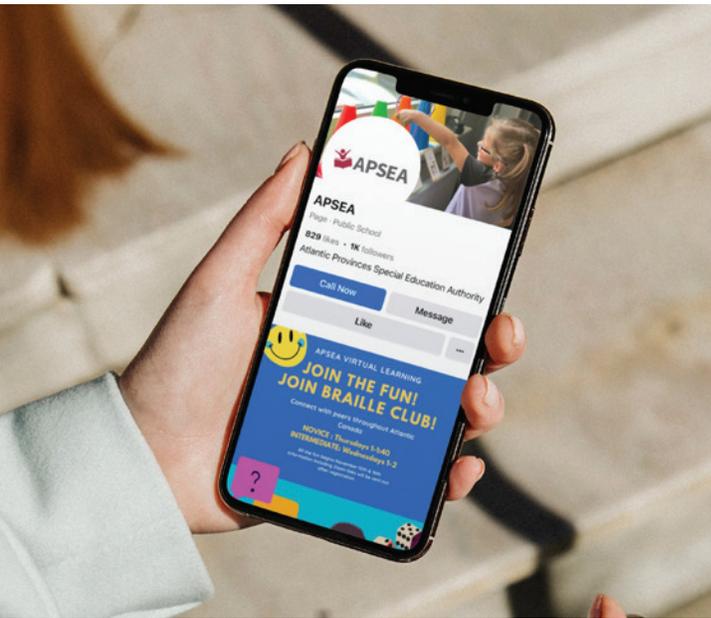
Twenty-five years of service:

Christa Rodrigues

## Nova Scotia Teachers Union Education Week Awards

APSEA Employees Christa Rodrigues, Erika Hermanson and Sheri Stevens were recipients of Nova Scotia Education Week Awards in 2023 which were presented by The Hon. Becky Durham, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and The Honourable Arthur J. LeBlanc, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia.





# SOCIAL MEDIA

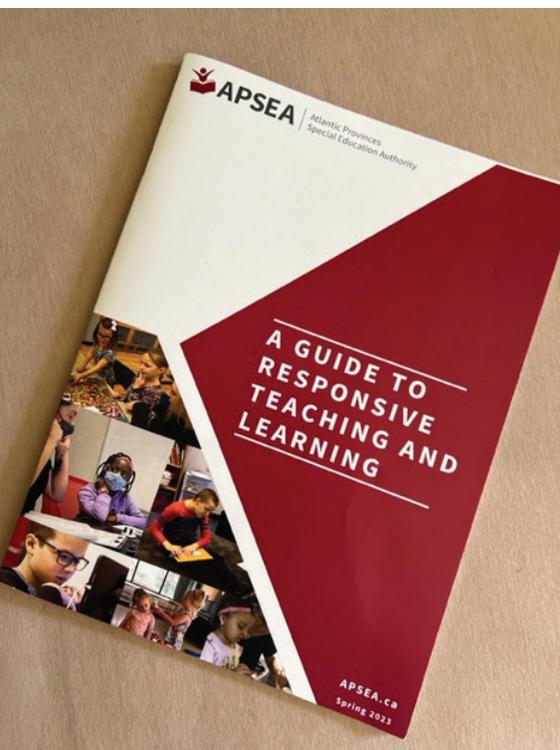
APSEA continues to have an active social media community where families, employees, key stakeholders, and the public regularly engage with posts and follow for useful information. APSEA utilizes Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) and can be found @APSEACANADA. Social media provides a space to engage with community and allows us to share highlights from within APSEA, promote community events and virtual learning opportunities and aid in recruitment of employees with sharing job opportunities.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Across Atlantic Canada, our learners, families, and team members work collaboratively to find creative and engaging ways to learn, teach and make connections. Throughout the year there are many bright spots all worthy of their own celebration, this report offers a quick snapshot of some of the great work across the region.

- Implementation of recommendations from APSEA's Service Delivery Review was a significant undertaking in the 2022-23 school year. The full report can be read [here](#). The key recommendations were used to inform the redesign of our Service Delivery Model. We prioritized our actions based on three key timeframes- immediate 1–6-month actions (August 2022-February 2023), short-term 7-12 months (March 2023- July 2023) and long-term actions (August 2023-July 2025). The implementation timeline can be reviewed [here](#).

The short and intermediate term deliverables have all be completed and much of the work is being implemented to enhance support for learners receiving APSEA services and their families.



APSEA's newly developed service delivery model, the Responsive Teaching and Learning Model is a student-centred, collaborative approach that is designed to include input from all APSEA Support Services, school-based education teams and families to ensure each learner is receiving the right supports at the right time. The implementation of the Responsive Teaching and Learning model will begin in the 2023-24 school year. This model will offer a consistent organization-wide approach to program planning as a critical component to support a greater degree of success in enabling students to learn and achieve. APSEA Service Delivery Teams and Program Planning Teams will work together to support the various programs and services across the Atlantic Provinces. These opportunities include in-person learning opportunities, virtual learning opportunities, and in-person gatherings.

## Professional Learning

- In advance of the 2022-23 school year, APSEA's Educational Interpreting Services team held their annual in-service. Team members from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick which includes Oral Interpreters, Educational Interpreters and Educational Deaf Interpreters gathered at the APSEA Centre in Halifax for three days of professional learning which provided tools and resources to help prepare for back to school.
- Saint Francis Xavier University invited APSEA staff to present at the February Professional Development Day. Two APSEA Itinerant Teachers developed an engaging presentation for pre-service teachers focusing on supporting students in classroom who are blind or visually impaired and/or Deaf or hard of hearing.



- In March the Nova Scotia BVI and DHH teams had the opportunity to get together in small groups in several areas of the province for in-person professional development. The focus was to learn more about the Multi-Tiered System of Support within Nova Scotia and to support diverse learners. Many thought-provoking conversations followed after hearing a presentation by Hailey Thomas, APSEA's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Consultant.



- Building on professional learning presented by Dr. Christine Roman-Lantzy the previous school year, a group of teachers delved into the intricacies of supporting students diagnosed with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI). They met once a month as a professional learning group to learn more about assessment and practices. Salient features, word bubbling and the CVI schedule were just a few of the topics discussed in-depth.



- Creating accessible materials for students diagnosed with Cortical Visual Impairment was the primary goal of a small group of itinerant teachers in Nova Scotia. They recognized a need to enhance the learning experiences and promote engagement for children/youth on their caseloads. The brainstorming began and accessible materials were designed. Focusing on the learner's needs, bright colours, additional textures, and opportunities for movement meant instant success. The group was excited to share their ideas and the accessible materials with their colleagues. The entire NS BVI team was impressed, and many children and youth benefitted from the project.
- Many APSEA staff gathered in Truro, NS this spring to learn more about the Responsive Teaching and Learning model. This began the ongoing professional learning that staff will delve into over the coming months

to understand the Responsive Teaching and Learning model, and how professional collaboration and communication will provide a framework for APSEA's programs and services through a collaborative, culturally and linguistically responsive process.

- In June, some APSEA team members gathered in Halifax for professional learning with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion consultant Hailey Thomas, the Information Technology and Human Resources departments. It was an invaluable experience to learn with so many other departments and to see colleagues making connections. Staff were serious while engaged in learning, but the room was filled with laughter during downtime for two full days.



# Virtual Learning



- APSEA Connect, the online resource for families, school teams and community partners offered many opportunities to connect and learn virtually. With a focus on collaboration and empowerment, sessions included ASL story time, sign language and playground communication for school staff, Canada Revenue Agency information session on benefits and credits for persons with disabilities, supporting learners and families in navigating the unplanned journey of sensory diversity, an introduction to APSEA counselling service, family focused sign language weekend, information session with Society for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians and New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc. to share information on services offered in the provinces and more.
- Sign Language and Playground Communication was our most successful virtual program yet, with more than 150 interested school staff registering. Led by APSEA ASL specialists with support from other staff, this four-week program brought together educators from all four Atlantic provinces and introduced American Sign Language (ASL) vocabulary commonly used at school.
- Virtual Learning delivered many sessions throughout the year, including:
  - Shirley Corbett, Speech-Language Pathologist hosted a virtual learning session for teachers who work with students who are Deaf and/or hard of hearing on Augmentative and Alternative Communication.
  - Orientation and Mobility hosted a virtual session on Winter Travel. It was designed for students to reflect on and discuss experiences, challenges and to learn new strategies related to travelling in inclement and wintry weather.
- Summer programs - Summer in a Box and Summer YouTube Crew.
- Virtual Learning ASL Cohort end of year celebration in Halifax.



- ASL Storytime continued for the second year, shining as one of our most popular programs. Supported by APSEA's Deaf mentors and an ASL specialist, this program is an opportunity for families and learners to practice their signing and meet members of the Deaf community in a relaxed online environment while enjoying a children's book.



- New for 2022 - 2023 were our Virtual Learning Single Sessions. These saw our virtual learning teacher partnered with a different APSEA specialist each time, leveraging the expertise and diversity within our organization. Topics included a book club, an exploration of identity, and ASL 1 - 10 number stories.
- Having the opportunity to showcase their access technology is a great way for a learner to demonstrate skills and teach a peer. This is what happened when two educational support teachers connected two students so they could learn from each other. A student in one regional center for education in Nova Scotia was a role model for a student in another area and encouraged using the access technology they both had in the classroom.

## In-Person Learning Opportunities

- An introduction to Goalball was hosted at the APSEA gym by Orientation and Mobility team. Goalball is a paralympic sport played exclusively by athletes who are blind or visually impaired, APSEA's event was led by certified coaches. In November, Simon Richard of Parasport New Brunswick facilitated a goalball workshop at Southern Victoria High School in Perth-Andover, providing four Phys-ed classes the opportunity to learn and try this sport for visually impaired.



- In January an itinerant teacher was asked by Antigonish Education Centre (Grades P-4) to do a presentation for World Braille Day. It was wonderful to teach 500 + students about Braille Literacy and why it is so important for students who cannot rely on their eyes to read. They discussed the incredible inventor, Louis Braille and how braille was created. Students participated in simulated activities and could take home a sentence written in braille. “Go Canada go” was the favourite sentence because Canada had just won the World Junior Championship.

- SuperNOVA Science supported our ASL cohorts once again, providing science kits that were mailed in advance and hands-on science lessons for learners. Further expanding this relationship, SuperNOVA staff participated in an APSEA Connect Day in the spring, bringing science fun such as elephant toothpaste to the event.



- APSEA ASL specialist, Symara Bonner, and Deaf mentor, Chrissy MacNeil, travelled to Newfoundland and Labrador in the spring to meet learners, school staff and families. Over the course of a week, they visited several different communities, collaborating, sharing professional expertise, and deepening connections that had been made online.

- In May 2023, learners (ages 11-15) attended a full-day Orientation and Mobility (O&M) event in Halifax that focused on improving city travel skills. Each learner received one-on-one in-person instruction from an O&M Specialist, targeting areas of independent urban travel specific to their identified needs. They also participated in a group session facilitated by APSEA Mentors for Learners who are Blind or Visually Impaired based on the online series: Planes, Trains and Canes which features Dr. Mona Minkara, who is blind and travels throughout the world using various forms of public transportation; sometimes choosing to do so as independently as possible, while other times choosing to seek out assistance available to her in a particular moment or travel scenario.
- A Parent Session was also scheduled as part of the day, when parents and family members of the O&M learners had the opportunity to explore BVI topics of interest in a group discussion facilitated by APSEA Social Worker.

# Virtual Gatherings

- Learners receiving services from across Atlantic Canada participated in the Braille Challenge between February and March. Braille Challenge is an academic competition held for learners who are blind or visually impaired and it was developed by the Braille Institute to motivate students to practice their braille literacy skills. A virtual celebration took place to celebrate the end of the challenge and the hard work of participants.



- ARC (APSEA Rec Club) offered opportunities to students who are blind or visually impaired from across Atlantic Canada to connect with peers virtually for recreational activities, conversation, and games. Hosted by the Mentors for Students who are blind or visually impaired, the 60-minute sessions were divided by grade level (4 to 6, 7 to 9, and 10-12) to help students better relate to each other.
- AMP (APSEA Mentorship Program) guided by the APSEA Mentors for students who are blind or visually impaired focuses on helping students develop skills to mentor other students. This program was offered on a weekly basis, exploring various topics including leadership, lived experience, goal setting, self-advocacy, teamwork, communication, and relationship building.
- AMP welcomed learners who are Deaf or hard of hearing from elementary to high school to come together and learn from each other. Supported by APSEA's Deaf mentors, learners explored topics such as self-advocacy, leadership, and communication, while sharing experiences and building community.



# In-Person Gatherings

In-person gatherings took place throughout the year with regional gatherings hosted by APSEA Early Learning and Counselling Teams for learners and families who are BVI or DHH in Kentville, Sydney and Sackville. Family Gatherings were held in Bathurst, Fredericton, Halifax, Truro and Moncton.



# More Highlights

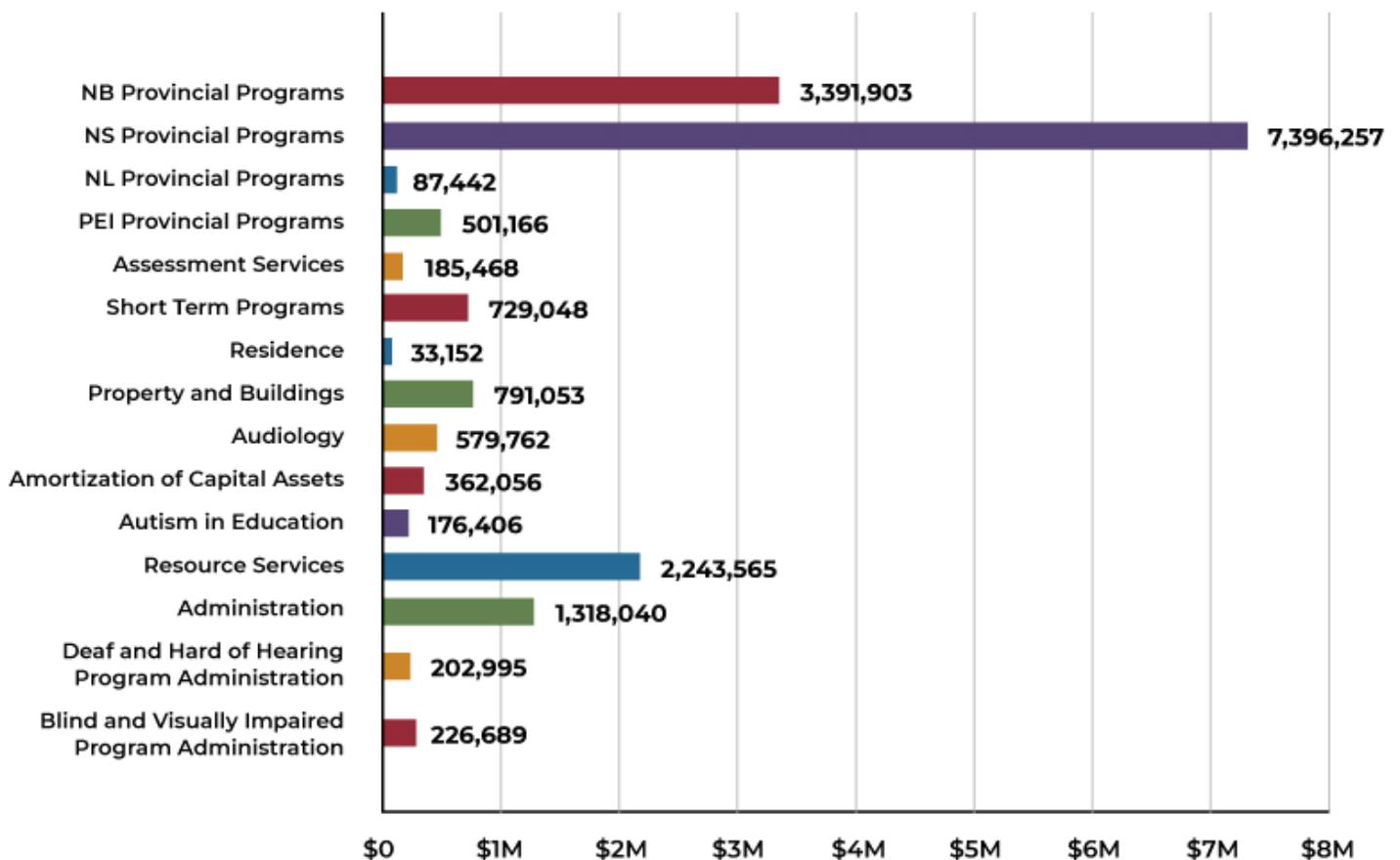
- Access Technology, Audiology, and Speech Language Pathologist collaborated regularly with colleagues including counsellors, early learning specialists, orientation and mobility, and Education Support Teachers.
- Christine Muise, Senior Alternate Format Technician at APSEA received the American Printing House's Louis Braille Award (Creative use of Braille) for her work in collaboration with Mi'kmaw community members to develop Mi'kmaw Braille Code. The code is meant to ensure that all braille users of Mi'kmaw language have a standardized, consistent braille code available to them. The Mi'kmaw Braille Code has been endorsed by Braille Literacy Canada and has been made available to transcribers in North America.
- APSEA's ASL Specialist, Holly Green contributed to a collaboration between NSCC, Deaf Mi'kmaw signers and elders to have the Mi'kmaq Honour Song translated into sign language.
- APSEA's Accessibility Committee developed a three-year accessibility plan for the organization. The province of Nova Scotia in support of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act is working towards a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Our plan is in support of this goal, and it focuses on four key areas: Education, Built Environment, Information and Communication and Employment. The



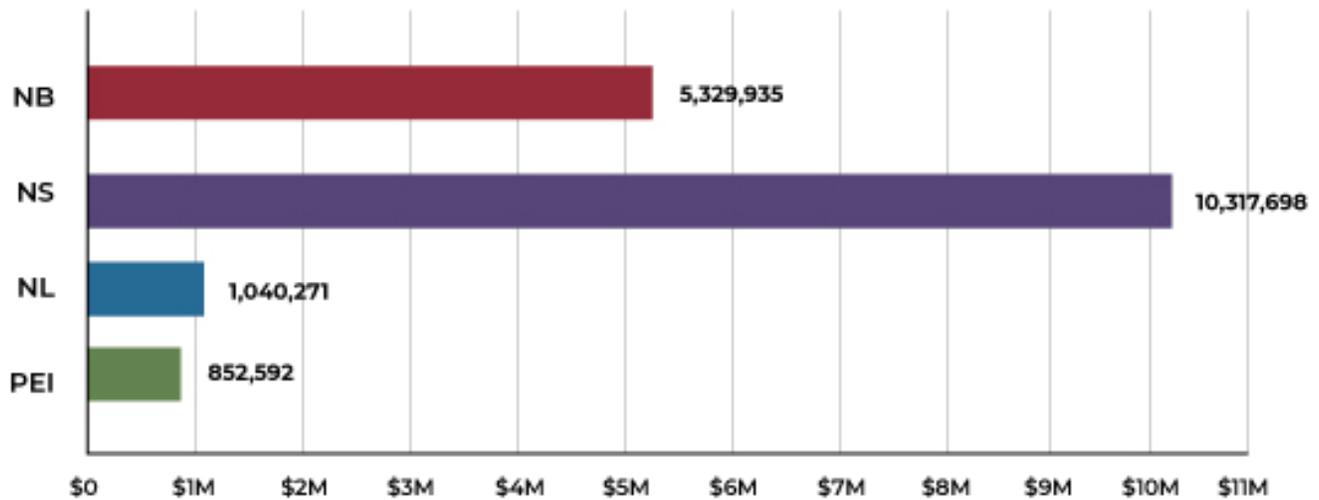
committee invested significant time in determining the areas of focus needed to achieve our immediate accessibility goals and consulted with families, key stakeholders, community partners, staff and individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired. It was important to gather as many perspectives as possible to ensure the work is meaningful and the best way to do that was to hear from those who have lived experienced and / or know of accessibility barriers at APSEA. The full plan can be read [here](#).

# REVENUE & EXPENDITURE

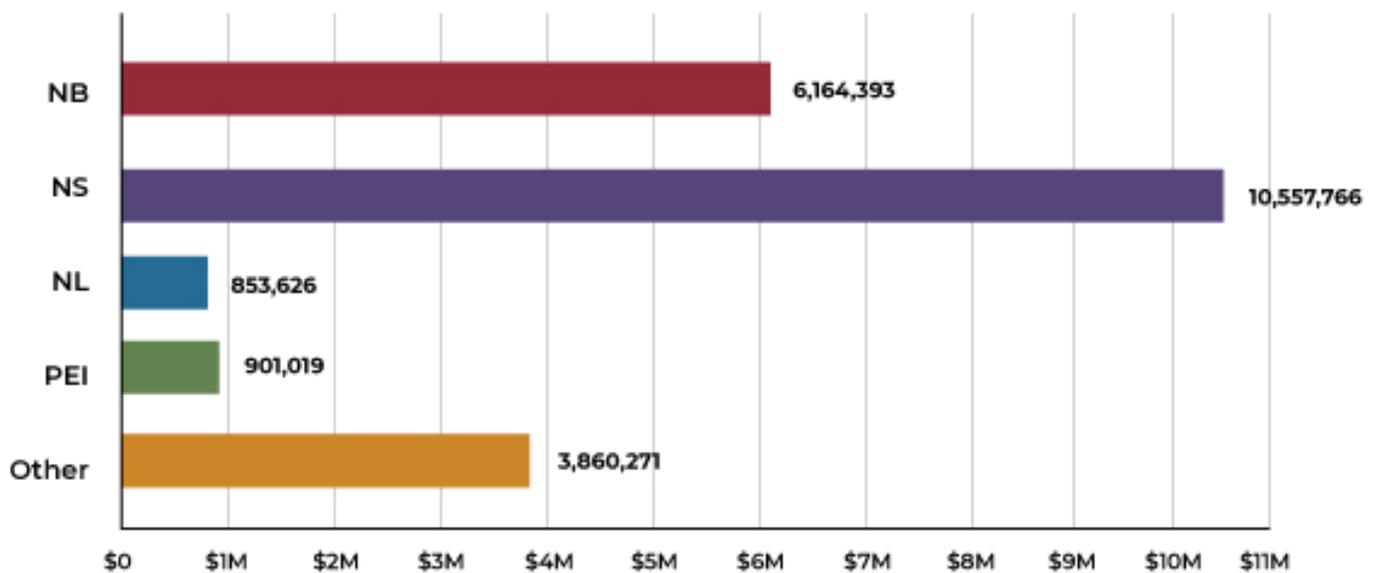
## Operating Expenses



## Expenditure by Province



## Operating Revenue



## ATLANTIC PROVINCES SPECIAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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