

Meghan Toal & Bonar Buffam

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

School District 23 (Central Okanagan) Board of Education
1040a Hollywood Rd S
Kelowna, BC

April 23, 2026

RE: Upcoming reduction of literacy intervention services for vulnerable learners

Dear SD23 Board Members;

We are writing today to express support for the Evolve Program Literacy Program and share our concerns about the proposed reduction in services related to this programming for the 2026/2027 school year. Since September 2025, our son [REDACTED] has been receiving Tier 3 literacy intervention support through this program. It has significantly supported his growth and development as a vulnerable learner.

In 2023, [REDACTED] was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (adhd inattentive type), followed by a dyslexia and dysgraphia reading and writing learning disability diagnosis in the fall of 2025. His diagnosis was determined through a psychoeducational assessment at the Okanagan Ability Centre in Kelowna. Since beginning kindergarten in the fall of 2022, school has been challenging for [REDACTED]. The challenges that accompany his neurodivergence have made learning in the classroom very difficult for him at times. He has struggled to maintain his attention while receiving instruction and during independent work time; his learning disability can also make him feel very lost, confused and alienated in the classroom. Although he was making many friends and being a kind, quiet, respectful and well-liked student and classmate, we observed him falling behind academically from kindergarten through the second grade.

What was more distressing for us as parents than his academic delay was witnessing our extremely intelligent, imaginative and creative child demonstrate behaviors that suggested that he was already 'floating away' or 'checking out' of the learning environment and process. We noticed a gradual intensification of his negative attitude and orientation toward school, as well as increased school resistance and anxiety about being at school or

having to engage in reading and writing. When we would attempt the at-home practice required throughout those early years, we were met with intense emotions and resistance from [REDACTED]. It was very difficult for everyone, but it was especially hard on him.

We would lie awake at night with our own anxieties about our child's future, as we are aware of the well-documented correlation between low literacy skills and mental health challenges, substance abuse, employment challenges, homelessness and other negative health outcomes. We felt an urgent need to implement necessary literacy interventions for our child. In 2nd grade we began private tutoring, but we saw minimal measurable growth in his literacy skills. By the end of 2nd grade, [REDACTED] was essentially still a non-reader, barely demonstrating basic phonological awareness, let alone reaching any level of reading and writing fluency. This was not because his classroom teachers were inadequate - they were excellent. It was because of the profound level of need [REDACTED] had for regular, focused literacy intervention that went well beyond what a classroom teacher who is responsible for the learning of 20-30 other students can provide.

At the beginning of 3rd grade, [REDACTED] was referred to the Evolve program led by Michelle Redman. It is an understatement to say Evolve has been a lifeline for our child. Through the course of this school year, we have watched our school withdrawn, resistant learner blossom into a self-determined, confident child both in and out of school. We believe this is due to his participation in this program. It has provided him with structured, regularized and concentrated literacy intervention that has dramatically improved his literacy skills and strengthened his confidence as a learner. It's not just that he has seen evidence of his own growth, but he now believes that he *can* learn with the appropriate support. He better understands his own neurodivergence and himself as a learner. He can now advocate for what he needs to be successful as a literacy learner because of the work Michelle and her team have done with him in this program.

Beyond what we have observed as parents, quantitatively the data has been very telling. [REDACTED] has demonstrated about a 30% increase in both his words per minute and accuracy since starting the program 8 short months ago in September, going from 21 WPM with 70% accuracy to 63 WPM with 97% accuracy. This is great progress in a short amount of time. Even more importantly, he has developed a love of reading during this time as well. Between 'ear reading' (audiobooks), parent-supported reading and independent reading, [REDACTED] has consumed about 25-30 novels and graphic novels since September, showing strong retention and comprehension of the material—an outcome we could not have imagined at the beginning of this school year. Data is an important indicator of growth, but

so is the quiet murmur of a child reading to themselves in the back seat of the car, or on the couch in the living room. Because of the Evolve program, we are less likely to be lying awake at night worrying about our child's learning future and more likely to be awoken by the sound of our child sneakily reading books with his reading light under the covers at night. It is a beautiful sound.

Ultimately, it may be possible that private tutoring and other interventions external to the school environment may have led to similar growth over time, but, in our experience, they were far less effective. More importantly, if we as a community believe that public education is foundational to health, well-being and a functional society, we cannot rely on fee-for-service, private sector interventions to fill the gaps for vulnerable learners. This is not an accessible nor equitable path forward. Upstream interventions for diverse learners are well worth the investment and have been demonstrated to ultimately cost taxpayers and decision makers less long term. A 2025 report from the National Literacy Alliance states, "the Atkinson Centre (2021) calculated returns of \$2 to \$7 for every dollar invested in early care and learning. The costs of inaction, however, are equally stark: the World Literacy Foundation (2015) estimated that illiteracy costs the global economy over \$1 trillion (USD) annually in direct losses"¹. Investing in literacy is not only the ethical thing to do, but it's also the fiscally responsible path forward

We would like to close our letter by sharing what our child told us recently about his time in Evolve this past year. To quote [REDACTED] ***"Last year I thought I would never ever learn to read, and now I am basically so good at reading"***.

Thank you for considering our experience in making your decisions about resource allocation for the next school year. Losing the Evolve program or even a reduction of services under the program would be a massive risk to vulnerable learners like [REDACTED] and a loss for us all.

Take Care;

Meghan Toal and Bonar Buffam

¹ By the National Literacy Alliance the CASE for a NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY. 2025. ([The case for a national Literacy strategy - 2025](#))