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N.S. extends learning disability tuition

By CBC News
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The Nova Scotia government plans multi-year support for a program that pays private school tuition for children with learning disabilities.

The Nova Scotia government plans multi-year support for a program that pays private school tuition for children with learning disabilities.

Education Minister Marilyn More said Wednesday the tuition support program will be extended to a maximum of three years per student. Up until now, the program has only been renewed on a year-to-year basis.

The program allows parents up to \$6,600 a year to help offset the cost of private school for their children who have a learning disability.

More said the program could be extended to four years for some students, but only under exceptional circumstances.

"We feel that three years would benefit those children who might benefit from this kind of placement, and still give the focus each year of knowing they have to go back to the public school system," More said. "It allows the public school system to be prepared to serve their needs."

That worries Wade Brummett. His 14-year-old daughter has attended Bridgeway Academy for the past five years.

"We're a little bit disappointed in the NDP because in the past they've said - in fact Mr. Dexter has gone on record in saying - that they don't believe that there should be any time limit on this program and a limit would be arbitrary," he said.

Brummett, chairman of a group that represents the families of children with learning disabilities, said they will continue to lobby government to remove this new limit.

"Much like a physical disability, where you wouldn't take a wheelchair ramp away after three years, with an optional fourth year, you can't expect a learning disability to just somehow heal. It doesn't work that way," Brummett said.

Many students who max out on the tuition program likely won't return to the public school system that failed them, he said.

That means their parents are going to have to make some tough choices in order to keep their children in private school, Brummett said.

"The likelihood is they're going to take out another mortgage, they're going to go into their RRSPs, they're going to avoid replacing the 10 year old car and make those sacrifices in order to do the right thing for their kids," he said.

Only students who attend Landmark East in Wolfville, Churchill Academy in Dartmouth and Bridgeway Academy in Dartmouth and Truro are eligible for tuition support.

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