

# Developmental Language Disorder: An Appeal for Increased Government Support in the Schoolboard Setting

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# Introduction and Goals

- ▶ My background
- ▶ My aims
  - ▶ Raise awareness about Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) among Ontario policymakers
  - ▶ Highlight the lack of public awareness about this disorder
  - ▶ Tie discussion into broader conversation around schoolboard SLP funding and staffing



# What is DLD?

- ▶ A communication disorder causing difficulties across language domains (Kuiack & Archibald, 2019)
  - ▶ Persistent (Bishop et al., 2016)
  - ▶ Significant negative impact (Bishop et al., 2016)
  - ▶ Any domain
  - ▶ In school age: most significant at sentence or discourse level (Tomblin & Zhang, 2006)
  - ▶ Production and Understanding
  - ▶ Across modalities (writing, reading, speaking, listening)
- ▶ CANNOT be explained by existing biomedical condition associated with language disorder (Bishop et al., 2017)
  - ▶ If existing: Language disorder associated with X
- ▶ Can co-occur with condition that does not typically involve language disorder (Bishop et al., 2017)



# Wide-Ranging Impacts of DLD

- ▶ Academic difficulties throughout development (St Clair et al., 2023)
- ▶ Lower academic qualifications in young adulthood (St Clair et al., 2023)
- ▶ Higher rates of reading and spelling difficulties, as well as math difficulties (McGregor, 2020)
  - ▶ Struggle most with high verbal demand math tasks (e.g. counting, arithmetic) rather than low verbal demand math tasks (e.g. number lines, magnitude comparison)
- ▶ Boys more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours; girls more likely to experience sexual abuse (McGregor, 2020)
- ▶ Higher rates of anxiety and depression (St Clair et al., 2023)
- ▶ Adults more likely to face unemployment (McGregor, 2020)



# Prevalence of DLD and Lack of Awareness

- ▶ Prevalence: 7.6% (Norbury et al., 2016)
  - ▶ 7 times more prevalent than autism (McGregor, 2020)
  - ▶ ~Equal prevalence to ADHD (8%) (Ayano et al., 2023)
- ▶ Australian internet survey: Very low public awareness of DLD (19.9%) compared to autism (97.4%), ADHD (97.7%), and dyslexia (98.5%) (Kim et al., 2023)
  - ▶ Those who had heard of DLD had limited understanding of its characteristics (Kim et al., 2023)
- ▶ Confusing labelling practices may contribute to this (McGregor, 2020)
  - ▶ Situation improving but still ongoing
  - ▶ Increased public education can help
- ▶ Study in Europe focusing on concept - awareness up to average of 59% across countries, but still lower than for other conditions
- ▶ Canada likely faces similar struggles
- ▶ Australian study of teachers: Many did not have high level of understanding regarding traits of DLD
  - ▶ Increase teacher training to increase likelihood of catching at-risk children



# Intervention in Ontario Schools - Approach and Benefits

- ▶ Tiered intervention approach in Ontario (Terreberry et al., 2021) - increased individualization and specialization with increased need (Ebbels et al., 2019)
- ▶ Approach supported by evidence - demonstrated effectiveness of non-SLP led intervention in Tiers 1 and 2
- ▶ More need for SLP at individualized service level (Tier 3)
- ▶ Targeted intervention of language impairment effective in children with DLD (Rinaldi et al., 2021)
- ▶ Classroom-based intervention alone not enough; individualized intervention needed
  - ▶ Requires sufficient resources and specialized staff to provide

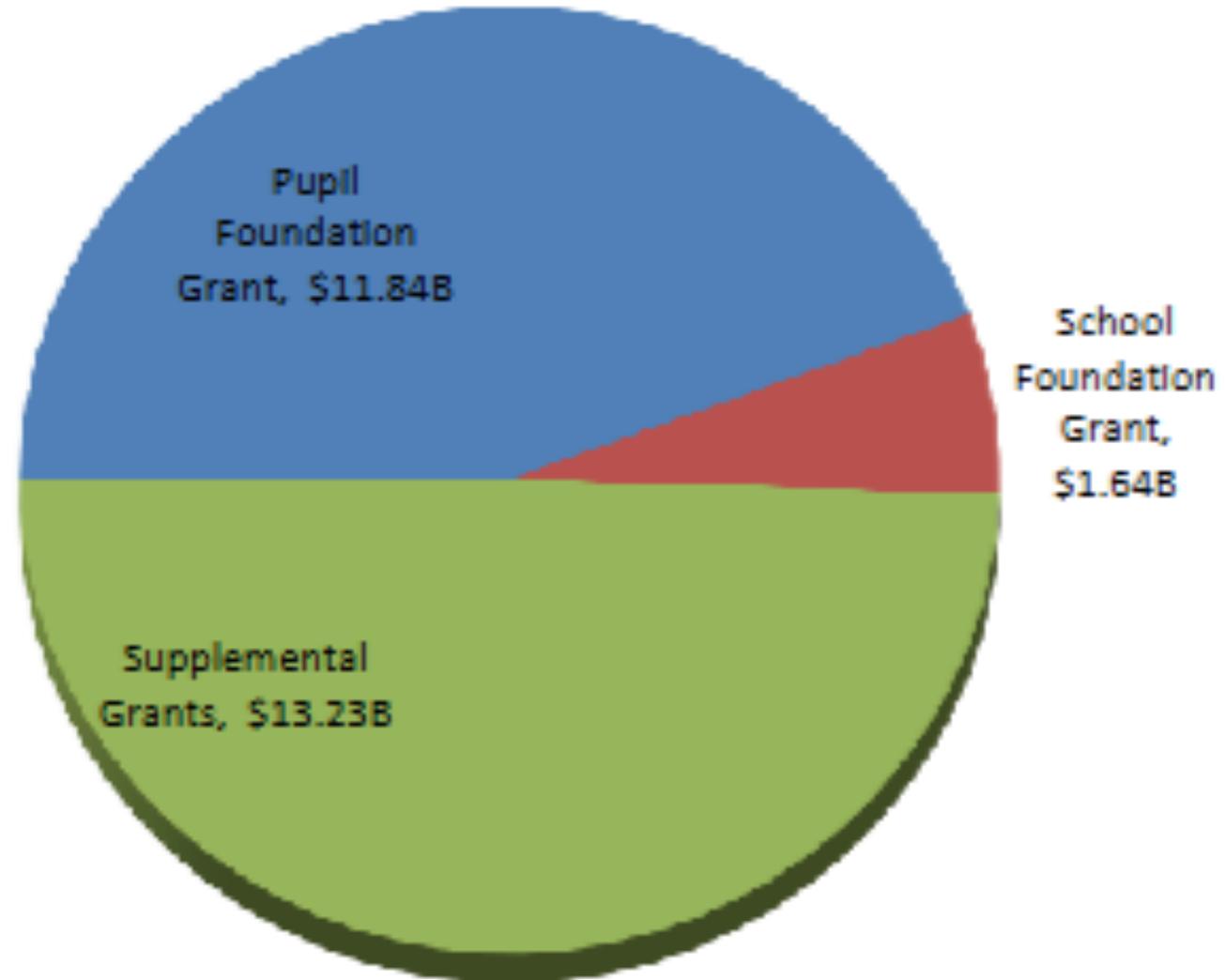


# Funding, Staffing, and Caseloads



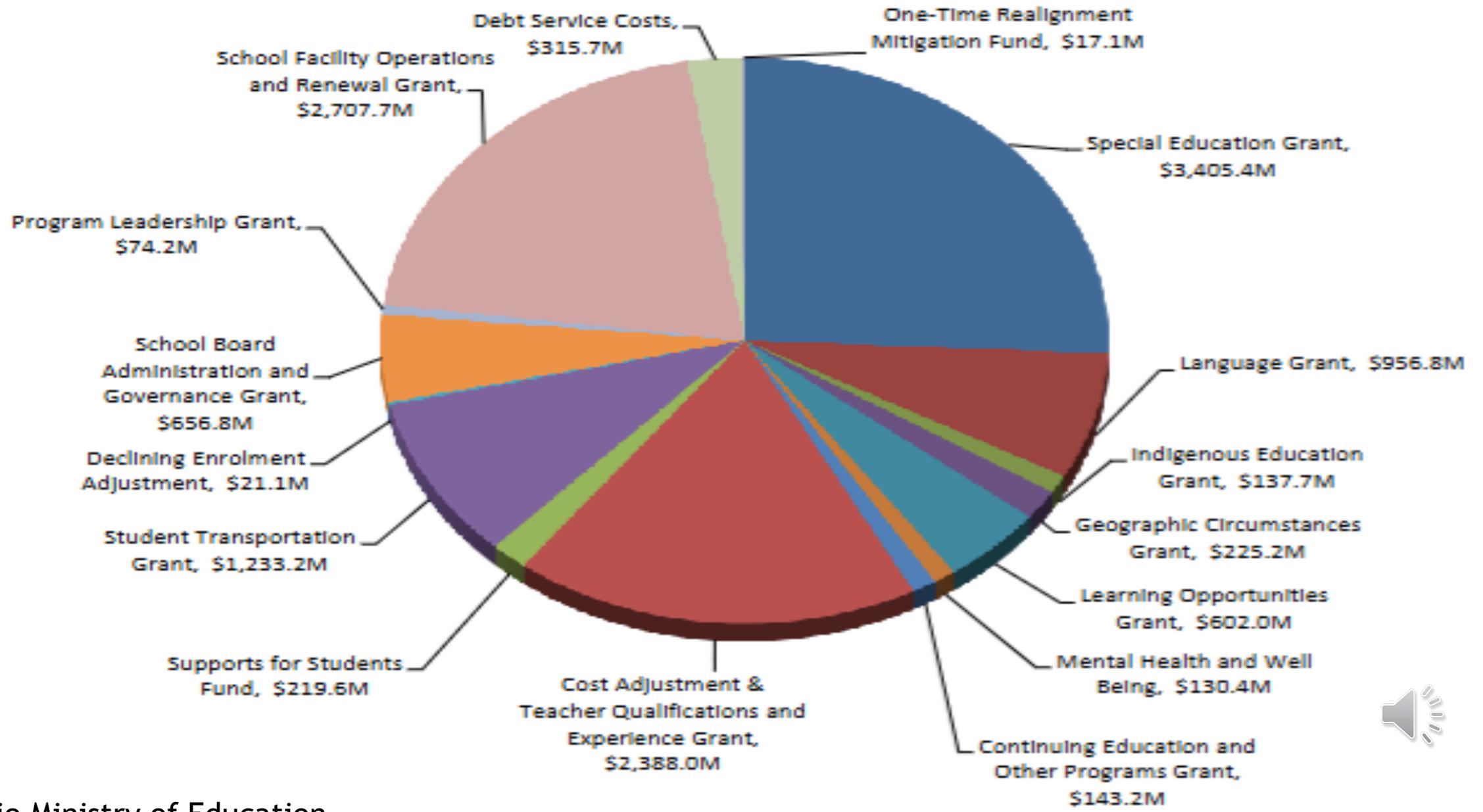
# 2023–24 Projected Grant Allocations

Total: \$27.08B.<sup>1</sup>



(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023)

# Supplemental Grants



(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023)

# Funding, Staffing, and Caseloads

- ▶ Special Education funding - allocated at schoolboard discretion to special education areas - no funding guaranteed for SLP services (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023)
- ▶ Funding split with other professionals supporting special education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023)
- ▶ Study of Ontario schoolboard SLPs (Terreberry et al., 2021)
  - ▶ Challenges with personnel and time
  - ▶ Funding perceived as limited by many
- ▶ Low staffing and high caseloads (OSLA, 2021)
  - ▶ SLP:Student ratio in Ontario - 1 SLP per 3182 students
  - ▶ Improving, but not near recommended minimum ratio of 1:1500
- ▶ Caseload: 160-240 children per school per year
  - ▶ Caseloads of 40 or fewer recommended
- ▶ Issues compounded in DLD due to lack of awareness previously discussed



# Takeaways

- ▶ Challenges faced by children with DLD are numerous
- ▶ Awareness surrounding DLD is low - more advocacy and training needed
- ▶ Limited funding and staffing of SLPs in schoolboard setting
- ▶ Greater funding of SLP services and advocacy/training efforts would be step towards ameliorating lives of children with DLD in Ontario
- ▶ Thank you for your time.



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