

Comments on the Report of the Safe Schools Action Team (September 2006)

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) would like to congratulate the members of the Safe Schools Action Team on their June report, *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action*. In February 2006 LDAO had sent comments and suggestions on the consultation questions to Chair Liz Sandals. We were very pleased to see many of our concerns and ideas reflected in the recommendations in the report.

The report contains many good ideas about prevention which we support. Individual safety plans were mentioned, and for students with special education needs we would add that these should be included in their Individual Education Plans.

LDAO is very supportive of the concept of progressive discipline, and we agree that there should be in-school disciplinary alternatives as steps in a progressive disciplinary framework. As part of policy development, it would be helpful if the Ministry could provide guidelines to schools on supervision of students during in-school suspensions.

The report contains good recommendations for education and training of staff, especially on recognizing mitigating factors and understanding students with special education needs. In addition, we suggest that training be provided for parents, on the application and procedures of the Safe Schools Act, and on their board's progressive discipline approach. We were also very pleased to see the emphasis on involvement of parents and SEACs, and on outreach to communities. Community partnerships could be one avenue to ensuring recreation opportunities for youth.

The section on application of the Safe Schools Act recommended useful revisions. An expanded list of mitigating factors was mentioned, but we were disappointed that mandatory consideration of mitigating factors was not included in the process for suspension and/or expulsion. We were very pleased, however, to see that the Ministry has already followed up on the recommendations for alternative programs for students who have received a full expulsion, in P/PM 130.

The report of the Safe Schools Action Team refers more than once to other Ministries besides the Ministry of Education, and LDAO emphasizes that there should be clarification of the roles and responsibilities of these other Ministries in prevention programs, treatment and reintegration of students.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action*, and we look forward to implementation of many of the recommendations in the near future.