

February 28, 2006

Ms. Marie-France LeFort
Director
Parental Engagement Office
Field Services Branch, Ministry of Education
900 Bay Street, 12th Floor Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Ms. LeFort,

On behalf of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), please accept our congratulations on your appointment as Director of the Parental Engagement Office of the Ministry of Education. LDAO represents the interests of students with learning disabilities who comprise the largest number of exceptional students in Ontario schools. LDAO has developed a reputation for presenting positive recommendations for the education system, including but not limited to the special education sector.

LDAO applauds the direction of the Ministry in seeking parent input and collaboration. We submitted a response to the Parent Voice in Education consultation and encouraged our chapters to participate in the local consultations. In response to the Parent Voice in Education Report, March 2005, LDAO wrote to Minister Kennedy supporting the direction of the report, but also pointing out that any parent initiatives need to have clear links to groups representing parents of students with special education needs.

The Ontario Parent Involvement Policy released in December 2005 has many initiatives that will positively influence parental engagement in their children's education. We are concerned, however, that the voice of parents of children with special education needs will not be represented on the school board Parent Involvement Committees and on the Provincial Parent Engagement Office, unless such representation is specifically mandated. One way that this could happen would be by a link to Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) at the board level, and to the Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee (PAAC) on SEACs at the provincial level. The provincial parent organizations that make up PAAC, and their local SEAC representatives, are the eyes and ears of parents who have children with special education needs. These parents, even more than others, need to understand the education system and be highly engaged in the education of their sons and daughters.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how special education organizations such as LDAO can become an integral part of the work of the Parent Involvement Initiative. We extend an invitation to you to visit our office, or we can come to meet at your office if that is more convenient.

Sincerely,

Christopher Carew
Chief Executive Officer
Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

c.c. Lynn Ziraldo
Chair, MACSE
Marilyn Dolmage
Chair, PAAC