

PUBLIC POLICY ROUNDUP Spring 2007

Role of the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) in Special Education

In a memorandum to Directors of Education on October 12, 2006, Deputy Minister of Education Ben Levin made the statement *“The Ministry is now reminding boards that an IPRC is not required when both the school and the parents agree that the student should be placed in a regular classroom. We believe that this reminder should allow a substantial reduction in the number of IPRCs.”* Later in the memo Dr. Levin did say *“Parents retain the right to initiate the IPRC process for any reason. Furthermore, it is considered good practice to hold an IPRC when the parents/school/board are considering a placement in a self-contained to partially integrated special education class.”*

In a follow-up memo to Directors of Education on November 30, 2006 Dr. Levin attempted to clarify the Ministry policy on IPRCs, stating that *“a parent’s right to an IPRC concerning their child is to be respected and acted upon consistent with the letter and spirit of Regulation 181/98.”* However, the memo still questioned whether an IPRC is necessary when parents and school agree on placement in a regular class and the supports to be provided.

In our January 2007 letter to Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne, LDAO pointed out that only the IPRC process provides parents with access to their legislated due process rights. For example, there is no way for parents to appeal what is written in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). While LDAO always advises that collaboration and negotiation are the most useful approaches to advocacy, we believe that parents and their children with special education needs require protected rights, whether the student is in a regular class, withdrawal program or a self-contained class. It is very important that parents are advised by the school of their rights to formal identification for special education through the IPRC process.

Informal Dispute Resolution Process

The Ministry of Education has conducted focus groups to help prepare a handbook for school boards on how to create 'welcoming schools' and informal dispute resolution processes for issues to do with special education programs and services. These informal dispute resolution processes may provide an avenue for addressing parental concerns about content and implementation of IEPs.

The Ministry is also planning to develop a policy for more formal dispute resolution processes, e.g. with mediators, when informal talks do not resolve issues. None of these dispute resolution processes are to replace formal appeal mechanisms for identification and placement issues through the IPRC process.

Ministry of Education/OPA partnership for assessments

In June 2006 the Ministry of Education announced \$20 million for professional assessments through a partnership with the Ontario Psychological Association.

The project objectives are:

- reducing wait time for students in JK to grade 4 requiring professional assessments
- enhancing teacher capacity to provide effective programming for students provided with professional assessments
- improving literacy/numeracy for students provided with professional assessments
- sustaining assessment process improvement for the long term.

In January 2007 school boards were asked to submit *Assessment Capacity Building Plans* to describe strategies, key activities, resources, timing and estimated costs to achieve project objectives.

LDAO supports this joint initiative to increase access to assessments. For students who may have learning disabilities, finding patterns of specific strengths and weaknesses through a comprehensive psychological assessment is critical, and provides important input to teaching approaches and accommodations in IEPs. It is our hope that by reducing wait times for JK to grade 4 students, this project will also increase access to assessments for older students.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Standards Development

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, mandates the government to develop, implement and enforce accessibility standards and to provide for the involvement of persons with disabilities, among other groups, in the development of these standards. Standards development committees were established in 2006 for Customer Service and Transportation issues, and on October 23, 2006 the proposed Standard for Accessible Customer Service was released for public input. LDAO submitted feedback in December, including a recommendation that service providers be required to consult with a representative group of persons with disabilities, or organizations that represent them, when establishing customer service policies and training for employees and volunteers.

The Information and Communications Accessibility Standards Development Committee begins meeting in March 2007, and LDAO will be represented on this committee. Issues of accessible information and communications are vitally important to individuals with learning disabilities.

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