

April 19, 2006

Ben Levin, Deputy Minister
Ministry of Education
Mowat Block, 22nd Floor
900 Bay St
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Dr. Levin,

The issue of bullying is a very important one that affects many students with learning disabilities, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) was pleased to participate in public consultations by the Safe Schools Action Team. The resulting report, *Shaping Safer Schools*, contained some excellent recommendations, and we are happy to see many of these recommendations reflected in the memorandum to school boards on the Provincial Bullying Prevention Strategy Implementation.

We understand that a *Policy/Program Memorandum (P/PM)* is being developed to support the bullying prevention initiative. In order to make this document as effective as possible, we wish to provide some input on critical elements to be included. The funding to schools for bullying prevention programs is an important step, but there must be concrete direction on accountability for how the money is used.

Although the checklist of *Key Elements of a School Bullying Prevention Program* does reflect current research on effective programs, it is our opinion that greater direction should be given to schools to utilize programs that are evidence-based. In addition, there is no formally stated requirement to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs in the schools. We note that some of the programs on the Registry do not have an evaluation component, and even if a school chooses a program that includes evaluation, there is no guarantee that the evaluation component will be utilized.

We recommend that the P/PM give direction to schools on the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs they use, and offer guidelines on doing this if the programs they choose do not include an evaluation component.

The CODE special education professional development project might provide a useful model for use of evaluation in a similar project.

Since students with special education needs, including students with learning disabilities, are represented among victims and perpetrators of bullying, it is important that any school bullying prevention programs reflect their needs and are inclusive of all students.

This is an area that might be addressed with funding from the Special Circumstances Fund.

It will also be important to include sensitivity to the perspectives of students with special education needs in any training programs for educators. We suggest that school boards consult their Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) as they plan bullying prevention initiatives.

We recommend that the P/PM give direction to schools and school boards to address the needs of special education students in bullying prevention programs, and in training for administrators, teachers and school staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to help with shaping safer schools on Ontario.

Sincerely,

Christopher Carew
Chief Executive Officer
Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

c.c. Aryeh Gitterman, Assistant Deputy Minister
Allan Kathnelson, Safe Schools Implementation Co-ordinator
Bruce Drewett, Director, Special Education Policy & Programs Branch
Lynn Ziraldo, Chair, MACSE