

Promoting Early Intervention for Learning Disabilities 1999-2002

In 1999 budget, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario received funding from the Government of Ontario to establish the Promoting Early Intervention (PEI) initiative. The result of this undertaking has had a significant impact on the educational system in Ontario in terms of the special education programmes, services and supports provided to students with learning disabilities. The project will complement the funding already provided to the Learning Opportunities Task Force for post-secondary education for students with specific learning disabilities and may become a part of the Government's response to the McCain-Mustard Early Years Study Report, "Reversing the Real Brain Drain."

Recommendations will be made for new and more efficient approaches to identifying and remediating young students at risk of school failure and of having a learning disability. As School Boards and students are the end users and beneficiaries of the products, the LDAO has committed itself to fostering partnerships with and between School Boards through an ongoing consultation process.

Focusing on students age 4 - 8, the initiative has produced deliverables in 5 main areas:

1. At the heart of the PEI initiative is the new definition of learning disabilities. This definition, while intended for use within the Ontario school system, has a lifelong application. The range of learning disabilities, what they are and are not, co-existing conditions and lifespan issues are all addressed by the definition. It is also accompanied by a supporting document, which serves as both an excellent synopsis of current LD research and as a blue print of the issues the working group tackled.
2. Recommended protocols for the effective screening and assessment of verbal and nonverbal learning disabilities. It is our goal to move the time of screening and assessment to a stage in the child's life that will reduce the chances of school failure and the development of self-esteem and behaviour problems.
3. Recommended intervention models and approaches for teaching, helping to ensure that young students with learning disabilities have access to the services, supports and programming within the school system to meet their needs.
4. The examination of the current state of education for teachers of children with learning disabilities. The primary mandate will be to examine the current status of teacher education (Preservice) offered by Faculties of Education across the province as well as teacher education at the School Board level (Additional Qualification). In addition, the working group will recommend effective venues for incorporating the findings of all the working groups into teacher education programs. Collectively we believe

- this process will substantially enhance the preparedness of educators working with children who have learning disabilities.
5. The creation of public education vehicles. It is our goal that the information developed by the four previous working groups will assist parents in seeking out help and intervention for their children at risk.

A volunteer Steering Committee co-chaired by two LDAO Board members, Dr. Jay Rosenfield from the Hospital for Sick Children, and Dr. Isabel Shessel from Seneca College oversee the initiative. The Steering Committee is comprised of representatives of key stakeholder organizations with interest and expertise in working with students with learning disabilities. These organizations include:

- The Provincial Demonstration Schools
- The Learning Opportunities Task Force
- Integra Foundation
- The Hospital for Sick Children
- The Ontario College of Psychologists
- Representatives from the Council of Directors of Education
- Representatives from the Ontario Association of Deans of Education
- LDA Chapter representation

The committee was broken down into the following groups:

- Steering Committee
- [Definition Working Group](http://www.ldao.ca/documents/Definition_and_Suporting_Document_2001.pdf)
(http://www.ldao.ca/documents/Definition_and_Suporting_Document_2001.pdf)
- [Screening and Assessment Working Group](http://www.ldao.ca/documents/Assessment_Protocols_Sept_03.pdf)
(http://www.ldao.ca/documents/Assessment_Protocols_Sept_03.pdf)
- [Programming Working Group](http://www.ldao.ca/WBTT/index.php) (<http://www.ldao.ca/WBTT/index.php>)
- [Teacher Education Working Group](http://www.ldao.ca/documents/Teacher_Education_--_July_2003.pdf)
([http://www.ldao.ca/documents/Teacher Education -- July 2003.pdf](http://www.ldao.ca/documents/Teacher_Education_--_July_2003.pdf))
- Public Education Working Group