

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO
Response to Learning for All Consultation Questions

1. Two prime beliefs are: All students can succeed
Fairness is not sameness (Page 6)

- *Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.*
- *Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student's literacy and numeracy development.*

What is your association's understanding of these beliefs from the L4All draft?

LDAO agrees with these shared beliefs, with the following qualifications:

Universal design and differentiated instruction are not sufficient for meeting the learning needs of all students with learning disabilities, without specialized, intensive instruction.

Many students with learning disabilities require specialized teaching from a special education teacher in order to achieve literacy and numeracy goals.

2. The premise is: Know your students (Page 7/31)

What is your association's understanding of these premises from the L4All draft?

It is important to "understand each student's strengths, learning styles, preferences, needs, interests, and readiness to learn" (p.31). For students with learning disabilities, the psychological report is an important source of such information. For all students, parents are a good source of information.

3. The core components are: Personalization
Precision
Professional learning (Page 7)

What is your association's understanding of these core components from the L4All draft?

For students with learning disabilities, individualization of their remedial instruction is critical, and these three components are a good start, although not necessarily sufficient to meet their needs.

Ongoing professional learning is extremely important. Since preservice training of teachers has no consistent component on special education, in-service professional development, with the support of professional learning communities, is particularly important. Teachers need to be kept up-to-date on evidence-based approaches to teaching students with special education needs including learning disabilities.

- 4. The three approaches to planning and instruction are: Universal design
Differentiated instruction
Tiered approach (Page 13)**

What is your association's understanding of these approaches from the L4All draft?

LDAO supports the usefulness of Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction for all students, including those with learning disabilities.

The tiered approach (Tier 1 and 2) is embodied in the Web-based Teaching Tool, an early screening and intervention program administered by LDAO on behalf of the Ministry of Education. Many students who have learning disabilities will need Tier 3 supports that are outside the scope of **Learning for All**.

- 5. The forms of assessment for learning are: Diagnostic assessment
Formative assessment (Page 27)**

What is your association's understanding of these forms from the L4All draft?

Diagnostic assessment is the basis of the Individual Education Plan (IEP), and as noted in Figure 5 on page 28, may include professional assessments. Professional psychological assessment is essential for educational planning for students with learning disabilities. There may be some confusion with the term *diagnostic*, which in this usage does not necessarily indicate that there is a diagnosis. For most students with learning disabilities who have a psychological assessment, there will be a formal diagnosis.

- 6. Assistive tools are: Student profile (Page 37)
Class profile (Page 31)**

What is your association's understanding of these tools from the L4All draft?

Class profiles are a useful tool for all teachers, and for all students. Student profiles are important for students who have special education needs. We particularly support the **L4All** recommendations to gather information from parents, students and community partners, to build on student strengths, and to consider accommodations that would help individual students demonstrate their learning. Of course for students who have IEPs, the accommodations that they are *entitled* to will be listed in their IEPs.

- 7. How do the concepts presented in the L4All draft align with your association's perspective and goals?**

On page 43 it states "There may be times when the teacher needs to consult with members of the in-school team(s) who may recommend other strategies, refer the student for further educational and/or professional assessments, or when appropriate, address special education needs through the development of an IEP."

This statement makes it clear that **Learning for All** is not really about special education, but rather about good pedagogy. As such LDAO supports it, but with the qualification that the methods outlined are **beneficial but not sufficient** for students with learning disabilities.

8. What additions, changes, improvements, would your association like to see to the draft?

Education for All contained a good discussion and description of assistive technology that can be used in the classroom. Assistive technologies are increasingly used in intermediate and secondary grades, and as demonstrated at last summer's symposium, AT4ALL, there is a trend to use of technologies for all students, in the model of Universal Design. All teachers need this knowledge. Therefore:

LDAO recommends that **Learning for All** include a chapter on assistive technology.

LDAO also recommends that teachers be reminded in **Learning for All** that they can find many useful examples of how to apply the **L4All** principles in the previous publication, **Education for All**.

Finally, **Learning for All** must not be mistaken for a special education manual. Therefore:

LDAO recommends that **Learning for All** explicitly state that the methods described are useful for all students, including those who have special education needs, but may not be sufficient for all students with special education needs. References to other documents that outline evidence-based special education teaching techniques should be included in **Learning for All**.

As stated in the 2008 LDAO response to the Ministry of Education consultation on revising **Education for All**:

For students with learning disabilities, instruction needs to be specifically differentiated to their profile of abilities and needs as documented in a psychological assessment.

The following is a summary of research on evidence-based approaches from *Learning Disabilities: From Identification to Intervention* by Jack M. Fletcher et al, The Guilford Press, 2007.

The author's strongest point is that students with LDs need to have "intensive specialized remediation" whereas "remedial instruction is frequently carried out in larger groups that make it difficult to ensure the level of intensity needed to accelerate growth in academic skills." (p. 264).

The authors point out that students with LDs often have complex, multifaceted problems that affect more than one academic domain, so classroom-based programs, even those that research has shown to be effective, may not be enough (p.265).