



Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

January 18, 2007

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, MPP
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
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Dear Minister Wynne,

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) would like to comment on some recent communication from your Ministry to school boards related to the process for accessing special education. Parts of the October 12, 2006 and November 30, 2006 memoranda to Directors of Education from Deputy Minister Ben Levin have caused great concern in the special education community.

LDAO agrees that early intervention in the regular classroom for students who are at risk for failure is a very useful approach. As you know, LDAO's Web-Based Teaching Tool (WBTT) was developed for this purpose, and has produced positive changes in EQAO results. We strongly support the statement in the October 12th memo that "programs and services are to be provided as soon as possible for students with special education needs", who "should be offered special education programs and services without undue delay, while waiting for an IPRC meeting or for additional assessments." However, this worthwhile principle should not be allowed to delay access to psychoeducational assessments, or the IPRC process. For students who may have learning disabilities (LDs), finding patterns of specific strengths and weaknesses through a comprehensive psychoeducational assessment provides important input to teaching approaches and accommodations in Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

The LDAO Legislation and Policy Committee discussed the fact that school boards have differing processes for deciding who should get special education services and who should go to IPRC, if indeed they offer IPRCs. The committee suggested that your ministry develop a protocol template, in consultation with parent organizations as well as MACSE, for decision-making about appropriate processes for accessing special education. These processes should be flexible enough to respond to needs of individual students and wishes of parents.

Many groups have expressed concern that boards may use the messages in the aforementioned memos to significantly reduce the number of IPRCs they hold. Like other parent organizations, we would like to point out that only the IPRC process provides parents with access to their legislated due process rights. There is no way for

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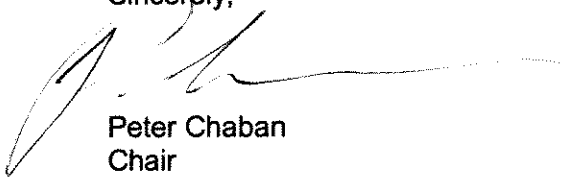
parents to appeal what is written in the IEP, and even more importantly, to insist that the provisions in the IEP are implemented. While we always advise that collaboration and negotiation are the most useful approaches, parents and their children with special education needs require protected rights as well. This is true whether the student is in a regular class, withdrawal program or a self-contained class.

If school boards continue to offer IEPs without IPRCs, parents will need to be fully informed of all their options for accessing special education services. As stated in *Special Education Transformation*, "in this transformed system, parents would be active participants in decisions related to the program and services for their children with special education needs." Well-informed parents are best able to be active participants.

LDAO commends the Ministry initiative to review a selection of school board IEPs. However, we strongly recommend that the current review be followed up by random sampling, to compare to the IEPs selected by the boards, and to exemplars of IEPs that demonstrate good practice. Once again we reiterate our concern that any provincially mandated IEP template not be used as a cookie cutter approach, as evidenced in some of the IEP engines.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these specific concerns. We remain optimistic about the general direction of changes to special education, following up on recommendations in your comprehensive report *Special Education Transformation*. We have a common goal of improving outcomes for students receiving special education, and enabling them to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,



Peter Chaban
Chair
LDAO

c.c. Ben Levin, Deputy Minister
George Zegarac, Assistant Deputy Minister
Bruce Drewett, Director, Special Education Policy & Programs Branch
Bob Stone, Chair, MACSE