Terms of Reference

Tools for Learning:
Effective Practice for the Use of Assistive Technology for Students with
Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 12

A Provincial Symposium

September 26, 27, 2006
Doubletree International Plaza Hotel
655 Dixon Rd.
Toronto ON
M9W 1J3
416-244-1711

Purpose:
The symposium will support implementation of the recommendations regarding assistive technology made in *Education For All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students With Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6* (2005).

The Expert Panel Report stated:
'Assistive technology is a powerful tool. The Expert Panel believes that Ontario schools can use it more effectively to support students with special needs, and therefore makes the following recommendations:

> **All teachers should be able to access professional development in the use of assistive technology**. While many teachers have significant skills in using instructional technology in their teaching, it is imperative that teachers also receive effective professional development to successfully implement and embed assistive technology when teaching students with special needs.
>
> **School boards need to create institutional structures that support the responsible use of assistive technology**. Accountability for assistive technology equipment is essential. The panel recommends the initiation of a comprehensive system that tracks needs assessments, implementation, and gap analyses. A statement of how assistive technology is used should be a mandatory part of each district school board's special education plan.
>
> **The Ministry of Education and school boards must make the development of additional assistive technology tools for francophone students a priority.** There is a greater variety of assistive technology available for English-speaking students than for francophone students with special needs.'

These recommendations are applicable to educators and students and therefore the symposium is planned for both the elementary and secondary panels.

The symposium supports the government's priorities of:
- high levels of student achievement;
- reduced gaps in student achievement; and
- increased public confidence and support for public education.

The intent of the symposium is to focus on assistive technology as one accommodation to support a barrier-free learning environment, where all students will have equal access to the learning experience and the Ontario curriculum.

Objectives of the Assistive Technology Symposium include:

- Assisting school boards in developing board wide plans on the implementation and use of assistive technology accommodations to support students with special needs;

- Supporting board staff in expanding their knowledge base on the effective use of assistive technology accommodations for students with diverse needs; and

- Building a provincial strategic plan for the effective use of assistive technology in Ontario's schools with the symposium as a first step.

The symposium is planned for two days with a combination of plenary and workshop presentations. Plenary sessions will be presented in English with simultaneous French translation. The workshops will be presented in either English or French. Delegates will be able to select their program from an array of lectures, demonstrations, and hands-on opportunities. A vendors'/publishers' display will enhance delegates' knowledge of the latest software, hardware and publications to support student learning.

Delegates:
In March 2006, all District School Boards, School Authorities, Provincial and Demonstration Schools, Faculties of Education and appropriate Ministry staff will receive invitations to select Symposium delegates based on the following:

District School Boards: 6 delegates/board
School Authorities: 1 delegate/authority
Provincial and Demonstration Schools   1 delegate/site
Faculties of Education   1 delegate/faculty
Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) representatives

Considerations for District School Boards in the selection of their delegates are:
- staff involved in planning professional development with regard to assistive technology;
- staff involved in the areas of accountability, needs assessment and implementation regarding the use of assistive technology;
- assessment providers;
- program leadership in areas that use assistive technology extensively;
- willingness to share what they have learned when they return to their respective school boards; and
- Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) representatives.

The Symposium is being planned for approximately 600 delegates.

Definitions of Assistive Technology

1. From Education for All:

Assistive Technology is any technology that allows one to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of an individual with special learning needs (Edyburn, 2000). Its applications and adaptations can help open doors to previously inaccessible learning opportunities for many children with special needs (Judge, 2001).

2. From Wikipedia:

Assistive Technology (AT) is a generic term that includes assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices and the process used in selecting, locating, and using them. AT promotes greater independence for [people with disabilities](#) by enabling them to perform tasks that they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had great difficulty accomplishing, by providing enhancements to or changed methods of interacting with the [technology](#) needed to accomplish such tasks.

3. From article in ERIC Digest

Assistive technology (AT) is defined as any item, piece of equipment, or product, whether acquired commercially, off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. (P.L. 101-407, The Technology Related Assistance Act of 1988).

Source: Integrating Assistive Technology into the Standard Curriculum. ERIC/OSEP Digest E568

4. Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)

Assistive technology, sometimes referred to as adaptive or access technology, includes a whole realm of high and low technology devices designed to increase the independence of individuals with learning disabilities by enabling them to compensate for deficits, enhance self-confidence, and participate more fully in all settings - work, school, home, and leisure. While not exclusively so, these technologies tend to be electronically sophisticated and largely computer-based. Assistive technology can enhance the quality of life for a person with a learning disability by enabling the individual to circumvent specific deficits, while capitalizing on given strengths.