

On May 6, 1997, the Hon. Ernie Eves, then Treasurer and now Premier of Ontario, made the following statement, as part of his budget speech:

*“Too few students with learning disabilities get the help that they need to make the transition to college or university. To help these students realize their potential, we will establish pilot projects at the college and university level, to provide real help to learning disabled students in a meaningful way.”*

The **Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF)**, under the leadership of Dr. Bette Stephenson, a former Minister of Education, is the mechanism through which these pilot projects have been established, with a clear mandate:

1. to improve the transition of students with specific learning disabilities from secondary school to post-secondary education, and
2. to enhance the services and supports that students with learning disabilities receive within the post-secondary educational sector, such that they can complete their education successfully.

After a period of preliminary research and review, the LOTF invited proposals from every community college and university in Ontario. The institutions were not given directions for the program and project components that the Task Force would fund. Instead, they were told to propose projects that would address the LOTF’s mandate. All were informed that to be eligible for participation in the newly created pilot projects, pilot students must satisfy the following diagnostic/definitional criteria for learning disabilities:

- C learning disabilities are neurologically based information processing deficits;
- C they occur in individuals with average to above average intelligence;
- C they typically cause a discrepancy between the individual’s potential and achievement, although they should not be diagnosed purely on the basis of such a discrepancy;
- C they are a life-long condition, manageable with appropriate supports and direction;
- C they must be diagnosed by a registered psychologist or an appropriately qualified professional, using a battery of tests.

The proposals were reviewed by the LOTF consultants as well as an external committee of experts in the field, the Task Force’s Committee of Reference. (A list of these individuals may be found at the end of this document.) The thirty-five proposals received from the forty-seven potentially eligible post-secondary educational institutions were reviewed in a “blind” format, i.e. with all information identifying the institutions and their locations deleted from review copies. On the basis of a second round of review and consultations, LOTF established eight pilot projects in thirteen post-secondary educational institutions. These were:

- C **Expanding Horizons: Transition to College for Students with Learning Disabilities** and a summer orientation program at Cambrian College in Sudbury;
- C **Learning Opportunities Program** at Conestoga College in Kitchener-Waterloo;
- C **Millennium Centre** at Fanshawe College in London;
- C **Centre for Access and Learning Disability Services** at Georgian College in Barrie,

- Orillia and Owen Sound;
- C **Learning Opportunities Program** at the University of Guelph;
- C **Project ADVANCE** summer orientation institute and mature student **PATH** program at York University in Toronto;
- C **Virtual Centre of Excellence for Learning Disability Integration**, English consortium: Trent University in Peterborough, Loyalist College in Belleville, Nipissing University and Canadore College in North Bay;
- C **Reussir ses Etudes Collegial - Troubles d'Apprentissage**, French consortium: College Boreal in Sudbury, La Cite Collegiale in Ottawa, College des Grands Lacs in Toronto and its environs.

Students first entered most of the pilot projects in September, 1998. After two years it became clear that the French language project, delivered at three French language community colleges, was not meeting its mandate, due primarily to the lack of adequate French Language assessment tools for the diagnosis of specific learning disabilities. As a result this pilot was discontinued. To address the problems identified by the Francophone project, the Task Force has since embarked on the development, standardization and norming of a French language diagnostic battery of tests for the assessment of learning disabilities among Franco-Ontarians. This is the French Language Assessment Project.

The remaining seven projects, involving six community colleges and four universities located throughout Ontario, continued their work into 2002. One pilot, located at the University of Guelph, is completing its mandate during the current academic year and will provide its final report to LOTF in the summer of 2003.

During the past four years **1242 students** who met the LOTF's very rigorous participation criteria received pilot services and participated in the pilot projects' evaluation. This made the LOTF project the largest research endeavour of its kind in the learning disabilities field, unique both in its depth of enquiry and the selection process of participants. The pilot projects were diverse in their content, specific program offerings, locations and languages of instruction. However, in order to achieve baseline consistency for their evaluation measures, all assessed student achievement using LOTF's student success indicators, which are contained in the LOTF vision statement.

The development of the LOTF vision statement began with the premise that students with specific learning disabilities are able to succeed in post-secondary education, provided they have access to certain key components which allow them to reach their potential and achieve their goals. To determine what these key components are, the Consulting Team began by examining the needs of students with learning disabilities. Once these needs, institutional service provisions and other available information were analyzed, it was feasible to determine the success indicators for students with learning disabilities in the post-secondary sector. These indicators were first articulated as:

- C entry into an academic programme of the student's choice, provided that the student meets standard entrance requirements;
- C successfully meeting the essential requirements of the programme, although the manner in which the student demonstrates mastery may be altered by academic accommodations,

- programme modifications or the use of coping and compensatory strategies, but with no change to standards or outcomes;
- C graduation from the student's chosen program and institution;
- C possession of the requisite skills to pass any licensing requirements, with appropriate accommodations, if needed, related to the field of study or career which he or she has chosen;
- C being employment ready;
- C being sufficiently job ready so that he or she can advocate for any job accommodations that may be required in order to obtain and maintain employment.

The initial LOTF vision statement also addressed ideal institutional and systemic provisions. In total, the vision statement provided LOTF with a set of comprehensive goals for achieving its mandate. Parts of this statement have required adjustment as a result of intensive applied research. Despite modifications, however, the essence of the original statement, including the student success indicators, has been confirmed.

All pilot institutions determined student eligibility for participation through the rigorous diagnostic validation criteria introduced by the Task Force in the second year of piloting. A summary description of this process is included in the final LOTF report. The complete validation document may be found in the accompanying technical report.

The Task Force closely tracked and evaluated the activities and outcomes of the pilot projects, with the students themselves providing much of the research data. The LOTF database contains information from more **3000 student questionnaires** received over the past four years. These consist of responses to LOTF's intake, progress and exit questionnaires. In addition, each of the pilot institutions completed nine institutional tracking questionnaires over the four year period. These objectivist measures were supplemented by comprehensive program evaluations conducted by the pilots, and by regular site visits by LOTF's consultants to all pilot projects

The accountability measures implemented by the LOTF have already resulted in some notable, positive systemic changes within the post-secondary education sector. Ontario's colleges and universities and the services and supports that they provide to their students with specific learning disabilities will never be the same as they were before the establishment of LOTF. However, despite encouraging changes and trends within the post-secondary sector, there is still much to be done to improve the transition process for students with specific learning disabilities as they leave the secondary system for post-secondary education or employment. Consequently, the work of the LOTF and the pilots is continuing in some areas, including the enhancement of workplace transition activities from the post-secondary sector.

Based on analysis of the data provided by the students and by the pilot institutions, the LOTF arrived at seven key findings. These key findings generated twenty-four recommendations that the LOTF now presents to the Government of Ontario.

The final report which the LOTF is submitting to the Government includes, in addition to the key findings and recommendations, the details of the criteria and the processes that the LOTF used to select and establish the pilot projects, to define criteria for student participation, to evaluate the

results and gather and interpret the information and data provided by the students and the pilots.

It contains information about continuing research activities and projects which are supported through the LOTF and about the common legacies of the pilot projects. Finally it contains a series of appendices with consolidated data and the analyses of the data obtained from the students and the pilot institutions.

In addition to the final report, LOTF has compiled a detailed technical report, which includes a description of research methodology, copies of the questionnaires used, information about the evaluation processes and other relevant technical information.

This summary of the final report includes the LOTF's key findings and recommendations. Each finding is accompanied by a series of supporting data statements, obtained primarily from the student questionnaires and occasionally from the pilot institutions' tracking questionnaires. The twenty-four recommendations that flow from their respective key findings and the supportive data lead to comments and clarification of the recommendation's intent. There are no detailed implementation plans included at this stage. These will be developed for all approved recommendations by the LOTF successor agency.

LOTF, the pilot institutions and many dedicated and talented students collectively rose to the challenge that was presented in 1997. Staff at the pilot projects provided outstanding supports, services and programming to the pilot students. The students participated and assisted with the evaluation tasks of the LOTF at an unprecedented rate. There is no doubt that the students felt well supported and expressed their appreciation of the opportunities available to them. They were also generous, lively and forthright in articulating their recommendations for institutional and systemic changes.

LOTF, in turn, greatly valued the formative and conclusive recommendations provided by the students and pilot staff. We note that the direct perspectives of the pilot students were granted particular "privilege" as the key findings and recommendations were formulated. We also commend the extent to which the pilot projects and their staffs sustained primary focus on student voice and experience. The LOTF is convinced that implementation of the twenty-four recommendations will lead to the anticipated and desired outcome that students with specific learning disabilities will be enabled to make the transition to post-secondary education, should they wish to do so, when they receive those supports, services and accommodations which enable them to realize their full potential.

**Now that we know what students with learning disabilities require to succeed and what is necessary to ensure that their goals are successfully attained at a reasonable cost, can we afford to do anything less?**

## LOTF'S KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### KEY FINDING I RELATED TO STUDENT SUCCESS

**Students with learning disabilities (LD) are as able to succeed in post-secondary education as their non-disabled peers, provided that:**

**A) their academic and social experiences during the elementary and secondary school years appropriately address the individual needs of students with learning disabilities;**

**B) their transition to post-secondary education is appropriately facilitated;**

**C) the necessary individualized supports, services, programs and/or accommodations are available to them during their post-secondary years and they choose to use them.**

#### **Supporting data**

- C 95% of responding (those who completed and returned questionnaires to the LOTF) students stated that the pilot project contributed significantly to their academic success*
- C 53% of students have been receiving As and Bs in their courses and only 7% have marks below a C*
- C 18% of students stated that they were doing very well, 26% doing well and 30% doing reasonably well in their studies while only 1% indicated that they were doing so poorly that they were thinking of dropping out of school*
- C 87% of the students stated that they were passing all required courses for their program*
- C 38% of the students who completed exit questionnaires were graduating; 26% had completed their current course but were not yet leaving the institution; 21% planned to stay on and continue their studies in spite of pilot closure; only 5% of exiting students stated that they were actually dropping out of post-secondary education. (This figure is much lower than the drop out rate reported for the post-secondary student population in general and for students with learning disabilities in particular.)*
- C 97% of students stated that they would participate in such a program again.*

**Therefore, LOTF recommends that:**

- 1. The results of the work of the LOTF and the pilot institutions be distributed to all secondary schools and post-secondary education institutions throughout Ontario.**

This information package should include the LOTF's key findings and recommendations; the Government's response to these; data demonstrating that students with learning disabilities are able to succeed in post-secondary education as their non-disabled peers; and identification of successful programs, project components and available resources. LOTF's research results indicate the need for systemic change throughout the education system, including but not limited to full implementation of and compliance with relevant legislation such as the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, the *Education Act* and its regulations and the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (ODA).

2. **School boards consistently be held accountable for compliance with Regulation 181/98 under the *Education Act*, which mandates the development of transition programming and planning for all students with disabilities who are 14 years of age or older.**

Almost none of the pilot students had the benefit of mandated transition planning. Transition plans developed for students with specific learning disabilities must be in accordance with the Ministry of Education's Individual Education Plan Standards document. Schools and school boards must ensure that these students are made aware of the option of proceeding to post-secondary education and are actively helped to pursue such goals.

3. **Proven transition programming should be available to all students with learning disabilities who are going on to post-secondary education and are interested in participating in such opportunities.**

Participants consistently lauded the program offerings of Project ADVANCE, the summer orientation institute offered at York University. These students came from all parts of the Province and proceeded to a wide range of universities and colleges for their post-secondary studies. Many of them commented favourably, over the past four years, on the ongoing value and academic benefit of Project ADVANCE. Many also expressed the wish that such transition programming had been available to them earlier during the last years of their secondary school experience. In response, LOTF is funding seven additional pilot summer programs for 2003. Evaluation of these will provide future direction for achieving the recommendation's objective.

4. **All post-secondary educational institutions introduce and implement a full range of LD-specific service and program options appropriate to the needs and identified disabilities of each individual student.**

It is imperative that these programs and services be delivered at all institutions by knowledgeable, caring and supportive disability services staff with expertise in learning disabilities. Students should be involved in the development and evaluation of these services, so that the provisions appropriately reflect student voice and experience, as was the case for the LOTF pilots.

5. **Incentives be made available to all post-secondary educational institutions to promote collaboration with secondary schools and other public sector organizations and agencies within their communities to offer intensive outreach and post-secondary orientation to adolescents and adults with identified or suspected learning disabilities.**

Extension to community-based organizations and adults who are no longer in school is particularly important for individuals with learning disabilities who have been barred from college or university entry because of lack of adequate educational supports and transition planning in the past. In many cases, adults have not had access to assessments. As a result, it is often suspected but not yet confirmed that their difficulties are due to specific learning disabilities.

## KEY FINDING II RELATED TO ACCESS TO DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENTS

**A significant majority of the students arrived at the pilot institutions with no, or at best inadequate, diagnostic information. As a result, students had neither appropriate documentation nor an understanding of their own learning disabilities. A comprehensive, up-to-date diagnostic assessment is essential for the provision of requisite supports, services, programs and accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Almost all (85%) of the pilot students required professional (re-)assessment to enable them to succeed in their post-secondary education. The total process of (re-)assessment encompassed an explanation of individuals' specific learning disabilities, identification of strengths and difficulties, current functional skills, learning styles, potential coping strategies and compensatory skills, and the accommodations needed to overcome the negative impacts of their disabilities in order to reach their potential.**

### Supporting data

- C pilot institutions reported that 80 to 85% of pilot students came to post-secondary education with no or inadequate assessment and documentation of their learning disabilities*
- C pilot institutions reported that they had carried out 1395 full and 362 partial assessments in order to determine student eligibility for the pilot and to identify the students' learning and accommodation needs*
- C 99% of pilot students reported that they participated in a psycho-educational assessment of their learning disabilities as a program component of their post secondary education*
- C 87% of pilot students identified that their understanding of their learning disabilities had improved during the pilot period, primarily due to the (re-)assessments and the comprehensive explanation of the diagnostic assessment results by pilot staff*
- C only 2% of the pilot students were assessed for learning disabilities before entering elementary school*
- C 24% of pilot students left secondary school without any diagnosis of learning disabilities*

**Therefore, LOTF recommends that:**

- 6. The Province of Ontario endorse a consistent definition and a comprehensive diagnostic assessment protocol for learning disabilities to be used in all publicly funded programs such as education, social service, health and other service areas.**

The definition should be up-to-date and based on current research. LOTF strongly urges the adoption of the definition developed by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) and supported by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) for use by the Enhanced Services Funding (ESF) projects. The components of such a diagnostic assessment process must include the use of specific standardized measures, operationally defined methods of establishing the presence of a specific LD, a written report, an opportunity for feedback to the individual who has been assessed as well as recommendations for services, supports and accommodations focussed on enabling the individual to overcome the barriers resulting from having a learning disability.

The assessment process must be carried out in accordance with the *Regulated Health Professions Act*, 1993 and the guidelines recommended by the Ontario Psychological Association (1998) for the diagnosis of learning disabilities. As with the diagnosis of any other medically related disability, the diagnosis itself is a controlled act and should therefore be closely regulated. For this reason, the Ontario College of Psychologists, the Provincial regulatory body for the profession, should develop and endorse standards for the proper assessment and documentation of learning disabilities.

- 7. The Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process for the identification of a learning disability, in accordance with Regulation 181/98, should always and consistently be based on an appropriate and comprehensive diagnostic assessment.**

This will correct the too frequent occurrence of non-diagnosis and mis-diagnosis of learning disabilities in elementary and secondary school populations in Ontario. Following an initial accurate diagnosis, there is no need for further regular psycho-educational testing. Learning disabilities are neurologically based and are a life-long condition. However, at major transition periods, such as elementary to secondary and secondary to post-secondary education or work, the validity of the existing recommendations for programming and accommodations must be reviewed. At these transition points, the student may need to have some additional educational or information processing testing to establish current functional levels and accommodation needs.

- 8. The Province adopt and endorse an early screening and intervention program designed to identify and assist all children at risk for school failure.**

Very often young children are identified as being at risk for school failure, but do not receive any help or intervention until they are at least two years behind their peers. Early intervention will enable some of these children to catch up without necessarily requiring subsequent special education supports later on. Others who do not make the requisite gains as a result of such early intervention should be referred for a diagnostic assessment to determine whether their difficulties are due to a diagnosable disability. The “Promoting Early Intervention” project delivered under the auspices of the LDAO, as well as other early intervention projects resulting from the Mustard-McCain report, are examples of such beneficial early programming.

- 9. The primary diagnosis of a learning disability should be publicly funded through Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) or some other public or universally accessible funding mechanism, as is the case for all other disabilities.**

Diagnosis is the gateway to identifying appropriate services, supports, accommodations and achieving future success and independence for persons with learning disabilities. Restricting diagnosis to those who are able to pay for it themselves is discriminatory and results in inequity for most people with learning disabilities.

- 10. The Province should establish, implement and evaluate the concept of Regional Assessment and Resource Centres.**

Such Regional Assessment and Resource Centres should have a mandate which includes the primary diagnosis of learning disabilities; the provision of access to and training in the use of assistive and adaptive technology, and other accommodation and resource supports to adolescents and adults who need such services.

Until such time as these are fully functional and providing services throughout the Province, the newly established **LOTF Mobile Assessment Team** should provide assessment supports to post-secondary students in the un-serviced and under-serviced areas of the Province.

The Regional Centres could be modelled on similar centres established and widely used in the United Kingdom and Sweden.

### **KEY FINDING III RELATED TO LEARNING STRATEGY AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTS**

**Pilot students consistently identified that, in addition to an improved understanding of their learning disabilities, they most valued:**

**A) provision of learning strategy supports by appropriately qualified and engaged staff, and**

**B) access to and instruction in assistive technology, from staff with expertise in both the technology and learning disabilities.**

*This was the basis of LOTF's preliminary recommendations to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities leading to the establishment, for September 2002, of Enhanced Services Funding (ESF) projects at all Ontario colleges and universities.*

#### **Supporting data**

*C pilot institutions reported that 1120 pilot students utilized assistive technology and 1086 pilot students utilized learning strategy and metacognitive training during the pilot period*

*C pilot students cited assistive technology and learning and metacognitive strategies as the most useful program components provided to them by the pilot projects*

*C 86% of pilot students indicated that they had used and/or plan to use assistive technology*

*C 94% of pilot students indicated that they had used and/or plan to use learning strategy and metacognitive training supports*

**Therefore, LOTF recommends that:**

- 11. The newly established ESF projects be monitored and evaluated. Success in achieving their goals, should ensure that these services be maintained, enabling post-secondary education institutions to continue to provide enhanced programs, services and supports to students with specific LD who need these and commit to their utilization.**

The ESF projects have been approved for a two year period based on the initial findings of the LOTF pilot project evaluations. The impact of these projects must be assessed. Evaluation must include a review of the quality of services, rate of utilization by students, ratio of staff to students, institutional commitment to supporting staff and the ESF projects and compliance with LOTF's conditions for ongoing funding.

The experience of the pilot projects indicates that student responsibility for participation in and evaluation of program components is a key requirement for success and meaningful accountability.

#### **KEY FINDING IV RELATED TO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

**A) Pilot students consistently reported that lack of or limited faculty awareness and understanding of learning disabilities, and faculty attitudes toward requested accommodations presented the greatest external barrier to students' post-secondary educational success.**

**B) Students, staff, programs and services thrived at institutions where there was demonstrable awareness and support from senior administration.**

#### **Supporting data**

- C 32% of pilot students identified that in spite of their participation in the pilot project, there were barriers to their academic success at the pilot institution*
- C 64% of these students identified faculty awareness and attitudes and related systemic issues as the primary barrier*
- C 56% of responding students stated that faculty professional development about learning disabilities would be the most effective way to eliminate the perceived barrier*
- C concerns about the reluctance of some faculty to comply with all accommodation requests were raised at all student focus groups at all pilot institutions*
- C seven of the ten pilot institutions are engaged in exploring ways in which the principles of Universal Instructional Design (UID) may be most effectively implemented*

**Therefore, LOTF recommends that:**

- 12. Incentives be provided to support innovative practices for faculty orientation and training at all colleges and universities. The goal is to ensure that all faculty and staff are made aware of and informed about the needs and entitlements of students with specific learning disabilities and the institutions' obligations to meet the accommodation needs of all such students.**

The pilot projects utilized diverse models for staff development. Although many students still expressed concerns about faculty attitudes, there were others who acknowledged individual faculty, or occasionally, whole departments as supportive and caring. The effectiveness of faculty training and orientation may be determined through student surveys and other evaluations.

13. **The Ministry of Citizenship amend the recently released guidelines for Accessibility Plans for colleges and universities under the ODA to include the following reporting and accountability requirements:**
- C **applying a more inclusive definition of access beyond physical access,**
  - C **measurable goals,**
  - C **detailed implementation plans,**
  - C **realistic time lines,**
  - C **inclusion of appropriate learning disabilities provisions (beyond the current appended reference to the largest group of students with disabilities in the post-secondary education sector),**
  - C **the delivery of faculty and staff training and professional development,**
  - C **full compliance with the “undue hardship standard” for the accommodation of students with disabilities as expected under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.**

The *ODA* is allegedly intended to support all individuals with disabilities. The current definition of access within the Act and the limited guidelines for accessibility plans imply that there is no real intent to make this Act meaningful and accountable for persons with learning disabilities.

14. **The principles of UID and its proven benefits for teaching and learning be disseminated throughout the education system.**

UID has dramatically altered the way in which many students and especially non-traditional learners, including but not limited to students with specific learning disabilities, can succeed in their studies. Senior administration and teaching faculty in the post-secondary sector and teachers in the secondary panel need information about UID and access to and training in assistive technology to introduce these principles. Incentives for wider UID application will require future exploration.

#### **KEY FINDING V RELATED TO FUNDING**

**A) A significant percentage of pilot students expressed ongoing concern about their inability to access the Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD). The BSWD was established to help with disability-related costs in college and university and the listing of eligible expenses specifically mentions LD assessments. Many students cannot afford the costly assessments, assistive technology and other supports that compensate for and accommodate the effects of their learning disabilities, yet cannot access the BSWD, primarily due to their ineligibility for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). The continued linkage of the BSWD and OSAP is a significant post-secondary barrier to academic success.**

**B) Systemic adjustments to MTCU’s Accessibility Fund are required because of adverse impact on staffing complements, assistive technology facilities and thereby student success.**

## Supporting data

- C throughout the four year piloting period, students reported that only 40% of them were eligible for and received funding from OSAP*
- C a slightly lower percentage of students (approximately 36%) received funding through the BSWD*
- C as a result the majority of pilot students had to rely on family support, if available, their own earnings or pilot institutional support to pay for disability-related costs, such as assessments, assistive technology and tutoring*
- C 38% of pilot students needed to have a paid job while studying, to meet such expenses. This is not an ideal situation because of the extra study load already carried by most students with learning disabilities*
- C concerns about money and lack of access to the BSWD were raised at every student focus group discussion at every institution throughout the four year piloting period*

## Therefore, LOTF recommends that:

### A) Re student funding

15. **The Province of Ontario separate eligibility for BSWD from OSAP so that all students with disabilities can access bursary funds equitably.**

The cost of the required assessment or re-assessment for determining BSWD eligibility should not be borne by the student. Nor should eligibility for the Bursary be based on the course load carried by the student. Failure to redress these inequities, including the linkage of the BSWD to OSAP, prohibits academic accomplishment for too many potentially successful students.

### B) Re systemic funding issues

16. **The Province of Ontario review and amend its current legislation and funding policies which result in discrimination against persons with learning disabilities.**

This issue was clearly identified in the *Report of the Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities*, 1992. Such previously identified discriminatory practices continue in the Assistive Devices Program of the Ministry of Health, in the lack of public funding for diagnostic assessments of learning disabilities, in the lack of access to OSAP for adult students studying on a part time basis and for students involved in other types of programming such as apprenticeships.

17. **The Accessibility Fund allocation from MTCU should reflect the total full time equivalent enrolment of all students at the institution *and* the number of students with disabilities served by the institution.**

Many students with learning disabilities, when they have a choice, prefer to attend smaller post-secondary education institutions. As a result, on a percentage basis, many of the smaller institutions support proportionately larger numbers of students with LD than the larger ones.

MTCU data demonstrate that there are significant variations among institutions' ratios of students with disabilities to their overall student enrolments. The funding formula needs to recognize this reality.

18. **Each post-secondary institution should receive adequate base funding, as part of the distribution of the Accessibility Fund allocation, to ensure that properly trained and qualified staff are available to provide assessments, intervention, training, coaching and support in learning strategies and assistive technologies to students with specific learning disabilities and properly equipped and staffed computer lab facilities available to students with specific learning disabilities.**

The experience of the pilot institutions, which resulted in the establishment of the ESF projects at all colleges and universities, has demonstrated the importance of adequate funding for staffing and facilities. However, the ESF is limited to specified staffing costs and does not address the more comprehensive list of needs specified in the above recommendation.

## **KEY FINDING VI RELATED TO ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**The majority of pilot students reported that they:**

- A) had no access to useful supports in secondary school that would enable them to cope with, compensate for, accommodate or overcome the effects of learning disabilities;**
- B) had no access in secondary school to assistive technology or other accommodations that would enable them to succeed in their studies;**
- C) received no meaningful individualized transition planning support in secondary school, despite the requirements of Regulation 181/98; and**
- D) surpassed their own expected performance levels at college or university once appropriate accommodations and supports were made available.**

### **Supporting data**

- C 24% of pilot students left secondary school without any diagnosis of learning disabilities and 12% of pilot students reported that they had no re-assessment done after elementary school*
- C 35% of pilot students repeated at least one grade, despite clear evidence from research that such practices are destructive and preventable for students with learning disabilities*
- C 28% of pilot students stated that they had received no special education help of any kind either in elementary or secondary school*
- C only 43% of the pilot students knew that they had been identified as having LD by an Identification Placement Review Committee*
- C 46% of pilot students stated that they had been told that they were "slow learners"*
- C only 16% of the pilot students had access to an LD class placement in secondary school*
- C the most common special education help available to pilot students was doing exams*

- differently from the rest of the students (reported by 57%) and access to a resource room, if they so requested (reported by 47%)*
- C only 8.5% of pilot students had access to assistive technology in secondary school*
  - C only 10.7% of the pilot students received any kind of transition help or support to prepare them for post-secondary education*
  - C students indicated that their understanding of their LD, their ability to explain it and advocate for accommodations significantly improved during the pilot period:*
    - C at the time of intake 47% felt that their understanding of their LD was good or very good; this increased to 75% at the time of exit*
    - C their ability to explain their LD well or very well increased from 37% at the time of intake to 56% at the time of exit*
    - C their ability to advocate for accommodations well or very well increased from 43% at the time of intake to 63% at the time of exit*
  - C 95% of participating students stated that the pilot project contributed significantly to their academic success*
  - C it is important to note that in each focus group at each institution throughout the four years of piloting, students regularly and consistently initiated discussion about the devastating academic and emotional impact of non-identification, school failure, “slow learner” labelling, absence of appropriate educational supports and accommodations and frequent misplacement in classes for those with behavioural and intellectual disabilities.*

**Therefore, LOTF recommends that:**

19. **The Ministry of Education enforce compliance with the *Education Act* and Regulation 181/98 so that students with specific learning disabilities are guaranteed access to appropriate special education programmes and services, diagnostic assessments, learning strategy training, assistive technology use and training, transition planning, a full range of special education placement options and all other entitlements that they have under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Education Act*. Where students are denied *any* of these entitlements, they must be guaranteed the right of appeal.**
20. **The Ministry of Education, the Faculties of Education and the College of Teachers must ensure that all teachers in the Province are taught about learning disabilities, including specific instruction in:**
  - C recognizing the needs and entitlements of students with learning disabilities;**
  - C recognizing the fact that students with learning disabilities can achieve the Provincial curriculum benchmarks and outcomes at the same level as their non-disabled peers, provided that they are taught in ways in which they best learn and are guaranteed access to requisite accommodations;**
  - C how to adapt and differentiate their teaching methods;**
  - C how to utilize the principles of UID;**
  - C how to offer appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of students**

21. **The Provincial special education funding formula be amended so that all students with learning disabilities (most of whom are not and should not be Intensive Support Amount / ISA-eligible) receive appropriate special education programs and services in accordance with their identified strengths and needs.**
22. **To facilitate improved transition planning, the Ministry of Education must immediately release the long-awaited transition planning guide for school board implementation and include in it exceptionality-specific components.**
23. **To facilitate successful graduation from secondary school, when taking the Grade 10 literacy test, students must be guaranteed access to the requisite accommodations listed in their IEP. Where students are initially unsuccessful in the test, they must have access to diagnostic assessments to determine whether they have an unidentified learning disability, or to a review of existing special education provisions to determine whether they require some additional or differentiated teaching prior to and accommodations when re-taking the test.**

Recommendations nineteen to twenty-three, as well as some of the earlier recommendations, relate directly to the work of the Ministry of Education and the school boards. LOTF has kept both ministries informed about its work and provided its reports to both Ministers and staffs. Therefore, none of these recommendations will surprise the Ministry of Education. LOTF and the successor agency look forward to working with the Ministry of Education to bring these specific recommendations to fruition for the benefit of students with specific learning disabilities.

## **KEY FINDING VII RELATED TO THE ROLE OF THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE**

**The LOTF model for applied research, with incentives for establishing pilot projects, accompanied by rigorous evaluation, meaningful accountability measures, and a major focus on valuing active student involvement, has proven successful for initiating significant systemic change within the post-secondary education sector. Similar changes are needed throughout the entire education system. Such change will build upon the successful results of LOTF’s work, with and in support of individuals with learning disabilities, their families, and our communities.**

**Given that the Government of Ontario has already determined that the LOTF be succeeded by a permanent entity, LOTF recommends that:**

24. **The LOTF successor agency be an independent, accountable, “arms’ length” crown agency, with the following mandate:**
  - C the development of detailed implementation and evaluation plans for all LOTF recommendations approved by the Government of Ontario,**
  - C the tracking and evaluation of ongoing research and innovative projects and services related to the implementation of the work of LOTF and the pilots,**
  - C establishment of applied research activities related to meeting the employment and**

- C other life-long needs of persons with specific learning disabilities,**
- C exploration related to meeting the needs of individuals who, in addition to having learning disabilities, face other equity barriers,**
- C collaboration with appropriate organizations in Ontario, such as the ODA Directorate, the Human Rights Commission, LDAO, etc. and related Government ministries,**
- C distribution of information and resources to support professional development and training activities related to learning disabilities, and**
- C a regular five-year review of the relevance and validity of the work of the agency and the education and equity status of persons with learning disabilities in Ontario.**

## **Key personnel involved in the work of the Learning Opportunities Task Force**

### ***Chairman of the Learning Opportunities Task Force:***

Dr. Bette M. Stephenson

### ***Consulting and Research Team members:***

Eva Nichols, Consultant to the Chairman

Allyson Harrison

Larry McCloskey

Laura Weintraub

### ***Administrative staff:***

Bonnie Tiffin, Executive Co-ordinator

Joanna Jannetta, Administrative Assistant to the Co-ordinator

### ***Members of the French Language Assessment Project:***

Gerald Blake

Eva Nichols

Berenice Saracoglu

Bonnie Tiffin

### ***Members of the Committee of Reference:***

Dr. Bette M. Stephenson, Chairman

Mariette Carrier-Fraser, former Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

Dr. Richard Cummings, Integra

Joan Green, former CEO, Education Quality Accountability Office

Catherine Henderson, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Clive Hodder, Provincial Schools Branch, Ministry of Education

Eva Nichols, Consultant to the Chairman

Dr. Wendy Roberts, Hospital for Sick Children

Karen Taylor, Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Douglas Waxman, former President, LDAO

Carol Yaworski, Executive Director, LDAO

Lynn Ziraldo, Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education

### ***Listing of the ten pilot institutions with their key contact staff member:***

- C Cambrian College, Sudbury: Susan Alcorn Mackay;
- C Conestoga College, Kitchener-Waterloo: Marian Mainland;
- C Fanshawe College, London: Frank Walsh;
- C Georgian College in Barrie, Orillia and Owen Sound: Kate Beatty and Jim Bryson;
- C University of Guelph: Bruno Mancini;
- C York University, Toronto: Cora Dusk and Marc Wilchesky;
- C Trent University, Peterborough: Eunice Lund-Lucas;
- C Loyalist College, Belleville: Catherine O'Rourke
- C Nipissing University, North Bay: Dan Pletzer;

C Canadore College, North Bay: Dawson Pratt.  
A full listing of all pilot staffs at all pilot institutions is included in the technical report.