

PUBLIC POLICY ROUNDUP FALL 2007

Since the last edition of Communique there have been developments on several fronts.

Safe Schools initiatives:

On June 5, 2007, Bill 212, the **Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety)**, 2007 was unanimously passed in the Ontario legislature. LDAO wrote a letter congratulating Minister Kathleen Wynne and the members of the Safe Schools Action Team, stating that we were pleased to see many of the recommendations LDAO had made in our submission to the Safe Schools Action Team reflected in the changes. Important features of the amendments include a progressive discipline approach, the requirement that mitigating factors be considered before students are suspended or expelled, and the requirement that school boards provide programs for students on long-term suspensions or who are expelled from all schools in the board (as of February 1, 2008).

On August 24, 2007 the Ministry issued two Policy/Program Memoranda (PPM 141 and 142) giving direction to school boards on programs to be set up for students on long-term suspension and expelled students. LDAO was pleased to see an emphasis on providing continuing academic support to these students, and the statement that "in all cases, every effort must be made to maintain the student's regular academic course work throughout the suspension period". In the case of students with special education needs, boards are required to provide appropriate support consistent with the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Dispute Resolution Processes

The Ministry of Education has recently produced a handbook on informal dispute resolution, *Shared Solutions: A Resource Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts in Special Education*. In addition, a Provincial Advisory Committee on Formal Dispute Resolution has been meeting over the last few months to provide input to the Ministry concerning a continuum of dispute resolution processes, and the design and implementation of a formal dispute resolution pilot, to be launched in the fall of 2007 in six school boards. LDAO is represented on this committee through PAAC on SEAC (Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee on Special Education Advisory Committees).

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Standards Development

The Information and Communications Standards Development Committee has met several times since March, and is working on the format of the proposed standard. With the rapid evolution of communication technologies the development of this standard will be challenging. LDAO is represented on this committee, and learning disabilities will be represented on the Employment Standards Development Committee by the executive director of ALDER (Adult Learning Disabilities Employment Supports). The proposed Transportation Standard was released for public review, and LDAO commented on a few relevant details.

Human Rights Reform

LDAO sent a submission to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, on Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, recommending that:

- at all stages of the complaints process, including the Tribunal hearing, there be adequate time and funding allotted for the accommodation requirements of complainants with disabilities.
- complainants who have disabilities be assigned a case manager/advocate to assist them through the various stages of the process, including investigation
- disability awareness training be mandated for the staff at the Human Rights Legal Support Centre and the Human Rights Tribunal.

Bill 107 was passed in the legislature, and LDAO has written letters to the Chair of the Human Rights Tribunal and the Transition Director of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre outlining our concerns about supports for complainants with LDs. The Human Rights Legal Support Centre is to be funded by the Ontario government to provide advice and assistance on persons' rights under the Human Rights Code. The Centre is also to provide legal services in relation to applications to the Human Rights Tribunal proceedings before the Tribunal, enforcing Tribunal orders, and applications for judicial review of Tribunal proceedings.

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