



LDAO Comments on Access to Assessment for Students with Learning Disabilities

May 2018

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) welcomes the announcement from the Ministry of Education on March 26, 2018 of a ministry initiative to address current waitlists for assessments. As you will know, the issue of addressing access to assessments is one that has been raised a number of times by LDAO, and in the 2017 report of the Provincial Auditor General. In LDAO's response to the 2017 consultation on the proposed Accessibility Standard for Education, we pointed out that:

"Access to psychoeducational assessment is a huge barrier for students with learning disabilities. Most school boards have long waiting lists, and private assessments are very expensive. Parents who have a group medical plan may get some help in paying for private assessments. There is two-tiered system of access to assessment. Assessment reports are required for some IPRC identifications, but more importantly they are needed for an individualized approach to provision of supports, programs and services."

The report by the Auditor General recommended "To ensure all special-needs assessments are completed in a timely and equitable manner, we recommend that school boards:

- establish reasonable timelines for completing psychological, and speech and language assessments;
- have access to all assessments wait lists at the board level and use this information to reassign assessments to specialists who have smaller workloads;
- implement a plan to clear backlogs; and
- track use of external assessments to better gauge demand." (page 643)

While LDAO supports these recommendations from the Auditor General, we also support the need to address underlying issues that affect the wait times. The Association of Chief Psychologists with School Boards and the Ontario Psychological Association outlined these in the February 23, 2018 letter to Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris and Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk. In particular, LDAO supports the need for consistent staffing levels for school psychologists across Ontario school boards. In order to in order to address the province-wide shortage of qualified school psychologists, we point to the need for more graduate programs and placements in school psychology. The potential use of modern technology to assist rural boards is also a solution worth examination.

LDAO has long supported the need for early screening for learning difficulties, and early intervention to address such difficulties. The LDAO Web-based Teaching Tool program, funded

by the Ministry of Education, was set up to address early screening and intervention, in part to provide help to struggling students before they become discouraged. When such interventions are provided early, it will be clearer which students need psychoeducational assessment in order to provide individualized, intensive evidence-based teaching approaches.

In summary, the current barriers to access to psychoeducational assessment need to be considered in planning for more timely and equitable access, and in implementing the current ministry initiative for addressing assessment waitlists. LDAO could add valuable input to consultation groups addressing these issues, in the same way we have participated in the Working Group revising PPM 8, the LD Pilot Project Working Group and the Education Standards Development Committee.

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

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