



Comments on Special Education Funding Consultation

October 2010

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) is pleased to offer comments on the Special Education Funding consultation that the Ministry of Education has been conducting with relevant stakeholders. As the organization representing over 40% of students receiving special education programs and services, the funding of special education has always been a priority interest for LDAO.

The current consultation is focused on possible changes to the way the High Needs Amount (HNA) is calculated for school boards, including the Measures of Variability (MOV) and the new Statistical Prediction Model.

In looking over the PowerPoint handouts for the **Special Education Funding Discussions** two points are apparent:

- Students with learning disabilities (LDs) continue to make up about 44% of students who are identified through an IPRC as needing special education programs and services. Presumably many of the students who receive an IEP without an IPRC also have learning disabilities.
- Learning disabilities identification rates in school boards have virtually no correlation (.01) with school board socioeconomic status (SES).

We understand that the Statistical Prediction Model is much more complicated than SES, and is in some ways aligned with school board identification numbers. Nevertheless we believe that the interests of students with learning disabilities as well as other exceptionalities with higher incidence rates, such as students who are identified as gifted, are best met when a significant proportion of special education funding is census-based, as it is currently through the Special Education Per Pupil Amount (SEPPA).

At the same time, there needs to be a broader understanding of the range of high needs that could and should be covered by the High Needs Amount. Most students with learning disabilities require intensive academic interventions, above and beyond what is usually offered in withdrawal or in-class support, the two most common placements. As stated in the LDAO response to *Learning for All, K-12*, research on education for students with learning disabilities demonstrates the importance of intensity, specificity and individualization in teaching approaches that are effective. Intensive intervention can take place in a variety of placements, but requires an individualized evidence-based program administered by an appropriately qualified special education teacher.

Students with learning disabilities may also have co-existing diagnoses (e.g. ADHD, Tourette Syndrome) and/or secondary emotional/behavioural difficulties. According to a report from the Canadian Council on Learning, "Co-occurrence rates between learning disability and depression

are very high. Depression and anxiety are often a response to the learning disability, especially among girls.” LDA Canada’s applied research study, **Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities** (PACFOLD), 2007, reported that 14.7% of parents of children with identified LDs said that their child had been diagnosed with emotional, psychological or nervous difficulties, while parents of children without disabilities reported only 1% of such diagnoses.

Determination of High Needs Amount funding to school boards should include some way of tracking the combined effect of more than one area of special education need. One option might be to obtain data from Children’s Mental Health Centres in school board regions, from their intake questionnaires, about numbers of children with co-occurring conditions. Similar data might also be obtained from Children’s Treatment Centres in school board areas. Both methods would require collaboration with the Ministry of Child and Youth Services.

Changes to the funding formula for the High Needs Amount must consider a wide range of reasons for high needs support, beyond behavioural intervention and control. Special education funding must be sufficient to allow intensive academic interventions for students with learning disabilities, in a range of appropriate special educational placements. With these types of interventions, students with LDs can be a tremendous boost to the achievement of the Ministry’s goals of higher levels of student success and reduced gaps in student achievement.

In previous submissions to the Ministry of Education on funding, LDAO has recommended the following:

- Special education funding must be maintained as a targeted envelope.
- Special education funding must be protected from being transferred to supplement other funding envelopes.
- School boards should be held accountable for and report on their special education expenditures in collaboration with their Special Education Advisory Committees.
- While maintaining the layered approach to special education funding, the bulk of the funds should be census based, as is currently the case for the SEPPA allocation.
- The SEPPA allocation for the secondary panel must be improved, in accordance with the recommendations of the Education Equality Task Force.
- SEA allocation for equipment usage must be maintained and the funding should reflect current needs.
- The special education funding formula must be changed to focus on student learning and achievement by providing incentives to school boards for improved student outcomes.
- The special education funding formula must be changed to promote research and evidence-based teaching and evaluation methodologies and the utilization of available resources such as collaboration and networking with the Provincial and Demonstration Schools as well as the research community within the Province’s post-secondary sector.

- In accordance with Ontario's human rights and educational legislation, all students with special needs must have access to appropriate special education programs, services and accommodations, as identified by the IPRC and as set out in the student's IEP. Special education placement or programming should not be determined on the basis of the student's eligibility for additional funding.

LDAO continues to support these recommendations and urges the Ministry to include them in its consideration of how to improve the funding of special education in Ontario.

References

A barrier to learning: Mental health disorders among Canadian youth, April 15, 2009, Canadian Council for Learning www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL200900415MentalhealthBarrier.html

Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities (PACFOLD) 2007, Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (www.pacfold.ca/)

**Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario,
365 Bloor St. E., Box 39, Suite 1004,
Toronto, Ont., M4W 3L4, (416) 929-4311, www.ldao.ca**