

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

LDAO Response to the Learning Opportunities Task Force Report

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario supported the establishment and the mandate of the Learning Opportunities Task Force, and participated in the Committee of Reference. We have watched with great interest the ongoing progress of the projects, and wish to commend the quality programming developed in the pilot sites, the useful research gathered and analyzed, and LOTF's success in applying the findings to the wider postsecondary community. In addition, the initiative of developing French language assessment tools will significantly increase the capacity of French language school boards and postsecondary institutions to diagnose and program for their students with learning disabilities.

The Enhanced Services Funding of learning strategists and assistive technologists around the province, along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation, is a very positive outcome of the LOTF research findings, and LDAO supports the continuation of these services. We also agree with LOTF that funding of special needs services should in some way reflect the number of students with disabilities served by the institution. In order for students with LD to succeed in college or universities "each post-secondary institution should receive adequate base funding ... 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." (LOTF Recommendation # 18)

In addition, the availability of transition programming for students with LD, from secondary to postsecondary education, and from secondary or postsecondary education to the workplace, is a very important component of the support that students with LD require.

Many of the recommendations of the LOTF report parallel those of LDAO and LDAO's Adult Advocacy Committee in response to the Ontario Human Rights Commission Consultation Paper on Education and Disability; for example:

- recommendation that students have access to the Bursary for Students with Disabilities to cover disability-related costs, regardless of OSAP eligibility.
- recommendation that implementation of principles of Universal Instructional Design be encouraged in postsecondary settings.
- recommendations on inservicing faculty and promoting awareness of their duty to accommodate students with learning disabilities.
- recommendations on access to assessment and diagnosis of learning disabilities for adults.

It is possible that the establishment of Regional Assessment and Resource Centre, as recommended by LOTF, could be one step in addressing the access to assessment issue.

LDAO has made its own recommendations to the Ministry of Citizenship and to the Ontario Human Rights Commission on the need for Accessibility Plans under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act to be inclusive of all disabilities, and to have accountability mechanisms.

LOTF's recommendation that all teachers in Ontario be taught about learning disabilities is in line with the recommendations of the Teacher Education Working Group of LDAO's Promoting Early Intervention Project. (see Projects on the LDAO website: www.ldao.on.ca)

Finally, LDAO strongly supports LOTF Recommendation # 6, that "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."

LDAO is grateful for the leadership shown by LOTF in adopting and promoting the new definition of learning disabilities and the diagnostic assessment protocol developed through LDAO's Promoting Early Intervention Project.

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