

LDAO Public Policy Manual 2002

Section Q: Professional Standards

The policies in this section relate to the standards which must be achieved and maintained by all professionals who are involved with students with learning disabilities.

Policies

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Policy Q1 – Professional Training/Development

Q1.1 LDAO advocates that all professionals including para-professionals involved in the field of education be required to take appropriate in-service/professional development courses such that they acquire a reasonable level of expertise in the field of learning disabilities.

Q1.2 LDAO advocates that all teachers and other school based personnel working with students with learning disabilities have the training necessary to achieve the competence levels outlined in the regulations of the MET and the “Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession”, developed by the Ontario College of Teachers.

Rationale

All educational professionals will encounter individuals with learning disabilities in the course of their careers. It is essential that they are informed of the nature of learning disabilities and the role they can play in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities.

This is of particular importance as integration and regular class placement are the most common placement option for students with learning disabilities. All staff dealing with students with learning disabilities must be informed of the nature of learning disabilities and the processes involved in appropriate identification, accommodation and remediation of learning disabilities.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996

Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession, Ontario College of Teachers, 1998

“For the love of learning”, Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, 1995

Memorandum #115, Ministry of Education, 27 June 1994
Response to Bill 31, LDAO, 1995
Response to the “Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession”, LDAO, 1998

Policy Q2 – College of Teachers

LDAO endorses the Ontario College of Teachers as the professional body for licensing, accrediting and governing the activities and competence of teachers in Ontario. LDAO advocates that the College of Teachers develop a set of competency and accountability standards for principals, vice-principals and teachers and use these standards both as an evaluation measure for licensing purposes and by recommending their use as an evaluation tool by school boards.

Rationale

Competence and accountability are the two key qualities that all parents and students with learning disabilities should be able to expect from principals, vice-principals and teachers. The Ontario College of Teachers, as the licensing body for teachers and teacher training institutions, is the appropriate body to establish criteria for determining competence in their membership.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996
Response to the consultation on Bill 31, LDAO, 1995
Correspondence with the Ontario College of Teachers on teacher training and standards of practice for the teaching profession, LDAO, 1996-98

Policy Q3 – Teacher Competencies

LDAO endorses the document “Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession” as developed by the Ontario College of Teachers and the five overall goal statements contained in the document. LDAO advocates that these proposed standards be expanded into detailed pre- and in-service expectations which must be mandated for every faculty of education and school board. LDAO further advocates that the College of Teachers establish a specific set of special education competencies to enhance teacher training and evaluation in Ontario.

Rationale

A well-qualified competent teacher is the most important component in the appropriate and successful education of all students, including students with learning disabilities. The Ontario College of Teachers as the body responsible for licensing teacher training institutions is the appropriate body to establish criteria for the minimum standards to be met by teachers both generally and in the area of special education.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996
Response to the consultation on Bill 31, LDAO, 1995
Correspondence with the Ontario College of Teachers on teacher training and standards of practice for the teaching profession, LDAO, 1996-98

Policy Q4 – Pre-Service Training for Teachers

LDAO advocates that the Ontario College of Teachers expand the pre-service training and testing of teachers, such that all newly qualified teachers can demonstrate some basic skills in identifying

students who have or are at risk for having learning disabilities and knowing how they need to modify their teaching methods to meet the needs of and accommodate these students.

Rationale

Almost 50% of all special education students are students with learning disabilities. Since the vast majority of these students are receiving their special education programming in a regular class, with the regular teacher being responsible for implementing the components of their IEPs, all teachers must be able to teach students with learning disabilities in the way that these students can learn best. Further, since having their needs accommodated is legally mandated, no matter what educational placement is provided for these students, all teachers must have the requisite competencies to provide these accommodations.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, Ministry of Education, 1996
Response to the consultation on Bill 31, LDAO, 1995
Correspondence and dialogue with the College of Teachers on teacher training, competencies and standards of practice for the teaching profession, LDAO, 1996-2001

Policy Q5 – Additional Qualifications

LDAO advocates that the College of Teachers ensure the availability of regular and appropriately structured AQ courses in all special education areas, such that all practicing teachers can demonstrate the requisite skills in identifying students who have or are at risk for having learning disabilities and knowing how they need to modify their teaching methods to meet the needs of and accommodate these students.

Rationale

Almost 50% of all special education students are students with learning disabilities. Since the vast majority of these students are receiving their special education programming in a regular class, with the regular teacher being responsible for implementing the components of their IEPs, all teachers must be able to teach students with learning disabilities in the way that these students can learn best. Further, since having their needs accommodated is legally mandated, no matter what educational placement is provided for these students, all teachers must have the requisite competencies to provide these accommodations.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, Ministry of Education, 1996
Response to the consultation on Bill 31, LDAO, 1995
Correspondence and dialogue with the College of Teachers on teacher training, competencies and standards of practice for the teaching profession, LDAO, 1996-2001

Policy Q6 – Teacher Testing and Recertification*

*No longer applicable

LDAO advocates that the College of Teachers develop a plan for the licensing, testing and recertification of teachers, in accordance with the Government's announcements, such that the plan focuses on enabling teachers to acquire and demonstrate teaching competencies and skills as well as factual knowledge, that there is adequate focus on special education competencies and that the format for the process parallels that which is utilized by other professional bodies for licensing and certification, such as the College of Psychologists, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, etc.

Rationale

A well-qualified competent teacher who has both the knowledge and the skills to meet the learning needs of the students in the classroom, including students with learning disabilities, is the most important component in the appropriate and successful education of all students. As new information becomes available about how students learn and as the new curriculum is developed, it is important that teachers participate in ongoing education and training. However, as highly educated professionals, their licensing, testing and any plans for recertification should match those that are in place for other professionals in similar or related fields. In particular, any plans for recertification testing should be enabling rather than punitive.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, Ministry of Education, 1996
Response to the consultation on Bill 31, LDAO, 1995
Correspondence and dialogue with the College of Teachers on teacher training, competencies and standards of practice for the teaching profession, LDAO, 1996-2001
CEC/DLD listing of teacher competencies, 1995

Policy Q7 – Specialist Teachers of Students with Learning Disabilities

LDAO advocates that the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Ontario College of Teachers and the faculties of education in Ontario, develop and implement a training program to enable teachers to become specialist teachers of students with learning disabilities.

Rationale

Currently, in the pre-service teacher training program approximately 90 minutes is spent on general special education issues.

Teachers who take the three-part special education program, even those electing to take the learning disabilities option in part III, acquire limited knowledge and understanding of how to teach students with learning disabilities effectively. With 10% of the population having learning disabilities and with most of these students being placed in regular classrooms, every teacher needs to have some knowledge of teaching students with learning disabilities and access to support and assistance from “master” teachers or mentors.

Some students with severe learning disabilities still continue in self-contained classes while a few students attend the residential demonstration school. These students require specialist trained teachers. In spite of a much lower incidence rate, there is training available for specialist teachers of deaf, blind and deaf-blind students. Given the high and, in fact, growing incidence of learning disabilities, it is necessary to introduce such training in this exceptionality area.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996
Correspondence with the Ontario College of Teachers, LDAO, 1996-98
Response to the standards of practice for the teaching profession document, LDAO, 1998

Policy Q8 – Qualifications of Principals and Vice-Principals

LDAO advocates that the current legislative mandatory qualifications for principals and vice-principals be extended to include:

- having appropriate special education and guidance training

- being knowledgeable about the relevant legislation governing education Ontario, including human rights legislation
- having training in and knowledge of curriculum development, evaluation, modification, including the writing and evaluation of IEPs

Rationale

Principals and to a lesser extent vice-principals must have a broad base of knowledge about the education system, special education and human rights legislation to facilitate the school and all staff meeting their legal obligations to all their students.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996

Regulation 297, s40

Letter to Ministry of Education regarding the qualifications and duties of principals and vice-principals, LDAO, 1998

Policy Q9 – The role of special education teachers

LDAO advocates that the Ministry of Education mandate and fund full compliance with Regulation 298, section 19, as it relates to the placement and deployment of special education teachers, such that:

- all exceptional students are assured that their special education programme is delivered by or at least in conjunction with a qualified special education teacher, and
- all special education classes are taught by a teacher who is a qualified special education teacher with the appropriate exceptionality specific qualification.

Rationale

In many cases, school boards allocate their teaching staff without necessarily considering that teachers should teach their teachable subjects and that students should be taught by teachers who are appropriately qualified to teach the subject in question. This is equally important for primary reading as secondary English or math. However, it is even more important for exceptional students with specific disability related needs that they be taught by teachers appropriately trained in that field. While in most cases it is recognized that students who are deaf or blind require significantly differentiated teaching, delivered by appropriately qualified staff, a similar need is frequently ignored for students with learning disabilities. Although every teacher should have basic skills in working with students with learning disabilities, students who are placed in a self-contained special education class or in a withdrawal type of programme should be assured that they will be taught by a teacher who is qualified in the field of learning disabilities.

References

Ontario College of Teachers Act, Ministry of Education, 1996

Response to the consultation on Bill 31, LDAO, 1995

Correspondence and dialogue with the College of Teachers on teacher training, competencies and standards of practice for the teaching profession, LDAO, 1996-2001

Regulation 298, section 19

Education Act, section 170

Special Education Information Handbook, Ministry of Education, 1984

Policy Q10 – Educational Assistants

LDAO advocates that the Ministry of Education amend Regulation 298, Operation of Schools - General, by specifying the role, qualifications, training, etc., of Educational Assistants, including the necessary directions that Educational Assistants must not function as teachers by undertaking teaching duties for the exceptional students with whom they work, preparing IEPs or report cards or carrying out any assessments or student evaluations for which they are not formally qualified.

Rationale

Educational assistants are very important in the work of the school system, especially for exceptional students who require additional help from time to time or even on a regular basis. However, most educational assistants are not qualified teachers and as such are therefore not qualified to carry out tasks which are the duties of teachers. Students with learning disabilities are shortchanged if their special education programming and services are mostly delivered to them by educational assistants, rather than qualified special education teachers.

References

Position paper on Professional Standards and Competencies for Educational Assistants, CEC, 1995
Responses to the Student Focused Funding documents and the deployment of educational assistants in the ISA process, LDAO. 1997-2001

Policy Q11 – Professional Standards for Educational Assistants

LDAO advocates that all educational assistants have postsecondary or equivalent pre-service education in a relevant child and youth or other program from an accredited college or university.

Rationale

The role of the educational assistant has evolved from non-instructional helper in the classroom to an instructional assistant for students with special needs. Diversity in knowledge and skills and competence in delivering assistance should be mandatory prerequisites to placement in a classroom.

References

Position paper on Professional Standards and Competencies for Educational Assistants, CEC, 1995

Policy Q12 – In-service for Educational Assistants

LDAO advocates that school boards provide and require educational assistants to attend professional development programs on learning disabilities and related programming strategies.

Rationale

As in any profession or discipline, ongoing professional development is important. Educational assistants must be aware of the nature and consequences of learning disabilities and have up-to-date information about appropriate programming strategies.

References

“For the love of learning”, Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, 1995
Position paper on Professional Standards and Competencies for Educational Assistants, CEC, 1995

Policy Q13 – Role of Professionals outside the School System

LDAO advocates that professionals working outside the school system with individuals who have or may have learning disabilities receive training in recognizing the signs and symptoms of learning disabilities and knowledge of modifications and accommodations to facilitate greater identification and assistance for individuals with learning disabilities.

Rationale

Professionals from many disciplines come into contact with persons who have learning disabilities, including paediatricians, family doctors, public health nurses, social workers and child care workers, early childhood educators, audiologists, speech and language therapists, day care workers, employers, human resources professionals and recreation leaders.

If trained, any could recognize signs of learning disabilities, and all need to know how to respond appropriately to persons with LD. Some medical doctors have been trained to assess for learning disabilities, or at least in undertaking basic testing to assist in deciding whether or not to refer to a psychologist. Public health nurses can help parents to find routes to appropriate assessment. Early childhood educators and day care workers can plan programs that do not involve academic instruction to help develop weak perceptual areas. Audiologists and speech and language therapists need to be able to distinguish language learning disabilities from other hearing and language-related problems.

Recreation leaders can use strategies for accommodation and compensation in coaching persons with learning disabilities, thereby increasing chances of success and resultant enhancement of self-confidence and self-esteem. All the professionals referred to above can help persons with learning disabilities and their families gain a clearer understanding and develop more appropriate responses.

Social workers and child care workers who know the signs of learning disability can refer clients for appropriate assessment when they suspect that an unidentified learning disabilities may be a factor in creating social and emotional problems.

References

“Please Doctor...if someone should mention learning disabilities: a handbook for physicians”; LDAO, 1984

Response to The Children’s Act, LDAO, 1983

Response to OSLA Report, LDAO, 1996

See also: Policy D9

Policy Q14 – Social Service and Mental Health Personnel

LDAO advocates that all social service and mental health personnel be informed of and trained to recognize learning disabilities.

Rationale

There is a high incidence of learning disabilities in the population accessing and needing social and mental health services. In order for social services and/or mental health personnel to provide effective services they must be trained in the area of learning disabilities. Assessment services must be made available where learning disabilities are suspected.

References

Children with Emotional and Learning Disabilities in Canada Report, 1972

Ontario Child Health Study, 1984

Integra study on the psycho-social needs of students with learning disabilities in Metro Toronto, 1985

Report of the Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities, 1992
See also: Policy D9

Policy Q15 – Training of Officials

LDAO advocates that all judges, defence counsel, Crown attorneys, police officers, social workers and probation/parole officers and corrections workers be trained to recognize and respond appropriately to individuals who have or may have learning disabilities.

Rationale

There is a high incidence of learning disabilities among the delinquent population. Unidentified learning disabilities may lead to a high level of anger, low self-esteem and frustration that in turn may result in anti-social acts. Once in the judicial system, a person with learning disabilities may give false statements or confessions as a result of their learning disability. This may be due to language processing, low literacy skill, an inability to fully understand or express themselves, or a desire to appear 'anything but stupid'. Learning disabilities of a conceptual nature may result in an individual committing offences or repeating offences without understanding the wrongness of the act.

References

Young Offenders Act, 1984
"Cognitive disorders and syntactical deficiencies in the inmate populations of federal penitentiaries in Canada"; Koopman, P., UBC, 1983
"Learning Disabilities and the Young Offender: arrest to disposition"; LDAC, 1985
"Did you ever wonder why?"; Nichols, E., LDAO, 1987
"The LD/JD Link: causation or correlation"; Crealock, C., UWO, 1987
See also: Policies N1, N2, N3

Policy Q16 – Access to Legal Services Provided by Legal Professional who are Knowledgeable about Learning Disabilities

LDAO advocates that the Law Society of Upper Canada and the Ontario Legal Aid Plan establish a panel of lawyers who are familiar with educational law and who are accessible to families and students facing suspension/expulsion hearings and other school situations which call for the involvement of qualified legal professionals.

Rationale

Students facing suspension or expulsion have a right to legal representation. It is important that these students and their families have access to lawyers who are familiar with educational law. This is particularly important when the student is an exceptional student, as the issues which may arise can be legally complex.

References

"Children and the Law", Wilson, J., and Tomlinson, M., Butterworths, 1994
"Education Law", Brown, A.F., and Zuker, M.A., Carswell, 1998
"Education Law: the three Rs - rights, rules and relationships", Canadian Bar Association conference proceedings, 1985
"Children and the Law", The Canadian Institute conference proceedings, 1984
See also: Policy P3, P4