



Advocacy Toolkit for Literacy Based Learning Disabilities 3.0

Goal: Evidence based interventions for learning disabilities in all schools in the province of Ontario.

This toolkit was developed to inform and motivate individuals to speak up on behalf of students who are struggling to read. Some of these children will go on to be diagnosed with literacy-based learning disabilities or dyslexia. Early intervention with evidence based reading interventions, based on a phonics approach, can teach kids at risk for an LD diagnosis the skills they need to read well. Psychoeducational testing is not necessary early on, and children at risk can be identified using simple screening tests administered by teachers. Students, parents, physicians, psychologists, and teachers all want the same thing: the best outcomes possible for our students, regardless of their learning profile.

Ontario students have performed well in reading in the PISA (OECD Programme for International Student Achievement, measured every three years) tests in 2015, placing 5th in the world. However, among Canadian provinces, Ontario has the greatest gap between high and low-performing students in reading, so this is no time to rest on our laurels.

Learning to read is fundamental and is closely linked with health outcomes. In addition, the science is unequivocal. We know what works for the 20% of students for whom reading does not come easily. Quality, evidence-based programs, some of which have been developed and researched in Ontario, are being used in many schools, but they must be made available in every school.

Please use this toolkit in a spirit of collaboration. Building relationships between families, medicine, psychology and education will help optimize student achievement and well-being. We are better together.

Nicky Jones-Stokreef, MD, Developmental Paediatrician November 18th, 2017.

Njonesstokreef@osmh.on.ca

[Www.pondaca.ca](http://www.pondaca.ca)

@pondanetwork

1. Backgrounder- <https://pondaca.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/evidence-based-interventions-for-literacy-based-ld.docx>
2. Ministry of Education documents that discuss intervention for children with learning disabilities
 - a. **New** Special Education in Ontario, policy and resource guide 2017 (Draft) – this is a highly detailed document which supersedes many other ministry publications
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2017e.pdf
 - b. IDENTIFICATION OF AND PROGRAM PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: policy/program memorandum 8
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm8.pdf>
 - c. Learning for All
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/learningforall2013.pdf>
 - d. Highlights of IPRC Regulation 181/98
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/hilites.html>
 - e. Guide to Special Education: Every school board must post one specific to their board on their website
3. Current political climate

This is a time of change in Ontario. There are signs of political will to ensure equity in the education system for all students, but also a desire to reign in spending, for example by considering closing the Provincial Demonstration Schools. With an election coming in spring 2018, this is the time to make your voice heard!

- a. Review of English Language Demonstration Schools by the Strategic Counsel http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/consult_tsc.pdf
 - b. Pilot of Empower and Lexia in 4 regions in Ontario, 7 school boards
 - i. https://news.ontario.ca/edu/en/2016/08/ontario-helping-students-with-special-needs-reach-their-full-potential.html?_ga=1.42307173.1782122941.1466452734
 - ii. <http://windsorstar.com/news/local-news/public-school-boards-literacy-pilot-projects-paying-dividends>
 - c. Accessibility standards in education promised by premier Wynne
 - i. More info available at <http://www.aodaalliance.org/education/default.asp>
4. Best Evidence Based instruction programs for decoding
- There are numerous programs being used in schools in Ontario, but only a few of them have high quality research evidence of effectiveness. Key elements of effective programs include explicit, progressive instruction on a daily basis over a number of weeks that is manualized to limit variation from one teacher to the next. There should be a tiered approach for students of all ages, starting in KG or grade one for the best outcomes.
- a. SRA reading mastery <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/aphd/UserFiles/File/Reading%20Mastery.doc>
 - b. Empower <http://www.sickkids.ca/empower/index.html>
 - c. National Institute for Direct Instruction <https://www.nifdi.org>
 - d. Rave-o-Town <http://www.voyagersopris.com/curriculum/subject/literacy/rave-o/research-results>
5. Potential barriers to implementation of evidence based interventions in school boards or individual schools
- a. The ultimate authority on what program is supported in a particular school is the principal who may not support such interventions
 - b. Cost

- c. Philosophy of inclusion for all with differentiated instruction in one classroom, which may limit the ability to remove certain students for Direct Instruction
 - d. Inquiry based learning may be valued above explicit teaching
 - e. Teacher's College curriculum may not include components of evidence based reading instruction, so new teachers need further education
 - f. Staff turnover which leads to the need to retrain staff to deliver the specialized reading program
 - g. Reading Recovery: many schools have committed to this inadequate, expensive, and resource intense program, with nothing left for good evidence based effective programs (see above) <https://www.dys-add.com/resources/ReadingMethods/ReadingRecoveryUnivofORStu dy.pdf>
6. What physicians can do to help their patients with reading difficulties
- a. Educate yourself
 - i. Be aware of your local school resources
 - ii. Consider the values of your local school board eg mission statement
 - iii. Develop a deeper understanding of dyslexia and how it is best treated
 - iv. Connect with local champions, agencies such as LDAO
 - b. Develop a positive working relationship with your local school board
 - i. Invite school psychologists, special ed teachers to relevant lectures, symposiums, workshops in your area
 - ii. Develop a working group with school representatives to share information and develop pathways to help students with complex learning, behavioural and mental health needs
 - iii. Attend school case conferences for your most hard to serve patients/students to help find solutions together
 - iv. Have a policy of welcoming school staff to call you or attend office visits to help serve the needs of complex and hard to serve patients/students
 - v. Ask to attend school board training for reading intervention

- c. Request a meeting with the teacher/principal at your patient's school (see sample letter below)
 - i. Billing with code K704 can be used if 2 school personnel and parent are present, 10 minute intervals \$31.25, includes telephone conferencing
 - d. Meet with the superintendent of special education at your local school board(s) to discuss their tiered approach to reading education
 - i. Draft letter you can adapt (see sample below)
 - ii. Suggest a pilot of an evidence based intervention (see bullet 4)
 - e. Use social media to get your message out: many teachers are on Twitter!
 - f. Request evidence based interventions in your consultation reports and letters to schools to support your patients with learning disabilities
 - g. Make a submission to the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) of your local school board
 - h. Consider speaking to the media or writing an opinion piece
 - i. Motivate parents and students to speak up: they are the ultimate stakeholders
7. Resources for families:

The role of parents as their child's first teachers is a critical one, and there are countless ways parents can encourage literacy in the home. Despite this, sometimes it is necessary to reach out for help.

- a. Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)
Local branches available in many regions of the province.
<http://www.ldao.ca/>
- b. **New** LDAO website to provide education, knowledge and resources to families
<http://www.ldathome.ca>
- c. Parent guide to reading and writing with your child, KG to Grade 6, available in 13 languages, includes many links to other resources, published in 2014
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/parentGuideLitEn.pdf>

- d. Promoting literacy from birth
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/read_speak_sing_to_your_baby
 - e. Promoting literacy in school aged children
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/promoting_reading_in_school_aged_children
 - f. Mobile app with preK to Grade 1 activities that target literacy and numeracy <http://more.starfall.com/info/about.php>
 - g. Organization supporting literacy in Australia “Teach reading effectively in every classroom, every day.”
<http://www.fivefromfive.org.au/parent-resources/>
 - h. **Integra** is a children's mental health agency providing evidence-informed, therapeutic programs and services to children, youth and their families who are dealing with mental health issues complicated by learning disabilities (LDMH).
<http://www.childdevelop.ca/programs/integra-program>
 - i. Reading rockets has lots of helpful information, including a “how to” on dialogic reading
<http://www.readingrockets.org>
 - j. Jollyphonics is a fun phonics based multisensory program for teaching letter sounds to young children
<http://www.jollylearning.co.uk>
 - k. TD Summer Reading Club: available at a library near you!
8. Resources for teachers
- a. <http://www.ldatschool.ca/>
 - b. <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/balancedliteracydiet/Home/index.html>
 - c. <https://learndifferent.org/>

- d. <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2016/07/rr11.pdf>
- e. <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/marketplace/HiFi-Handout.pdf>
- f. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/12-components-research-based-reading-programs>
- g. [Www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org)
- h. [Www.teachspced.ca](http://www.teachspced.ca)
- i. [Www.raz-kids.com](http://www.raz-kids.com)

9. Resources for physicians from the CPS

Physicians have an important role to play in promoting literacy in their practice. Students are frequently referred to paediatricians to help sort out why they are struggling in school.

- a. <http://www.cps.ca/en/tools-outils/map/literacy-resources-for-physicians>
- b. <http://www.cps.ca/issues-questions/literacy>
- c. <http://www.cps.ca/issues-questions/children-with-school-problems>

10. Advocacy Groups

- a. Dyslexia Canada <http://www.dyslexiacanada.org/>
- b. Decoding Dyslexia Ontario
https://www.facebook.com/DecodingDyslexiaOntario/?ref=page_internal
- c. International Dyslexia Association, Ontario branch
<http://www.idaontario.com/>
- d. **New** Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation
<http://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/heather-munroe-blum-heather-reisman-and-col-chris-hadfield-announce-the-launch-of-the-canadian-childrens-literacy-foundation-in-honour-of-canadas-150th-622985173.html>
- e. People for Education: working to support public education in Ontario. Sign up for their newsletter to stay up to date on upcoming changes. They also have an annual conference in November in Toronto.
[Www.peopleforeducation.ca](http://www.peopleforeducation.ca)

11. **New** Resources for other learning/behaviour issues

- a. Decades of research have helped experts identify key concepts that-if not learned properly-will hinder a child's progression in mathematics.
www.knowledgehook.com
- b. Many individuals with learning difficulties also struggle with:
 - i. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder www.caddra.ca
 - ii. Tourette's Syndrome www.tourette.ca
 - iii. Developmental Coordination Disorder www.canchild.ca
 - iv. Language Disorder
 - v. Autism Spectrum Disorder www.autismontario.com
 - vi. Mental health conditions
<http://www.childdevelop.ca/sites/default/files/files/Sept%202020Integra%20LDMH%20Handbook%202016.pdf>

Glossary of terms

<http://www.rrdsb.com/sites/www.rrdsb.com/files/sss/speced/terms.pdf>

Sample letters

Principal
School's name

Dear <insert principal's name here>

I am a paediatrician working in this community. I am also a member of PONDA ([@pondanetwork](http://www.ponda.ca)), a group of physicians and psychologists very interested in working collaboratively with school boards to maximize outcomes for students with learning disabilities in Ontario.

<Insert Name> has been referred to me because of his/her difficulties in school. I believe he/she has significant difficulties learning the skills needed for proficiency in reading, including phonemic awareness, and phonological processing.

In my clinical practice, I meet many children who struggle with their learning, particularly with reading and writing. Decades of research has shown these students require a phonics approach to reading intervention in order to succeed.

The Ministry of Education (EDU) in Ontario has made it mandatory for school boards to have a dedicated approach to teaching children with LD in PPM8. The tiered approach to learning, described in Ministry documents such as Learning for All and Education for All, outlines the process of identifying students at risk for LD early and intervening in a stepwise approach with increasing intensity of interventions, rather than waiting for them to fail. We support these strategies.

I recommend that <insert name> be assessed as soon as possible for reading support, and I recommend programs such as Jolly Phonics, EMPOWER, SRA and Rave-O as evidenced based reading programs.

I would be happy to discuss your school's overall approach to a tiered intervention for children with literacy based learning disabilities and how this would help your student<insert name>. I know we share a desire for the best possible outcome for his/her achievement and wellbeing. Sincerely,

<your name>

Superintendent of Special Education
Your District School Board

Dear <insert the supertindent's actual name>

I am a member of PONDA (www.ponda.ca, @pondanetwork), a group of physicians and psychologists very interested in working collaboratively with school boards to maximize outcomes for students with learning disabilities in Ontario.

In my clinical practice, I meet many children who struggle with their learning, particularly with reading and writing. Research in Canada has shown that 5 percent of students have a formal identification of a learning disability (LD), but the numbers of students who struggle with literacy are much higher. Fully 85 percent of students with a learning disability will require direct and intentional instruction in the area of literacy to be successful. Decades of research has shown these students require a phonics approach to reading intervention in order to succeed. (1.) One example of an excellent evidence based program is Empower, developed and researched in Ontario by a team at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. This year, there are 30 school boards in the province of Ontario using Empower. It is also being piloted in 4 school boards over three years by the Ministry of Education, to look at the feasibility of rolling this out province wide.

The Ministry of Education (EDU) in Ontario has made it mandatory for school boards to have a dedicated approach to teaching children with LD in PPM8. The tiered approach to learning,

described in Ministry documents such as Learning for All and Education for All, outlines the process of identifying students at risk for LD early and intervening in a stepwise approach with increasing intensity of interventions, rather than waiting for them to fail. Ongoing monitoring is necessary to document response to intervention.

Learning Disabilities are not just an Education issue, but a Health issue. Children with untreated LDs are more likely to have mental health problems like anxiety and depression, and report a higher rate of chronic medical conditions in adulthood. Thousands of children in Ontario are seen every year by paediatricians at great public expense to the health care system, because they struggle in school.

I would like to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss your board's approach to a tiered intervention for children with literacy based learning disabilities. I know we share a desire for the best possible outcomes for our children when it comes to their achievement and wellbeing, and a robust approach to addressing learning disabilities is a critical step in this endeavour.

Sincerely,

<insert your name>

1. Galuschka K, Ise E, Krick K, Schulte-Körne G (2014) Effectiveness of Treatment Approaches for Children and Adolescents with Reading Disabilities: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. PLoS ONE 9(2): e89900. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0089900