



Physicians of Ontario Neurodevelopmental Advocacy

Advocacy Toolkit for Literacy Based Learning Disabilities 6.0

Goal: Evidence based interventions for children with literacy based 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. Reading is a complex skill that most children learn from good teaching. Approximately 10 percent of students struggle to learn how to read, and some of these children will go on to be diagnosed with literacy-based learning disabilities or dyslexia. Early intervention with systematic, evidence based reading instruction, based on a phonics approach, can teach kids at risk for an LD diagnosis the skills they need to read well. [Ladder of Reading](#). Psychoeducational testing is not necessary early on, and children at risk can be identified using easy to use [screening tests](#) administered by teachers. Students, parents, physicians, psychologists, and teachers: we all want the same thing, the best possible outcomes for our students, regardless of their learning profile.

Ontario students have performed well in reading in National and International tests. In the [PCAP](#) 2016 testing (Pan Canadian Assessment Program) which highlighted reading literacy, Ontario did well with 89% of the random sample of Grade 8 students reaching at least a baseline level of reading proficiency. There is some cause for concern since this means 11% of Ontario Grade 8 students do not have at least a baseline level of reading proficiency. In the [PISA](#) 2015 testing (OECD Programme for International Student Achievement, measured in 15 year olds every three years), Ontario placed 5th in the world in reading proficiency. However, among Canadian provinces, Ontario had the greatest gap between high and low-performing students in reading. According to a recent [report](#) by the

Ontario Human Rights Commission, students with disabilities (including learning disabilities) do not have equal access to educational opportunities. There is still important work to be done.

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

Nicky Jones-Stokreef, MD, Developmental Paediatrician April 3,2019.

Njonesstokreef@osmh.on.ca

www.pondaca.ca

@pondanetwork

@njstokreef

1. Backgrounder-

- a. <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. 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

- f. Shared Solutions: A guide to preventing and resolving conflicts regarding programs and services for students with special education needs

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/shared.pdf>

3. Current political climate at Ministry of Education

The PC government in Ontario is putting their stamp on education. Changes are being made to the curriculum, class sizes are going up, and elearning is becoming a regular part of high school. Funding for special education is not changing substantially for the next academic year, as far as we can tell so far. Some of the measures include the following:

- a. [Memo](#) outlining the changes to education starting in 2019, some of which is based on the public consultation that ended in December 2018.
- b. The Ministry has been supporting a pilot program in many boards to allow the provision of the **After School Skills Development Program**. The ministry will make an investment of \$6.1 million to allow this successful pilot to be extended to all school boards across the province in the 2019-20 school year.
- c. The March 11 **Supporting Students with ASD** Memo from government mentions:

The ministry will host a series of virtual sessions about **exclusions and modified days** to engage parents, educators, administrators and others in a dialogue about these complex issues. The details will be communicated at a later date. The issue of denial of school attendance is one that affects all students with special education needs, not just those with ASD. This issue has been raised by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in its **Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities** (2018), as well as by the AODA Alliance and People for Education. PAAC on SEAC addressed the issue in a 2018 response to the authors of the *Suspension/Expulsion Program Evaluation* conducted by Western University Centre for Educational Leadership

4. 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 Kindergarten or Grade one, for the best outcomes. Although reading comprehension is the ultimate goal, children who struggle with decoding do not develop the fluency needed for good reading comprehension.

- 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
<http://www.voyagersopris.com/curriculum/subject/literacy/rave-o/research-results>
- e. 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

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 be based on the best 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 no time or money left for better evidence based, effective programs (see above)

<http://www.iferi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IFERI-INFORM-No.2-June-2015-Reading-Recovery.pdf> ;
<https://www.dys-add.com/resources/ReadingMethods/ReadingRecoveryUnivofORStudy.pdf>

6. What physicians can do to help their patients with reading difficulties through advocacy

- a. Educate yourself
 - i. Be aware of your local school resources
 - ii. Consider the values of your local school board e.g. mission statement
 - iii. Develop a deeper understanding of dyslexia and how it is best treated
 - iv. Connect with local champions and 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. Daily dialogic reading is important. In some cases, it is necessary to reach out for help from experts in teaching your child to read.

- a. Promoting literacy from birth
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/read_speak_sing_to_your_baby
- b. Promoting literacy in school aged children
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/promoting_reading_in_school_aged_children
- c. Guide to helping your child to read at home.
<http://www.fivefromfive.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/homereading.pdf>
- d. Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)
Local branches available in many regions of the province.
<http://www.ldao.ca/>
- e. LDAO website to provide education, knowledge and resources to families
<http://www.ldathome.ca>

- 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!
- l. Evidence based resource to be used along side an effective reading program <https://www.nancyyoung.ca/secretcodeactions>
- m. **NEW** Neuropsychologist who researches the brain basis of learning and memory. Website has many useful articles and resources.
<http://www.danielwillingham.com/articles.html>

8. Resources for teachers

- a. <http://www.ldatschool.ca/>
- b. <https://learndifferent.org/>
- c. <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2016/07/rr11.pdf>
- d. <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/marketplace/HiFi-Handout.pdf>
- e. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/12-components-research-based-reading-programs>

- f. [Www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org)
- g. [Www.teachspeced.ca](http://www.teachspeced.ca)
- h. [Www.raz-kids.com](http://www.raz-kids.com)
- i. <https://www.nancyyoung.ca/secretcodeactions>
- j. Ladder of reading <https://www.nancyyoung.ca/research-and-links>

9. Resources for physicians

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>
- d. Jacob G, et al. Literacy Promotion by Health Care Professionals: A Comprehensive Biomedical and Psychosocial Approach. Paediatr Child Health, 2017;Vol XX, p 1-6.

10. Resources for Psychologists

- a. Consensus statement on guidelines for assessment and diagnosis of children, adolescents and adults with Learning Disability
[http://www.psych.on.ca/getattachment/37646d71-1469-4731-a3c6-55a458a8238f/OPA-Guidelines-for-Diagnosis-and-Assessment-of-Learning-Disabilities-Sept-7-2018-\(1\)-1.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf](http://www.psych.on.ca/getattachment/37646d71-1469-4731-a3c6-55a458a8238f/OPA-Guidelines-for-Diagnosis-and-Assessment-of-Learning-Disabilities-Sept-7-2018-(1)-1.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf)

11. Advocacy Groups

- a. Dyslexia Canada: currently engaged in an awareness campaign called Mark it Read for Dyslexia <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. 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. International Foundation for Effective Reading Intervention
<http://www.iferi.org/iferi-inform-factsheets/>
- f. People for Education: working to support public education in Ontario. Sign up for their newsletter to stay up to date on the latest. They also have an annual conference in November in Toronto.
[Www.peopleforeducation.ca](http://www.peopleforeducation.ca)

12. 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. The Ontario Human Rights Commission released their Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities in September 2018
<http://ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-accessible-education-students-disabilities#overlay-context=en/policy-employment-related-medical-information>
To see the training videos on their new policy: <http://bit.ly/2FAueV0>
- c. 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%202%20Integra%20LDMH%20Handbook%202016.pdf>

Glossary of terms

<https://www.teachspced.ca/glossary-old>

<https://www.ldatschool.ca/learn-about-lds/glossary-terms/>

Sample letters for physicians to use

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 (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.

<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-Town 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. There are 30 school boards in the province of Ontario using Empower. It is also being piloted in 8 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>