

Revised Policy/Program Memorandum 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities

**Ministry of Education
Special Education Policy and Programs Branch
October 2014**

Introductions

PPM 8 can be accessed at :

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm8.pdf>



Ministry of Education

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8

Date of Issue: August 26, 2014

Effective: Until revoked or
modified

Subject: IDENTIFICATION OF AND PROGRAM PLANNING FOR STUDENTS
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Application: Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities
Superintendents of Schools
Principals of Elementary Schools
Principals of Secondary Schools



- Provide an overview of :
 - the demographics of students with learning disabilities in Ontario
 - the process used to revise PPM 8
 - the core policy objectives of revising PPM 8
- Highlight the key changes of PPM 8 “*Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities.*”
- Outline key ministry supports that will be available to teachers, educators, professional support personnel and school and system leaders in implementing PPM 8.

Achieving Excellence



- Every student has the opportunity to succeed, including students with learning disabilities.
- PPM 8 supports:
 - enhanced teachers, support staff, school and system leaders' capacity to understand learning disabilities and deliver effective special education programs and services
 - timely and accurate identification of students with learning disabilities
 - higher levels of academic achievement by ensuring that educators have precise information on the cognitive and learning profile of their students so that instructional approaches and practices are responsive to their intellectual potential
 - improved mental health and well-being as persons with learning disabilities are more likely to struggle with mental health issues
 - increased levels of public confidence in the publicly-funded education system.



Core Policy Objectives



PPM 8 is being updated to:

- reflect the advancement in research on LDs in school settings and consensus among experts on LDs
- align the key policy directions in the PPM with other Ministry policies and initiatives
- integrate developments in special education policies and school board practices in supporting students with LDs
- promote consistency in the identification of students with LDs
- support wide use of evidence-informed data based approaches to effective assessment and instructional approaches such as that described in *Learning for All, K-12* (2013)
- eliminate deficit-based language and to ensure equity for students with learning disabilities

Revision Process



- The Learning Disabilities Working Group (LDWG) was formed as an advisory group in 2011.
- The LDWG was comprised of educators, international researchers, psychologists and key stakeholders.
- The LDWG met regularly during 2011-12 and again in December 2013 to provide input into the revision of PPM 8.
- The revised content of PPM 8 is based on the advice of the LDWG members, an interjurisdictional review, a literature review and was aligned with other Ministry initiatives and policy directions.
- Two rounds of consultations took place.

Revised PPM 8 Content

Content of Revised PPM 8 by Section:

1. Introduction
2. Definition of Learning Disability
2. Recognition and Identification of Learning Disabilities
3. Program Planning
4. Implementation
5. Resources

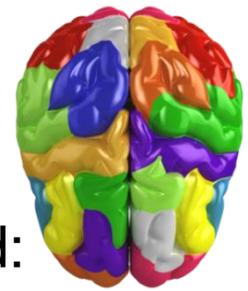


Introduction



- Provides the ministry's definition of LD which must be used by IPRCs in the identification of students with LDs
- Sets out requirements for the identification and program planning for students with LDs.
- Program Planning section on pages 4–6 of this memorandum also applies to any other students who demonstrate difficulties in learning and who would benefit from special education programs and/or services that are appropriate for students with learning disabilities.
- Aligns with other regulatory or policy requirements such as the Ministry's commitment to fostering a caring and safe learning environment to support the achievement and well-being of all students, including students with LDs.

Definition of LD

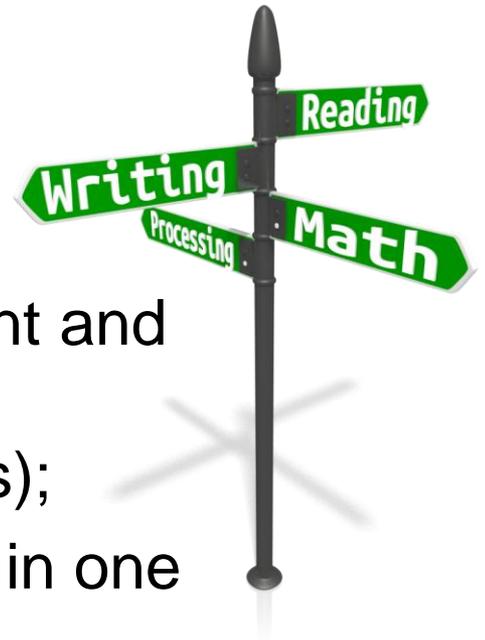


The following key characteristics of LDs are emphasized:

- LDs persistently and significantly have an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills.
- LDs affect the ability of the brain to perceive or process verbal or non verbal information in an effective and accurate manner;
- Students with LDs have assessed intellectual abilities that are at least in the average range;
- LDs result in (a) academic under-achievement that is inconsistent with the intellectual abilities of the student (which are at least in the average range), and/or (b) academic achievement that can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support;

Definition of LD... cont'd

- LDs result in difficulties with the development and use of one or more areas (reading, writing, mathematics, work habits and learning skills);
- LDs are typically associated with difficulties in one or more cognitive processes;
- LDs may be associated with difficulties in social interaction, various other conditions or disorders diagnosed or undiagnosed or other exceptionalities.



Use of LD Definition



- As with all categories and definitions of exceptionalities, the revised definition of LD in the PPM is for the use of Identification, Placement and Review Committees to identify a student as exceptional with a Communication: Learning Disability exceptionality.
- It is also used by Special Education Appeal Boards and the Ontario Special Education Tribunal.
- The revised definition of LD in PPM 8 supersedes the LD definition in all other relevant policy and guides.

Recognition and Identification of LDs

- The PPM stresses the importance of early and ongoing screening and provides direction to school boards regarding the recognition, assessment and identification of LDs.
- Many students with learning disabilities have already shown precursors or signs of learning disabilities before they enter school – such as language delays; difficulties with rhyming, counting, or fine-motor skills; or behavioural manifestations. However, for most students with learning disabilities, difficulties in learning may not be noticed until the early school years.
- After a period of instruction that has taken into account individual students' strengths and needs, it will become evident that some students who are experiencing difficulties in learning may potentially have a learning disability.
- Learning disabilities range in severity.
- Their impact may vary depending on the environmental and cognitive demands on the student, the instructional strategies employed, and the individual student's profile and age.



Recognition and Identification of LDs

- Only after an appropriate period of instruction that meets their strengths and needs should students who have difficulties with learning be considered for more in-depth assessments.
- Assessments should use input from multiple sources (e.g. information provided by parents, student, educators, educational history, medical information, educational assessment and/or psycho-educational or psychological assessments).
- The importance of a psycho-educational assessment is heightened and enhanced in PPM 8. It is up to the IPRC, however, to determine the type of assessment the committee needs to enable it to make a correct identification or placement decision, as per Regulation 181/98.
- PPM 8 emphasizes that psycho-educational or psychological assessment must be performed by or under the supervision of a qualified member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario.
- Assessment measures preferably use Canadian norms, be culturally sensitive and available in accessible formats.
- The use of standard scores instead of grade-level or grade/age equivalencies is emphasized.



Program Planning



- The program planning section applies to the following students:
 - students who have been identified as exceptional by an IPRC
 - any other students who demonstrate difficulties in learning and who would benefit from special education programs and/or services that are appropriate for students with learning disabilities
- The revised PPM reiterates that the determining factor for the provision of special education programs or services is not any specific diagnosed or undiagnosed condition, but rather the needs of individual students based on the individual assessment of strengths and needs.
- Assessment results should inform the description of a student's strengths and needs and be used to determine special education programs and services for the student.

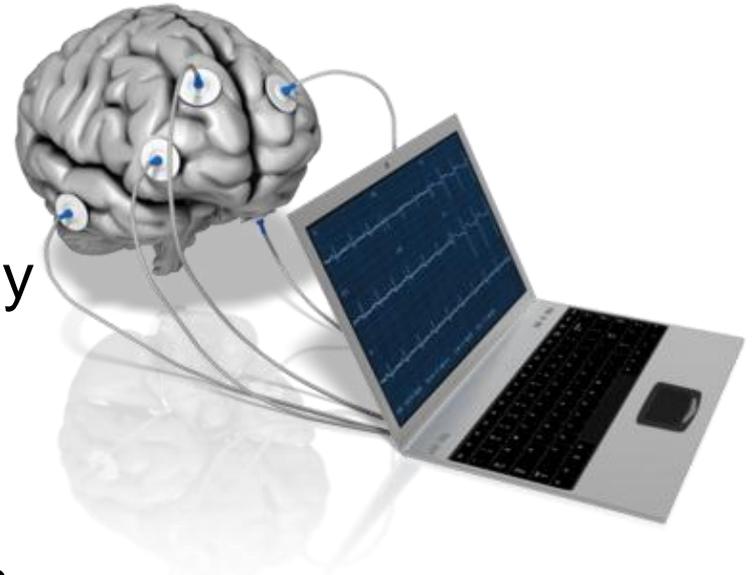
Program Planning

- Direction is provided to school boards on using the principles and approaches as described in *Learning for All, K-12 (2013)* to support personalized and precise teaching and learning, to provide explicit and intensive assessments and instruction, as required.
- Direction is provided on the planning and development of IEPs for students with LDs, stressing the fact that the program should reflect and nurture the student's intellectual abilities (which are at least in the average range) and take into consideration the student's cognitive processes.
- Therefore the recourse to modified expectations from another grade-level should only be considered if the student cannot demonstrate learning through the use of diverse strategies outlined in the PPM.
- Transition planning requirements under PPM 156 and Regulation 181/98 are emphasized.



Implementation

- The requirements set out in PPM 8 will take effect January 2, 2015.
- Implementation will be monitored by the Ministry of Education through existing accountability mechanisms .
- Since the field of LDs is constantly evolving, school boards are encouraged to make use of current, evidence-informed strategies, tools and technologies that are effective with LDs.



Ministry Implementation Supports



- Adobe Connect information sessions
- Presentations at various forums:
 - Regional Special Education Councils
 - Regroupement des leaders francophones en enfance en difficulté
 - Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education
 - Professional Conferences
- A webinar on the revised PPM 8
- *Guidelines for the Delivery of Special Education Programs and Services for Students with Learning Disabilities*, release date yet to be determined

Additional Implementation Supports

- The Ministry is funding the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) to:
 - develop a range of online resources:
 - www.LDatSchool.ca
 - www.TAaLecole.ca
 - conduct a Summer Educators Institute in August 2015 on effective assessment and instructional strategies for students with LDs.