

Ministry of Education**Ministère de l'Éducation**

Student Support and Field
Services Division

Division du soutien aux élèves
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The Ministry of Education thanks the Ontario Human Rights Commission for its Right to Read Inquiry report. This report highlights key challenges faced by students with reading difficulties and their families, in particular students with reading disabilities/dyslexia and other disabilities, students from lower income backgrounds, and Indigenous, Black and racialized students.

We agree that learning to read is essential for success in school and in life. This comprehensive report requires time for thoughtful review and consideration. We will engage with stakeholders in the education sector, parents, and Indigenous partners, and work with key experts so that every student, including students with learning disabilities, is supported to learn to read well.

According to the Education Quality and Accountability Office, approximately 25 per cent of Grade 3 students in Ontario did not meet provincial standards in reading, and 30 per cent did not meet provincial standards in writing in 2018-19. There has been insufficient improvement, as at least one in four students still does not meet the provincial standard for reading and writing. Learning disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have further created a need for learning recovery supports, particularly for students facing additional barriers.

The government is taking immediate action to improve student literacy and making longer-term reforms to modernize the way reading is taught and assessed in schools, with a focus on phonics. Ontario's plan to boost literacy outcomes and support learning recovery includes:

- Revising the elementary Language curriculum and the Grade 9 English course with scientific, evidence-based approaches that emphasize direct, explicit and systematic instruction and removing references to unscientific discovery and inquiry-based learning, including the three-cueing system, by 2023
- Revising the elementary Français, Actualisation linguistique du français, Programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants, and the Grade 9 Français curriculum by September 2023
- Releasing a science-based guide for educators in spring 2022 that will support effective early reading instruction
- Collaborating with partners, including faculties of education, on professional development for educators to ensure they are learning science-based reading instruction methods
- Beginning development of a French-language reading intervention program
- Engaging with parents and sector partners on a longer-term response and developing accessible, parent-friendly resources on literacy skills.

Informed by our dialogue with the OHRC, in 2020-21, the ministry provided \$11.76M to support evidence-based reading intervention programs and \$20M for re-engaging students and providing early reading assessment supports. As part of its Learning Recovery Action Plan, the ministry announced \$25M to support evidence-based reading intervention programs and professional assessments – beginning immediately and into the 2022-23 school year. The government is also investing over \$176 million in expanded tutoring supports to assist with learning recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, \$304 million for temporary additional staffing supports to continue to hire teachers, educational assistants and other education workers, including to address the implementation of the first year of a fully de-streamed Grade 9, and increasing the Special Education Grant by a projected \$92.9M, bringing the total to \$3.25 billion, the highest ever. We thank the OHRC for its support of our de-streaming work.

With this funding, the ministry provided guidance to boards about evidence-based approaches to supporting struggling readers, building on expert advice from the ministry’s multi-year pilot project on supporting students with learning disabilities affecting reading. The Ministry of Education also has a long-standing funding relationship with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), which has produced widely-used resources in English and French for parents and educators (including relating to remote learning) and educator training.

Research shows that when reading interventions are early, evidence-based, fully implemented and closely monitored, they are highly effective in improving reading success. The ministry is exploring options to support boards and educators to provide students with appropriate reading assessments. We will engage with experts and sector partners to identify and implement effective reading assessment practices in the Ontario context.

The ministry is reviewing recommendations from a number of reports and considering how special education legislation and policy fit within the broader context of human rights and disability legislation and new ministry policy, such as de-streaming. The OHRC’s recommendations on accommodations and modifications will be a valuable contribution to this analysis.

The ministry expects that the needs of individual students are the determining factor for the provision of special education programs and/or services. The absence of a professional assessment does not preclude any student from receiving those that may be required to access the curriculum. Boards have flexibility to use a variety of funds for professional assessments in cases where they are necessary in order to identify students’ individualized needs and appropriate accommodations.

How educators are trained and engaged in ongoing professional development are also key to equipping students with the supports they need. The Ministry of Education will continue to work closely with the Ontario College of Teachers and Faculties of Education to align training of

prospective teachers with evidence-based approaches to reading. Teachers in Ontario continue to learn and develop professionally once they are in practice, including through the New Teacher Induction Program, professional activity days, additional qualification courses, and initiatives like the Learning and Innovation Fund for Teachers. These activities support Ontario's teachers to have access to the latest resources and educational approaches.

The Ministry of Education is committed to human rights, inclusion, and supporting the success of every student across our education system. The province continues to work closely with school boards and community organizations to provide guidance and funding to maintain high standards and gain deeper understanding of how to implement inclusive and equitable policies and practices that support all students, including those experiencing reading or learning disabilities. The ministry is strengthening accountability and data collection to inform decision making through a new Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP) framework. The BIEP will require reporting related to reading/literacy, achievement, and broader systemic human rights-related data. The ministry is working with school boards to finalize the new BIEP process.

The ministry thanks the OHRC for its extensive work. We continue to be committed to working with our partners in the sector, to take into account the local contexts of boards and ensure a systemic and integrated response to improving literacy outcomes for every student in Ontario.