

**ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN:  
EMERGING ISSUES IN LEARNING DISABILITY  
IN CANADA**

**THE ROEHER INSTITUTE**

**Prepared for  
Learning Disabilities Association of Canada  
August 2000**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **I. Introduction / 1**

Environmental Scan of learning disability and methodological considerations / 1  
 Current issues in the popular literature and identified themes / 2

### **II. Current Issues Affecting Elementary and Junior High School Students with Learning Disabilities / 3**

Early diagnosis of learning disabilities in the educational system / 3  
 High grade retention rates of students with learning disabilities / 3  
 School dropout among students with learning disabilities / 4  
 Drugs and alcohol abuse among students with learning disabilities / 5  
 Learning disabilities and troubles with the law / 5

### **III. Changes in Education and other Publicly-funded Programs across Canada / 6**

Increased pressures and responsibilities of regular teachers as it relates to the needs of students with learning disabilities / 6  
 Do regular teachers have the knowledge and skills required to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities? / 7  
 Cuts to the education budget are resulting in fewer special education services being provided / 8  
 Cuts to the education budgets are resulting in fewer psychologists in schools who are familiar with issues of education and learning disabilities / 9  
 Local school boards are struggling to raise the resources needed to meet the educational needs of students with learning disabilities / 10

### **IV. Out of Pocket Expenditures for Families of children and youth with learning disabilities (LD) / 11**

Parents are removing their children from the regular education system and seeking placements in publicly funded special schools for children with learning disabilities / 11  
 Parents are turning to the private sector for instructional services (e.g., tutoring) and private schools to meet the needs of their children with learning disabilities / 12  
 Parents' out of pocket expenditures to have their child assessed for LD / 12  
 Parents' financial difficulty paying for educational services and assessment of LD / 13

## **V. Families Fight Back: Turning to the Courts & The Human Rights Commission / 13**

The Human Rights of children and youth with LD to education services / 13

## **VI. Learning Disabilities: Public perceptions and stereotypes / 14**

Does the public at large consider ensuring adequate special ed. services a priority? / 14

The legitimacy of ADHD-the current debate / 14

Gifted children with ADHD and learning disabilities / 15

Myths and stereotypes: Families with children with learning disabilities / 15

Stereotyping of children and youth with learning disabilities / 16

## **VII. Changing the term ‘learning disability’ to ‘different learning styles’: What it means for families, children and youth with learning disabilities / 16**

## **VIII. Conclusion / 17**

## **References / 20**

## **Appendices:**

Appendix A: LDAC Survey /

Appendix B: Summary of Responses as indicated by LDA Staff and Professionals /

# I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines current issues and themes that are front and center in the minds of educators, school administrators, parents, children and adults with learning disabilities across Canada. There is an estimated 730,000 of school aged children who have learning disabilities (Canada and the World Backgrounder #1, 1998). Learning disabilities may be manifested in delays in early development and or difficulties in the following areas: “attention, memory, reasoning, co-ordination, communicating, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, social competence, and emotional maturation” (Sheppard, Maclean’s, 1998, p.3 of 4). Popular literature points to elements of “best practice” in education for children and youth with learning disabilities. It also points to social and other issues currently faced by children and families with learning disabilities. Although more is known about what causes learning disabilities, provincial governments are retrenching vital resources to the educational system. We’re living in an age of devolution, budget restrictions, and competing claims for public resources. Furthermore, a perception has emerged within the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) network that the gap between what we know about good education practices, and what is actually occurring in schools and classrooms, may be widening. Social and other issues, which needed priority attention a few years ago, seem to be all the more urgent today.

The following study provides an environmental scan of current issues related to learning disabilities and education from the perspective of staff and professional volunteers in the LDAC network. The focus of the environmental scan is on current issues faced by children, youth and adults with learning disabilities and their families. The purpose of this environmental scan is twofold: 1) to provide an overview of emerging themes and issues concerning learning disabilities as reflected in major Canadian newspapers and popular magazines; and 2) based on the professional knowledge and experience of staff and volunteers of LDAC and its local chapters, provide a brief assessment as to whether those issues and themes are a greater or lesser problem now than two or three years ago.

In developing this assessment, a brief structured survey was designed and administered to provincial and local Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) staff and professional volunteers across Canada. The survey contained lines of questioning, which were consistent with the themes that were identified in the review of popular reading materials (e.g., newspapers, magazines). For each theme the survey asked whether it was now a much bigger issue than two or three years ago, a little bit more of an issue, about the same, a little bit less or a lot less of an issue now (refer to Appendix A). In total 38 completed surveys were returned. Survey results were analyzed in three different ways: a) for all respondents taken as a whole; b) by whether respondents were paid staff or volunteers; and c) by region of the country. Concerning regional breakdowns, a variable was developed which combined British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba into a grouping called “Western provinces.” Ontario was taken as a stand-alone category and all other provinces and territories were grouped as “Other regions.” This strategy was adopted owing to small sample size for the regions. Generally the analysis has grouped responses for “a lot more” and “a little more” into a single category of “more of an issue”. The same general tack was taken for responses referred to as “less” of an issue. Breakdowns have been provided where the data seemed particularly striking, however. The study examined six key issues and related themes in the area of learning disabilities and

education (Please refer to Table 1.0 for a summary of current issues and themes identified in the current education literature, and popular press).

[Table 1]

<b>Current Issues in the Literature...</b>	<b>Identified themes in the literature...</b>
Issues affecting elementary and junior high school students with learning disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Learning disabilities are being diagnosed as late as nine to ten years of age, when in fact they can be detected as early as grade one if teachers are provided with the training.</li> <li>➤ There is a 2-5 year grade retention rate among children and youth with learning disabilities. School boards do not act until the child has failed two years.</li> <li>➤ High-risk behaviours among students with learning disabilities may include: school dropout, alcohol and drug use, and delinquency).</li> </ul>
Changes in education and other publicly funded programs across Canada.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Cutbacks to the education system have increased pressures and responsibilities on regular classroom teachers, which divert their attention away from the special needs of students with learning disabilities.</li> <li>➤ There is a general concern that regular teachers may not possess the knowledge and skills required to meet the special needs of students with learning disabilities.</li> <li>➤ Cuts to the education budget have resulted in fewer special education services and school psychologists who are familiar with education and learning issues.</li> </ul>
Out of pocket expenditures for special education programs, services and assessment of learning disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Parents have been turning to the private sector to meet the educational needs of their children with learning disabilities, which has created an economic burden on the family.</li> </ul>
Learning disabilities, human rights and issues of access to adequate educational services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Children and youth with learning disabilities have the right to education services.</li> <li>➤ Public perception of the need for special education programs and services have not been very positive or supportive of families.</li> </ul>
Public skepticism of ADHD, myths, and stereotypes of families and children with learning disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The perceived legitimacy of ADHD: current debates.</li> <li>➤ Gifted children with learning disabilities are excluded from educational programs for gifted children because they have not been diagnosed.</li> <li>➤ Myths and stereotypes concerning children and youth with learning disabilities and their families.</li> </ul>
Changing model of cognitive activity, educators and school boards are dropping learning disability as a category and adopting the term 'different learning styles'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The implications for families: it has a negative impact on the family's ability to access needed instructional programming and educational services to meet the needs of their children with learning disabilities.</li> </ul>

## II. Current Issues Affecting Elementary and Junior High School Students with Learning Disabilities

In Canada, educators recognize that children and youth with learning disabilities are not slow learners but rather different learners. Dr. Mel Levine, in his book *Educational Care* argues that:

In view of extreme diversity (of learning disabilities), no (singular answer) evidence exists. Individualization must be the rule . . . We certainly do not wish to isolate struggling children to heighten any sense of feeling defective, or to remove them from the mainstream of education . . . It is possible to recognize and meet the individual needs without segregation and stigmatization. (Canada and the World Backgrounder, 1998, Jan 1, p.1).

This section examines whether there has been any significant change over the last several years in addressing the issues affecting children and youth with learning disabilities: such as, early identification of LD; grade retention rates; school dropout rates; alcohol and drug use; and delinquency.

### ➤ **Early diagnosis of learning disabilities in the educational system**

The review of the popular literature found several reports about the early identification of learning disabilities among children (Cowan, Edmonton Sun, 1998; LDAC, 1996). While an estimated 10% of the Canadian population has a learning disability, and while a learning disability can be detected as early as grade one, the popular literature surveyed suggests that this is not happening in a systematic and timely fashion (Cowan, Edmonton Sun, 1998). As a result the educational development of children with LD is being compromised.

When asked about this issue, more than 40 percent of respondents (44.4%) to the survey indicated that indeed this is ‘more of a problem’ now than previously. Professional volunteers were more likely than LDA staff to say this is more of an issue now than previously (50.1% and 42.8% respectively). Respondents from Ontario indicated that this was more of a problem (69.9%), than the Western provinces (33.3%) and all other areas of the country (33.4 %).

### ➤ **High grade retention rates of children with learning disabilities**

According to Laurie Wilson-Larson, special education consultant at the conference of Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta in 1998, “School boards are too reluctant to recognize and deal with learning disabilities . . . you have to be really failing, four to five years behind before the school boards will act” (Cowan, Edmonton Sun, 1998). Despite reports that learning disabilities are not being identified early, and while children with learning disabilities are falling two years behind their peers before they can get help from the school board, provincial governments have cut the education budget (Cowan, Edmonton Sun, 1998). More effort is needed for the early detection of learning disabilities, in order to maximize the potential of children and youth with learning disabilities.

When asked about this problem, 36.2 % of respondents indicated high grade retention is more of a problem now (30.6% a little more and 5.6% a lot more) than previously. The remaining respondents from the total surveyed indicated the following: 30.6% said the problem was about the same now as previously; or a little less of a problem (11.1%); or a lot less of a problem (22.2%). LDA staff were more likely to view this as a problem (40%) than LDA volunteers (33.4%). Regional differences indicated that respondents from Ontario were more likely to view grade retention rates among children and youth with learning disabilities to be more of a problem (53.9%) now than previously; compared to the Western provinces (18.2%); and the other regions across the country (36.4%).

### ➤ **The problem of school drop out among youth with learning disabilities**

In 1997, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) completed a report on the educational systems of its 29-country membership. Canada when compared to other rich countries fared poorly with respect to its high dropout rates. According to Karen Kovac, one of the authors of the OECD report, the high dropout rate is “punitive for the individual, harmful for society, and there’s a heavy burden on wasted resources in a time of government restraint” (Canada and the World Backgrounder #2, 1998, January 1, p.7 of 9). The OECD suggests to decrease the dropout rate various strategies should be incorporated into the educational system, such as: innovative approaches in the classroom that eliminate barriers; increased support and training of teachers and the implementation of new teaching methods; introduction of early childhood education into the elementary school system; flexible curriculum; increasing the age of compulsory education (beyond the age of 16); increased effort at career counselling; a systemic analysis of current practices based on positive outcomes for students and schools; and maintaining accurate statistics on student achievements and dropout rates (Canada and the World backgrounder # 2, 1998, January 1).

When asked about school dropout rates among students with learning disabilities, 50% of the total respondents surveyed indicated that indeed this is more of a problem now (13.9% a lot more or 36.1 a little more) than previously. The remaining 50 % of the total respondents surveyed, indicated that the extent of the problem was either about the same (44.4%) or less of a problem (2.8% a lot; 2.8% a little) than before. LDA staff was more likely than professional volunteers to report that this is more of a problem now (57.9% and 43.8% respectively) were. Half of the professional volunteers (50%) indicated that the issue was about the same as in previous years. The regional analysis revealed a consensus among the respondents from Ontario and the Western provinces, with respect to this being more of a problem (58.3%) today than in previous years. However, there were more respondents from the Western provinces to view this as ‘a lot more’ of a problem (33.3%) today than in previous years when compared to Ontario (8.3%). In other regions across the country, respondents indicated that this was perceived as a little more of a problem (36.4%), about the same (54.5 %) or a lot less of problem (9.1%) today than previously.

### ➤ **Drug and alcohol abuse among students with learning disabilities**

Alcohol and other drug abuse occur in families, peer groups, schools, job sites and rehabilitation settings. According Moore, an addiction therapist (1990) some individuals may experience life with a disability “as so unpleasant that there is an ‘entitlement’ to use of alcohol or drugs, in order to cope” (Resource Centre on Substance Abuse Prevention and Disability, 1991, p.1 of 2). It has been suggested that individuals with learning disabilities, such as ADD or ADHD may be more vulnerable for alcohol and drug abuse. According to a study by Hectman, et al. (1984), when ADHD persists into later adolescence, more than 50% of the cases of people diagnosed with ADHD developed an alcohol and drug addiction. Several risk factors were identified: childhood exposure to medication to control ADD or ADHD, and the lack of information provided on its use and precautions; pressure from peer groups to experiment with drugs; poor experiences at school combined with feelings of low self-esteem, perceived underachievement and rejection. A greater effort must be made in providing children and youth with learning disabilities with drug education and prevention information (Resource Centre on Substance Abuse and Prevention, 1991).

When asked about the problem of drug and alcohol use among young people with learning disabilities, more than 55% of the total respondents surveyed felt that this was indeed ‘more of a problem’ now (26.5% ‘little more’ or 29.4% ‘a lot more’) than in previous years. LDA staff were more likely to perceive this to be slightly ‘more of a problem’ today (55%) than professional volunteers (53.9%). Regional differences, suggest that the respondents from the Western provinces were more likely to report that this is ‘a lot more’ of a problem (50%) than Ontario (16.7%) and all other regions and territories (22.2%). About 66.7% of the respondents from the Western provinces and all other regions across the country, said this was a ‘little more’ of a problem. There were some respondents from the Western provinces that report that drug and alcohol use among youth with learning disabilities is a ‘little less’ of a problem (8.3%) than previously.

### ➤ **Learning disabilities and troubles with the law**

According to Sinclair (Mencapnews, 1992) many of the crimes committed by people with learning disabilities are of a minor nature: such as, breach of the peace, minimal damage to property, actual bodily harm, or indecent behavior in public. Most youth crimes are nonviolent, involving charges that are property related (i.e., shoplifting). According to Wilson-Larson, “the cost of not giving children the help they need is heavy . . . these kids dropout of school . . . become a burden to the justice system . . . and approximately 90% of juvenile delinquents are learning disabled” (Cowan, Edmonton Sun, 1998, p.26).

Potential risk factors associated with criminal activity in youth with learning disabilities include: antisocial or aggressive behaviours experienced in early childhood; bad experiences at school associated with the learning disability (e.g. academic failure, underachievement, bullying or harassment); school-based violence and high rate of school drop out; family conflict and/or violence; history of abuse (e.g. physical, emotional, sexual); poor health and ongoing mental health issues; and child poverty. Protective factors that may help buffer against the impact of



risk factors and contribute to a reduction in criminal activity among youth include: a supportive and nurturing relationship with a caring adult or mentor; opportunities to make friends, to play, and to learn in a safe, caring environment; programs that enhance the child's social and emotional development; and special education programs that help counter the risk factors that contribute to delinquency (Voices for Children, 1999).

When asked about the problem of children and youth with learning disabilities running into problems with the law, more than 55 percent of the respondents (55.9%) to the survey indicated that this was indeed 'more of a problem' today (42.2% a little more or 15.2% a lot more) than previously. The review also found that professional volunteers were slightly more likely than LDA staff to say this is 'more of a problem' now (61.2% compared with 57.9% respectively) than previously. Regional data suggests that this is 'more of a problem' in all other regions and territories across Canada (66%) than in the Western provinces (58.4%) and Ontario (54.6%) respectively.

### **III. Changes in Education and Other Publicly funded Programs across Canada in the Last Three Years.**

In Ontario \$1.2 billion is designated for students with special needs. As part of the provinces' efforts to centralize education funding, each student with special needs is suppose to be allotted a specific amount. School Boards can request extra funds (a maximum of \$27,000 for each student) however obtaining these funds through the application process has been described as "a bureaucratic nightmare" (Chamberlain, Toronto Star, 1999). The Education Improvement Commission said, "boards need more flexibility in how they can allocate resources so they can serve students"(Chamberlain, Toronto Star, 1999). Parent groups have lobbied for a provincial auditor to investigate how educational monies are being spent and wasted. In 1993, an auditor "...warned that the ministry did not have procedures to ensure boards provide services as required and had no guidelines for how special education should be provided"(Chamberlain, Toronto Star, 1999). While the demand for special education programs has increased, and while the supply of educational assistants has decreased, the student caseload of regular teachers has increased. As a result, teachers are experiencing increased pressure and responsibilities in meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities

#### **➤ Increased pressures and responsibilities of regular teachers as it relate to the needs of students with learning disabilities.**

A special report by the London Press (1999) investigated whether children had sufficient individual attention from their classroom teachers. The responses varied but two students interviewed commented that it is dependent on whether students have the capability of acquiring knowledge quickly and that classroom time does not allow for students to help one another. Furthermore, a teacher commented that because of the classroom size students with learning disabilities were "sacrificing their recess time" to receive individualized attention. These challenges are further intensified by the inclusion of students with special needs into regular classrooms. It becomes difficult for teachers to divide their time in a fair and equitable manner

(London Press Report, 1999). Each student has a unique way of learning and therefore teachers must incorporate ‘different learning styles’ into their teaching methods. This complex and challenging task must be addressed within an educational system that offers less in the way of supports and services to children and youth with special learning needs because of government cutbacks to education (Canada and the World Backgrounder #3, 1998).

According to the findings from the LDAC Survey, more than 85 percent of the respondents surveyed agreed that regular teachers were experiencing more of a problem than in previous years in meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities (60.5% ‘a lot more’ or 26.3% ‘a little more’). In total, there were only 13.2% of respondents who indicated that the problem was ‘about the same’ as in previous years. The individual differences indicated that LDA professionals were about as likely as LDA staff to view this as a problem (87.5 % compared to 85.7 %). Ontario respondents overwhelmingly agreed that this was ‘more of a problem’ now (84.6% ‘a lot more’ and 15.4% ‘a little more’). Similarly, in the Western provinces approximately 92% of the respondents surveyed indicated this was ‘more of a problem’ now (58.3% ‘a lot more’ or 33.3% ‘a little more’). In all other regions and territories across Canada, about 67 percent of the respondents indicated that this is ‘more of a problem’ now (41.7 % a lot more and 25.0% a little more). The remaining 33.3 percent of the respondents in all other regions indicated that the problem was ‘about the same’ as in previous years.

Given the wide range of student needs, larger classroom sizes, cutbacks in the number of teaching assistants and resources available to teachers, it is inevitable that the quality of education will be compromised. According to education specialist Peter Jaffe, the following methods can be used in a classroom setting to foster educational growth and meet the individual needs of students with learning disabilities, as well as provide some practical support to teachers: volunteers, peer tutors, buddy programs and parent volunteers (London Press, 1999). According to Inclusion International (1996) peer education that is the child-to-child relationship has been characterized as ‘peer power’. Peer tutors, are a “valuable resource in helping children learn successfully” (1996, p.7). Children can be encouraged to help each other by implementing “... cooperative learning in groups and through various forms of peer tutoring”(1996, p.7). Peers trained as tutors can “sometimes be more effective than adults at improving reading or teaching particular content such as mathematical concepts...because they are more directive than adults (1996, p.7). The aforementioned are especially important when one considers that educational assistance is increasingly being removed from the classrooms.

➤ **Do regular teachers have the knowledge and skills required in meeting the educational needs of children with learning disabilities?**

All teachers may not have the same knowledge and skills required to meet the needs of children and youth with learning disabilities. As stated by one student in a Burlington high school “...some teachers don’t understand what you are going through and you are made out to be the stupid one” (Gillespie, Toronto Star, 1998). Brenda Kearney, the Director of Special Education, has suggested for the Halton Board in Ontario, that because learning disabilities are ‘invisible’ they are not always taken seriously by teachers (Gillespie, Toronto Star, 1998). Without individualized support, students with special needs may not be able to cope and may act

out their frustration behaviourally. Students may be typecast as having behavioural problems rather than there being recognition of their learning disability and the necessary accommodation for their special needs. In order for children and youth to make choices and maximize their learning capacity they need the support of family and educators in building their skills and self-confidence. According to Peter Jaffe, what should be avoided at all cost is “labeling kids or schools unfairly.” Standardized testing can be useful if it is ensured that the tests are performed in a helpful and relaxed manner. The ultimate objective is to have a method of comparison of student learning so that the educational budget can be reflective of student needs. Peter Jaffe also points out that standardized testing is also useful in identifying the strengths of children and youth with learning disabilities (London Free Press, 1999).

When asked about whether regular teachers lack the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of children and youth with learning disabilities, more than 70 percent of the respondents surveyed indicated that this is ‘more of a problem’ now (47.4% ‘a lot more’ and 23.7% ‘a little more’) than in previous years. The remaining 26.3 percent of the total respondents surveyed, indicated that the problem is ‘about the same’ now as in previous years. Only 2.6% of the respondents indicated that this was ‘a little less’ of a problem than before. With respect to differences among professional volunteers and LDA staff, there were more professional volunteers to view this issue as ‘more of a problem’ now (75%) than previously compared to LDA Staff (71.4%). Respondents from the Western province felt more strongly about the issue and indicated that this was ‘a lot more’ of a problem today (75%) than previously, compared to Ontario respondents (38.5%). Respondents from other regions and territories were divided as to whether this is ‘more of an issue’ (50%) or ‘about the same’ (41.7%) or ‘a little less’ of a problem (8.3%) than before. It was noted that there were more respondents from the Western provinces who viewed this issue as ‘a lot more’ of a problem (75%) compared to Ontario (38.5%).

➤ **Cuts to the Education Budget are resulting in fewer special education services being provided.**

There are different views as to the impact of Provincial cuts to the Education Budget for students with learning disabilities. Some School Boards in Ontario contend that there is insufficient money to meet the needs of students with a learning disability. Teresa Freedman, a superintendent of student services with the Durham Catholic District School Board, stated that “morally and legally we have to provide the services, but the province isn’t giving us enough money” (Chamberlain, Toronto Star, 1999). It has been suggested that without these services the learning potential of students with learning disabilities is reduced. A parent in the Durham Region wrote to Premier Harris and documented that the provincial government should “spend the money where it counts and stop burdening the vulnerable” (Chamberlain, Toronto Star, 1999). Another parent commented that “no mother should have to open a student project of a drawn broken heart with the words written underneath, ‘I have a broken heart because I can’t read or write’ ” (Galluzo, Toronto Star, 1999).

Bill 160, was introduced in Ontario in January 1997 as part of the Education Quality Improvement Act. This Bill makes the provincial government entirely responsible for education funding and no longer makes education a component of residential property taxes. As a result of

Bill 160, school boards were reduced from 129 to 72, as well the number of school trustees were decreased. Furthermore, teachers can no longer negotiate classroom size as part of their bargaining rights under the teacher union. The government also intended to employ people without education certification to operate libraries and teach physical education and technological courses. "...Most school board officials, and many parents felt that Bill 160 was not about improving public education; it was about chopping another \$1 billion from the system, and, eventually, turning it over to private enterprise" (Canada and the World Backgrounder #2, 1998, January 1, p.3 of 9). Although some parents have resorted to private schools as a means of improving the quality of education for their children, there are many parents without the economic means to do so (Canada and the World Backgrounder #2, 1998, January 1).

There have been numerous changes to the education system in the Western provinces as well as other regions and territories across Canada. In September 1998, Manitoba and Alberta examined closely their special education programs. It was expected that 590 full-time intern teachers would supplement the current system and be specifically designated to kindergarten, grade 1 and 2, to offer literacy assistance (Canada and the World Backgrounder #1, 1998, January 1). However, the number of specialized classrooms for students with learning disabilities in Calgary "was dropped from 148 in 1994 to one in 1997" (Canada and the World Backgrounder #1, 1998, January 1, p.1 of 2). Between 1994 and 1997, the Alberta education system was affected by 20% reduction in the education budget, and teachers salaries were reduced by five percent (Canada and the World Backgrounder #2, 1998, January 1). According to the Quebec Ministry of Education "the number of special education teachers has dropped by 35% in the province since 1993" (Canada and the World Backgrounder #1, 1998 January 1). In New Brunswick in 1996 all boards of educations were abolished (Canada and the World Backgrounder #2, 1998, January 1).

When asked about the changes to the education system, the budget cuts and the impact on special education services, about 95 percent of the total respondents surveyed indicated that it is 'more of a problem' now (71.1% a lot more and 23.7% a little more) than previously. Professional volunteers were slightly more likely to see this as a 'more of a problem' (81.3% a lot more and 18.3% a little more) than LDA staff (66.6% a lot more, 23.8 % a little more). Regional responses to the question whether there are fewer special education programs as a result of the cuts to the education budget varied. In the Western provinces, there was an overwhelming response (83%) that felt that this indeed was 'a lot more' of a problem today than previously. In Ontario, 77% of respondents indicated that this was 'a lot more' of a problem, and there were only 58% of the respondents in all other region across the country that felt this way.

➤ **Cuts to the education budgets are resulting in fewer school psychologists familiar with the issues of education and learning disabilities.**

Up until 1995, Ontario was the leading province in Canada with respect to the identification, treatment, and the development of innovative approaches for students with learning disabilities (Kot, Toronto Star, 1999). However, parents are now facing many barriers in accessing specialized services for children with learning disabilities, which deal with issues related to education, child development and learning disabilities because of government cutbacks to these programs. Similarly, in Quebec there has been a decrease in the number of

psychologists since 1993 by six percent, as well as social workers by 38%, and counsellors by 13 % (Canada and the World Backgrounder #1, 1998, January 1). Another report by the Canada World Backgrounder #2 on education reform, indicated that retiring psychologists, counsellors and social workers in Quebec are not being replaced. Responsibility for handling behavioural and emotional problems of students is falling to teachers who lack the appropriate training and educational credentials (1998 January 1). For students, not having their special needs recognized may mean that they are persistently "...berated for not paying attention or not trying hard enough; they are told they are lazy, stubborn, unmotivated, disorganized and uncooperative" (Henry, USA Today, 1997, p.3 of 3). An article in the Toronto Star (1999) stated that "It seems unbelievable...that a society can make significant progress in an area like this and then, for fiscal reasons decide to turn its back on 10% of the population" (Kot, 1999, p. A17). It is important to note, that without fully understanding the type of learning disability and its implications for learning, it is extremely difficult to investigate educational options and programs for children and youth with learning disabilities (Smith, Toronto Star, 1998).

When asked about the problem of fewer psychologists in schools and its implications for children and youth with learning disabilities, approximately 95% of the total respondents surveyed indicated that the reduction of school psychologists is 'more of a problem' now (71.1% a lot more and 23.7% little more) than previously. Only 5.3% of the total respondents surveyed indicated that this issue was 'about the same' as in previous years. Professional volunteers were much more likely than LDA staff to indicate that this is much 'more of a problem' (62.5% a lot more and 37.5% a little more) than LDA staff (52.4% a lot more and 38.1% a little more). The respondents surveyed from the Western provinces, and those from other regions and territories across Canada, indicated that this is 'more of a problem' now (58.3% a lot more or 41.7% a little more) than previously. Ontario respondents also indicated that this 'more of problem' today (53.8% a lot more and 30.8% a little) than in previous years.

➤ **Local school boards are struggling to raise the money needed to meet the educational needs of students with learning disabilities.**

The most visible sign of change to the Canadian educational system is the amalgamation of school boards. There is little evidence to suggest that this positively influence education in any significant way. In fact, school administrators have stated that education reform is very complex and is a long-term process. Michael Fullan and Andy Hargraves, education professors and the authors of 'What's Worth Fighting For Out There' suggest that reform has to come from the 'ground up' not from the 'top down' since the 'top-down' approach has failed to ameliorate student learning and achievements. They contend that the 'ground-up' approach should include collaboration between teachers, parents, students and politicians on how to best reform the educational system. In addition, reform should include early childhood education, teacher education and professional development, and a greater degree of parental involvement (Canada and the World Backgrounder # 2, 1998, January 1). Schools have been increasing their efforts at fund raising as a means of filling the gap that resulted from the provincial governments cuts to the education system. For example, teachers, students and parents have become involved in implementing auctions, selling chocolates etc. (Canada and the World Backgrounder #2, 1998, January 1).

When asked about the difficulty school boards are having raising money to meet the educational needs of students with special needs, 86 % of the total respondents surveyed indicated that this is much 'more of a problem' now (55.2% a lot more and 31.0% a little more). About 92% of professional volunteers indicated that this is 'more problem now' (58.3% 'a lot more' and 33.3% 'a little more'). Similarly, 82.3% LDA staff indicated this is 'more of a problem' now (52.9% a lot more and 29.4% a little more) than previously. The regional differences indicated that the respondents from all other regions and territories across Canada considered this to be 'a lot more' of a problem about 72%, compared to only 55.6% in the Western provinces and 46.2 % in Ontario. Both the Western provinces and all other regions across Canada considered this issue to be 'more of a problem' today than in previous years.

#### **IV. Out of Pocket Expenditures for Families of children with learning disabilities.**

##### **➤ Parents are removing their children from the regular education system and seeking placements in publicly funded special schools for children with learning disabilities.**

According to an article in the Toronto Star (1999) the cutbacks to the education budget in Ontario has serious implications for children and youth with learning disabilities because "their needs can't be met now in 19 out of 20 schools in the province" (Toronto Star, 1999, November 18, p.1 of 2). Many parents feel that with the recent cutbacks to education, their child's special educational needs are not being met in the regular school system. Therefore, some parents have opted for publicly funded special schools for children with disabilities; others have opted for private schools. The education cutbacks have created barriers for inclusive education, as well as accessing special education programs and services. Thereby limiting a child's educational options and possibly hindering their development.

When LDA staff and professional volunteers were asked the question pertaining to parents removing their children from the regular education system and seeking placements for their children who have learning disabilities in publicly funded segregated schools-the total percentage of respondents to consider this to be 'more of a problem' was about 72% percent (22.0% a lot more and 48.6% a little more). The remaining 28 % of the respondents either viewed this issue to be 'about the same' (20%), a 'little less' of a problem (5.7%) or 'a lot less' of a problem (2.9%) today than in previous years. Both the LDA staff and the professional volunteers felt this was 'more of problem' today (70% and 71.4% respectively). However, there were some respondents who felt that this was a 'little less of a problem'- approximately 21.4% of professional volunteers and 30% of LDA staff.

Regional differences indicated that all of the respondents (100%) from all other regions and territories viewed this issue as 'more of a problem' today (20% a lot more or 80% a little more) than previously. Similarly, in the Western provinces 75% of the respondents indicated that this issue (families turning to publicly funded schools for children with learning disabilities) is 'more

of a problem' today than in previous years. In Ontario, only 41.7% of the respondents indicated that this was 'more of a problem' today. There were an equal number of respondents from Ontario (41.7%) who said that the aforementioned issue is 'about the same' today as in previous years. The remaining respondent from Ontario indicated that this issue was either 'a lot less' of a problem (8.3%) or 'a little less' of a problem (8.3%). Only 8.3% of the respondents from the Western provinces indicated that this was 'a little less' of a problem (16.7%) or 'about the same' (8.3%) than previously.

➤ **Parents are turning to the private sector for instructional services (e.g., tutoring) and private schools to meet the needs of their children with learning disabilities.**

In the early 1990's there was a push for an increasing number of special education teachers and a focus on the development of individualized communication programs. More recently, "...cash strapped school boards have retrenched, leaving parents of children with learning disabilities, attention-deficit or emotional problems no alternative but to resort to the squeaky wheel approach or scramble for the growing number of private alternatives" (Sheppard, Maclean's, 1998, p.1 of 7). Parents increasingly have to supplement their children's education through private tutoring. Despite economic hardships, the need for private tutoring has resulted from poor educational quality within the classroom setting with little if any individual attention. Some parents believe that their reliance on for-profit instructional services is a result of the educational system not meeting their children's needs. Some parents believe that this is not the fault of teachers but a direct consequence of government cut backs to the educational system and overcrowding in the classroom. It has been noted that individualized tutoring may be especially important for children or youth with learning disabilities that require individual attention and motivation (Daniszewski, London Free Press, 1999). ). In an article by Maclean's magazine, some parents have been placing their children in private schools, such as the Landmark East School in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, primarily because of the specialized programs and their reputation for teaching children and youth with learning disabilities and ADHD. Given their success rate with children who have ADHD, parents are willing to pay the \$29,000 tuition fee to ensure their child's educational needs are met (Jenish, 2000, p.1 of 5).

When asked this question, 89.1% of the total respondents surveyed indicated that this was 'more of a problem' now (45.9% a lot more or 43.2% a little more) than previously. The remaining 10.8% felt that the problem was 'about the same' as in previous years. LDA volunteers were much more likely to report that this is 'a lot more' of a problem now (53.3%) than LDA staff (38.1%). In Ontario about 85% of the respondents surveyed indicated that this was 'more of a problem' (46.2% a lot more or 38.5% a little more) than in previous years. In the Western provinces a total of 83.3% of the respondents surveyed indicated that this was 'more of a problem' now (50% a lot more and 33.3% a little more) than before. Compared to Ontario and the Western provinces, the regional data indicated that this was 'more of a problem' now in other regions and territories (36.4% a lot more and 63.6% a little more) than previously.

➤ **Parents' out of pocket expenditures to have their child assessed for learning disabilities.**

There has been a decrease in the number of psychologists operating within schools across Canada. This has direct implications for the identification and assessment of students with learning disabilities. As stated by Lawrence-Larson, of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the main difficulty with the identification of learning disabilities is that it is an invisible disability and students may try to accommodate themselves to their circumstances. Suarez-Orozco, a clinical psychologist, considered herself fortunate because she had the training required to identify what her child with a learning disability needed and her educational credentials empowered her in negotiating the educational system. However, most parents are not as fortunate and may not have the knowledge to navigate the system (Henry, USA Today, 1997). The analysis of the data found no significant differences among LDA staff or professional volunteers in regards to parents out of pocket expenses for the assessment of their child's learning disability. All say this is 'more of a problem' now than in previous years. Similarly, there were no significant differences in the regional data, all regions viewed this as 'more of a problem' today than in previous years.

➤ **Parents' financial difficulty paying for educational services and assessment of learning disabilities.**

Parents have organized charity bingoes and donated their time as a way of funding teaching assistants within the public school system. In 1998 parents successfully raised \$50,000 for the salaries for two teaching assistants, in Saskatchewan which successfully assisted 28 students between grade seven and nine. However, this time commitment detracts from their other parenting responsibilities and places increased responsibility and burden on the families. Many parents are becoming frustrated that they are placed in a position of obtaining funds rather than their children being acknowledged for their needs and right to educational services. Parents have expressed that this situation is unjust and that funding should come from the government (Sheppard, Maclean's, 1998).

When asked about this question, 63.2% indicated that this was 'a lot more' of a problem now than in previous years. Professional volunteers were more likely to view this as 'more of a problem' now (62.5% a lot more and 37.5% a little more) than in previous years compared to LDA staff (61.9% a lot more and a little more 23.8%). Regional data indicated that respondents from Ontario are more likely to view this as 'a lot more of a problem' now (84.6%) compared to all other regions and territories (41.7%) and the Western provinces (58.3%).

## **V. Families Fight Back: Turning to the Courts and The Human Rights Commission.**

➤ **The Human Rights of children and youth with learning disabilities to education services**

In Canada, children and youth with learning disabilities have a right to elementary and



junior-high school education. However, parents of children and youth with learning disabilities are having difficulty obtaining education services that address their child's learning needs. LDAC staff indicated that parents are increasingly resorting to the courts and the Human Rights Commission of Canada, to present their case, establishing their children's rights to appropriate educational services and to gain access to these services for children with learning disabilities. When asked about this question, the vast majority of the respondents indicated that this was 'more of a problem' now (11.1% a lot more and 50% a little more of a problem 50%) than previously. The remaining respondents felt this issue was 'about the same' (38.9%) as in previous years. There were more LDA staff (55%) than professional volunteers (46.7%) to consider this issue to be 'a little more' of problem today than in previous years. The Regional data suggests that this issue was viewed as 'more of a problem' in the Western provinces (16.7% a little more or 58.3% a little more) and in other regions across Canada (54.5% a little more). Ontario respondents were divided (50% felt the issue was 'about the same' as in previous years; 41.7% reported it was 'a little more' of a problem; and 8.3% indicated it was 'a lot more' of a problem).

## **VI. Learning Disabilities: Public perceptions and stereotypes.**

### **➤ Does the public at large consider ensuring adequate special education services a priority?**

When asked whether the public at large doesn't consider it a priority to ensure that adequate educational services are available to young people with learning disabilities, 63.1% of the respondents surveyed indicated this was 'more of a problem' now (18.4% a lot more and 44.7% a little more) than previously. The remaining respondents indicated that this issue was 'about the same' (23.7%) or 'a little less' of a problem (13.2%). There was a larger number of LDA staff (66.6%) to consider this issue to be 'more of a problem' today than previously, compared to professional volunteers (56.3%). Ensuring adequate special education services as a priority among the public at large was considered 'more of problem' today than in previous years in the Western provinces (91.7%) and Ontario (61.5%), and somewhat in all other regions and territories (33.3%) across Canada.

### **➤ The legitimacy of ADHD-the current debate.**

It has been proposed that many children within the school system are incorrectly labelled as having ADHD. In Ontario, 15% of the child population was labelled as having a ADHD, while some experts argue only 3% to 5% of the population is actually predisposed to the condition (Moyle, Toronto Sun, 1998, p.1 of 4). The ramifications of a misdiagnosis have potentially negative effects on the child development and social well-being. According to psychologist Bunni Tobias, "Labels lead to dead ends because they limit the search for solution" (Moyle, Toronto Sun, 1998, p.2 of 4). Furthermore, Tobias contends it is crucial that ADHD be accurately diagnosed so that treatment approaches can reflect individual needs and assist families in obtaining special services for their children with this disorder (Moyle, Toronto Sun, 1998).

According to medical experts, there is a small window of opportunity to make an accurate diagnosis of ADHD. If the diagnosis is delayed or undetected, the child's learning growth is significantly altered and negatively effected (Medical Post, 1998). Unfortunately, "the diagnosis comes too late, if at all, for too many children, who then reach adulthood without receiving adequate help" (Jenish, 2000, Maclean's Magazine p.1 of 5). Research findings suggest that in order to foster optimum learning potential, students with ADHD require a structured, predictable environment with predefined and consistent rules and expectations. Children and youth with ADHD may not be able to cope with changes in routines and therefore all effort must be made to keep a consistent environment where the students learning needs are accommodated (NICHCY, 1999). Unfortunately, children with ADHD may not find the continuity and stability they require which is conducive to optimal learning in the regular school system which is influx because of the undercurrent of cutbacks by the provincial governments and changes to the education system. Similarly, there is a concern that given the cutbacks to school psychologist children with behavioural or emotional issues may be labelled as having ADHD by educators who have not received training in the early identification of ADHD.

The assumption that many children within the school system are being incorrectly labelled as having ADHD, public scepticism about whether this is a legitimate condition at all is on the increase. When asked this question, 97.3% of the LDA staff and professional volunteers surveyed indicated that this was 'more of a problem' now (36.8% a lot more and 60.5% a little more) than two to three years ago. Regardless of LDA staff/volunteers or region, there is a general consensus that public skepticism about ADHD is 'more of a problem' today than in previous years.

### ➤ **Gifted children with ADHD and learning disabilities**

The LDAC national staff expressed the view that children with learning disabilities and ADHD are not being diagnosed early enough and consequently are not having access to educational programs for gifted children. When asked about the issue 71% of the respondents surveyed suggested that this was 'more of a problem' (35.5% a lot more; and 35.5% a little more) than previously. The remaining 29% indicated that this issue was 'about the same' as in previous years. LDA staff were more likely to view this as 'a lot more' of a problem today (41.2%) than previously, compared to professional volunteers (28.6%). Regional data indicated that this was viewed as 'a lot more' of a problem in the Western provinces (60%) compared to Ontario (41.7%) and other regions (33.3%). The main finding in other regions and territories is that it hasn't changed (66.7% said it was 'about the same' as in previous years).

### ➤ **Myths and stereotypes: Families with children with learning disabilities.**

There are several negative stereotypes of families of children with learning disabilities. For example, an article in the Toronto Star (1999) indicated that these families are often perceived to be poorly educated, lacking in parenting skills, and led by single-parents on welfare (Kot, Toronto Star, 1999). When asked about the negative perceptions of families of children with learning disabilities roughly one-half of the respondents (48.8%) said it was 'more of a problem' now than in previous years. The remaining respondents said it was 'about the same'

(35.1%) or ‘a little less’ of a problem (16.2%). Professional volunteers were more likely to say that this was ‘more of a problem’ (75.1%) than LDA staff (57.1%). The Western provinces were more likely to report that this was ‘a lot more’ of problem (33.3%) compared to Ontario (16.7%) and all other regions (8.3%).

### ➤ **Stereotyping of children and youth with learning disabilities**

Children and youth with learning disabilities may face rejection from peers, experience feelings of inadequacy academically and in social situations. They may also suffer from low self-esteem and motivation, and their lack of opportunities hinders their resiliency and life chances (Littman, Toronto Star, 1999). The nature of the disability is often misunderstood because of common misconceptions or stereotypes associated with learning disabilities. As noted by Penny Littman (1999), “LD children have varying degrees of intelligence and strengths . . . are worthy of investment by our educational system . . . and a school board needs to cooperate with families in providing adequate resources and services, so that learning disabled can blend into mainstream society” (p. F5)

The survey population was asked about whether the public at large has a negative perception of children and youth with learning disabilities (e.g., young people are stereotyped as disruptive school failures, prone to violence and crime and likely to be unemployed as adults). The total number of respondents who indicated that this was ‘more of a problem’ was 63.1% (26.3% a lot more or 36.8% a little more). The remaining 39.6% of the respondents indicated that this issue was either ‘about the same’ (26.3%) or ‘a little less’ of a problem (10.5%). Professional volunteers (75.1%) were more likely LDA staff (57.1%) to indicated that this is ‘more of a problem’ now than previously.

About 42% of the respondents from the Western provinces indicated that they viewed this as ‘a lot more’ of a problem. Whereas, the results from Ontario indicated that only 23.1% of the total number of respondents viewed this issue as ‘a lot more’ of a problem. Only 16.7% of the respondents from other regions across Canada viewed this as ‘a lot more’ of a problem. The negative perceptions were viewed as ‘a little more’ of problem in the Western Provinces by 41.7% of the respondents, by 30.8% of the respondents in Ontario, and 41.7% of the respondents surveyed in other regions across Canada. The only two regions to indicate that this was ‘a little less’ of a problem was Ontario (7.7%) and all other regions and territories across Canada (25.0%). The survey results indicated that the Western provinces did not perceive this to be any less of a problem than previously.

## **VII. Changing the term ‘learning disability’ to ‘different learning style’. What it means for families and children with learning disabilities.**

Schools and education authorities are replacing the term ‘learning disability’ by such terms as ‘different learning style’. As a result, issues of cognitive and perceptual disability are

being overlooked and children with learning disabilities are not getting the instructional programming and other educational services they need. When asked about this problem nation wide, 71 % of the respondents surveyed indicated that this was ‘more of a problem’ now (42.1% a lot more and 28.9% a little more) than in previous years. About 24% of the respondents surveyed indicated that this was ‘about the same’ now, and only 5.3% said it was ‘less’ of a problem. Professional volunteers (81.3%) were more likely than LDA staff (61.9%) to indicate that indeed under the new term children and youth with learning disabilities are being overlooked and not getting the instructional programming and services they need. This is happening more today than in previous years. The Western provinces were much more likely to view this as ‘more of a problem’ now (66.7% a lot more or 16.7% a little more); compared to all other regions and territories (33.3% a lot more or 33.3% a little more) and Ontario (30.8% a lot more or 30.8% a little more). The percentage of the respondents to consider this issue to be ‘about the same’ now was 30.8% in Ontario, 25.0% in other regions across Canada, and 16.7% in the Western provinces.

## VIII. HIGHLIGHTS

This research conducted an environmental scan of the issues that are front and center in the minds of parents, educators and volunteers with respect to current practices in the education system concerning children and youth with learning disabilities. The research drew from a survey, which probed themes and issues in popular media-representations of children and youth with learning disabilities.

The survey that was developed for the research probed those and other issues. The research found that issues were perceived to be ‘more of a problem’ now than two or three ago by all respondents (i.e. LDA staff and professional volunteers respectively):

- Increased alcohol and drug use among young people with learning disabilities (55.9%);
- Increased criminal activity among youth with learning disabilities (57.6%);
- Less 1:1 time provided by teachers to students with learning disabilities because of larger classroom sizes and cutbacks in teaching assistants (86.5%);
- Local boards having difficulty raising money to meet the educational needs of students with learning disabilities (86.2%);
- Parents making out of pocket expenditures for professional services (i.e. assessment of learning disabilities, diagnosis of ADHD) (97.4%);
- Financial burden regarding the cost of private schools and special education services purchased by parents to meet the needs of their children (92.1%);
- Lack of compassion in the public at large for ensuring adequate special education services for students with LD (63.1%);

- Public perception that ADHD is being over-diagnosed and skepticism over the legitimacy of ADHD (97.3%);
- Barriers to accessing programs and services for gifted children and youth with learning disabilities (71%);
- Negative public perceptions of children with learning disabilities (63.1%);
- Children being overlooked and not getting the help they need because the term 'learning disabilities' has been redefined to mean 'different learning styles' (71%).

LDA staff were more apt to consider the following issues and themes to be 'more of a problem' now than two or three years ago:

- High grade retention rate of students with learning disabilities;
- School drop out rates among students with learning disabilities;
- Lack of compassion in the public at large toward ensuring adequate special education services for students with learning disabilities;
- Public skepticism over ADHD;
- Barriers to inclusion in gifted children's programs for gifted students with LD.

Professional volunteers were more apt to consider the following issues as 'more of a problem' now than two or three years ago:

- Delayed diagnosis of learning disabilities in children;
- Youth with LD getting involved in criminal activity and in trouble with the law;
- Regular teachers lacking skills and knowledge of learning disabilities;
- School boards having difficulty raising money for special education programs and services for students with learning disabilities;
- Parents turning to the private sectors for assessments (e.g., learning disability or ADHD), instructional (e.g., tutoring) and educational services (e.g., private schools for children with learning disabilities) ;
- Parents making out of pocket expenditures for educational services in the private sector and the economic burden on the family;
- Negative public perceptions of families of children with learning disabilities;

While LDA staff and professional volunteers may have had slightly different perspectives on the issues explored in the survey, there was a general consensus across all regions included in the survey that the following issues are 'a lot more' of a problem today than in previous years:

- Increased responsibilities and duties of teachers as a result of the cutbacks and changes to the education system which is diverting their attention away from students with learning disabilities;
- Fewer special education services and programs for students with learning disabilities;
- Fewer school psychologists available in the schools that deal with learning disabilities and education;
- Parents are removing their children from the regular education system and finding placements in the private sector to meet the educational needs of their children who have learning disabilities;
- Parents are turning to the courts and the Human Rights Commission to establish the rights of their children with learning disabilities to education services;
- Under the new term 'different learning styles', issues of cognitive and perceptual disability are being overlooked and children with learning disabilities are not getting the instructional programming and other educational services they need to facilitate their learning process, foster their development and maximize their potential and growth.

Owing to the small sample size, the research was unable to produce definitive findings for regional differences in problem issues across Canada. However, the research found some evidence which suggests that issues associated with the changes to the education system may be more problematic for children and youth with learning disabilities in some regions of the country than others, an intriguing issue for further exploration in another research context.

## IX. CONCLUSION

This research conducted an environmental scan of the issues that are front and center in the minds of parents, educators and volunteers with respect to current practices in the education system concerning children and youth with learning disabilities. The research drew from a survey, which probed themes and issues in popular media-representations of children and youth with learning disabilities.

The popular media (i.e. newspaper and magazines) that were reviewed have reported that provincial governments are retrenching resources to the education system. As a result, vulnerable children such as those with learning disabilities have been particularly affected by cutbacks. With the education budget reduced, local school boards have cut back on the number of special education classes for children and youth with learning disabilities and have cut back the resources available for various supports on which children rely for learning and development. In response, parents are seeking placements outside of the regular system to meet the educational needs of their children. The popular media have reported that, in face of the denied right of children and youth with learning disabilities to education services in the publicly funded system, parents are resorting to the Human Rights Commission to address their claims. The press has also profiled the growing public skepticism concerning ADHD and the lack of compassion in the public at large associated with the struggles of families of children with learning disabilities.

The survey that was developed for the research probed those and other issues. The research found that many of these issues were perceived to be ‘more of a problem’ now than two or three ago by most respondents.

While LDA staff and professional volunteers have slightly different perspectives on the issues explored in the survey, there was a general consensus regardless of region that some issues are ‘*a lot more*’ of a problem today than in previous years, such as increased responsibilities and duties of teachers; fewer special education services and programs; fewer school psychologists; parents resorting to the private sector, the courts and the Human Rights system to address the educational needs of their children; new definitions that draw attention away from students with learning disabilities.

## REFERENCES

- Canada and the World Backgrounder # 1 (author not available), (1998, January 1st). Education: Learning Disabilities. *Canada and the World Backgrounder*. [Online]. Available:  
<http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159057429x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D004&Form=RL&pubname=Canada> [2000, March 14].
- Canada and the World Backgrounder #2 (author not available), (1998, January 1). Education reform. *Canada and the World Backgrounder*. [Online]. Available:  
<http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159061679x127y65051w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q007D018> [2000, March 14].
- Canada and the World Backgrounder #3 (author not available), (1998, December 1). Education-Curriculum. *Canada and the World Backgrounder*. [Online]. Available:  
<http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=166496164x127y64005w0&clean=1&Form=EN&Button=MEM&OIDS=0Q002> [2000, June 8].
- Chamberlain, A. (1999). Special Ed hurting, boards say. *Toronto Star* [Online]. Available:  
<http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=166496164x127y64005w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q007D029> [2000, June 8].
- Cowan, P. (1998, November 22). Learning disabled kids falling through the crack, experts say. *The Edmonton Sun*, pp.26. [Online]. Available:  
<http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159061679x127y65051w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q007D017> [2000, March 14].
- Daniszewski, H (1999, September 27). *Learning centres making their marks/parents willing to dig into their pockets to ensure their children succeed in school are fuelling a new growth of business in London*. The London Free Press pp. 10. [Online]. Available:  
[http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159057429x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D005&Form=RL&pubname=The\\_L](http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159057429x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D005&Form=RL&pubname=The_L) [2000, March 14].
- Galluzo, K. (1999, June 13). Child with learning disability needs compassion. *Toronto Star*. [Online]. Available:  
<http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=166496164x127y64005w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q007D001> [2000, June 8].
- Gillespie, K. (1998, June 17). *Learning disabled fear school shake-up*. The Toronto Star, B-2.
- Henry, T. (1997, June 18). Diagnosing Learning problems can be difficult for parents and teachers. *USA Today*, pp.08D [Online]. Available:  
[http://www...getdoc.cgi?id=159057429x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D005&Form=RL&pubname=The\\_L](http://www...getdoc.cgi?id=159057429x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D005&Form=RL&pubname=The_L) [2000, March 14].



- Inclusion International (1998). *The journey to inclusive schools: An overview of the Inclusive Education in six issues of Getting There in the context of the Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education of UNESCO*. France: Inclusion International (Series no.1-6, 1995-1998).
- Inclusion International (1996 May). Peer Education: The child-to-child approach. In Inclusion International, (1998). *The journey to inclusive schools: An overview of the Inclusive Education in six issues of Getting There in the context of the Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education of UNESCO* (Series no.3, p.7). France: Inclusion International.
- Inclusive News, (1994). Ten good reasons for inclusive education. *Inclusive News, Centre for Integrated Education and Community*.
- Jenish, D. (2000, May 15). Reclaiming the good life: Early diagnosis and counselling are helping kids with behavioural and neurological disorder. *Maclean's*, pp.54. [Online]. Available: <http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id167177106x127y32924w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&QUIDS=0Q001D01> [2000, June 16].
- Kot, M. E. (1999, June 2). *Our betrayal of learning disabled kids*. Toronto Star, p. A17.
- Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (1996). Learning Technologies and Persons with Learning Disabilities: Annotated Bibliography. Office of Learning Technologies (LDAC) [Online]. Available: <http://www.olt-bta.LDAC-drhc.gc.ca/publicat/bibldise.html> [2000, March 8].
- Littman, P. (1999, June 13). Learning disabilities bring anguish. *Toronto Star*. [Online]. Available: [http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=15905749x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D013&Form=RL&pubname=The\\_T](http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=15905749x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D013&Form=RL&pubname=The_T) [2000, March 14].
- London Free Press, author not available (1999, June 5). Making the grade: Part I. London: *London Free Press*, pp. A12 [Online]. Available: <http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=15906484x127y45496w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q007D021> [2000, March 14].
- Moyle, Elaine (1998, Nov 22). Hyperactivity Hoax? ADHD: The trash can diagnosis of the 90's. *Toronto Sun*, pp. 66 [Online]. Available: <http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159061679x127y65051w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q007D01> [2000, March 14].
- Medical Post, (author not available), (1998, Oct 20). Attention deficit aid hard to find: Window small for treatment and assessment doctor say. *Medical Post*, 34, p.50. [Online]. Available: <http://.../getdoc.cgi?id=159067266x127y57219w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q007D04> [2000, March 14].

- National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) (1999) *Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: Fact sheet number 19 (FS19)*. Washington: National Information Centre for Children and Youth with disabilities. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/factshe/fs19txt.htm> [1999, June 1].
- Resource Center on Substance Abuse Prevention and Disability (1991). *A look at alcohol and other drug abuse prevention and ...Disability and enabling*. Washington: Resource Center on Substance Abuse and Prevention and Disability (pp.1-4).
- Resource Center on Substance Abuse Prevention and Disability (1991). *An overview of alcohol and other drug abuse prevention and disability*. Washington: Resource Center on Substance Abuse and Prevention and Disability.
- Sheppard, R. (1998, June 22). Battling the system: Parents of learning disabled fight for rights. *Maclean's*, pp.46 [Online]. Available: <http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159057429x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q0007D003&Form=RL&pubname=Maclean> [2000, March 14].
- Sheppard, R. (1998, September 07). Why kids can't read: As science cracks the code, parents fight for their children's rights to special education. *Maclean's*, pp.40. [Online]. Available: <http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=159057429x127y43893w0&OIDS=0Q007D000&Form=RL&pubname=Maclean> [2000, March 14].
- Sinclair, L. (1992, Nov). Vulnerable suspects: The criminal law and people with learning disabilities. *Mencapnews*, pp.3-4.
- Smith, G. (1998, April 28). Don't be ashamed of learning disability label. *Toronto Star* [Online]. Available: <http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=166496164x127y64005w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q011D000> [2000, June 8].
- Toronto Star (1999, November 11). What kind of government punishes the weak? *Toronto Star*, [Online]. Available: <http://www.../getdoc.cgi?id=167177106x127y32924w0&clean=1&Form=RL&Button=&OIDS=0Q001D08> [2000, June 16].

## **APPENDIX A: LDAC SURVEY**

## **APPENDIX B: Summary of Responses**

[Appendix B]  
**Summary of Responses**  
**as Indicated by LDA Staff and Professional Volunteers**  
**in the LDAC Survey, 2000.**

<b>IDENTIFIED ISSUE/ PROBLEM</b>	<b>Total % (Accumulative Responses )</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA STAFF</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA Volunteers</b>	<b>Significant % Regional Differences</b>
1.Delayed diagnosis of LD in the Canadian education system.	More of a problem now 44.7%; about the same 39.5%; less of a problem 15.8%	More of a problem now 42.8% than previously	Much more of a problem now 50.1% than previously	Much more of a problem now in Ontario (69.3%), than the Western provinces (33.3%) and other regions (33.4%).
2.High grade retention rate of children and youth with learning disabilities at school.	More of a problem 36.2%; about the same 30.6%; less of a problem 33.3%	More of a problem 40%; about the same 40%; less of a problem 20%	Less of a problem 53.3% now; or about the same 13.3%; or more of a problem 33.4%;	More of a problem now in Ontario 53.9%; and less of a problem in the Western provinces 45.5%; and more of a problem in other regions (72%)
3. High dropout rate of young people with LD in the Canadian education system.	More of a problem 50%; 44.4% about the same; less of a problem 5.6%	Much more of a problem 57.9%; about the same 36.8% ;or less of 5.3%	About the same 50%; or more of a problem 43.8% ; or a lot less of a problem 6.3%	Equal % of respondents from Ontario and the Western provinces who felt this is more of a problem now (58.5%) than previously. About 55% of the respondents from other regions felt this issue was about the same. The remaining respondents from other regions viewed this issue as a lot more of a problem 34.5% or a lot less of a problem 9.1%.

<b>IDENTIFIED ISSUE/ PROBLEM</b>	<b>Total % (Accumulative Responses )</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA STAFF</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA Volunteers</b>	<b>Significant % Regional Differences</b>
4 Turning to drugs and alcohol use	More of a problem 55.9%; about the same 41.2%; less of a problem 2.9%	Much more of a problem 55% than professional volunteers; or about the same 45%	More of a problem 53.9% ; or about the same 38.5%; or a little less of a problem 7.7%	More of a problem in other regions 66.7%; and more of a problem in the Western provinces 58.4% or Ontario 33.4%
5.Delinquency	More of a problem 57.6% ; about the same 42.4%	More of a problem 57.9%; or about the same 42.1%	Much more of a problem 61.2%; or about the same 38.5%	Much more of a problem in other regions (66.6%), than the Western provinces (58.4%) or Ontario (54.6%).
6.Increased duties and responsibilities are diverting teacher's attention away from away from students with learning disabilities.	More of a problem now 86.5%; about the same 13.2%	More of a problem now 85.7% ; or about the same 14.3%	Much more of a problem now 87.5%; or about the same 12.5%	Much more of a problem now in Ontario (84.6% a lot more or a little more 15.4%), than the Western provinces (58.3% a lot more or a little more 33.3%) and other regions (33.3% a lot more or 16.7% a little more).
7.Skills and Knowledge of regular teachers to meet students special needs	More of a problem now 71.8%; about the same 26.3%; less of a problem 2.6%	More of a problem now 71.4%; about the same 28.6%	Much more of a problem now 75%; or about the same 18.8%; or a little less 6.3%	More of a problem now in Ontario (84.7%), than the Western provinces (83.3%) or other regions (50%).
8.Fewer special education services	More of a problem now 94.8%; about the same 5.2%	More of a problem now 90.5%; or about the same 9.5%	Much more of a now problem (81.3% a lot more or 18.8% a little more)	A lot more of a problem now in the Western provinces (83.3%), Ontario (76.9%) and other regions 58.3%).
9. Fewer school psychologist	More of a problem 94.8%; about the same 5.2%	More of a problem 90.5%; or about the same 9.5%	Much more of a problem (62.5% a lot more or 37.5% a little more)	A lot more of a problem in the Western provinces (58.3%), other regions (58.3%) and Ontario

				(53.8%).
--	--	--	--	----------

<b>IDENTIFIED ISSUE/ PROBLEM</b>	<b>Total % (Accumulative Responses )</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA STAFF</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA Volunteers</b>	<b>Significant % Regional Differences</b>
10. Local boards are finding it difficult to raise money to meet educational needs of students with LD	More of a problem 86.2% ; about the same 10.3%; a lot less 3.4%	More of a problem 82.3% ;or about the same 17.6%	Much more of a problem (58.3% a lot more or 33.3% a little more)	A lot more of a problem in the other regions (71.4%) , the Western provinces (55.6%), and Ontario (46.2%)
11. Parents are removing their children with learning disabilities from the regular education system	More of a problem now 71.5% ; about the same 20%; less of a problem 8.6%	More of a problem now 70%; or about the same 30%	Much more of a problem now 71.4%; or about the same 7.1%; or less of a problem 21.4%	Generally more of a problem now in other regions (20% a lot more or 80% a little more) than the Western provinces (50% a lot more or 25% a little more) and Ontario (41.7% a lot more).
12. Parents are turning to the private sector for tutoring and private schools to meet the educational needs of their children with learning disabilities.	More of a problem now 89.2% ; about the same 10.8%	More of a problem now 85.7%; or about the same 14.3%	Much more of a problem now 93.3%; or about the same 6.7%	A lot more of a problem now in the Western provinces (50%), than Ontario (46.2%), or other regions (36.4%). A little more of a problem in other regions (63.6%), than Ontario (38.5%) or the Western provinces (33.3%).
13. Parents' out of pocket expenses for the assessment of LD for their children	More of a problem now 97.4%; or about the same 2.6%	More of a problem now 95.2%; or 4.8% about the same	Much more of a problem now (50% a lot more or 50% a little more)	A lot more of a problem now in the Western provinces (66.7%) and Ontario (46.2%) than other regions (33%).
14. Economic burden on parents as it relates to the cost of assessments and special ed.	More of a problem now 92.1%; or about the same 7.9%	More of a problem now 85.7%; or about the same 14.3%	Much more of a problem now (62.5% a lot more or 37.5% a little more)	A lot more of a problem now in Ontario (84.6%) than the Western provinces (58.3%) and other regions



services...				(41.7%).
<b>IDENTIFIED ISSUE/ PROBLEM</b>	<b>Total % (Accumulative Responses )</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA STAFF</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA Volunteers</b>	<b>Significant % Regional Differences</b>
15. Parents are turning to the courts and the Human Rights Commission to establish the rights of their children to education services	More of a problem now 61.1%; or about the same 38.9%	About the same 40%; a little more of a problem 55%; or a lot more of a problem now 5%	About the same 40%; or a little more 46.7%; a lot more 13.3%	Generally more of a problem now in the Western provinces (75%) and other regions (54.5%) than Ontario (50%).
16. Lack of compassion in the public at large toward ensuring adequate special ed. services for students with LD.	More of a problem now 63.1%; or about the same 23.7%; or 13.2% a little less of a problem now than previously.	More of a problem now 66%; or about the same 23.8%; a little less 9.5% of a problem now than previously.	A little more problem now 37.5%, a lot more 18.8%, about the same 25%, or a little less 18.8%, than previously.	Generally more of a problem now in the Western provinces (91.7%) and Ontario (61.3%) than other regions (33.3%)
17. There is an assumption that ADHD is being over-diagnosed, which is resulting in public skepticism over ADHD	More of a problem 97.3%; or about the same 2.6%	Much more of a problem now (38.1% a lot more or 61.9% a little more)	More of a problem (37.5% a lot more or 56.3% a little more); or about the same 6.3%	Generally it is more of a problem across Canada. A lot more of a problem in the Western provinces (58.3%) than Ontario (38.5%) and other regions (16.7%). A little more of a problem in other regions (75%) than Ontario (61.5%), and the Western provinces (41.7%).
18. Gifted children with LD- barriers to accessing special programs for gifted children	More of a problem 71%; or about the same 29%	Much more of a problem 76.5% or about the same 23.5%	More of a problem 64.3% or about the same 35.7%	Generally this is a lot more of a problem in the Western provinces (90%) and Ontario (83.4%) than other regions (33.3%). The other regions felt the issue was about the same (66.7%) as in previous years.

<b>IDENTIFIED ISSUE/ PROBLEM</b>	<b>Total % (Accumulative Responses )</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA STAFF</b>	<b>Significant % Responses from LDA Volunteers</b>	<b>Significant % Regional Differences</b>
19.Negative perceptions of families of children with LD.	About the same 35.1%; a little less 16.2; or more of a problem 48.6%	More of a problem 45%; about the same 35%; or a little less 20%	More of a problem 56.3%; about the same 31.3%; or a little less 12.5%	Generally this is more of a problem in Ontario (58.4) and the Western provinces (58.3%), than other regions (33.3%)
20.Negative perceptions of children and youth with LD	More of a problem 63.1%, 26.3% about the same, 10.5% a little less of a problem.	More of a problem 57.1%; about the same 28.6%; a little less 14.3%	More of a problem 75.1%; about the same 18.8%; or a little less of a problem 6.3%	This was viewed as more of a problem in the Western provinces (83.4%) and other regions (58.4%), than Ontario (53.9%). Also there were 7.7% of Ontario respondents and 25% from other regions who felt this was a little less of a problem.
21. Under the term 'different learning style'-children are being overlooked and not getting the help for their special needs.	More of a problem 71%; or about the same 28.9%; or 5.3% less of a problem than previously	More of a problem 61.9%; or about the same 33.3%; or a lot less 4.8%	Much more of a problem 81.3%; or about the same 12.5%; or a little less 6.3%	This was viewed as more of a problem in the Western provinces (83.4%), than other regions (66.6%) and Ontario (61.6%). There were a small % of respondent from Ontario who felt this was a lot less of an issue (7.7%) and 8.3% of respondents from other regions who felt this was a little less of an issue than in previous years.

