

Educators' Institute 2026
Two half-day virtual sessions

Unique Minds, Remarkable Potential

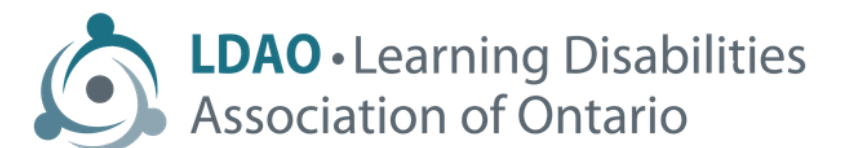
August 18-19, 2026

Program current as of May 27, 2026.
Updates may occur.

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Welcome to the Educators' Institute 2026 (Virtual)



Unique Minds, Remarkable Potential

At LDAO, we believe that every student deserves to be seen, understood, and supported to succeed. This year's theme, **Unique Minds, Remarkable Potential**, reflects a shared commitment to recognizing the diverse ways students learn and ensuring that classrooms respond with intention, care, and evidence-informed practice.

Across this year's sessions, we explore the connections between belonging, well-being, and inclusive instruction. From rethinking bias and access to strengthening everyday classroom practices, the Educators' Institute is designed to support meaningful, practical change.

We are glad you are here and look forward to learning together.

What You'll Experience

- Practical, evidence-informed strategies to support students with learning disabilities, ADHD, and diverse learning needs
- Opportunities to reflect on your context and apply learning to your practice
- Meaningful connections with educators across roles, schools, and systems
- A focus on belonging, access, and inclusive practices that support student success

Schedule

Two Half-Day Virtual Sessions

August 18

August 19

8:30-9:00

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Welcome & Opening Remarks

9:00-10:00

Opening Keynote

Ardavan Eizadirad & Steve Sider

Breakout Session 3

Terri Jackson

10:00-10:15

Coffee Break

Coffee Break

10:15-11:15

Breakout Session 1

Jackie Eldridge

Breakout Session 4A or 4B

4A Jessica Leney & Rachel Powers

4B Teresa Kingston

11:15-11:30

Coffee Break

Coffee Break

11:30-12:30

Breakout Session 2A or 2B

2A Robyn Rутtenberg-Rozen

2B Isabelle Chartrand-Dubois & Tali Aikenhead

Closing Keynote

DJ Cunningham, Thalia Wright, & Brooklyn Cotgrave

Day 1 - 9:00–10:00 | Opening Keynote

Who Gets Seen? Rethinking Bias and Access in Today's Classrooms

Educators want every student to be seen, understood, and supported. When evidence-based instruction and inclusive practice work together, classrooms become spaces where students can thrive. Yet across Ontario, inequities persist in how students are identified, interpreted, and supported within special education, particularly for racialized students with learning disabilities, ADHD, and other neurodivergent profiles.

Informed by LDAO's Seeing the Whole Student Educator Guide and the Diagnosed through Bias literature review, this session moves beyond describing systemic barriers to focus on a key question: how do everyday classroom decisions shape who gets seen and supported?

Participants will explore practical classroom moves that reduce stigma, expand access, and strengthen belonging, including rethinking readiness, interrupting referral bias, using supports intentionally, strengthening communication with families, and examining the hidden curriculum.



Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad
*Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education,
Wilfrid Laurier University*



Dr. Steve Sider
*Professor, Faculty of Education,
Wilfrid Laurier University*

Ardavan Eizadirad is an Associate Professor at Wilfrid Laurier University and a former TDSB educator. His work focuses on equity, anti-racism, and inclusive education. He is the author and co-editor of several books and the founder of EDlcation Consulting, supporting organizations through equity-focused training and capacity building. He is also a Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Innovation and Inclusion in Education for Thriving School-Community Ecosystems.

Steve Sider is a Professor at Wilfrid Laurier University and founding director of the Centre for Leading Research in Education. His work focuses on inclusive school leadership and building caring school communities across global contexts. He has led multiple national research projects and is a co-author of books on inclusive education and leadership. He was recently named a Wilfrid Laurier University Research Professor for 2026-27 in recognition of his research excellence.

Day 1 - 10:15–11:15 | Jackie Eldridge

Belonging by Design: Why Well-Being Comes Before Learning

Student well-being and belonging are foundational to learning, particularly for students with learning disabilities and ADHD. This session explores how trauma-informed and emotionally responsive classroom practices can support regulation, engagement, and resilience. Drawing on research and classroom experience, educators will consider how to move beyond behaviour management toward relationship-centred, needs-based approaches. Practical strategies focus on strengthening emotional safety, supporting self-regulation, and building inclusive classroom communities. Participants will leave with clear, actionable approaches aligned with Ontario's well-being and inclusive education priorities.

Dr. Jackie Eldridge

Instructor, Master of Teaching Program, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto)




Jackie Eldridge is an educator, teacher educator, and leadership consultant with over 20 years of experience supporting schools and communities. She teaches in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and works with organizations across Ontario to strengthen inclusive, relationship-centred learning environments. Her work focuses on well-being, belonging, and supporting students with diverse learning needs.

Day 1 - 11:30–12:30 | Robyn Rутtenberg-Rozen

When Rules Break: Turning Misconceptions into Mathematical Learning Breakthroughs

Students often develop informal mathematical “rules” that help them navigate early learning but can later limit understanding. This session reframes misconceptions as valuable insights into student thinking rather than errors to correct. Participants will explore how to surface and use these misconceptions to strengthen conceptual understanding for students with learning disabilities. Educators will learn how to design tasks that reveal thinking, facilitate discussion, and support the development of more flexible and durable mathematical understanding.



Dr. Robyn Rутtenberg-Rozen
Associate Professor and Research Excellence Chair in AI and STEM Inclusion, Ontario Tech University

Robyn Rутtenberg-Rozen is an Associate Professor at Ontario Tech University and Research Excellence Chair in AI and STEM Inclusion. A former teacher and administrator, her research focuses on inclusive STEAM education and how students with learning disabilities develop mathematical understanding. She is particularly interested in how classroom practices can support deeper thinking and equitable access to mathematics learning.

Day 1 - 11:30–12:30 | Isabelle Chartrand-Dubois & Tali Aikenhead



From Awareness to Action: Identity-Affirming Mental Health Promotion and Social-Emotional Skill Development in the Classroom



Isabelle Chartrand-Dubois

*Educational Leader and Consultant,
School Mental Health Ontario*

Tali Aikenhead

*Co-Lead, Early Identification and
Support, School Mental Health Ontario*

Educators play a critical role in supporting student mental health, yet many are asking a practical question: what does this look like in everyday classroom practice?

Building on foundational mental health literacy, this session moves from awareness to action. Participants will explore how to create identity-affirming, mentally healthy learning environments and understand behaviour as communication, shifting from behaviour management toward relationship- and strength-based approaches in daily classroom routines.

The session also examines executive functioning and emotion regulation, including how planning, stress management, and coping can be taught as part of learning. Attention is given to reducing stigma, particularly for students with learning disabilities and ADHD, and to strengthening collaboration across the circle of support.

Participants will leave with practical, classroom-ready strategies to support student well-being, belonging, and success.

Isabelle Chartrand-Dubois is an experienced educational leader with more than 33 years in Ontario's French-language education system. She has served as a teacher, guidance counsellor, vice-principal, principal, and provincial leader, with expertise in pedagogical leadership, strategic planning, and school mental health. She now works as an independent consultant and with School Mental Health Ontario, supporting leadership development and mental health initiatives.

Tali Aikenhead is a Co-Lead for Early Identification and Support and an Implementation Coach with School Mental Health Ontario. She is a Registered Social Worker with over 15 years of experience in education, providing clinical services and leadership in program and policy development. Her work focuses on building mentally healthy communities through early support and collaboration.

Day 2 - 9:00-10:00 | Terri Jackson



From Overwhelmed to Organized: Supporting Executive Function in the Classroom

Executive functioning skills such as planning, organization, and self-regulation are critical for learning but can present significant challenges for students with learning disabilities and ADHD. This session helps educators understand how these differences appear in everyday classroom contexts and how to respond effectively. Participants will explore practical strategies including visual supports, structured routines, task breakdown, and metacognitive approaches. Educators will leave with actionable strategies to support students while maintaining high expectations and building independence.

Dr. Terri Jackson

Assistant Professor, University of Prince Edward Island



Terri Jackson is an Assistant Professor at the University of Prince Edward Island with over 20 years of experience in education. Her work focuses on inclusive education, neurodiversity, and building educator capacity to support diverse learners. She works with educators to design classroom environments and instructional approaches that promote independence and success.

Day 2 - 10:15-11:15 | Jessica Leney & Rachel Powers



Unlocking Potential: Equitable Vocabulary Instruction for Students with LDs



Jessica Leney
*Educator,
Provincial Demonstration Schools*



Rachel Powers
*Educator,
Provincial Demonstration Schools*

Vocabulary knowledge is essential for reading comprehension, writing, and academic success. Educators will learn about high-utility academic vocabulary and an effective, easy-to-implement instructional routine that integrates explicit instruction, contextual practice, and repeated exposure to support meaningful vocabulary development appropriate for junior, intermediate, and senior grades. Grounded in equity, this session emphasizes ensuring students with learning disabilities have access to the academic language needed to fully engage in learning in all pathways. Educators will leave with practical tools to build confident, capable learners.

Jessica Leney and **Rachel Powers** are experienced educators with extensive backgrounds in special education and inclusive instruction. Both have worked within Ontario's Provincial Demonstration Schools and bring deep expertise in supporting students with learning disabilities. Their work focuses on explicit, evidence-based instruction that strengthens literacy, builds confidence, and supports equitable access to learning.

Day 2 - 10:15-11:15 | Teresa Kingston

Making Tier 2 Work: Practical Small-Group Reading Strategies for Real Classrooms

Many schools across Ontario are strengthening early reading instruction through screening tools and systematic, explicit teaching. Yet many educators continue to ask a practical question: what does effective Tier 2 instruction look like within a busy classroom? Drawing on classroom and system-level experience, this session explores how short, targeted small-group instruction can support students who benefit from additional practice with foundational reading skills. Participants will see how Tier 2 instruction can be embedded within daily routines through precise instructional moves, ongoing assessment, and collaboration among educators. Educators will leave with practical strategies for structuring small-group instruction, using explicit routines, and integrating Tier 2 supports into everyday classroom practice.

Teresa Kingston

*K–8 Literacy–Numeracy Consultant,
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School
Board*



Teresa Kingston is a K–8 Literacy–Numeracy Consultant with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. She supports educators in implementing evidence-based literacy practices, with a focus on early reading, Tier 2 instruction, and system-wide coherence. Her work connects classroom practice with system-level planning to improve outcomes for students with diverse learning needs.

Day 2 - 11:30-12:30 | Closing Keynote



From Access to Impact: What Happens When Students Are Truly Seen

This closing session brings the themes of the Educators' Institute into lived experience. Through the voices of students and professionals who have navigated Ontario's education system with learning disabilities, ADHD, and other neurodiverse profiles, participants will reflect on how educator decisions shape identity, access, and long-term pathways.

Designed as a facilitated conversation, this session connects individual experiences into a shared narrative, highlighting how moments of recognition, access, and intentional instructional design can create lasting impact. Participants will leave with a strengthened understanding of how their daily decisions influence not only learning, but belonging, identity, and future directions.

DJ Cunningham
CEO, LEARNstyle Ltd.



Thalia Wright
Student, Carleton University



Brooklyn Cotgrave
Student, McMaster University



DJ Cunningham is the co-founder of LEARNstyle and a leader in student support innovation. Drawing on his lived experience with ADHD and dyslexia, he is dedicated to helping students understand how they learn and build confidence in their abilities. He works with school systems across Canada to strengthen supports for learners and has shared his message widely, including through a TEDx talk and presentations across North America.

Thalia Wright is a student at Carleton University in the Global and International Studies program. They are a disability advocate and researcher focused on Blackness, intersectionality, and systems impacting Black disabled communities. They are pursuing a career in law and social work, with an interest in building more caring and inclusive systems. Thalia is also a poet.

Brooklyn Cotgrave is a student at McMaster University studying Biology and Mathematics. Diagnosed with a learning disability in Grade 3, she has developed strong self-advocacy skills and has received the "Yes I Can: Self-Advocacy Award" and scholarships from the Learning Disabilities Association. She shares her lived experience to support and inspire others.

Our Partners



Supporting learning, access, and student success

LDAO works with partners across Ontario to support students with learning disabilities, ADHD, and diverse learning needs. Together, we advance access and student success.

Supported by funding from



Conference Contributors

