

**2010**

*J.P. Das Centre on  
Developmental and  
Learning Disabilities*

*University of Alberta*

**Exemplar Alberta Schools:  
A Case Study of Foothills Academy**

*[Report for Alberta Education's Intervention Supports  
for Special Education Students Project]*

**Authors:**

**Dr. Lynn McQuarrie, Dr. Rauno Parrila, Dr. Janine Odishaw**

**Jennifer Barber, Marjorie Hitschfeld and Jennifer Williams**

**May 2010**

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	4
Introduction .....	4
Study Background .....	5
Study Data .....	6
Key Findings .....	6
Introduction .....	9
Parent Survey .....	11
Practices to Support Students with LD .....	11
Teaching Students with LD .....	12
Assessment Practices .....	13
Relations with School .....	13
Supportive Learning Practices at Home .....	14
Staff Morale and School Culture .....	15
Parent Phone Interview .....	16
Supporting Students with LD .....	16
Previous School Experiences .....	17
Future Attendance .....	17
School Survey .....	18
School Policies and Practices .....	19
Practices to Support Student with LD .....	19
Teaching Students with LD .....	19
Assessment Practices .....	20

Relations with Parents and Supporting Learning at Home .....	20
Staff Morale and School Culture .....	20
Further Comments .....	21
Focus Group .....	21
Student Interview .....	24
Relationships with School Staff .....	24
Learning Resources .....	25
Identification of Personal Strengths and Challenges .....	25
Recommended Advice for Other Schools .....	26
Overall Conclusions .....	26
References .....	29
Appendices .....	29
Appendix A. Parent Survey.....	30
Appendix B. School Survey.....	42

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This report focuses on the research findings from a single case study conducted at Foothills Academy, which has been identified by Alberta Education as a school providing exemplar educational programming for students with learning disabilities (LD). “Learning Disabilities” as defined in Alberta Education’s (1996) *Programming for Students with Special Needs: Book 6: Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities* is “a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency” (p. 13). It is well known that in order to be successful, students with learning disabilities require timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community and workplace settings. These interventions may include specific skill instruction, accommodations, compensatory strategies, and self-advocacy skills (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2002).

The case study was part of a larger research project entitled: *Intervention Supports for Special Education Students*. The project was conducted to provide information to inform Alberta Education and Alberta K to 12 school jurisdictions in their ongoing efforts to support and enhance learning for students with learning disabilities. Although direction was given to the researchers and writers to establish parameters for the project, the contents of this document reflects the writers’ perspectives on topics and subjects reviewed and do not necessarily reflect the position of Alberta Education.

## **Study Background**

As a school for students with LD, Foothills Academy is recognized for its success and praised for its unique learning environment. Therefore, in conducting a case study on Foothills Academy, our aim was to identify the specific factors that contribute to its success, and to find out what makes the learning environment conducive for students with LD. The intent of this report is to expand our knowledge regarding what is needed to improve school practices for students with LD, and to recognize how we may better support these practices.

The case study consisted of collecting information from students, parents, and school staff utilizing both Parent and School mail-out surveys, student and staff interviews, a focus group, and telephone interviews with parents. The survey development process was a multi-step, time intensive process that resulted in the construction of two surveys that were used to identify factors that parents and school staff found important in contributing to the success of the school. School staff were also able to further elaborate on their survey responses during a site visit by the research team. The student interviews conducted during the site visit were designed to collect in-depth, personalized and detailed information about what makes Foothills Academy unique. The focus group that took place with teachers and teaching assistants provided information from the perspective of those interacting with students with LD on a daily basis, as to what interventions are most effective, and what others should know about teaching students with LD. The site visit was followed by individual phone interviews with a sample of parents who had responded to the Parent survey. The information from these sources was collected and analyzed. The key themes that emerged are highlighted in this report, as well as quotes that exemplify what the respondents identified as making Foothills Academy successful.

## **Study Data**

Five sources of data were analyzed for this report:

- a school survey completed by 39 participants including teachers, teaching assistants, and school administrators
- a parent survey completed by 36 parents whose children attend Foothills Academy
- a focus group conducted with nine school staff members
- student interviews conducted with nine students
- follow-up telephone interviews conducted with six parents

Quotations found in this report have been drawn directly from the study data and are put forward in a verbatim fashion.

## **Key Findings**

Key findings were those factors that were commonly identified by students, parents, or staff at Foothills Academy as contributing to the success of the school. These findings can be grouped into the following six categories: relationships with school staff, supporting students with LD, learning resources, teaching and assessment strategies, supporting learning at home, and school culture and atmosphere.

### ***1. Relationships with School Staff***

- School staff encourage students to feel good about themselves
- Students reported that teachers are approachable and understand them
- There is a high level of communication between parents and teachers
- Teachers report that they work as a team and collaborate to enhance learning

## ***2. Supporting Students with LD***

- Small class sizes and one-on-one attention are seen as key factors to success
- Parents reported that teachers use flexible teaching methods, diverse resources, and are knowledgeable about LD
- Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) were described as being highly beneficial in supporting individual student learning

## ***3. Learning Resources***

- Teachers use assistive technologies, computer-related resources, and make necessary accommodations for differing student needs
- Teachers use a wide-range of strategies and interventions that build on student strengths and target areas of need

## ***4. Teaching and Assessment Strategies***

- Teachers use various methods to demonstrate student progress, and regularly monitor IPP goals
- Teachers cater instruction to student needs, rather than using a ‘one-size fits all’ formula
- Teachers make accommodations to assessment practices, when needed, to help students reach their IPP goals
- Assessments are used to plan for future instruction and to help students identify both their strengths and areas of weakness

## ***5. Supporting Learning at Home***

- Homework expectations are clearly communicated to parents, as well as students, and parents are informed of learning strategies that may assist their child

- Teachers tell parents about positive student behaviour, not just challenges, and involve parents in creating the student IPP
- Teachers will communicate homework assignments to parents for students who have difficulty in documenting assigned homework

#### ***6. School Culture and Atmosphere***

- There is a positive school atmosphere and a focus on student strengths
- Foothills Academy was described as welcoming, encouraging, and embodying a sense of belongingness and self-esteem for its students. On several occasions, Foothills Academy was described as a “happy family”
- Parents and teachers feel that school administrators are accessible and approachable
- Teachers are passionate about teaching, and genuinely care for students.



## **Introduction**

Foothills Academy is a school in Calgary for children identified as having a learning disability (LD). Established in 1979, Foothills Academy was the first school for learning disabled children in Alberta, and one of the first in Canada. The school focuses on providing quality educational programs and a supportive environment for both families and staff.

Approximately 200 students, ranging in age from 8 to 18 years attend the school. Students are in average class groupings of 12, with a teacher and a teacher assistant in each classroom. Student groupings are based on age and level of functioning, rather than grades.

Foothills Academy has been largely successful in helping students with LD; teachers, students, and parents alike have provided numerous accolades. A case study was therefore designed to investigate the factors that contribute to the school's success and to hear first-hand from parents, students, and school staff what it is about Foothills Academy that effectively promotes the growth and learning of children with LD.

Data for the study was collected through surveys, interviews, and a focus group – all designed to identify the factors that contribute to Foothills Academy's success.

Surveys were completed by a sample of parents whose children attend the school, as well as by a sample of teachers, teaching assistants, and administrators. In both the parent and school surveys, participants rated the importance of various factors in contributing to the school's success.

Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with some of the parents of Foothills Academy's students. These interviews provided an in-depth exploration as to what parents see as making the school unique and allowed parents to elaborate on what they and their child have experienced.

In addition, during a site visit to Foothills Academy a focus group was held with a sample of teachers and teaching assistants from the school. During the focus group, participants had a chance to discuss essential components in supporting students with LD. Participants also had an opportunity to express what they think, specifically, is working in terms of interventions for the students and what key decision makers should know about how to better support students with LD. Similar to the phone interviews, the focus group allowed for school staff to provide detailed responses and express their personal views concerning support for students with LD. During the site visit, individual interviews took place with nine students attending Foothills Academy. These interviews gave students the opportunity to discuss their experiences at the school, providing first-hand accounts of the impact that this school has made in their lives.

The following summary comprises the results of the surveys, interviews, and focus group. From these results, common themes and factors that contribute to Foothills Academy's success are identified. In addition, quotes from parents and teachers, who work to support students with LD on a daily basis, are provided. These opinions and experiences help to provide a deeper understanding of how Foothills Academy is unique and the impact it has made on its students and their families.

Having identified Foothills Academy as a school that is effective in addressing the needs of students with LD, examining its practices provides a unique opportunity for us to recognize which components and factors are vital to its success. By identifying the practices that help students at Foothills Academy succeed, we may then be able to better help support children with LD in other schools or programs.

## **Parent Survey**

A total of 36 parents of children attending Foothills Academy for various learning disabilities (LD) completed a survey investigating contributions to the program's success. At the time of intake, children were in grades ranging from 4 to 12. Approximately 25% of students attended Foothills Academy for one year, 28% for two years, 8% for three, four, and five years, 11% for six years, 3% for seven years, and 6% for eight years. Two of the parents who completed the survey had two children attending the school.

Components of the survey exploring contributions to success included five major domains: practices to support students with LD, teaching students with LD, assessment practices, relations with school, supportive learning practices at home, and staff morale and school culture (see Appendix A). Within each of the five domains, parents were provided the opportunity to offer additional comments.

Each domain of the survey presented participants with items for which they were required to circle *yes*, *no*, or *don't know*, as to whether the item contributed to the school's success. If the question was answered *yes*, participants were directed to rate how important the item was by circling either *somewhat important*, *important*, or *very important*. An example of an item participants rated was: "Parents were given the opportunity to share information about the way their child prefers to learn." This item was listed in the section on *relations with school*.

### **Practices to Support Students with LD**

A substantial proportion of items were rated as "important" or "very important" within each of the five domains. With regard to supportive practices for students with LD, having school staff encourage students to feel good about themselves as learners was significant in

contributing to the school's success. One parent reported the profound impact Foothills Academy had on their child, stating:

Foothills made a significant difference to our learner. The child we sent to Foothills believed he was stupid, frequently displayed physical symptoms of distress, and occasionally expressed suicidal thoughts. Thankfully, this is only a memory now. The confident, positive learner who deals with his learning disability head on is the student who attends Foothills. We can't say enough about what this school means!

In addition, having one-on-one attention and instruction for students in need, and providing clear expectations and consequences for classroom behaviours, were reported by parents to be contributors to the school's success. Other contributors noted by parents included, having staff work at developing students' social skills, having special equipment available for those in need, having school staff motivate students to do their best, and rewarding students for positive behaviour.

### **Teaching Students with LD**

When responding to teaching practices for students with LD, it was reported that having teachers knowledgeable in the area of LD, willing to experiment with differing teaching methods, and understanding of the needs of those with LD were influential factors for the school's success. When commenting on his or her experience with Foothills Academy, one parent expressed:

The school staff have all been very knowledgeable in their understanding of learning disabilities and are given the skills and resources to help the students. If one strategy is not working, another is found until hopefully, the student can learn to overcome and succeed, despite their learning disability.

Furthermore, teaching individual students about their strengths and needs, allowing students to provide feedback, having teaching assistants supportive of students, and utilizing Individual Program Plans (IPPs) to monitor students' progress were identified as significant factors in contributing to the school's success.

### **Assessment Practices**

Various assessment practices concerning students' learning were identified by parents to play a role in the school's accomplishments. These practices included: using assessment results for future instruction planning, regular monitoring of IPP goals, and using various methods to demonstrate student progress. When describing the assessment practices of Foothills Academy, one parent noted, "Assessments help students to find out what works for them, how they learn, and where their strengths and weaknesses are."

### **Relations with School**

Regarding their relationship with the school, parents reported optimistic and positive experiences. One parent expressed:

Foothills Academy is not just a school, it is a tremendous community. It is warm and welcoming and you know as soon as you come in the door that this place is different. The teachers, staff, and admin know every student in the school. Our Foothills student is as comfortable at school as he is at home.

Regularly communicating with parents, giving parents opportunities to share information regarding their child's learning, encouraging parent participation, informing parents of their child's positive behaviour, and welcoming as well as valuing parents at the school are behaviours practiced by school administrators that were reported by parents to contribute to the school's success. Parents commonly described the school as a happy family; one parent stated, "The staff

are our family and friends.” Another parent described how the positivity at Foothills Academy has deeply affected her:

I hear more about my son’s positive behaviour than anything else! In fact, the first year we were here, I cried on a regular basis because his teachers would tell me what a wonderful young man he was. Prior to Foothills, most of the feedback I received about my son was negative.

### **Supportive Learning Practices at Home**

Although reported to be more applicable amongst the younger grades, supportive learning practices at home were valued by parents, who reported that having homework expectations clearly communicated to both parents and students and being informed of learning strategies at school (such that they can be implemented in the home environment) were influential factors for the school’s success. One parent commented on the value of having differing resources to rely upon regarding student academic responsibilities:

I like the use of day timers the students record their homework in. My son checks his every night to make sure he has completed everything. As well, I can go to the school website to see what is due in each class.”

Another parent was grateful for having school staff understanding of the difficulties that students may encounter in documenting homework and the efforts of staff in informing parents of academic requirements, stating: “Foothills Academy understands that LD students need to work on their study and social skills. Teachers will email homework assignments, something that LD students might not do in class.”

## **Staff Morale and School Culture**

All staff morale and school culture items listed on the survey were identified by parents to be vital in contributing to the school's success. Parents believed that the school was welcoming to students with LD. Encouraging students to treat each other with respect and helping students feel like they belonged were identified as significant success factors. One parent expressed the relationship between embodying a sense of belongingness and self-esteem:

Self-esteem is huge for kids with learning disabilities. Making kids feel at home, welcome, and safe is huge! Foothills Academy does this like pros! The office staff, admin... everyone makes the effort to know all of the kids.

Additionally, having accessible and approachable school administrators who treat students with respect was also reported to contribute to success. One parent expressed her gratitude for the positive academic transition her child experienced, stating, "My child started at Foothills Academy in grade 5, but was reading at a kindergarten level, and has now been accepted to university for fall, 2009. Now that's success! Thank-you!"

Overall, factors associated with practices to support students with LD, teaching students with LD, assessment practices, relations with school, supportive learning practices at home, and staff morale and school culture have been identified as "important" to "very important" contributors to success at Foothills Academy. Parents expressed gratitude, pride, and thanks when commenting on the school's impact on both their own lives as well as the lives of their children. As summed up by one parent, "I don't know what we would have done without this school. They are fantastic!"

### **Parent Phone Interview**

Six parents of children attending Foothills Academy (the length of attendance ranged from one year to nine years) for various forms of LD including dyslexia, auditory and visual perception impairment, attention deficit disorder, slow processing speed, and mathematical difficulties participated in follow-up phone interviews. Parents were asked a series of five questions regarding their experiences, as well as those of their child, at Foothills Academy. Responses were recorded by the researcher and later transcribed to identify common themes, which included: practices of the school in supporting students with LD, previous school experiences, and future plans.

### **Supporting Students with LD**

Regarding the contributions of Foothills Academy in supporting children with LD, three main themes emerged. These themes included: a positive atmosphere, flexible teaching methods, and diverse resources. A positive atmosphere embodied a focus on the child's strengths and increasing self-esteem and morale. One parent stated, "When my son started, he called himself stupid. That changed in the first year." In addition, parents commented on the explicitly positive attitudes demonstrated by teachers when working with students. One parent captured this sentiment by expressing, "It takes people who really want to see these kids succeed. It's not just a job; it's a life for them. They really take a personal interest."

Flexible teaching methods were described as non-traditional, allowing for uniqueness and "thinking outside of the box." One-on-one attention was also strongly valued by parents, who reported that the teachers taught in whatever manner necessary to facilitate the learning of each child. One parent commented, "They are not trying to teach the average. Every child is treated individually."



Various resources available and accessible for differing student needs, including small class sizes, teaching assistants, and interventions were also of significance to parents. When commenting on developed curricula for children with LD by teachers, one parent stated, “They know how to program for children with learning disabilities. They understand learning disabilities. They have specialized resources.”

### **Previous School Experiences**

When asked about school experiences before attending Foothills Academy, all parents reported that their children endured negative experiences. Being singled out by frustrated teachers was a common event for students. Parents reported that teachers in previous schools did not know how to handle a child with LD and because of such large class sizes and insufficient time and attention paid to those with differing needs (i.e., LD), their children were often falling behind and feeling lost. One parent reported making a life-changing decision so their son could receive the academic support he needed: “[We] left the province and ended up moving back to Alberta just so [our] son could attend Foothills,” while another parent commented on how her child’s academic life turned around after attending Foothills Academy:

Teachers [before] thought [my] daughter wasn’t working hard enough or wasn’t interested. They didn’t consider other possibilities. At Foothills, it’s very supportive.

Everyone is on the same side. The attitude and the time they take... It’s been night and day for us. She really likes her teachers... really positive. Her grades – there’s no comparison. She’s an honours student now.

### **Future Attendance**

All parents reported planning to have their child continue attendance at Foothills

Academy. Individualized learning support systems, increases in self-esteem, and positive school experiences – including high grades and strong relationships with school staff – played key roles in such decisions. One parent stated, “The people, the teachers, the janitors – you end up getting a more respectful child than you would in the regular school system.”

### **School Survey**

A survey was distributed to teachers, teaching assistants, and administrative staff at Foothills Academy to assess what factors contribute to the school’s current success with students with LD. Participants were asked to identify items that contribute to the school’s success in the following seven domains: school policies and practices, practices to support students with LD, teaching students with LD, assessment practices, relations with parents, supporting learning at home, and staff morale and school culture (see Appendix B). . There was also an opportunity for participants to include additional comments for each of the seven domains. Participants were then asked to list what three factors most significantly contribute to their success as a teacher, teacher assistant, or administrator, and what three factors contribute most significantly in supporting students with LD.

Thirty-nine participants completed the school survey. Similar to the parent survey, participants were presented with a list of items and were asked to circle *yes*, *no*, or *don’t know*, as to whether the item contributed to the school’s success. If the question was answered *yes*, participants then rated how important the item was by circling either *somewhat important*, *important*, or *very important*. An example of an item participants rated was: “Teachers at this school use evidence-based practices for teaching students with LD.” This item was listed in the section on *practices to support students with learning disabilities*.

### **School Policies and Practices**

Numerous factors in each of the seven domains were rated as “important” to “very important.” In regards to school policies and practices, the items rated as “important” or “very important” included having teachers, teaching assistants and administrators work as a team, having teachers engage in ongoing professional development, and having teachers and teacher assistants collaborate to enhance learning and develop effective practices for students with LD. One participant commented on the collaboration that also goes on within the community stating: “Advocacy work of administration in the greater community is tremendous!”

### **Practices to Support Students with LD**

In regards to practices that support students with LD, school staff rated several factors as being critical to success. They found having IPP, providing students with one-on-one support when needed, having assisted technology and computer-related resources, using evidence-based practices, and making necessary accommodations during assessment practices were all important or very important factors. One staff member commented on the qualifications of teachers and the resources available that contribute to Foothills Academy’s success, remarking. “All teachers here are special education teachers; there are lots of resources available.”

### **Teaching Students with LD**

In the domain of teaching students with LD, using a wide range of strategies and interventions that build on strengths and target areas of need, and having school administrators provide support and information to teachers of students with LD, were factors associated with the success of the school. Furthermore, all questions related to using IPPs, as well as all questions related to catering instruction according to student needs, were rated as being “important” to “very important” by the majority of participants.

### **Assessment Practices**

School staff also appraised factors that are important in assessment practices. They found that using different kinds of evaluation strategies to demonstrate student progress (e.g., exams, assignments, portfolios), using standardized tests, and making accommodations to assessment practices that keep in line with curriculum and IPP goals, were all deemed to be “important” to “very important.”

### **Relations with Parents and Supporting Learning at Home**

The teachers and staff at Foothills Academy maintain effective communication and develop close relationships with the parents of their students. In the domain of *relations with parents*, it was found that establishing meaningful two-way communication with parents and sharing information about students’ learning preferences was highly important. Furthermore, having parents hear about positive student behaviour, not just student challenges was found to be essential by the majority of participants. Finally, involving parents in the development of their child’s IPP was seen as a necessary part of parent relations. One participant expressed how he or she felt about relationships with student families by commenting, “We are family! [There is] constant contact, often daily, with parents through phone, email, etc.”

In terms of supporting learning at home, most participants responded that giving homework activities and clearly communicating homework expectations to both students and parents are key factors to success.

### **Staff Morale and School Culture**

Finally, several factors in the area of staff morale and school culture were seen to be crucial in contributing to the school’s success. Having accessible and approachable administrators and staff who treat each other with respect were rated as highly important.

Furthermore, having teachers and teaching assistants treat students with respect, encouraging students to treat each other with respect, and providing a welcoming atmosphere were also seen as essential factors by most participants. Finally, the majority of participants reported that having students feel comfortable approaching teachers and staff, and having students sense belonging at Foothills Academy, were very important factors.

### **Further Comments**

When asked about what factors contribute to being a successful teacher, teaching assistant, or administrator in supporting students with LD, some common themes emerged. These themes included: using teamwork, being flexible and adaptable to children's needs, communicating with families and other staff, having small class sizes, and a "great staff." Personal qualities that were listed as important for staff to embody included: consistency, patience, building strong rapport with students and providing structure. One of the teachers explained how beliefs and attitudes contribute to student success by commenting, "[We have] a belief that all students can learn, nothing is impossible, you might just have to try it another way." This sentiment was also shared by another teacher who expressed, "[We have] perseverance – we never give up!"

When asked to consider all the factors that contribute to the school's success in supporting students with LD, some common factors that stood out included: understanding student needs, innovation, the fact that all the students have LD and lessons are catered towards these students, having supportive staff who are knowledgeable and passionate, and having extra resources and community services. One participant reported how the whole environment contributes to student learning, remarking, "Learning is not just curriculum, but also learning how to learn – fostering an environment that promotes self-knowledge and advocacy. "

## Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with teachers and teaching assistants from Foothills Academy. This group consisted of nine participants who shared their thoughts on the key components that contribute to the school's success in supporting students with LD. The focus group discussion consisted of three components: Essential Questions, Quick Write, and Minute Paper. Essential Questions consisted of asking the group three questions regarding students with LD. These questions were: (1) *What are the key components that contribute to your school's success in supporting students with LD?* (2) *What are the key components that contribute to your success (as a teacher, teacher assistant) in supporting students with LD?* and (3) *If you could design professional development opportunities and support services that would help you to do your work even better – what would that include?* Answers were discussed among the group and recorded by the facilitator.

Quick Write was a task where each participant was provided a blank page to answer the following question: *If you had the chance to tell key decision makers (teachers, principals, government leaders, Faculties of Education) how to better support students with LD, what advice would you give them?* Similarly, during Minute Paper, each participant was provided a blank page and answered the following question: *Intervention supports for students with LD: What's working?*

Common themes emerged from participant responses. In regards to key component's that contribute to the school's success, the group emphasized having small class sizes, hiring great teachers and staff, and the team approach taken at Foothills Academy. Staff qualities that were mentioned as being vital to success included seeking professional development and lifelong learning opportunities, being passionate about what they do, and having a holistic or team

approach. One staff member expressed, “Staff are resilient, perseverant, open-minded, provide freedom for students, [are] fearless, empathetic, hopeful, and passionate about their subjects and kids.”

When provided the opportunity to communicate what professional development opportunities would help them do even better, the main themes that emerged included social skills training, outside professional development opportunities, and being able to have more assessments of children in the school. One of the staff members emphasized the importance of better understanding each child’s cognitive abilities by stating, “We need more cognitive testing of children to better understand their needs,” while another participant stressed the importance of also being able to address students who are gifted, “We need more information on how to address needs of students who are ‘gifted’ in this population.” Of note, there was general agreement that teacher education programs did not provide sufficient initial training in this area and overall, more information and preparation in supporting students with LD’s would be helpful to include across the board in initial teacher education programs.

In terms of the intervention supports that are working for students with LD, eight of the nine participants mentioned that student-generated IPPs (where students meet with teachers individually on a weekly basis) are effective. Eight of the nine participants also mentioned that assistive technologies (e.g., Read/ Write Gold; Dragonspeak computer program) are working. Four participants mentioned that specific strategy training for students, or what is also referred to as blended style and structure, is effective. (The blended style and structure intervention is part of the current curriculum for students at Foothills Academy). Other aspects that were mentioned included having small class sizes, regular meetings, community bonding, and consistent behaviour plans.

It was noted that teachers were enthusiastic while talking about their school and seemed to have an easy and open relationship with each other. Many teachers identified themselves as being part of a team, rather than a teacher of a single subject or class. The teachers said that being well prepared to teach students with LD (e.g., having two-weeks of training in August prior to starting teaching at Foothills Academy), having access to resources, and having a school-wide behavioural plan contributed to their success as a school. Most teachers also noted that displaying genuine caring and support for students were main factors in their success as a school and as individual teachers.

### **Student Interviews**

A total of nine students with learning disabilities attending Foothills Academy completed one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Students were asked a series of questions targeting their experiences at Foothills Academy and responses were later transcribed to identify prominent themes. The experiences upon which students focused include: relationships with school staff, learning resources, identification of personal strengths and challenges, and recommended advice to other schools supporting students with learning disabilities.

#### **Relationships with School Staff**

All students commented on the friendly, nice, and approachable teachers at Foothills Academy. They expressed genuine appreciation for the extra time and commitment teachers invested in helping the students learn. The students reported that teachers often stay after school if students feel they need additional guidance. In addition, students were grateful for the unique teaching strategies tailored towards differing student needs. One student reported that it seemed like his teacher understood how he thought, which allowed her to tailor instruction based on this



information. Another student stated, “They explain it in a different way when I don’t get something.”

### **Learning Resources**

All students indicated having experience with remedial programs in previous schools, but did not receive the same quality of learning resources. For example, all students emphasized the importance of small class sizes in contributing to their learning. They reported that having a small class size provided them opportunity to seek help from the teacher when needed and it diminished distractions, such as noise. Conversely, it was reported by all students that previous remedial school programs were not conducive to their learning (e.g., it was reported by some that being placed in a resource room did not contribute to their learning process). Technological resources (Dragon Speak; SMARTboards), academic resources (e.g., Read Write; Precision Reading; Study Skills program; Individual Program Plans), supportive accommodations (e.g., allowing “active learners” to take tests in rooms where they can move around; providing stress-balls to anxious students), behavioural interventions (e.g., Time-Out; Merit system), and social/transition strategy training programs (e.g., PACE and CALM classes) were also embraced by students.

### **Identification of Personal Strengths and Challenges**

All students were able to name their disability and comment on their strengths and weaknesses. Many students indicated that the school makes a deliberate effort to point out how all students learn differently. In addition, all students were knowledgeable of the IPP (Individual Program Plan) and were able to identify their personal goals. Many students appreciated knowing their most effective learning strategies and being able to monitor their progress in achieving goals.

### **Recommended Advice to Other Schools**

When commenting on advice that they would give to other school programs to support students with learning disabilities, five main suggestions were offered by the students at Foothills Academy. Treating students with respect, allowing students to learn about what they like, providing students with leadership roles, and having smaller class sizes were identified as the most important recommendations that other schools should espouse.

### **Overall Conclusions**

When evaluating the practices of Foothills Academy associated with its success, direct recipients of the school's program, the students, provided first-hand accounts of the significant influence that the school has had on their lives. Students expressed appreciation for the caring relationships they hold with school staff, the availability of diverse learning resources, and the opportunity to be involved in identifying practices of personal strengths, challenges, and learning strategies.

Both teachers and parents identified practices associated with support (e.g., one-on-one attention), teaching (e.g., focusing on student strengths and needs), assessment (e.g., IPPs), school relations (e.g., regular contact with parents), home learning (e.g., communicating homework expectations to both parents and students), and staff morale and school culture (e.g., helping students feel welcome) to be significant contributors to the school's unique success in promoting academic growth among students with LD. Both parents and school staff commented on how the enthusiasm, dedication, care, and passion for teaching students with LD demonstrated by teachers at Foothills Academy play a central role in the school's success.

Focus group members had numerous ideas about what they would tell key decision makers to better support students with LD, including providing specific and focused training opportunities for preservice and inservice teachers, finding out about student strengths (rather than focusing on weaknesses), keeping class sizes small, providing early intervention and ongoing supports, adapting standardized testing in some cases, listening to LD students and working to best understand them and their needs, teaching all skills (such as social skills) that these children might need, and working to understand how each student learns and is capable of success. One of the teachers captured many of these ideas by writing,

I would tell them that students with LD are able to learn and it is our job to find out how to teach them. Teaching to multiple intelligences really helps these students to focus more on what they are good at, as opposed to their areas of need.

Encouraging these students and providing a positive environment for their learning is crucial. We need to be open to adapting the way we teach in order to see success for all. If students are made to feel that they can do something and that we have faith in them, I feel they will better succeed. We need to have patience with these students. If we can find the areas they struggle with we can build detours around those roadblocks and teach them strategies they can use for their future.

The case study on Foothills Academy was thus effective in allowing parents and school staff to identify the factors that have led to the success of the school. The rich descriptions provided by the parents of children attending Foothills Academy demonstrate the significant impact that this school has had on their children's lives, which according to their parents, would have not occurred in the mainstream school system.

Because of the teaching practices and resources available at Foothills Academy, many parents are optimistic about their children's future, which for some, will include university. When commenting on the significant transition his or her child had undergone since attending Foothills Academy, one parent stated, "Before she thought she was dumb, but now she knows she can do it. Her self-esteem has grown. She doesn't suffer anxiety attacks like she used to...Hopefully looking forward to university." Personally vested teachers with expertise in LD, who have the time and resources to allocate to individual students contributes to a positive and successful learning experience. Demonstrating the profound impact that Foothills Academy has had on families and students with LD, one parent expressed, "I just can't say enough."

### Reference

Alberta Education. Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities. Book 6 of the Programming for Students with Special Needs series. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, 1996.

Retrieved from:

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/19/bd/37.pdf](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/19/bd/37.pdf)

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. (2002). Retrieved from <http://www.ldactaac.ca/learn-more/ld-defined/official-definition-of-learning-disabilities.html>

## Appendix A: School Survey



# school survey

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.**

Your school has been identified as a school in Alberta that is effective in addressing the needs of students with Learning Disabilities (LD). The information you provide will help us identify what factors contribute to the current success of this school. The results of this survey will be used to develop better school practices for children and adolescents with LD.

Your responses to all items will be kept private. The only individuals with access to your results are the researchers of this project. All reports will include only summary information and no individual respondent will be identifiable.

If you have any questions, you may call:  
Dr. Rauno Parrila at the University of Alberta at  
(780) 492-3696.

### DIRECTIONS:

In this survey, we are interested in finding out what contributes to the school's current success with students with LD. If you think that an item *does* contribute to the school's success with students with LD, circle YES, then rate how important it is in promoting this success. When rating how important an item is to the school's success, you are asked to choose from a list of possible answers that range from "Somewhat Important" to "Very Important". Select your answer by circling the number that corresponds to your preferred response.

If you think that an item *does not* contribute to the school's success, circle NO, or if you *don't know*, circle Don't Know, then move on to the next question.

Below are sample questions that show you how to answer the items on the following pages.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
Sample 1: The department heads provide strong leadership.		<input checked="" type="radio"/>			1	2	3

\* "NO" might be selected if you do not have department heads or if you don't think that their leadership contributes to the success of the school. "Don't Know" might be selected if you don't know if the leadership of the department heads contributes to the success of the school. **Notice that you do not rate the importance of the item when you select NO or Don't Know.**

2. Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
Sample 2: The school provides a social skills class.					1	2	3

\* "YES" would be selected if you think that the school's social skills class contributes to the school's success, then "Important" would be selected if you think the social skills class is important to the school's success.

### REMEMBER:

- STEP 1 is to determine if an item contributes to the school's success.
- If you answer "yes" in step 1, then STEP 2 is to rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. If you answer "no" or "don't know", then go to the next item.

## A. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

---

- Within this school year have you used any specific intervention programs designed for students with LD?

⇒ If Yes, please provide the name(s) of the program below and rate to what extent you found the program effective.

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Don't Know	Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Don't Know	Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Don't Know	Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5



## B. SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Do you think the items listed below contribute to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
1. The school mission statement provides clear direction for addressing either student diversity or students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
2. For the most part, the teachers, teacher assistants and administrators work as a team.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
3. Communication between the administrators and the staff is generally effective.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
4. Teachers at this school engage in ongoing professional development with respect to students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
5. Recent research findings about effective school practices are regularly shared among staff.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
6. There is strong leadership from the administrators.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
7. For the most part, teachers and teacher assistants collaborate to enhance learning for students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
8. For the most part, teachers collaborate with each other to develop effective practices for students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
9. For the most part, teachers share LD-specific resources and knowledge with each other.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
10. Teachers are given preparation time to plan and monitor programs of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## C. PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD)

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?				Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
11. Students with LD have Individual Program Plans (IPPs) in place.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
12. If needed, students are provided with small group or one-on-one support to enhance learning.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
13. Special education teachers are available within the school to support teachers in working with students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
14. Teachers have sufficient access to external consultants in special education for support in teaching students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
15. Assistive technology, computer-related resources, and other special equipment are used to help students with LD at this school.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
16. There is a school counselor available to students.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
17. The school uses instructional resources (e.g., LD-specific intervention programs) that effectively support the learning of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
18. Teachers at this school use effective strategies to motivate students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
19. Teachers at this school use evidence-based practices for teaching students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
20. In exam situations, teachers make necessary accommodations to assessment practices (e.g., a reader, extra time) for students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

21. The school focuses on developing the social skills, self-esteem, and emotional well-being of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>Does this item contribute to the school's success?</b>				<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
22. Transition planning for students' future placements etc. is addressed.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
23. In general, teachers have clear expectations and appropriate consequences for classroom behaviour.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
24. In general, students are rewarded for positive behaviour.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## D. TEACHING STUDENTS WITH LD

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
25. Teachers have the necessary knowledge, training, and skills to feel competent in teaching students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
26. Teacher assistants have the necessary knowledge, training, and skills to feel competent in supporting the learning of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
27. Teachers and teacher assistants use a wide range of strategies and interventions for students with LD that build on students' strengths and target areas of need.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
28. School administrators provide support and information to teachers of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
29. Teachers use IPPs to set goals for students' learning.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
30. Teachers monitor student progress based on timelines established in the IPP.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
31. Teachers plan instruction according to learner readiness, preferences, and needs.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
32. Teachers are willing to revise plans for instruction if the current plan is not meeting the needs of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
33. Most teachers provide their students with opportunities to give feedback about which strategies work for them.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## E. ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
34. Effective assessment practices are in place to assess students' ability in basic skills (e.g., reading, math).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
35. Teachers use different kinds of evaluation strategies (e.g., exams, assignments, portfolios) to demonstrate student progress.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
36. Standardized tests (e.g., Woodcock Reading Mastery Test) are used to monitor students' progress over the year.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
37. Assessment results are used to guide and enhance instruction.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
38. Teachers use <i>assessment of learning</i> to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
39. Teachers use <i>assessment for learning</i> to monitor the progress of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
40. Any accommodations to assessment practices (e.g., a reader) are in keeping with curriculum and IPP goals.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
41. Assessments are used to help students better understand their learning strengths and weaknesses.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## F. RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
42. Teachers use a variety of tools to establish meaningful two-way communication with parents (e.g., agenda, in-person meetings, e-mail).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
43. Parents and teachers have ample opportunity to share information about students' learning preferences.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
44. Parents hear about positive student behaviour, not just student challenges.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
45. Parents are given the opportunity to review and comment on student work.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
46. School staff reach out to families who need extra support.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
47. Parents are given the opportunity to be involved in the development of their child's IPP.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
48. School administrators encourage the active participation of parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
49. Parents generally feel valued and welcome at this school.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## G. SUPPORTING LEARNING AT HOME

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?				Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
50. Students are given homework activities to work on alone or with their parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
51. Homework expectations are clearly communicated to students and parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
52. Parents are informed of learning strategies used in school, and are encouraged to use them at home.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
53. Parents are informed of social skills and behaviour strategies used in school, and are encouraged to use them at home.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## H. STAFF MORALE & SCHOOL CULTURE

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
54. Teachers can contribute to decisions concerning school policy.					1	2	3
55. For the most part, teachers and teacher assistants generally get along with each other.					1	2	3
56. For the most part, teachers and teacher assistants at this school enjoy their job.					1	2	3
57. The administrators are accessible and approachable.					1	2	3
58. Teachers feel comfortable approaching the administrators.					1	2	3
59. Teachers and administrators treat each other with respect.					1	2	3
60. Students are encouraged to treat each other with respect.					1	2	3
61. This school is welcoming to students with LD.					1	2	3
62. Teachers and teacher assistants treat all students with respect.					1	2	3
63. The administrators make an effort to get to know the students.					1	2	3
64. Students with LD feel comfortable approaching teachers and other staff for support.					1	2	3
65. In general, students with LD feel a sense of belonging at this school.					1	2	3
66. This school provides a variety of extracurricular activities that are appealing to many children.					1	2	3
67. The school creates an environment where students can see themselves as successful learners.					1	2	3

COMMENTS:



When considering all of the factors that contribute to your success (as a teacher, teacher assistant, or administrator) in supporting students with LD, what are the top 3 factors that stand out to you?

When considering all of the factors that contribute to your school's success in supporting students with LD, what are the top 3 factors that stand out to you?

If we have left out any factors that you think are important in contributing to your school's success with students with LD, please use the space below to elaborate.

**THANK YOU!!!**

**Your responses will help to enhance instruction for students with LD. We appreciate your time.**

*\*Some items from this survey were taken or adapted from the *Tell Them From Me* teacher survey.*

## Appendix A: Parent Survey



# parent survey

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.**

Your child's school has been identified as a school in Alberta that is effective in addressing the needs of students with Learning Disabilities (LD). The information you provide will help us identify what factors contribute to the current success of this school. The results of this survey will be used to develop better school practices for children and adolescents with LD.

Your responses to all items will be kept private. The only individuals with access to your results are the researchers of this project. All reports will include only summary information and no individual respondent will be identifiable.

If you would prefer to complete this survey over the phone, please call (780) 492-7756 and leave a message with your name, phone number, and time when we can call you back to complete the survey.

If you have any questions, you may call:  
Dr. Rauno Parrila at the University of Alberta at  
(780) 492-3696.

## DIRECTIONS:

In this survey, we are interested in finding out what contributes to the school's current success with students with LD. If you think that an item *does* contribute to the school's success with students with LD, circle YES, then rate how important it is in promoting this success. When rating how important an item is to the school's success, you are asked to choose from a list of possible answers that range from "Somewhat Important" to "Very Important". Select your answer by circling the number that corresponds to your preferred response.

If you think that an item *does not* contribute to the school's success, circle NO, or if you *don't know*, circle Don't Know, then move on to the next question.

Below are sample questions that show you how to answer the items on the following pages.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
Sample 1: The teacher communicates with me through my child's agenda.			<input checked="" type="radio"/>		1	2	3

\* "NO" might be selected if your child's teacher does not communicate with you through the agenda. It might also be selected if your child has an agenda book, but you don't think it contributes to the success of the school. "Don't Know" might be selected if you don't know if the teacher communicates with you through the agenda, or if you don't know if this communication contributes to the school's success. **Notice that you do not rate the importance of the item when you select NO or Don't Know.**

2. Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
Sample 2: The school provides a social skills class.					1	2	3

\* "YES" would be selected if you think that the school's social skills class contributes to the school's success. THEN, "Important" would be selected if the you think that the class is important in contributing to the school's success.

### REMEMBER:

- STEP 1 is to determine if an item contributes to the school's success.
- IF you answer "yes" in step 1, then STEP 2 is to rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. IF you answer "no" or "don't know", then go to the next item.

## A. CHILD'S INFORMATION

---

- What grade is your child in? (If you have more than one child attending this school, please provide information for all children attending). Please check the box that corresponds to the grade of your child(ren).

Child 1:  grade 4  grade 5  grade 6  grade 7  grade 8  grade 9  grade 10  grade 11  grade 12

Child 2:  grade 4  grade 5  grade 6  grade 7  grade 8  grade 9  grade 10  grade 11  grade 12

Child 3:  grade 4  grade 5  grade 6  grade 7  grade 8  grade 9  grade 10  grade 11  grade 12

- How long has your child attended this school?

Child 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 3: \_\_\_\_\_

- What type of learning disability does your child have?

Child 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 3: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*If you have more than one child with a LD attending the school, consider the collective experiences of all of your children when responding to the following items.**

## B. PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD)

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
68. Teachers give small group or one-on-one instruction to students who need it.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
69. Teachers make accommodations to tests and assignments (e.g., giving extra time; providing a reader) for students who need it.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
70. There is special equipment (e.g., computers, assistive technology) for students who need it.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
71. School staff motivate students to do their best (e.g., awards, recognition).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
72. School staff works to develop students' social skills (i.e., getting along with others).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
73. School staff encourage students to feel good about themselves as learners.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
74. School staff make plans to help a student move between grades or between elementary, junior high and high school.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
75. Teachers have clear expectations and consequences for classroom behaviour.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
76. Students at this school are rewarded for positive behaviour.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
77. There is a school counselor available to students who need it.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## C. TEACHING STUDENTS WITH LD

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
78. Teachers know how to teach students with LD.					1	2	3
79. Teacher assistants know how to support students with LD.					1	2	3
80. Teachers and teacher assistants are willing to try different ways to help students with LD learn.					1	2	3
81. Teachers use Individual Program Plans (IPPs) to set goals for students' learning.					1	2	3
82. Teachers use Individual Program Plans (IPPs) to keep track of students' progress.					1	2	3
83. School administrators understand the needs of students with LD.					1	2	3
84. Students with LD are taught about their own learning strengths and needs.					1	2	3
85. Students with LD can provide feedback about which learning strategies work for them.					1	2	3

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## D. ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
86. Teachers use the results of assessment to plan for instruction.					1	2	3
87. Teachers use different ways (e.g., exams, assignments, portfolios) to show student progress.					1	2	3
88. Teachers regularly monitor if students are meeting their IPP goals.					1	2	3
89. Assessments are used to help students better understand their own learning.					1	2	3

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## E. SUPPORTING LEARNING AT HOME

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
90. Homework expectations are clearly communicated to students and parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
91. Parents are told about learning strategies used in school, and are encouraged to use them at home.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
92. Parents are told about social skills and behaviour strategies used in school, and are encouraged to use them at home.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## F. RELATIONS WITH SCHOOL

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
93. The school regularly communicates with parents (i.e., through agendas, interviews, phone, in person).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
94. Parents are given the opportunity to share information about the way their child prefers to learn.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
95. Parents are given the opportunity to review and comment on their child's work.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
96. Parents are involved in developing their child's Individual Program Plan (IPP).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
97. Parents hear about their child's positive behaviour, not just their challenges.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
98. School staff reaches out to families who need extra support.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
99. School administrators encourage the active participation of parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
100. Parents generally feel valued and welcome at the school.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## G. STAFF MORALE & SCHOOL CULTURE

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
101. School administrators are accessible and approachable.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
102. Students are encouraged to treat each other with respect.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
103. This school is welcoming to students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
104. School staff treat all students with respect.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
105. School administrators make an effort to get to know the students.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
106. Students with LD feel comfortable approaching school staff for support.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
107. Students seem to have a sense of belonging at this school.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
108. This school provides a variety of extracurricular activities that are appealing to many children.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU!!!**

Your responses will help to enhance instruction for students with LD. We appreciate your time.

\*Some items from this survey were taken or adapted from the *Tell Them From Me* teacher survey.

**Appendix B: School Survey**

# school survey

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.** Your school has been identified as a school in Alberta that is effective in addressing the needs of students with Learning Disabilities (LD). The information you provide will help us identify what factors contribute to the current success of this school. The results of this survey will be used to develop better school practices for children and adolescents with LD.

Your responses to all items will be kept private. The only individuals with access to your results are the researchers of this project. All reports will include only summary information and no individual respondent will be identifiable.

If you have any questions, you may call:  
Dr. Rauno Parrila at the University of Alberta at  
(780) 492-3696.

### DIRECTIONS:

In this survey, we are interested in finding out what contributes to the school's current success with students with LD. If you think that an item *does* contribute to the school's success with students with LD, circle YES, then rate how important it is in promoting this success. When rating how important an item is to the school's success, you are asked to choose from a list of possible answers that range from "Somewhat Important" to "Very Important". Select your answer by circling the number that corresponds to your preferred response.

If you think that an item *does not* contribute to the school's success, circle NO, or if you *don't know*, circle Don't Know, then move on to the next question.

Below are sample questions that show you how to answer the items on the following pages.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

**1.** Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
Sample 1: The department heads provide strong leadership.		<input checked="" type="radio"/>			1	2	3

\* "NO" might be selected if you do not have department heads or if you don't think that their leadership contributes to the success of the school. "Don't Know" might be selected if you don't know if the leadership of the department heads contributes to the success of the school. **Notice that you do not rate the importance of the item when you select NO or Don't Know.**

**2.** Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
Sample 2: The school provides a social skills class.					1	2	3

\* "YES" would be selected if you think that the school's social skills class contributes to the school's success, then "Important" would be selected if you think the social skills class is important to the school's success.

### REMEMBER:

- STEP 1 is to determine if an item contributes to the school's success.
- IF you answer "yes" in step 1, then STEP 2 is to rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. IF you answer "no" or "don't know", then go to the next item.

## A. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

---

- Within this school year have you used any specific intervention programs designed for students with LD?

⇒ If Yes, please provide the name(s) of the program below and rate to what extent you found the program effective.

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Don't Know	Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Don't Know	Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Don't Know	Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

## B. SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Do you think the items listed below contribute to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important the item is in contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
109. The school mission statement provides clear direction for addressing either student diversity or students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
110. For the most part, the teachers, teacher assistants and administrators work as a team.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
111. Communication between the administrators and the staff is generally effective.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
112. Teachers at this school engage in ongoing professional development with respect to students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
113. Recent research findings about effective school practices are regularly shared among staff.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
114. There is strong leadership from the administrators.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
115. For the most part, teachers and teacher assistants collaborate to enhance learning for students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
116. For the most part, teachers collaborate with each other to develop effective practices for students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
117. For the most part, teachers share LD-specific resources and knowledge with each other.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
118. Teachers are given preparation time to plan and monitor programs of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## C. PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD)

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?				Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
119. Students with LD have Individual Program Plans (IPPs) in place.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
120. If needed, students are provided with small group or one-on-one support to enhance learning.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
121. Special education teachers are available within the school to support teachers in working with students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
122. Teachers have sufficient access to external consultants in special education for support in teaching students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
123. Assistive technology, computer-related resources, and other special equipment are used to help students with LD at this school.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
124. There is a school counselor available to students.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
125. The school uses instructional resources (e.g., LD-specific intervention programs) that effectively support the learning of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
126. Teachers at this school use effective strategies to motivate students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
127. Teachers at this school use evidence-based practices for teaching students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
128. In exam situations, teachers make necessary accommodations to assessment practices (e.g., a reader, extra time) for students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

129. The school focuses on developing the social skills, self-esteem, and emotional well-being of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>Does this item contribute to the school's success?</b>				<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
130. Transition planning for students' future placements etc. is addressed.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
131. In general, teachers have clear expectations and appropriate consequences for classroom behaviour.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
132. In general, students are rewarded for positive behaviour.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:



## D. TEACHING STUDENTS WITH LD

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
133. Teachers have the necessary knowledge, training, and skills to feel competent in teaching students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
134. Teacher assistants have the necessary knowledge, training, and skills to feel competent in supporting the learning of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
135. Teachers and teacher assistants use a wide range of strategies and interventions for students with LD that build on students' strengths and target areas of need.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
136. School administrators provide support and information to teachers of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
137. Teachers use IPPs to set goals for students' learning.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
138. Teachers monitor student progress based on timelines established in the IPP.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
139. Teachers plan instruction according to learner readiness, preferences, and needs.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
140. Teachers are willing to revise plans for instruction if the current plan is not meeting the needs of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
141. Most teachers provide their students with opportunities to give feedback about which strategies work for them.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## E. ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
142. Effective assessment practices are in place to assess students' ability in basic skills (e.g., reading, math).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
143. Teachers use different kinds of evaluation strategies (e.g., exams, assignments, portfolios) to demonstrate student progress.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
144. Standardized tests (e.g., Woodcock Reading Mastery Test) are used to monitor students' progress over the year.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
145. Assessment results are used to guide and enhance instruction.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
146. Teachers use <i>assessment of learning</i> to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
147. Teachers use <i>assessment for learning</i> to monitor the progress of students with LD.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
148. Any accommodations to assessment practices (e.g., a reader) are in keeping with curriculum and IPP goals.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
149. Assessments are used to help students better understand their learning strengths and weaknesses.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## F. RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
150. Teachers use a variety of tools to establish meaningful two-way communication with parents (e.g., agenda, in-person meetings, e-mail).	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
151. Parents and teachers have ample opportunity to share information about students' learning preferences.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
152. Parents hear about positive student behaviour, not just student challenges.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
153. Parents are given the opportunity to review and comment on student work.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
154. School staff reach out to families who need extra support.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
155. Parents are given the opportunity to be involved in the development of their child's IPP.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
156. School administrators encourage the active participation of parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
157. Parents generally feel valued and welcome at this school.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## G. SUPPORTING LEARNING AT HOME

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?				Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
158. Students are given homework activities to work on alone or with their parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
159. Homework expectations are clearly communicated to students and parents.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
160. Parents are informed of learning strategies used in school, and are encouraged to use them at home.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3
161. Parents are informed of social skills and behaviour strategies used in school, and are encouraged to use them at home.	YES	NO	Don't Know	IF YES →	1	2	3

COMMENTS:

## H. STAFF MORALE & SCHOOL CULTURE

Do you think this item contributes to the school's current success with students with LD? If *yes*, circle YES, then rate how important it is to contributing to the school's success. If *no* or *don't know*, circle your response, then proceed to next item.

ITEM	Does this item contribute to the school's success?			IF YES →	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	YES	NO	Don't Know				
162. Teachers can contribute to decisions concerning school policy.					1	2	3
163. For the most part, teachers and teacher assistants generally get along with each other.					1	2	3
164. For the most part, teachers and teacher assistants at this school enjoy their job.					1	2	3
165. The administrators are accessible and approachable.					1	2	3
166. Teachers feel comfortable approaching the administrators.					1	2	3
167. Teachers and administrators treat each other with respect.					1	2	3
168. Students are encouraged to treat each other with respect.					1	2	3
169. This school is welcoming to students with LD.					1	2	3
170. Teachers and teacher assistants treat all students with respect.					1	2	3
171. The administrators make an effort to get to know the students.					1	2	3
172. Students with LD feel comfortable approaching teachers and other staff for support.					1	2	3
173. In general, students with LD feel a sense of belonging at this school.					1	2	3
174. This school provides a variety of extracurricular activities that are appealing to many children.					1	2	3
175. The school creates an environment where students can see themselves as successful learners.					1	2	3

COMMENTS:

When considering all of the factors that contribute to your success (as a teacher, teacher assistant, or administrator) in supporting students with LD, what are the top 3 factors that stand out to you?

When considering all of the factors that contribute to your school's success in supporting students with LD, what are the top 3 factors that stand out to you?

If we have left out any factors that you think are important in contributing to your school's success with students with LD, please use the space below to elaborate.

**THANK YOU!!!**

**Your responses will help to enhance instruction for students with LD. We appreciate your time.**

*\*Some items from this survey were taken or adapted from the *Tell Them From Me* teacher survey.*