



FOOTHILLS ACADEMY

find understanding. build confidence. maximize potential.

Admissions Information



**Leading the Way for Students with
Learning Disabilities**



Foothills Academy is a full-time independent school program (grades 3 – 12) for 300 students with a diagnosed Learning Disability. Many of the students who attend Foothills Academy also have a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

In addition to the school program, Foothills Academy also offers outreach programs for the broader community through Community Services. Programs are available for children, teens, parents and educators.

Foothills Academy was founded in 1979 as the first school exclusively for students diagnosed with a Learning Disability in Alberta and has been leading the way in Calgary and far beyond ever since.

"I feel as though my teachers have made real, personal connections with me and that has helped me immensely throughout high school."

Foothills Academy was built around the belief that all students with Learning Disabilities have exceptional potential, and that with the right supports and guidance, they can achieve great success in school, post-secondary, and the workplace. We understand the difficulties and challenges facing students and their families, be it academic, social, emotional/behavioural, or financial. Foothills Academy's community builds upon these foundations with the individuals and families we work with. Much of our success is found in our agency-wide philosophical belief in, and understanding of, Self-Determination Theory, which has three core values.

Find Understanding Build Confidence Maximize Potential

We do this by:

- **Building strong RELATIONSHIPS** with students to really understand each individual's strengths and interests (finding understanding)
- **Ensuring that students feel a sense of COMPETENCE**, to develop their confidence and self-belief that they can be the incredible people whom they know they really are (build confidence)
- **Providing a sense of AUTONOMY**, so that students feel connected to their learning, and have a voice; which allows them the freedom to thrive and maximize their potential (maximize potential)

Many students with Learning Disabilities have faced adversity, failure and disappointment in previous schools and they may arrive at Foothills with low levels of motivation, self-esteem, and increased anxiety. By rooting our program in Self-Determination Theory, staff create a positive environment in which students with Learning Disabilities can learn. Effective teaching of evidence-based programs and strategies address each individual student's learning needs. With the right approach to teaching and learning, Self-Determination Theory enhances each students' sense of self and motivation allowing students to leave Foothills Academy as lifelong learners with a strong sense of intrinsic motivation for success.



FIND UNDERSTANDING



Building Relationships are the Key to Understanding

We start by making students feel valued for who they are with all their individual strengths and challenges.

When students feel safe and cared for, they are more willing to engage with learning again. Students are surrounded by staff throughout the school who truly care about them.

It requires the staff to be well trained in understanding the wide-ranging and specific needs of students with Learning Disabilities.

Understanding each student requires time and commitment from staff as we build personalized learning plans (IPPs) for each student.

We value the importance of collaboration between teachers, families and students. We successfully implement student-directed IPP goals and accommodations, which are regularly reviewed, monitored and accomplished in collaboration with families.

By understanding each student, we are also able to support their “islands of competence” by building important, self-esteem building activities and opportunities to explore the students’ interests into the school day.

We find strengths, passions and "Islands of competence"



Students come to know themselves as learners - strengths and challenges - and develop self-advocacy skills

It's not just teachers understanding their students but also helping students to develop an understanding of themselves. We encourage students to gain an understanding of themselves as learners and develop self-advocacy skills for what they need to be successful both within Foothills Academy and also when they leave us and go on to post-secondary or the workplace.



"At other schools, teachers are there to teach the curriculum. But, at Foothills Academy, the teachers are there to teach the student."

BUILD CONFIDENCE

We Build Academic Confidence

Classes are small. On average they have 12 - 14 students with 1 Teacher and 1 Educational Assistant. This allows for teachers to really get to know and understand their students and their individual needs. Staff function in teams to more consistently provide interventions for students. Staff get to know the students in the team even if they don't work with them directly.

Being at a school where every child has a Learning Disability can make a huge difference for a child. It removes the shame and stigma that they might have felt in their previous school. Here every child has a Learning Disability. But, they are also all unique people so there is open discussion about acknowledging strengths and weaknesses that we all have. And, being a small school community really allows for a sense of belonging to the Foothills Family.

"Kids at Foothills Academy are able to be their true selves and are accepted and embraced for who they are."



Electives, Clubs and Sports Can Develop Confidence

Confidence is built through non-academic activities too. Participating in electives, sports and clubs that reflect a child's unique interests is a way to build their confidence in themselves and develop the "islands of competence" that are not academic.

Electives & Extracurricular

Fine Arts:

Photography
Drama
Art clubs and events
Movie club
Culinary arts

Sports Teams:

Basketball
Volleyball
Floor hockey
Track and field
Curling
Badminton
Running club
Golf

Activities:

Woodworking
Swimming
Archery
Floor hockey
Intramural lunchtime sports
Indoor climbing
Backcountry camping
Hiking
Volunteering opportunities



Clubs

- Empowering Girls Club
- Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA)
- Anime Club
- RPG Club
- Art Competitions and Challenges
- Sewing Your Own Clothes
- Archery
- Team 1 Chess/Board Games
- Improv Club
- English Premier Watching Club
- Student Parliament (Team 1 Leadership)
- Chess Club
- Jack.org - FA Chapter
- Teams 2 & 3 Chess/Board Game Club
- Drawing Club
- Coding Club
- Homework Club*



MAXIMIZE POTENTIAL

The third pillar of our teaching philosophy is Maximizing Potential.

All of our students are bright, capable individuals. In order to maximize student potential, we offer the full range of Alberta Education academic courses allowing our students to achieve success at the highest level they are able.

Staff support students to develop the skills to advocate for their needs so that learning is owned by the students.

Remediation & Accommodation

While some schools focus on accommodations like assistive technology for students with Learning Disabilities, we focus both on remediation and accommodation strategies.

Remediation tries to increase skills that are below grade level. Strategies may include a focus on repetition, breaking tasks down into smaller chunks and re-teaching skills.

By contrast, compensation or accommodations help students reach their full potential. Assistive Technology such as audiobooks, text-to-speech software and speech recognition software that converts a student's own words to text are some examples. Our goal is to find the right balance between remediation and compensatory approaches for each student.



Assistive Technology

A full-time Assistive Technology specialist is on staff to work with students to determine the best assistive technology for them and teach them how to use it. We support a wide variety of Assistive Technology tools that students can continue to use at post-secondary and beyond.

Self-Regulation

We maximize potential by supporting the development of self-regulation. Since individuals with Learning Disabilities and co-existing disorders tend to struggle with self-regulation, it can affect the ability to focus on academic tasks, the ability to control behaviour and emotions.

The school uses the Zones of Regulation program in order to help students develop self-awareness of their regulatory states, and to identify strategies that work well for them (e.g., "regulation breaks"). The consistent use of the Zones language allows us to develop a common understanding and ability to communicate amongst staff and students across the entire school. Additionally, Mindfulness plays an important role in many classrooms to help student self-regulation.

Self-regulation is supported through thoughtful choices of classroom design and furnishings. The classrooms provide active furniture to aid with regulation, flexible working spaces for collaboration, quiet areas and opportunities for movement.

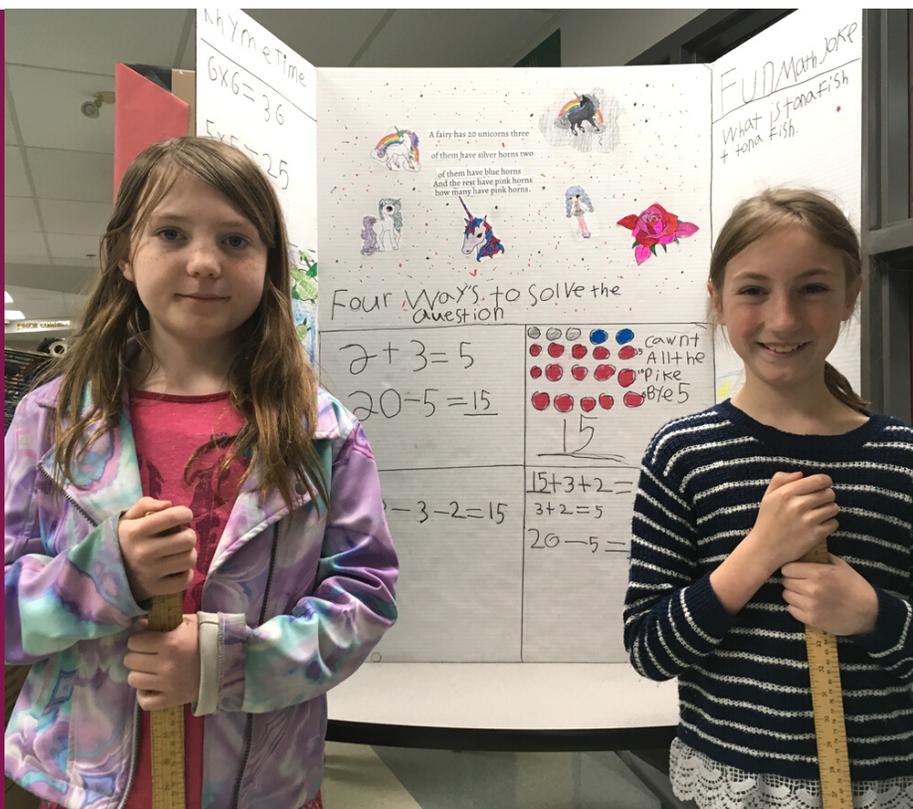
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Executive Functioning

Executive Functioning skills like collaboration, time management and task initiation are just as important for students' future success as academics.

Many students with learning and attention issues can struggle with Executive Functioning. Skills are explicitly taught and reinforced by teaching staff.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS TO MAXIMIZE POTENTIAL



Team of Psychologists

We maximize potential by having an on-site group of psychologists to support the learning, social and emotional needs of our students. We have an Assessment Psychology team that supports the school by collaborating with teaching staff to maximize their understanding of each incoming student's learning strengths and challenges and identify appropriate evidence-based practices to support their learning. The students in our school program are also supported by a Counselling Psychology team that promotes their mental well-being and fosters their long-term resilience.

Speech Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy

Maximizing potential also includes providing other support services as needed such as Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology. These services focus upon supporting students with strategies for regulation, executive functioning, practical and functional language and developing engaging and supportive classroom environments. Although the services are predominantly found in the younger years of Teams 1 and 2, high-school students also receive the services when necessary.

If students require one-to-one work with Occupational Therapy or Speech-Language support, their needs are met based on priority. Our Occupational Therapists and Speech-Language Pathologists also consult with classroom staff and observe lessons so that they can determine if the supports which they would provide one student could positively impact the entire class. This allows us to maximize the opportunities to support as many students as possible.



PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LIFE BEYOND Foothills ACADEMY

Maximizing potential also includes preparing students to transition to life after high school. Starting in Grade 10, high school students are guided through post-secondary transitions and options for the future including: the work force, university, college, trades, gap year. We have a Learning Strategist /Career counselor dedicated to assisting our senior high students and families in this journey.

We are proud that we have virtually a 100% graduation rate with nearly every student graduating from grade 12 on time. Over 70% of our grade 12 students are eligible for the Rutherford Scholarship which indicates our students are graduating from Foothills with the knowledge and skills they require to be successful beyond Foothills Academy in post-secondary and the workplace.



"Foothills provided me with a safe haven to learn, to grow and taught me that I could achieve more than what I thought I was capable of."



Elementary Grades

Core courses are taught by separate Language Arts/Social Studies and Mathematics/Science teachers with support from Educational Assistants. We follow the Alberta Curriculum and use academic interventions so that the curriculum is accessible for all students.

In Language Arts, we use a Structured Literacy approach, including Wilson Reading that is aligned with the Orton-Gillingham principles of instruction and the Science of Reading and focuses on phonological and morphological awareness (word attack skills and word recognition skills); syntax (how words are used); and developing comprehension (semantics).

In Mathematics we use a variety of programs, including Jump Math; with a focus on building foundational skills, number sense, pattern recognition, fluency and computational skills.

Students are further supported with a daily Skills class which provides additional academic instruction on Reading, Writing and Math. Skills classes use research-based, targeted programs, strategies and approaches intentionally delivered by expert, caring instructors.

It is also important for us to focus on each student's social and emotional needs. We use programs such as Social Thinking, and Zones of Regulation to provide supports for resiliency, developing self-awareness, and a range of self-regulation tools.

"Since coming to Foothills Academy, I have more abilities to read. I used to say I hate reading, now I NEVER say it because I have learned to read!"

Grade 5 student



Junior High

These crucially formative years require significant attention to academics, as well as to essential social and emotional supports in order to help students reach their full potential.

Developing independence and confidence is important, as students may enter these grades with the mindset that they are unable to achieve success without the assistance of others. Students establish new routines and strategies as they begin to manage a larger variety of subjects, teachers, and have an incremental increase in expectations for homework. Staff work with students to establish study routines and provide academic interventions and provides strategies to help mitigate and manage test anxieties.



In addition to the core curriculum, there are classes teaching organizational skills, reading strategies, and study skills. These skills are then incorporated in regular programming but we ensure that they are broken down and developed with the students in achievable increments. Students are recognized in these grades for their positive contributions to school and community life with a merit program and student of the week award.

From a social-emotional approach, staff work with grades 7 and 9s to talk more specifically about responsible social media use. Challenges with building and maintaining adolescent relationships are addressed with staff mediating social conflicts. Staff also help students find their “islands of competence” and encourage them to share these with others through establishing or joining the various clubs hosted at the school throughout the week.

Electives

Elective classes are introduced at the Junior High level.





High School

The senior high school program adheres to the Alberta Education Program of Studies and students write the same diploma exams as every other student in Alberta, often with results much higher than the provincial average.

Foothills Academy prepares students to enter a post-secondary program or the workplace and High School builds upon the strategies, programs and expertise of the earlier grades.

With grades 11 and 12, we expand more upon furthering the lifelong skills developed to be a successful individual living with a Learning Disability. Students focus on an area of study to pursue and our homeroom and learning strategies teachers support them to evaluate and apply to post-secondary institutions as well as monitor their academic performance to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood. Students' understanding of themselves as a learner is emphasized with open discussions about identifying strategies and supports that work best for them in preparation for large cumulative exams. Even at this stage of education, staff continue to support students to develop strong self-advocacy, organization, and interpersonal skills.

With important transition years such as this, staff work with students to support healthy choices for maintaining a balanced work-life and help to emphasize mindfulness and sensory tools that have been used in the past and continue to help the student. Students are given skills to construct resumes and interview for jobs to balance out the work that is being done to help students apply for post-secondary institutions and scholarships. As often as programming allows, students are exposed to professionals in various occupations and recruiters from local and national postsecondary institutions. As with each stage of development, relationships and social-emotional supports continue to be the strong relationships that have been built between staff, students and families.



TUITION, BURSARIES AND FAMILY COMMITMENT

Tuition

It has been an important principle of Foothills Academy to try to provide a high quality education at the most affordable price so that a high-quality learning experience is available to as many children with Learning Disabilities as possible no matter what the family's financial circumstances.

The current tuition is \$15,600. This price includes almost EVERYTHING!

- busing
- technology fees
- field trips
- supplies
- on-site psychological team
- sibling discount

You will receive a tax receipt that allows you to claim tuition as a Medical Expense - some families are able to claim it on income tax

Bursaries

Foothills Academy is proud that in over 40 years no potential child has been turned away from the school due to their financial circumstances. Currently, approximately 40% of families attending the school receive some amount of bursary assistance. Student intake decisions are made completely separately and prior to any discussion about bursaries.

Since we ask our parents, staff and broader community to support our bursary fund, we have to be careful stewards of this money. Bursary amounts are allocated on a sliding scale based on the combined gross family income.

Family Commitment

In order to sustain the bursary program at Foothills Academy, there is a strong culture of philanthropy at the school and an expectation that everyone contributes to the fundraising efforts. We refer to it as Family Commitment. There are different ways that this can be done and opportunities provided throughout the year. For those families who can afford it or wish to fulfil their financial commitment, they are able to set up a yearly or month donation.

Everyone attending Foothills Academy agrees to help contribute to the fundraising efforts that support the school and bursary program.



ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

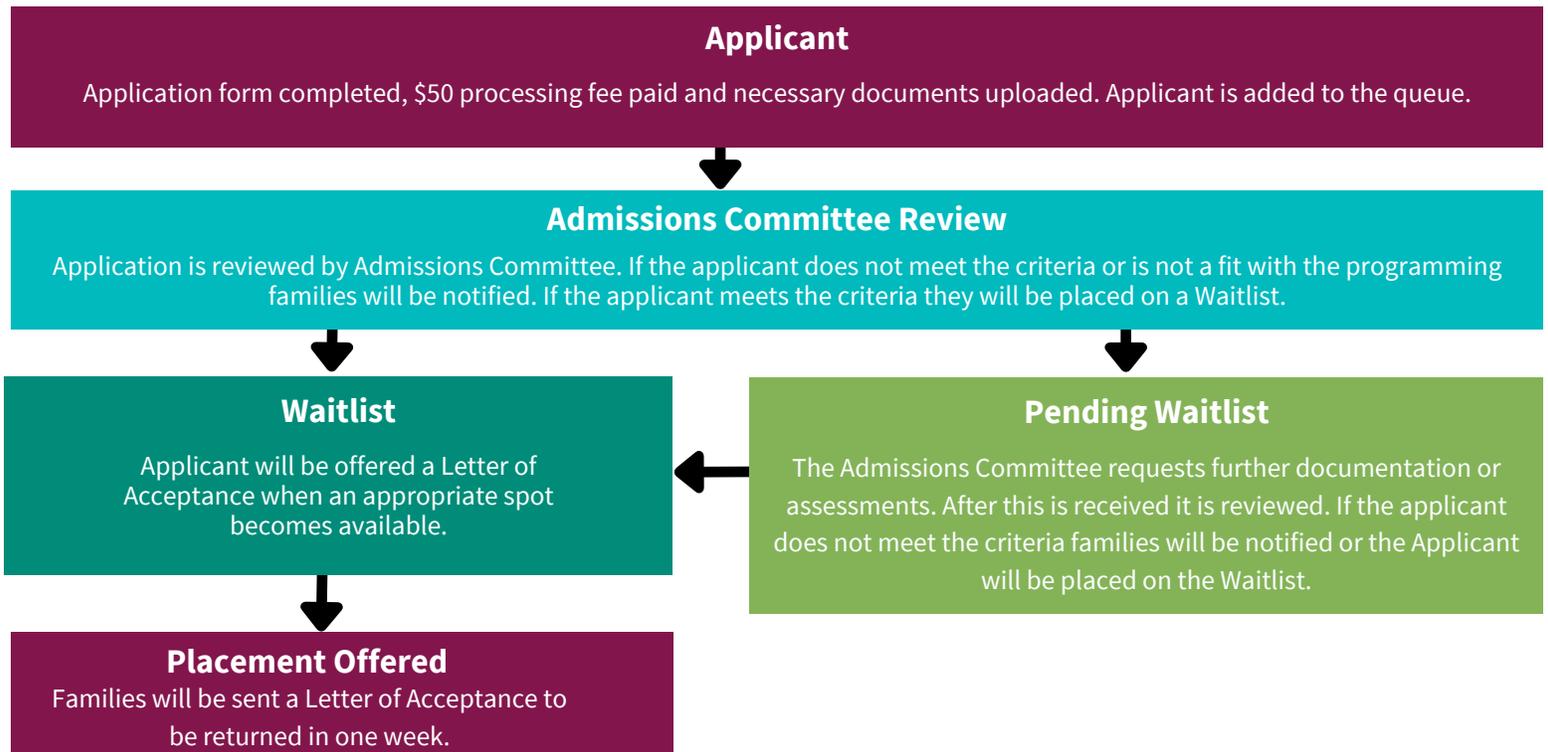
Foothills Academy is the only school in Calgary that has an exclusive focus on students with Learning Disabilities.

Our intake criteria are:

- A Primary diagnosis of a Learning Disability as reported in a psycho-educational assessment done within the past 2 years
- An IQ within the average range (or above)
- No severe social/emotional/behavioural concerns
- No identified needs requiring 1:1 classroom support to be successful



ADMISSIONS PROCESS



ENROLLMENT PROCESS

1. Once offer of placement is accepted, you will be able to complete online enrollment forms (starting in late Feb. and onward)
2. Bursary application is submitted if you are applying.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

One other very unique aspect of Foothills Academy is the comprehensive wrap-around programs and services that are available onsite through the Estelle Siebens Community Services centre. Community Services benefits students directly at Foothills Academy by have staff like psychologists and reading specialists available to work directly with students or as a resource for teaching staff to consult.

Additionally though, there are programs and services available through Community Services that are open to everyone regardless of whether they are connected to the school program or not.

- Read/Write one-to-one instruction
- Community Webinars & Education
- Assistive Technology Consultations
- Social skills-based Camp Amicus & year-round Recreation
- Psycho-educational Assessments
- Psychologist-led group programs focusing on social skills, girls, transition to jr high
- LD & ADHD Network



The Foothills Advantage

- 1. Our focus is on teaching students with Learning Disabilities and its associated conditions like ADHD.** Our PD focuses on this and all teachers participate in extensive training to understand best teaching practices for students with LD & ADHD.
- 2. The small size of the school allows for deep and meaningful relationships between students and staff.** Once you're a Foothills student, you're a student of the whole school and staff are there to support them to develop and realize their potential. Staff develop relationships with students of all grades - not just those they teach.
- 3. Foothills Academy has the strongest approach to literacy and numeracy which is evidence and research-based.** We are continually reviewing research to inform our practices.
- 4. We utilize a robust Assistive Technology program with a full-time staff person to support students in learning to use it.**
- 5. Having Community Services on-site allows us to benefit from their expertise and research to inform best practices in the school program.**



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