

City and District

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Disgruntled parents plan private school for handicapped

By Elsie Ross
(Herald staff writer)

A group of city parents, convinced their children aren't receiving the help they need, have launched a private school for children with learning disabilities.

The Foothills Academy, which will open about Sept. 15, is currently interviewing students and teachers, says executive director Hal Anderson, a remedial reading specialist.

Once it is set up, the school will ask the provincial government for approval to operate and learning disabilities grants.

In order for Foothills Academy to obtain the grants, however, the Calgary public and separate school boards must be willing to co-operate, conceding the program is needed and giving up a portion of their grants to the new school, he says.

Although both boards have been notified of the school's plans, a formal approach must wait until Foothills Academy is open.

If government money isn't available, parents will have to pay \$5,000 to \$6,000 a year in fees and the school, Anderson concedes, "will be

elitist until the school board co-operates."

The school — which has been organized since January and is registered as a charity for tax purposes — already has some money but is looking for additional corporate donations.

The Sam Nickle Foundation also has pledged \$50,000 a year for five years for capital equipment contingent upon the school's ability to obtain provincial grants.

The school is completing negotiations with the separate school board for the use of an elementary school which is to be closed.

Modelled on the Denver Academy which a number of Calgary children already attend, the Foothills Academy initially will have a maximum of 60 children aged six to 14 with a maximum of 100 in later years.

The school is aimed at helping students who currently are encountering serious difficulties in their regular school programs and who have been diagnosed by a certified specialist as having specific learning disabilities.

These may include attention-concentration spans, visual memory, fine visual-motor co-ordination and organization of thought processes.

Average intelligence

Children accepted at Foothills also will be of average or above average intelligence and their learning problems won't primarily be due to emotional or environmental factors.

Such children have innate difficulties in reading and spelling so it is harder for them to learn even though they are intelligent.