

**Nova Scotia Department of Education
Tuition Support Program Review
2009**

Nova Scotia Department of Education

**Tuition Support Program
Review – 2009**

CONFIDENTIAL

Acknowledgments

The Department of Education would like to thank the many people who participated in the Tuition Support Program Review.

The Tuition Support Program Review Committee acknowledges the designated special education school students, parents, administrators, and teachers who made oral and/or written responses and submissions during the consultation phase of the review.

We extend particular thanks to the students, parents, teachers, and administrators who took time to attend the focus groups and share their experiences with the committee. A special thank you to the faculty at Bridgeway Academy, Churchill Academy, and Landmark East School.

The Tuition Support Program Review Committee acknowledges the important contributions of Department of Education staff that spent time collecting, organizing data, and analyzing results.

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Preface

The Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs was submitted to the Honourable Karen Casey, Minister of Education, in June 2007.

Recommendation 3.0 of the review recommended that "the Minister of Education and government announce the end of the Tuition Support Program effective June 30, 2010."

The recommendation was not supported by parents of students enrolled in the designated special education private schools. The Learning Disabilities Association of Nova Scotia (LDANS), which represents parents of students with learning disabilities across Nova Scotia also did not support this recommendation and called for a review of the Tuition Support Program.

In response to concerns from parents regarding the recommendation, the Minister of Education, Karen Casey, announced a review, "The Special Education Programs and Services (SEPS) Committee will be charged with reviewing the Tuition Support Program."

The Tuition Support Program Review was conducted by the Tuition Support Program Review Committee (TSP Review Committee) over a nine-month period, beginning in June 2008. The following five elements were used as the terms of reference for the review:

1. long-term effectiveness of the program
2. duration of placement
3. research-based interventions and instructional methods used
4. transitional outcomes for students receiving the service
5. regional accessibility and criteria for acceptance to determine if the "program is a truly effective and equitable method to support the implementation of the Special Education Policy for Nova Scotia students with Learning Disabilities."

The review also identified the additional supports that would be necessary to provide the desirable level of service, not only in areas served by designated special education program schools (DSEPS), but also in other areas across Nova Scotia.

To assist with future planning and development of a provincial learning disabilities strategy, a literature review and summary of research based interventions and instructional methods utilized for students with learning disabilities was completed by Dr. Anne Price of the Calgary Learning Centre (Appendix A: Best Practices in Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities.)

While this review was being completed, the Tuition Support Program continued under the current guidelines. However, the minister also extended the Program for Learning Assessment for Nova Scotia (PLANS) to include students in the DSEPS. This ensures that the progress of the students attending DSEPS will be evaluated on the same basis as the progress of students attending public schools in Nova Scotia and will provide accountability for the issuing of the high school graduation diploma.

To assist in ensuring that parents understand their child's progress, the Provincial individualized program plan (IPP) Report Card will be used for students attending the DSEPS under the Tuition Support Program.

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Process

- Timeline Framework was established with the TSP Review Committee.
- Meeting dates were determined.
- Agenda and summary were developed based on
 - a. developing questionnaires
 - b. focus groups, including parents, teachers and students
 - c. tours of the three designated special education private schools to view the facilities and classrooms

Timeline Framework

The review was broken into five phases:

1. Phase One: School Visits
Learning walks—classroom visits
Teacher/administrator interviews
Student focus groups
Student surveys
Program information collection
Timeline: October 2008
2. Phase Two: Parent Consultation
Focus group meetings
Parent surveys
Timeline: October 2008
3. Phase Three: Former Parent/Student Consultation
DSEPS student questionnaire/survey (phone or face-to-face interview)
Transition/program/progress information collection
Timeline: November 2008 to January 2009
4. Phase Four: Research
Research-based intervention, instructional methods, and assessment—Contract research report
Timeline: December 2008 to February 2009
5. Phase Five: Report and Recommendations
Timeline: February 2009

Background

The mission of the Department of Education is

“To provide excellence in education and training for personal fulfillment and for a productive and prosperous society.”

This mission is supported by the belief statements that reflect the department’s commitment to access to lifelong learning opportunities, full participation at all levels of the educational and training system for all Nova Scotians, and accountability of all partners.

One of the functions of primary–12 education is to co-ordinate the development and implementation of programming and services for students with special needs and other student support services. The *Special Education Policy* provides the outline with regard to the education of Nova Scotia students with special needs in the primary, elementary, and secondary school system in the province of Nova Scotia.

In June 2001, the department released the findings of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee in which the philosophy of inclusive schooling was further defined in terms of implementation.

Response of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee states:

“... The implementation of inclusive education looks different for each student depending on the outcomes developed to meet their needs and the settings in which these outcomes can be met. In each individual case, the principle of “only as special as necessary” should be employed. Envisioned as a continuum, this starts with the grade level/subject area classroom where students participate independently in class with adaptations in instructional strategies and evaluation techniques implemented by the classroom teacher.”

When it is determined by the program planning team that adaptations in the classroom are not sufficient to meet the student’s needs, additional supports may be needed. The program planning team considers a range of supports including options in programming and settings necessary to meet the student’s needs. In all cases, it is necessary for the program planning team to monitor and adjust programming and settings on an ongoing basis. The range of supports includes, but is not limited to, assistive technology, additional teaching materials, resource teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, and teacher assistants. These supports can be provided in a variety of ways, in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to:

- consultative services to classroom teachers
- co-teaching
- short-term/partial withdrawal to address specific learning outcomes
- temporary placements in specialized programs and short-term residential placements

When students receive specific programming outside the classroom or neighbourhood school setting, the team is responsible for incorporating outcomes and strategies in the plan that address how and when a student will transition back to a more inclusive setting. In all cases, it is necessary to consider maximizing student growth and moving students towards independence and self-advocacy.”¹

Special Education Policy

The Statement of Principles included in the Nova Scotia *Special Education Policy* was considered as an overarching framework while conducting this review.

Right to an Appropriate Education

A right to an appropriate education means the fundamental education human right of every individual to have their unique learning needs responded to on an individual basis.

Right to Quality Education and Qualified Teachers

All students have a right to a quality education taught by licensed qualified teachers.

Right to Inclusive Education

Inclusive education embodies beliefs, attitudes, and values that promote “the basic right of all students to receive appropriate and quality educational programming and services in the company of their peers” (*Inclusion, Supporting Student Success* fact sheet).

The goal of inclusive schooling is to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students in school programs and activities. The support services that are designed to meet students’ diverse educational needs should be co-ordinated within the neighbourhood school, and to the extent possible, within grade-level/subject area classrooms.

Teacher’s Responsibility

Teachers are responsible for teaching all students who are placed under their supervision and care. This includes responsibility for safety and well-being, as well as program planning, implementation, and evaluation. This is not responsibility that can be transferred or delegated to non-teaching staff.

Parental Involvement

Parents have a duty and a responsibility to support their children in achieving success. They are an integral part of their children’s education and should be involved in program planning from the outset.

¹ *Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee*, SEIRC Review, June 2001, ISBN: 0-88871-687-7, Continuum of Programming Options and Services, p 17–18.

Student Involvement

All students are expected to achieve to the best of their individual abilities the Essential Graduation Learnings as stated in *Public School Programs* and the *Education Act*, Section 24.

Individual Program Plan and Accountability

An individual program plan (IPP) is developed in consideration of the student's strengths and challenges. The outcomes in the IPP form the foundation for the evaluation of student progress. This progress is an important component in measuring school success.

Collaboration

Collaboration and consultation are essential in the planning and supporting students with special needs to ensure a co-ordinated and consistent approach to program planning and service delivery.

Tuition Support Program Overview

The designated special education private schools (DSEPS) are private, independent schools with a primary mandate of serving students with special needs. The purpose of the Tuition Support Program (TSP) is to provide an option for students diagnosed with one of the identified disorders or disabilities to access special education programs and services outside the framework of the Nova Scotia Public school system. The Tuition Support Program addresses the specific needs of learners who are diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and/or Learning Disabilities (LD).

Currently, the Tuition Support Program provides funding support for individual students to a maximum of four years. In the year 2008, an extension of a fourth year was granted by the Minister of Education.

Requests for initial acceptance and subsequent renewals must be submitted on an annual basis. Applicants use the Tuition Support Application, which indicates the supporting documentation required:

- a confirmed diagnosis of an Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and/or Learning Disabilities (LD)
- a letter of acceptance by the school
- confirmation of the individualized program plan (IPP) and services from the designated special education private school
- a letter outlining the rationale for initial or an additional year at the DSEP school

For the Tuition Support Program, during the last year of funding, the DSEPS must develop and implement a transition plan for students planning to return to a public school or to attend a post-secondary institution and/or a community based option.

Key Findings

The following section is a summary of the feedback gathered from the students and their families who are either current or past participants in the Tuition Support Program and information provided by the designated special education private school administrators and teaching staff. This information was gathered through written surveys and focus groups. The TSP Review Committee valued this stakeholder input, which, along with the expertise found in its own diverse membership, was factored into the development of recommendations.

The attached appendices B–K contain a complete summary of the collected data.

The TSP Review Committee also benefitted from an informational presentation delivered by the Tuition Support Program Reviewer and Appeals Officer, who shared their insights from an administrative perspective. In particular, the acceptance requirement of an individualized program plan (IPP) was a major concern due to inconsistencies related to the application of program adaptations and IPPs. It was their recommendation that this requirement be removed and replaced with “the ability to demonstrate the student’s involvement in the program planning process as outlined in the *Special Education Policy 2008*.”

Current and former Tuition Support Program students expressed overall satisfaction with most aspects of their TSP experience and expressed that not only did they feel their learning had improved while at the designated special education private schools but also that they had the opportunity to make friends and experienced a sense of belonging.

“I have matured, grown strong and developed an understanding here at this school.”

“I love this school. It has completely changed my life ... they make you feel like you belong to something.”

Areas in which current TSP students expressed dissatisfaction included limited access to computers in support of their learning, having enough time to complete their work, and limited availability of extracurricular activities.

“I think we should have more activities at our school, like basketball, soccer, art classes.”

“I would like extracurricular activities.”

Parents of current Tuition Support Program students expressed overall satisfaction with the program, as they felt their children’s needs were being met in a way they were not in the public system. The candid responses shared by the parents highlighted the extreme situations many of these families experienced which extended well beyond the academic in nature. Attendance at the designated special education private school was credited with providing a safe and supportive environment without which the students would have found themselves in extreme crisis.

Parents did express concern about teacher turnover rate at some of the DSEPS and worried about how that could potentially impact their children’s progress. Other areas in which parents raised questions related to meeting the social/behavioural needs of their children and also the ongoing balance between challenging their children academically while also providing remedial/compensatory supports.

All three of the designated special education private schools acknowledged that the Tuition Support Program funding has a significant impact on their enrolment numbers and that without the support of this program a large percentage of their student body would not be able to attend their schools.

Parents' areas of strongest agreement were with the following survey statements:

- I am satisfied with my child's experience at this school.
- My child has improved academically in reading and writing.
- Ongoing assessment informs me of my child's progress.
- Good communication exists between home and school.
- The stress level at home has been reduced.

"After one month at DSEPS some of the bad behaviours were getting better and when asked about this, we were told that it came about because there was no teasing or bullying anymore, everyone was the same."

"I consider this opportunity life saving—without this special school he would be lost—this gives him a chance at a normal life and job."

"It is important to note that I strongly believe that no parent would choose a DSEPS if they felt their child would be able to receive a similar education in a safe environment within the public school system."

Parents' areas of least agreement were with the following survey statements:

- I am satisfied with the Tuition Support Program application process.
- My child is being prepared for transition to public school or post-secondary education.
- My child can make and keep friendships.
- My child has improved organizational skills.
- My child has the ability to apply learned strategies to new situations.
- My child has the ability to self-advocate.

"Speaking from experience, this is an unnecessarily difficult process. It became very intimidating and caused a great deal of stress."

"The DSEPS has been helpful for my child however I feel the school needs to challenge their students more. I think returning to the public school will be very difficult for my child."

The designated special education private school teacher surveys were all very positive in terms of their responses regarding their teaching delivery and opportunity to meet the needs of their students. Survey results indicated that teachers have a strong understanding of how to differentiate instruction to maximize student learning while actively engaging the students in the learning process. Teachers in all three of the designated special education private schools desired increased opportunities for professional development, more time to reflect on student progress, and increased compensation reflective of the Nova Scotia teachers' provincial collective agreement.

“Our school does effectively address the learning needs of students who have fallen through the cracks in the public system. However, far more can be done to better address the needs of our students and families.”

Recommendations

Long Term Effectiveness

1. It is recommended that the Department of Education collaborate with the DSEP Schools and Regional School Boards to develop a specific annual accountability reporting framework that demonstrates student progress as related to academic, physical and social development.
2. It is recommended that the Department of Education provide professional development to designated special education private schools regarding the Program for Learning Assessment for Nova Scotia (PLANS) and individualized program planning (IPP) and reporting.

The Tuition Support Program Review Committee gathered data that provided initial insight into the long-term effectiveness of the program. This proved to be a challenge as none of the designated special education private schools currently has formalized tracking mechanisms for students who are no longer receiving tuition support.

Further, in researching this component, the Tuition Support Program Review Committee determined that although it is a requirement in the *Education Act*, the designated special education private schools have met only on an inconsistent basis with school boards to develop transition plans, and information collected by the Department of Education was not used in a formalized process. This lack of standardized information, such as formalized student assessments and attendance records as collected by the Department of Education, presented a challenge to the TSP Review Committee when tasked with evaluating the overall effectiveness of the Tuition Support Program.

Anecdotally, administrators from all three schools indicated a very high percentage of their students graduate with a grade 12 diploma and continue on to post-secondary education. Administrators and teachers attribute this success largely to their ability to support remediation and social skill development first, along with the use of multi-sensory instructional techniques, small class size, and the teachers' ability to differentiate instruction.

Parents almost unanimously reported that their children have shown improvements socially, both in and out of school, while also experiencing academic gains. It is worth noting that not all students were happy to leave their former schools and some reported that they missed their friends and the extracurricular options available to them at a bigger facility.

The knowledge base of teachers and their ability to identify, understand, and respond effectively to the needs of students with learning disabilities was also recognized by Dr. Price and the TSP Review Committee as being a very important component of the success of these students. While all three of the designated special education private schools stated that they require their content teaching staff to hold a teacher's certificate issued by the Minister of Education, and that they have demonstrated qualifications or competencies to teach students with special needs as set down in the *Governor in Council Education Act Regulations*, Section 68 (1) (a) (i), the need for ongoing professional development was identified to address the disconnect between best practice implementation as identified in research and its practical application.

Dropouts and suspension rates were reported to be very low at all three facilities, and all three designated special education private schools indicated that they have established rules and procedures for the discipline of students as required in Section 68 (1) (a) (iii), of the *Governor in Council Education Act Regulations* (2009).

All three schools indicated that regular and varied evaluations and assessments are a core part of their programs and that results are routinely and systematically communicated with parents through a variety of means such as weekly communication logs, parent conferences, and report cards.

Teachers at all three schools stated that they focussed on, and noted improvements in, both academic and non-academic areas such as increased abilities related to self-advocacy, organizational independence, and social and emotional growth.

All three schools reported active and engaged board involvement focussing on overall governance issues.

Barriers identified as possibly having an impact on long-term effectiveness include the following:

- limited professional development opportunities for teachers
- limited teaching resources such as assistive technology, resource centre, text books
- teacher retention/compensation
- inconsistent annual transition planning
- limited access to professional support staff such as psychologists, SLPs and guidance counsellors
- limited understanding of disability-related issues
- older facilities: e.g., electrical system unable to support assistive technology needs, space issues, etc.

Duration of Student Placement

3. It is recommended that the Department of Education provide support for a maximum of three years. The funding may be extended beyond the three years in exceptional circumstances as determined by the Tuition Review and Appeal Process.
4. It is recommended that the Department of Education, in collaboration with the designated special education private schools and the regional school boards establish a Tuition Support Program Review Process framework for evaluating applications for a funding extension beyond three years. An appeals process would be included.

Though not a survey or focus group question, a significant number of parents expressed strong opinions that there should be no time limitations on access to the funding unit from the Department of Education.

Bridgeway Academy and Churchill Academy stated that their ultimate program goal is to provide students with the skills and support necessary to make a successful transition back into the public school system. Landmark East School's philosophy differs in this respect, as transition back to public school is not necessarily the primary goal, although they will work towards successful transition back to public school if that is the wish of the student and their family.

Parents indicated that they would prefer that their children attended and accessed programs in their local public schools if the schools were able to provide similar types of intervention as those provided at the designated special education private schools.

Dr. Price stated in the summary section of her report that the greater determinant for long-term success for a student with learning disabilities is the effective implementation of best practices and "this is not dependent upon a particular model of service delivery." This conclusion is consistent with the overarching principles of the Nova Scotia *Special Education Policy*, which is based on a philosophy of inclusion that is grounded in the belief in the provision of a continuum of programs and services that provides options to students that are only "as special as necessary."

Research-Based Interventions and Instructional Methods Used

5. It is recommended that the designated special education private schools supply the Department of Education with a listing of the interventions and instructional strategies utilized in their annual accountability framework.
6. It is recommended that the *Best Practices in Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities* report by Anne Price, Ph.D. (Appendix A) be shared with the designated special education private schools as a useful reference tool when programming for students with learning disabilities.

The Tuition Support Review Committee completed three learning walks of the designated special education private schools. During these tours, classes were observed, discussions took place with administrators, teachers, and students, and observational checklists were completed. A variety of interventions and instructional strategies were observed during these school visits.

To better position future identification and evaluation of best practices, the TSP Review Committee requested Anne Price, Ph.D., of the Calgary Learning Centre to research and produce the report *Best Practices in Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities 2009*. This report presents a review of best practices in the field of learning disabilities based on current national and international research and identifies nine key components as essential considerations when programming for students with learning disabilities.

While the effective and systematic implementation of these recommendations will benefit all learners, the focus of Dr. Price's report was specific to learning disabilities, and further research would be required to adequately address the unique needs of learners diagnosed with ADHD and ASD.

The relatively limited scope of this review, and the lack of an evaluative tool through which to compare current practices at the designated special education private schools with accepted

established best practices, did not allow for an in-depth investigation of the pedagogical, curricula, and instructional approaches of the designated special education private schools.

However, there were many indications that best practices in teaching students with learning disabilities were being used by teachers, including remedial classes, study skills programs, specialized reading programs, Bridgeway's Reading Program (BRP), math skills and learning disabilities awareness class (LDA), social skills program, middle school tutorial program, language tutorial for auditory processing, adaptive strategies, phonological awareness program, Orton-Gillingham approach, Jump Math, guidance support, and speech language pathologist and psychologist services.

Transitional Outcomes for Students Receiving the Service

7. It is recommended that the Department of Education collaborate with the designated special education private schools and the regional school boards to develop and implement a formalized communication process for both transition into, and out of, the Tuition Support Program.
8. It is recommended that the guidelines outlined in the *Special Education Policy* Section 2.7 Transition Planning, inform this process.

Schedule "A", Section 69 2(c) of the *Governor in Council Education Act Regulations* states, "meet at least 2 times per school year with the school board to explain each funded student's progress and share documented evidence of student achievement;" and Section 69 2(d) states, "develop transition plans with receiving school boards for each funded student returning to the public school system."

The TSP Review Committee found that currently there are inconsistencies in the implementation of these regulations and there have been limited opportunities for ongoing communication or transition planning between regional school boards and designated special education private schools. (See Appendix J, Former Student Survey Results.)

Regional Accessibility and Acceptance Criteria

9. It is recommended that the Department of Education provide each regional school board with targeted funding to establish Regional Learning Disabilities Centres. This recommendation is in addition to, and not instead of, existing Regional SLD Services and Tuition Support Programs.

Ideally, these centres will allow for a dynamic collaboration and connection between programs and services. The Learning Disabilities Centres would provide additional programming options along the continuum of service, which may include direct intervention for students, professional development opportunities for teachers, and/or consultative services to boards.

10. It is recommended to the Department of Education that Conseil scolaire acadien provincial students who meet the Tuition Support Program eligibility criteria be allowed to apply the funding unit and supplement, where applicable, to attend a French first language school, approved by the Minister as offering only programs and services designed to meet the needs of students with special needs outside the province of Nova Scotia.

Currently there is no French first language program available at any of the approved provincial designated special education private schools.

11. It is recommended that students with autism spectrum disorder meeting the criteria for the Tuition Support Program, may apply the funding to special education schools outside of the province if that special education school has a primary mandate to provide programs and services specific for autism spectrum disorder.

Currently there are no DSEPS in Nova Scotia with the primary mandate of serving students with ASD.

12. It is recommended that the application criteria for the Tuition Support Program and Guidelines be revised as follows:

- the current requirement of an applicant having an individualized program plan be changed to “demonstrated involvement in the program planning process.”
- the eligibility criteria for the Tuition Support Program include Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or Learning Disabilities (LD) and be expanded to include students who have been assessed with other cognitive impairments, emotional/ behavioural disorders, physical disabilities and/or health impairments, speech impairments and/or communication disorders, multiple disabilities, or giftedness.

Proposed Changes to Guidelines – General Considerations

In *Blueprint for Building a Better Nova Scotia*, the Government of Nova Scotia outlined the development of a new “Tuition Support Program (TSP) for special needs students with individualized program plans (IPPs).” This process has been developed to provide eligible students with the opportunity to attend a designated special education private school (DSEPS).

The intention of this support is to provide options for students accessing education outside the framework of the public school system if they have been assessed as having any of the following exceptionalities: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); or Learning Disabilities (LD); as well as students who have been assessed with other cognitive impairments, emotional/ behavioural disorders, physical disabilities and/or health impairments, speech impairments and/or communication disorders, multiple disabilities, or giftedness.

The TSP Review Committee expressed great concerns about the accessibility of the Tuition Support Program. These concerns extended beyond geographic considerations to issues related to the current program application procedure existing outside the established program planning process.

At the focus group discussions and in the collected survey data, parents shared their frustrations and limited communications to them about options such as the TSP through the program planning process at their public schools. Parents learned about the program by word of mouth or through their own research. Parents also shared with the TSP Review Committee the ongoing financial impact that having a child at a DSEPS has on the family, as the TSP covers only partial tuition. Other costs associated with the DSEPS include the remainder of tuition and transportation.

While the potential and actual benefits of the type of programming options provided through the DSEPS were clearly articulated by current and past recipients and the schools themselves, the TSP Review Committee also considered the disadvantages of this type of placement as outlined in the Price report. This includes student isolation, limited generalization of strategies to situations beyond the specialized setting, transition challenges, and homogenous grouping, which may foster behavioural and social difficulties.

There have been many inconsistencies in the availability and development of IPPs for students applying to the schools and the requirement for a plan while attending the designated special education private school. The TSP Review Committee is recommending changes that include amending the current requirement of an individualized program plan by replacing it with demonstrated involvement in the program planning process.

Application Guidelines – Recommended

For the purposes of the Tuition Support Program, the following applies:

1. A student applying for Tuition Support for the first time is eligible to be approved if the student
 - a. is a student with special needs. For the purpose of this support, special needs is defined as a student with ADHD, ASD, or LD, or a student who has been assessed with other cognitive impairments, emotional/behavioural disorders, physical disabilities and/or health impairments, speech impairments and/or communication disorders, multiple disabilities, or giftedness as diagnosed by a licensed physician or registered psychologist or candidate-registered psychologist, in accordance with *Ministerial Education Act Regulations*. The above professionals must have expertise and training in making these diagnoses
 - b. has secured a placement in a designated special education private school for the school year. The only current designated special education private schools are Bridgeway Academy, Churchill Academy, and Landmark East School
 - c. is a student who has previously studied in a public school in Canada for at least one school year and is a resident of Nova Scotia
 - d. has received for a previous school year educational programs and services by a public school, utilizing the individualized program planning process while in public school in accordance with policies established by the Minister of Education
 - e. has confirmation from the designated special education private school that the student will receive individualized programs and services designed to meet the student's special needs
2. Tuition Support funding is provided to a designated special education private school for a student with special needs meeting the eligibility criteria and is approved pursuant to the *Governor in Council Education Act Regulations*. A funding unit is calculated as the average per student, allocation to school boards as determined by the Minister.
3. The funding provides Tuition Support for one year with an option to renew for an additional two years. Applicants should use the Tuition Support Renewal Application Form, which indicates the supporting documentation required. Additional years of support will be considered on an individual basis via the TSP Review process. Supporting documents include a letter of acceptance by the designated special education private school and a letter outlining the rationale for continuing for a further year at the designated special education private school.

4. Students who are successful in receiving a Tuition Support grant may be eligible for an additional supplementary grant. There is an online estimator on the website at www.ednet.ns.ca/tuition_support/estimator.php. Application forms for the supplement will be included in the letter approving the Tuition Support grant.

Application Process and Timelines

1. Applications are available
 - a. online at www.ednet.ns.ca/tuition_support
 - b. by telephoning Student Services: (902) 424-7454
 - c. in person from the Department of Education (Reception), 2021 Brunswick Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia
 - d. from the schools themselves:
 - i. Landmark East School, 708 Main Street, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, B4P 1G4, (902) 542-2237, (1-800) 565-5887
 - ii. Bridgeway Academy, 3 Valleyford Avenue, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, B2X 1W8, (902) 464-0134
 - iii. Churchill Academy, 5 Crichton Avenue, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, B2Y 1P1, (902) 446-3410
2. Applications must be submitted to
Department of Education
Student Services Division
PO Box 578
Halifax, NS B3J 2S9
3. Applications must be received by **March 1** of the current year. However, applications after that date may be considered.
4. Applications must include
 - a. pertinent educational, medical, and/or specialist reports from qualified persons documenting the student's diagnosis as a student with special needs as defined in paragraph 1(a). Applications may be submitted without this documentation if the diagnosis is pending.
 - b. letter of acceptance at the designated special education private school for which tuition is requested
 - c. proof that the student has previously studied in a public school within Canada for at least one school year before the date of application, including any period of suspension
 - d. proof that the student is a resident of Nova Scotia

- e. a copy of the student's individualized program plan and/or evidence of an ongoing program planning process in a public school, accompanied by
 - i. an outline of the individualized programs and services proposed for the student in the designated special education private school for the upcoming school year; and/or meeting minutes regarding the ongoing program planning process

Decision-Making Process

A reviewer is appointed by the Minister of Education to review applications and to make a decision on eligibility for funding as per the *Education Act and Regulations*, Section 72.

Appeal Process

1. A student, or the parent/guardian on behalf of the student, may appeal
 - a. a determination under *Ministerial Education Act Regulations*, Subsection 72(3) that the student is not eligible to receive a funding unit or
 - b. a determination under *Ministerial Education Act Regulations*, Subsection 72(5) not to accept the rationale explaining the student's positive effects that attendance at the DSEPS will provide to the student
2. An appeal must be made within 30 days after notification of the decision as per Section 78(1) of the *Governor in Council Education Act Regulations*.

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Appendix A: Best Practices in Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities (84 page report)

Prepared for: Department of Education, Nova Scotia

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**Calgary Learning Centre
3930 – 20 Street SW
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February 6, 2009**

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Introduction

This report presents a review of best practice in the field of learning disabilities (LD) based on current research from North America, the United Kingdom and Australia and, to a lesser extent, other countries such as New Zealand, the Netherlands, and South Africa. The following questions guide this review of current research on best practice in the field of learning disabilities:

- Who are students with learning disabilities and how is "success" defined?
- What are "best practices" in teaching students with learning disabilities?
- How do various models of service delivery align with best practices in teaching students with LD?
- What are some examples of current practice in service delivery? How do they align with best practices?

Section One presents information about students with LD and discusses what "success" means for these students. Section Two addresses the "best practices" in teaching students with LD. Overall considerations of effective instruction are presented first and include:

- Assessment and Identification
- Individualized Program Plans
- Collaboration
- Meaningful Parent Involvement
- Ongoing Assessment
- Accommodations and Assistive Technology
- Self-advocacy
- Transition Planning

Next, instructional practices are explored. Best practices that apply across the school years are presented, followed by practices more specific to the early years and then to grades 3 through 12. Finally, additional emerging issues relevant to students with LD are presented, including co-existing AD/HD, the knowledge base of teachers and administrators, multicultural and second language issues in intervention and inclusive practices such as Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning.

In Section 3, the elements of best practice in teaching students with LD are used as a basis for exploring models of service delivery to determine how well they align with best practice. Examples of current practices in service delivery are provided to illustrate a variety of approaches to meeting the needs of students with LD at different age levels. Segregated special placements to more inclusive models are presented.

Section 1 – Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Defining and Describing Learning Disabilities

The development of the LD field in Canada parallels that of the United States. Compared to other special needs, learning disabilities were not recognized in the American educational system until the 1960s and actual provision for children with LD did not formally occur until the mid 1970s with the passage of Federal Legislation (Public Law 94-142). In Canada, the Montreal Children's Hospital Learning Centre was founded in 1960 by psychiatrist Mel Levinson. The purpose was to investigate the difficulties experienced by children who seemed to have average intelligence but who experienced significant difficulty with school functioning. Considerable leadership in the field has been provided by the "Association for Children with Learning Disabilities" (now the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada) founded in 1963 by a group of concerned parents.

Individuals with LD have average to above average intelligence but experience difficulties in processing information that affect learning. Learning disabilities have a neurological basis, are often hereditary and are life long. They represent the most common special education need in North America. For example, 57% of high school students with disabilities in public high schools in the United States have LD. A Statistics Canada survey of parents of children with disabilities conducted in 2001 found that four out of five children requiring special education services had LD (Uppal, Kohen and Kahn, 2006). In Alberta, students with LD are the largest group of students designated as having special education needs. It is estimated that 1 in 10 Canadians has a learning disability.

Canadian provinces have authority over education and there is no federal legislation related to LD resulting in variability in defining and diagnosing LD across the country. Most Canadian provinces accept the

following conceptual definition put forward by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada in 2002:

"Learning Disabilities refer to 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. Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision-making). Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- *oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding)*
- *reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension)*
- *written language (e.g. spelling and written expression)*
- *mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).*

Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking. Learning disabilities are lifelong. The way in which they are expressed may vary over an individual's lifetime, depending on the interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's strengths and needs. Learning disabilities are suggested by unexpected academic under-achievement or achievement which is maintained only by unusually high levels of effort and support.

Learning disabilities are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors or injury that alters brain functioning in a manner which affects one or more processes related to learning. These disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, socio-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation or ineffective teaching, although these factors may further complicate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities may co-exist with various conditions including attentional, behavioural and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions. For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community and workplace settings. The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include the provision of:

- specific skill instruction
- accommodations
- compensatory strategies
- self-advocacy skills.

As can be seen from the definition, students with LD experience diverse challenges, often hidden, that differ in terms of severity and the areas affected. There are many different patterns of strengths and needs among students with LD. Language processing is the most common area of difficulty. Considerable research has confirmed that the majority of children with LD experience phonological processing difficulties, with 80% of LD children having difficulty learning to read. Phonological awareness is a cognitive requisite for reading and is the most frequent impediment to learning early reading skills. Phonological awareness enables the learner to understand and manipulate smaller components in spoken language (e.g., adding, omitting, substituting sounds, or phonemes, within words;

understanding syllables within words; and putting words together into sentences), and provides the foundation for acquiring the alphabetic principle, word analysis, spelling and other high level skills.

Learning disabilities are not just confined to difficulties in reading, and can manifest in other areas such as visuospatial processing, executive functioning and reasoning, directionality, mathematics, and so on. All learning is directly affected by the student's memory and attention. Students with LD often have problems with their memory, a cognitive activity that is part of the executive system. Memory is the capacity to encode, process, hold, retrieve and manipulate information for as long as necessary to accomplish a task. Students with LD have difficulty holding and maintaining attention to task despite distraction or disturbance, forget instructions, struggle to keep track of complex tasks, and have particular difficulty with tasks requiring processing and storing information.

To add to the complexity, LD often co-exists with other disorders. The most common co-existing disorder is Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) with 30% to 50% of children with LD also having AD/HD. Adolescents with learning disabilities also often describe experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression. A person with LD can also have "twice-exceptional status", that is be formally diagnosed with more than one disorder (e.g., Gifted/LD).

The increasing diversity of the Canadian population is also adding to the complexity of practice in the field of LD. Multicultural and second language issues have an impact on the identification and diagnosis of LD, on interactions between parents and school personnel, and on strategies for intervention.

What does “success” mean for individuals with LD?

Individuals with LD have the potential to lead happy and productive lives and to make significant positive contributions to society and to the economy. However, when their difficulties are not recognized and appropriate interventions and supports are not provided throughout their school careers, there are negative long term consequences. In a recent report by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, *Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities (2007)*, an analysis of Canadian census data found that when compared with the general population, individuals with LD were:

- twice as likely to drop out of school
- significantly underachieving in literacy
- less likely to experience stable employment
- more likely to report higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety
- more likely to report poorer mental/physical health

In addition, individuals with LD are at an increased risk for lingering dependence on caregivers and are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system (Shrum, 2004).

Given these potential negative outcomes, it is critical that action be taken to increase the success of students with LD. In the long term, the goal is that adults with LD have positive interpersonal relationships, stable and meaningful employment, good mental and physical health, financial security and no involvement in criminal activity. Success includes completing high school and going on to the successful completion of some kind of post-secondary education. Six factors that contribute to the success of adults with LD are self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal-setting, support systems and emotional coping strategies.

During the school years, success is measured in many different ways:

- basic skill development: achievement of or movement towards age appropriate reading, written language and math skills
- ability to access age appropriate regular curriculum with minimal support from the teacher and with increasing independence as a learner
- demonstrated and observable use of compensatory strategies
- demonstrated knowledge and use of helpful accommodations and assistive technology
- demonstrated ability to “self-advocate” and self-monitor for success
- involvement in and understanding of planning for transitions that goes beyond one year
- pursuit of career options based on goals, interests and abilities
- appropriate and successful social interaction with peers and adults.

In the future, a potential measure of success may be to demonstrate changes in brain functioning as a result of intensive remedial programs for individuals with LD. Functional MRIs (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) allow neuroscientists to study the brain at work and have shown different brain activation patterns during reading tasks for good readers compared with individuals with LD characterized by severe reading difficulties. There is some evidence that intensive remedial reading instruction may actually change brain processes (Carnegie Mellon University, 2008).

Summary

One in ten Canadians has a learning disability. Students with LD form a large part of the school population. They have a range of complex needs that interfere with learning. Language processing difficulties that affect the acquisition of literacy skills are most common, but students with LD have difficulties that go beyond reading and a range of educational supports are

needed. Individuals with LD have the potential to be successful in school and in life when their difficulties are recognized and appropriate interventions and supports are provided in school.

Section 2 – What are “Best Practices” in Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities?

In a review of research and best practice in meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities conducted by the Calgary Learning Centre in 2000-2001, nine key components were identified as essential considerations. These components formed the basis for a resource developed for Alberta Education (Unlocking Potential: Key Components of Programming for Students with Learning Disabilities, 2002). The key components were: collaboration, meaningful parent involvement, identification and assessment, ongoing assessment, individualized program planning, transition planning, self-advocacy, accommodations and instructional practices.

The current review confirmed the importance of the above components for effective programming. Advances in knowledge and emerging themes were found to relate to these key components and include: changing approaches to identifying learning disabilities, an emphasis on early intervention and evidence-based practice, recognition of adolescent literacy issues and advances in Assistive Technology. Overall considerations in meeting the needs of students with LD are presented first. The following components are considered:

- Assessment and Identification
- Individualized Program Plans
- Collaboration
- Meaningful Parent Involvement
- Ongoing Assessment
- Accommodations
- Assistive Technology as an Accommodation
- Self-Advocacy
- Transition Planning

Next, instructional practices are explored. Best practices that apply across the school years are presented, followed by practices more specific to the early years and then to grades 3 through 12. Finally, additional emerging issues relevant to students with LD are presented, including co-existing AD/HD, the knowledge base of teachers and administrators, multicultural and second language issues in intervention and inclusive practices such as Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning.

Overall Considerations in Meeting the Needs of Students with LD

The components presented below all contribute to effective programming for students with LD. They are not isolated, but influence and complement one another and support instructional practices.

Assessment and Identification

Since the term "learning disabilities" was first used in 1962 by Dr. Samuel Kirk, the field has struggled to define the concept of LD and to operationalize the definition. In diagnosing LD, psychologists have typically explored the following:

- discrepancy (uneven abilities, underachievement)
- processing deficits (intrinsic to the individual)
- exclusionary factors (cannot be primarily accounted for by other conditions environmental factors or cultural or linguistic diversity).

In practice, the emphasis on identifying LD students who are eligible for special education services has resulted in reliance on a discrepancy between intelligence test scores and achievement as the criteria for identifying LD. However, at the 2002 LD Summit in the United States, there was consensus that the ability-achievement discrepancy was "neither necessary nor sufficient" for LD identification. Criticisms of the discrepancy criteria include:

- intelligence test scores do not predict the ability to benefit from remediation in reading
- intelligence test scores are not synonymous with "cognitive abilities"
- tendency to regard those with LD as one group of similar individuals in contrast to the heterogeneity of this group
- bias towards culturally and linguistically diverse populations
- problematic psychometric properties of tests
- lack of consideration of the role of inadequate instruction and lack of effective remediation for some students
- delay in service provision given that the discrepancy requires students to fail academically ("wait to fail" philosophy).

In the United States, federal policy, namely the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was amended in 2004 to reflect a more current understanding of the concept of LD. The requirement of an intellectual-achievement discrepancy was removed and the Act allowed the use of "Response to Intervention" (RTI) data as part of the evaluation for special education to assist in the identification and determination of eligibility of students with LD. The core concepts of RTI include the systematic application of scientific, research-based interventions in general education; measurement of student responses to the interventions; and use of the response data to change the intensity or type of subsequent intervention. RTI will be described further in a later section.

A recent review of Canadian provincial and territorial policy information related to LD found that the majority of policies retained a discrepancy between intelligence test scores and achievement as a defining feature of LD even though most Canadian provinces accept the cognitive processing conceptual definition put forward by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada in 2002 (Kozey and Siegel, 2008).

This is a time of change and transition in the assessment and identification of LD in North America. There is a desire to move away from reliance on the IQ-achievement discrepancy as criteria for identifying LD and alternative approaches are being explored. As we wait for research to validate new approaches to LD assessment and identification, recommended practices include:

- early identification - the earlier, the better eliminating the “wait to fail” philosophy
- systems in place to identify LD at all ages with the understanding that the difficulties of some students will not manifest until the demands of the environment increase
- a comprehensive problem-solving and collaborative team planning approach that includes looking at a student’s response to instruction/intervention
- use of standardized tests to assess basic psychological processes with careful consideration of the appropriateness of the measures for students from different cultures and language groups
- multiple sources of information: academic, cognitive, oral language proficiency, mental health; classroom observations and indirect data (teacher and parent reports)
- exploration of discrepancies across abilities
- examination of the link between processing deficits and academic difficulties
- consideration of environmental influences: social, cultural, familial and contextual.

Individualized Program Plans

When a student with LD is identified as having special education needs, most education systems in North America require an individualized plan for that student, typically referred to as an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) or

an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The term IPP will be used in this report. Some provinces make IPPs available to students not identified as exceptional but who still require accommodations, program modifications or alternative programs (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). IPPs currently have an important role in supporting students with LD given that the IPP process is typically the mechanism guiding joint planning and monitoring of success. These joint team plans are intended to involve the parent or caregivers who can provide personal information and will be in the position of supporting the student in the future, and school-based personnel and/or other professionals involved with the student. Described as a working document, the IPP is based on diagnostic information and written to outline a plan of action including a summary of goals, objectives and accommodations to provide appropriate supports and educational instruction targeting the unique needs of a student. IPPs are used to record student progress, and to help create smooth transitions throughout the student's school career.

A number of areas have been identified as challenges in the development, implementation and maintenance of IPPs, including:

- level of collaboration and communication that occurs among the IPP team members
- level of investment of teachers in the IPP process - do they view the actions in the document as 'do-able' and meaningful?
- level of teachers' knowledge of LD and methods for ongoing assessment, intervention and accommodation; professional development dedicated to the IPP process
- understanding of necessary elements for smooth transitions, particularly to secondary education

- methods for efficiently incorporating goals and objectives of IPP into all content areas in daily classroom experiences, regardless of placement or program delivery model
- time available for developing, maintaining and reviewing the IPP.

The following is a synopsis of the literature on common elements of useful, meaningful and effective IPPs, and therefore more effective programming for the student with LD:

- Student-focus is central with active student participation in the ongoing process.
- Students, teachers, involved school personnel and external professionals, and caregivers and/or parents must value the document as a necessary foundation and guide for supporting students with LD and have a shared understanding of the intent of the document.
- All teachers involved with the student should be versed in the contents of the IPP.
- Sufficient time must be allocated by administration for teachers and/or support personnel to develop, implement, maintain and regularly review the IPP.
- Timelines must be established to review and update the IPP to ensure it is a meaningful and fluid document responding to, and reflecting the strengths and needs of the student.
- Various assessment measures must be conducted to monitor the student's progress, including specialized assessment (e.g., psycho-educational assessment), classroom assessment, and assessment of progress related to IPP goals. Where possible, the student should be included in monitoring (e.g., self-reporting through interview or checklists).

- Goals must be meaningful to students, particularly in secondary school. Students should be included in writing their goals with post-school interests and goals in mind.
- Terminology of IPP, such as 'goals', 'objectives', 'accommodations', 'strategies', and so forth must be understood by those writing the document and written in a reader-friendly way to ensure understanding amongst the team members.
- Support services must not only be identified in the document, but a team member must be dedicated to follow-through on making sure the service is made available for the student (e.g., occupational therapy).
- A transition plan for the student's new learning environment (e.g., new classroom, new grade) should be in place at the start of each year.
- Meaningful parent involvement is necessary both for informed consent and to help goals and objectives generalize to environments other than school.

Collaboration

No one person or one profession has all of the knowledge and skills to meet the complex needs of students with LD. The “learning team” of the student, parents, teacher, support personnel and specialists is most effective when administrative support fosters teamwork and collaborative problem-solving. “Schools that succeed in changing practice are those that start with the practice and modify the school structure to accommodate it” (Elmore as cited in Deshler et. al, 2006, p. 5). For effective programming for students with LD, the environment must be structured to allow for differentiated instruction (the act of fine-tuning instruction to address individual strengths and needs of every learner), time for preparation, planning time, team meetings, flexible programming options and professional development. For example, the opportunity for teachers to plan

and coordinate instruction to teach and reinforce strategies in every classroom creates a consistent delivery of information regardless of the content area, thereby promoting the generalized use of a strategy. Teamwork provides the opportunity for organizing small groups to facilitate delivering more intensive instruction often needed by students with LD. For instance, teachers can coordinate how much homework is assigned and schedule tests to prevent overlap and to provide ample time for studying.

Classroom teachers need the support of personnel with knowledge about LD. Through team teaching, coaching, planning and discussion, all personnel can gain skills to be more effective in teaching students with LD. Regular education teachers often find the development and implementation of IPPs to be challenging and they benefit from the support of school personnel with training in the field of LD.

Collaboration beyond the school level is also recognized as important. The school alone cannot meet all of the students' needs, particularly for students with LD who may also have social, emotional and mental health concerns. There is a growing emphasis on the need for schools and community agencies to work together to meet the diverse needs of students and their families. Such collaboration requires being open to other organizations and institutions in the community, cooperation among stakeholders from these various organizations and coordination of their actions.

Meaningful Parent Involvement

There is an important connection between constructive and meaningful parent involvement and student achievement. Studies from the 1980s to the 1990s highlight the ongoing and reoccurring theme of “higher academic achievement, improved school attendance, increased cooperative behaviour, and lower dropout rates” with increased parental involvement

(Bryan and Burstein, 2004, p. 217). Historical approaches to special education viewed the teacher as expert and the parent as a passive participant. Parent roles in education are moving from passive recipient to knowledgeable consumer. Factors contributing to this shift include increased efforts by professionals to empower and include parents in the educational decision-making process and to reduce their 'expert' role as service provider, and because of the accessibility of information on the internet. While this shift has been deemed a positive and necessary move, it has also increased parental criticism of the education system.

Barriers to meaningful parent involvement in the support of students with LD are well researched. Some examples offered by both teachers and parents include frustration with confusing educational jargon, information overload at meetings, lack of teacher or parent follow-through after meetings, limited time available for communication between school and parent, and challenges with communication between home and school. Socio-cultural factors such as financial status, cultural and/or language differences between home and school, and lack of knowledge about how to navigate the educational system are common themes. In addition, families may experience stress related to the social and behavioural problems often experienced by children with LD (Dyson, 2003). Peer rejection and social difficulties are most significant for children who have both LD and AD/HD (Wiener, 2004) and are of concern to parents.

The following strategies are recommended to increase meaningful parent involvement:

- Supporting parents to increase their knowledge about LD, for example, suggesting print and non-print resources, connecting them with parent support associations such as the Learning Disabilities Association

- Being sensitive to the possibility that the parents of a student with LD may also have LD and thus have difficulty with oral and written language. Determining their communication preferences can be supportive (e.g., written notes, email, telephone)
- Empowering parents by recognizing their point-of-view and socio-cultural situation, including stress factors and cultural differences in how they regard learning, education and disabilities
- Communicating with parents and seeking frequent input from parents to ensure their productive involvement through the use of an agenda, meetings, and inclusion in the process of developing the student's IPP.
- Employing verbal communication techniques, such as balancing positive and constructive feedback regarding the student's challenges and the use of "I" statements to avoid blaming,
- Providing clear expectations regarding how to support their child at home in a collaborative problem-solving way - what is realistic for the specific family?
- Developing a guide for parents of students with special needs and informing them of policies, procedures for accessing services, IPPs, transition plans, and ways to navigate the system, such as *"The Learning Team"* developed by Alberta Education.

Ongoing Assessment

Ongoing monitoring of student progress has many benefits for students with LD. Ongoing assessment within specific areas is necessary to ensure:

- timely and appropriate adjustments to programming are made
- appropriate accommodations can be chosen
- the learning strengths as well as the needs of the student can be considered when developing the IPP

- a baseline of personal strengths and needs is established as early as possible in the student's school career so that repeated evaluation can occur to monitor progress
- a plan for transition can be created
- immediate and corrective feedback can occur
- pacing of instruction is appropriate.

Different levels of assessment are necessary when gathering information. These include: norm-referenced achievement testing (comparison of student's performance to same age peers); informal observational reports (e.g., documentation for screening purposes); criterion-referenced testing (comparing a child's performance to a list of skills, e.g., a math test that assesses long division skills); in-class assessment (analysis of daily class work including task and error analysis); and curriculum-based assessment (daily or biweekly assessment of in-class student work and performance, e.g., frequent timed tests in calculation and progress is charted).

Formative assessment is particularly beneficial. Direct and frequent measures of reading, writing and math can provide information to improve instruction and increase the achievement of students. The immediate and corrective feedback is particularly helpful to students (Ysseldyke, 2001).

Other assessments include compiling a portfolio to create a chronological representation of a student's growth; authentic assessment (student performs a task that in a real-world setting such as identifying flora and fauna on a field trip); dynamic assessment (consideration given to student's performance and their thought processes in executing a task, as well as their response to intervention, e.g. interact with a student as they execute a math problem and observe the student's understanding, ability to recognize and respond to error analysis, and response to intervention); and, strengths-based assessment (an assessment of the student's competencies

to determine how to utilize their strengths to help them compensate for their LD).

Assessment in the classroom can include observation of the student, reviewing student work; investigating progress of particular skills (e.g., reading comprehension), monitoring the development and use of learning strategies and work habits; understanding and addressing attitude towards themselves as learners, of school, and of specific subject areas; daily functioning skills, identifying and monitoring social/emotional or behavioural skills; and diagnostic assessment.

There are a number of considerations in the ongoing assessment of students with LD:

- A variety of assessment tools should be used to capture data as one single test will not necessarily reveal change; the student's performance may vary from one situation to the next, depending on his challenges and response to the type of measurement; or, the choice of assessment may not fully capture the desired information.
- The intent of the assessment (what information is desired) must be carefully considered, as well as the test format. For instance, to gain information about a student's knowledge of a topic, the assessment should not pose a barrier, e.g. a student with weak fine motor and written language skills but stronger verbal skills could be assessed via an oral exam.
- The same measurements should be used when gathering information about progress in specific skill areas. For instance, an Informal Reading Inventory has several versions available.
- Students should be involved where possible in assessing personal growth to encourage self-monitoring, independence and self-advocacy. Areas might include: goal setting, good habits of learning

(e.g., using time wisely, organizational skills, building reading endurance), or actively using learning strategies.

- High expectations for each student and personalized, respectful, caring interactions between teachers and students are key features of ongoing monitoring which allow for a supportive learning environment that celebrates growth and achievement.

Accommodations

In addition to the key elements of best practice for instruction, a student's challenges resulting from their LD can be offset with accommodations that 'level the playing field'. "An accommodation is a change or alteration to the regular way a student is expected to learn, complete assignments or participate in the classroom" (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 47).

Accommodations include: classroom or physical changes, such as alternative seating; instructional changes, such as providing notes for a student with difficulty in written language ; and, changes in testing and evaluation, such as providing extended time. Examples of accommodations to address a range of difficulties are presented in Appendix 1. Accommodations do not give the student with LD an advantage over their peers. Accommodations ensure that students with LD are given the same opportunities as other students to access information, to demonstrate their knowledge and to succeed. Accommodations do not replace strategic and responsive teaching or the need to continue the development of basic skills. They should not be overused or reduce the teacher's expectations for a student. For example, providing access to a computer to a student with severe fine-motor challenges does not necessarily mean the teacher eliminates working on letter formation or fluency in handwriting.

The following best practices contribute to the positive and effective use of accommodations:

- The choice of accommodations should be unique to the strengths and needs of each student.
- Students may need to be taught how to use an accommodation, and should be given opportunity to practice before a major assignment (e.g., proper use of a calculator, learning to use speech-to-text software).
- Students should be involved in selecting accommodations. Often, teachers choose what they believe to be an appropriate accommodation but the student may refuse to use it because it makes them look different from their peers, or they find it difficult to use.
- Accommodations should be included on the student's IPP to make certain the student will have them available on diploma/provincial exams.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the accommodation and ensuring that the student understands the benefits are important to developing self-advocacy.
- Collaboration should occur between teachers so the student may consistently use accommodations in all appropriate settings (e.g., a laptop in every classroom to take notes) and to facilitate teachers' recognition and understanding of the intent for the accommodation.
- Appropriate adjustments may be required to allow the student to use an accommodation (e.g., sit next to a plug-in for a laptop).

Assistive Technology as an Accommodation

"For people without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For people with disabilities, technology makes things possible (Cardinali and Gordon, 2002). Assistive technology (AT) enhances learning for students with LD, and can range from simple "low-tech" tools such as raised or highlighted lines on paper, to "mid-tech" tools such as a talking calculator, to more complex "high-tech" tools such as screen reading software.

As with any accommodation, AT must be specifically chosen to address a particular need and to allow for increased independence when executing a task. Not all AT is appropriate for all students with LD and some AT may cause frustration if a student's difficulties interfere with its use. Ongoing monitoring should occur regarding the effectiveness of the AT. As the student matures and expectations change, the choice of AT may also change.

Success in choosing AT involves including the student, parent/caregiver and the school team to ensure it will be appropriate, accepted, and consistently used. Specialists such as occupational therapists should be included where appropriate to assist with AT choice. Certain technology may already be available and accessible to all students in the classroom in a differentiated learning environment, and so consideration must be given to what is already available, and what supports may need to be put in place for the student with LD to use their accommodation. Will those adjustments be realistic or possible? For instance, for a student to benefit from screen reading software, they must have access to a computer and possibly a scanner whenever reading is involved, and will require direct instruction/training and supported practice to learn to use the software. The **SETT** framework developed by Joy Zabala is useful when considering AT for a student: **S**tudent needs and strengths, **E**nvironmental considerations, **T**asks that will be supported, and **T**ools and strategies needed to address the task.

AT must be clearly linked to goals and objectives in the student's IPP. Outlining AT in the student's IPP also ensures access to whatever tools are needed in the classroom environment and for specific activities, such as provincial/diploma exams. As well, AT should be considered in transition-planning. For instance, as reading becomes more complex and extensive, consistent access to reading software may become more appropriate and necessary for a student with LD in high school who previously was able to cope with extended time as an accommodation.

Self-advocacy

Self-advocacy involves taking action on one's own behalf and is related to success in school and in the workplace for persons with LD. Strong self-advocacy skills have been shown to facilitate smoother transitions for the learner from year-to-year, and to post-secondary education. A student's ability to effectively and constructively advocate on their own behalf requires a clear understanding of their abilities and challenges, knowledge of effective interventions necessary for learning and skills to communicate this knowledge to others. Self-advocacy is a component skill of self-determination which is described as self-knowledge (identifying one's own likes, dislikes, wants, needs, strengths, and limitations), the need for autonomy and control in decision making; and opportunities to express one's needs and interests.

Research has clearly shown that students with LD often struggle with self-advocacy. They may have minimal understanding of themselves and limited ability to articulate their strengths and needs. They may lack self-confidence, be reluctant to seek help and take a passive approach to learning. In addition, teachers may not effectively support the development of self-advocacy skills because they hold traditional belief systems of adult and student roles regarding responsibility for learning do not recognize or

value self-advocacy or lack the awareness and skills to promote self-advocacy.

Supporting the development of self-advocacy skills beginning early on in school is essential for the long term success of students with LD. The seven most frequently discussed components of self-advocacy instruction are:

- making choices and decision-making
- setting goals
- problem-solving
- management and evaluation of self
- skills for self-advocacy
- participation in the planning and executing of IPP meetings
- awareness of self as a learner and person (Fiedler and Danneker, 2008).

A student's involvement in the IPP process has been found to be important for developing self-advocacy skills. Students who are able to participate in their program plans and lead meetings are more likely to:

- develop effective communication of personal strengths and needs
- demonstrate a vested interest and understanding of goals
- request suitable accommodations (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, and Johnson, 2004; Torgeson, Miner and Shen, 2004).

The following general strategies promote the development of self-advocacy skills:

- involve students in making decisions about their education
- help students understand their learning strengths and needs
- model and teach appropriate self-advocacy skills
- help students set appropriate and realistic goals for their learning (Alberta Education, 2002).

Transition Planning

Including the student in the process of transition planning is critical to promoting self-advocacy. A transition is when something changes in the student's world, such as routines, relationships, settings, and roles.

Educational transitions include moving from grade to grade, moving through divisions, changing schools or programs, moving between more specialized programs and the regular classroom, and moving from grade school to post-secondary or job related settings.

Effective transition planning begins early, is collaborative, and involves the student as much as possible. Student involvement varies depending on their age, maturity, skill sets and ability; older students may be more involved in exploring career interests, monitoring their own progress, or exploring post-secondary options. Raising the student's level of awareness of personal strengths and needs, and effective compensatory strategies helps position the student for successful and independent transitions. Students with LD benefit from supported opportunities to practice skills and strategies that will be important in a new learning situation; opportunities to become familiar with a new setting, the people and the expectations prior to the change; and opportunities to practice responding appropriately to novel situations and forecasting consequences. To facilitate transition planning, the key participants must have knowledge of what is required to make effective transitions. For instance, the learning team must understand the steps necessary for a student with LD in high school to prepare for transition to a post-secondary setting: What documents are necessary for the student to access accommodations and supports? How much time is needed to get ready? What does the student need to do to prepare?

Transition planning involves identifying the skills and strategies that a student will need for a future change early on and planning instruction to develop them. The student's readiness to make a transition is often part of

the decision-making in transition planning. Adequate information regarding the student's strengths and needs facilitates appropriate choices for transitions. Considerations in the literature often include the student's level of independence as a learner such as basic skill development, their ability to use learning strategies, their effective use of accommodations and assistive technology and their ability to self-advocate. The demands of the new learning environment and access to supports are also considered.

Effective Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities

The components described above are important to programming for students with LD. They influence and support classroom practice. There is no "one size fits all" approach to the instruction of students with LD. These students vary in the severity of their needs, in the pattern of their strengths and difficulties, and in the range and types of supports they need across the lifespan. They need support that begins in kindergarten and continues to the end of high school and leads to their transition to post-secondary studies and the job market. This section focuses on the elements of effective instruction for students with LD across the school years. Overall best practices are described followed by more specific considerations that address the changing needs across the school years from the early years to grades 3 through 12.

Effective instruction for students with learning disabilities is explicit and intensive and combines direct instruction with strategy instruction. Effective instruction is strategic and responsive to the specific information processing and learning needs of students.

Explicit instruction involves systematic, clear, overt, detailed explanations. Concepts, steps and procedures are demonstrated and the connections, rationale and reasoning are clearly described.

Intensive instruction refers to the amount of time in instruction and how engaged students are in learning experiences. Intensive instruction involves longer periods of instruction, opportunities for highly individualized learning experiences, such as individual and/or small group instruction and instructional techniques that increase student engagement such as progressive pacing, frequent question-answer interactions and frequent activities that require a physical response (e.g., pointing, writing, raising hands, repeating) and questioning techniques that evoke reflection and thought).

Direct instruction is teacher-directed explicit instruction. Objectives are clearly specified and taught in specific small steps. Feedback, guided and independent practice and practice for transfer to other situations are provided.

Strategy instruction involves teaching students "how to learn". Students are taught how to approach tasks and to use knowledge to solve problems. Learning strategies, often referred to as cognitive strategies, address planning, performing and evaluating performance. Self-monitoring is emphasized. Students gain greater independence as learners through the use of strategies. Some of the strategies may be viewed as "compensatory strategies", that is, they enable the student to bypass an area of difficulty. The effective teaching of strategies to promote independent application requires explicit teaching through the following steps developed by Schumaker and Deshler (1992) of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning Disabilities:

- pretest
- describe
- model
- verbal practice

- controlled practice
- grade appropriate practice
- posttest, and
- generalization.

In this model, the students learn the rationale for each strategy, verbally rehearse and actively employ the strategy in controlled tasks, and eventually apply the strategy to grade-relevant material. This metacognitive approach to instruction is appropriate at all grade levels, with an increasing emphasis in later years on approaches to problem-solving, organization, listening and note-taking, study and test-taking skills to foster independence and self-advocacy. Examples of metacognitive strategies include the use of visual organizers, intentionally activating prior knowledge and linking it to new information, and memory strategies.

Combined direct instruction and strategy instruction is most effective for students with LD. A meta-analysis of intervention studies by Swanson, Hoskyn and Lee (1999) supported a combined model with the following elements:

- sequencing; e.g., breaking down the task, fading of prompts or cues, sequencing short activities, giving step-by-step prompts
- drill-repetition and practice-review; e.g., daily testing of skills, frequent short opportunities for review and practice distributed over time, sequenced review, daily feedback and or weekly review
- segmentation; breaking down a targeted skill into smaller units and then synthesizing the parts into a whole
- directed questioning and responses; e.g., the teacher asks process-related and/or content-related questions; students are directed to ask questions; teacher and students engage in dialogue

- controlling the difficulty of processing demands of a task; that is, tasks are sequenced from easy to difficult and only necessary hints and probes are provided
- technology; e.g., use of computers, structured text or flow charts to facilitate presentation, emphasis on pictorial representations, use of specific or structured material, use of media to facilitate presentation and feedback
- modeling of problem-solving steps by teacher
- instruction in small groups
- strategy cues, reminders to use strategies; e.g., teacher verbalizes problem-solving steps, think-aloud models are used, teacher presents benefits of strategy use or procedures.

Reading instruction has been a major emphasis in intervention studies because 80% of students with LD experience language and reading difficulties. The overall best practices for teaching students with LD are evident in four themes that emerged from an investigation of the characteristics of teachers who effectively motivated and delivered early reading instruction to students with LD:

Quality of instruction – Delivery of quality instruction by effective teachers is flexible and geared towards student needs in an intensive, deliberate and cohesive way. All material is clearly interconnected and meaningful to the student, and instructional strategies are consistently integrated into the teaching in an explicit manner so students recognize the benefits of utilizing strategies.

Response to student needs – Teachers frequently interact with students during group instruction and individual work-time, check often for student errors in a positive and private manner, and provide positive, consistent and

constructive feedback to behavioural issues occur in a timely manner so that instruction and learning are minimally disrupted.

Sociocultural climate – Teachers provide a positive sociocultural climate; their classrooms are open, caring, supportive and positive. Purposeful academic activities are executed with the intent to promote a nurturing environment, and teachers display an observable curiosity and intentional questioning of student interests, family life, and events outside of the classroom. Teachers address student errors in a respectful and private manner with a spoken acceptance that errors are part of effective learning. Positive student interaction and peer support are encouraged.

Self-regulation – Self-regulation of behaviours is promoted, and student autonomy is encouraged by accepting student contribution while maintaining clear structure and expectations. Students are expected to make choices relevant to their learning, and encouraged to acknowledge and monitor their effective use of strategies (Seonjin, Brownwell, Bishop and Dingle, 2008).

The above themes reinforce the importance of the overall classroom climate and behaviour management. A positive learning environment and high levels of student engagement in learning are essential. A school-wide behaviour program is important to support the efforts of individual teachers.

Intervention in the Early School Years

Early intervention during the first three years of schooling is essential for children with LD. A primary focus of research over the past two decades has been on the prevention of reading failure. The early years are the focus for the prevention of reading difficulties and children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely "catch up" (Lentz, 1988; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Torgesen, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). The development of literacy skills is the primary focus of instruction in the early

school years for students with LD, or for students who are at risk for LD. Critical considerations include early identification and early intervention for reading difficulties.

Early identification of reading difficulties

Ongoing monitoring and built-in opportunities for screening for literacy problems should exist in kindergarten and the early grades to help guide programming decisions. Several measures should be taken over the course of a year to update information and to ensure emerging issues are recognized. Schatschneider and Torgesen (2004) found that the best predictors of early word reading difficulties are:

- letter-name knowledge in early kindergarten
- letter-sound knowledge mid to late kindergarten
- efficiency in phonemic decoding and fluency when reading text measures in mid-grade one (when children are beginning to read)

Early Intervention Strategies

A multi-tiered approach to providing early intervention in reading has gained momentum in the United States and is referred to as "Response to Intervention (RTI)". The framework developed in the United States is primarily a prevention model and a response to the Federal "No Child Left Behind" legislation that is directed towards the literacy development of all children in general education. The framework is also seen as contributing to the identification of children with reading disabilities – those who do not respond positively to increasingly intense instruction are referred for special education services. RTI is a process that emphasizes how well students respond to changes in instruction and is designed to identify at-risk children early, to provide access to needed interventions, and to help identify children with disabilities. The core concepts of RTI include: 1) use of scientific, research-based interventions in general education; 2)

measurement of student response to the intervention; and 3) use of response data to modify the type, frequency and intensity of intervention. RTI involves a multi-tiered framework and refers to an array of procedures and is not a specific model, test or single procedure:

- Tier 1: High quality instructional and behavioural supports for all students in general education
- Tier 2: More specialized prevention or remediation within general education for students whose performance and rate of progress lag behind peers. This is typically small group tutoring
- Tier 3: Intensive, systematic and specialized instruction and comprehensive evaluation by a multidisciplinary team to determine eligibility for special education services.

There is currently considerable debate about the effectiveness of large-scale implementation of RTI in the United States. The knowledge base about RTI is developing, but at present more is unknown than is known and continued research is required. Debate surrounds what constitutes "scientific, research based interventions". In a position paper about evidence-based reading instruction, the International Reading Association (2002) has argued that evidence-based "practices" (actions teachers take and the practices in which they routinely engage children) for teaching reading can be identified, but that evidence-based "programs" (materials teachers use) have not been identified. They emphasize the importance of the teacher's knowledge of practices and flexibility in adjusting or responding to the specific needs of students. Others have criticized the formula-like approach to evidence-based practices that could ultimately limit teacher's responses to individual differences in the classroom. Most importantly, professional wisdom and knowledge possessed by teachers is critical in individualizing instruction (Cook, Tankersley and Webb, 2008; Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes and Richardson, 1996).

Instruction in literacy

The focus of literacy instruction during the first three years of schooling for all students should be “balanced”, combining 'meaning' and 'code' emphasis:

- focus on mastering the alphabetic principle, letter/sound relationships, rhyming, phonemic awareness (separating and working with sounds) in kindergarten
- teaching and reinforcing more complex phonological skills, such as segmenting, blending and deleting phonemes (sounds) in grade one via a multisensory approach
- providing a "literacy-rich" setting with ample and intensive opportunities for reading and writing practice based on themes as a way to organize instruction
- increasing focus on word identification strategies, the elements of text, metacognition, vocabulary development, and strategies specific to comprehension and monitoring.

Children with LD affecting the acquisition of literacy skills generally struggle with phonological awareness affecting letter-sound association, fluent sight-word recognition, and phonetically deciphering unknown words. They require more explicit systematic direct instruction and strategy instruction; more intense (individual or small group) instruction and more time devoted to teaching and learning to read. Critical levels of phonological awareness can be developed through carefully planned instruction, and this development has a significant influence on children's reading and spelling achievement (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Bradley & Bryant, 1985; Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1989, 1991). Researchers have suggested that intensive literacy instruction (up to one hour per day) may be necessary for students with severe LD at all grade levels.

Instruction across Content Areas

While 80% of students with learning disabilities experience language and reading difficulties, their difficulties go beyond the area of reading to other academic areas and their cognitive processing difficulties affect performance on many learning tasks and social interactions. Students with LD require instructional strategies that support their difficulties in the metacognitive domain, that is, in problem-solving and organization and in the information processing domain (language, attention, memory, visual-spatial functioning, etc.). Examples of strategies for effective instruction across content areas include:

- establishing clear classroom routines and expectations
- modeling simple think-aloud strategies
- using visual referents to help with the organization of thinking
- using multisensory approaches
- teaching strategies for remembering new information
- intentional teaching of new vocabulary
- actively involving the students by requesting paraphrasing and rephrasing to monitor understanding.

Social Domain

Explicit instruction and strategy instruction are also effective in developing social skills. Attention should be given to developing social skills through problem-solving, modeling appropriate behaviour and providing explicit and specific feedback to reinforce positive behaviours.

Grades 3 - 12

Instruction needs to be responsive to the changing needs of students as they progress through school. This section addresses the overarching concerns for students with LD in elementary through to grade 12. Specific attention will be given to what these students require as curriculum demands

in literacy, math and other content areas change and become more sophisticated and complex.

The move from grade two to three is challenging for most students as they transition from instruction in how to read to using reading to access information. There are increased demands for well-developed literacy skills, for the effective communication of ideas and for the demonstration of learning through expressive language and written work. Students with LD often continue to require intensive basic skill instruction and supported practice well beyond their peers to develop basic literacy skills. Mathematical skills become increasingly important as well, and competent literacy skills directly affect performance in mathematics and other content areas.

Adolescents with LD deserve access to the highest academic challenges matched to their cognitive ability, yet their LD may be a barrier to success as complex language tasks in all content areas increase in junior and senior high, and the demand for independence, effective organizational strategies and adequate memory become essential. Accommodations, differentiated instruction, modifications to curriculum and explicit and direct instruction in learning strategies are crucial to ensure the student can successfully access the curriculum. Based on research exploring the needs of adolescent learners with LD, Deshler et al. (2006) concluded that the intensity of instruction should vary depending on the severity of the disability, be comprehensive in nature, and be well-coordinated amongst teachers. Finally, ongoing assessment must occur to determine whether accommodations or more intensive instruction (or both) is needed to ensure equal opportunity for learning and demonstration of knowledge across content areas.

Instruction in Literacy

Researchers and practitioners are increasingly recognizing the importance of studying adolescent literacy problems (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; NJCLD, 2008; Torgesen et. al, 2007). Torgesen et al. (2007) compiled a guidance document based on meta-analysis of best practices in developing literacy skills from grade 4 to 12 and listed the following recommendations for improving literacy-related instruction in the content areas for all students:

- explicit instruction and supportive practice in the use of effective comprehension strategies throughout the school day
- increase the amount and quality of open, sustained discussion of reading content
- set and maintain high standards for text, conversation, questions, and vocabulary
- increase students' motivation and engagement with reading
- teach essential content knowledge so that all students master critical concepts.

Effective communication of ideas and information via reading, writing, speaking and listening, and synthesis and evaluation of what is heard and read are essential in junior and senior high. Without focused teaching and appropriate supports, research has demonstrated adolescent students with LD do not adequately demonstrate their knowledge of age-level curriculum, and increasingly experience frustration and a lowered sense of self as a learner. Lack of appropriate support can lead to inappropriate program placements in high school that do not provide sufficient cognitive challenge, and contribute to the student drop-out rate.

Reading

Literacy is a multi-faceted and complex process that may take students with LD longer to acquire. Even though a student with LD may have positively responded to intensive explicit early intervention in phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle and word identification strategies, they may continue to struggle with reading fluency. This means they are not able to automatically apply the skills and reading is slow and laboured which hinders acquisition of knowledge and speed of learning. Therefore, it is imperative that fluency and reading comprehension strategies continue to be intensively addressed for students with LD in the elementary years and beyond. Prosody, or attending to meaning while reading, is a key component of reading fluency and a strong indicator of whether reading comprehension is occurring. Therefore, teachers must also deliberately encourage prosody to develop word recognition skills and subsequently comprehension skills.

Torgesen et al. (2007) offered the following conclusions from their meta-analysis of instructional research focused on struggling readers in the elementary years. The principles are also applicable to junior and senior high:

- Schools must provide superior instruction that varies in intensity and focus depending on the student's challenges in word-level and comprehension skills. Professionals specifically trained in the area of reading are appropriate and necessary in upper elementary and beyond. Reading accuracy and fluency are specific areas of concern
- Components of effective literacy instruction is the same for students with and without LD and include developing skills for applying reading comprehension at all points in reading, vocabulary knowledge,

motivating and engaging assignments, and improving knowledge of content

- Carefully coordinated instruction between reading specialists (resource teachers) and general educators so that common curriculum provides the foundation for teaching and practicing strategies.

Balanced reading instruction of both word-level and comprehension interventions is necessary to help struggling readers surpass the fourth grade “hump” experienced by many students and to allow the learner to acquire advanced comprehension strategies to compete in the working world. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 2008) compiled a report to describe the problems, consequences and factors of adolescent low literacy, and presented guiding principles for ways to assess and support students, and for professional development. Strategies previously mentioned in the elementary section pertain to older adolescents. The following is a synthesis of major considerations evidenced in the research for explicit instruction in reading specifically vital for students with LD in grades 4 through 12:

- Appropriately leveled and engaging (high interest/low vocabulary) materials both in print and computer format
- Strategies for accurately recording and remembering salient information via analysis and synthesis strategies
- Strategies unique to understanding and comprehending narrative (fiction) text (e.g., TELLS – (T) study story Titles; (E) Examine and skim pages for clues; (L,L) look for important and difficult words; and (S) think about Story settings)
- Strategies unique to understanding expository (factual/informational) text (e.g., MULTIPASS strategy: 1. become familiar /overview main

ideas and organization 2. get specific information by reading study questions guessing, checking; 3. self-test)

- Strategies to understand and use varied symbol systems
- Strategies to efficiently use the internet
- Critical thinking and reflection skills.

Guided reading is an instructional strategy appropriate for every grade level to support all students as they progress in learning to read. Teaching and then concentrated supported practice of various reading strategies to small groups of students enables the teacher to monitor students' progress and use of reading strategies in a strategic way with a goal to create independent readers. Guided reading involves pre-reading strategies, such as predicting, pre-vocabulary instruction, and activating prior knowledge; ongoing reading strategies, such as prompting and asking questions, summary and paraphrasing, and providing constructive feedback regarding the use of strategies (e.g., using contextual cues, decoding); and, post-reading strategies, such as reviewing what was learned and asking the student to summarize using their own words. Guided reading provides the foundation for adapting reading for specific learner needs, such as providing leveled reading materials, multiple ways to access text (e.g., AT) and tailoring methods for demonstrating knowledge (e.g., diorama based on text; oral presentation) (Lesesne, 2003).

Based on intervention research, Deshler et al. (2006) concluded that some adolescent students with severe reading disabilities, i.e., students who have not yet made sufficient gains in literacy development with intensive, small group support, will continue to require a class at least one hour per day of no more than 15 students focused specifically on “word recognition, fluency, vocabulary and strategies for encouraging persistence in reading” (p. 4) with a shift to comprehension strategies when appropriate.

Writing

Eleven elements of effective instruction for developing proficient writing skills starting in the 4th grade for all students were identified in a meta-analysis by Graham and Perrin (2007):

- writing strategies to encourage planning, revising and editing
- strategies for summarizing texts
- collaborative writing to practice how to plan, edit, draft, and revise compositions
- use word processors and computers as instructional supports
- sentence combining to construct complex and sophisticated sentences
- pre-writing activities and organizers to create structure and order
- inquiry activities to encourage analysis of immediate, concrete data to develop ideas and content
- process writing so student writes for authentic audiences in meaningful contexts
- writing models provided to encourage analysis of good writing
- writing as a tool for learning content.

For students with LD in upper elementary grades through high school, curriculum demands require a more intensive focus on intentional teaching of strategies to develop competent written language skills. In addition to the list of recommendations above, students with LD will require:

- rubrics and checklists provided to create external guide/organization for expectations
- planning/organizational strategies to handle quantity of work
- external structures to assist in organizing written work (e.g., a three step approach for writing stories: set goals, brainstorm ideas, sequence using graphic organizers).

In addition to learning strategies for written work, the need for accommodations increases in the later grades, such as:

- extended time to complete tasks and exams requiring extensive writing
- a scribe or alternative methods to ensure students with LD can adequately demonstrate their knowledge
- access to a computer to develop and practice keyboarding skills especially for students with fine motor challenges affecting printing and handwriting fluency and letter formation
- access to a computer for word processing (use thesaurus, spell check, semantic mapping programs)
- speech-to-text software as appropriate for generating written work.

Instruction in Mathematics

In the literature, researchers note that there are many differing definitions of 'mathematical disability' and that a diagnosis of a math disability is less common than any other learning disability. Math can be negatively affected by many of the characteristics of students with LD, even if a specific disability in math is not diagnosed. Language processing difficulties hamper a student's ability to become skilled at understanding and using vocabulary, concepts, symbols, signs, or operations. Difficulties with directionality, sequencing, and organization affect math understanding and performance. Reading difficulties interfere with fluency and the comprehension of word problems. Picking out salient information is a challenge. Fine motor difficulties can be a barrier in math, and unfortunately assistive technology is currently less helpful to students with LD in mathematics. Auditory comprehension difficulties result in difficulty following verbally delivered lessons, which are very common in math classes. Slow information processing leads to difficulty being efficient with large quantities of math problems. Students with LD often rely on immature and

concrete strategies (e.g., finger counting) because they have trouble utilizing more abstract strategies, and so those strategies should not be discouraged if needed. Finally, students with LD are often challenged with problem-solving in math (e.g., choosing an approach, deciding how to do it, and then evaluating if it worked) (Wadlington and Wadlington, 2008).

It is important that the area of mathematics not be overlooked in teaching students with LD. The following strategies for intervention recommended for students with LD in elementary grades:

- focus on automaticity of math facts with an increased frequency of use and an emphasis on memory strategies
- focus on developing student's ability to handle complex computations, such as introducing accommodations (e.g. calculator) with supported instruction in its use
- use a multisensory instructional approach
- anchor math in real-world situations and link to all content areas
- increase emphasis on strategies for dealing with word problems such as problem-solving approach, identifying key words, pre-learning vocabulary, and encouraging use of compensatory strategies such as manipulatives. **STAR** is an example of a math problem-solving strategy: **S**TAR - **S**earch the word problem, **T**ranslate the problem, **A**nswer the problem and **R**eview the solution
- adjust curriculum for students with language disabilities (e.g., utilize various levels of text to teach a concept); break assignments down into manageable pieces - modify/adapt curriculum to adjust to student needs (fewer questions, photocopy pages from a textbook with simpler language to teach/reinforce a concept)
- assist students with working memory deficits (e.g., reference sheets, memory strategies to reinforce sequences and order of operations)

- use everyday language to make sense of math symbols and processes
- encourage use of metacognitive, reading and memory strategies in math
- offer mock conditions to practice strategies, self-monitoring of procedural work, and error analysis.

In addition to the above list of strategies focusing on best practice, the following are a sample of suggestions compiled from research specifically focused on students with LD in the older grades:

- explicit focus on math vocabulary - how to identify, study and organize (e.g., flashcards); translate math symbols into user-friendly language
- teach strategies for the use of a calculator
- teach and practice error analysis
- provide advance organizers to lessons and build in review at beginning of each class
- even at higher grades, try to move from concrete to abstract (and back and forth) - multisensory approach
- use vocabulary in meaningful discussion
- provide access to a scribe and/or reader for exams depending on the student's needs.

Instruction across Content Areas

Much of the research tends to focus on reading and writing in language arts. However, the importance of presenting strategies across content areas to ensure meaningful generalization of strategies is highlighted in most recent research. Examples include explicit instruction and modeling of approaches to problem-solving, organizational and study skills and an increased focus on strategies such as note-taking, organization of school work, studying and test-taking in all subjects. Positive reinforcement and

discussion is important to encourage active learning and involvement when the student utilizes metacognitive strategies, such as monitoring when reading or actively using a problem-solving approach.

An increase in focus should occur in the later years on developing listening strategies, on making connections between new information and prior knowledge, on self-monitoring for understanding and on requesting clarification and paraphrasing. "Learning-to-learn" strategies become critical, including methods for handling and organizing schedules and larger quantities of homework and studying. Best practice includes collaboration among teachers to coordinate how much work is assigned, what strategies are being taught, and to make certain that accommodations are consistently in place and available to the student.

Social Domain

Skills for navigating social relationships must continue to be explicitly modeled and taught in all content areas. Finally, a student's sense of self and responsibility as a learner should be promoted through providing positive feedback to reinforce desired behaviours and strengths, and by creating a role for the student in IPP meetings and in setting personal goals.

Emerging Issues

Co-existing AD/HD

The review of best practices in teaching students with LD found very little consideration of the needs of students who have both LD and AD/HD. Given that 30% to 50% of students with LD have co-existing AD/HD, this lack of information was surprising. For students with LD and AD/HD, there are increased levels of challenge in the areas of attention, impulsivity, hyperactivity, social- emotional functioning and executive functioning. Difficulties with organization, time management, self-monitoring and task

completion add to the complexity of needs. The behaviour and academic needs of students with both LD and AD/HD warrant further research.

Knowledge Base of Teachers

The needs of students with LD are met in a range of settings from dedicated and specialized segregated programs to inclusive classroom settings, with the latter becoming increasingly the norm across North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and more recently South Africa. In Canada, as well as in other countries, there are growing concerns that teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare teachers to meet the needs of the diverse learners in today's classrooms. Reviews of special education in Canada in recent years have suggested that teachers do not receive the training needed to respond to students with special needs (e.g., Mackay, 2006).

Regardless of the setting, the teacher's ability to identify, understand and respond effectively to the needs of students with LD is important to the success of these students. The powerful influence of teachers has been demonstrated in many studies. Teachers implementing the same program or using the same strategy may have different student outcomes and teachers using different approaches may have the same outcomes. The teacher and the learning situation make the difference (e.g., Bond & Dyskstra, 1967/1997). Teachers who have the knowledge of best practices in teaching students with LD are better prepared to choose strategies flexibly to meet the complex and individual needs of the students. A recent survey of practices across Canada found that teachers enter the profession with little awareness of LD or knowledge of their role in supporting these students (Philpott & Cahill, 2008). Currently, there is little empirical research revealing the most effective way to educate pre-service teachers, only that education of special needs is required in some way to help prepare educators for contemporary classroom settings (Sharma et al., 2008).

In addition to initial teacher preparation, there is a need for ongoing professional development. Practicing teachers often lack confidence and do not feel professionally prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners. A disconnect between best practice identified in research and practical application in the classroom influences the delivery of instruction and quality of support provided to students with LD. Teachers are reported to feel that research ideas are often not usable or concrete enough to employ in the classroom, or, if an intervention was regarded as usable, minimal time was allocated to “meaningful professional development” to encourage and develop competency in the area of interest (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006; Greenwood & Abbot, 2005).

Follow-up to intensive workshops with professional development opportunities that are embedded in context and connected to daily classroom practice are promising practices for the future. Collaboration and teamwork to meet the needs of students with LD could include continuous sustained learning about teaching practices including observing other teachers, being observed by others who are knowledgeable about best practices in teaching LD students, team teaching and collaborative reflection on daily challenges.

Knowledge Base of Administrators

Strong administrative leadership and understanding of special education have been identified as essential to meeting diverse needs in today's classrooms. Administrative training for prospective principals in the United States often neglects preparation for the unique challenges of administrating in schools with special education programs or inclusive classrooms (Torgeson, 2003). A survey of Canadian school principals investigated their perceptions of their leadership roles and responsibilities in special education (Zaretsky, Moreau, and Faircloth, 2008). The principals felt that their leadership training provided minimal training for issues unique to

special education programs, and expressed a need for more emphasis on special education issues to better prepare them to properly understand and support teachers in all settings working with students with LD.

Cultural Differences

The dilemma of teaching students with LD whose culture and/or language differ from the teaching environment is a rapidly emerging reality in North American schools. The 2006 Canadian census confirms an increasing diverse cultural profile with more than 20% of the population predicted to be from a visible minority by 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2007a). More than 200 languages are spoken in Canada and 20% of the population reported a mother tongue other than English or French (Statistics Canada, 2007b). The Aboriginal population in Canada is increasing faster than the non-Aboriginal population and is much younger with almost half of all Aboriginal people under 24 years of age (Statistics Canada, 2007c).

In their report on the current state of adolescent literacy in the United States, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 2008) addressed the unique concerns of English Language Learners (ELL), i.e. students whose first language or culture is not the same as the language of instruction. In Canada, the term English as a Second Language (ESL) is more common. ELL students who also have LD are particularly susceptible to academic failure: "ELLs at grades 4th, 8th, and 12th are twice as likely as their peers to score below basic levels in reading and writing skills, and these achievement gaps have been generally stable for more than a decade" (Grigg, Donahue, and Dion, 2007, p. 3). They projected 25% of all children by 2025 in the United States will be ELL and therefore it will become paramount to determine whether "limited language proficiency is due to a language difference from those who have a concomitant LD" (p. 3). However, research is limited with regard to the assessment and intervention of ELL students or of the unique issues of students with LD from diverse cultural

backgrounds (Gersten & Baker, 2000, 2003). The authors noted that “most of our knowledge base in this area remains more theoretical and experiential...than based on controlled research” (p. 105).

The following key components have been proposed to address the distinctive challenge of supporting students with LD who are ELL or ESL :

- teach the use of the second language according to established conventions of grammar and syntax;
- provide opportunities to work on academic-based tasks in either the primary or English language to practice conventions;
- involve peers in both instruction and collaborative strategic reading to promote general language development, including strategies for comprehension and improved reading fluency;
- teach vocabulary that is meaningful to students and targets key concepts within content areas;
- utilize visual referents, such as graphic organizers or word banks, to reinforce vocabulary development; and
- balance “cognitive and language demands” (p. 106) so that challenging material requiring higher-level thinking and reasoning is presented or can be responded to using simpler language (Gersten & Baker, 2003).

With regard to Aboriginal learners, Alberta Education (2005) developed the manual, “Our Words, Our Ways”, focusing on education of aboriginal students, with a chapter dedicated to students with LD. The authors noted, “Traditional and contemporary Aboriginal cultures are diverse and unique, yet they share the perspective that each individual has the ability to become a fully contributing member of the community” and the conceptual understanding of a learning disability is “at odds with the holistic

framework of Aboriginal education" (p. 123). Sensitivity to the cultural values is important in supporting Aboriginal students.

Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning

The trend towards inclusive education requires that teachers attend to a diverse range of needs in the regular classroom. Two approaches are widely promoted as responsive to a wide range of learning needs: Differentiated instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Using these approaches, teachers attempt to reduce or eliminate barriers to learning by tailoring instruction to meet diverse needs.

DI involves providing choices with regard to content (broad based that addresses the same concept and adjusted by degree of difficulty), process (instructional procedures, such as flexible groupings and scaffolding) and product (how students demonstrate their learning, such as written proposal, video, speech) (Tomlinson, 2001). The choices are made based on understanding students' readiness, interests, needs and learning profiles. Knowing the learner through pre-assessment strategies and on-going assessment to adjust instruction are critical to DI.

UDL as promoted by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) includes technology and assistive technology as options for students to engage and access the curriculum in a manner that suits their strengths and needs. UDL involves instruction presented in multiple ways, multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning, novelty, and a number of different options for engaging students to encourage motivation and active learning. Strategy instruction becomes a natural part of the regular classroom experience. The need for specific accommodations for students with LD may be reduced. For example, a traditional method for in-class testing may be to administer an end-of-chapter test created by the text authors and to provide a reader/scribe, extended time, or other accommodations for

students with LD. In UDL, all students may be offered the choice of demonstrating their knowledge in a different way, such as an un-timed oral test.

The philosophies of DI and UDL are expected to become increasingly important for implementing best practices in teaching students with LD. Flexibility, recognition of the importance of ongoing assessment to guide instruction, responsiveness to the individual needs of students and the use of technology to engage and support students are potentially positive directions for the future.

Summary

Best practices in teaching students with LD have been presented in detail.

The following summarizes some key points from the review of best practices:

- Explicit, intensive instruction combining direct instruction with strategy instruction is critical to equip students with LD with metacognitive strategies and academic skills.
- The intensity of instruction is a key element for success. Students must be engaged in learning and have extended opportunities for learning in response to the severity of their needs
- Early intervention involving literacy instruction in the first three years of school is most beneficial for students with LD
- Supports need to be in place across the school years in recognition of the interaction between changing demands and the needs of students with LD as they progress through school
- Instruction must address more than literacy and consider needs in the metacognitive, Information processing and social domains

- Instruction must be responsive to the specific needs of students with LD. There is no "one size fits all" approach to meet the needs of all students with LD
- Ongoing progress monitoring should inform instructional decision-making and academic programming
- Accommodations, including assistive technology, need to be selected carefully to match the needs of the student and the environment. Students need to be supported to use accommodations and their effectiveness should be monitored
- The explicit development of self-advocacy skills needs to begin early and be supported throughout the school years
- Transition planning also needs to begin early to ensure that the student has the opportunity to develop the skills and strategies needed in a new setting or grade. Student involvement and collaboration promote successful transitions.

Factors that support the implementation of best practices were also identified, such as:

- collaboration is required at many levels - with the student and parent (meaningful parent involvement), among school personnel and with outside agencies. Teamwork contributes to organizing expertise to support students with LD
- individualized Program Planning provides a vehicle for problem-solving, planning (including transition planning) implementation and ongoing monitoring of progress
- The knowledge base of teachers affects the implementation of best practices. Teachers can be most effective in flexibly adjusting instruction to meet the needs of students with LD when they have

knowledge of a range of instructional choices and the support and organizational structures to implement effective practices. Teachers' level of confidence and their feeling of competence with regard to teaching students with LD affect their practice.

- The knowledge base of administrators contributes to the support provided to school personnel to organize instruction. Significant elements within a school setting include: flexibility in scheduling and delivery of instruction, time to plan and collaborate within the learning team, administrative support for a continuum of services, school-wide behaviour plan
- Ongoing professional development is important, including opportunities for professional learning embedded in context and connected to daily classroom practice.

"Emerging issues" were identified. Future research and practice in these areas is expected have an impact on teaching students with LD:

- Co-existing LD and AD/HD
- Knowledge base of teachers
- Knowledge base of administrators
- Cultural and language differences, including Aboriginal issues
- Inclusive practices such as Differentiated Learning and Universal Design for Learning.

Section 3 – Models of Service Delivery

The search for an effective model of service delivery to support the needs of students with LD has spanned several decades. The elements of best practice in teaching students with LD as described in Section 2 were used as a basis for exploring models of service delivery to determine how well they align with best practice. Research literature was reviewed and current practices were explored through a survey of educators and a review of websites describing services for students with LD. The survey (Appendix 2) included seventeen questions to gather information about delivery, success and transition. These questions also guided the review of websites.

Canada has historically offered dedicated education programs for children with special needs, including special schools, specialized classes and varying degrees of integration into regular classes combined with pull-out/resource programs. Since 1999, several Canadian Provinces have reviewed their special education services. Information from these reviews is summarized in the “MacKay Report” (2006) prepared for the Department of Education of New Brunswick. The current trends towards more inclusive education practices are consistent with movements occurring internationally. MacKay and Burt-Garrows (2004) defined inclusion this way: *“We are not referring to a specific program, service, or methodology. We are referring to a school system that in both its design and its effect continually strives to ensure that each student has access to and is enabled to participate in the school community, to be part of the community in positive and reinforcing ways and whose identity is reflected in the operations of the school community”* (p.6). Many Canadian provincial education systems are exploring policies and practices to ensure that the goal of inclusion is achieved. At this time, most models of service delivery fit within the Cascade Model (Bunch, 2005). The models include: special

placement (alternate setting); full-time self-contained class in a regular school (segregated or contained class); part-time regular class and self-contained (special or congregated class); to full inclusion (regular class with direct/indirect support; and regular class without support).

How do various models of service delivery align with best practices in teaching students with LD?

The general consensus in current research is that the implementation of the elements of best practice is important and is not dependent upon a particular model of service delivery. Reviewing the copious research on a range of models since the late 1970s, Zigmond (2003) provided the following observations:

- effective practice is more important than the location
- we know what we learn, and students with LD require more than the usual time to ensure they learn their basic skills
- explicit and intensive instruction is critical
- the ease of delivery of certain instructional practices may be dictated by the setting
- more research is required about “who learns what best where” (p. 120)
- new research designs are needed to help connect research outcomes and placement decisions.

Specific models of service delivery are described below beginning with the most segregated models to the most inclusive.

Special placements (alternate settings) and full time self-contained classes

Based on current literature, special placements and self-contained classrooms align with best practices as follows:

- lower pupil-teacher ratio allows for more intensive instruction

- time is available to teachers for planning and implementation of direct and intensive instruction, and for development and implementation of IPPs
- consistent and frequent monitoring of student progress is possible
- instruction is directly tied to individual needs
- teachers may have more specialized training.

Disadvantages of special placements and self-contained classes have also been identified, including:

- students are often isolated from the regular classroom settings
- there may be limited generalization of strategies to situations beyond the special setting
- students may experience challenges transitioning to other learning situations
- homogenous groupings may foster behavioural and social difficulties depending on access to appropriate social role-models
- the stigma of disability may be perpetuated
- options or extracurricular activities that tap into the strengths or interests of students may not be available.

Part-time regular class combined with pull-out program

Tutorial, Work Study, and Functional Skills models are examples of approaches to delivery in which students attend a pull-out program for varying amounts of time. For some students with LD, part-time support outside of their regular classroom can offer:

- a place of safety to learn or a direct connection with someone whose focus is to monitor and address their unique needs

- intensive instruction and supported practice of skills in conjunction with regular classroom instruction, and
- paced learning.

Criticisms of these pull-out models include:

- teachers in pull-out programs may face the challenge of dealing with unfamiliar curriculum or be placed in a tutoring role
- tutoring or reinforcement and practice of academic skills may not include teaching learning strategies
- a potential disconnect between skills or content learned and practiced in the pull-out program, and what is taught in the student's classroom.
- pull-out programs may perpetuate the stigma of 'disability'
- time spent in pull-out may place the student at a disadvantage if they do not obtain the pre-requisites or preparation to pursue post-secondary education.

Inclusion

In the full inclusion model, all students with LD are placed in regular classroom settings. The regular classroom teacher may have full responsibility for providing support to students with LD, or additional supports may be provided. In the Learning Strategies model, the regular classroom teacher delivers both metacognitive strategies and teaches core content to all students in their classroom. While the model aligns with best practice in terms of teaching strategies, and the concept of inclusion, several problems have been identified. Regular classroom teachers often lack the knowledge, training, or time to effectively plan and deliver both curriculum and learning strategies. Students with LD may require more intensive instruction to learn strategies, content, or both.

The most recent trend in service delivery is towards a non-categorical and cross-categorical approach, that is, offering differentiated instruction and additional resources to meet the individual needs of all students within the regular classroom setting by combining in-class and out-of class supports. For example, in a Learning Strategies Team model as described by Deshler (2006), on-site support teachers, such as resource teachers or learning strategists, are involved in both planning and strategy instruction with LD students. Deshler described the teachers' roles as follows:

- Content teachers specializing in the subject matter thoughtfully select, organize and deliver the salient information in their subject area in a participatory fashion
- Support teachers teach to specific skills and strategies to enhance students' effectiveness as learners in their core curriculum classes.

The support teacher may team teach or one of the teachers (the content teacher or the support teacher) may take smaller groups of students and work with them either in the classroom or in a pull-out room. This provides the opportunity to engage students more intensely and to individualize the instruction in response to their specific needs. The goal is to ensure that strategy instruction dovetails with core curriculum to encourage generalization and consistent use of strategies in a meaningful way. To be effective, this approach is dependent upon the availability of specialized staff with knowledge of LD, time to plan, collaboration and coordination of services and a clear description of roles.

Great controversy has been generated by the concept of inclusion and its many interpretations. The dilemma dominating the literature is whether inclusive education is sensible for all students with disabilities, and if so, how is it accomplished in a reasonable and realistic manner within a general

classroom setting. Several elements have been identified in the literature as necessary for inclusive education to work:

- all pre-service training and ongoing professional development must always inherently take differences of abilities into account, and the concept of normalcy be discouraged in exchange for acknowledgement of a continuum of abilities
- all teachers must be receive professional development and support so they feel able to teach all children, regardless of ability
- collaboration with informed professionals and colleagues to learn strategies to deal with varied abilities in their classrooms must be available (Florian, 2008).

There are examples of schools and school districts that have re-organized instruction around the needs of individual students. While not exclusive to students with LD, the changes made in these schools align with the best practices described in Section 2. The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2005) and the National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities (2003) in the United States have reacted to the concept of "Full Inclusion", i.e., that students with LD must be served only in regular education classrooms. Both organizations clearly support a continuum of services and reject the arbitrary placement of all students in any one setting. Specifically, the LDAC (2005) policy statement includes the following:

"The LDAC does not support full educational inclusion or any policies that mandate the same placement, instruction, or treatment of all students with learning disabilities or the idea that all students with learning disabilities must be served only in regular education classrooms at the exclusion of all other special education options."

Continuum of Services

Many jurisdictions are now using the term inclusive education to describe a commitment to meeting the needs of all students rather than in reference to a specific setting. A continuum of services and choices in service delivery may still be provided. In terms of alignment with best practices identified in this review, the continuum of services acknowledges that “no one size fits all” for students with LD and that flexibility to meet specific needs is required. A continuum of services may be needed to ensure that best practices can be implemented in response to the diverse needs of students with LD across the school years.

There are examples of schools and school districts that have re-organized instruction around the needs of individual students. While not exclusive to students with LD, the changes made in these schools demonstrate practical approaches to providing instruction to meet diverse needs. In 2007, The National Center for Learning Disabilities published *Challenging Change: How schools and districts are improving the performance of special education students*. They sampled five school districts in the United States with schools that had made changes and increased the academic success of students with special needs. The common definition of success was improved achievement levels of all students with special needs on state-wide testing. Many of the findings align with best practices in teaching students with LD. Common themes across schools were:

- all students with disabilities were included in general education classrooms
- data was used to adjust instruction to each student's individual needs
- the way in which teachers worked together was changed to ensure collaboration could occur
- administrative organization and procedures were restructured.

Other features worth noting within specific schools included:

- instruction primarily tied to curriculum with clear standards
- implementation of a school wide behaviour management program
- flexibility built in for creative scheduling and planning
- administrators involved in a 3-year program to bridge research to practice in the field of special education
- opportunity for team-teaching between regular teachers or regular teachers with special education teachers
- ongoing monitoring of student progress
- pull-out provided where necessary by resource teachers for strategy instruction combined with academic skill development, although majority of student time spent in regular classroom
- ongoing professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals
- frequent communication with parents, and strong before and after school programs
- one school committed to year-round support programs for low-performing students including more intensive math and reading courses, tutoring, and differentiated instruction.

What are some examples of current practices in service delivery for students with LD? How do they align with best practices in teaching students with LD?

There is great variability in models of service delivery across Canada today. Most provincial departments of education provide non-categorical funding for LD, that is, funding is provided through general education grants to school districts. The school districts then determine how the resources will be used to provide services consistent with government policy. However,

some provincial departments of education provide additional funding for services for students with LD that are provided in segregated school settings. For example, Alberta provides some funding directly to designated special education private schools and parents pay the balance of the tuition. Nova Scotia has a tuition support program for students attending private schools serving students with LD. Ontario has established four provincial residential demonstration schools for students with LD, one of which is for French language speakers.

In practice, the majority of students with LD are in regular classrooms with varying levels of in-class and pull-out support. However, there are also segregated (or congregated) special schools organized at the provincial level or within public school systems and many private schools for students with LD. Examples of a variety of initiatives are presented below. The information for this review was gathered through a survey of educators (telephone and on-line) and a review of websites describing services for students with LD. This is not intended to be an exhaustive presentation of models of service delivery. It is a sampling to illustrate a variety of approaches to meeting the needs of students with LD at different age levels and in segregated placements to more inclusive models. The descriptions will highlight how each of these models incorporates best practices in teaching students with LD.

Residential Segregated School

Trillium School, Provincial Demonstration School, Milton, Ontario, is one of four provincial schools for Ontario children with severe learning disabilities. Application for admission is made on behalf of students by the school board with parental consent. The Provincial Committee on Learning Disabilities (PCLD) determines whether a student is eligible for admission. The Trillium School serves grade 7 to 12. The three other Demonstration Schools serve grades 4 to 8/9 (Sagonaska School in Belleville), grades 7 to 10 (Amethyst

School in London) and French-speaking students (Centre Jules-Leger, Ottawa).

Students attending Trillium School have severe LD or AD/HD. The program is a one-year residential program but the one year can be extended if deemed necessary or beneficial. Intensive instruction is provided individually or to groups of two to six students allowing for high levels of student engagement. All students participate in the Wilson Reading System and/or Fast ForWard phonological awareness program as well as the regular curriculum. All students have access to assistive technology.

Teachers do follow-up visits to the students in their regular classrooms. In addition, students have access to the services of child and youth worker. A psychiatrist is available to support students with anxiety and other issues.

In terms of success, students are reported to generally increase their reading skills by 2.5 grades with no technology support and by more with technology support. All students are able to write and pass the provincial literacy test at their level. There has been no formal long term follow up but many of the students do go on to post-secondary education.

All teachers are required to be involved in ongoing professional development. New teachers go through training on the specific reading intervention programs. A workshop is conducted each fall for new and returning teachers and internal workshops are held each Friday.

Segregated School within a Public School District

Dr. Oakley School, Calgary Board of Education, Calgary, Alberta, is a “congregated” special school that provides intensive instruction dedicated to improving the literacy skills of students with LD who have made minimal progress in response to instructional supports in their community school. The mandate is short-term intervention lasting no more than two years, with dedicated staff to support the students over one year as they transition back

to a regular setting. Maximum enrolment is 135 students ranging from grade 3 to grade 9.

The setting offers lower pupil/teacher ratio and an all-day literacy focus that is tied to curriculum. Direct instruction in literacy is combined with strategy instruction. Small group intensive literacy instruction is provided for one hour each day. Content areas including science and options such as music are not available. All teachers work in teams of two to meet the needs of students. Ongoing assessment is conducted to monitor progress and to guide interventions and accommodations, including assistive technology. Parents are involved in the IPP process and commit to a minimum of 20 minutes per day of home reading.

Transition back to the community school is planned from the time a student begins the program at Dr. Oakley and is described as “usually very successful as long as supports in the setting continue to be in place for the student”. Practices to facilitate successful transitions include a meeting between the Dr. Oakley teachers and the teaching team in the community school in June or September. A dedicated “Collaborative Support Team” of two teachers from Dr. Oakley support the transition of 14 students. This service is provided for students who are interested in weekly support in their community setting and for students in Senior and Junior High school settings. These teachers meet with the students and go over their assignments, assist classroom teachers with accommodations and modifications for the students and communicate weekly with the student’s parents. This support is provided for a one year period.

Teachers vary in terms of training in special education but they commit to professional development on a continuous basis and develop an understanding of LD and various interventions. Teachers meet every two weeks to discuss their literacy program, read research and ask questions.

In terms of success, many of the students gain up to 4 grade levels in their reading and 2 grade levels in writing. The staff of Dr. Oakley consider their interventions to be successful when students regard themselves as competent, confident and capable learners.

Regular Class with Pull-out Support

Toronto Catholic School District has entered into a license agreement with the Arrowsmith School (private school for students with LD) to provide specific repetitive programming which is computer generated to provide remediation in areas of memory, ability to focus, sequencing and automaticity of response. The Arrowsmith program is offered in seven elementary schools throughout the district at no charge to the families. Few details were available and the results of research with regard to this programming have not yet been released to the public. The initiative is included as an example of a partnership between public education and the private sector.

Regular Class with Direct/Indirect Support (Grades 4 to 9)

Learning and Literacy (L &L) Programs, Calgary Board of Education, Calgary, Alberta, provide a variety of opportunities and supports for grade 4 to 9 students with LD. The program has recently expanded from six to 11 schools. Students come to these programs based on system referrals. The goal of the L&L program is to assist each child in gaining skills, knowledge and competencies to reach their academic, social and emotional potential. The emphasis of instruction is on developing literacy skills (reading and writing) in a model of service delivery where instruction for L&L students is fully blended with regular classroom instruction. Program staff includes a regular classroom teacher and an L&L designated teacher in each classroom allowing for flexible instructional groupings throughout the school day. L&L students receive small group or individualized intensive instruction to meet their specific learning needs. Depending on the number of L&L

students at each site and on timetabling options, there may be teacher time directly assigned for assistive technology and/or additional small flexible instructional groups.

The L&L program has been intentionally designed to provide intensive, explicit instruction with L&L teachers working together with core subject area teachers. Universal Design for Learning, assistive technology, instructional accommodations and strategic planning are incorporated. All students have IPPs and collaboration between home and school is promoted. Transition planning, ongoing assessment and the development of self-advocacy skills are components of L&L programs.

Specific details about success were not provided on the survey as an evaluation report has not been released to the public.

Regular Class with Direct/Indirect Support (High School)

Cochrane High School Learning Centre, Rockyview School Division, Cochrane, Alberta, provides support for grade 9 to 12 students with LD. At Cochrane High School, students with LD are in regular classes with accommodations. They have the opportunity to receive additional support in a "Learning Centre". Students attend the Centre for three or six 76 minute periods per week. The time spent in this situation is considered a "Learning Strategies course" for which the students receive high school credits. The student sets goals for each visit to the Centre and they are evaluated in terms of attitude, organization and use of class time. Students can also arrange to go to the Centre for at other times if needed, for example, to work on a particular English Language Arts (ELA) assignment during an ELA period if requested by the ELA teacher. There are four to 15 students in the Centre at any one time. Each student brings curriculum materials to work on and they receive individual support from a teacher or teaching assistant as needed. The focus is on teaching strategies to help students access the

curriculum. Support in learning to use assistive technology (e.g., Kurzweil reader) is provided.

The Administration at Cochrane High School is very supportive of the Learning Centre program. For example, students with LD are given preferential scheduling to ensure that they can access the supports they need within the school day. The staff includes two full-time teachers and a part-time teaching assistant who has assistive technology expertise. The teachers have special education backgrounds.

Students are involved in the IPP process and self-advocacy is encouraged through conversations with Learning Centre teachers about IPP goals, strategies, accommodations and assistive technology. Transition planning is formally addressed each year and students are engaged in problem-solving and goal setting.

One measure of success is academic achievement. The high school completion rate for students with LD participating in the Learning Centre is 95%. Other indicators of success are a student's knowledge of themselves as a learner, their effective use of accommodations and assistive technology and their ability to advocate on their own behalf.

Private Segregated Schools for Students with LD

There are many private schools for students with LD across North America. The survey questions guided an analysis of the information provided on the websites of ten private schools. The following common themes were identified:

- small group settings with low pupil/teacher ratio
- provided strategy instruction in combination with academic instruction tied to mandated curriculum to encourage learner independence and improve self-advocacy skills

- listed graduation from school with the ability to pursue post-secondary studies as a measure of success
- offered instruction from grade 4 onward, although two schools started in grade one and two respectively
- provided counselling for students experiencing social/emotional challenges in addition to their learning disability
- included assistive technology as part of the student's educational experience
- delivered instruction via a multi-modal teaching approach.

The schools were found to differ in the length of attendance by students. Some schools focused on a two year commitment and emphasized planning for transition back into regular education. Other schools are flexible and the length of attendance depends on the needs of individual students. Other differences included the level of training in special education of the teachers, the focus of professional development for teachers, access to additional supports (e.g., speech and language therapists), the use of specific intervention programs or approaches, and the availability of instruction in the arts and vocational areas.

Summary

The general consensus in current research is that the implementation of the elements of best practice is important and is not dependent upon a particular model of service delivery. In terms of alignment with best practices identified in this review, a continuum of services acknowledges that “no one size fits all” for students with LD and that flexibility to meet specific needs is required. There are many models of service delivery in Canada today. Each has advantages and disadvantages that must be

considered in planning instruction to meet the diverse needs of students with LD across the school years.

Appendix 1

Academic/Instructional Accommodations

Name _____ School _____		Grade _____	Date _____	Completed by _____	
Reading Difficulties	Written Expression Difficulties	Attention Difficulties	Memory Difficulties	Fine & Gross Motor Difficulties	
<input type="radio"/> Use less difficult/alternative reading material within a subject area <input type="radio"/> Reduce amount of reading required <input type="radio"/> Allow student to tape record lectures and class discussions <input type="radio"/> Allow alternative methods of data collection (tape recorders, dictation, interviews, fact sheets) <input type="radio"/> Set time limits for specific task completion <input type="radio"/> Enlarge text of worksheets and reading material <input type="radio"/> Extend time to complete tests and assignments <input type="radio"/> Use large print editions of tests <input type="radio"/> Read directions aloud to student <input type="radio"/> Read test items aloud to student <input type="radio"/> Read standard directions several times at start of exam <input type="radio"/> Record directions on audiocassette <input type="radio"/> Provide written directions for exam ahead of time <input type="radio"/> Use assistive technology (optical character recognition system, books on tape/CD, screen readers)	<input type="radio"/> Allow student to tape record lectures and class discussions <input type="radio"/> Provide a written outline <input type="radio"/> Individualize assignments (reduce volume of work, break long-term assignments into manageable tasks, allow extra time for completing assignments, offer alternative assignments, allow student to work on homework while at school) <input type="radio"/> Allow alternative methods of data collection (tape recorders, dictation, interviews, fact sheets) <input type="radio"/> Allow for spelling errors on written assignments <input type="radio"/> Extend time to complete tests and assignments <input type="radio"/> Permit use of scribe or tape recorder for answers (student should include specific instructions about punctuation and paragraphing) <input type="radio"/> Waive spelling, punctuation and paragraphing requirements <input type="radio"/> Accept keyword responses instead of complete sentences <input type="radio"/> Use assistive technology (word processor, spell-check device, grammar-check device, text to speech software)	<input type="radio"/> Provide alternative seating (near teacher, facing teacher, at front of class, between well-focused students, away from distractions) <input type="radio"/> Provide additional/personal work space (quiet area for study, extra seat or table, "time-out" spot, study carrels) <input type="radio"/> Permit movement during class activities and testing sessions <input type="radio"/> Allow student to tape record lectures and class discussions <input type="radio"/> Provide directions in written form (on board, on worksheets, copied in assignment book by student) <input type="radio"/> Set time limits for specific task completion <input type="radio"/> Extend time to complete tests and assignments <input type="radio"/> Allow untimed testing sessions for comprehensive tests <input type="radio"/> Use multiple testing sessions for student to take breaks during tests <input type="radio"/> Use place markers, special paper, graph paper or writing templates to allow student to maintain position better or focus attention <input type="radio"/> Provide cues; e.g., arrows, stop signs, on test answer forms <input type="radio"/> Provide a quiet, distraction-free area for testing <input type="radio"/> Allow student to wear noise buffer/device to screen out distracting sounds <input type="radio"/> Provide checklists for long, detailed assignments <input type="radio"/> Provide a specific procedure/process for turning in completed assignments	<input type="radio"/> Provide a written outline <input type="radio"/> Provide directions in written form (on board, on worksheets, copied in assignment book by student) <input type="radio"/> Provide a specific procedure/process for turning in completed assignments <input type="radio"/> Provide checklists for long, detailed assignments <input type="radio"/> Read standard directions several times at start of exam <input type="radio"/> Provide cues; e.g., arrows, stop signs, on answer forms <input type="radio"/> Allow student to use response aids (arithmetic tables, dictionary, calculator, word processor, spell-check device, grammar-check device)	<input type="radio"/> Use assistive and adaptive devices (slant boards/desktop easels to display written work/reading material, pencil/pen adapted in size or grip diameter, alternative keyboards, portable word processor) <input type="radio"/> Set realistic and mutually agreed-upon expectations for neatness <input type="radio"/> Reduce/eliminate the need to copy from a text or board (provide copies of notes, permit student to photocopy a peer's notes, provide carbon/NCR paper to a peer to allow a duplicate copy of notes to be made) <input type="radio"/> Extend time to complete tests and assignments <input type="radio"/> Alter the size, shape or location of the space provided for answers <input type="radio"/> Accept keyword responses instead of complete sentences <input type="radio"/> Allow student to type answers or to answer orally instead of in writing	

Source: Calgary Learning Centre, 2002.

Appendix 2

Survey Questions

Program or School

Where do you deliver your programs?

Nationally Provincially Locally

How do you deliver the services provided?

Public Private Collaborative

How do you fund the programs for students with learning disabilities?

IF this is a specific program, is it provided:

In a private school
 In a special school in a school district
 In a segregated setting within a school

What is your eligibility criteria?

How long do students attend?

How successful is their transition back into an inclusive setting?

What do you do to ensure the transition is successful?

Delivery Model

Intensity:

- Amount of time
- Size of groupings
- Student engagement

How is it tied to the curriculum?

How does the instruction differ from instruction in general education?

What is the commitment of students?

What is the commitment of parents?

Success

What successes have you had in teaching LD?

What does success mean to you?

How do you measure your success?

What training and expectations do you have of your teachers?

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Appendix B: Data Collection Summary

Long-Term Effectiveness

Common Themes

- Current Tuition Support Program (TSP) students indicated that they felt their learning had improved and they had gained a greater understanding of their learning profile.
- Almost universally, parents stated that attending the designated special education private school (DSEPS) has changed their children’s educational experiences for the better and without them they felt their children would not complete grade 12 or attend a post-secondary program.
- Parents indicated that stress levels and behavioural issues within the household had been reduced since the students began attending the DSEPS.
- Parents did express concerns around the effective fostering of self-advocacy skills and transition options to post-secondary studies for their children.
- Academically, the teaching staff of all three DSEPS reported that students showed improved achievement and organizational skills in a fairly short timeframe, leading to increased confidence and a reduction of negative behaviours.
- Parents responded positively when asked if they were kept informed of their children’s progress, if they were satisfied with their children’s experience, and if there were good communication between themselves and the school.

Duration of Student Placement

Common Themes

- In various forms, parents strongly voiced their belief that “the underlying disability necessitating the student’s attending designated special education private school does not change, therefore, the requirement for funding does not change and funding should be continued as long as it is required.”
- Two of the designated special education private schools said that their ultimate goals are the students’ effective transition back to the public school system and that the recommended duration of placement is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Research-Based Interventions and Instructional Methods Used

Common Themes

- The majority of current students, teachers, and parents surveyed indicated satisfaction with the instructional methods used and provided examples of differentiated instruction

and formalized assessment methods they felt had a positive impact on the students' ability to learn and demonstrate knowledge.

- Assistive technology use was not universally accessed by Tuition Support Program students.
- Teachers indicated that students learn self-advocacy by first gaining an understanding of their learning disability and then by developing skills and appropriate adaptations to help them deal with their particular issues. Interpersonal skills are emphasized within the designated special education private schools, encouraging students to develop strategies for conflict resolution and social interactions.
- Professional development opportunities varied among the designated special education private schools, and teachers from all three DSEPS indicated their desire for more professional development related to current research that would complement their instructional practices, as well as professional development around provincial policies and the program planning process. It was highlighted, however, that the cost of attending such training and arranging for qualified substitute teachers presents barriers to access.
- Access to professional supports such as psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and guidance counsellors varies at the designated special education private schools, and in all cases they serve as consultants rather than full-time members of the core staff.

Transitional Outcomes

Common Themes

- Parents with students currently attending a designated special education private school stated that their children were being prepared for transition to public school or post-secondary education.
- Many parents with students currently attending a designated special education private school do not believe their children will ever be capable of returning to the public school system.
- Current Tuition Support Program students feel that they are learning the skills necessary for successful transition to post-secondary education or employment.
- All three designated special education private schools indicated that they have designated staff who participate in transition meetings both internally and with regional schools boards.

Former students were able to make successful transitions; however, grade-level outcomes presented challenges as did the large class size and other related academic and social demands.

Regional Accessibility and Acceptance Criteria

Common Themes

- Parents stated that the application and appeal process is very stressful and that it needs to be streamlined for ease of access.
- The requirement that a student must attend a public school in Nova Scotia the year prior to application affects equitable access to the Tuition Support Program.
- Parents stated that there was lack of awareness about the Tuition Support Program as it was not communicated during the program planning process.
- The requirement that a student be on an individualized program plan presents a barrier to access and should be removed from the application process.
- Families are grateful for the Tuition Support Program funding; however, the program costs continue to present a financial strain on families.

Appendix C: Student Survey

Summary of the Student Survey Responses

Overall, the responses to the survey of students currently attending Landmark East, Churchill Academy, and Bridgeway Academy were favourable.

In 17 of the 19 questions, the percentage of students who responded either “strongly agree” or “agree” ranges from 85 percent to 94 percent. Only questions 3 and 17 had less than 84 percent of the respondents answering “strongly agree” or “agree.” Approximately 77 percent of students responded “strongly agree” or “agree” to question 3’s statement, “I use assistive technology to support my learning.” Sixty-four percent of the student respondents agreed with question 17’s statement, “Extracurricular activities are available to me at this school.” However, it should be noted that 80 percent of student responses from Landmark East School indicated agreement with this statement.

Among the statements that elicited the highest level of agreement (strongly agree or agree), between 90 percent and 94 percent of respondents indicated agreement with the following statements:

1. The teacher uses many examples when explaining things.
2. I have opportunities to challenge my own thinking.
4. I have opportunities to work independently, with a partner and in a group.
6. My teacher knows what I can do well.
10. I work hard and try my best at this school.
11. My learning has improved at this school.
15. I have made supportive friendships at this school.
19. The skills I am learning are preparing me for the future.

Responses to statements 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 18 also indicated a high level of agreement, ranging from 84 percent to 89 percent of students who either strongly agreed or agreed with these statements:

5. I have opportunities to show my learning in a variety of ways.
7. My teacher knows what I need help with.
8. I know what my teacher expects of me.
9. I have the time I need to complete my work.
12. I understand more about how I learn best.
13. I enjoy being at this school and I feel a sense of belonging.
16. I advocate for what I need to be successful academically.
18. I have gained study skills at this school.

Seven percent of respondents strongly disagreed with statement 11, “My learning has improved at this school.”

Student Survey Results

The column heading “Totals” refers to the total number of responses from that school to the question or statement or to the total number of survey responses.

The chart for each school shows the level of agreement with the statement as a percentage of the responses received from that school and not as a percentage of the total survey responses.

For example, in the first question shown below, from Churchill Academy, there were a total of 51 responses to that question. Twenty-one or 41.2 percent of those 51 responses strongly agreed with the statement “The teacher uses many examples when explaining things.” For that question, there were a total of 107 responses from all three DSEPS involved, of which 41 or 38.3 percent of the total respondents who answered that question, strongly agreed with the statement.

1. The teacher uses many examples when explaining things.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	21 41.2%	26 51.0%	2 3.9%	2 3.9%
Bridgeway Academy	41	12 29.3%	26 63.4%	3 7.3%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	15	8 53.3%	6 40.0%	1 6.7%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	107	41 38.3%	58 54.2%	6 5.6%	2 1.9%

2. I have opportunities to challenge my own thinking.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	26 51.0%	18 35.3%	6 11.8%	1 2.0%
Bridgeway Academy	41	14 34.1%	24 58.5%	3 7.3%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	14	5 35.7%	8 57.1%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	106	45 42.5%	50 47.2%	10 9.4%	1 0.9%

3. I use assistive technology to support my learning.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	50	21 42.0%	19 38.0%	9 18.0%	1 2.0%
Bridgeway Academy	40	9 22.5%	19 47.5%	8 20.0%	4 10.0%
Landmark East	14	4 28.6%	8 57.1%	2 14.3%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	104	34 32.7%	46 44.2%	19 18.3%	5 4.8%

4. I have opportunities to work independently, with a partner and in a group.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	50	21 42.0%	24 48.0%	4 8.0%	1 2.0%
Bridgeway Academy	40	19 47.5%	17 42.5%	4 10.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	13	4 30.8%	7 53.8%	2 15.4%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	103	44 42.7%	48 46.6%	10 9.7%	1 1.0%

5. I have opportunities to show my learning in a variety of ways.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	17 33.3%	26 51.0%	6 11.8%	2 3.9%
Bridgeway Academy	40	10 25.0%	28 70.0%	2 5.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	14	7 50.0%	6 42.9%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	105	34 32.4%	60 57.1%	9 8.6%	2 1.9%

6. My teacher knows what I can do well.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	31 60.8%	17 33.3%	1 2.0%	2 3.9%
Bridgeway Academy	41	20 48.8%	17 41.5%	4 9.8%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	15	7 46.7%	5 33.3%	2 13.3%	1 6.7%
Survey Totals	107	58 54.2%	39 36.4%	7 6.5%	3 2.8%

7. My teacher knows what I need help with.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	27 52.9%	17 33.3%	4 7.8%	3 5.9%
Bridgeway Academy	40	18 45.0%	19 47.5%	1 2.5%	2 5.0%
Landmark East	15	5 33.3%	7 46.7%	2 13.3%	1 6.7%
Survey Totals	106	50 47.2%	43 40.6%	7 6.6%	6 5.7%

8. I know what my teacher expects of me.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	50	23 46.0%	17 34.0%	6 12.0%	4 8.0%
Bridgeway Academy	39	19 48.7%	19 48.7%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	14	5 35.7%	6 42.9%	2 14.3%	1 7.1%
Survey Totals	103	47 45.6%	42 40.8%	9 8.7%	5 4.9%

9. I have the time I need to complete my work.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	20 39.2%	24 47.1%	5 9.8%	2 3.9%
Bridgeway Academy	40	15 37.5%	19 47.5%	6 15.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	15	3 20.0%	10 66.7%	1 6.7%	1 6.7%
Survey Totals	106	38 35.8%	53 50.0%	12 11.3%	3 2.8%

10. I work hard and try my best at this school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	28 54.9%	19 37.3%	3 5.9%	1 2.0%
Bridgeway Academy	37	19 51.4%	15 40.5%	3 8.1%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	15	10 66.7%	4 26.7%	0 0.0%	1 6.7%
Survey Totals	103	57 55.3%	38 36.9%	6 5.8%	2 1.9%

11. My learning has improved at this school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	29 56.9%	16 31.4%	1 2.0%	5 9.8%
Bridgeway Academy	40	23 57.5%	14 35.0%	1 2.5%	2 5.0%
Landmark East	13	8 61.5%	4 30.8%	1 7.7%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	104	60 57.7%	34 32.7%	3 2.9%	7 6.7%

12. I understand more about how I learn best.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	23 45.1%	18 35.3%	5 9.8%	5 9.8%
Bridgeway Academy	41	19 46.3%	19 46.3%	1 2.4%	2 4.9%
Landmark East	13	5 38.5%	5 38.5%	2 15.4%	1 7.7%
Survey Totals	105	47 44.8%	42 40.0%	8 7.6%	8 7.6%

13. I enjoy being at this school and I feel a sense of belonging.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	26 51.0%	18 35.3%	4 7.8%	3 5.9%
Bridgeway Academy	38	14 36.8%	20 52.6%	2 5.3%	2 5.3%
Landmark East	14	5 35.7%	4 28.6%	4 28.6%	1 7.1%
Survey Totals	103	45 43.7%	42 40.8%	10 9.7%	6 5.8%

14. My teachers give me helpful comments about my work.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	24 47.1%	23 45.1%	1 7.8%	3 5.9%
Bridgeway Academy	40	16 40.0%	19 47.5%	4 2.5%	1 2.5%
Landmark East	14	7 50.0%	6 42.9%	1 42.9%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	105	47 44.8%	48 45.7%	6 0.0%	4 3.8%

15. I have made supportive friendships at this school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	25 49.0%	24 47.1%	2 3.9%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	41	16 39.0%	22 53.7%	3 7.3%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	14	6 42.9%	7 50.0%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	106	47 44.3%	53 50.0%	6 5.7%	0 0.0%

16. I advocate for what I need to be successful academically.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	19 37.3%	24 47.1%	5 9.8%	3 5.9%
Bridgeway Academy	41	13 31.7%	24 58.5%	3 7.3%	1 2.4%
Landmark East	14	7 50.0%	6 42.9%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	106	39 36.8%	54 50.9%	9 8.5%	4 3.8%

17. Extracurricular activities are available to me at this school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	50	11 22.0%	9 18.0%	14 28.0%	16 32.0%
Bridgeway Academy	41	15 36.6%	18 43.9%	5 12.2%	3 7.3%
Landmark East	14	7 50.0%	7 50.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	105	33 31.4%	34 32.4%	19 18.1%	19 18.1%

18. I have gained study skills at this school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	50	22 44.0%	21 42.0%	2 4.0%	5 10.0%
Bridgeway Academy	41	18 43.9%	18 43.9%	4 9.8%	1 2.4%
Landmark East	13	7 53.8%	5 38.5%	1 7.7%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	104	47 45.2%	44 42.3%	7 6.7%	6 5.8%

19. The skills I am learning are preparing me for the future.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	51	24 47.1%	19 37.3%	4 7.8%	4 7.8%
Bridgeway Academy	40	23 57.5%	15 37.5%	2 5.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	14	5 35.7%	8 57.1%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	105	52 49.5%	42 40.0%	7 6.7%	4 3.8%

Student Survey: Student Survey Comments

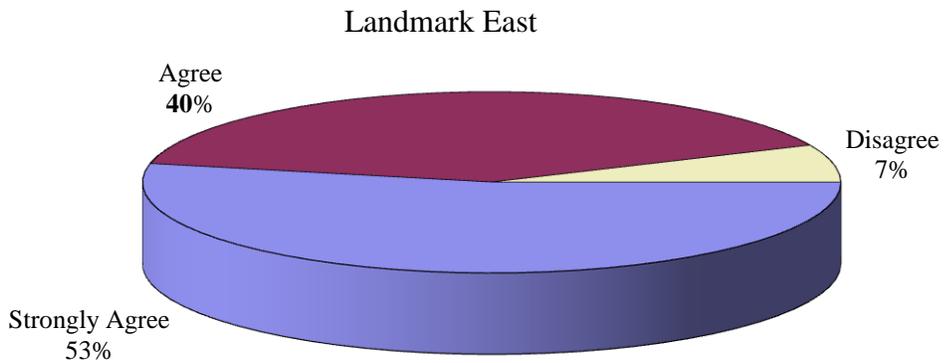
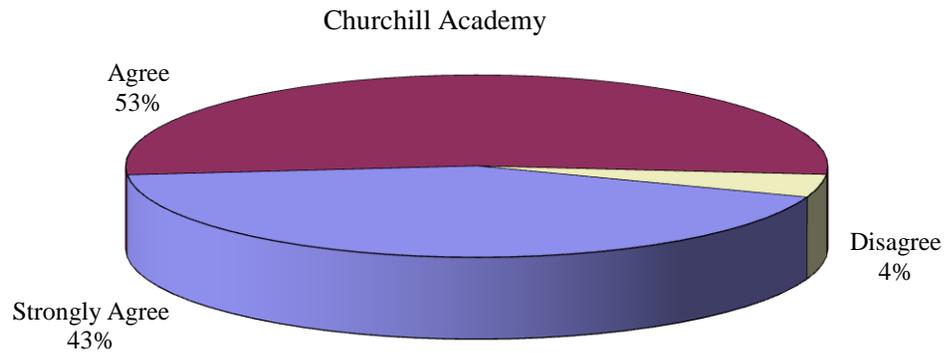
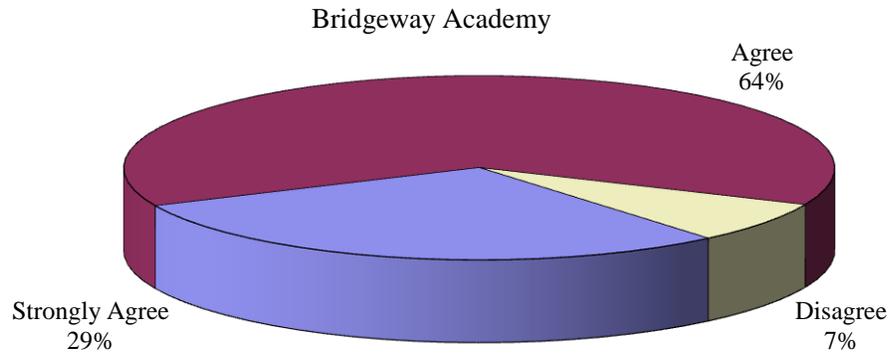
School	Comments
Bridgeway Academy	I have matured here, grew strong here and developed understanding here at this school.
Bridgeway Academy	I like all my teachers. I do need more help at spelling.
Bridgeway Academy	I think I mess up.
Bridgeway Academy	My experience has not been good here because I am bullied.
Bridgeway Academy	Teachers are very helpful.
Bridgeway Academy	This school is the perfect school (for this student).
Churchill Academy	I like this school because of the teachers.
Churchill Academy	I think this school is amazing.
Churchill Academy	I think we should have a couple of activities at our school, like basket ball, soccer, volleyball.
Churchill Academy	I want more art class, like one a week.
Churchill Academy	I want there to be more sports teams.
Churchill Academy	I wish there were some sports teams.
Churchill Academy	I would like extracurricular activities.
Churchill Academy	It wouldn't kill anyone to have an art class or dance or a guitar hero, rock band class once in a while.
Churchill Academy	Some high school tables in the classrooms are, umm ... Cruddy. Paper sticks to the tables and the tables are falling apart, and the tables are ... Ugly.
Churchill Academy	They should be able to let some kids go outside at lunch like junior high school kids and elementary. To be fair because high school get to go outside every lunch.
Churchill Academy	This school is great.
Churchill Academy	Well, I'm new here and I feel accepted here but they should have a sports team like a soccer team, basketball team and some other sports.
Landmark East	I am doing better.
Landmark East	I love coming to Landmark East. I would not want to go to any other high school. The class sizes are just right. Help is more accessible. From what my sister hears, she

	sometimes wishes that she had a learning disability so she could come.
Landmark East	I love this school. It's completely changed my life. I hope to continue at Landmark until grade 12 which is 2012.
Landmark East	Landmark is an excellent school for students with learning disabilities. They make you feel like you belong to something.

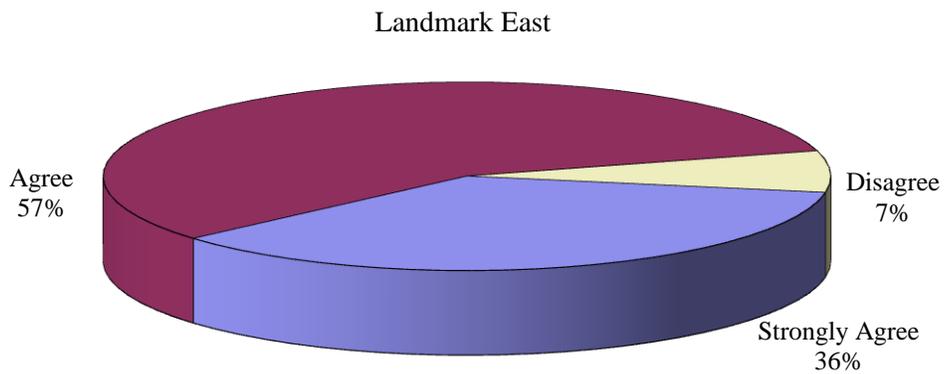
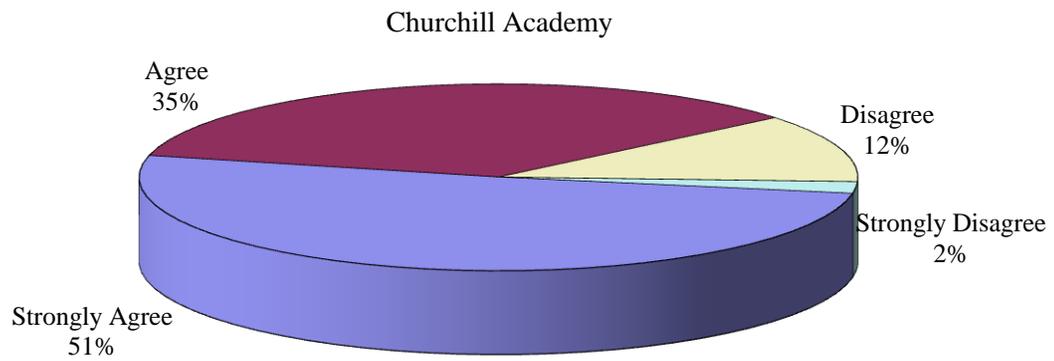
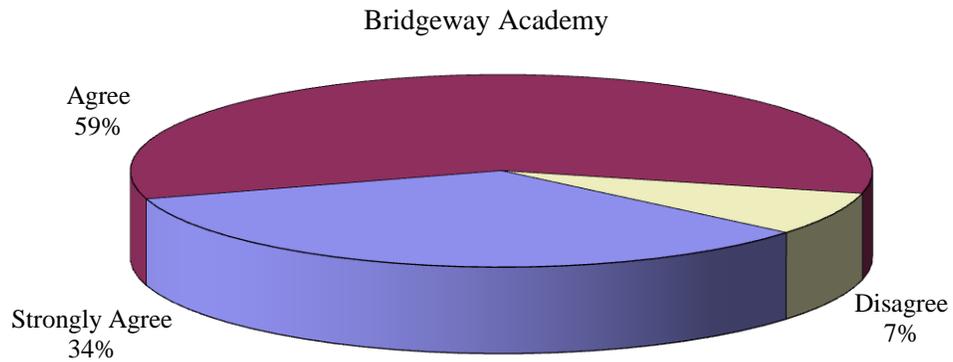
Tuition Support Program Review – Student Survey Pie Charts

The chart for each school shows the level of agreement with the statement as a percentage of the responses received from that school and not as a percentage of the total survey responses.

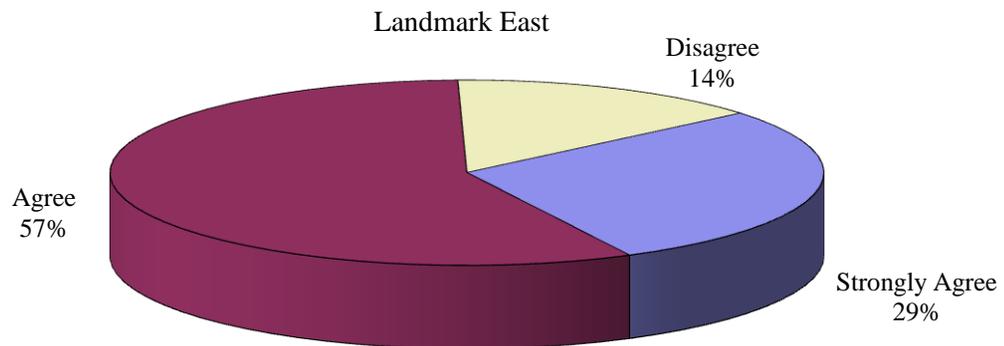
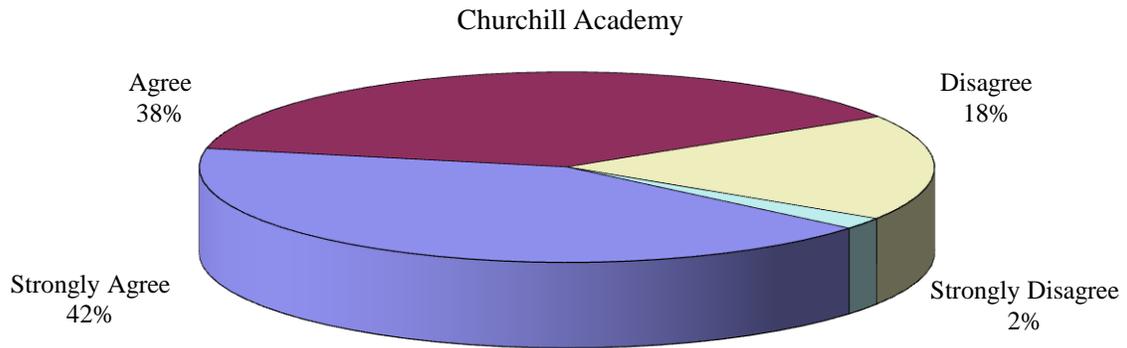
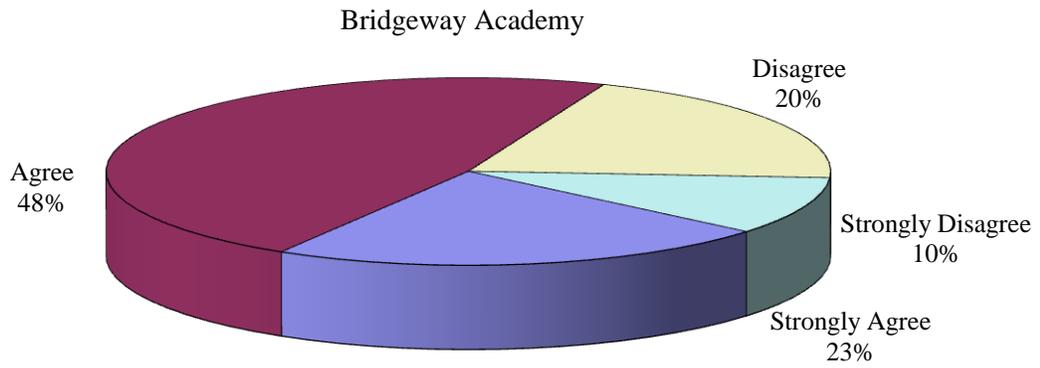
Student Survey Question 1. The teacher uses many examples when explaining things.



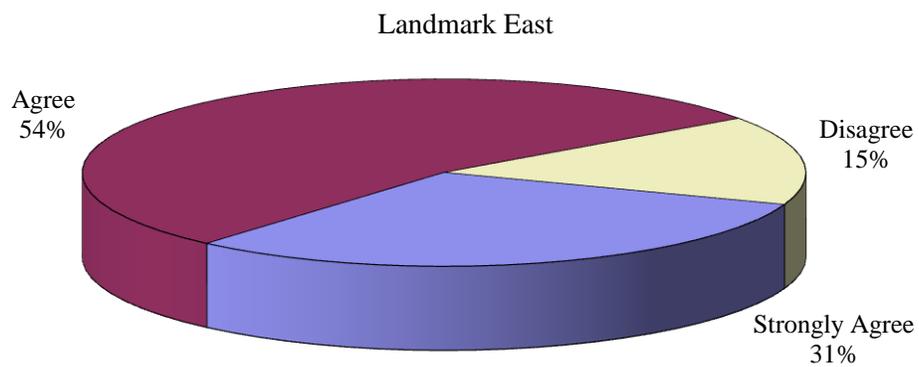
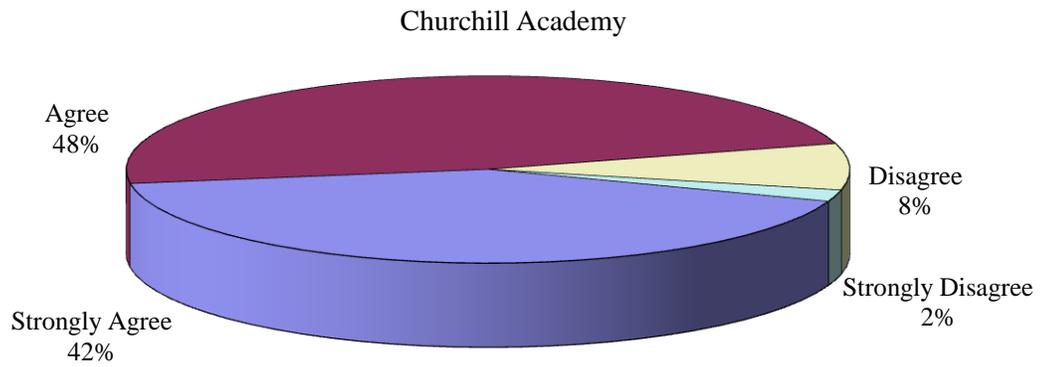
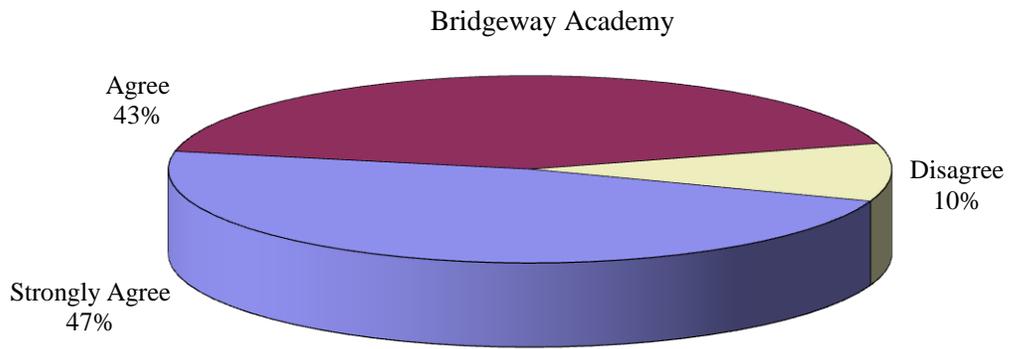
Student Survey Question 2. I have opportunities to challenge my own thinking.



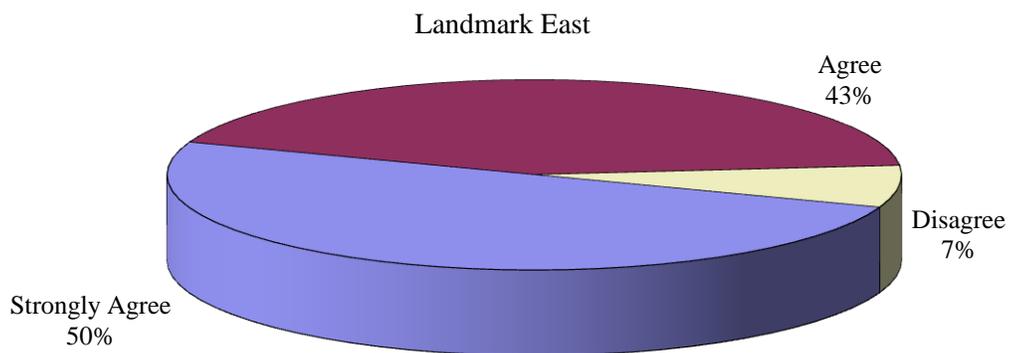
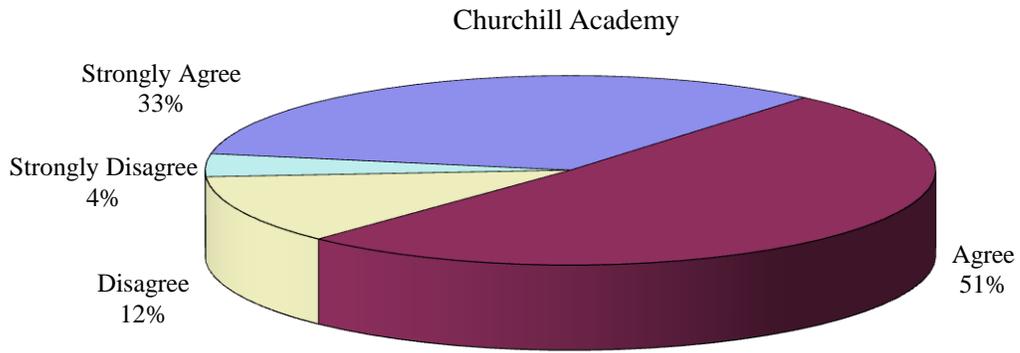
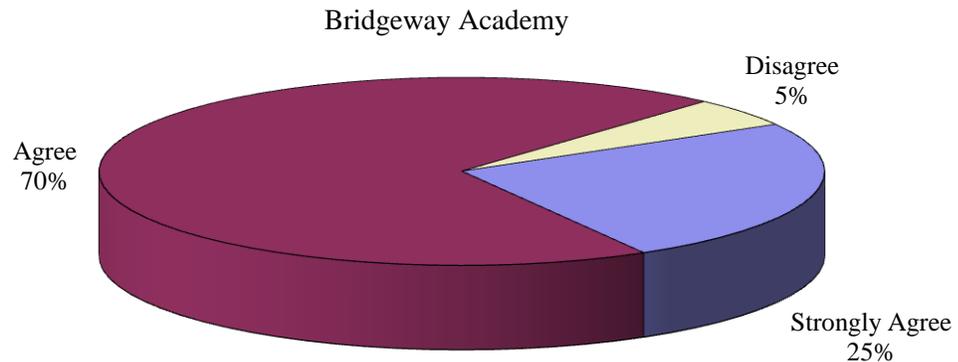
Student Survey Question 3. I use assistive technology to support my learning.



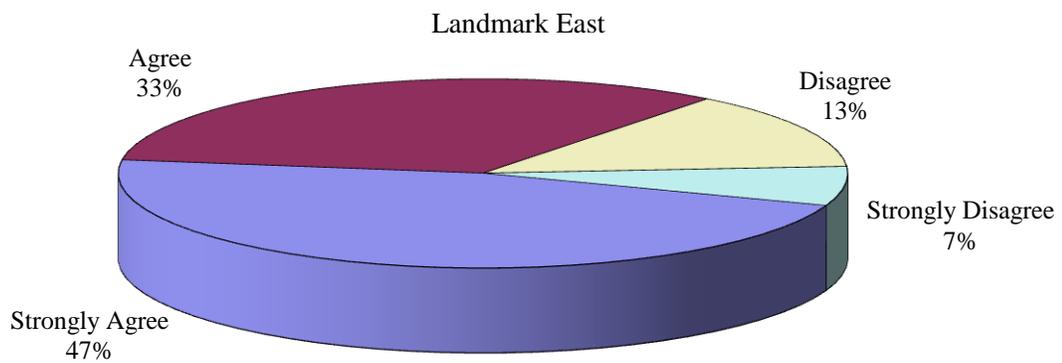
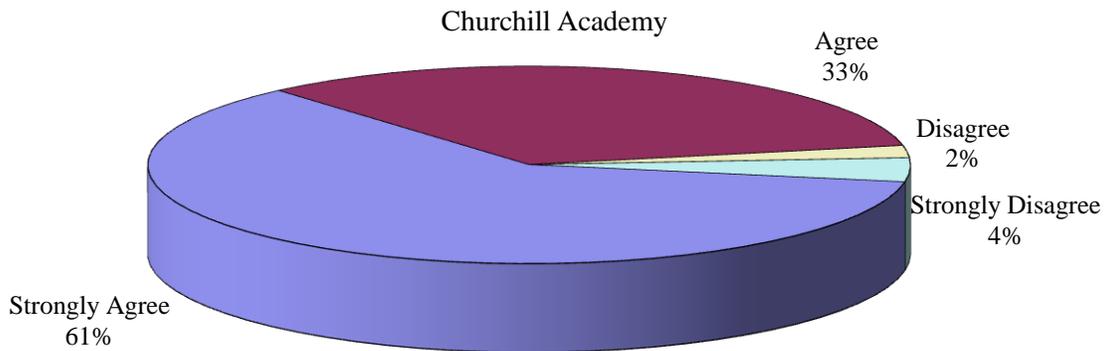
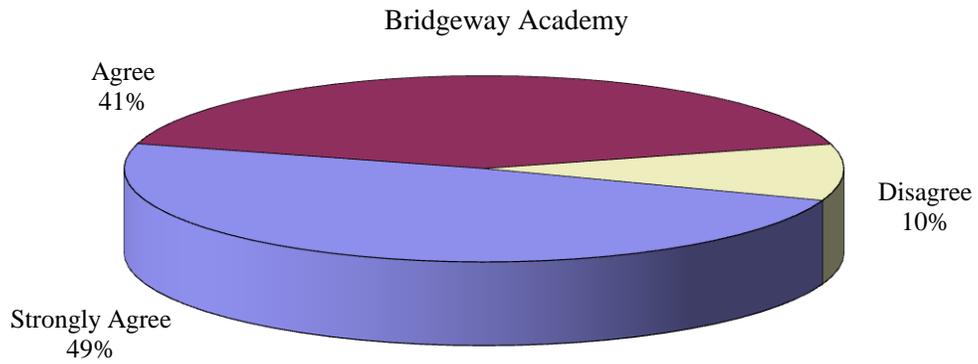
Student Survey Question 4. I have opportunities to work independently, with a partner and in a group.



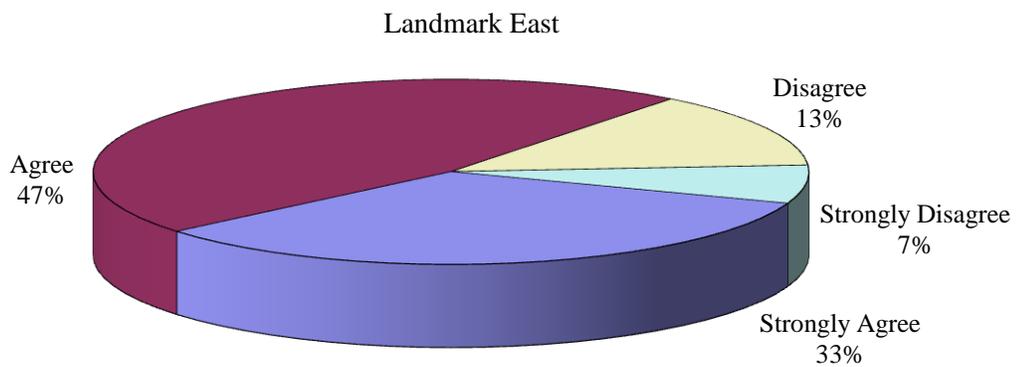
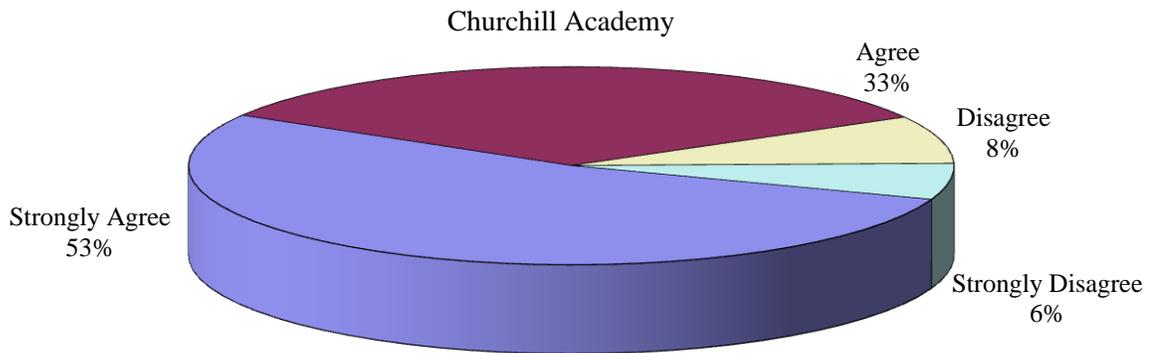
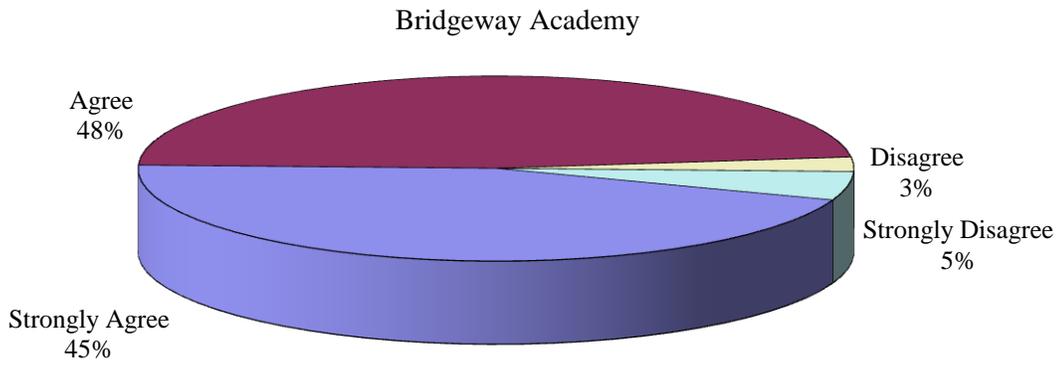
Student Survey Question 5. I have opportunities to show my learning in a variety of ways.



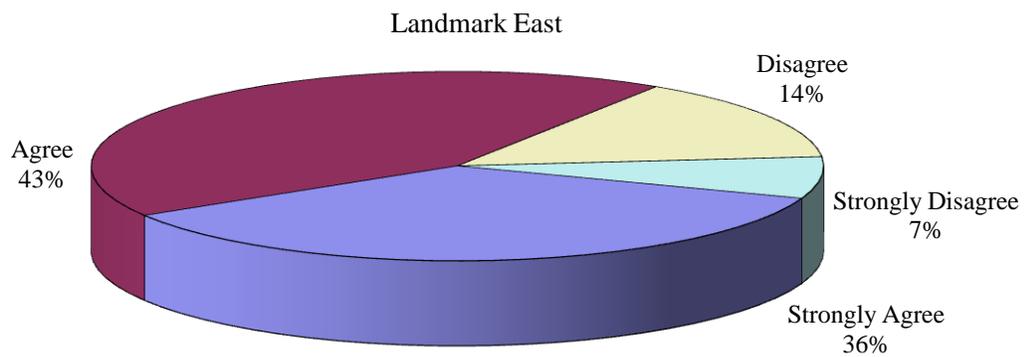
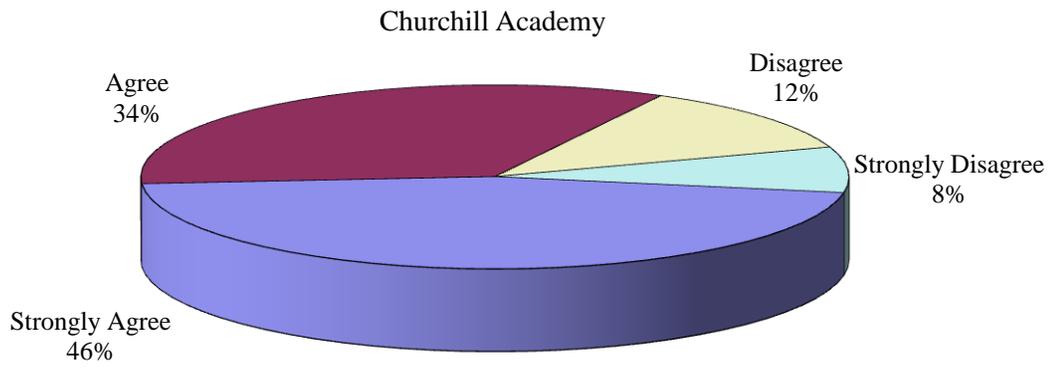
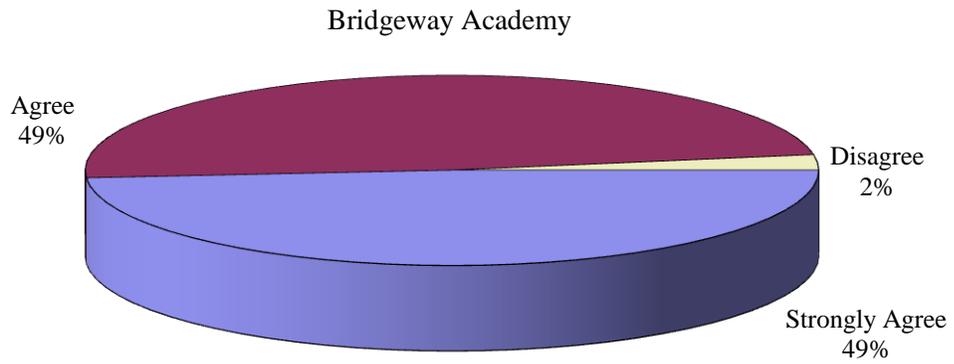
Student Survey Question 6. My teacher knows what I can do well.



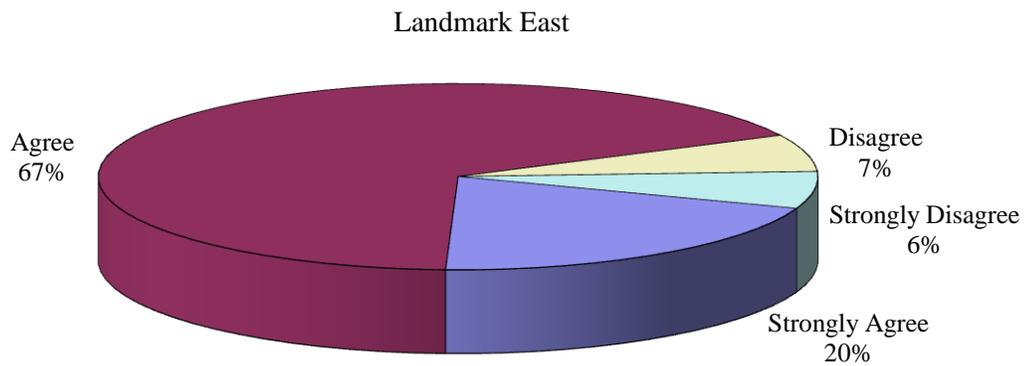
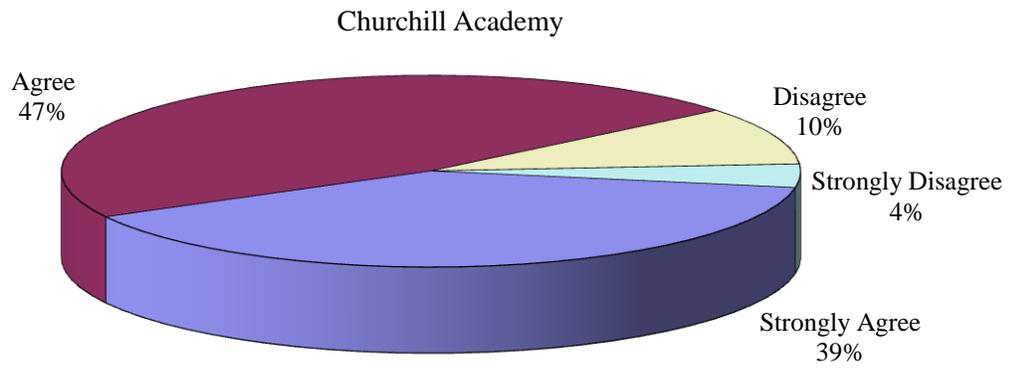
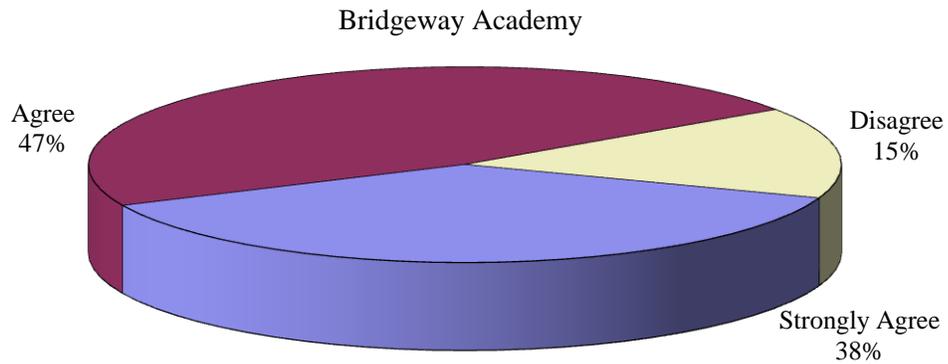
Student Survey Question 7. My teacher knows what I need help with.



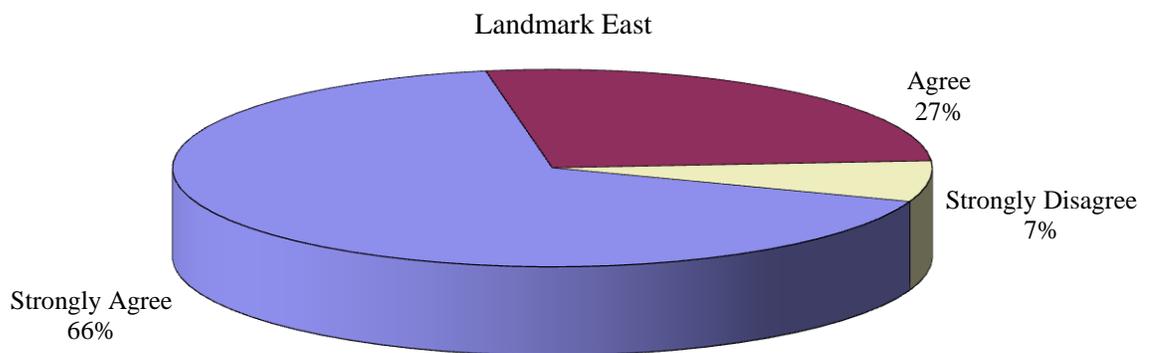
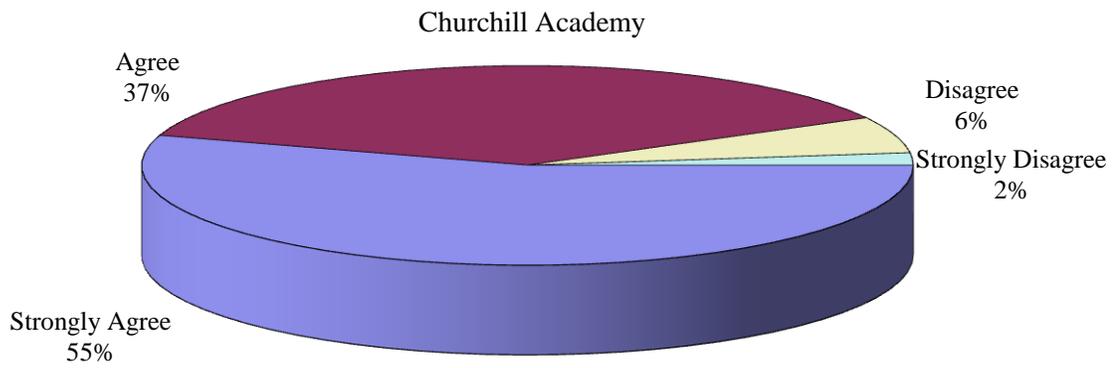
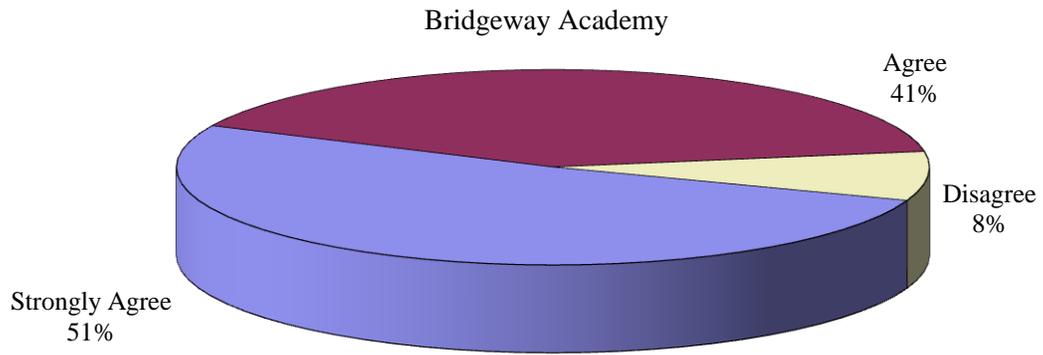
Student Survey Question 8. I know what my teacher expects of me.



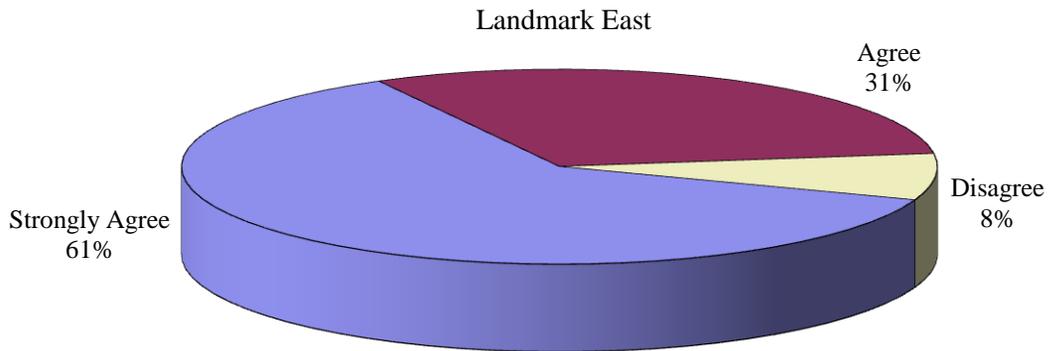
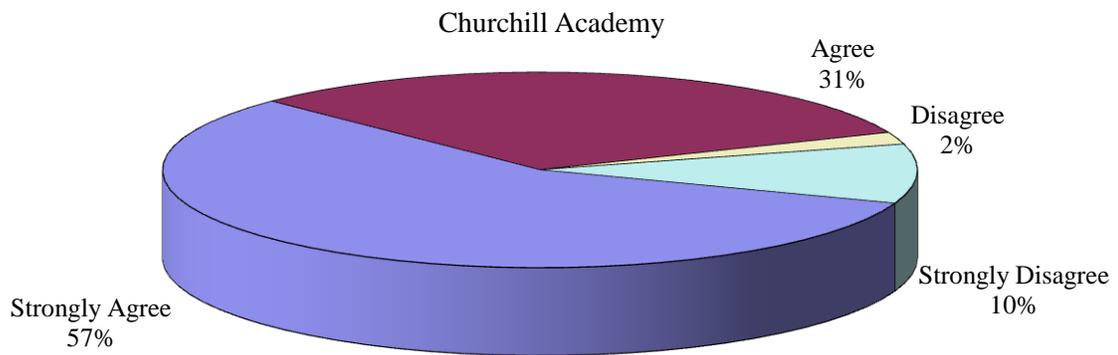
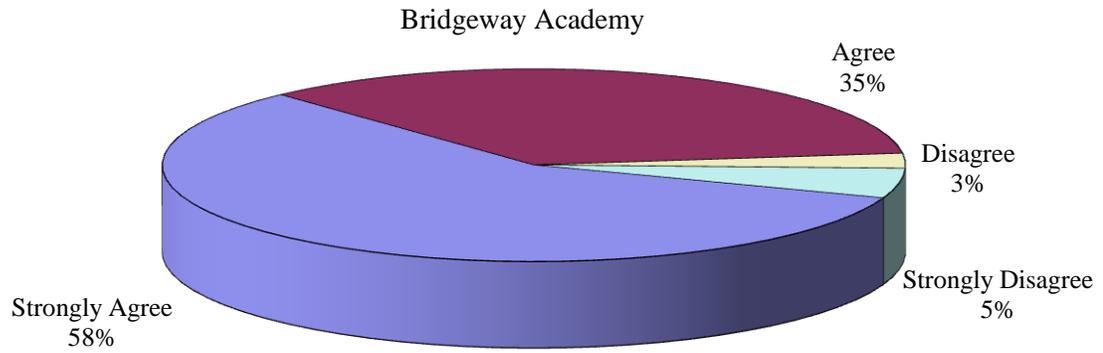
Student Survey Question 9. I have the time I need to complete my work.



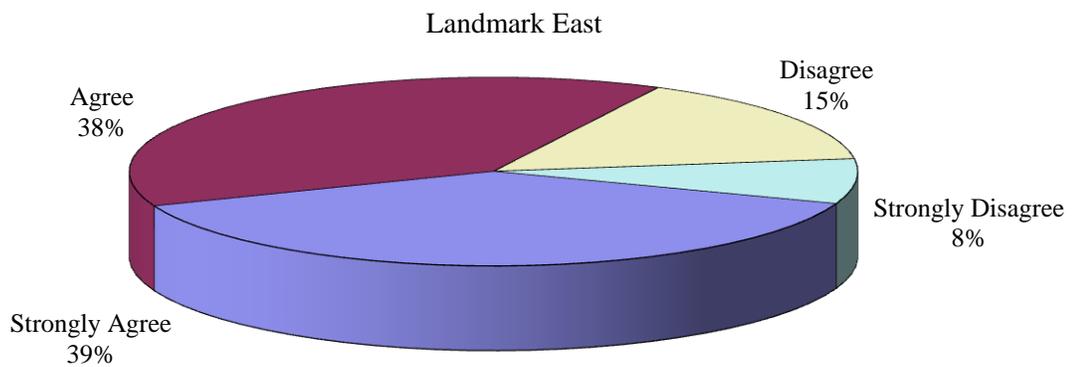
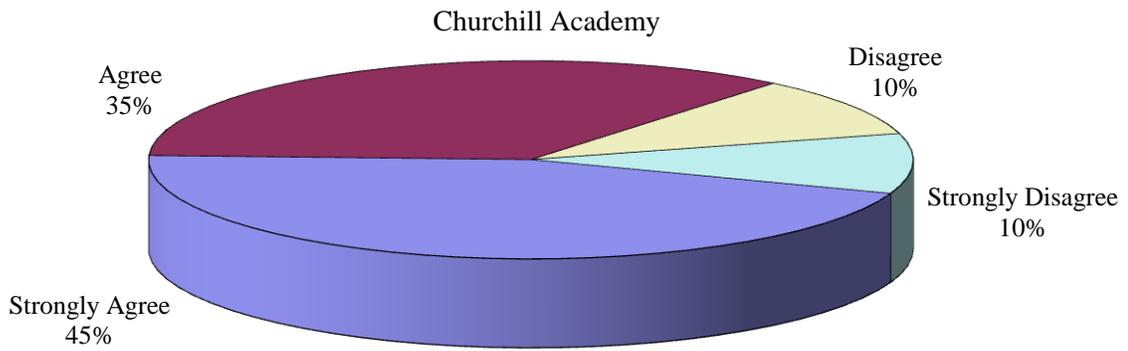
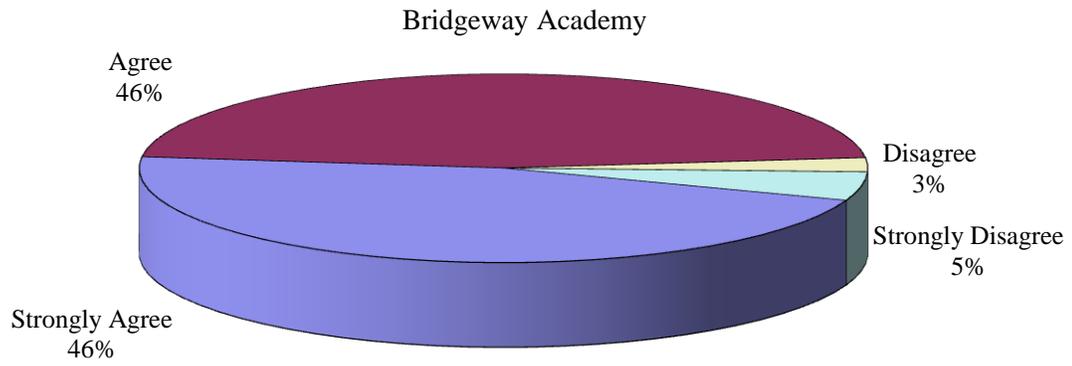
Student Survey Question 10. I work hard and try my best at this school.



Student Survey Question 11. My learning has improved at this school.

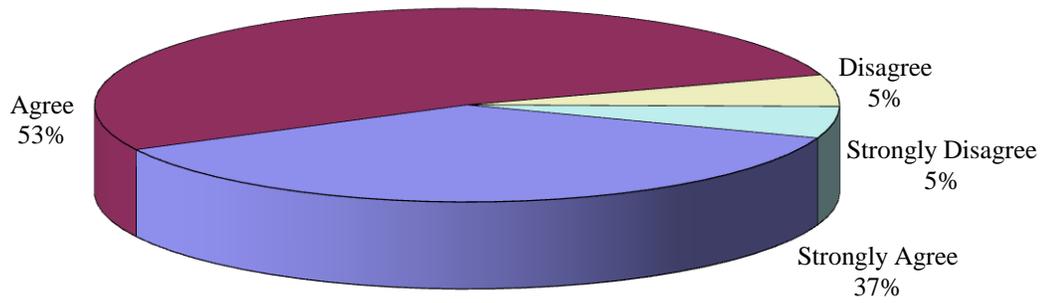


Student Survey Question 12. I understand more about how I learn best.

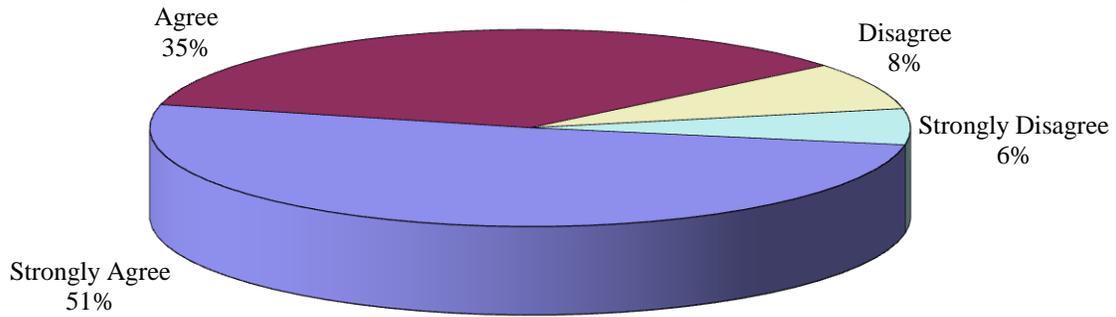


Student Survey Question 13. I enjoy being at this school and I feel a sense of belonging.

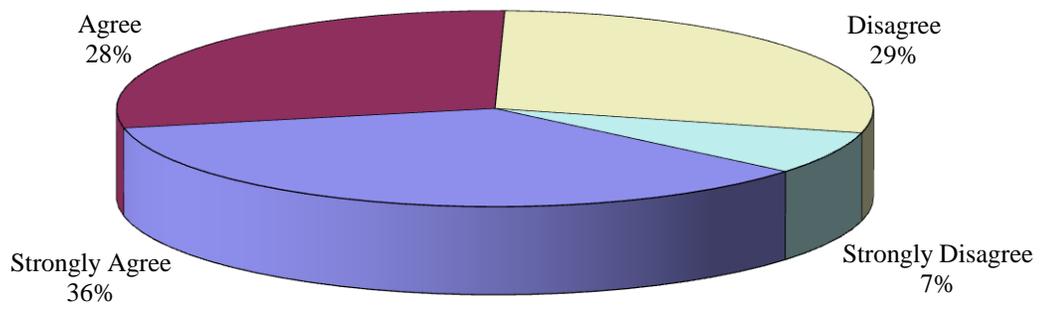
Bridgeway Academy



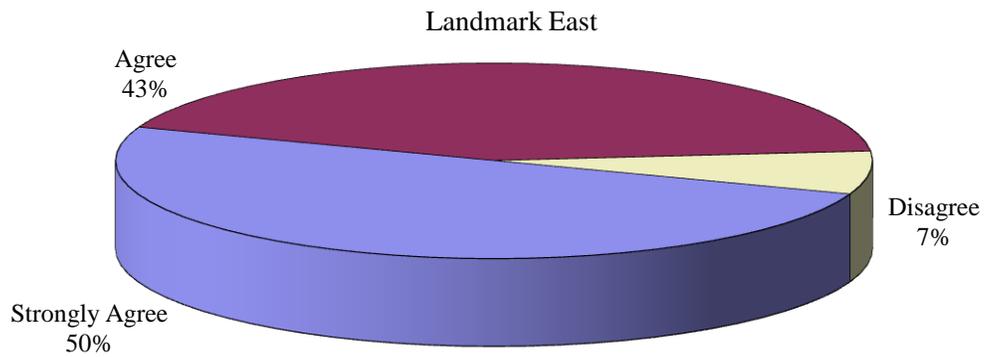
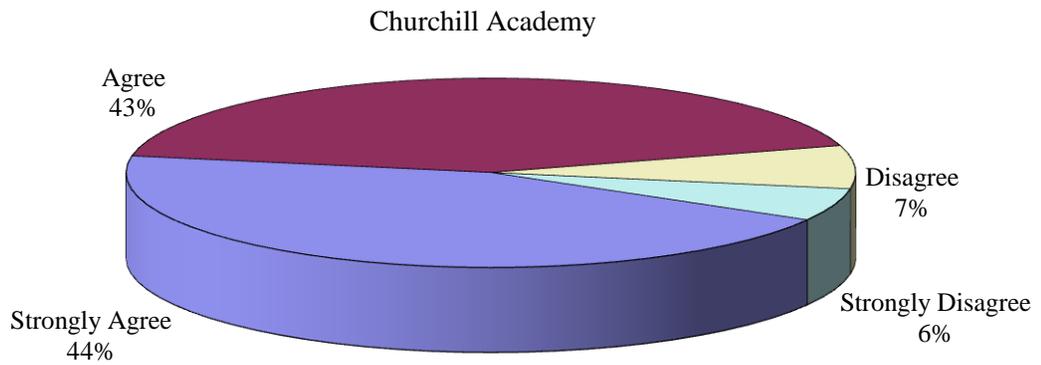
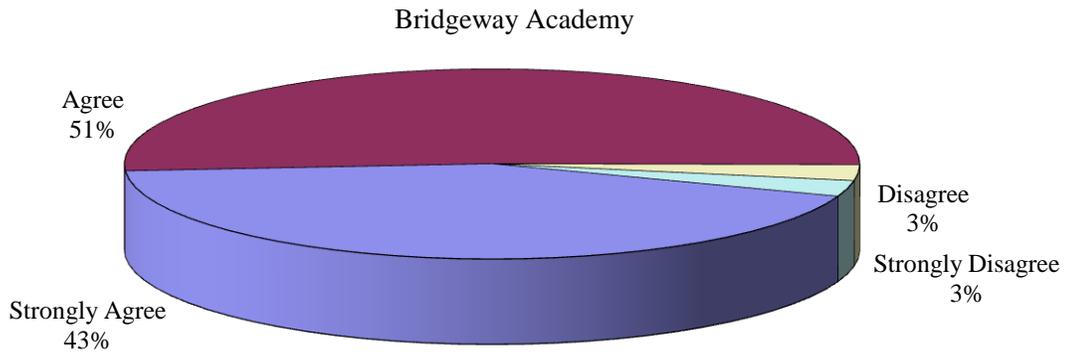
Churchill Academy



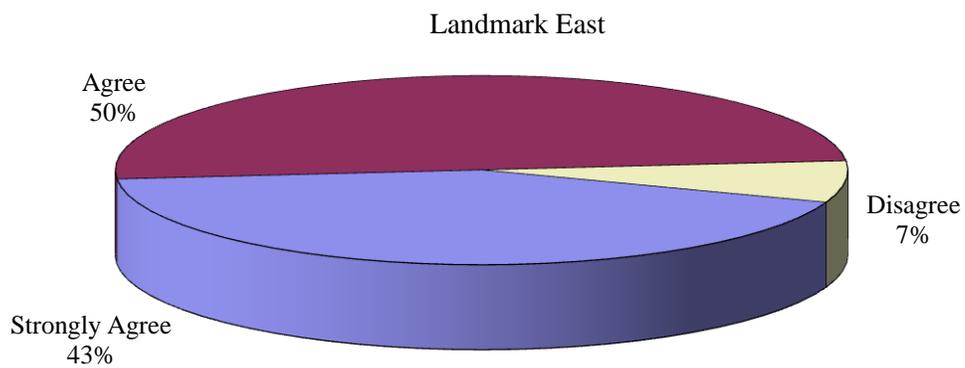
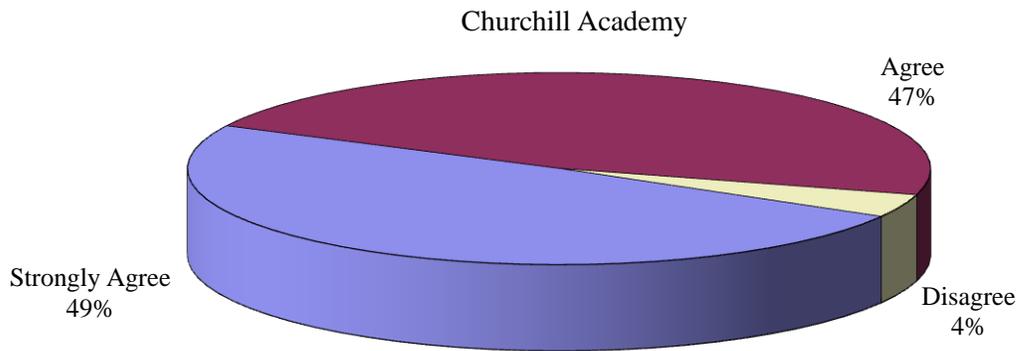
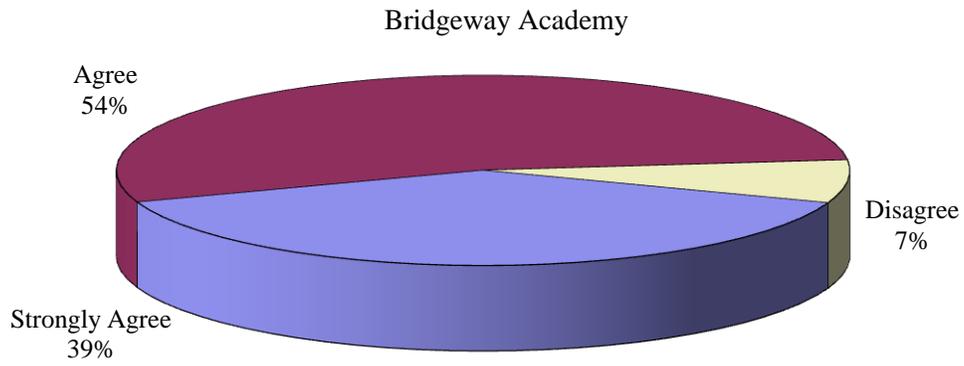
Landmark East



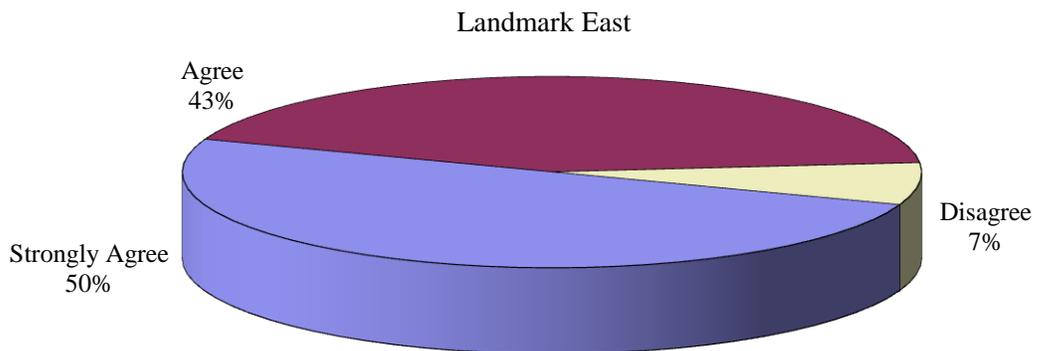
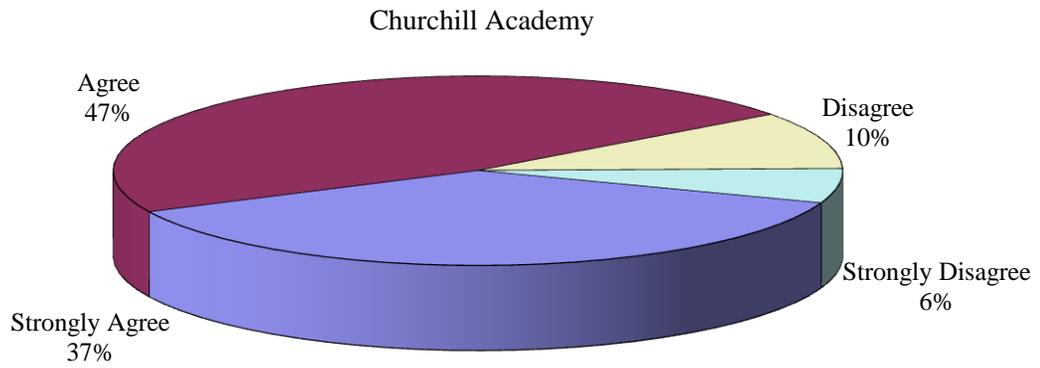
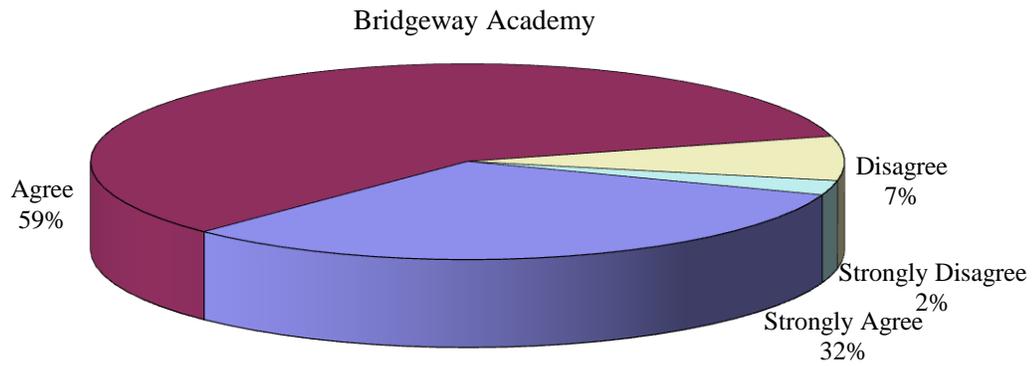
Student Survey Question 14. My teachers give me helpful comments about my work.



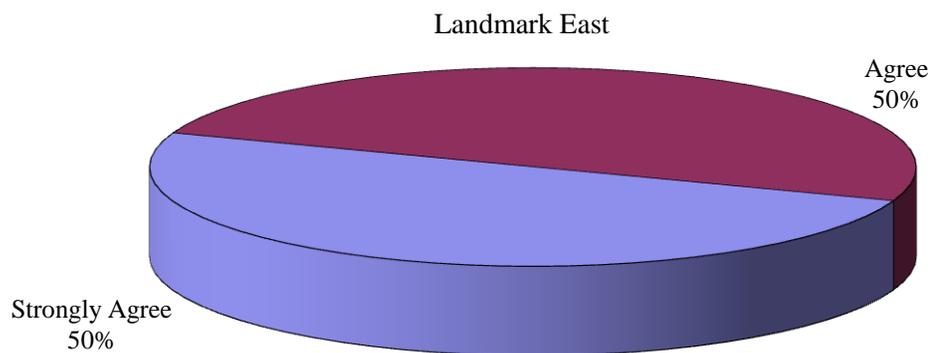
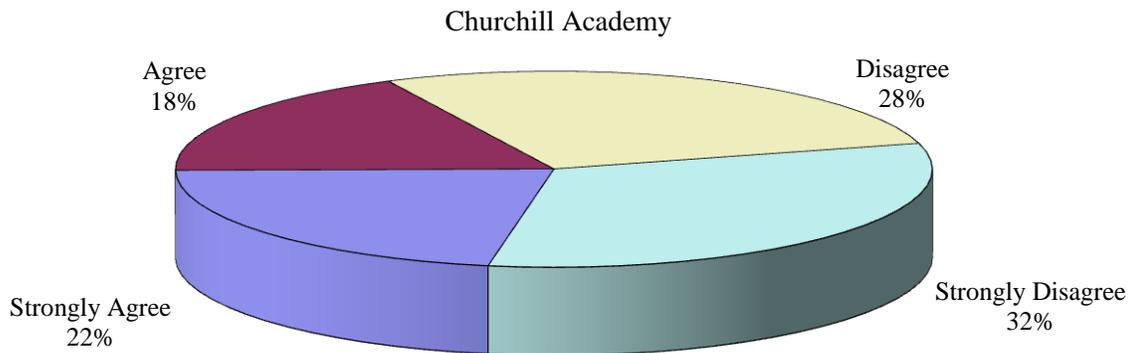
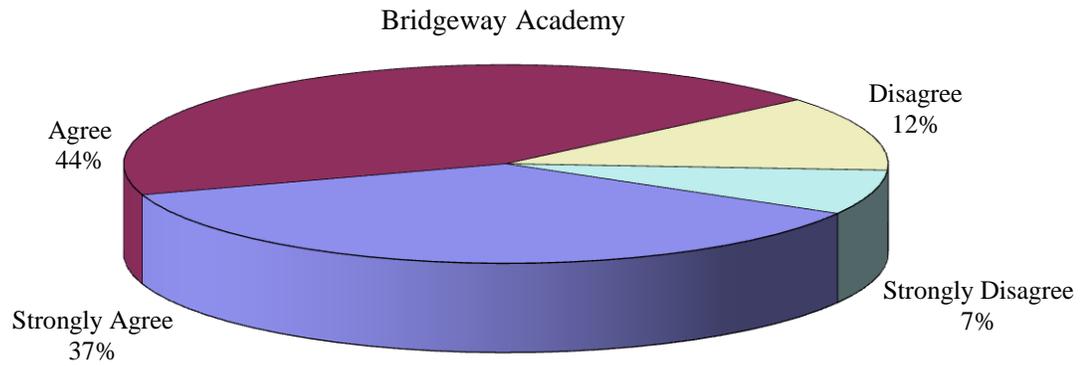
Student Survey Question 15. I have made supportive friendships at this school.



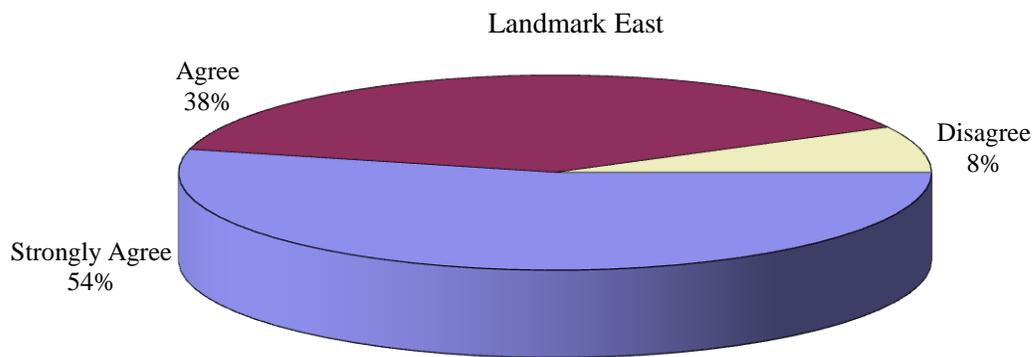
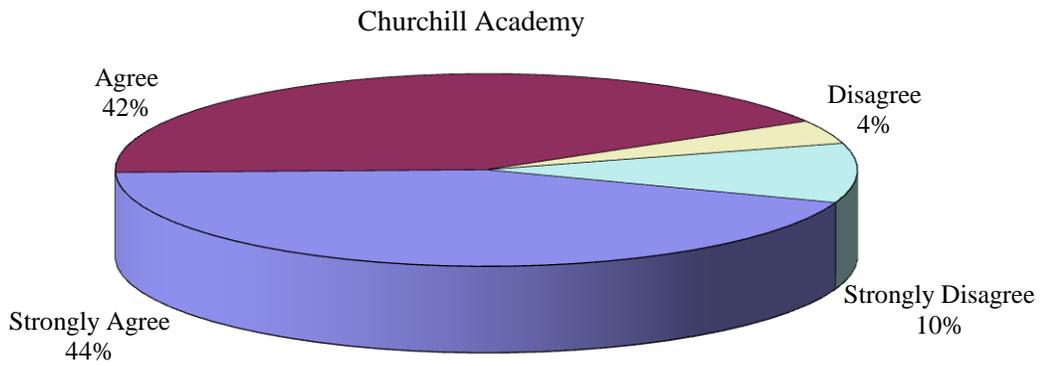
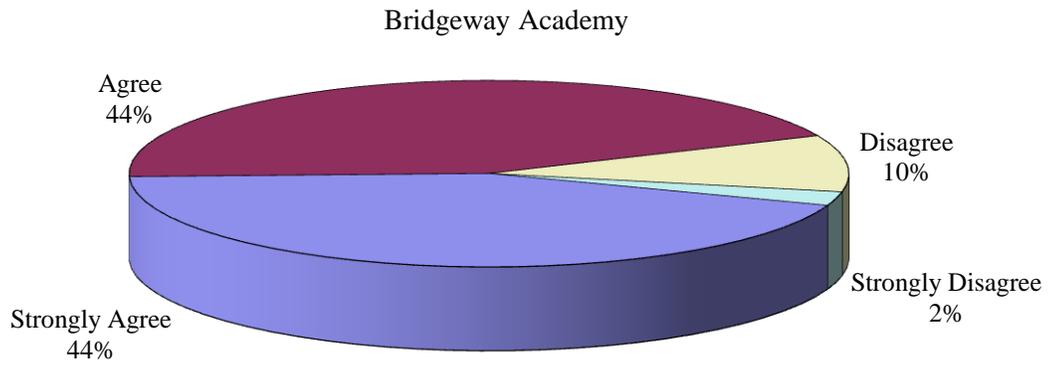
Student Survey Question 16. I advocate for what I need to be successful academically.



Student Survey Question 17. Extracurricular activities are available to me at this school.

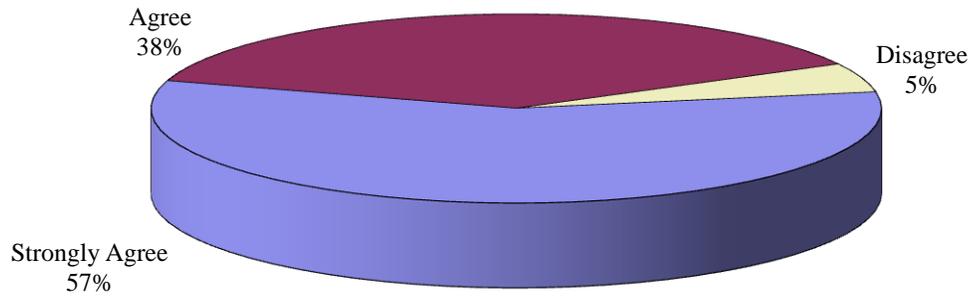


Student Survey Question 18. I have gained study skills at this school.

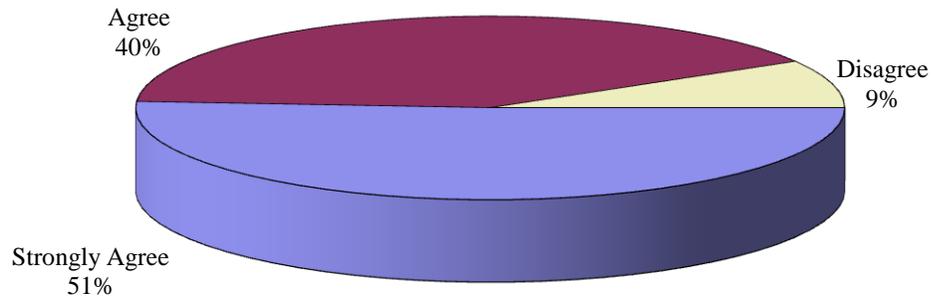


Student Survey Question 19. The skills I am learning are preparing me for the future.

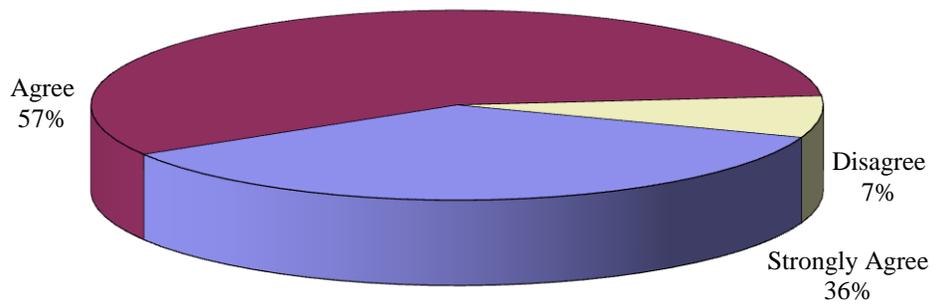
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy



Landmark East



Appendix D: Parent Survey

Summary of the Parent Survey Responses

A review of the survey questions answered by parents and their comments in the focus groups reveals similarities in their perceptions of public school versus designated special education private school, where most of their children had been receiving education for at least one year.

Most parents had the perception that if a child deflects from the “mainstream,” it is very difficult to find any help in the public schools, resulting in a loss of motivation to continue schooling, loss of interest in staying in school, frustration for the parent, significant stressors at home, and reduction of the child’s self-confidence along with self-esteem. Social ineptness further affects functioning, with resulting withdrawal or increased dropout rates.

Parents feel that public schools do not recognize or assess the academic needs of their children until a significant gap in academic achievement has occurred and the child is two to three years behind their peers. Many parents were concerned that the level of training of public school teachers is inadequate for recognition and teaching of the learning disabled and leads to labelling of the child, which decreases interest in the teacher–child relationship and that of the child and the environment.

The Tuition Support Program seems to provide parents with hope that their children will be able to achieve the education they are entitled to. However, in spite of the support provided financially, some parents still cannot afford the extra funding required for their children.

Some of the parents’ concerns are as follows:

- The student enrolled in the designated special education private school (DSEPS) does not adequately understand their learning disability. The DSEPS teachers must have adequate training to be able to provide the student an understanding of their own cognitive issues. An ongoing liaison with psychologists and medical professions is necessary.
- Application of learned strategies to new situations is also an issue hence teachers must be able to help students sequence and sustain information; e.g., to be able to apply, encode, and decode information as necessary.
- Transition to public school and/or post-secondary education for students did not indicate clear guidelines. Parents felt that transition from DSEPS to public school and /or post-secondary was not always a formal process. Some schools did not have a transitional support team, and teachers communicate with public school teachers. Perhaps, this could be achieved by allowing elective subjects such as physical education or fine arts to be conducted in the public school system, so when readiness is assessed, it is a gradual transition for the student, rather than the abrupt transition of starting a new academic year in an unfamiliar school, which can cause emotional and academic issues to resurface.
- Satisfaction with the Tuition Support application process was minimal among the parent group. Most parents felt the process was lengthy. The uncertainty about their child’s acceptance into the program was stressful and overwhelming, and not enough information about the Tuition Support Program was being provided in public schools. Parents also felt the criteria necessary for a student to be accepted were convoluted, students who were not on an IPP were excluded, and the appeal process lengthy and time consuming. They felt that guidelines are not clear and that students with learning

disabilities are often left out. Psycho-educational testing is not done in time to allow children to receive support/IPP in public schools, and teachers often construe a learning disability as behavioural issues or lack of cooperation on the part of the student.

- Parents also felt that the TSP should be an unlimited support and be based on the individual achievement and progress of the student without timelines attached until at least high school graduation. Parents expressed some concern about the financial commitment for their child over several years and felt it should be covered due to the nature of their child's disability.

Summary of the Parent Survey Responses

Overall, the responses to the survey of parents with students currently attending Landmark East, Churchill Academy, and Bridgeway Academy were favourable; the exceptions being those questions dealing with funding and self-advocacy.

In 11 of the 15 questions, the percentage of parents responding with either "strongly agree" or "agree" ranges from 87 percent to 100 percent. For questions 3, 8 and 13, the percentage of parents responding with either "strongly agree" or "agree" ranges from 77 percent to 80 percent. Only questions 2 and 15 had less than 57 percent of the respondents answering "strongly agree" or "agree."

The following statements elicited the highest level (between 87 percent and 100 percent) of agreement (strongly agree or agree) by the respondents:

1. My child has an understanding of their learning disability.
4. My child has improved academically in reading and writing.
5. My child has improved academically in math.
6. My child has improved organizational skills.
7. Ongoing assessment informs me of my child's progress.
9. There has been an improvement in my child's emotions and moods.
10. Improvement has been noted in my child's self-esteem.
11. The stress level at home has been reduced.
12. Good communication exists between home and school.
14. I am satisfied with my child's experience at this school.

Responses to statements 3, 8, and 13 also indicated a high level of agreement, ranging from 77 percent to 80 percent of parents either strongly agreeing or agreeing with those statements.

3. My child has the ability to apply learned strategies to new learning situations.
8. My child can make and keep friendships.
13. My child is being prepared for transition to public school or post-secondary education.

Of the total number of parents responding to the survey, questions 2 and 15 received the most variance.

To question 2, "My child has the ability to self-advocate," only 56.2 percent of the responding parents indicated "strongly agree" or "agree", while 36 percent disagreed with that statement.

The responses to question 15, “I am satisfied with the Tuition Support application process,” were split almost in half: 56.8 percent indicated “strongly agree” or “agree,” and the remainder 43.2 percent indicated “disagree” or “strongly disagree.”

Of the 71 additional comments submitted by the parents, 21 dealt at least in part with the application funding process, only 2 of which were positive comments. Most found the application and appeal process very stressful. There were also 22 comments dealing with the limited number of years the Tuition Support Program is available. All of those comments noted a variation of “the underlying disability necessitating the student’s attending these schools does not change, therefore the requirement for funding does not change and funding should be continued as long as it is required”.

Parent Survey Results

The column heading “Totals” refers to the total number of responses from that school to the question or statement or the total number of survey responses.

The following tables detail the survey results for each question or statement, by the school and by the total number of survey responses. The first column contains the total number of responses. The remaining columns show the level of agreement with each statement as a number and as a percentage of the responses received.

For example, in the first question shown below, from Churchill Academy there were a total of 32 responses to that question. Seven or 21.9 percent of those 32 responses, strongly agreed with the statement “My child has an understanding of their learning disability.” For that question, there were a total of 89 responses from all three DSEPS involved, of which 22, or 24.7 percent of the total respondents answering that question, strongly agreed with the statement.

1. My child has an understanding of their learning disability.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	7 21.9%	18 56.3%	4 12.5%	3 9.4%
Bridgeway Academy	40	8 20.0%	29 72.5%	3 7.5%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	17	7 41.2%	9 52.9%	1 5.9%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	89	22 24.7%	56 62.9%	8 9.0%	3 3.4%

2. My child has the ability to self-advocate.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	0 0.0%	11 34.4%	17 53.1%	4 12.5%
Bridgeway Academy	40	2 5.0%	26 65.0%	10 25.0%	2 5.0%
Landmark East	17	1 5.9%	10 58.8%	5 29.4%	1 5.9%
Survey Totals	89	3 3.4%	47 52.8%	32 36.0%	7 7.9%

3. My child has the ability to apply learned strategies to new learning situations.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	2 6.3%	19 59.4%	8 25.0%	3 9.4%
Bridgeway Academy	39	5 12.8%	28 71.8%	6 15.4%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	16	3 18.8%	10 62.5%	3 18.8%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	87	10 11.5%	57 65.5%	17 19.5%	3 3.4%

4. My child has improved academically in reading and writing.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	13 40.6%	19 59.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	39	19 48.7%	18 46.2%	2 5.1%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	16	8 50.0%	8 50.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	87	40 46.0%	45 51.7%	2 2.3%	0 0.0%

5. My child has improved academically in math.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	10 31.3%	19 59.4%	3 9.4%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	39	10 25.6%	27 69.2%	2 5.1%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	16	10 62.5%	6 37.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	87	30 34.5%	52 59.8%	5 5.7%	0 0.0%

6. My child has improved organizational skills.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	5 15.6%	21 65.6%	6 18.8%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	40	16 40.0%	21 52.5%	3 7.5%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	16	7 43.8%	9 56.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	88	28 31.8%	51 58.0%	9 10.2%	0 0.0%

7. Ongoing assessment informs me of my child's progress.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	14 43.8%	17 53.1%	1 3.1%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	37	15 40.5%	22 59.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	17	11 64.7%	5 29.4%	1 5.9%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	86	40 46.5%	44 51.2%	2 2.3%	0 0.0%

8. My child can make and keep friendships.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	30	6 20.0%	16 53.3%	8 26.7%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	40	12 30.0%	22 55.0%	5 12.5%	1 2.5%
Landmark East	17	5 29.4%	7 41.2%	5 29.4%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	87	23 26.4%	45 51.7%	18 20.7%	1 1.1%

9. There has been an improvement in my child's emotions and moods.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	15 46.9%	14 43.8%	3 9.4%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	40	18 45.0%	21 52.5%	1 2.5%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	17	11 64.7%	6 35.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	89	44 49.4%	41 46.1%	4 4.5%	0 0.0%

10. Improvement has been noted in my child's self-esteem.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	16 50.0%	12 37.5%	4 12.5%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	39	22 56.4%	17 43.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	16	13 81.3%	3 18.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	87	51 58.6%	32 36.8%	4 4.6%	0 0.0%

11. The stress level at home has been reduced.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	18 56.3%	12 37.5%	2 6.3%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	39	27 69.2%	11 28.2%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	17	12 70.6%	5 29.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	88	57 64.8%	28 31.8%	3 3.4%	0 0.0%

12. Good communication exists between home and school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	22 68.8%	10 31.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	40	24 60.0%	15 37.5%	1 2.5%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	17	12 70.6%	5 29.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	89	58 65.2%	30 33.7%	1 1.1%	0 0.0%

13. My child is being prepared for transition to public school or post secondary education.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	30	4 13.3%	16 53.3%	5 16.7%	5 16.7%
Bridgeway Academy	38	8 21.1%	24 63.2%	6 15.8%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	15	8 53.3%	6 40.0%	1 6.7%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	83	20 24.1%	46 55.4%	12 14.5%	5 6.0%

14. I am satisfied with my child's experience at this school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	32	21 65.6%	11 34.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	40	26 65.0%	14 35.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	17	12 70.6%	5 29.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	89	59 66.3%	30 33.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

15. I am satisfied with the Tuition Support application process.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
Churchill Academy	32	7	21.9%	14	43.8%	7	21.9%	4	12.5%
Bridgeway Academy	40	8	20.0%	11	27.5%	14	35.0%	7	17.5%
Landmark East	16	4	25.0%	6	37.5%	2	12.5%	4	25.0%
Survey Totals	88	19	21.6%	31	35.2%	23	26.1%	15	17.0%

Parent Survey: Parent Survey Comments

Please note:

In these survey comments (Student) is used where parents used child's actual name.

When a detailed comment document was submitted, the comments were condensed while attempting to keep the original salient points.

School	Comments
Landmark East	Before LME our house was a nightmare ... We wonder why tuition support is not granted past 3 years. One way or the other, you have to pay for them to go to public school. Why not supplement tuition costs for as long as a child needs it.
Landmark East	If it was not for Landmark East, my son would not have developed socially/academically/self-esteem, friendship, etc ... He will actually sit down and talk to you. Academically, he has improved greatly ... I would like to board him. He would improve more (but I) can't afford it. There should be a GRANT for BOARDING so parents can board their children.
Landmark East	The tuition support is greatly appreciated. The process to receive this assistance was lengthy and stressful.
Landmark East	The tuition support application process is extremely difficult to go through. The process is not easy, there is not enough information provided by the public school system or the Dept. of Education. Parents are kept in the dark and many parents and family go through an extremely frustrating and stressful time in order to help their children.
Landmark East	The process for tuition support application is often long and you don't hear anything for a long time. Would like to see deadlines met and info given in ample time so if appeals are needed you can give yourself time to prepare. It is a lot of money at stake here and most families cannot dish out the funds.
Landmark East	The application process at the initial stage was very stringent and was not supportive of students who had not been supported through the IPP Process, which eliminated them from the support program. After several appeals and a meeting (and intervention), (Student) was finally accepted into the Tuition Support Program.
Landmark East	A child with a learning disability must be assessed with a holistic approach judging how that disability affects the child's world, including the emotional, physical and self-esteem challenges that create daily barriers to his/her ability to learn.
Landmark East	We feel the application process could be made easier. In our case, we were turned down and had to appeal ... We also strongly disagree with the decision to phase out this program, because the public system cannot handle kids like our son.

Landmark East	(Student) has gone from hating public school (since primary) to smiling in the morning going to Landmark East. They have worked with his learning disabilities so that he even likes math, give him respect that he hasn't seen in public school, and a sense of belonging he has not experienced. I am very grateful for the Tuition Support Program. Without it, (Student) would not have progressed greatly in all areas.
Landmark East	We had a struggle getting funding because his school wanted the funding so they wouldn't label (Student) IPP.
Landmark East	Speaking from experience, this (the application) is an unnecessarily difficult process. It became very intimidating and caused a great deal of unnecessary stress and documentation. This process does not need road blocks. Parents are caused undue grief and financial stress. Guidelines are very ambiguous and the appeal process is unreasonable. This has caused many parents to give up in frustration. This process needs compassion and common sense, focusing on the educational needs of the student. I suspect that the number of applications that are refused is much greater than those that are accepted. The Department of Education is doing an injustice to these students with learning disabilities that have to count on this financial support.
Landmark East	We believe the Tuition Support and Tuition Support Supplement should be in place for the student/child if need be until they graduate from grade 12!! This not knowing whether we can count on Tuition Support and Tuition Support Supplement is FAR TOO STRESSFUL (and yes, nerve wrecking, literally when both the parents and the child/student KNOW where they would be MORE SUCCESSFUL BUT THE FINANCIAL BURDEN IS TOO-O-O GREAT!
Churchill Academy	Eligibility criteria are problematic and are clearly designed to exclude as many people as possible. Imagine what would happen if ALL students in NS received the help and support they needed!
Churchill Academy	My son is autistic and ADD. Moving him from public school to Churchill has resulted in a palpable improvement overall. He's in a safe and nurturing environment and a return to public school at this juncture would be detrimental to his mental health. I was initially denied TS but was successful upon appeal. The appeal chair humanized the process and for that I am grateful. Not all children fit into boxes in the prescribed timeframe!
Churchill Academy	Our son has just started at Churchill Academy but we have already seen an improvement. His teacher works great with him and she is teaching him new skills and ways to adapt every day!
Churchill Academy	Churchill has been my son's survival! He needs to graduate from this school. Until the public school can offer all the advantages of Churchill for all students, the tuition support program must continue with no cap on funding, do not put an end to this program after 4 years. Continue it until our children can go to public schools and succeed like Churchill. All programs/classroom size must be in place at public schools.
Churchill Academy	There should be no limit on the number of years that the support is received. Parents would not send their child to this type of school unless they felt there was no other option. The public school system does not have the support systems available to meet the needs of our child. A school of this type is her only hope of success.
Churchill Academy	Churchill Academy has been life changing for both my daughter and our family ... The Tuition Support program is ABSOLUTELY VITAL for our family and we would be in seriously bad circumstances without it. Thank you.

Churchill Academy	My daughter spent 11 years in the public school system and this system failed her tremendously as noted by myself and two psychologists at the IWK. But YET I was denied funding from the Tuition Support Program. I was made to APPEAL!! This should never have happened. Children who do not learn in the typical classroom setting in a public school and have unique learning styles should NEVER have to go through what my daughter has.
Churchill Academy	<p>The above comments have left no room for “Could be improved upon,” etc. The area of concern for me is the unavailability of courses and the school decides what class my child has to enrol in—parents do not (at least I didn’t) have a say.</p> <p>As a small school, the grade 12 students should be introduced to options re: careers and info—this is only by request and for interested fields, the students need to have choices as they do not always have a clear picture of what may be available to them after grade 12. This is missing.</p> <p>Finally, suggestions have been made to the Principal at Churchill in the past years (up to and incl. last year) to have “free” classes. By this, it was asked if students from NASC, Community College, etc. could come to school and either teach students, give a presentation on available courses, etc., have free counselling from outside the school, however, no effort has been made to do so. Things such as this could be a help to our children at a minimal cost—if any cost at all. Because funding is available for the students through the Support Program, perhaps this could be looked at for future students entering grade 10, 11, and 12.</p> <p>Also, there is not enough tailored teaching for the individual.</p>
Churchill Academy	I feel Tuition Support should be provided as long as the child is in school and not have to go back to regular school. This will only cause them to go back to where (they) started and all the work this school has provided will be lost.
Churchill Academy	I am satisfied with the Tuition Support application process. Any and all questions have always been addressed ... I will say, that although the process is great and I am thrilled beyond words to know that this program will continue for a 4th year, I am very concerned about my son’s welfare once this support is gone. Please continue this program ...
Churchill Academy	The Tuition Support Program and Churchill Academy have provided hope for the future of my pre-teen daughter; where there was little before ... We cannot overstate how this opportunity has positively affected the trajectory of her social and academic life. We are enormously grateful.
Churchill Academy	I am satisfied with the Tuition Support Application process, however I do feel that Tuition Support should be available for as long as the child needs it. Not just a set amount of years. I am thankful for the Tuition Support but it should be a right not a privilege to go to a specialized school if the child needs it.
Churchill Academy	<p>The tuition support program is a cost neutral program, and potentially cost saving. The program should be easier to access. A student should be funded for as long as they require the services.</p> <p>The tuition support program should be continued with the following amendments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students meeting the criteria for acceptance to a Designated Special Education Private school should be able to EASILY ACCESS the funding allotment they are rightfully entitled to from the provincial Department of Education; and, 2. Students should have the access to this funding FOR AS LONG AS THEY REQUIRE reenrollment at a designated special education private school.

	It is a small amount of public funding that could change the life of students with learning disabilities. It will give them options to become contributing members of society instead of an eventual burden to society because of the dead end they face as victims of a school system that failed them.
Bridgeway Academy	The process is okay, however, a coordinated approach, where the funds follow the child, would be the most effective in that it allows for parental choice and would potentially be more streamlined in its administration. This private/public partnership should be strengthened and encouraged by coordinating a controlled expansion program similar to the recent early learning and core expansion program. I hope we can look to other progressive jurisdictions such as Alberta, and internationally, Switzerland. Thank you.
Bridgeway Academy	Tuition Support should pay the full amount of tuition.
Bridgeway Academy	The present requirement to have an IPP for a year in order to be eligible for tuition support is unjust. If a child has a diagnosed learning disability then he or she should be eligible for tuition support. All children have a right to an appropriate education. The current IPP requirement is unrealistic and appears to be a strategy to fund as few children as possible, in spite of their need. This is false economy as these children will end up costing the government much more as angry and dysfunctional adults. The IPP is not well understood by teachers and school administrators and not at all by most parents. To require a child to be 3 years behind in one or more subjects in order to qualify for tuition support is like closing the barn door after the horse is gone—the damage is already done and may never be undone.
Bridgeway Academy	I felt that the most stressful part of the application process was for the first year application. At that point the process was not clearly defined in terms of application dates; how long to expect to wait prior to a decision being made. Clear cut specific reasons as to why an application could be denied funding. It appears to be a very arbitrary/independent decision made by one person. While specific in what was required to apply, it was very much an attitude of say “no” as the first response. I feel this was a huge disservice to both the students, parents and other taxpayers of the province. As taxpayers, we fund the Education system of this province and when the system no longer is able to meet the needs of a child then it is appropriate to move that “funding unit” to specially Designated schools that can deliver a service the public system can’t. The goal is to educate students to develop to their full potential and it is prudent that we have a system in place that allows for this to happen. I would very much like to see an attitude shift towards “working with students/families” to help students to succeed rather than “make it as difficult as possible for families to apply” and leave things as status quo. After first year funding was secured, it appeared to be “easier” to get a renewal. Having said the above, we are very pleased that the program has been extended to four years under the current government. There should not be a time limit on the funding, as a learning disability is lifelong and everyone’s disability is different (not all are able to transition after 3 years). I would hope a review will continue to validate the need for the program and the program will remain in place. Thanks.
Bridgeway Academy	Without this program my son was lost in a world he could not comprehend. His health and emotional well-being were suffering in a public school system that was attempting to the best ability they had to help but they were not setup to meet his needs. Bridgeway is teaching him success where all he knew was failure. They are giving him back his pride in himself and his school. He can READ where he could not before. Everything else follows from this. This program is vital to the future of many of our children.

Bridgeway Academy	We had to appeal before we were accepted for tuition support. There shouldn't be a time restriction associated with tuition support. Learning differences or disabilities are not "corrected" by any institution (public or private) within an allotted time.
Bridgeway Academy	<p>Tuition support should NOT be limited to a specified number of years; it should be based on individual need of the student. Full pay of the tuition (currently \$10,000) would still be cheaper than the cost of support in the public school, where students with learning disorders would need an EPA plus an established LD program such as is offered by school such as Bridgeway. If anything, the school board should add these schools as part of their program — thereby supporting full inclusion!</p> <p>Children have a right to equal education, however those who require support though LD programs are only funded partly. Some parents cannot afford the cost of part pay. These children suffer!</p>
Bridgeway Academy	Our son has a diagnosed learning disability and developmental delay. We feel that as long as the health professionals that have assessed (Student) deem it necessary, he will continue to attend Bridgeway Academy. The tuition support that we have received to date has been a tremendous benefit to our family. We would hope that the program continues in to the future since learning disabilities do not have an end date. Thank you.
Bridgeway Academy	Bridgeway has been helpful for my child. However I feel the school needs to challenge their students more. I think returning to a public school will be very difficult for my child. 32 kids in a class room is too much for my son. No teacher in the public schools ever had time for him. I don't think this will change after he's been at Bridgeway.
Bridgeway Academy	If it wasn't for the tuition program, I have no idea where he'd be with his education. We would never have been able to send him to this school. I sent him to this school to give him the best education he deserves with his LD. Leaving him in the public school, he would have been pushed through.
Bridgeway Academy	Before we were able to get (Student) funding for Bridgeway, he was a grade level behind his age group, had no friends, was bullied a lot, no self-esteem, in danger of leaving school due to failure and negativity. Now he is fully functioning at grade level, has lots of friends, sees that he HAS A FUTURE, he is no longer a failure. Please don't take this away.
Bridgeway Academy	<p>Although I have a few points in "disagree," it is only because my son is very new in this environment. Already we see great change in organization and I'm sure the others will follow suit.</p> <p>My only heartaches with the Tuition Support Program are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very difficult to obtain information on the program unless you are in it already; 2. The rules for initial assessment are too stringent (meet 3 requirements or go to appeal process). This puts a lot of unnecessary stress on parents that already live in a stressful environment; and, 3. The deadlines for decision on Supplemental Funding are not as clear as initial and take too long.
Bridgeway Academy	We are very grateful for the tuition support program; without it we wouldn't have been able to send our daughter to Bridgeway Academy ... She has improved significantly, academically as well as emotionally ... A learning disability is a lifelong disability and cannot be "cured" in a

	Designated time frame ... We hope that the Tuition Support Review Board will recognize the critical need for tuition support in order to allow students with learning disabilities to attend schools such as Bridgeway in order to give them the best chance at a successful education.
Bridgeway Academy	I appreciate the tuition support program because my son would not be able to attend without this program and would fall through the traditional system. However the communication between the board and the parents has been minimal so we do not understand where we stand with further funding and this is a concern.
Bridgeway Academy	Our son started at Bridgeway Academy last year. He improved three grade levels in his reading in one year. He is continuing to improve and wishes to go to our local high school. Bridgeway Academy has helped increase his self-esteem and decreased his stress level.
Bridgeway Academy	The uncertainty of not knowing if you will receive the support for the coming year is stressful. The rules changing and the timelines changing are all unsettling for parents who are trying to plan for their learning disabled children, as without the proper education for our children; there is no future for them.
Bridgeway Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Application dates do not reflect real world decisions parents make in Spring and Summer. b. too much focus is placed on IPP in application when schools are not applying them per Department of Education guidelines or withholding them altogether. c. Program length should be per student need. Funding needs to follow student. c. Appeal progress needs additional flexibility to ensure the students' needs are ahead of rigid rules.
Bridgeway Academy	I have two children with LD's. One in public school and one at Bridgeway. My child in public school cannot advocate and doesn't have a clear understanding of his LD. The answers for him to the above questions would all be "Strongly Disagree". Until the public schools start teaching students about their LD, teaching reading like Bridgeway, teaching study skills, etc., kids with LD will not succeed in public school. You must also drop (the) requirement for IPP from Application process. The only requirement should be professional diagnosis. Many schools discourage IPP due to lack of resources, meanwhile (the) only loser is the child.
Bridgeway Academy	<p>Update application – shouldn't require a "letter from parents" to justify the need for Tuition Support.</p> <p>A "disability" doesn't go away, so why should the funding!</p> <p>Public school programs don't work for children with learning disabilities – Bridgeway Academy's program does!</p>
Bridgeway Academy	We believe the Tuition Support should continue as a Learning Disability is lifelong. Most children require more than the 2-3 years to transition back to public school, therefore the parents should not be penalized for wanting an education for our children.
Bridgeway Academy	The first level of the TS application process could have deterred me from getting my son the education he needed had I not been so determined. The cost alone of the educational assessment was beyond me, never mind the placement fee and school fees and deposit, once support was acquired. But the appeal went smoothly and actually provided me with valuable information and a sense of reassurance. I will be paying for the expenses I incurred (outside of tuition support) for the next year, but I feel it was well worth the sacrifice and stress as my son is more productive, enthusiastic and happier than I have ever seen him since he began school.

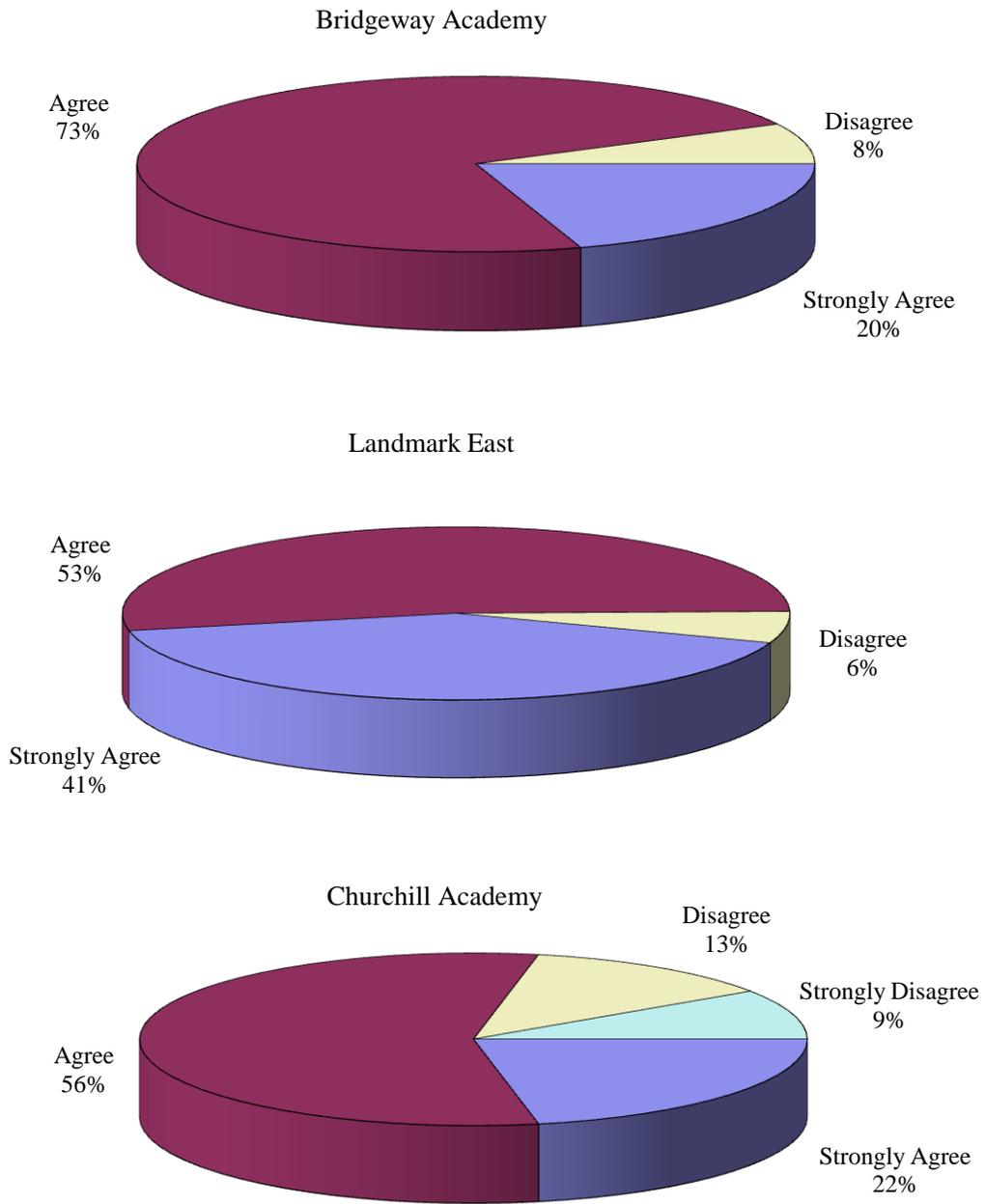
<p>Bridgeway Academy</p>	<p>(Student) has improved in many ways while at Bridgeway. The Tuition Support Program has been a great help to us and enabled him to learn effectively—something he was unable to do in the public school.</p> <p>I would love to see the program go to 5 or even 6 years - better to have it extend all the way to post secondary—if the child requires it. Public school is not for everyone. It can't "fix" all the problems our children face on a daily basis.</p>
<p>Bridgeway Academy</p>	<p>Bridgeway has been a tremendous help to my daughter in so many ways and the fact that they removed some burden from the public school system to focus on the child is what really matters. The fact that the tuition support program is in place is excellent however I do not feel it should be capped to four years. I pay a lot in taxes that go toward tuition and this should be taken into account.</p>

Tuition Support Program Review—Parent Survey Pie Charts

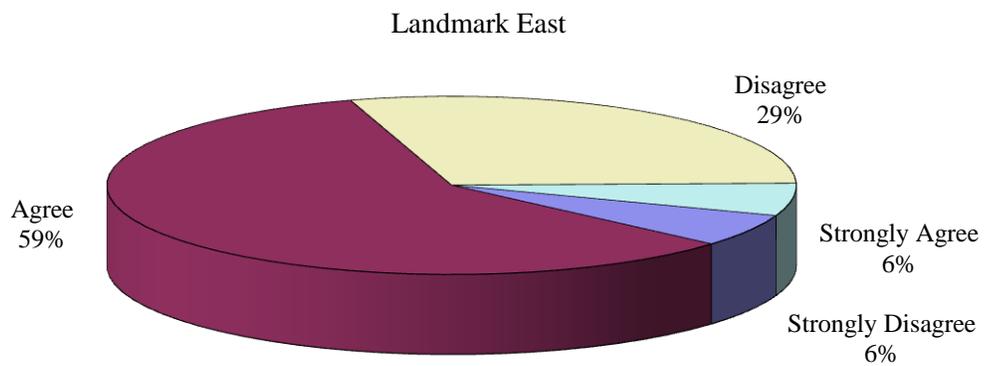
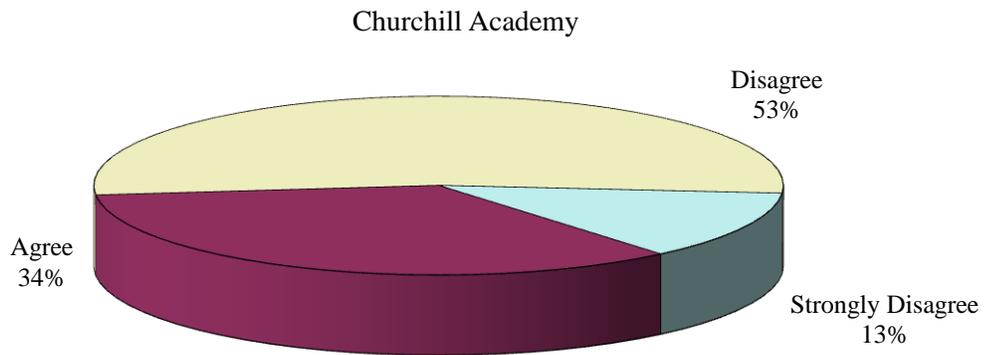
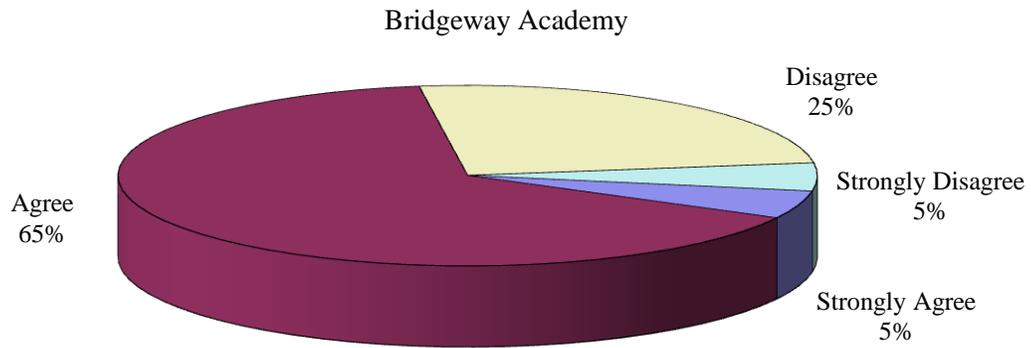
Each pie chart is dedicated to the school named and shows the percentages of the responses that agree and disagree to the question asked as it pertains to the number of responses from that school and are not based on the total number of returns for that question.

If the responses were “0” in a particular category, that category is not displayed within the pie chart.

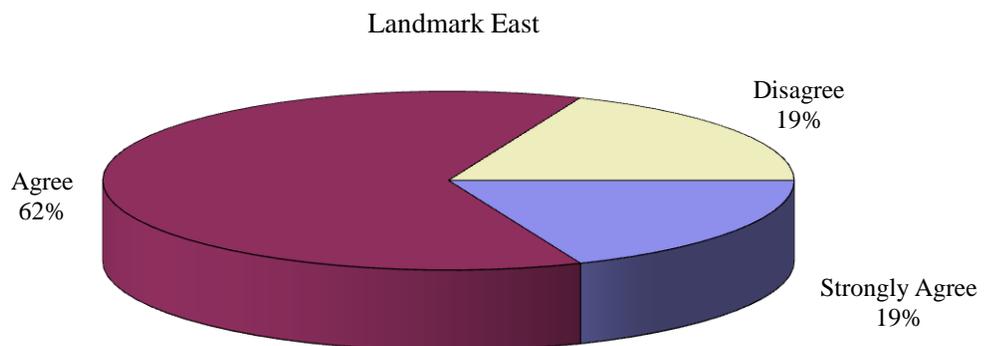
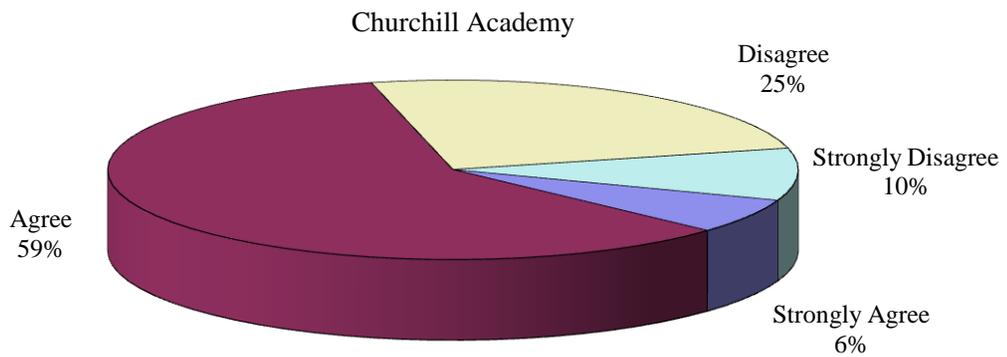
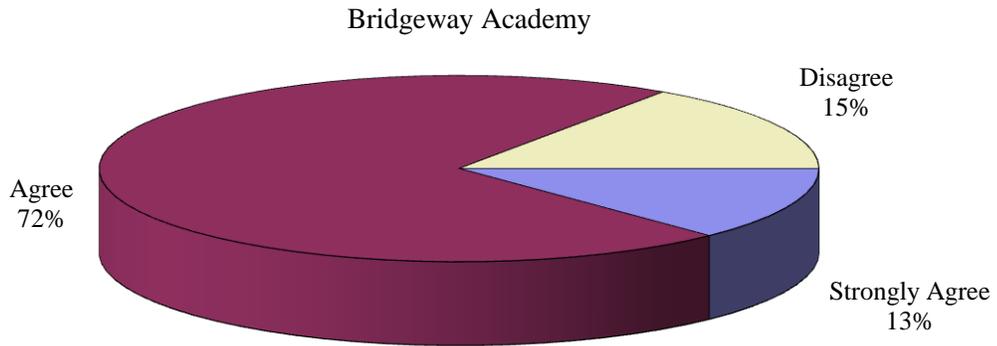
Parent Survey Question 1. My child has an understanding of their learning disability.



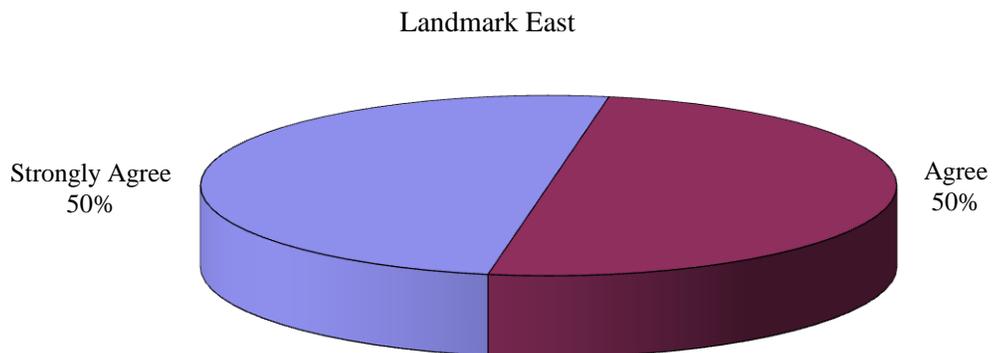
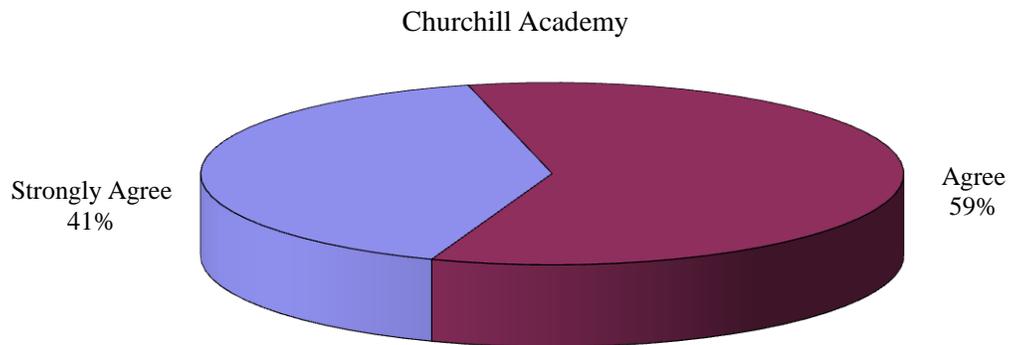
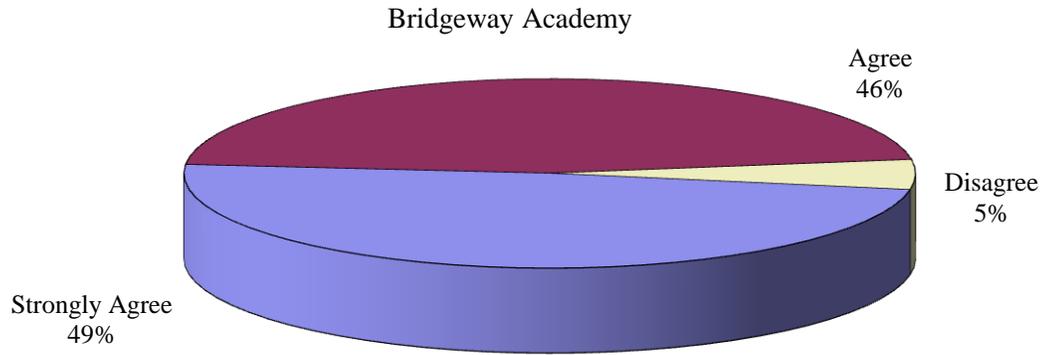
Parent Survey Question 2. My child has the ability to self-advocate.



Parent Survey Question 3. My child has the ability to apply learned strategies to new learning situations.

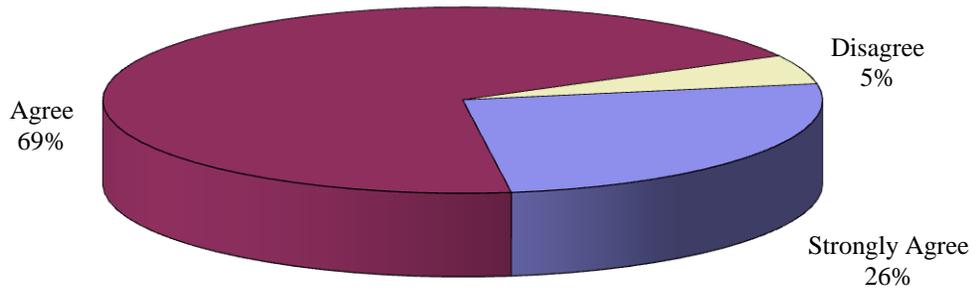


Parent Survey Question 4. My child has improved academically in reading and writing.

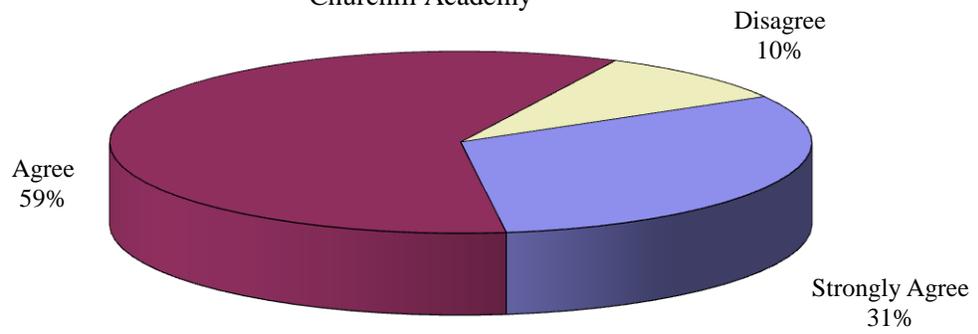


Parent Survey Question 5. My child has improved academically in math.

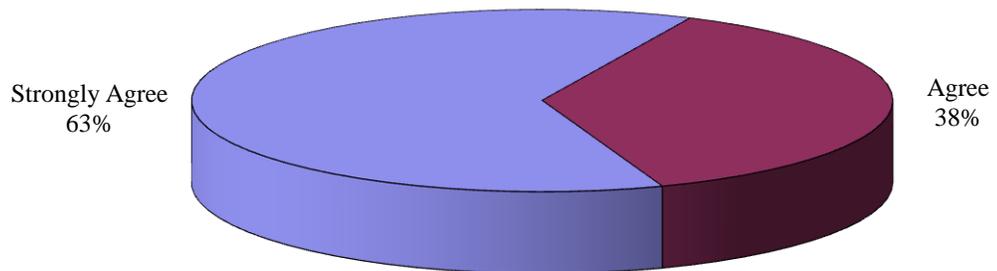
Bridgeway Academy



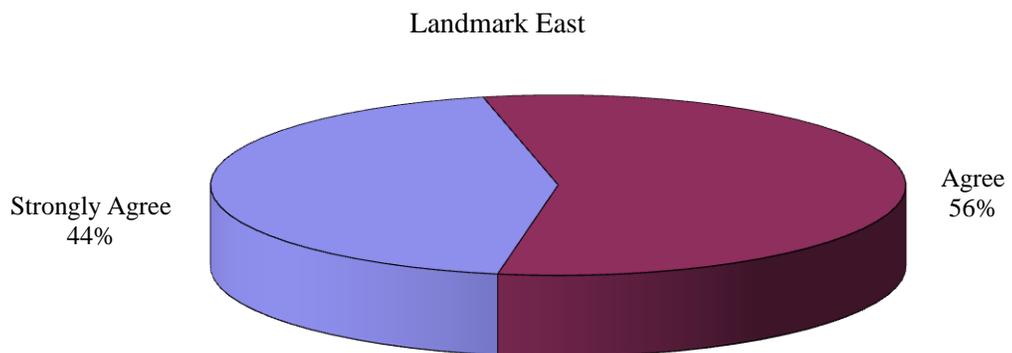
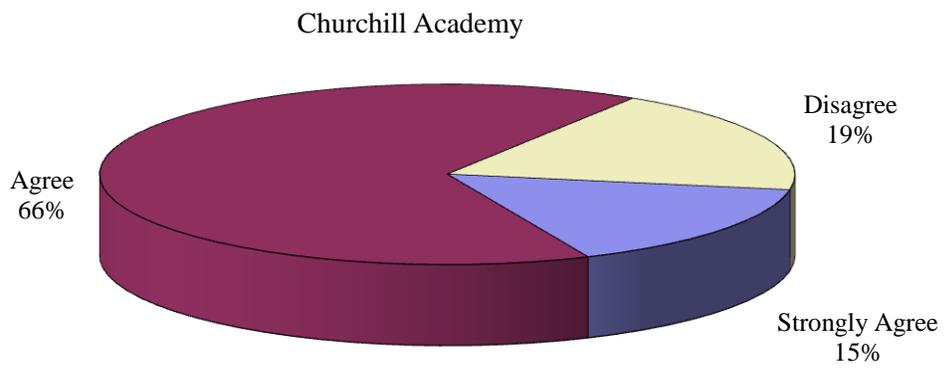
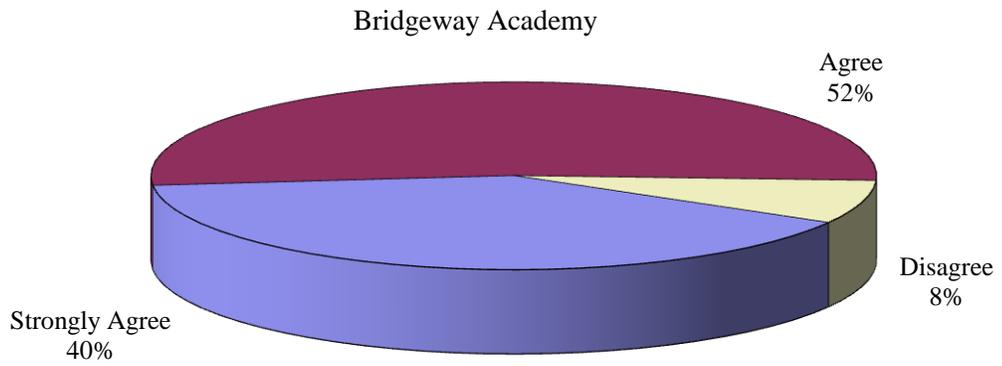
Churchill Academy



Landmark East

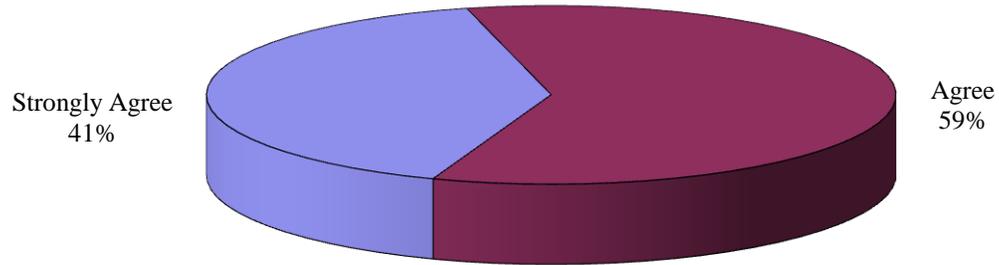


Parent Survey Question 6. My child has improved organizational skills.

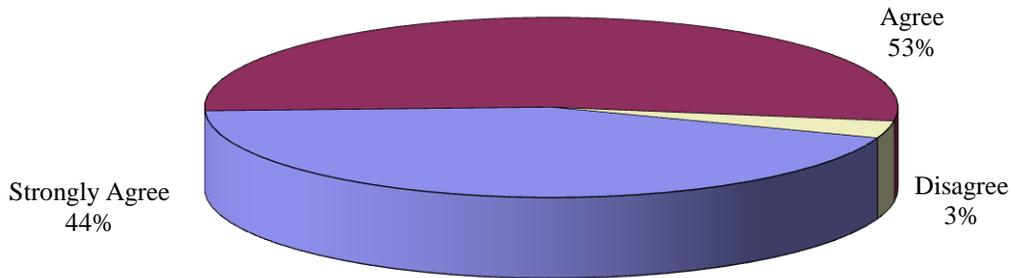


Parent Survey Question 7. Ongoing assessment informs me of my child's progress.

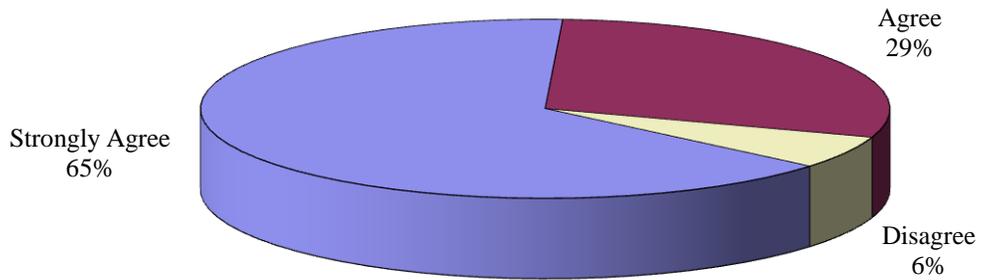
Bridgeway Academy



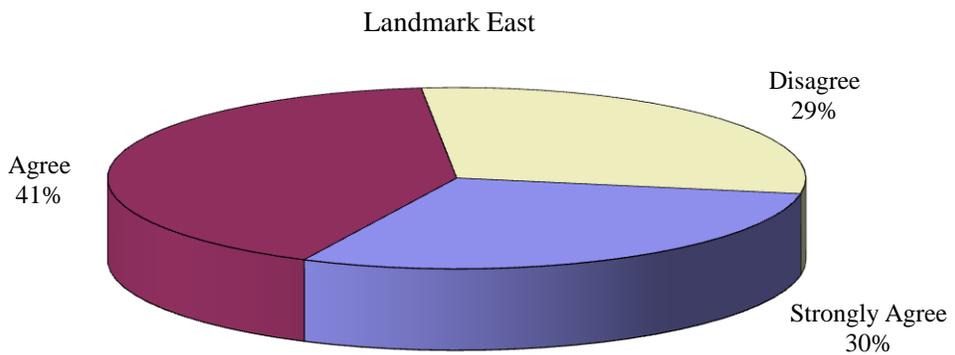
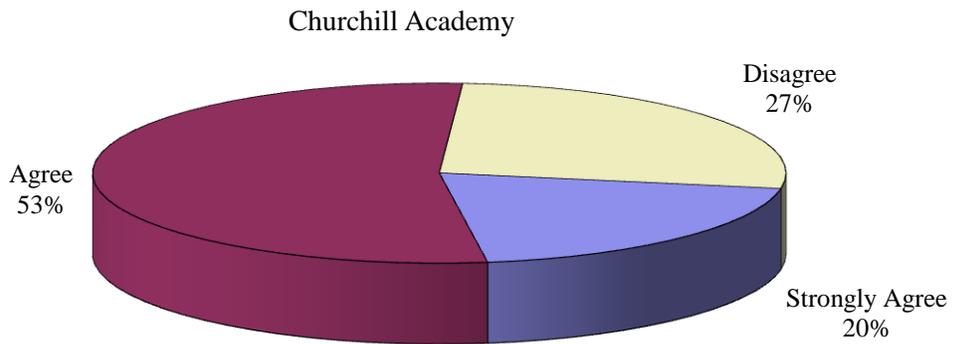
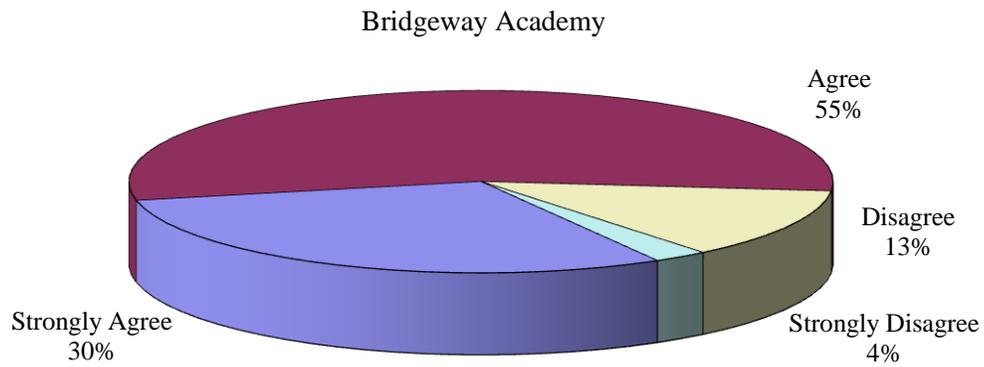
Churchill Academy



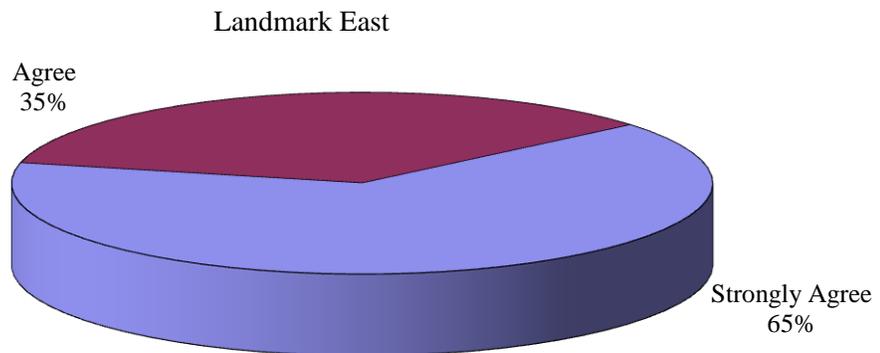
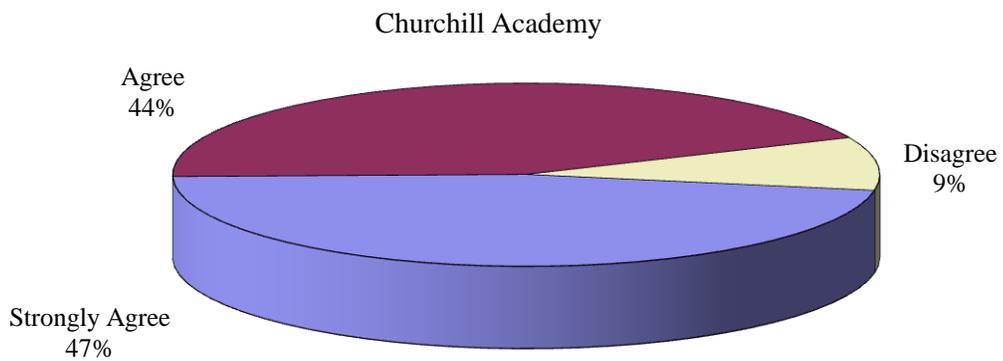
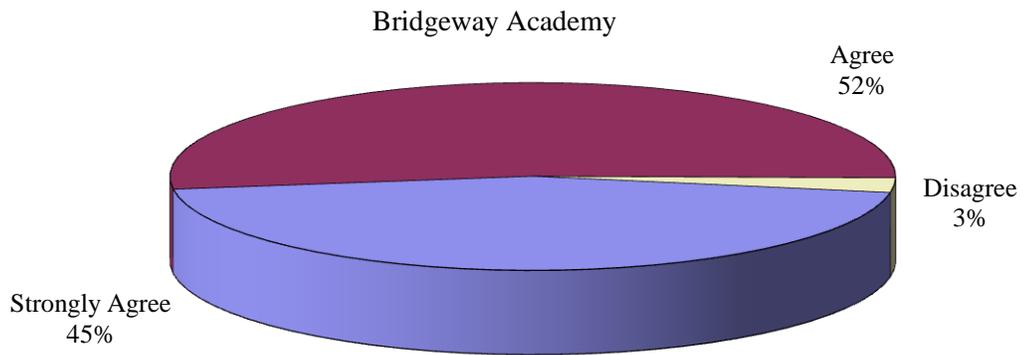
Landmark East



Parent Survey Question 8. My child can make and keep friendships.

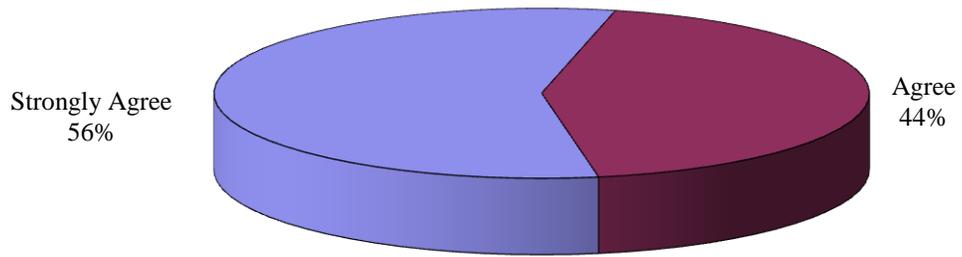


Parent Survey Question 9. There has been an improvement in my child's emotions and moods.

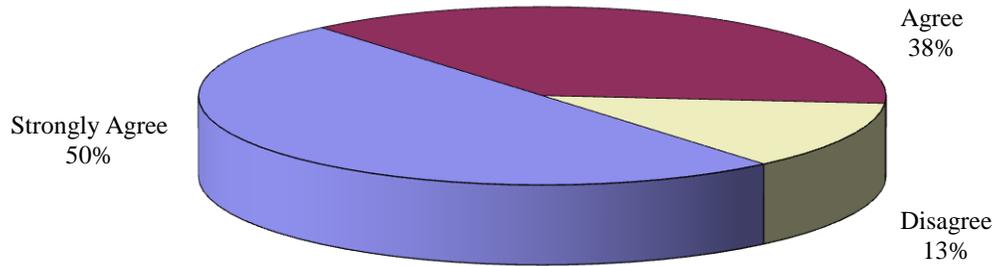


Parent Survey Question 10. Improvement has been noted in my child's self-esteem.

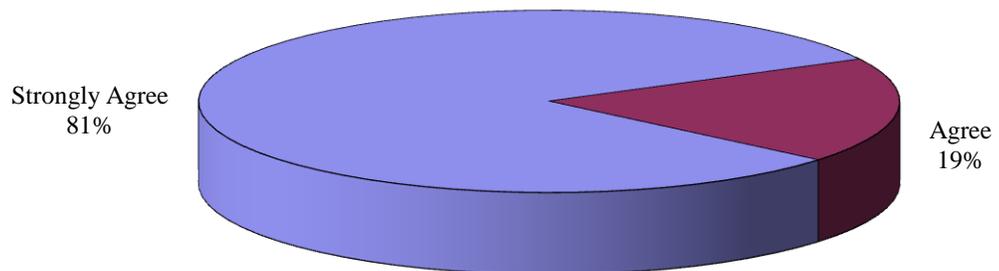
Bridgeway Academy



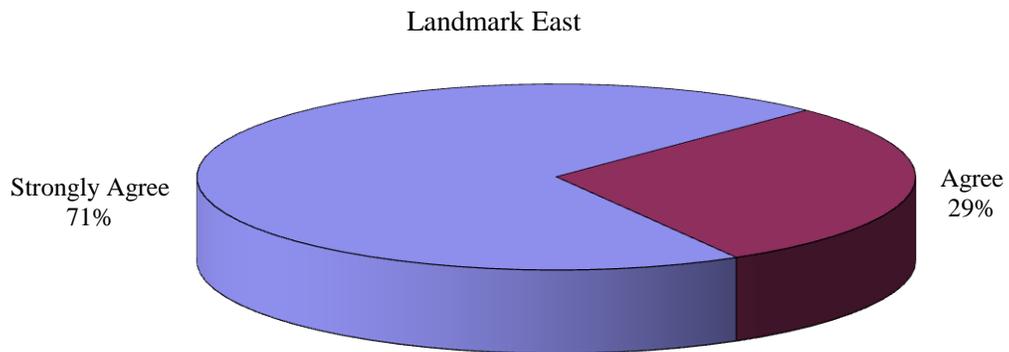
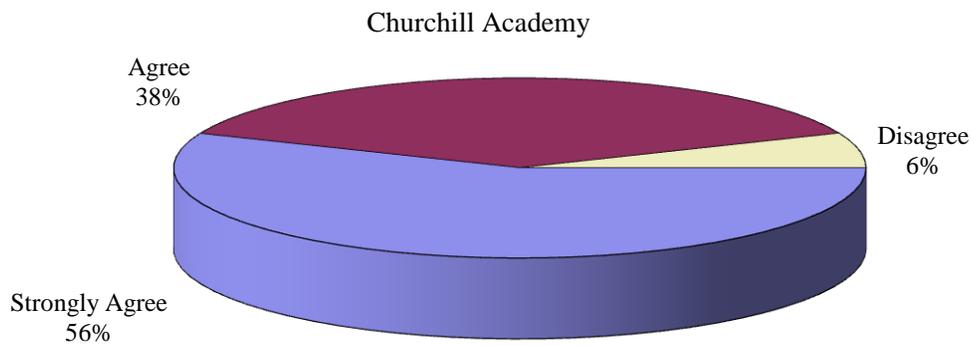
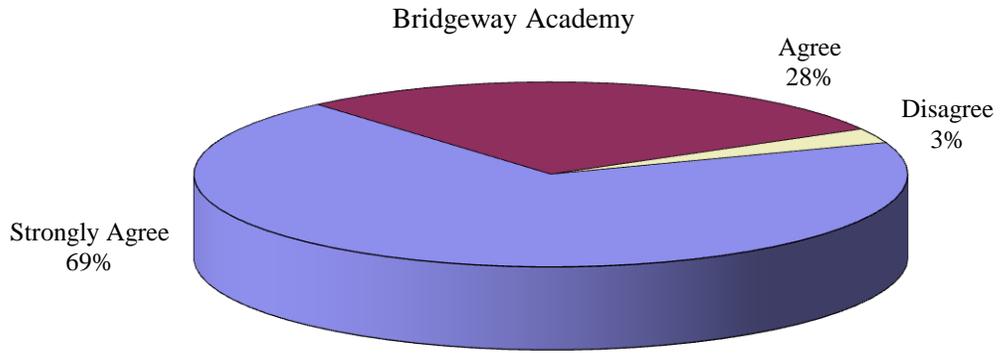
Churchill Academy



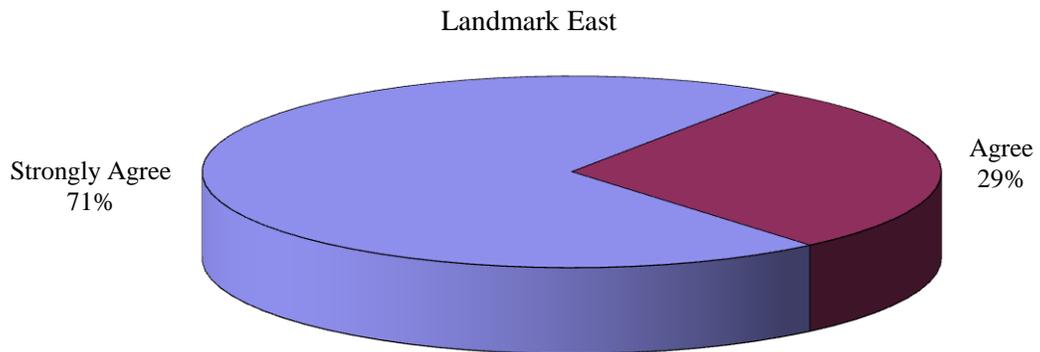
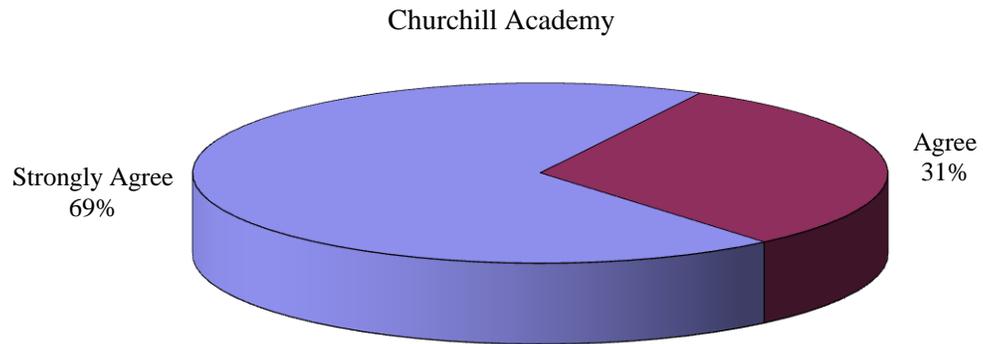
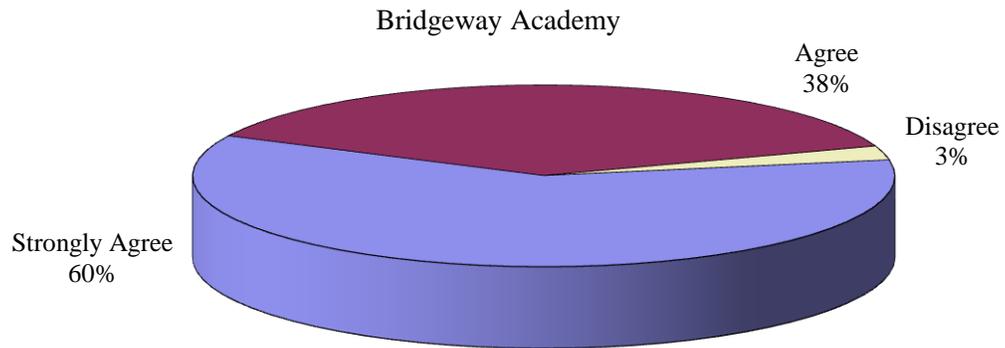
Landmark East



Parent Survey Question 11. The stress level at home has been reduced.

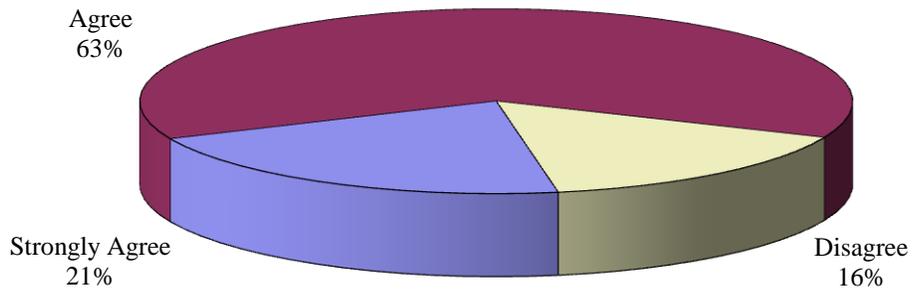


Parent Survey Question 12. Good communication exists between home and school.

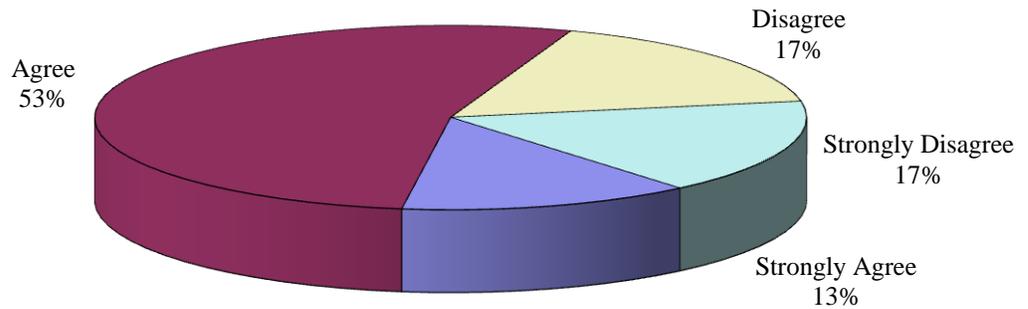


Parent Survey Question 13. My child is being prepared for transition to public school or post secondary education.

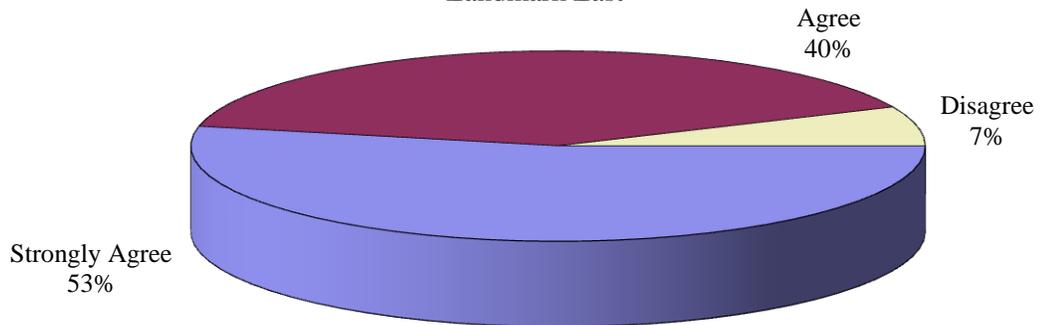
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

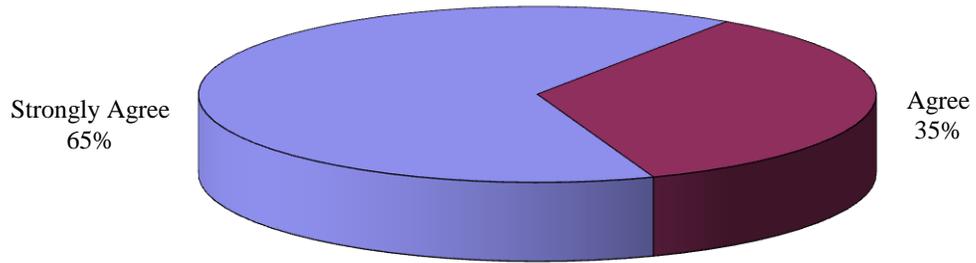


Landmark East

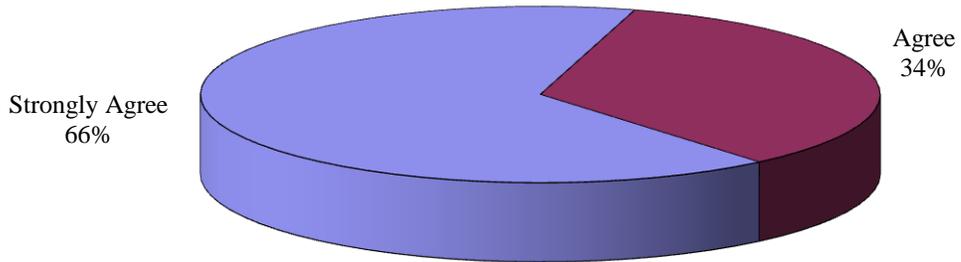


Parent Survey Question 14. I am satisfied with my child's experience at this school.

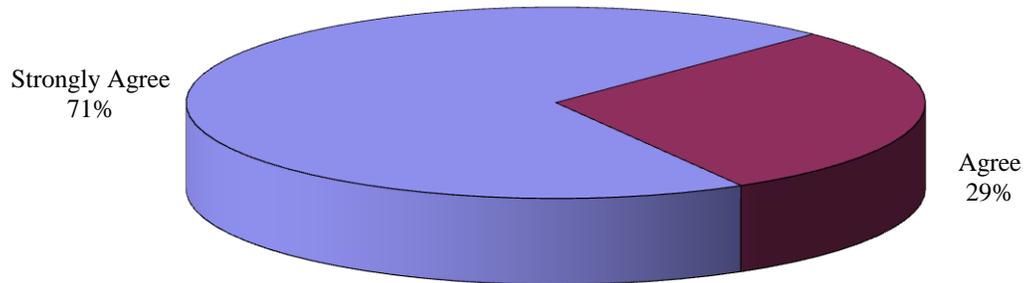
Bridgeway Academy



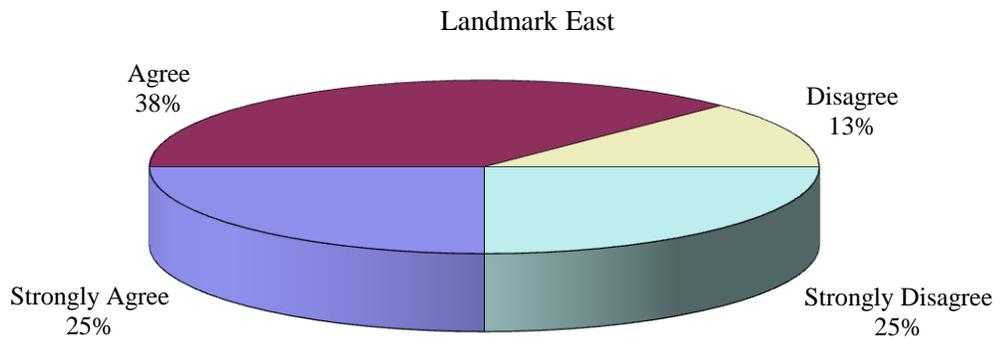
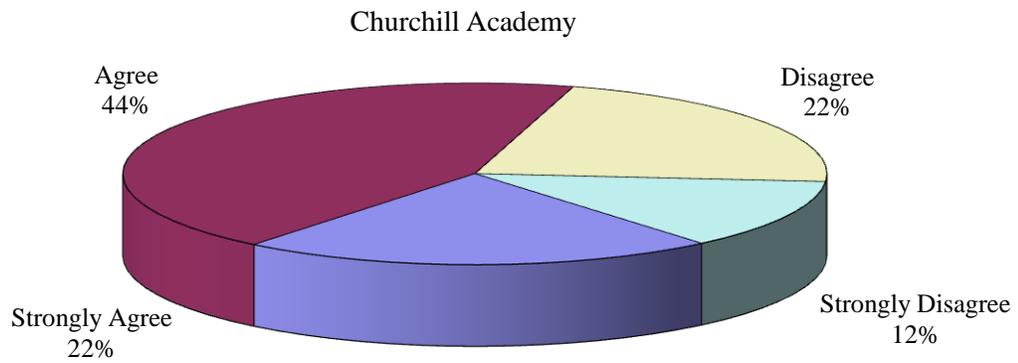
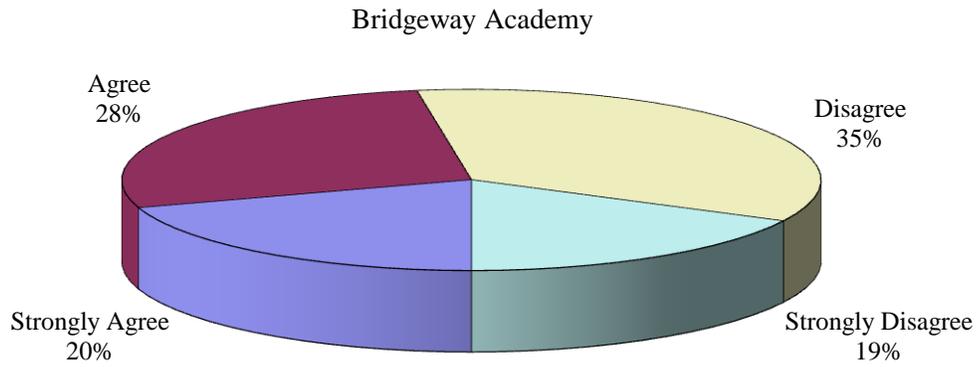
Churchill Academy



Landmark East



Parent Survey Question 15. I am satisfied with the Tuition Support application process.



Appendix E: Teacher Survey

Summary of the Teacher Survey Responses

Overall, the responses to the teachers' survey of Landmark East, Churchill, and Bridgeway were favourable.

In 13 of the 15 questions, the percentage of teachers responding with either "strongly agree" or "agree" ranges from 95 percent to 100 percent.

1. I use a variety of instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of my students.
2. I use a variety of assessment tools/practices to track the academic progress of my students.
3. Classroom instruction promotes the understanding of learning disabilities and the need for self-advocacy.
4. Our day is organized to maximize student learning.
6. Students receive direct instruction and practice on organizational skills.
7. My training has given me an understanding of various learning disabilities.
8. I participate in ongoing professional development.
10. Our staff works as a team (psychologist, SLP).
11. Our staff is innovative and tries new things to support student learning.
12. Effective behaviour plans are put in place when necessary to maximize the learning of all students.
13. Teaching resources reflect diversity.
14. Attendance is good at this school.
15. Our school effectively addresses the learning needs of students.

For question 9, 90 percent of teachers responded with either "strongly agree" or "agree" to the statement "I have frequent communication with parents."

Only question 5 had less than 73 percent of the respondents answering "strongly agree" or "agree" to the statement "My school day allows me time to reflect on the progress of each of my students." When this is broken out by school responses, 90 percent of the teachers from Churchill Academy strongly agreed or agreed, with only 10 percent disagreeing. Seventy-three percent of the teachers from Bridgeway Academy indicated strong agreement or agreement, with 18 percent disagreeing and 9 percent of the responses strongly disagreeing. Landmark East, however, showed the largest variation within this question. Sixty-one percent indicated strong agreement or agreement, with 28 percent disagreeing and 11 percent of the responses indicating strong disagreement.

No additional comments were received from the teachers responding from Bridgeway Academy, although comments were encouraged on the questionnaires.

Teacher Survey Results

The column heading “Totals” refers to the total number of responses from that school to the question or statement or the total number of survey responses.

The following tables detail the survey results for each question or statement, by school and by the total number of survey responses. The first column contains the total number of responses. The remaining columns show the level of agreement with each statement as a number and as a percentage of responses received.

For example, in the first question shown below, from Churchill Academy, there were a total of 11 responses to that question. Ten or 90.9 percent of those 11 responses, strongly agreed with the statement “I use a variety of instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of my students.” For that question, there were a total of 43 responses from all three DSEPS involved, of which 33, or 76.7 percent of the total respondents that answered that question, strongly agreed with the statement.

1. I use a variety of instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of my students.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	11	10 90.9%	1 9.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	10	7 70.0%	3 30.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	18	16 88.9%	2 11.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	43	33 76.7%	10 23.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

2. I use a variety of assessment tools/practices to track the academic progress of my students.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	4 40.0%	6 60.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	16	9 56.3%	7 43.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	7 63.6%	4 36.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	37	20 54.1%	17 45.9%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

3. Classroom instruction promotes the understanding of learning disabilities and the need for self-advocacy.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	9	3 33.3%	6 66.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	16	9 56.3%	7 43.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	8 72.7%	3 27.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	36	20 55.6%	16 44.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

4. Our day is organized to maximize student learning.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	7 70.0%	3 30.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	17 94.4%	1 5.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	7 63.6%	4 36.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	31 79.5%	8 20.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

5. My school day allows me time to reflect on the progress of each of my students.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	3 30.0%	6 60.0%	1 10.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	2 11.1%	9 50.0%	5 27.8%	2 11.1%
Landmark East	11	4 36.4%	4 36.4%	2 18.2%	1 9.0%
Survey Totals	39	9 23.1%	19 48.7%	8 20.5%	3 7.7%

6. Students receive direct instruction and practice on organizational skills.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	7 70.0%	3 30.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	16 88.9%	2 11.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	10 90.9%	1 9.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	33 84.6%	6 15.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

7. My training has given me an understanding of various learning disabilities.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	6 60.0%	4 40.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	13 72.2%	4 22.2%	1 5.6%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	10 90.9%	1 9.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	29 74.4%	9 23.1%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%

8. I participate in ongoing professional development.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	2 20.0%	7 70.0%	1 10.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	9 50.0%	9 50.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	6 54.5%	5 45.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	17 43.6%	21 53.8%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%

9. I have frequent communication with parents.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	10 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	8 44.4%	6 33.3%	4 22.2%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	6 54.5%	5 45.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	24 61.5%	11 28.2%	4 10.3%	0 0.0%

10. Our staff works as a team (psychologist, SLP).

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	5 50.0%	4 40.0%	1 10.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	14 77.8%	4 22.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	9 81.8%	2 18.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	28 71.8%	10 25.6%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%

11. Our staff is innovative and tries new things to support student learning.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	6 60.0%	4 40.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	13 72.2%	4 22.2%	1 5.6%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	10	10 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	38	29 76.3%	8 21.1%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%

12. Effective behaviour plans are put in place when necessary to maximize the learning of all students.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	7 70.0%	3 30.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	5 27.8%	12 66.7%	1 5.6%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	10 90.9%	1 9.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	22 56.4%	16 41.0%	1 2.6%	0 0.0%

13. Teaching resources reflect diversity.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	9	2 22.2%	7 77.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	8 44.4%	8 44.4%	2 11.1%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	5 45.5%	6 54.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	38	15 39.5%	21 55.3%	2 5.3%	0 0.0%

14. Attendance is good at this school.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	9 90.0%	1 10.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	11 61.1%	5 27.8%	2 11.1%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	9 81.8%	2 18.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	29 74.4%	8 20.5%	2 5.1%	0 0.0%

15. Our school effectively addresses the learning needs of students.

School	Totals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Churchill Academy	10	8 80.0%	2 20.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Bridgeway Academy	18	15 83.3%	3 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Landmark East	11	10 90.9%	1 9.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Survey Totals	39	33 84.6%	6 15.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

Teacher Survey: Teacher Survey Comments

Please note:

In these survey comments (Student) is used when a child's actual name was used in the survey returns.

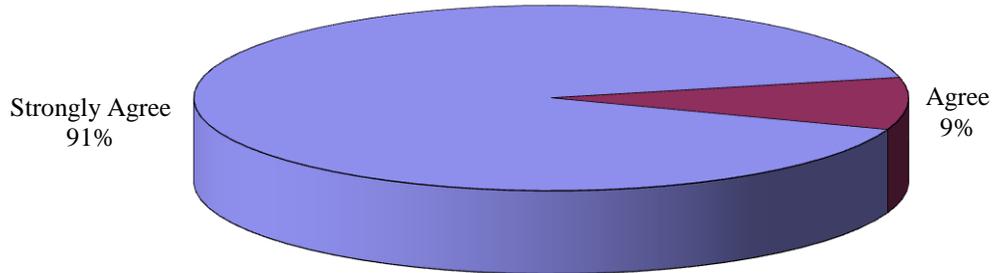
When a detailed comment document was submitted, the comments were condensed while attempting to keep the original salient points.

Comments:

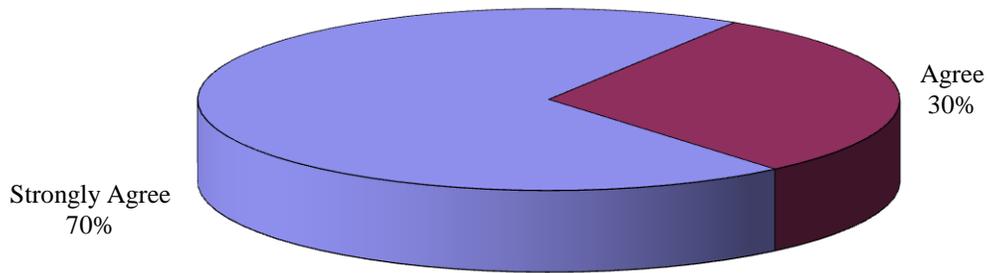
School	Comments
Churchill Academy	Q7. My training has given me an understanding of various learning disabilities. I went out of province. Q8. I participate in ongoing professional development. Q9. I have frequent communication with parents. Daily.
Churchill Academy	Most of our students experience a tremendous boost in self-esteem which enables them to increase their academic skills and improve socially and emotionally. They have a sense of belonging. The younger we are able to get them, the better opportunity we have of success.
Churchill Academy	Our school does effectively address the learning needs of students. However, far more can be done to better address the needs of our students and families. Education in the areas of nutrition, technologies and family coping strategies, to name a few, would increase the success of more students on a constant scale.
Churchill Academy	Factors that ensure success: a good team; parent support; class size; continual learning by staff; and, willing students.
Landmark East	Tuition support is essential for students so they can attend Landmark East.
Landmark East	Having spent 28 years in a public high school and 2 ½ years in a university environment, I have seen many students from a number of different perspectives. I feel that a school like LME is able to give learning disabled students the special assistance they need to become self-confident learners. Anything that can be done to financially help these students is commendable.
Landmark East	... The small class size and individual attention are key to the students' success. Any child that has the privilege to come here is a very lucky individual.
Landmark East	The greatest joy, as a teacher, is when my students read and/or spell a word they thought they would not read or spell. The same is true for students who have difficulty understanding material.
Landmark East	This school provides a positive and safe place for students with learning difficulties to learn and grow as individuals.
Landmark East	The government SHOULD be funding all Nova Scotian students who need to attend Landmark East School.

Teacher Survey Question 1: I use a variety of instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of my students

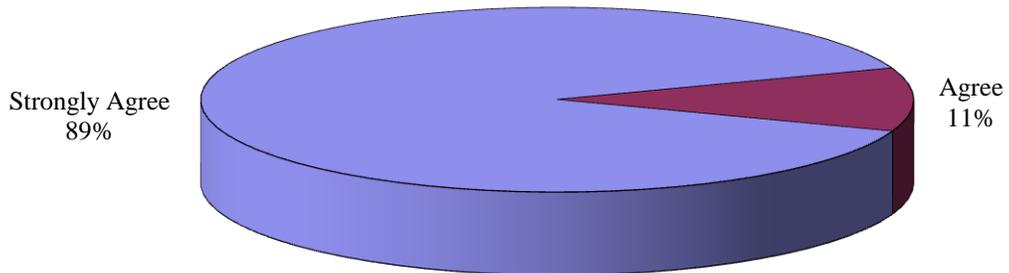
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

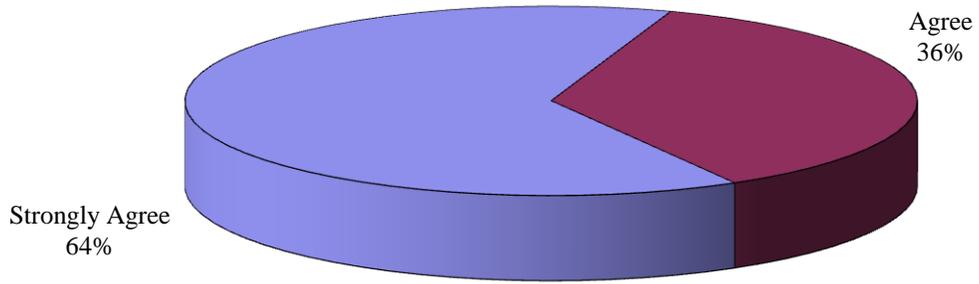


Landmark East

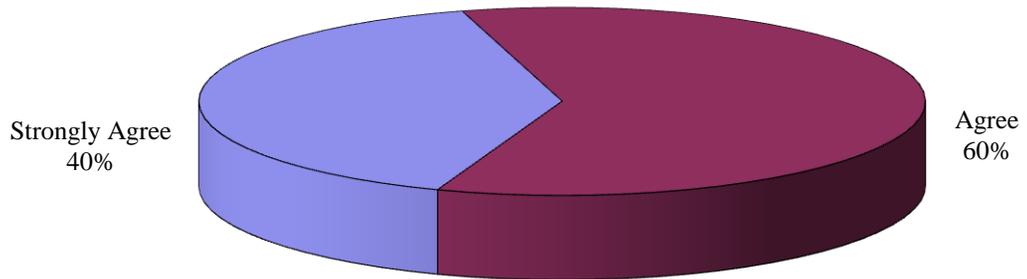


Teacher Survey Question 2: I use a variety of assessment tools/practices to track the academic progress of my students.

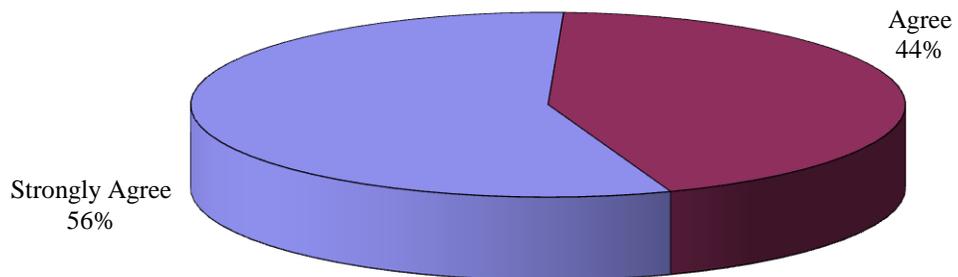
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

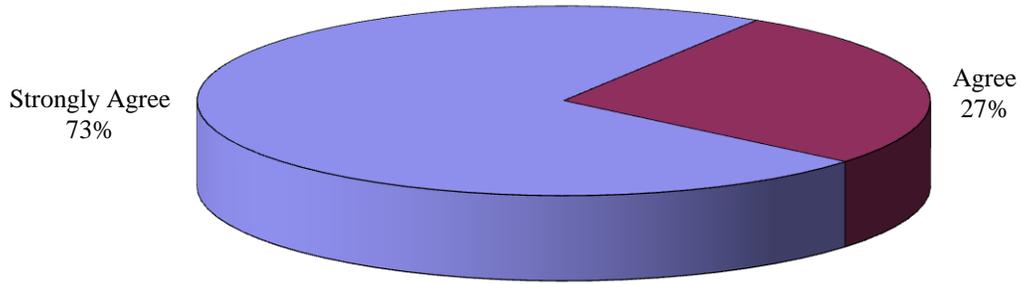


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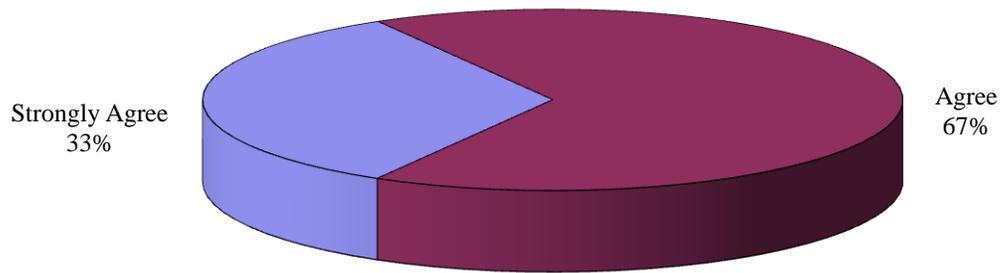


Teacher Survey Question 3: Classroom instruction promotes the understanding of learning disabilities and the need for self-advocacy.

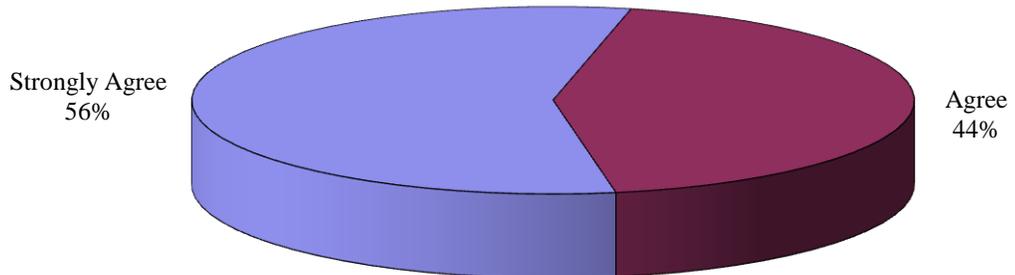
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

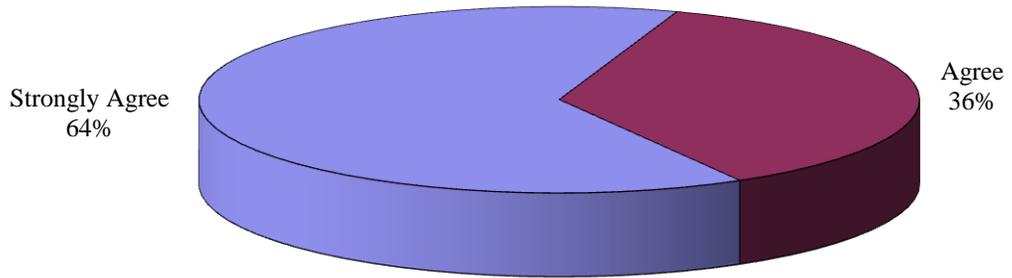


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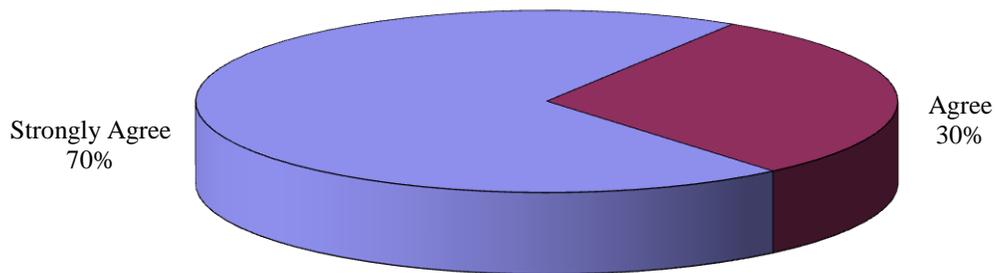


Teacher Survey Question 4: Our day is organized to maximize student learning.

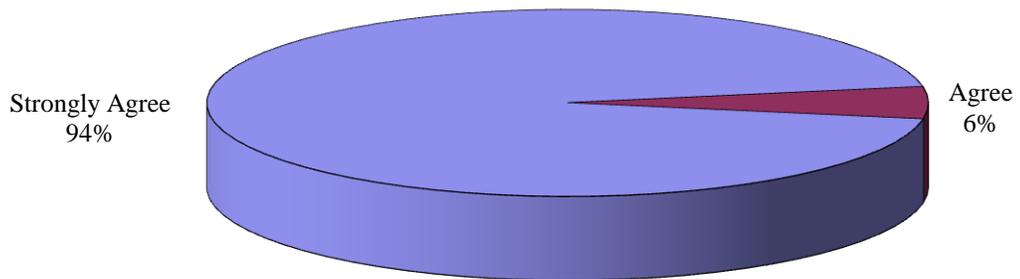
Bridgeway Academy



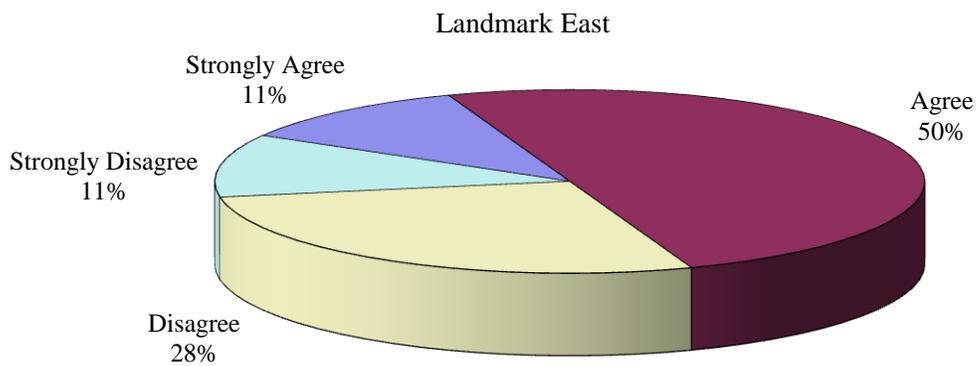
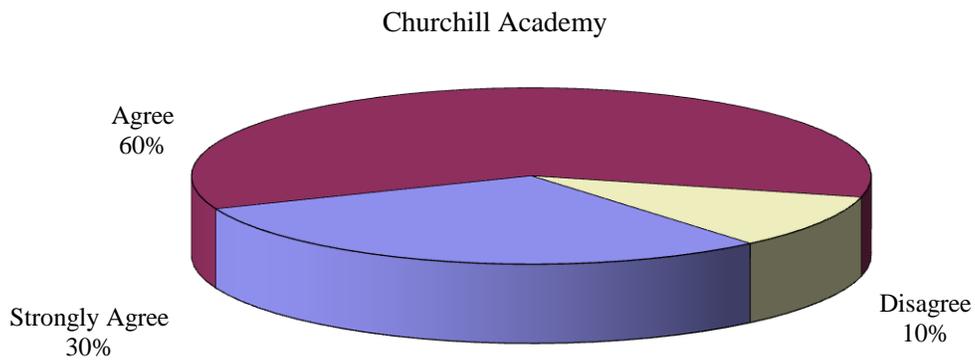
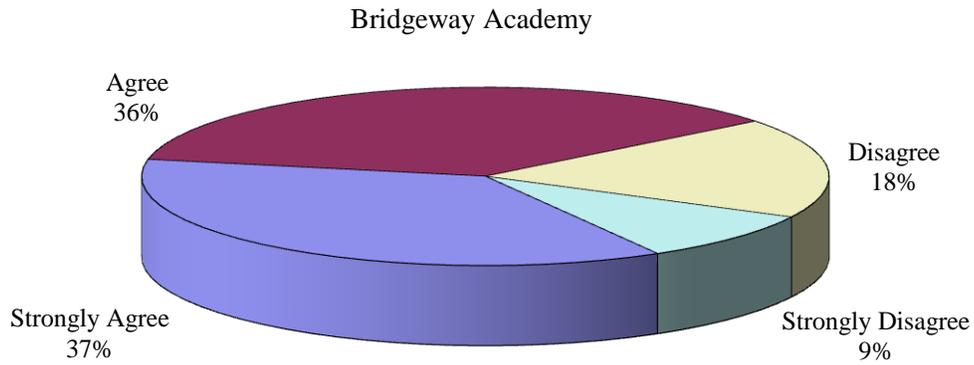
Churchill Academy



Landmark East

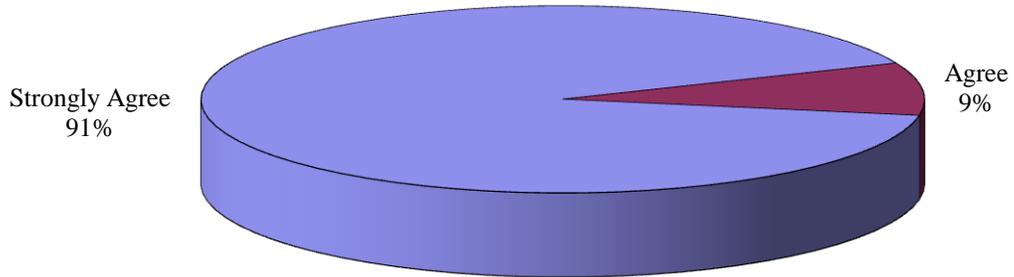


Teacher Survey Question 5: My school day allows me time to reflect on the progress of each of my students.

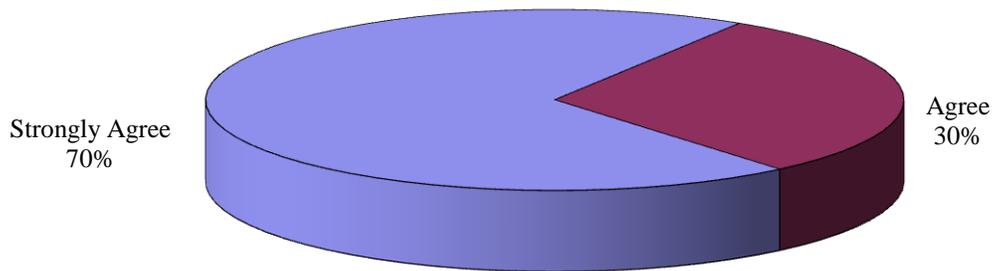


Teacher Survey Question 6: Students receive direct instruction and practice on organizational skills.

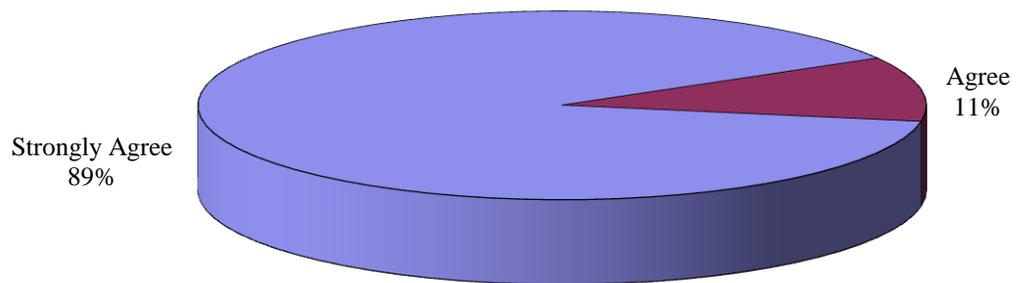
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

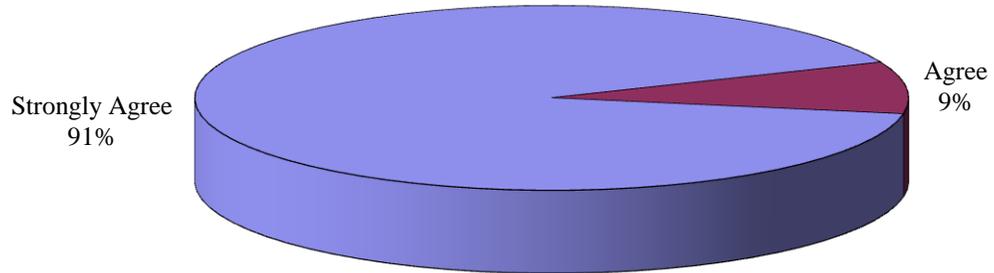


Landmark East

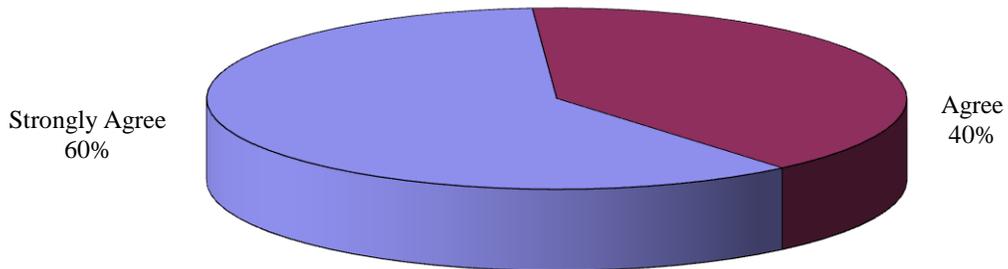


Teacher Survey Question 7: My training has given me an understanding of various learning disabilities.

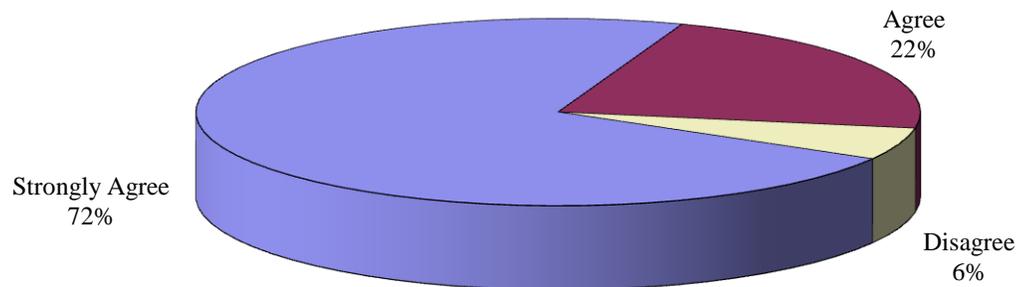
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

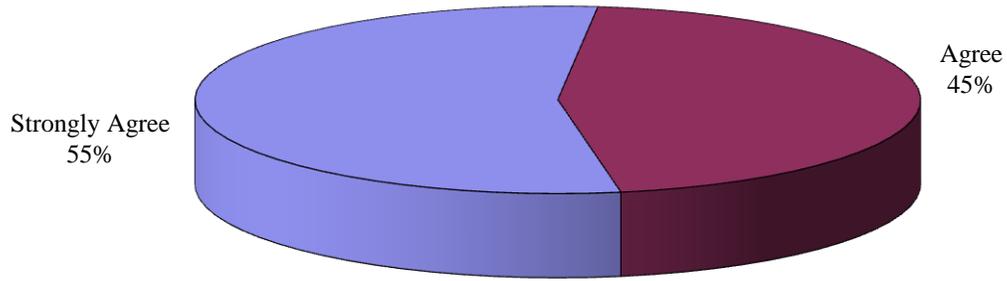


Landmark East

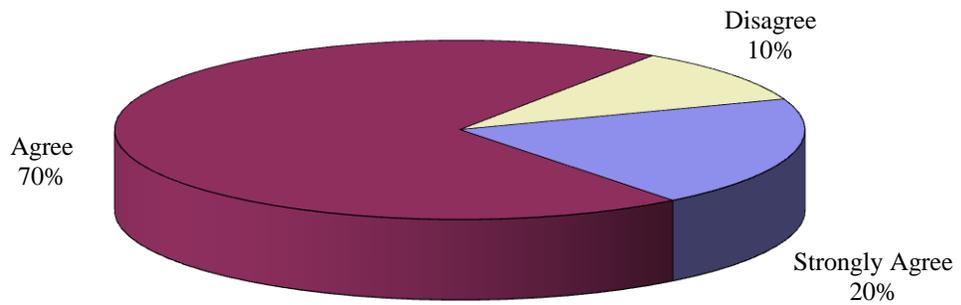


Teacher Survey Question 8: I participate in ongoing professional development.

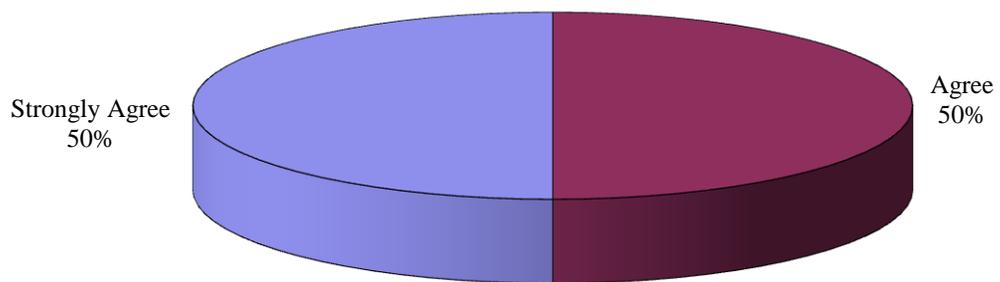
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

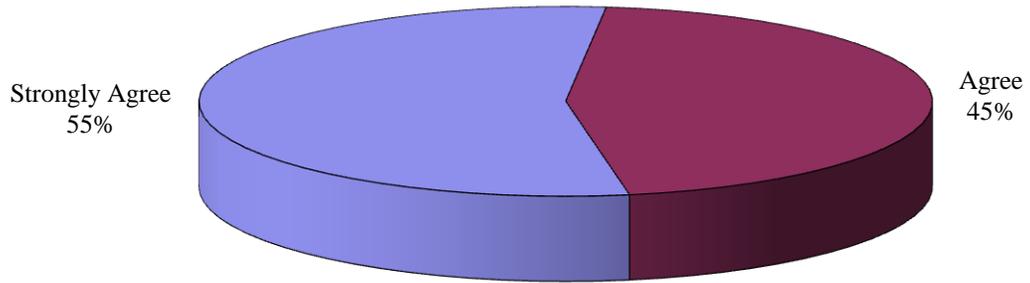


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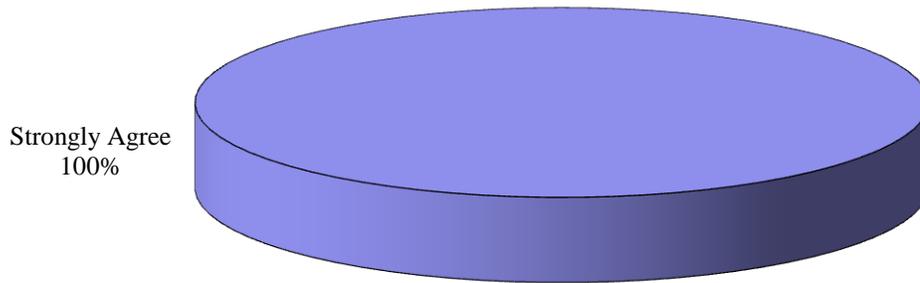


Teacher Survey Question 9: I have frequent communication with parents.

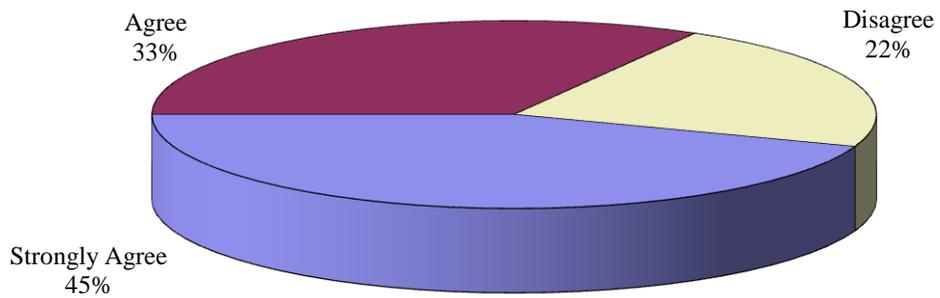
Bridgeway Academy



Bridgeway Academy

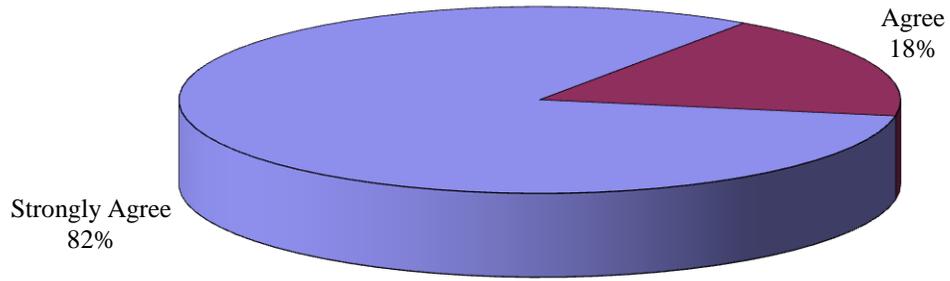


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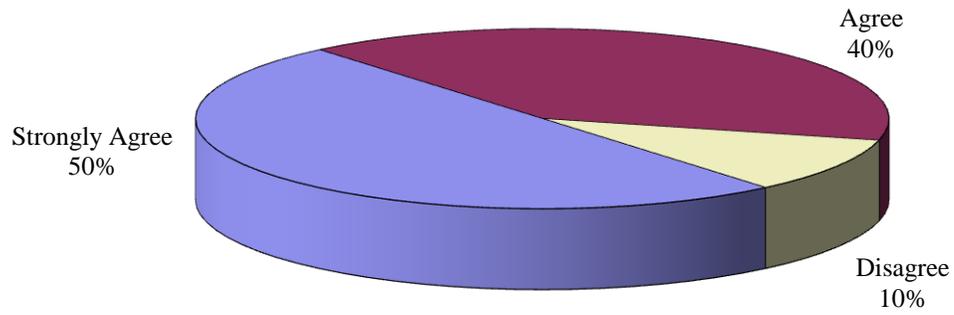


Teacher Survey Question 10: Our staff works as a team (Psychologist, SLP).

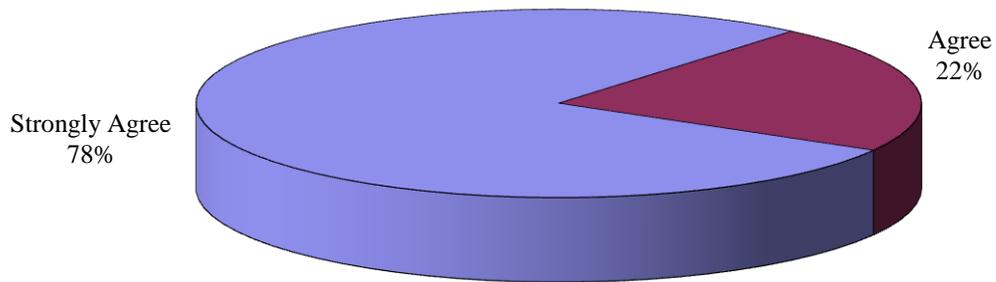
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

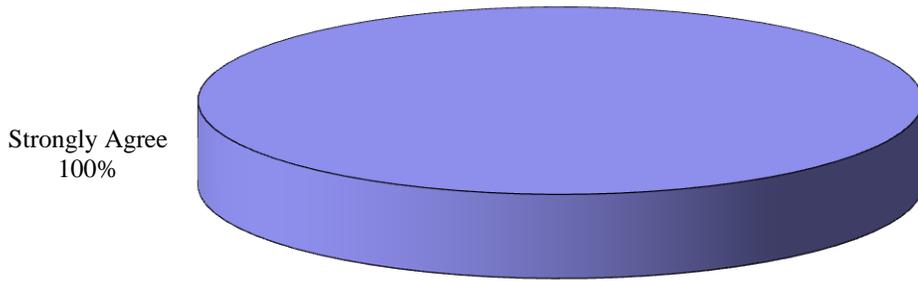


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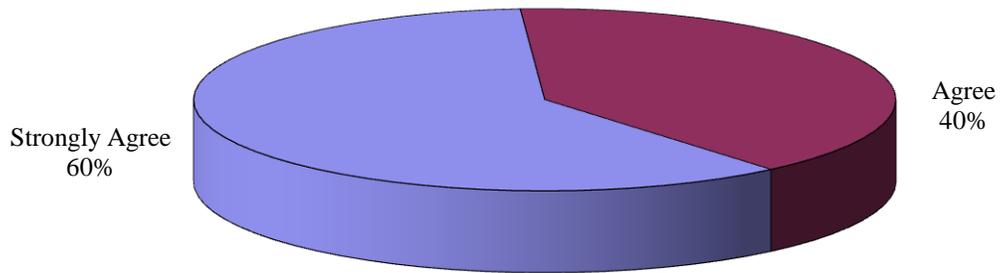


Teacher Survey Question 11: Our staff is innovative and tries new things to support student learning.

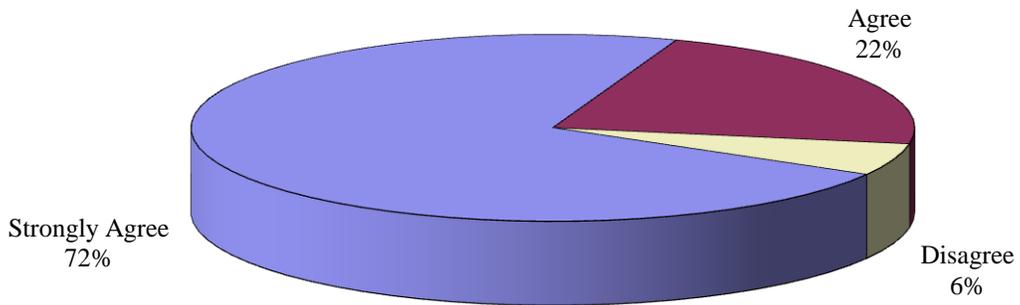
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

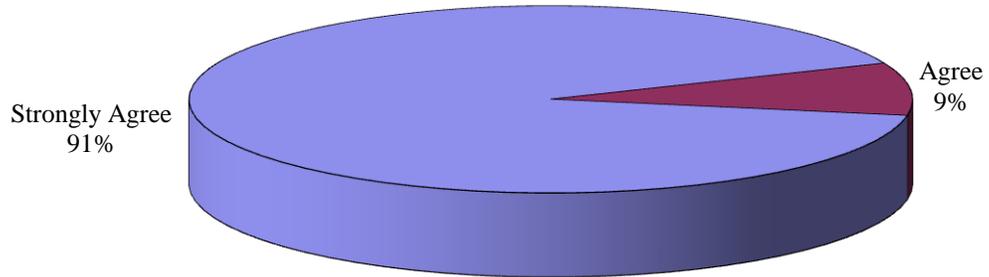


Landmark East

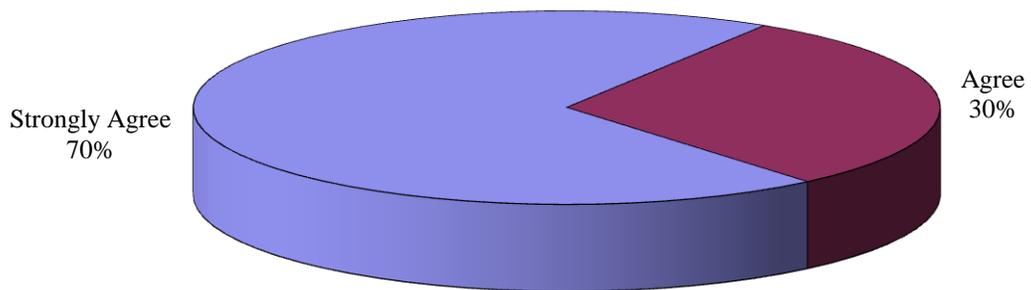


Teacher Survey Question 12: Effective behaviour plans are put in place when necessary to maximize the learning of all students.

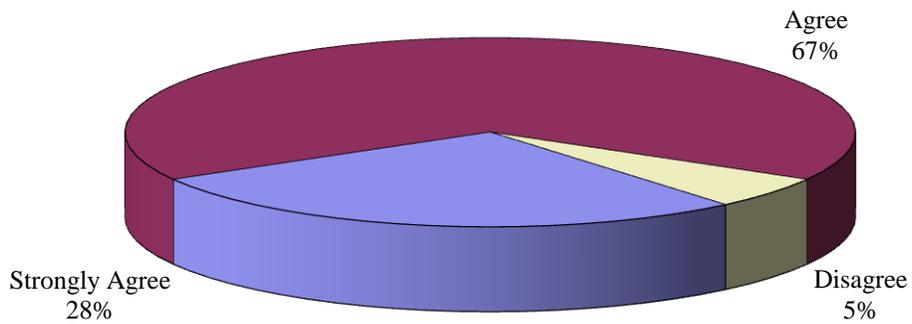
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy

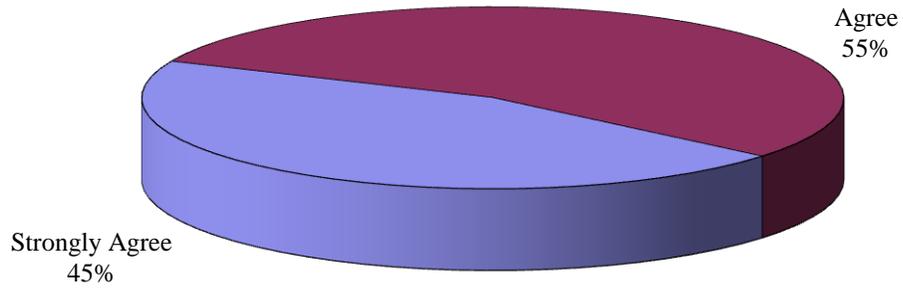


Landmark East

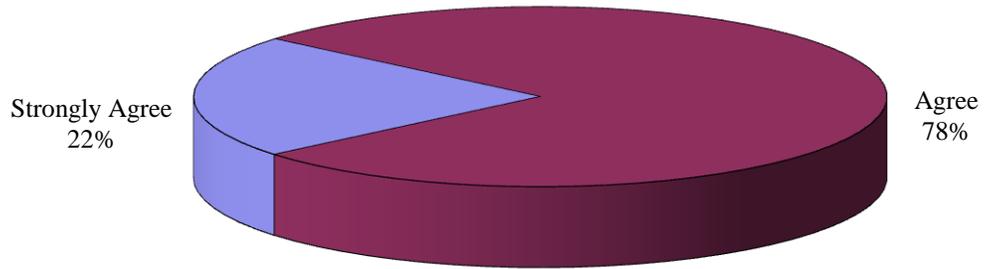


Teacher Survey Question 13: Teaching resources reflect diversity.

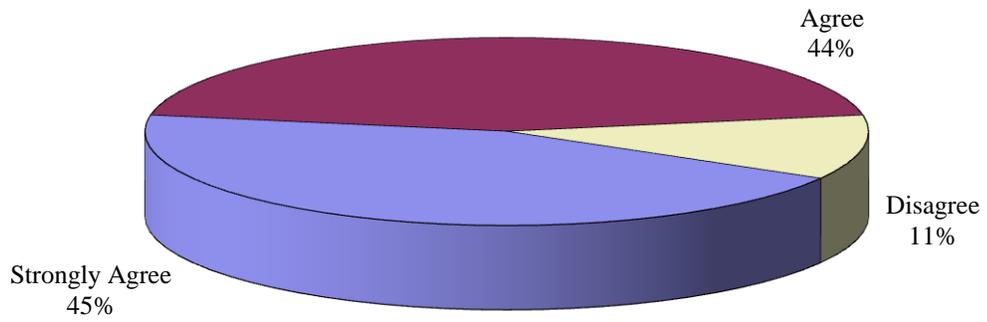
Bridgeway Academy



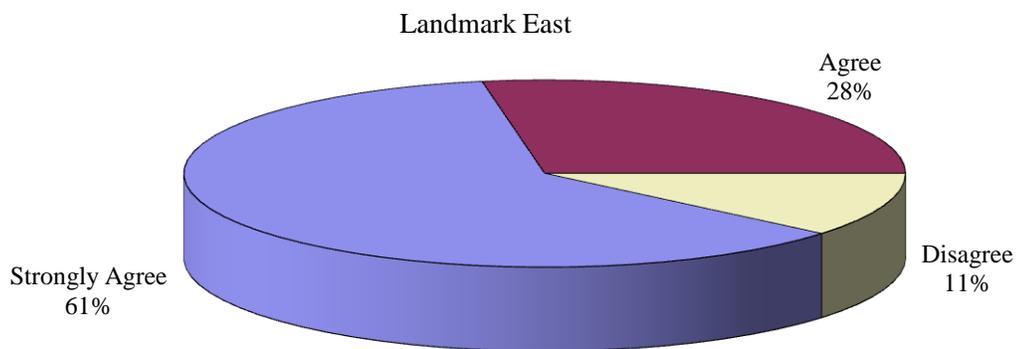
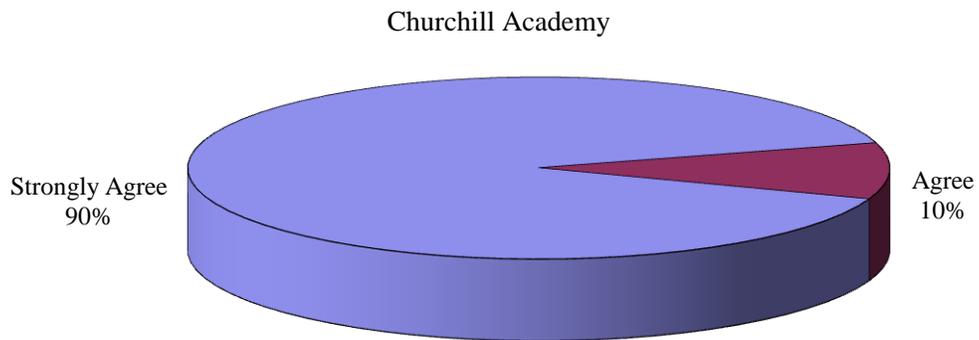
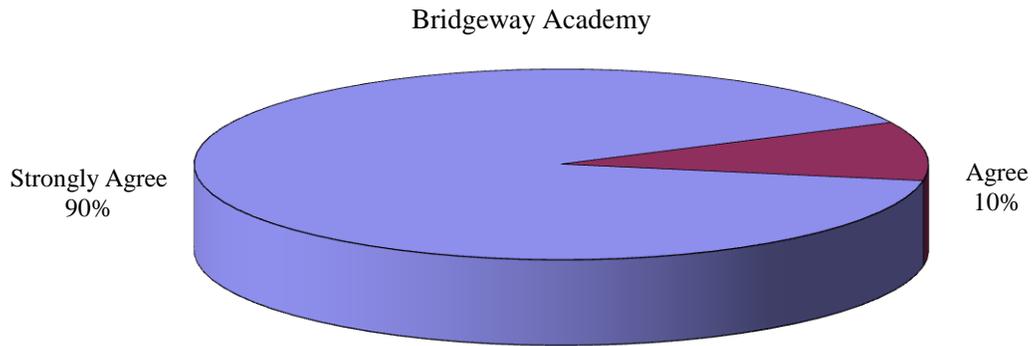
Churchill Academy



Landmark East

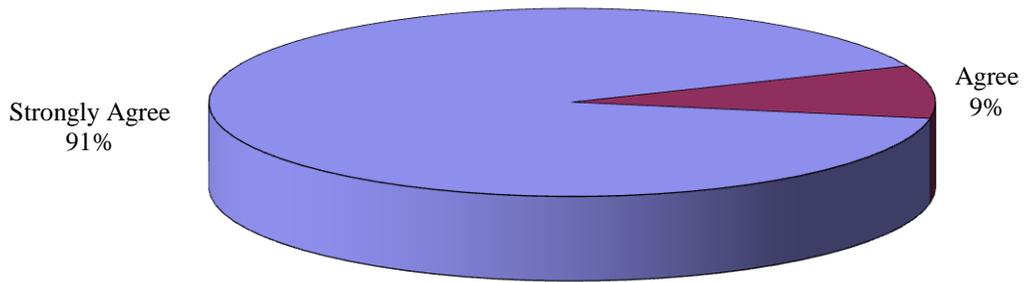


Teacher Survey Question 14: Attendance is good at this school.

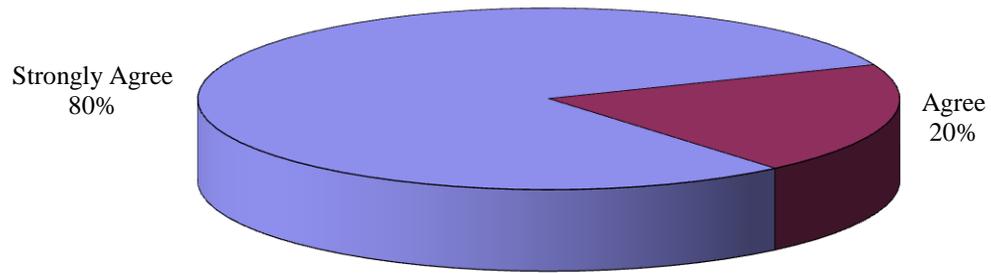


Teacher Survey Question 15: Our school effectively addresses the learning needs of students.

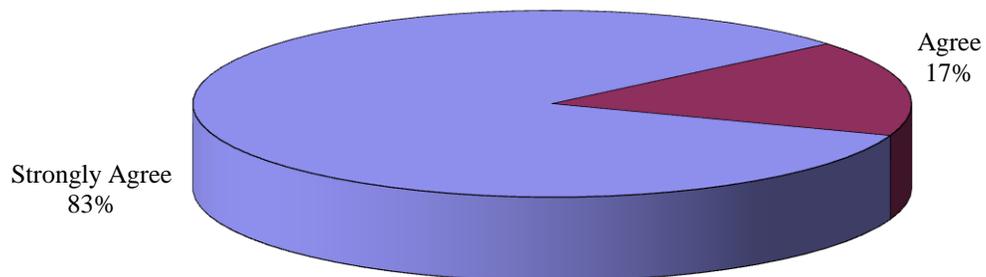
Bridgeway Academy



Churchill Academy



Landmark East



Appendix F: Students Focus Group

A student focus group was conducted at each DSEPS in conjunction with the learning tour and the administrator and teacher focus groups. Members of the TSP Review Committee participated and held more of a dialogue with the students than a survey.

Based on answers to question 3, “How long have you been at this school,” 121 students between the grades of 3 and 12 participated to some degree in these focus groups.

In most cases, the relevancy of the information gleaned depended in part to the age/grade level of the student involved, such as those topics concerning transition and future plans.

Student Focus Group Responses

1. *Why did you choose to attend this school?*

The top three reasons given by the students for attending a DSEPS were

- had issues concerning scholastic aspects in public school: 32
- parents/guardians requested/insisted: 18
- learning disabilities-related issues: 9

Reasons for leaving the public school system included inter-personnel issues, class sizes, discipline issues, teaching staff not being helpful or understanding learning disabilities and anxiety or stress related issues.

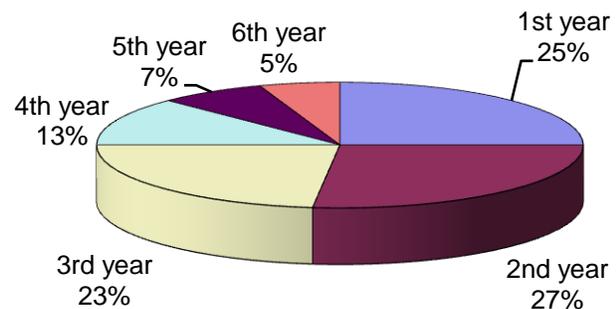
2. *Were you having difficulty in reading, writing, organizational skills, listening behaviour?*

The majority of the participating students admitted they were experiencing, or had experienced, difficulty in the categories listed. Some also mentioned difficulty in mathematics, although this was not a subject specifically named.

3. *How long have you been at this school?*

The majority of the participating students had been attending the DSEPS for between one and three years. The totals listed below are for all three schools.

1 st year:	37 students
2 nd year:	32 students
3 rd year:	24 students
4 th year:	14 students
5 th year:	9 students
6 th year:	5 students



4. *What subjects do you take here?*

A full range of academic subjects were listed, including law, art, music, and economics. The top three subjects the participating students mentioned were

- math: 60 students
- language arts: 50 students
- sciences: 33 students

Language arts included English, reading, writing, grammar, and spelling and their associated remedials. Computer studies, including keyboarding, were mentioned by 23 students; social studies and/or sociology were mentioned by 15 students; and another 15 students said they took history.

There were also some DSEPS-specific subjects listed, the top three being

- learning disabilities coping strategies: 28 students
- social skills: 18 students
- study skills and/or organization skills: 10 students

5. *Talk about a typical day at this school.*

When asked about a typical day at their DSEPS, the students listed their subjects, study periods, break periods, lunches and such items as one would expect from any similar group of students attending a public school.

6. *What skills have you learned here to help you with your studies?*

The top three skills mentioned by the participating students ranged from language skills to organization techniques to studying and/or homework skills. These were followed by math, behavioural modifying skills, and the ability to self-advocate.

- language skills (reading, writing, spelling, grammar, etc.): 22 students
- organization skills (colour coding, agenda, etc.): 17 students
- studying/homework skills (focussing, coping, doing homework immediately, etc.): 12 students

Learning to cope with their learning disabilities was also mentioned by two of the students.

7. *How does your teacher assess your work?*

Some variation of “tests, exams, and quizzes with follow-up evaluations” was the main method the students gave as the manner in which their teachers assess their work. Evaluation of assignments and projects conducted both as individuals and in groups, was the second most popular response when the students were asked about this. The students also mentioned homework and that the teachers confirmed the students comprehended the work already covered before building on that foundation and advancing within a given subject.

8. *Do you meet with your teachers to talk about your work?*

The answers to this question may have depended more on the age group and grade level of the student than on the actual answers given by the student.

- yes: 12 students
- sometimes: 8 students
- no: 7 students

As well, three students said that help was available to them whenever they requested it, and one said the meetings were of an informal nature.

9. *Do you have homework? Tell us how you complete your assignments.*

When asked if they have homework, 19 answered yes without any comments, while 5 said they completed their homework either while at school or during a study hall. Two said that every class had some daily work assigned. There were 15 comments that seemed to elaborate about either the type of homework assigned (multiplication, project work, sight words) or under what circumstances they did their homework, such as they did their homework as soon as they got home; or they listened to music while doing their homework.

10. *Do you use technology to support your learning? (computers, laptops)*

Yes was implied by 38 students out of the 45 responses to this question, with specific computer programs being used having the highest scoring response. Computer programs such as Dragon Naturally Speaking, Kurzweil, and Typing Pal were mentioned. Seven students said technology was available in the classroom for their use, while 6 said they used laptops and 5 said computers were available for research.

11. *Have you been introduced to assistive technology? Are you using it?*

There were 23 responses from students recorded for this topic, 17 of which seemed to indicate some sort of assistive technology was being used.

12. *Are you involved in extracurricular activities?*

Of the 88 responses to this question, 74 indicated they were involved in some sort of extracurricular activity. Four of the students responding in the negative explained that they had part-time jobs instead.

Of the 74 positive responses, almost one third, 24 students, indicated that they were involved in some sort of sports activity. Six students from Bridgeway Academy said they participated in cooking, possibly a cooking club or after school cooking lessons, and five said they were involved with drama.

13. *Were you involved in extracurricular activities in public school?*

Of the 58 responses to this question, 15 were in the negative, and 2 indicated that the students had had part-time jobs at that time. Of the remaining 41 positive replies, 28 (68 percent) indicated that they had been involved in some sort of sports activity.

14. How is private school different from public school, specific to your learning?

In total, there were 63 responses to this. Individual attention and smaller classes accounted for 60 percent of the answers.

- more teachers /more individual attention: 21 students
- smaller classes here: 20 students
- comfortable here/feel safe/enjoy being here/feel accepted: 10 students

Of those that did not answer within these categories, two mentioned that they weren't learning within the public school system, leading to frustration. One mentioned the lack of French, art classes, and tech (perhaps "shop") education at the DSEPS. Another mentioned that there were no extra social activities, such as dances, at the DSEPS.

15. Are your grades different here? How?

Of the 55 students responding, almost half (24) said their grades were either much higher/better or were higher/better at the DSEPS they were attending. Twelve said they were "different," without specifying. Two said they didn't know, and two more said the work was easier, although they did not elaborate and may have meant they now comprehend the subject matter being taught, therefore making it "easier."

16. Do you find it more or less challenging here compared to public school?

When asked how challenging the students found their DSEPS to be, almost half (28 out of 58 responses) said it was less challenging, while three said it was not challenging enough. The answers were not elaborated upon and could mean that the students comprehended the subjects better, making it less of a challenge for them. One said it was challenging, but there was a safety net so they weren't afraid to try; while three also said it was more challenging but that it was fair because of the help they received while at the DSEPS. Another student noted it was easier to get help with their studies at the DSEPS.

17. Have you made friends here? Do these friendships extend beyond school?

There were 50 responses recorded to this question. Most of the students said they were making friends at the DSEPS. Because this was asked as a compound question, it is inferred that those who responded with “sometimes” meant that sometimes the friendships extended outside the school, while five definitely indicated that they saw the friends they made at the DSEPS outside of the school environment.

18. Do you keep in touch with your friends from public school?

Only 13 of the 58 students responding to this question said they did not keep in touch with their friends from public school. One comment noted it was difficult to do so because they got home later now.

19. What are your plans for the future?

The responses to this question may have depended on the student’s age and grade level. Of the 79 responses, about one third (27) indicated that they hoped to attend a university, a private college, or an NSCC campus with another 10 students saying they wished for some sort of trade (electrician, mechanic, etc.).

There were 14 “other” responses ranging from “making chocolates” to “working at an airport” to being an author or an actor. These responses may have been from some of the younger students.

20. What is this school doing to prepare you for the transition?

There were 34 responses to this question. Ten students indicated that they either did not know or were not sure (4), that nothing was being done (4), or that they were not capable of making a transition to another education facility (2).

Of the remaining 24, almost a third (7) of the students indicated that there was an increase in responsibility and work level to prepare them for reintegration into another education facility. Nine indicated that they were learning new skills—either “soft” skills (self-advocacy or social skills) or “hard” skills (keyboarding, computer use, organization).

21. Additional comments

Only 22 additional comments were recorded by the committee members during their interaction with the students’ focus groups.

Of note, from Landmark East one comment was that the days were “long,” however; Landmark East is a boarding school.

Two of the comments from Churchill Academy mentioned the uniforms the students are required to wear (“hate uniforms”), and one of the comments concerned the lack of social and recreational choices (no dances or proms).

Appendix G: Parents Focus Group

1A. How did you learn about the Tuition Support Program: Private School?

The majority of the parents reported that they had to do research on their own to find out about the Tuition Support Program. Some said they were informed about it through a formal network consisting of pediatricians, psychologists, a resource teacher, one of the teachers at a public school (who did not want the parent to use their name), and guidance counsellors. Some psych-ed reports mentioned it, and support groups at IWK were also referenced. An informal network consisting of family members, friends, neighbours, other parents, word of mouth, media reports, and, in some cases, prior local knowledge were also cited as how the parents learned about the Tuition Support Program.

1B. How did you learn about the Tuition Support Program: Department of Education Funding

When asked how the parents learned about the Department of Education funding of the Tuition Support Program, roughly half said through the DSEPS staff or the website. Almost as many cited networking, both informally (other parents, MLA, tutor) and professionally (paediatrician, psychologist, IWK staff, etc.). A handful mentioned the Department of Education website or staff or said they learned about it while the student was in another program (LDANS, SLD).

Students' Progress at DSEPS

The parents attending the focus groups almost unanimously said that their children were now much happier. Their children were now learning social skills, which prompted interaction with society in a positive manner.

In fact, some parents mentioned that their children had been suicidal or were so depressed while attending public school that they feared returning their children to that environment. Some of the students demonstrated their frustration by acting out violently; one parent went so far as to say her child had caused extensive damage to their home, incurring expensive repairs, while another parent said the student was physically assaulting family members prior to attending the DSEPS. The parents said the DSEPS were not only teaching the students how to develop learning strategies to cope with their learning disabilities, but were also teaching their children social skills, making it possible for these students to interact positively with others.

2A. Student's progress at DSEPS: Academic Development

The general consensus was that the students were showing improvements, in some cases "vast" improvements, in all academic subjects, including their comprehension of subjects and basic skills. In some cases, the student had entered the DSEPS functionally illiterate at middle school grade level, or four or five grade levels below their age/grade level, and were reading, writing, and comprehending by the end of the first year. Some parents mentioned an improvement in math skills. Students were now engaging in classes, demonstrating a willingness to attempt new things, and completing assignments and homework on their own, without having to be forced to do so. The students were now part of extracurricular teams or on the student council,

participating in outside activities such as having a part-time job or contributing to the school's yearbook.

2B. Student Progress at DSEPS: Social - Emotional Development

While at public school, students were ostracized, demonstrated low self-esteem, and had no confidence in their ability to contribute. As a group, they were bullied, were called "stupid," and were afraid to ask for help. They demonstrated their anxiety, fear, and frustration by crying, running away from home, being depressed, being non-communicative, and fighting. One parent stated that they were scared to put their child back into the public school because of those social issues. Other parents said the children's behaviour was a concern while at the public school, and one mentioned that their child was at the principal's office "every other day." The student's actual involvement, or high potential of involvement, with violence, drug, and alcohol, due in part to their age group/grade level, was also concerns mentioned.

At the DSEPS, these same students are developing friendships and social relationships. Their confidence and self-esteem have increased. They appear happy and enjoy the safe learning environment they are now in. They are learning social skills and are accepted within their community. As one parent stated, "DSEPS gives the student hope."

One parent did say their child had always had friends and was in a large class while in public school. This parent said this student is also making friends while at the DSEPS, but is angry about leaving the old school. There was no indication of how long this student had been attending the DSEPS, nor of this particular student's issues leading to their attending this DSEPS.

Parent involvement in individualized program plan (IPP) development

The general experience of the parents with the IPP in the public school system was very negative and stressful. The parents found it very difficult to get an IPP developed for their students. In some cases, they were given the impression by the public schools that the "IPP thing is just 'smoke and mirrors'" or that it would "limit the student's potential." In many cases, once a parent finally succeeded in getting an IPP developed for a student, the public school either could not (possibly due to limited resources) or would not implement the IPP.

Although the IPP is a requirement to receive Tuition Support Program funding, the parents gave the designated special education private school implementation of the IPP mixed reviews. Some parents said their DSEPS updates and amends the IPP as the student's requirements change. Other parents said the IPP is submitted or drafted up when the student enters the DSEPS, but there is no direct indication that it is being followed or revised, as the "process is less formal. A few parents said the IPP was ignored, but the DSEPS developed its own road map for the student. All parents seemed pleased with the outcomes.

3. How are you involved in the development of IPP?

In the public school system, the parents indicated, they had to fight for an IPP for their children. Some said the only reason their student finally received an IPP was because of their high

involvement in forcing the public school to develop it. In some cases, the parents had to do it themselves, becoming experts to successfully advocate for their students. In a few cases, the public school declined to develop an IPP for the student. Some were told it would be detrimental for the student, others that adaptations were “blowing smoke.” In one case, the school refused to release the IPP to the parent when the parent applied for Tuition Support Program funding. A large percentage of the parents’ comments stated that even where the individualized program plan had been developed, the IPP was not implemented. The overwhelming impression the parents received from the public school system was that the IPP was “bad” and that it would limit the student instead of helping them. In some cases, when the application for Tuition Support Program was made, the students were declined because they did not have an IPP.

According to the parents, the staff at the DSEPS develops and follow the IPP, although it may not be labelled an “IPP.” It may be referred to as “meeting outcomes,” a “learning plan,” or the “road map” instead of a formal “IPP.” The impression the parents have is that sometimes the IPP is followed very closely and modified as the student’s needs change, while at other times it is only referred to occasionally. In all cases, the parents seemed pleased.

One of the things mentioned repeatedly was that the parents found it much less stressful having the IPP requirements being handled by the DSEPS staff.

Of note, parents queried the requirement for having an IPP when applying to the Tuition Support Program. In some cases, students were denied funding but upon appeal, when the reviewing officer examined the situation, it was determined that the student met all other criteria and funding was approved.

There were two comments by parents concerning the DSEPS. One parent felt they had to take the initiative to request to be involved in developing the IPP. Balancing this comment, a parent of a child at the same DSEPS said they felt they could offer suggestions dealing with issues raised in the IPP and that the teachers would listen and consider their input. At a different DSEPS, a parent said they felt part of the IPP planning process and could tell the teachers what would, and would not, work with that student.

Another parent stated that they were quite upset because they didn’t receive the student’s report card until payment had been made to the DSEPS.

Some of the comments made included the following

- DSEPS IPP is done by teachers. Even though parents not involved, the IPP meets student’s needs.
- IPP is more concrete at DSEPS. Classes for study skills, writing, reading, organizational skills, 2 math classes, 3–4 language arts classes.
- Parent has no role in IPP. This is a relief as the process was stressful in public school. (Parent was) always fighting for more.
- Parent trusts DSEPS representative to make decisions because parent feels person is qualified to make those decisions.
- Parent likes the concept of separating remedial from course content. Parents not involved, but parent is not the expert in learning disabilities and would prefer not to have to be involved in development of outcomes that are concrete and specific.

Student Assessment at DSEPS

Parents indicated that students are continuously being assessed, utilizing various methods, on a daily basis and that the outcomes of those assessments are regularly communicated to the parents.

One DSEPS has a formal “assessment week” during February in which all students write exams or tests to evaluate their competency. At another DSEPS, exams, based on the public school system grade-level curriculum, are written three times a year by all students. The third DSEPS conducts standardized achievement testing of the students, including testing of academic subjects. In all cases, the results are formally communicated to the parents.

4: How is the student being assessed at the DSEPS?

At one DSEPS, highlights and student reports are issued three times a year, covering all areas of the student’s learning growth—education, social, and emotional aspects are all commented on. A student communication book is sent home or e-mailed to the parents every two weeks, detailing behaviour and educational developments. The students are assessed in various ways on a daily basis. There is strong one-to-one communication between the teacher and the parent. E-mail is used extensively to facilitate communications between the DSEPS and the parent. There is a standardized achievement testing done of the students, including testing of academic subjects. A list of all results is given to the parents along with any relevant comments.

The second DSEPS uses a daily agenda for tracking the student’s behaviour, and school work is sent home, both of which the parents are required to sign. Formal student assessments are conducted twice a year, at the start and end of each school year, to track the changes and growth of the student. This DSEPS has designated one week during February as the “Assessment Week” for standardized testing of the students. Parents have been told these tests are on par with the public system grade-levels. However, one parent noted, the marks issued by the DSEPS are high and wondered if they were realistic.

At the third DSEPS, daily verbal contact between the parents and teachers was mentioned by some parents. As well, an agenda book is sent home daily for the parent’s signature as one of the main communication tools between the teachers and the parents. Exams, based on public school system grade-level curriculum, are written three times a year by all students. Report cards are issued at the same time of year as the public school system and are a combination of traditional grading and narrative comments. Oral testing follows regular written testing, allowing students to show what they actually know, not only what they can write down. As well, journals, quizzes, tests, homework assignments, and projects are used to assess the student on a regular basis.

This DSEPS uses a reward system of treats, movies, or swimming periods to reinforce acceptable behaviour.

DSEPS Communication with Parent

The parents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the communication flow between the teacher, and the parents. One of the things mentioned was that the teachers actually responded to the parents’ concerns.

5. *How does the DSEPS communicate with the parents?*

Methods of communication included formal written reports, with parents from two of the DSEPS indicating that they received report cards three times a year, as well as daily informal communications. The most common methods mentioned by the parents at the focus group included daily e-mails or phone calls, a daily agenda sent home with the student that the parents are required to sign, and communication books sent home every second week, also to be signed by the parent. Mention was made of a website, but it was not clear if this was a universal method of communication between teacher and parents (e.g., posting homework assignments online) or if it was only at one of the schools.

Using the above methods, the teachers regularly communicate social skills, sports and non-academic achievements as well as academic achievements to the parents.

However, mention was also made that at one school there were no scheduled face-to-face parent-teacher meetings during the academic year unless specifically instigated by the parent. For the same school, one of the parents remarked that there was no weekly plan regarding the student's activities, just a yearly plan.

Other comments made by the parents included the following

- If student doesn't hand in an assignment, it is looked at as an opportunity. Teacher is on the phone to the parent immediately.
- Daily feedback. There is two-way contact communication immediately.
- Individual accountability is developed in students by stressing that inappropriate choices or behaviours have consequences (e.g., detentions).
- Students are not sent home for inappropriate behaviour. Teachers handle outbursts, not the office.
- You can pick up a phone and e-mail, and they respond.
- No scheduled parent meetings. Onus on parents as opposed to volunteering information. Not as proactive as DSEPS should be.

Students' Educational Experiences at DSEPS

Universally, the parents at the focus groups stated that attending the DSEPS has changed the student's educational experience for the better. All comments were positive. Some went so far as to say that attending the DSEPS was the student's only chance at receiving an education of any sort and the student now had a chance at even receiving a post-secondary education by employing the social skills, learning disabilities coping skills, and academic knowledge gained at the DSEPS.

6. Has the students' attendance at the DSEPS changed their educational experience? How?

Many of the parents commented that attending the DSEPS totally changed the student's attitude toward learning. Most of the students were failing or struggling with excessive amounts of homework in an attempt not to fail while at the public school. In an attempt to be inclusive, many of the students were kept with their age group but were not able to successfully comprehend or complete schoolwork at, or near, that grade-level. Most were frustrated with their inability to interact in an accepted social manner with their peer group and others. Attending the DSEPS allowed these students to learn in a manner consistent with their abilities, allowing some of them to actually comprehend for the first time some of the academic subjects they had previously not been grasping.

Parents used words such as "happy," "eager to learn," "excited to go to school," "engaged," "light went on," and "joyous" to describe the students' current educational experience.

Some of the parents reported that the student's expectations concerning their educational limitations had expanded beyond their previous hopes. They are now exploring the possibility of attending university or community college, being able to contribute to society, and becoming self-reliant to some degree.

Some of the comments made by the parents included the following:

- Student is joyous—wants to go to school even more than coming home.
- Engaged—a light went on—understands work—work ethic has improved.
- Work ethics are incredible, like night and day.
- Student doesn't want to miss school. Even if ill, student still wants to go to school.

Socially, the skills learned at the DSEPS function well outside the classroom setting and affect all aspects of the student's life.

Impact of DSEPS Placement

Except for the financial impact of having a student attend a DSEPS as a whole, the vast majority of the parents said the impact of the student attending the DSEPS was a very positive, or a positive experience. Two parents specifically commented on the financial impact. One said there would be no vacations for the student's older siblings because of the tuition cost. The other parent commented that they were now retired and thought the supplement should be based on the current year's income, reflecting the actual ability to pay tuition.

One parent remarked that it had been a massive decision to send the student to a DSEPS as they lost the possibility of francophone schooling.

Another negative impact reported by one parent was the long transportation time for the student to attend the DSEPS. Because the student left early and returned late, the student was not able to interact as much socially within the neighbourhood as the parent wanted.

Another parent also commented on there being some isolation from the local neighbourhood but did not elaborate further.

7. Has placement at the DSEPS had a positive or negative impact for the student?

As noted above, the majority of the parents reported that placement at the DSEPS had a positive impact for the student, and, the student's family.

Most mentioned the social interactions of the student. By learning social skills not taught at public school, the student was much better at interacting with family, friends, and the community at large. Many parents commented that family life was much better in that the stress levels and fighting were reduced.

Some of the comments related to this included the following:

- We've gone from war to peace.
- Polite—manners—less depressed—self-advocacy—self-esteem up.
- More respectful of things around them.
- (Student is) able to make larger decisions.
- No homework stress. No hate.

Some of the parents mentioned that the students' maturity level had risen and they were now taking responsibility for their own actions and decisions.

Other parents noted reduced health issues and lower medication rates for their children, possibly due in part to the lower anxiety levels being experienced by the students.

Typical comments made by the parents were similar to the following

- Absolutely positive at home. No battles over tutoring and homework. Now enjoys other activities: Sea Cadets, music. No longer fighting at home. Homework no longer parent responsibility; consequences occur at school. "Has given us back our family life."
- Others in family can do "things" instead of managing student's behaviour.
- No longer destroying the home; student has totally stopped now. Student caused thousands of dollars of damage in repairs (previously).
- Improved parent-child relationship: Now able to go to a restaurant or a movie with parent because student is taking more responsibility for behaviour. Student is learning how to behave in public.

It was mentioned that some of the students were still getting frustrated or exhibiting behavioural issues, but for the most part, these were improving. One parent commented that they were involved with the IWK to get assistance in dealing with the student's behavioural issues.

It was suggested that it would be a good experience for older siblings to attend a sibling group to learn more about the student's needs. One parent mentioned that the student was teased by their sibling about the DSEPS placement.

Transition

Those parents believing their children should, or could, return to the public school system said the student was being prepared both academically, by increasing the workload and expectations of the student's output and ensuring that the student has good learning skills, and socially, by ensuring that the student can self-advocate and has the social skills to interact within the community.

There were parents who expressed no interest in having the student return to the public school system. Some parents stated they did not believe the student would ever be capable of making the transition, while other parents thought returning the student to the public school system would undo any of the gains the student may have made, socially and emotionally, while at the DSEPS, and they were not willing to take that risk.

A minority of the parents encouraged the students to return to public school, but more believed the student should remain at the DSEPS until they could move into community college, private college or a university, or the workforce.

8. How is the student being prepared for transition?

Parents stated that the DSEPS are preparing students academically by accessing more of the curriculum, teaching them how to write exams, how to use resources properly for studying and research, and stressing study and organization skills.

The DSEPS also encourages the students' social aspects by promoting volunteering and applying their experiences.

A key area has been how the DSEPS teaches students about their learning disabilities and how to self-advocate.

According to the parents, a vital component is teaching the students how to process stress and anxiety in a useful manner to help the student deal with making a transition back to a system that previously failed them.

The parents said a transition depends on the student's own needs and abilities. As well as having the academic requirements, students also require the social skills, confidence, self-esteem, and self-advocacy skills for a successful transition.

Administrative Strengths - Needs of Tuition Support Program

Several areas were discussed by the parents' focus groups: the funding process, the appeal process, the timelines, the acceptance criteria, and the duration of the program.

It was suggested that all areas could be revised and/or simplified.

As well, the Tuition Support Program needs to be better advertised and supported through the public school system.

Parents said the appeal process did not meet the needs of student. The consensus was that even if a student needs this type of support, they could still be denied. It was thought there is not enough flexibility within the system to allow varying from the regulations.

The timelines given for the application deadlines were felt to be disconnected from reality, as there is actually a continuous intake. The inclusion of a deadline on the application form increases the parents' stress.

Again and again, the inclusion of the individualized program plan as a requirement for acceptance into the Tuition Support Program was found to be a difficult criterion to comply with.

Parents expressed gratitude for the Tuition Support Program and the fact that it has been extended to four years but noted that putting a time limit on funding was tantamount to removing a diabetic from their medications after four years and expecting them to survive. It was stressed that learning disabilities are not something a student "outgrows." Some students will be able to return to the public school system in two or three years; some may never be able to do so.

9A. What are the administrative strengths (needs) of the Tuition Support Program: Application and Funding Process?

Individualized Program Plan criteria

The general consensus by the parents was that the IPP was one of the greatest stumbling blocks to the Tuition Support Program. The public school system seemed to actively discourage IPPs for students, telling parents not to put their student on an IPP because it closes doors. Requiring an IPP caused delays and frustration when the parents applied for the Tuition Support Program. It was felt the application should not require IPPs and that the psych-ed report should be enough justification for a student to attend a DSEPS.

Deadlines Are Not Realistic

Many parents did not seem to be aware that the Department of Education had continuous intake and believed the applications are available only in February with a deadline in March. This does not give the parents enough time to compile all the information requested. It was noted that some applications were accepted well after the deadline, while others were not. This was considered quite unfair.

Assessments

As mentioned above, some of the parents commented that there was not enough time to have a psych-ed assessment conducted in the timeframe given. It was thought letters from psychologists should be acceptable substantiation.

Letter

Currently, the application is to be accompanied by a letter of rationale. This was thought not to be "user-friendly" for those parents who also have difficulty communicating effectively. Parents shouldn't be judged for the way they write. Parents also questioned why a letter should be required for subsequent years. They believed a student requiring the Tuition Support Program the

first year continues to require support in subsequent years. The initial rationale would not have changed.

Process

The process of applying for the Tuition Support Program can itself be intimidating for unskilled/illiterate parents, and the financial pressure can be overwhelming. Parents noted that much can be done during the review to ensure that an appeal isn't required. While the initial application process was difficult, the renewal process was easier, although it was still frustrating to fill in paperwork each year. It was felt students should not have to apply every year.

Several other comments were noted:

- The Tuition Support Program needs to be more widely advertised in the public school system.
- The Tuition Support Program needs to be more open in accepting students, such as students on the SLD program.
- Professional development on learning disabilities should be mandatory.
- The Tuition Support Program should be made available in all areas of the province; and,
- Payments owed to the DSEPS should be paid in a timely manner, as supplements seem to be arriving "very late."

9B. What are administrative strengths (needs) of the Tuition Support Program: Appeal process?

The parents seemed to agree that having to apply and then appeal was very stressful, regardless of the outcome. However, experiences were mixed with some parents saying they had a positive experience with the reviewer, and others said their experience was anything but positive. Some of the parents said the appeal process was fair and the reviewer/adjudicator was well prepared. Others questioned why only one person handled the appeal instead of a panel.

Parents indicated they thought they had no control over the outcomes. "Someone else is holding (the students') future in their hands."

It was also noted the *Education Act* is difficult to decipher and a legislation amendment is required to permit out of province students attending a DSEPS type school to transfer into the Nova Scotia DSEPS when the family takes up residence in Nova Scotia.

9C. What are administrative strengths (needs) of the Tuition Support Program: Timelines?

The stated deadline for applying to the Tuition Support Program is disconnected from reality as there is actually a continuous intake into the program. However, by giving a cut-off date of the end of March on the application, stress is increased on the family.

Some of the parents also indicated stress levels were increased because they could not count on receiving funding support for the student.

It was noted that one of the DSEPS had expressed concerns to the parents regarding late payments.

9D. What are the administrative strengths (needs) of the Tuition Support Program: Acceptance criteria?

Most of the comments noted had been mentioned previously.

It was felt the criteria should be reviewed and streamlined or simplified. The requirement for a rationale letter, especially after the first acceptance, was felt to be excessive, adding to the stress and complexity of applying.

It was noted that requiring parents to apply in February or March for the next school year is in most cases too early for the parent to make an informed decision regarding the student. In some cases, parents indicated they were not aware of any issues until April or May. Some public schools seem reluctant to communicate with the parents until the last moment.

The validity for an individualized program plan was again raised. If the IPP is a technical requirement, and the public school refuses to work with an IPP, the student is not eligible for the Tuition Support Program. Many of the public schools seem very reluctant to develop or implement an IPP. In one case, the student was placed on a “modification” in order not to label them as IPP. When the parents applied for the Tuition Support Program, this impaired the student’s acceptance into the program. It was also noted that most students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD don’t have IPPs. It was suggested alternatives such as the Psych-Ed report be accepted instead.

One of the comments made by a parent noted the acceptance criteria does not accommodate a family moving into the province from another province or from another country. This parent noted that requiring a student to have attended a Nova Scotia public school the previous year might constitute a Charter of Rights violation.

9E. What are the administrative strengths (needs) of the Tuition Support Program: Duration of program?

Although the parents expressed gratitude that funding had been extended to four years, it was universally stated that limiting the funding at all was considered inappropriate as students have their learning disability lifelong. Some students will be able to develop coping skills and move back into the public school system in two or three years; some never will and should not be forced back into a system that guarantees their failure.

Some of the comments made by the parents included:

- The stress that was endured while attempting to find funding for the student nearly caused a nervous breakdown.
- A 14-year-old student was trying to advocate for self and family to continue the funding. The student was sick with worry about returning to the public school system.
- If the student wasn’t at the DSEPS, the student would probably be in jail.
- One of the students attending the parents’ focus group said, “I can’t go back. There is not enough help within the public school system. I’ll just be bullied. I’ll go back to being depressed.”
- The Tuition Support Program should not be limited. LD/ADHD does not go away. It is like pulling a diabetic away from treatment.

- Students need to be at DSEPS until there is an equivalent program available in the public system.
- There seems to be a misconception out there. The students are not here (at the DSEPS) because it is a private school and it's fun to be here!

Many of the parents commented on the huge financial burden having a student at a DSEPS is on the family, even though the family may pay only 40% of the actual tuition costs, for some families even that is impossible and those students are not able to attend a DSEPS. Some parents went so far as to claim they would sell their house or take out a second mortgage just to ensure their children could continue at the DSEPS.

One of the parents recommended investigating how other provinces are dealing with this issue.

Appendix H: Teachers Focus Group

1. Do you feel that you were provided with relevant and appropriate information regarding your students' learning strengths and needs?

Most of the teaching staff felt there was a lack of consistency in the type of information received, and whether or not information was actually received from the public schools. As well, some of the teaching staff felt that more coordination with the public schools would be helpful. Where documentation was received, teaching staff indicated the files were reviewed and consulted as needed although it was suggest samples of the student's work and a more complete psychologist assessment would, in some cases, be very helpful.

2. To what extent have you been involved with the transition process of students returning to public school or to post-secondary?

Feedback from the focus groups indicated that the actual involvement of the DSEPS' teaching staff with the transition process varied with the school. Most respondents indicated they did not have direct involvement with the transition process of students returning to public school or to post-secondary as this was handled by either the school's principal or by consultants, with the teaching staff's input.

Respondents from Churchill Academy indicated that transition within the school was well managed but also indicated there did not seem to be a formal procedure in place to ensure consistent results when students transitioned from Churchill Academy to a public school. Respondents from Bridgeway Academy noted the teaching staff signed off on grade-level forms while Landmark East respondents remarked the Guidance Counselling department assisted with the completion of applications to post-secondary institutions. Landmark East respondents also indicted they met with school board, SLD, and Program Support teachers and that they discuss students and transition requirements during staff meetings.

3. Describe student growth

Academically, the teaching staff of all three DSEPS reported students showed improved scholastic and organizational skills in a fairly short timeframe, leading to increased confidence and a reduction of negative behaviour by the student.

All respondents indicated a higher reliance on assistive technology in the form of computer programs, calculators, audio books, laptops, oral testing, and manipulatives, than are the norm in a public school, allowing students to demonstrate comprehension of various subjects in non-traditional manners.

Over all, the teaching staff indicated that students learn self-advocacy by first gaining an understanding of their learning disability and then by developing skills and appropriate adaptations to help them deal with their particular issues. Although this may be a lengthy process, once trust between students within a class and within the school has been established, the students' confidence in their ability to self-advocate increases, leading in turn to improved self-esteem.

Interpersonal skills are emphasised within the DSEPS, encouraging students to develop strategies for conflict resolution and social interactions. Teaching staff indicated interpersonal skills are taught in a more direct manner than within the public system, through the aid of behavioural specialists, with emphasis on problem-solving.

Teaching staff respondents indicated a visible and demonstrated ability on the part of the students to work independently. This is demonstrated by the student through, among other things: accessing resources as the student requires them; completing homework without parental involvement; and, by asking for help when the student requires it.

Teaching staff respondents credit patience and a nurturing environment as the keys in encouraging the social and emotional growth of the students. Although it is acknowledged that growth in this area can be slow, teaching staff credit acceptance within a peer group as being very helpful in increasing the student's confidence, leading in turn to growth in these areas.

4. Can you identify any barriers that may have had an impact on student learning and how were they addressed?

Teaching staff respondents identified a number of barriers impacting on student learning. These included:

- Past negative experience while in the public school system leading to students having emotional issues, becoming resistant learners, demonstrating mistrust of staff and other students, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence.
- The individual learning disabilities of each student.
- A lack of professional development opportunities for the teaching staff.
- A general lack of teaching materials, resources, access to a teachers' resource centre, and access to modern assistive technology.
- Dated materials and text books.
- Outdated teaching technology, such as overhead projectors, is still being used.

Respondents suggested the students' issues stemming from past negative experiences can only be addressed through patience and persistence in building trusting relationships with the students, and by supplying positive reinforcement where appropriate.

Assisting students in developing specialized coping skills to deal with their individual learning issues is a major component of the mandates of these schools.

The remainder of the issues raised by the teaching staff respondents should be addressed through interaction between the specific school and the appropriate agency, governmental or otherwise. Resource purchasing is an internal matter and beyond the scope of this committee.

5. What support systems exist for teachers as you work to address the learning needs of your students?

Most teaching staff respondents mentioned professional development and a team approach in addressing the students' learning needs. This included some of the following: utilizing the in-house expertise among staff members, sharing instructional strategies, weekly meetings, and accessing specialized knowledge available through contacts from outside agencies such as

Mental Health Services, Children's Aid, and the IWK. Actual support systems fluctuated from school to school. It was suggested access to HRSB's resources and an on-staff psychologist would be valuable.

Comments on professional development opportunities also indicated inconsistencies between the DSEPS. Comments ranged from limited professional development due to funding constraints and a lack of substitute teachers, to presentations given at monthly in-service days and specialized training held during August, to scheduled professional development days with guest speakers and workshops/presentations/conferences being available on various subjects including assessments, social behavioural skills, and specialized teaching techniques for academic subjects.

It was remarked the administrative staff works closely in supporting the teaching staff and that most parents are also very supportive. It was noted the principals were very supportive and that teaching staff have input into the weekly meetings held to address issues. Also, in some of the designated special education private schools there are behavioural supports, social skills classes offered by psychologists, and guidance counsellors available to assist the teachers.

However, it was also mentioned that at least one of the schools has an apparent high turnover rate. This observation may require investigation to determine if it is valid and, if so, what recommendations, if any, might be made on this issue.

6. Do you feel that you have the training necessary to meet the needs of your students?

When asked if the participants of the teacher focus groups felt they had the training necessary to meet the needs of their students, all replied they felt they did, but all also mentioned continuing and specialized professional development was always welcomed. One group made mention of the extra training sessions arranged for them by their school during August, and that they had a mentoring program. References were made to training received through other positions.

However, added to that were comments suggesting that disability related training would be helpful.

7. Can you identify other professional development that would complement your instructional practices?

The teacher focus groups respondents identified evidenced-best research on best practices as a major area of professional development that would complement their instructional practices. Specialized training as it relates to learning disabilities evidenced by the students, such as ODD, Dyslexia, ADHD, Aspergers, and professional development in counselling skills and behavioural intervention as well as differentiated instructional design were also identified as shortfalls that would complement their instructional practices. It was suggested guest speakers could be invited to present during professional development days.

Mention was made of training in Internet use, tiered teaching and instructions on how to adapt and modify curriculum-building resources. Requests for professional development to be partnered with the school boards and for more information on IPP and provincial policy offerings were noted.

8. Describe the program planning process specific to the development and implementation of the IPP and/or Adaptations.

Respondents of the teacher focus groups described the program planning process specific to the development and implementation of the IPP and/or Adaptations in a variety of ways.

Most reported reviewing the student files and using the IPPs as the starting point in developing specific strategies designed to meet the individual learning needs of each student. The key factors appear to be the teachers' ability to be flexible and adaptable, allowing them to customize the curriculum to each student.

Most of the teachers used a combination of student self-assessment and teacher assessment to develop benchmarks for gauging progress within the curriculum as developed by the teacher for that student. A multi-modal approach seemed widely used to implement the teaching process.

Mention was made by one participant that they did not use IPP but that PSP was followed in their school.

It was suggested that students and parents should be encouraged to involve themselves in the program planning process.

9. What methods of reporting to parents are in your current practice?

All three teacher focus groups related they use the same customary methods used by the public school system of reporting to parents such as report cards, as well as formal and informal meetings with the parents. They also use email and phone conversations. In addition, one focus group mentioned a password protected website had been set up to allow parents to track any concerns at their convenience.

10. Identify instructional strategies that effectively address the remediation and compensatory needs of students.

The teacher focus groups listed a wide variety of specialized name brand programs they found useful when addressing the students' remediation and compensatory needs. As well, instructional strategies used included manipulatives and assistive technology, hands-on opportunities, and organizational strategies such as notes on boards and providing handouts. Mention was also made of specialized training for the teachers such as Linda Mood training.

11. Do you have adequate resources to implement the curriculum? Identify any needs both in physical and personnel resources.

All three designated special education private school teacher focus groups said they had adequate assets to implement the curriculum but admitted that there is always a need for more resources. Physical resources mentioned included laptops, assistive technology, science resources as well as software. Personnel resources mentioned included access to psychologist for assessments, a full time guidance counsellor and more professional development opportunities. Of note, one of the schools remarked there is a need for financial stability.

Appendix I: Administrator Focus Groups

The Administrator Focus Group data was collected as a part of the school audit of the DSEPS for the purpose of analysing long-term effectiveness of the Tuition Support Program. Information was collected in the following areas:

- **School Background**—Information about the student population, teacher training and salaries, grade levels, and number of students receiving tuition support was requested. One school did not provide information for this section.
- **Admission Criteria**—Overall, all three schools have common criteria for enrolment. However, there were some differences with regards to enrolment of students for whom the primary concern is based on emotional behavioural challenges.
- **Teacher Training**—According to the data collected, there appears to be a lack of commonality between the DSEPS with regards to teacher training and expected training levels.
- **Student Performance**—This section outlines the student progress/reporting systems, student performance, dropout rates, and suspension rates. One school did not provide comments in this section. It should be noted that the data regards to 80 percent of students from one school continue on to post-secondary education facilities and do well within that system is anecdotal feedback.
- **Discipline**—This section outlines discipline policies and procedures.
- **Communication**—This section consists of internal as well as parent communication techniques applied in the schools.
- **Student Assessment Practices**—This section provides a description of informal and formal assessment measures as well as reporting practices.
- **Needs of the Schools and School Improvement Initiatives**—This section provides information on the strategic planning as outlined by perspective boards for two schools, where the third school is focussed more on teaching staff evaluations.
- **Thoughts on Parents' Perceptions of Schools**—All three administrators felt that overall parents had a positive opinion of the school. Although the reasons provided did vary.
- **Key Elements of Instruction and Curriculum Implementation and Student Success**—Administrators stated a variety of key elements which include: class size, multi-sensory instruction techniques, teacher flexibility, etc.
- **Supports Provided to Students That Might Not Be Available in public schools**—Administrators stated that class sizes allow for a nurturing and safe environment for students. As well, this setting allows teachers to foster social, emotional, and academic support which is not available in the larger public school environment.
- **Impacts of Tuition Support Program Funding**—all administrators acknowledged that the Tuition Support Program has a major impact on students attending their schools. Two administrators stated that without that support, students currently receiving support would not be able to attend. One school stated that this would be the case even though they have bursaries and payment plans in effect.

Appendix J: Former Student Survey Results

Telephone/Mail Survey: Former Tuition Support Program Students

Surveys were mailed out to those families listed in the database as having had children formerly attending the DSEPS. According to the database, 126 families met the criteria of having had children attend one of the DSEP schools and of having their children move onward.

Unfortunately, six of the surveys were returned due to incorrect addresses as the families had moved since the student's transition.

Of the 120 delivered, surveys were returned by 53 of the parents and 16 of the students.

The breakout for the parents is 30 returns from Bridgeway Academy, 15 returns from Churchill Academy, and 8 returns from Landmark East. The breakout for the students is 5 returns from Churchill Academy, 7 returns from Bridgeway Academy, and 4 returns from Landmark East.

Of note, five of the parents indicated that their children were still attending the designated special education private school and had not returned to public school although the database showed that the Department of Education was no longer funding the student. Their surveys, while included, were discounted in the areas dealing with transitioning.

Former Student Survey Results

Of the 16 former Tuition Support Program students who returned the surveys included in the surveys mailed to their parents or who agreed to answer a telephone interview survey, an overwhelming majority said their experiences within the DSEP schools were either positive (69 percent) or mixed (25 percent).

In the group reporting mixed experiences, all mentioned that their academic studies or learning skills improved while attending the DSEPS. On the negative side, two specifically mentioned a lack of electives (gym, music, auto shop) at the DSEPS. One said it was hard to attend that school as the student was "very young" at the time, while another student specifically said the school they attended was not geared to teaching young adults in the upper grades.

Six (38 percent) of the former Tuition Support Program students moved on to either NSCC or a private college. One of these former students withdrew from NSCC, finding themselves easily distracted and due to the large class numbers found it hard to learn and do class work. The remainder that made the transition reported either success or that they were still attending the education facility.

- Eight students returned to the public school system, one of whom returned to the designated special education private school.
- Eight students graduated high school within the DSEPS. Five went on to NSCC, one to a private college, one directly entered the workforce, and one took a year off before intending to enter university.

Appendix K: Former Parent Survey Results

Overall, 75.5 percent of parents rated their designated special education private school experience as a positive one. Several even credited these schools as a key reason their child was able to complete secondary schooling. Not all reports were positive, however, with 21.5 percent stating mixed experiences for various reasons. A smaller grouping, 7.5 percent, reported a negative experience, although two of those cases still offer that the Tuition Support Program is warranted and needs to continue. Several families contacted reported that their child was still attending a DSEPS school despite tuition support ending. This is indicative that the limit on Tuition Support Program funding (4 years) does not necessarily affect attendance for all students. Average attendance based on the sample data was 3.4 years.

The interview data suggests that 71 percent of former students are having success in their post-SEPS schooling. For those who are having mixed results (15 percent) and those who are struggling (14 percent), the reasons are not clear. However, a commonality among the responses is that parents continue to struggle to obtain support for their children upon returning to public school (P-12 or post-secondary). Parents reported that the interventions and specific skill development, such as social, organizational, and study skills, taught at the DSEPS were valuable.

Transition planning was found to have been supported in 74 percent of those interviewed. In the majority of cases, transition meetings with public school counterparts took place, although some reported that the information provided at these meetings did not make it to the student's teachers, leaving the teachers unprepared, with the student's performance suffering as a result.