

To Whom It May Concern:

We, along with our son Matthew, are proud and honored to nominate Harry Balfour School (HBS) in the Peace Wapiti School Division for a National Inclusive Education Award. In particular, we would like to nominate Mrs. Jen Clevette (Principal), Mrs. Kim Schellenberg (Vice-Principal) and Mrs. Rochelle Dempsey (Inclusive Education Coordinator). This is only Matthew's second year at HBS and what a difference they have made. Here are a few reasons why we would like you to consider Team HBS.

From the first day we showed up (unexpectedly) we were met with a positive and welcoming feeling that made us feel at ease. After that one initial visit, we were left wondering if this was too good to be true! Since that day we are constantly being shown that this school really gets it. We feel like we have won the education lottery. They don't talk about inclusion, they live inclusion. The team has always been open, honest and transparent. They will be the first to let you know that they do not always know the right answer or what they should do next but they are willing to learn right along with us. The team is consistently checking with us to ensure that they are doing what is best for Matthew. They value our input and look at us as partners in Matthew's education.

In the past, we have been supported through various people and services with Inclusion Alberta. When we talked to the HBS team about Inclusion Alberta and about some of the ways that they would be able to lend support to the school if they were open to accepting it, the HBS team jumped at this offer. They welcomed any support that would benefit Matthew in their school community as well as benefit their own professional development. They didn't take our offer of bringing Inclusion Alberta in to help as a sign that we doubted their ability to teach or manage their day-to-day organization with Matthew in the school. We were thrilled when they requested that we contact Inclusion Alberta's Inclusive Education Consultant (IEC). Kaylee continues to visit HBS and we, as parents could not be happier to hear feedback from the school on how her support is helping Matthew. We are learning about what the school is actually doing to ensure that they have all the tools available to them to achieve the goals we have set for Matthew. These tools are shared with all of Matthew's teachers and educational

assistants. As a matter of fact, to ensure that Matthew's team get the most from Kaylee's visits, sometimes the admin hire substitute teachers to cover classes so each teacher can meet with her one on one.

The team's leadership and commitment to providing a school community where all children are provided supports that they need to actively participate inside a regular classroom along side their peers is exemplary. The HBS community celebrates diversity and children are all encouraged to participate in activities that leads to them learning compassion and empathy for things they may not have previously understood. Matthew is growing so much from being given opportunities to be with his peers and we are sure that there is learning back onto his peers as well. Matthew attends school dances with his peers, has many friends, and is on the afterschool basketball team.

Mrs. Clevette has also set up and joined us at our first meeting with Matthew's future high school. Along with us, she is advocating for Matthew's inclusive journey into high school. We have no doubt that with the support of her team, we will be successful in including Matthew at the high school level.

We sincerely hope you will consider the extraordinary team from Harry Balfour School for the National Inclusive Education Award. Without them, Matthew would not be where he is today. HBS is turning doubters into believers that inclusion really does work. They are an example for other schools and deserve to be celebrated.

Thank you for your time,
Jackie Ryder, Dennis Lodge and Matthew Lodge