# My Child was Just Diagnosed with a Learning Disability. NOW WHAT?

*[Slide: My Child was Just Diagnosed with a Learning Disability. NOW WHAT?*

*February 19th 7pm-8:15pm EST*

*Presenters: Lawrence Barns and Kelli Cote*

*Brought to you by: the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)*

*For technical support, please call Shannon at 1-888-269-1946 ext. 44*

*Image on slide: a women looking up, surrounded by question marks.]*

AMY: Good evening everyone, we're going to get started now.

*[Slide: Image of a doormat that says welcome.]*

Welcome to LDAO's first webinar featuring LDAO's very own President and CEO Lawrence Barns, and guest speaker Kelli Cote. Just to let everyone know, all webinar participants, except for the presenter, have now been muted for the remainder of the presentation, although once Lawrence and Kelli have finished their presentation, we will be opening up the floor for questions.

*[Slide: Technical Support?*

*Call Shannon*

*1-888-239-1946 ext. 44.*

*Image on slide: a hammer and a wrench.]*

If at any point during the presentation you experience any technical difficulties, please contact Shannon Malloch, at the phone number provided on this slide, as she will be standing by to help you.

*[Slide: Your GoTo Webinar Control Panel.*

*Image on slide: the GoTo Webinar Dashboard.]*

Before we get started I am going to help everyone get comfortable with the GoTo Webinar control panel that you should be seeing on the right hand side of your screen. If you don't see the full panel, you should see an orange arrow, which you can click on to maximize the panel. This same button will minimize the panel during the presentation. At the top of the control panel, you will see the audio heading. If you choose to access the audio portion of this presentation by telephone, you will see a series of prompts on your screen, which will allow you to access the audio.

Over the course of the presentation, if you would like to ask any of the staff a question, you can enter your text in the box at the bottom of the control panel, and choose to send it to staff from the drop down menu underneath. Finally, the hand raise button can be used to ask a question of Lawrence or Kelli at the end of their talk. If you raise your hand you will be un-muted so that you can ask your question personally.

*[Slide: image of the LDAO Survival Guide, with the LDAO Logo, and the motto "The right to learn, the power to achieve."]*

After the webinar we will be sending out a survival guide that includes great parental support resources, as well as a link to an online survey about the webinar.

*[Slide: The format of today's webinar:*

1. *A Parent's Perspective, Presented by Lawrence Barns*
2. *An Educator's Perspective, Presented by Kelli Cote*
3. *Common Questions a Parent Might Have, Presented by Lawrence Barns and Kelli Cote*
4. *Live Q&A with Lawrence and Kelli!]*

Alright, that takes care of all of our house keeping for this evening, so let's get started.

Tonight's webinar will be given in four parts. To start off, Lawrence will be giving his presentation from a parent's perspective. Next, Kelli will be giving her presentation from an educator's perspective. After this, Lawrence and Kelli will be addressing some of the most common questions that a parent might have when working within the education system to support their children. And finally, we will open up the floor to all of our viewers for an open Q and A, where you can ask Kelli and Lawrence questions live.

*[Slide: Lawrence Barns, President & CEO, LDAO*

*Image on slide: picture of Lawrence and the LDAO logo.]*

I'd like to introduce our first speaker, Lawrence Barns at this time. Lawrence is the President and CEO of LDAO, but prior to this role, he was already a parent of a son with LDs. A lawyer by training, he found that it was easy for him to feel empowered to advocate for his child within the school system. However, he found that his ability to ask the right questions proved to be a challenge. A fluke conversation enabled him to find a path that not only changed the dynamic of his son's education, but one that saw a confident young adult graduate high school and launch into higher education. After 20 years as a global business executive, sought after public speaker, and TV host, his time is now dedicated to changing the perception of learning disabilities, and the individuals that it impacts. And now, I'm going to turn the presentation over to Lawrence.

*[Slide: Learning Disabilities and School – A Parent's View*

*Image on slide: an adult holding hands with a child.]*

LAWRENCE: Well thanks Amy for that, and welcome everyone to our first LDAO webinar. What I am going to do tonight, and I want to make it very clear, is really address the subject from a parent's perspective. Whilst I work in the field now, Kelli is really the expert here tonight and we will get to her in due course. But I have been at this for 15 years now, with a child with an LD, and hopefully what I can show you tonight is some of the things I learned along the way, and some of the potholes you can avoid, and some of the things that worked for me. And I want to put the caveat up front on these that every child is a little different, so you will hear me talk a lot to tweak things, try things, see what works, and move on.

*[Slide: image of a road sign that says, "Change Ahead."]*

So, just to give you the quick background on Jake, Jake was struggling in school from about grade 1, was officially diagnosed in grade 4, and really, it was from that point, that the hard work for us began. In terms of his diagnosis, he's a child with dysgraphia, which for those that don't understand the technical term, he really struggles with the communication between the thought process in his head and writing anything down on paper. And as you will see later in the story, it proved challenging to me in a lot of ways.

*[Slide: Keep Calm and Carry On*

*Image on slide: a crown.]*

So, I think, you know, you'll hear it from me a lot tonight, but your attitude, and the way you deal with your child in the early days, will have a huge impact. So, in these few short minutes I am trying to help you to start on the right foot, start in a way that you can work with the school well, that you can work with your child well, and also hopefully take away some of the grey areas that worry a parent when you first get a diagnosis. I think it's - for most of us it's pretty obvious that our child is struggling at school ahead of the official diagnosis.

*[Slide: Warning Signs!*

*Image on slide: caution tape.]*

Depending on your school board, even if you are in the queues to be assessed, it could be 12, 18 months before you get that official diagnosis. But you will see the red flags, and more and more schools now are even working on IEPs, and I will get to that language in a moment, ahead of official diagnosis, to really help the classrooms start to respond to the student.

So, let me tell you some of the things we saw in my child, that maybe you've seen in yours. Obviously there is a disengagement at school. Jake was very socially strong, but in the classroom environment wasn't. He seemed to be shy and withdrawn, and it was at odds to the child we knew at home. The homework subject, which will come up time and time again as we speak, was really just, it's too big a topic to talk to here, but let's just say it was an interesting time anytime he had homework, for now, and I will come back to it. He really didn't like to read, and his handwriting as well was, really at least probably two or three grade levels below what you would expect to see of the student at that point. So, this again was indicative of a child who socially had a good verbal range, and suddenly these things were becoming really challenging for him and we didn't know why. The other thing for me that was difficult was my other two children, who are both older, had actually both flown through school. So it was really difficult for me to suddenly have a student that wasn't following the pattern that I had experienced in the past, and maybe some of you are feeling that with your children as well. The other thing with Jake was he really lacked focus in the classroom. Now, interestingly, the first teacher who really, I guess set us on the path to an official diagnosis, immediately labeled him as ADHD. And you know, actually told us quite honestly to ring our doctor and start to get him on Ritalin. Which unfortunately, Jake doesn't have ADHD, never did have, and you've got to be careful of people, who, in a well-meaning sense, take you down a blind alley. So, always stick to the official school process, and engage it as quickly as you can to help your student out.

*[Slide: Diagnosis: Learning Disabilities*

*Image on slide: a notebook.]*

So we get to the day, that a lot of us as parents dread, when Jake was officially diagnosed as having an LD. And that really is the start of a journey, and I will call it a journey because, as the child matures, things will change, so this is a constant process. You'll always have to be looking at: what can I tweak, what can I move, because as they grow through grades, as they move into high school, it's a different kettle of fish.

*[Slide: Get Perspective.*

*Image on slide: a pair of reading glasses.]*

But let's get some perspective. One of the things that was interesting to me; my older boy is a leukemia survivor, and when he was diagnosed with leukemia, we really didn't have to do very much in terms of plotting his treatment, it was kind of like getting on a roller coaster and riding it, but we didn't have to build the track. Sometimes with LD, as a parent, you feel like you are building the track. Because no one comes up and says, "well, here is the plan, here is what we are going to do." There's some elements of that, but how you deal with it in the home environment, how you actually build the social skills, the confidence in your child to advocate for themselves, a lot of that is going to be almost trial and error. Hopefully tonight we'll give you some tips that will allow you to get past that.

Here’s the other thing that I think is important when we talk about perspective. A child with an LD, does not have to give away any of their dreams at that point. They are perfectly capable, because by definition, a child with an LD will have above average intelligence, they are quite capable of success; the question is finding their learning path to allow them to succeed. So don’t give up on dreams the minute you get the diagnosis and start to look at - where do I now start to dampen things down.

*[Slide: Speak Up. Take Action. Create Change.]*

So, we have a diagnosis, the school now has a duty set out in the law, in terms of the special education process with the student. And that actually has been reinforced recently for those of you that like that kind of thing, you can look up the Moore judgment, it’s on our website, LDAO.ca, and you can see the details of case histories, in terms of making sure students get what they need. The issue is, one of your roles as a parent is to become the advocate, particularly when the child is in the young grades; they are not going to do a lot of speaking out for themselves. So you’re going to have to be the person, the change advocate for your child, and I’m not necessarily saying it’s always going to be a battle, by the way, but you will have to be prepared to take action and create the change you need to see.

*[Slide: image of a light bulb.]*

This wonderful light bulb slide is about one of the revelations that came out of the diagnosis. Because when Jake sat down with the special education resource teachers, SERTs for short, and I, and we were talking about the diagnosis, he turned to me and frankly just said “Dad, I am so glad they found something and I am not just dumb.” And it was a huge revelation to us as parents, that a lot of what we had seen in him – the withdrawal, the social issues, were because he was feeling a failure and it was affecting his confidence. Suddenly, we had a child who went, “OK, there’s something wrong, and you guys can help me fix it, and we can get this put to bed,” and it changed his attitude to school almost over night.

*[Slide: Disability = Human Rights.*

*Image on slide: circle of hands.]*

The other thing that’s terribly scary I think as a parent, is the whole word disability. And, even in the field, there’s lots of debates, you will probably hear and read things where people will talk about learning differences rather than disability. The way I see it, and as you heard in my introduction, I am a lawyer, so I do tend to lean this way. The reason disability is a strong word, is because it also brings with it strong human rights. And that could well for some of you be important down the road, because that means that there’s protections in the law for your student, for what has to be provided, not just through school but at a higher education level. And then, of course, into adulthood, there are now human rights that will affect their employment and other issues going forward. So I know it’s a scary word, I know no one likes it, and I know as a parent I felt, "oh my goodness what am I going to do with this label," but frankly it does bring with it a lot of protection.

*[Slide: Now it begins…*

*Image on slide: a new plant sprouting from dirt.]*

Okay, so, there's a quick-checkered background. Let's talk about, we're now on this rollercoaster, we are on the ride, what do we do as a parent to try and help support our student, support the teachers, and get to grips with what's going on.

*[Slide: Image of a circular flow chart with the words:*

1. *Research*
2. *React*
3. *Resource*
4. *Rethink*
5. *Resolve*
6. *Recycle]*

So, I came up with these six R's. Firstly, you need to research. One of the things I spent a lot of time doing was understanding dysgraphia, understanding how it displayed itself, understanding it's impact on learning, reading things about LD in a broader sense. Really equipping myself to have an educated discussion, an informed discussion, and making sure, particularly now with the Internet, it's easy to stay on top of anything that's current.

From that, you start to react. So with Jake some of the early things we tried were text-to-speech software, to see if that would help him to complete homework assignments. Start to do things that will actually give you an idea as to whether you are having success or not. Get those resources, and here is point three, if you can in both the classroom and the home environment. Now again it's a bit of trail and error, so just immediately going to the school and saying, "can I have a laptop and this and that and the other," – that may not be the most appropriate thing. So make sure at home you've tried it, but then try and mimic the school and home environment to be as close as possible to help the student to have a way of working.

Rethink. When we get through this process, we've tried some stuff, maybe it's working, maybe it's not. One of the things with Jake was that we found text-to-speech wasn't great. So instead, we worked on his keyboarding skills. He found that much easier, we found some software that helped him have fun and learn and increase his speed, and that was where we went in the longer term.

Resolve is, you are going to have times when the classroom environment, or your student is not working, and you know as a parent something needs to happen. So go in, talk, work with the teachers, work with the SERTS, work with the school, try things, and let's make sure that as a team we change the environment for the student. And finally, recycle. So what I mean by this is we keep going around, we keep going through these steps. As the student changes, you know one of the obvious transitions from elementary to high school, let's keep going around and use the same patterns.

*[Slide: The Homework Issue*

*Image on slide: a boy resting his head on a pile of books.]*

The good old homework issue. One of the reasons this has as a slide is because it actually is the issue that, for me, caused me the most problem. I did a lot of things that, as a parent weren't probably wise, because I wasn't used to a student that just wasn't completing assignments. Having said that, it also is a really good barometer of how you are doing, and whether you are improving, and your student is improving. So let's do one thing, and here's my first real solid thing to try, I kept a homework diary. Everyday I made some kind of note to it, as we tried different things, as they did different things at the school, for example highlighting notes to help Jacob actually get through it easily. We made notes about was it working, how much time was he spending, so that when I went back into the school, I could really give them evidence of the impact that we were having on him as a student.

*[Slide: The Homework Diary*

*Image on slide: a stack of different colored folders.]*

And that really does help you when you talk to the teachers, to have this homework diary, and just have this file that you can say, "well this was working but now it seems to have stopped," and, "has something changed, has the way you're teaching, is it a different teacher," – all of those things will be prompted by the stuff that you keep at home, and make sure your student is well aware of why you are doing it, because otherwise they could just think, "hold on a second am I just being monitored?"

*[Slide: The IEP: A Guidance Tool*

*Image on slide: a rocket ship shooting up into the sky.]*

The next thing that is your, and I've called it a guidance tool, the IEP, the Individual Education Plan for your student, is a working document. And, the nice thing about this is, it really helps you to understand what the school is doing to help your student, and then you can check whether it's working. So think of the IEP as your guidance system, and if you think your student is misfiling in this case and I know that's not the greatest analogy, think of three steps. The first one is to aim. So make sure there are goals on the IEP, what are we trying to achieve. Is it to make sure the student reads a book this semester, or whatever it may be so that you can check back. Second A is to analyze, review your progress, and if something isn't working whether it be a piece of assistive technology, whether it be a placement in the classroom, don't be frightened to analyze why is this not working, and then the third A is adjust. Go back to the school and try different things. With Jake, often in classes, it was as simple as putting him to the front of the room, to see him actually change the success rate in terms of his work.

*[Slide: Signposts for Success*

*Image on slide: a line graph with an upward trend.]*

So, and I know I'm whizzing through a bunch of stuff. Ultimately, we are looking for those signs of success. If the IEP is working, if us and the school are working together, what are we going to see in the student that's going to help us to understand it?

Well, the first thing is a rise in self-esteem. And I will say that, you can really help self-esteem as a parent, by success outside of the classroom. For Jake, he was always a rep soccer player, he had medals on his wall and all of the stuff that went with that. And that outlet through sport, that success through sport, really helped him find his success niche and didn't make him feel that he was just bound by failure at school.

*[Slide: image of a sad face turning into a happy face.]*

The second sign you'll see is the frustration at homework will start to lift. As you adopt strategies that work for your student, it may be a time difference, it may be help with notes, reduced homework…school should start to become, I'm not going to go quite so far as to say fun, but at least the frustration will break away, both for you, as a parent, and for the child.

*[Slide: The School-Based Team*

*Image on slide: a group of educators sitting at a table.]*

The third thing in terms of looking for your signposts for success is making sure that the school-based team is working with you. The best grades I had with Jake were really six to eight where the school, right from the very top, the principal got it, the SERTs got it, the classroom teachers got it, they involved us, there was lots of open honest dialogue, we tried lots of things, and I think those years were really critical in setting Jake up for success at high school. The school can be an ally to you. It doesn't have to be an adversarial relationship, as long as you can get one that is fully open and the communication is strong.

*[Slide: Positive Communication*

*Image on slide: multiple hands doing the "thumbs up" sign.]*

And, which is this one, just, let's be positive in the communication. I think teachers are trying, we have to be careful as parents sometimes that, what we don't get from the child is their view of events, and then we play them back to the school. So I was always open to saying to Jake, "well, you know what, I hear you, but I'm going to go and talk to the teacher, and just see what their view of this is." And sometimes of course, I would find that Jake had, you know, either deliberately or through admission, left out a few facts that were vital, and we worked on things and we moved forward.

*[Slide: Is There A Magic Formula?*

*Image on slide: a white bunny sitting in a magician's hat.]*

Is there a magic formula? Well, after 15 years I can tell you honestly that the answer is no. There is no magic formula, there is no button that you press, and everything is suddenly right. What I do believe though and what I hope my comments have led you to tonight, is if you get on top of this process and you manage it on a constant basis, with smaller adjustments, it will be much easier than going from calm to crisis, to calm to crisis. A constant attention, smaller amounts of time, but like the homework diary, keeping a constant check on how things are developing. I do think you should see teachers as allies, and I've said that before so I won't labor that point. And finally, you're going to need a bit of luck. Because if I'm perfectly honest, and Amy talked to a discussion…I was just very lucky that I actually flipped Jake from one school to another, and the results were night and day. There are a number of reasons why it happened, which isn't important here, but frankly, it was a lucky discussion with another parent, that led me down the path that allowed us to do that.

So, I think as a parent you have to also, be kind to yourself. You will make mistakes, for me my biggest mistake was around homework, I berated Jake at times, if I'm quite honest. Thinking he was just being lazy, not understanding what the issues were. So you have to be kind to yourself, because you will make mistakes. But I think, at the end of the day this is the key point.

*[Slide: If something isn't working…CHANGE IT.]*

If it's not working, work out what you can change, and then work with the school, and your child to bring the change that you want to see to the situation. And with that, I am going to hand you back to Amy.

*[Slide: Kelli Cote – Principal, Ramer Wood Public School, York Region District School Board.*

*Image on slide: picture of Kelli Cote.]*

AMY: Thank you Lawrence for sharing your experience with us. Now I would like to introduce you to our second speaker, Kelli Cote. Kelli has been an educator with the York Region District School Board for over 20 years. She has taught primary, junior, and intermediate students, and has a passion for special education. She is currently a principal at Ramer Wood Public School in Markham. Kelli is a board member for the Learning Disabilities Association in York Region, a member of the LD Steering Committee for the York Region District School Board, and a member of LDAO's new LD@school Advisory Committee, which is a web resource developed specifically for educators. Kelli is also the mother of two amazing boys. Her youngest son Mathew has a learning disability, and so she brings a well-rounded perspective to this topic. Over to you Kelli.

*[Slide: Working with the School to Support my Child.*

*Image on slide: a line of paper people holding hands.]*

KELLI: Thank you for that wonderful introduction. Welcome and thank you Lawrence for your perspective from a parent. My journey in education has been long and full of learning, and over the many years in education, I have spent a lot of years in the field of special education. As with Lawrence, you've heard my son Mathew has a learning disability, so my perspective will include that of an educator, and also as a parent. However, I would like to correct Lawrence, as I am really not an expert, and I'm not so sure there're any experts when it comes to having a learning disability, because Lawrence said it right. There are many paths and many journeys as we go into the world of learning disabilities, and there really is not a one-size-fits-all kind of, program that we can tailor to every student.

*[Slide: Early Signs and Communication*

*Image on slide: two hands with faces drawn on to each of the fingers, surrounded by speech bubbles.]*

When we're looking from the educational side of things, what are some of the early signs and communications? There are a variety of early signs that we see in the classroom, that may be early indications that something is hindering your child's academic success. It's important to note that students may have different characteristics that they present. Some early warning signs might be difficultly reading, or they might not want to pick up the book that you want to read with them. They have difficulty rhyming words, putting words together. They might avoid any kind of contact with text. Another characteristic that we see is that kids are avoiding writing, they don't want to put their paper to the pen, they might not know how to spell a word. Or, for the child that we know has all kinds of information in their head, and they're spelling very simple sentences, without the elaborate vocabulary that they use when they're talking. Reading, when we think of reading, we think of it as a process of pulling words apart to make meaning. and writing as a way of constructing those words. And sometimes they get muddled as kids with learning disabilities are trying to put things together. One of the things we also see is organizational difficulties, children loosing their belongings, forgetting to bring required items to class, not being able to follow multi-step directions sometimes. You know they get lost in the process of, of thinking about what the first piece of information is that you ask them. They might engage in work avoidance behaviors, you know, right when it's their turn to read they might want to get up and go to the washroom, or have to go out and get something from their bag, or they need a drink. Those are some signs that you start to be aware of, and observe in the children. Another characteristic is the development of negative behaviour; and sometimes the behaviour is a way of masking what they're having difficulty with. Because sometimes in a social environment like the classroom, it's easier to demonstrate or harder to take a risk and show what you don't know. And so it's easier sometimes to be the clown in the classroom, or someone that is getting into trouble.

*[Slide: The Process*

*Image on slide: picture of a flow chart.]*

The process. The process to discovering that your child has a learning disability can be a very daunting one, and one that takes a long time. And, as Lawrence has referred to, it we often see it at home, before it's brought to the attention at school. And I think we see signs of it all over the place. It opens up a whole new language for you to become familiar with. It can seem overwhelmingly, overwhelming initially, however if you work together with the school you will quickly learn all the acronyms, and if you don't learn them, and we continue to talk in edu-babble, please remind us that we need to explain the terms that we are working through. I'm going to go on the premise that most of our listeners have been, you know, through some of the school-based processes, but we will quickly review for some of our listeners who are at the beginning stages.

The process usually begins with an in-school team meeting, where educators meet to problem solve the difficulties that they may be seeing in the classroom, or that you may have brought to the attention of the school that you might also be seeing. And it's a way to come up with an action plan. If needed, an academics assessment is completed and the results are shared with parents, and then with parent permission shared with a board psychologist. Once a psychoeducational assessment is done, a child can be formally identified through an IPRC process. However, there are many boards that have, as Lawrence has shared with us, IEPs, without necessarily the formal process while we are waiting. And that's because they deem it necessary, that the child start receiving some support and resources that they need along the way.

This document is your program; it will contain the accommodations and modifications that your child will receive in the classroom, and these are based on school assessments. You have to consider the IEP, the Individual Education Plan, as your child's program or guide to how they will access the curriculum, and demonstrate their knowledge.

*[Slide: Educational Jargon*

*Image on slide: word art with the word "blah" repeated many times.]*

IEP, IPRC, continuation – those are all the language that you will be inundated with. Simply put, an IPRC meeting is the process of formalizing service and the identification level of service that your child will receive. Remember that a student with a learning disability has average to above average intelligence and need support to ensure that they are able to demonstrate what they know. The psychoeducational assessment will help this, and will also make recommendations regarding assistive technology.

If you and your assessments suggest the use of assistive technology, please remember that this process can be a long one to acquire, and in the meantime encourage your child to make use of the technology available at home and school. The more we're seen as partners in their education, the more successful they will be. I would encourage you, after listening to assessment or educational reports, to go home and take the time to reflect on what they mean and come up with some questions. Sometimes it's difficult in the meetings to know the questions you want to ask, so please come back and share the questions with us and we would be more than happy to talk about them with you. Schedule another meeting at anytime, as you begin to understand.

*[Slide: The School-Based Team*

*Image on slide: picture of a group of educators.]*

The school-based team – I can't stress enough how important it is to work as a team with the school. There is a plethora of supports available, and for students with learning disabilities, it's not necessarily a one-size-fits-all approach. And as they get older their needs change. It's important for them to see themselves as part of the process, so that as they mature and understand their learning needs, they can become advocates for their own learning; strategically letting teachers know what they need for support and how they can help them. Schools and parents can work together to develop the self-advocacy skills for our students. Coaching and nurturing is an essential part of this process, and builds confidence and an understanding of their strengths and needs. And, I think as Lawrence has alluded to in his presentation, one of the things that is important is that the needs of the child do change as they get older, and we have to start listening to what they might be, throughout their educational process. Some of the things we put in place for a primary student might not necessarily be what they need when they are a junior student or a senior student in high school. And so we have to be able to keep those lines of communication open with the children at the same time.

*[Slide with 6 different colored boxes. From left to right the boxes read: Special Education Resource Teacher, Classroom, Principal, Support Staff, Student, and Consultants.]*

When you think about the supports in your school-based team that are available to you, there is the Special Education Resource Teacher, otherwise known as the SERT, and their goal is to advocate for your child with their classroom teacher. They work closely with the students to make sure they are receiving their accommodations and modifications. They work with the classroom teacher to develop the IEP. The SERT will provide a program to your child, if necessary, provide the quiet location, provide scribing, and technology support. They also work to develop advocacy skills in your children, and are often the first place that parents go if they're having some difficulty, or they need to have some time to talk to somebody if things aren't working in the classroom quite well. Classroom teachers, classroom teachers will work with the SERT to ensure that the modifications and accommodations are in place, and they coordinate with the SERTs to see if tests or assignments need to be supported, and how they can help the student along the way or if the IEP needs to be adjusted. And it's very important to remember, as again, as Lawrence has reminded us, that the IEP is a working document, and it needs to change, and it needs to be written on and developed along the way. It's not done once in October and then that's it for the rest of the year; it needs to be continually looked at and revisited.

There are support staffs in our school such as an educational assistant, or a CYW that the school may or may not have available, who is able to offer guidance and support in the classrooms. They can provide scribing, they can put together study guides, or read questions to the student as they are working. And, most importantly, there is the student. The student is the most important person I think, and they need to let us know what works for them, what's difficult, and what they need. And this happens when we construct an environment that's safe and encourages risk-taking. The final person that I have up here are consultants, and they work with the staff at the school if we need some extra supports to deliver programs, or suggestions in terms of instructional impact for our kids.

*[Slide: Parents as Partners.*

*Image on slide: two puzzle pieces that have been stuck together. The first piece is labeled "partner," and the second piece is labeled "ship."]*

Parents as partners. The role of the parent in this process cannot be minimized. As Lawrence has stated, positive communication is critical. You may not always agree but it's important that students see us working together for their success. One way to participate is to encourage and embrace the use of compensatory strategies. We know that our kids with learning disabilities are going to have difficulty, and we often use their strengths to help support their weaknesses in the classroom. This helps our students demonstrate their knowledge and highlights their strengths. If your child, for example, uses assistive technology, please participate in the training if it's available so that you can encourage its use. Often students have difficulty embracing the use of assistive technology, so when a parent knows about its value and promotes its use, children begin to see success. Celebrate the successes of your child. Sometimes it won't be an A that you are celebrating, but the hard work and determination that went into completing the assignment.

I encourage you to let the school know about the impact of homework at home; this is often difficult for our students with learning disabilities, and it's often hard on parents. I also encourage parents to try not to be everything to their children. Sometimes they just need you to be a mom or a dad. School is a long day, and so when you're having difficulty with reading and writing it demands a lot of brainpower. The last thing they need to do is go home and spend one or more hours on homework or drills on a skill set that they will always find difficult. Let the school know if you're struggling to complete homework, and develop a plan to reduce it, and develop a strategy. I know my son would always phone me at the end of the day to let me know how his day went, and on many occasions he would be distraught with the volume of work he had to complete. When I spent time debriefing with him, sometimes we discovered that he had misheard instructions, or was unclear about what was really expected. Or, if he received a large assignment, he could not possibly break it down into manageable parts, without becoming overly anxious. And so I worked closely with his SERT, so that if an assignment was given to him, she would send me a quick email to let me know, so that I knew when I got the frantic phone call about it, we already knew a plan of attack to kind of break it down and chunk it for him. It's been very successful; he's applying for university right now, and he has told me that he is ready to take on ownership of his learning, and I need to step back and let him be his own advocate.

*[Slide: What is Necessary for Success.*

*Image on slide: a person standing on top of a mountain.]*

What's necessary for success? Teaching self-advocacy. It's an essential skill for the success of our students with learning disabilities. They don't need to be ashamed of it; they have average to above average intelligence, and we just need to support them along the way, and teach them to understand what their learning disability is and how it impacts them. I think they need to understand themselves as a learner, what do they bring to the table? Embrace assistive technology, it's a skill set that can open up multiple pathways for students. Work as a team - parents, children, educators alike, we need to work together to ensure that our students are being successful. Remembering that it's not going to be an easy path, but it's going to be worth the journey. They're going to get there and they're going to have skills like perseverance and confidence, and self-esteem, and they're going to have to work hard but they're also going to know what hard work is, and they're going to know how to celebrate success.

*[Slide: My Message to Parents.*

*Image on slide: an open letter.]*

So, my message for parents, celebrate your child's hard work and determination. These skills will ensure success. Help them see their strengths, and again as Lawrence has said, they might find this outside of school. They might not find it in school, but it's important to have something that they can see that they are successful in right away, and something that might not necessarily take a lot of work, because schoolwork is going to take a lot of work.

Encourage them to reflect on their strengths as a learner, and use this to support their learning. And with them build an understanding of a learning disability.

*[Slide: Encourage and Empower.]*

Embrace compensatory strategies, assistive technology, audio books, scribing…consider that a learning disability does not have to be limiting. The world is a wonderful place to take risks. Encourage your child to dream big, and have big dreams for your child. Build their confidence, and resiliency.

*[Slide: the word 'Disability' is crossed out to read 'ability'.]*

Thank you. And that brings us to the end of my section.

AMY: Thanks Kelli for sharing your expertise as an educator. Lawrence and Kelli will now be discussing some of the common questions that parents have while they are working with schools to support their children.

*[Slide: Common Questions a Parent Might Have.*

*Image on slide: two adults asking each other questions.]*

LAWRENCE: Thanks Amy for that. Kelli I guess this puts you in the hot seat for this section, so I've got a few questions here that, frankly were ones that, as a parent I found difficult to grapple with, so hopefully we can shed some light before we get to the open Q&A.

*[Slide: Should a Parent Attend an IPRC Meeting?]*

So, my first question tonight for you Kelli is this one, should a parent attend an IPRC meeting?

KELLI: Hi. A parent attending an IPRC meeting – parents can attend. Often the work is done prior to the IPRC meeting, the IPRC meeting is really a formalization of the process. it's usually a 10-minute meeting where we walk through the paper work, and so if we've done our job well, we've explained all of that ahead of time, this is what's going to be happening, these are what the supports are, so while I don't want to say they shouldn't attend, hopefully if all of the work has been done ahead of time, there's not going to be anything surprising at the IPRC meeting.

LAWRENCE: Okay, good. Next question.

*[Slide: Early IEPs and the Assessment Gap.]*

So we've done the IEP and the assessment gap in terms of timing; I know your board in particular doesn't do IEPs ahead of assessments if it can avoid them. But let's just talk about those timing gaps and any tips you might have for a parent in terms of what can they do in terms of working with the school ahead of any formalized process, to really try and kick start with their student the success that we've been talking about trying to achieve tonight.

KELLI: I guess there's a couple of ways, it depends on where your board is in the process. There are many boards that develop an IEP early, and that still has a legal value, and it determines, I mean it talks about – that the student is exceptional, ahead of the psychoeducational assessment. And so it lets teachers and the board know that they require special programs and services, to attend and achieve their full potential. In other boards, they might have a growth plan while they're waiting for the educational assessment before.

LAWRENCE: Okay.

KELLI: So, the IEP is the Individual Education Plan that comes out of assessment data, that lets us know what this child needs in the classroom. The IPRC is a formalization of that process.

LAWRENCE: Perfect, thank you Kelli.

*[Slide: Modification vs. Accommodation.]*

LAWRENCE: This one is one, that as a parent, I learnt is a bit of a bear trap you have to be careful around. Can you just talk us through, there's a big difference between modification, and accommodation within the curriculum? Could you talk to those two words, and their differences Kelli?

KELLI: Yep. A modification is a reduction in classroom expectations. So for instance, if I was working with a child in grade 5 social studies for instance, I might not, if I was modifying the expectations for the child, I may reduce the number of expectations that I would be wanting to assess them on. And they would get the full plethora of the instruction, but when I look at what my assessments would be, I wouldn't have the assessment piece on the entire curriculum. It might be on identifying two or three pieces of information, where the full curriculum might be having them identify five or six things, and so they would not be assessed on all of it. If I thought about an accommodation, I would look at scribing, for example. So the child would still get the same assessment, they would still get the same instruction, but I might read the questions to the child, for a test, for instance, and then their answers would be written down. So they would still have the same depth and breadth of the expectations that were delivered, and still be accountable to that. Does that make sense?

LAWRENCE: Okay, that's great Kelli but also, just to clarify, because this is where the bear trap comes in, can you talk about, if my child is accommodated, through their school career, that doesn't necessarily have any ramifications. However, if modifications are made, there are potential ramifications. Just want to clarify around that difference.

KELLI: You are absolutely right' there is. An accommodation, and truthfully if we go back to the human rights piece, an accommodation can be provided to any student in the classroom – whether they're identified or not as having a learning disability, or a learning need at any point. A modification is something that you could be doing reduced grade level expectations as well. So, some of our LD kids we know have difficulty reading, so their reading level might be modified. And so when we look at things like high school and university, we need to make sure that our modifications aren't hindering their accessibility to other programs.

LAWRENCE: Okay, perfect, thank you Kelli. And that's an important difference because I know as a parent, again, it was more luck than judgment that I came to understand that those two words can have very different ramifications.

KELLI: Yes.

*[Slide: Homework Tips.]*

LAWRENCE: The wonderful topic of homework Kelli, I've done my mea culpa tonight about how much it was a, it was the top of Everest when it came to my struggle in my dealing with this as a parent. You talked a little about potentially changing the time, and trying to do things with the school, but do you just want to go over those? Because I do think homework is, it really is the front line of what tends to be the greatest pain in the relationship between parent and child when it comes to school. So, do you want to maybe revisit that and have you got any other tips for us?

KELLI: Homework was a struggle even for me at home, and again I would go back to, sometimes you need to be the parent. And remember having to take a step back, especially being an educator and kind of knowing where things were going, that I had to say, "no he's done, he has done 10, 15 minutes of homework and it's been a struggle." I need to let the teacher know that we spent 15 really great minutes on homework and that was enough for my son. Little tips along the way, you know, mathematics, I would write out all the questions for him and have him do the answers. I would make sure that the school knows when things are difficult, because that's really important, because often parents see a different child at home than we see at school. Sometimes they work really hard to hold it together at school, to save face and to present as being very confident and very self-assured, but they will let their parents know when things are difficult, so instead of making it sometimes adversarial, let us know because those are the pieces we don't necessarily see. That's really important for you to share with us, and you might see little things that we don't see, that are important. I would say reading is important, one of the things I was thinking about on the way here that was really invaluable for my son, was reading with him, well into his teens. It helps develop the richness of vocabulary and lots of our LD kids will avoid reading, so you know reading to them to keep up their vocabulary, and to keep up their general knowledge I think is a really valuable valuable tip. Audio books are really great, because they can listen to them, and they can participate in conversations with their peers at their intellectual level. But I can't stress enough, just letting us know when things aren't working at home, and limiting it. I think they spend a lot of time struggling at school, and so we need to know when to say that my child needs a break.

*[Slide: Message to a Parent from an Educator.]*

LAWRENCE: Perfect, thank you Kelli and I think that is one of the things that I didn't learn quickly enough, was when to just know, "tonight we're done! Tonight we're done. Time to move on. We will deal with this tomorrow, and we will deal with the outcomes whenever we need to." So, just to finish this section off Kelli before we open the floor to our listeners. I wanted to give you the opportunity to talk to parents tonight' most of the audience will be parents. I know for me, working with the school particularly when you hadn't been used to being on this road, with students who were being fairly successful, was pretty daunting. But I think often as parents we don't hear the educator coming back and talking to us about what they'd like us to do. So if I was to ask you for a message to kind of close this section off tonight for parents, what would you like to say to parents who are dealing with these issues?

KELLI: Dealing with trouble at the school boards? I'm sorry.

LAWRENCE: Yes, with just the struggles of having a child with an LD, and they are wondering, what do the educators think of my child? What is their view of what I should be doing?

KELLI: I think it's again, it goes back to, it's not the same. We think you should love your children. We think that you should work with us as a team. We think that together we can make kids be confident, self-assured learners. We need to remember that there is a whole child, outside of just the reading and writing struggles that they are having. And that we need to value what they bring to the table. I think, what I see over my years, is that we forget that, although reading and writing are very very valuable skills that children need, and I'm not trying to diminish them, but we have to remember to embrace who they are as learners along the way. And it is tough. It's a tough place, and we need to embrace them and parents need to support us along the way. And I think the biggest message is the more we can work together, the more that we can see success, and the more we can see confidence in our learners along the way.

LAWRENCE: That's great Kelli, thank you very much, and with that, I'm going to hand the floor back to Amy.

*[Slide: Q. A.]*

AMY: All right thank you both so much again, for sharing all of your personal experiences with everyone. We do have some questions that have been rolling in - you've been very inspiring. So I'll just invite, anyone who has not posed any questions, if you do have something you would like to ask, you can click on the raise hand button on your control panel, or you can type your question into the chat box on your dashboard. So, I'm going to start with some of the questions that have come in. The first one, I'm actually going to ask to both Lawrence and Kelli. Lawrence maybe you can take the lead and then pass along to Kelli when you've finished. The question is: What steps should be taken in preparing for university or college in terms of continuing the work that's been set out in the IEP?

LAWRENCE: Well, the transition from university to college is a topic in and of itself, so I can touch on it briefly but there is a lot of detail. One of the things you need to understand is that your kind of moving into a different system, so if I remember correctly, they will want an assessment that's no older than three years, so if your child was diagnosed very early on in the piece, you may have to get a new assessment somewhere along the line. The language is a little different, but I think the major thing, and I think it's something that I did through high school, and my boy's just moving into higher education now, the key part is the self-advocacy part. Because whereas your coaching them through that in elementary school, that was something that I think with Jake I passed the baton on. I think 9 and 10 I was still involved a little bit, grade 11, I was really starting to move away, and let him do it himself. By grade 12, he didn't want me anywhere near the school, which was a good thing. So I think, there are disability offices in higher education, it's a complex topic and we can't really deal with it in one simple question, but with research you can find out what you need to make sure that the supports continue through that process. Kelli, anything you'd like to add?

KELLI: I would just like to reiterate a couple of things that you've said Lawrence, I think the importance of self-advocacy is really important. The more they learn what works for them, and what doesn't work for them, they will have access to it at university. My son is just applying to university, so these are things I'm discovering along the way as I sort of roll into the university level. The psych assessment, I think some universities it's three, some it's two, so you do need to check. And my understanding is that it doesn't always have to be a full assessment, but again you need to check with that university. It could be an addendum to the diagnosis. What we do know is that a learning disability doesn't go away, so it could be just an addendum. And learning strategies is available, I know the couple of universities that my son is applying to, they have learning strats offices where kids can get all of their accommodations that they're used to. But again, they have to be able to speak up for them; they won't come to them to get them, the students have to be able to articulate those and go and seek those out. So again, the roll of self-advocacy is really important, as they move into higher education.

AMY: Okay, thanks Kelli and Lawrence. The next question that we have is from Anna, and Kelli, I'm going to send it over to you. The question is: Should the IEP be produced in written format?"

KELLI: I think that depends on your board. Most boards have an electronic version. I think, I guess, perhaps your question is referring to it being a working document, and so if it's written on it's a little bit more fluid. I don't think it really matters whether it's written or typed, but it can be written all over during the course of the year so that it looks like we're working on it. Yeah, I think that's all I have to say on that one.

AMY: Okay, thanks Kelli. Kelli I am going to send this one your way as well. The women who is asking this question has a son in 5th grade, who's been loaned a computer with Kurzweil, WordQ, Mind Mapping and keyboard programs. However, his teacher is not allowing him to use it in class and she feels that this would help her son a lot. She is wondering if you might have some suggestions for her.

KELLI: Yeah, if it's part of his IEP, then it really should be used in the classroom, and perhaps going back to the school and finding out what the difficulty is about it being used in the classroom would be really important. Kurzweil, the programs that your son has at his access, would be wonderful to see whether he can be using them and support his program. I think the biggest suggestion I would have is, if he has it and it's his computer, I would be going back to the SERT first of all, and then the classroom teacher, and finding out why it's not being embraced in the classroom. Use your school-based team to support you through this.

AMY: Okay, thanks Kelli. Our next question is coming from a woman named Karen. Her daughter, she has taken her out of the public school system and put her in a separate school, and she's now deciding to return her child back to the regular public school, but she's worried about the supports that her daughter is going to receive there. She knows what her daughter needs to succeed, but she's not sure if some of the strategies, such as having her daughter taken out of class, or what is best, and she is wondering how her actual path, her daughters actual path will be decided on in a public school system and how she can contribute since she knows her daughter so well. So actually, I think both of you might have something to contribute to this. So Kelli, do you want to get us started, and then Lawrence can follow up?

KELLI: Okay, yeah, that's kind of an interesting question. You do know your children very well, and we would never want to suggest that you don't. We do have structures in schools, and so we need to, again I think as Lawrence and I have both said, working with the school would be really important to ensure that we can offer what you need for your daughter to be successful. Sometimes there are limitations in terms of staffing, but I think if you are in conversations, I think that things will work for you. I think that the school is there to help you and help your daughter, and I think we have to trust each other along the way, and make sure that – I think as Lawrence has said and I have said it, sometimes it's a tricky process and we have to do things by trial and error. But we both, from both sides, have to be open and keep the lines of communication open. Lawrence, do you have anything you want to add?

LAWRENCE: Yeah, I'll talk a bit to experience, because I did the flip, so I actually moved Jake from the public system to the separate system, and I guess, Amy it was from Karen you said?

AMY: Yes.

LAWRENCE: Okay, so Karen, I think if I can tell you anything, I found from one school board to another, a great openness to allow me to be involved, I'm assuming you've had some of those discussions, but the paperwork that I brought from the public system was clearly shared with the SERT, I met with the principal of the school as Jake moved in. The reality is you're going to have to advocate through the switch. Because sometimes, what I found was they would say, "well, you're going to have to wait until we have done our assessments, and we've done this and we've done that." And what I just pushed for was that, well that's all okay, and I don't mind you doing what you need to do under your system, but given I have this other paperwork, can we start to do some of this ahead, to make sure that we don't end up with this gap between him moving in and the right supports being in place. I didn't really, now again, I had success, so I went into a system where he got more support, and he started to fly very quickly. So, if you did the switch, and I think I heard Karen you've done one switch and your switching back again now, so I'm not sure of all of the ins and outs, as to why you are taking that decision. But I think it's, the school will do what they can. The one thing I do want to caution is, even between different schools in the same board, because of student population, resources don't always look the same. So you really have to do your homework as a parent, to work out what the school has available, and how do you maximize the opportunity for the win-win situation to be in place. And that's really what I found through the process is, you have discussions. Frankly at times, the public school principal I was dealing with said to me, "because of other strains on budget, I just can't do some of the things you're asking me to do." And that's not necessarily, you know, it's not that the principal doesn't want to, it's just sometimes their hands are strung. So, work with your team, be up front, and just be really communicative, and when you don't like answers, or the answer you feel may have a negative connotation for your student, I would encourage you, Karen, just to really press that conversation. And explain your concerns, and see how the school reacts. My view is that, most teachers and most schools are going to do everything in their power to help you succeed.

AMY: Okay, thanks both of you. The next question I have is for Kelli: Should the IEP have timeframes?

KELLI: Yes, it should actually. The IEP has three reporting time frames, but those are just time frames for reporting, and assessing on. We have 30 days from the beginning of a school year to develop the IEP, where we get to know the student, and that's the first draft, with parent input as well, and so that goes home and gets signed. We generally review the IPRC after the first term, but there's no reason along the way that it can't be relooked at. So again, in the IEP there should be some timeframes. Generally, it's the progress report, and then the first term report, and then the last year, the end of term report. But again, they can be looked at those as guidelines for relooking at it, but if the student is not being successful, or is meeting those expectations, then we certainly need to be looking at those all along the way.

AMY: Okay, our next question is from Stacy, and I'm going to direct this one to Kelli as well. The question is: My child has been diagnosed with an LD, and has an IEP in place. Should I have my child identified through an IPRC meeting, and why?

KELLI: Stacy that's a good question, I'm not sure where your child is along in the process. The formalization of – if the LD has been formally diagnosed through a psychoeducational assessment, then you would move towards an IPRC. But if the IEP is in place without a formal diagnosis at this point, then you would wait until you had a formal diagnosis. I hope that answers your question.

AMY: Okay, our next question is: Where do I get the information to show our SERT that the IEP is a living document with parental input? Ours is not aware of that. So I think, Kelli, we'll send this one your way as well.

KELLI: That is in the IEP document that is written by the Ministry of Education, and you can get it on the Ministry website.

AMY: Alright, so you should be able to do a search for that and it will come up?

KELLI: Absolutely.

AMY: Okay, great. The next question you both might have some input on. You talked about tools that we can have at home, such as keyboarding. Where does one get these tools or where can you look is the question? Kelli, do you want to start us off?

KELLI: Sure. Keyboarding, you can get on your computer. So, there's lots of software packages that you can download now from websites, in terms of teaching your kids how to type and look at. I used, one of the resources I used a lot was iTunes. ITunes has a variety of audio books available for kids, so that you can download the ones that they want to read, and they can be listening to them while they're reading along. My son found that a valuable tool. Other home tools, a lot of the assistive technology pieces are ones that we get through the ministry, if they're recommended for that. The one that I know very well is Kurzweil and that's really a very expensive program, and not one that I would suggest. WordQ is something that you have available, even on Microsoft Word there is a dropdown menu where kids can talk into the computer, and it will type it for them. There's Read&Write Gold which is available online, which is also a program that will read text to kids. Which gives them access to more information and more material at their intellectual level, so that's another resource. Lawrence, do you have anything?

LAWRENCE: Well, just because actually, you know, Steve Jobs didn't rule the world, for those of you that have android you can use the PlayStore on Google and find a lot of stuff in there as well. And, certainly for younger students now, with all of the pads that are out there, there are a lot of touch and learn programs that can really help the student to come to grips in the classroom. The other thing is I am going to put a bit of a plug in Amy, here for our chapter network. Because there are a lot of courses going on, through the LDA chapter in your backyard that can help your student because sometimes, yes it is a case of, keyboarding or something, you know, fairly straightforward. That's really an understatement, but you get my drift. But what for example happens if your student struggles with social skills? Those are the kinds of things where the LDA chapters have groups going on, there are summer camps, there are lots of, I guess, resources available so certainly if you go through the LDAO.ca website you can find the list of our chapters, and the one local to you and find out what's going on there. There's a lot of stuff available, and so I think it's just, just hunt. And also, this is another one by the way, where the school-based team will help you. Because, particularly the SERTs have got a ton of experience, and often if you go to a SERT and say, "this is where my child's having a problem, can you suggest something?" They would do what Kelli just did, and reel you off a list. So, don't forget the school is a massive resource, because they've been there, done that, got the t-shirt.

AMY: Alright, thanks Lawrence. Our next question: How come some kids get missed by schools, but get accommodated along the way? For example, they get SERT support outside of the regular classroom teacher support, but why wouldn't they get an IEP or an assessment done until they're prompted by the parents? Maybe Kelli you can answer that one.

KELLI: Can you actually repeat that question for me? I was trying to get the gist of it.

AMY: Of course, yes it's kind of in two parts, so I am trying to reword it a little bit. Let me give it another shot. So some students get support all the way through school, from a SERT, outside of their regular classroom teacher, but they never get an IEP or an assessment actually completed until the parent prompt them. Can you, kind of describe why that might happen?

KELLI: I guess part of it is that if they are getting accommodated or support and they're still being successful, then there's probably not a reason to identify them because the school has probably recognized that, with the accommodations that are in place, the child is meeting with success, and because we know that accommodations are available for anyone who needs them, that's what the school is doing. The other piece that we see along the way is that sometimes LDs are very subtle and that they don't always present themselves at early grades. We know that they're struggling, we know but we are not really sure, and with the accommodations we see success, but as the information gets wider, and the depth of some of their written stuff that they have to do gets more complex, then we're seeing things. And, again as a parent, you're seeing different things at home. I know for me, it was me pushing, even as an educator, because I would see things where Mathew, for instance, could remember an entire book and repeat it back to me, word for word for word for word, but when he went to write something, in one paragraph he might spell the word 'said' five different ways in the same sentence. So it wasn't until I continued to bring that forward, that they sort of started to make some connections. But because he had other compensatory strategies such as a strong memory, and they did some accommodations along the way, it wasn't until he was in grade five that they thought that maybe they needed to look at that.

AMY: Okay, thanks Kelli. Okay, kind of an extension almost, this last question is, what advice would you give to a parent whose child is waiting on a list for an assessment, and will probably never get one through the school, but can't afford a private assessment? Do either of you have any tips for this?

LAWRENCE: Wow, that's a real conundrum. I mean, I guess, what you can do, in the absence of, if you're in a school where they will generate an IEP ahead of the assessment, and it is certainly becoming more common, because of the assessment gap, I think you can certainly take that route. But I think ultimately the school again, whilst there's a wait, ultimately that assessment should be available, so you would have to be pressing the school, and if really there is a fear it would not get done, for some reason, then I think you could potentially take it to the higher levels of the school board, the District Superintendent, or whoever you need to talk to, as a parent, to understand what they're going to do to make sure the assessment gets done in a reasonable time frame.

AMY: Okay, thanks Lawrence, Kelli did you have anything to add?

KELLI: No, I think Lawrence did a great job on that one.

AMY: Okay, great. Our next question comes from Sandra, and she's wondering: How can a modified IEP be changed to an accommodation after diagnosis and a plan has been put in place, so that the child can be brought up to grade level? So, Kelli I'm going to send that one over to you.

KELLI: I think that comes from some conversations with the school, and you have to, I can't speak sort of fully without seeing the IEP, and where the modifications are, and whether those really need to be in place. But it's also something that I think that you could bring forward to the school, and say, "this is where I'd like to move to," and work with, the other piece is, you need to work with the student, to make sure that they understand what those differences will be, and what the impact on the learning will be for your child along the way. So, certainly a conversation that you can have with the teacher, you have to look at where the modifications are, the modifications are because of reading, and we have a modification in our social studies to access some of the reading material of the social studies program, what are some of those compensatory accommodation strategies that we can be using, that may help move it from a modified program to more of an accommodated program.

AMY: Thanks, Kelli. I have a question here from Arlene, and I'm going to send this one over to Kelli as well. Kelli, the question is: Do you feel that ADHD is being considered as a learning disability by all school boards yet? I've heard a principal state that assistive technology is reserved for kids with learning disabilities, and not usually used by kids with ADHD, and she is kind of wondering if you have some insight as to what the principal might have meant.

KELLI: I don't know. I do know that ADHD is being more and more recognized as a learning disability, and sometimes schools, in tandem with a learning disability, but not always. Some of the presenting skills with ADHD are the executive functioning pieces that hinder some of what the children are able to demonstrate that they know. Organization, staying on track, you know, that kind of, sometimes put them back where they shouldn't be. That's kind of where I see it. I know in our board if it is having an impact on their learning, we have made identifications for kids with ADHD as a learning disability, because it is having an impact on how they can demonstrate their knowledge.

AMY: Okay, great. We just have a few more questions, so we're going to try to get through them all before we sign off for the night; our next question is from Paula. Her child has non-verbal learning disabilities, and he is in grade eight and will be going to high school. She's wondering if there are programs or supports available for social abilities with peers, and even the anxiety of finding his locker and navigating halls and classrooms. And, just to give you some background, he's in a Montessori school right now with only 12 other students, and the high school he is going to be moving to has 1,100 students.

KELLI: Wow, I would begin talking to the high school that he is going to be going to. Certainly working with your Student Success Officer that does the transition piece, and asking them about what kinds of resources they have available in the school. I would suggest taking your son to the school so that he gets an idea of how big it is, and who he's going to interact with. Most boards will do hand timetabling for kids with learning disabilities, and would recommend learning strategies as a course that they would take, so that they would be attached to a SERT in the building. And if it's a semestered school, learning strats usually takes place in the first semester, so that they can start to connect with a caring adult in the building. There are other programs, but again, every school kind of has different resources that they have available. But high schools have the guidance offices available to them, and to kids to seek out that caring adult, which I think in this case would be really important.

AMY: Okay, great. I have two questions here about accommodations that are sort of related. So the first question is from Stacy, and it says: Where can I go to gain insight as to what accommodations are available to my child within the school system? And she's wondering if there are limits to the amounts of accommodations that can be added before a program needs to be modified. So Kelli, I'll send that one over to you.

KELLI: I would say yes, there are limits to accommodations because then you are looking at changing the depth and breadth of the curriculum, and so you have to really think strategically about what it is that is going to work for your child, and that's when we go back to, we need to develop a kind of a road map and do some trial and errors along the way, because not every student is the same. You can go to the LDAO websites probably have information I'm sure, on accommodations and modifications. The Ministry of Education, they have their own guidelines that we have to follow up, that you can research on what are accommodations and what are modifications. And I would not hesitate to go back into the school and talk to the SERTs or the principal, about what are the accommodations that are available, and if you have a psych assessment, revisit that because that will tailor the accommodations to the specific learning needs of your child.

AMY: Okay, so the next question relating to accommodations is from Helga, and it's: How do you work with a teacher who refuses to do the accommodations and follow the IEP? So Kelli, I'm going to give this one to you, the educator.

KELLI: Okay, then you actually would come and see me, or you would go to see your class principal or your school principal, because it certainly is a dilemma, and it is something that they are entitled to in the classroom, so we have to make sure that those accommodations are in place, and together we would come together as a team and make sure that we would put those in place for your child.

AMY: Okay.

LAWRENCE: Amy, If I may, sorry -

AMY: Yes, of course Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: Because I just want to stress, and I am going to disagree a little bit with Kelli, because I always saw the principal as a place of last resort, so assuming the conversation with the teacher is not producing the result, I would go to the SERT next, because the SERT has a relationship with the parent and with the student.

KELLI: That's true.

LAWRENCE: And will also have a relationship with the teacher, and there is a little bit of informality there as opposed to bringing the principal straight to the table. So I would suggest that might be a middle step, just because you're not, you know, activating the hierarchy of the school initially, and the SERT may well be able to have a quiet conversation, and make sure that some of those accommodations are brought to bare, or if nothing else, would want to understand, as the SERT, why the accommodations are not being put in place.

AMY: Okay, thanks for that perspective Lawrence. Our next question is also from Helga, and the question is: Why is it required to get an assessment in elementary, high school, and then again in university?

LAWRENCE: Okay Amy, I'll take that if I may.

AMY: Okay, of course.

LAWRENCE: So the first one, the assessment from elementary will follow the student to high school. There is not necessarily the need to do another assessment going into high school. In fact, my experience was they look more at the current IEP to look at what's being done, and how they move that into their environment. The difference with the universities is, if it's done, and for Jake, mine was done in grade four, so although the IEP is changing year and year, there wasn't another assessment done, now you're going into a different higher education environment, where they do things a little differently, and they just want to make sure, you know, where are we at? One of the things, and to not get too technical, but you'll see if you look into research around LD, and the brain in general, you'll see this whole idea around neuroplasticity, which is the idea that you can train your brain. You've probably all seen luminosity adverts about brain training, and stopping your brain getting old. There is a real potential for a student coming out of high school to have slightly different needs than they would have had on that first assessment. So I think it's, whilst it, I used to see it as awkward, I now see it as actually a good way to actually put another sign post in the road, see where your student is at, and set them up for success in the university environment, so, it's just, you know, the brain doesn't stay the same, it actually changes as they go through the education process.

AMY: Alright, thanks Lawrence. At this point in time, we're actually going to hold off on our questions for the evening.

*[Slide: More Questions? Send them to ShannonM@LDAO.ca*

*Image on slide: a bunch of papers with question marks on them.]*

The rest of you who may have submitted some questions, we will answer them, but we will answer them over email, and additionally if you do have more questions, feel free to email them to Shannon at ShannonM@LDAO.ca and we will ensure that we give you a personal reply.

*[Slide: Thank you!]*

AMY: So Lawrence and Kelli, thank you again so much for sharing your personal experiences, and for answering everybody’s questions. I’d also like to thank everyone out there who joined us this evening, and took time out of their busy schedules. Don’t forget that we’ll be sending you out a survival guide, and a short survey following this webinar, and we would really appreciate your taking the time to fill out the survey so we can use this information to inform our future webinars. Thanks again for joining us everyone, and have a wonderful evening.