

DATE: March 23, 2021

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Program Unit Funding (PUF)
(Response to Request for Information #094)

ORIGINATOR: Todd Burnstad, Chief Financial Officer
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REFERENCE: [Impact of Changes to the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery](#)
(Response to Request for Information #084) – December 8, 2020
[Strategic Plan update: Early Years Report - February 9, 2021 Board Meeting](#)

ISSUE

At the February 9, 2021, public Board meeting, Trustee Gibson requested that administration provide further information on the impact of the province discontinuing program unit funding (PUF) grants for Kindergarten age children for school jurisdictions.

BACKGROUND

This fall, Edmonton Public Schools put forward the following policy position at the Alberta School Boards Association, which passed with a majority vote by school boards in Alberta:

*That Alberta Education reverse decisions on Program Unit Funding (PUF) program eligibility in order to ensure that all students with mild to moderate and severe disabilities-delays who require specialized early intervention provided by this funding are able to receive it, and that funding of the **PUF Program be restored to the equivalent per-student amount as 2018 levels**, including Family Oriented Supports, allowing Early Childcare Service providers to offer fully funded half-day programming, and that program funding be extended from two years to three years to include supports for Kindergarten.*

CURRENT SITUATION

How have the reductions to PUF impacted the supports for students in Kindergarten at Edmonton Public Schools?

Prior to the 2020-2021 school year, children in Kindergarten with severe special needs were eligible for PUF. The PUF grant was allocated to the Early Years decision unit to provide specialized services in Kindergarten classrooms. Because the PUF grant was directly allocated to the individual child, there were advantages and limitations to this grant in how it could be used. While the new Specialized Learning Support (SLS) grant is not specifically allocated to individual children or students, it does have greater flexibility in how funds can be used. With the funding shift from the PUF grant to the SLS grant, the following changes have occurred:

- The Early Years decision unit has been combined with the Inclusive Learning decision unit and the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery decision unit and renamed the Specialized Learning Supports (SLS) decision unit. The combined staff from these three units continue to provide targeted and individualized services and assessments in Kindergarten classrooms through the nine school linked teams. This includes multidisciplinary specialists such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and adapted physical education consultants. The [RCS D report](#) from December 8, 2020, shows that the staffing in the SLS decision unit has increased slightly to further support schools from Kindergarten to Grade 12.
- Previously, a portion of the PUF grant was used centrally to hire and assign Educational Assistants (EA's) to Division Kindergarten classes to support children eligible for PUF. With changes to the funding model, funds from the SLS grant can be allocated to schools to hire their own EA's based on the needs of students in the school, including Kindergarten. Feedback from school principals indicates that having EA's as part of the school staff allows for greater program flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of children and students in their school.
- Previously, children eligible for PUF in their Kindergarten year who still required highly individualized intervention could remain in a Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program prior to Grade 1. With the PUF grant discontinued for the Kindergarten year, all Kindergarten aged children with severe special needs now go to their attendance area Kindergarten. Factors that influenced this decision were based on developing a sustainable Pre-K model using the reduced PUF allocation which included reducing programming hours to 445 to maximize staffing, and to reduce transportation costs using a more flexible schedule. Because Kindergarten programs require 475 hours of instructional time, Kindergarten children could not be accommodated in the Pre-K model. This means there may be more children transitioning to Kindergarten requiring individualized supports which will increase pressure on school linked teams and the need for EA's in schools.
- Families continue to have a choice for their child's Kindergarten year. Children can attend their community school or families can select a private Early Childhood Services (ECS) operator to provide services either in the child's Kindergarten classroom or in another setting. ECS operators in the province continue to provide Kindergarten programming through the third year of PUF as they do not receive an SLS grant from the province. To that end though, it is possible that a child who requires extensive specialized supports may end up attending three different educational environments in a three-year period, which is not ideal from a developmental perspective.

Are we expecting an impact on school readiness in Kindergarten?

- In reference to the [Strategic Plan update: Early Years report](#), children assigned special education codes 30 or 41-47 enter Kindergarten developmentally behind their peers. This is expected based on their meeting the criteria for special education coding. Data from the Early Years Evaluation-Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA) demonstrated the benefit of Kindergarten programming for this cohort of children.
 - They consistently experienced positive growth towards Grade 1 readiness.
 - Children who attended an EPSB Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program also experience growth in global readiness in Kindergarten.
 - Multi-year data also suggests there may be a correlation between growth and the gradual expansion of Division Pre-Kindergarten programming.
- While we don't fully understand what the impact to school readiness will be in Kindergarten in the years to come, we can predict, that we will see more children in Kindergarten with mild, moderate and severe special needs who will require support for language delays. This is in part due to fewer

children receiving early intervention in Pre-K because of reduced space due to funding reductions and narrowing of PUF eligibility criteria for severe language delays. The impact of the pandemic and a shift in early intervention service provision and assessments by Alberta Health Services are additional factors to consider when reviewing the impact on Kindergarten children and their readiness for school.

Recognizing that our funding model has changed significantly, please provide as much information as possible on EPSB spending (or allocations) on Kindergarten for the 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. Please include total amounts spent on or allocated to Kindergarten, as well as spending on specialized supports in Kindergarten.

- Total Kindergarten allocations for 2018-2019 were approximately \$46.1 million; \$18.6 of this allocation was funded through PUF (Kindergarten year).
- Total Kindergarten allocations for 2019-2020 were approximately \$46.7 million; \$17.8 of this allocation was funded through PUF (Kindergarten year).
- In 2020-2021, allocations for specialized learning supports changed as a result of the new funding model introduced by the province; \$8.3 million was allocated to the SLS decision unit for provision of specialized learning supports for Kindergarten children. The school linked teams prioritize supports and services for Kindergarten and Grade 1 students to support early intervention.
- The \$8.3 million was based on allocations for PUF (Kindergarten year) provided in previous years, less the EA costs directed to schools in 2020-2021. This was allocated with the assumption that the number of severe special needs children in Kindergarten would have stayed approximately the same as the 2019-2020 enrolment levels.
- An additional one-time transition allocation of \$4.5 million was allocated directly to schools to provide educational assistant supports in the classroom. As third year PUF funding is no longer available, the \$4.5 million was allocated from the Division's total funding which includes the SLS grant.
- The SLS grant of approximately \$88 million was introduced in 2020-2021 and replaces the Inclusive Education, Equity of Opportunity, RCSD, and the PUF Kindergarten grant. In 2019-2020, these grants totaled approximately \$110 million. This is a reduction of \$22 million in supporting grants or 22 per cent.
- Attachment II demonstrates that if enrolment in 2020-2021 remained somewhat in alignment with prior years, severe special needs allocation per child would have decreased by approximately \$7,000 or 27 per cent.
- For 2020-2021, Kindergarten allocations are not detailed separately as the majority of school allocations are based on 2019-2020 fall allocations (which are not per-pupil allocations).
- For specialized supports that are identified after allocation deadlines, principals also have access to additional resources through the equity fund. Any use of equity funds to support Kindergarten children is not included in this report.

(Further information is included in Attachments I and II)

Please include Kindergarten enrolment numbers so a per-student equivalent may be calculated for comparison across years, and please provide the number of students who qualified for PUF supports in these years as a proportion of the total number of students enrolled in Kindergarten for these years.

- The number of Kindergarten children with a severe coding in 2018-2019 was 805 or 11 per cent of total Kindergarten enrolment; and 839 (remaining at 11 per cent of total Kindergarten) enrolment in 2019-2020.
- In 2020-2021, only 492 children, or 7 per cent of total Kindergarten enrolment, were identified with severe special needs. There may be several reasons for the decline including:
 - changes to the provincial coding criteria for severe speech and language eligibility
 - the revision of the Kindergarten age of entry from 4.6 years to 4.8 years of age on September 1
 - families selecting the online programming option which may result in fewer children being assessed and identified than in the past
 - a general decrease in enrolment across the province due to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - some families choosing the PUF Kindergarten year option with private ECS operators.
(Further information is included in Attachment I and II)

For every coded student who previously received PUF, what would the Division estimate the anticipated typical annual cost of supports and typical number of year's supports are required in Division 1 years to ameliorate the loss of the PUF intervention?

- Supports and services available from the SLS school linked teams have remained generally consistent as they continue to prioritize Kindergarten and Grade 1 to support early intervention. As we are only halfway through the first year of the weighted moving average (WMA) funding model it is difficult to determine the long-term implications or ongoing annual costs other than those included in Attachment I.

ATTACHMENTS

- ATTACHMENT I PUF Kindergarten Analysis (2018-2019, 2019-2020)
ATTACHMENT II PUF Kindergarten Analysis (2020-2021)

TB:ja

Edmonton Public Schools
RFI # 94
PUF KINDERGARTEN ANALYSIS (2018-2019, 2019-2020)

	2018 - 2019				2019 - 2020			
	Provincial Funding Rates Base - \$3,339 Class Size - \$761	Allocations (costs)	Enrolment	Allocation (Cost) per Child	Provincial Funding Rates Base - \$3,339 Class Size - n/a	Allocations (costs)	Enrolment	Allocation (Cost) per Child
Kindergarten students								
Base Allocation	\$25,216,128	\$21,813,374	7,552	\$2,888	\$26,641,881	\$23,105,294	7,979	\$2,896
Class Size Allocation	\$5,747,072	\$5,747,072	7,552	\$761	n/a	\$5,832,649	7,979	\$731 ¹
Subtotal	\$30,963,200	\$27,560,446	7,552	\$3,649	\$26,641,881	\$28,937,943	7,979	\$3,627
PUF Year 3 (Early Years) Kindergarten								
PUF Allocation	\$16,360,040	\$16,360,040	717	\$22,817	\$15,609,630	\$15,609,630	751	\$20,785
PUF - Full Day Kindergarten (Tevie Miller, Scott Robertson & Mayfield)	\$2,204,488	\$2,204,488	88	\$25,051	\$2,204,488	\$2,204,488	88	\$25,051
Subtotal Specialized Supports (PUF)	\$18,564,528	\$18,564,528	805	\$23,062	\$17,814,118	\$17,814,118	839	\$21,233
% of children in K accessing PUF			11%				11%	
TOTALS	\$49,527,728	\$46,124,974		\$26,711	\$44,455,999	\$46,752,061		\$24,859

NOTES:

- ¹ The Division had allocated class-size funds as part of the normal spring budget process; however, due to the late release of the 2019-2020 budget, we were unaware that this funding would be discontinued. Rather than re-open budgets in late fall, a decision was made to continue with a one-time, class-size allocation using surplus dollars.

Edmonton Public Schools
RFI # 94
PUF KINDERGARTEN ANALYSIS (2020-2021)

	2020 - 2021			2020 - 2021 (if normal enrolment)			Variance per child	
	Allocations (costs)	Enrolment	Allocation (Cost) per Child	Allocations (costs)	Enrolment	Allocation (Cost) per Child	\$	%
Specialized Learning Supports (SLS)								
Base Allocation	n/a	6,772	n/a	n/a	6,772	n/a		1
Allocation to schools for EA's (from SLS grant) one-time	\$4,536,147	492	\$9,220	\$6,000,000	750	\$8,000	(\$1,220)	-13% 2
Subtotal	\$4,536,147	492	\$9,220	\$6,000,000	750	\$8,000	(\$1,220)	-13%
Allocation to SLS cost centre (from SLS grant)	\$8,311,000	492	\$16,892	\$8,311,000	750	\$11,081	(\$5,811)	-34% 3
% of children in K accessing SLS		7%			11%			
TOTALS	\$12,847,147	492	\$26,112	\$14,311,000	750	\$19,081	(\$7,031)	-27% 4

NOTES:

- 1 For 2020-2021, Kindergarten allocations are not detailed separately as the majority of school allocations are based on 2019-2020 fall allocations (which are not per-pupil allocations).
- 2 Beginning this year, the provision of EA's in Kindergarten has shifted from SLS providing the EA's to the allocation being distributed to schools. A total of \$4.5 million was allocated to schools to support 301 of the 492 Kindergarten children requiring special supports. The projected allocation in the spring of 2020 was \$6 million.
- 3 Funding of \$8.3 million was allocated to the SLS decision unit (formerly Early Years) to support Kindergarten children and was also intended to replace third year PUF. Last spring, we projected approximately 750 severe special needs children in Kindergarten; however, due to the pandemic, this number was reduced to 492 for 2020-2021.
- 4 In 2020-2021, the \$26,000 per child allocation is higher than projected due to a lower than anticipated enrolment of severe special needs children. Had this been a regular (in-person) school year, the estimated per student allocation for severe special needs supports would have decreased by 27 per cent to \$19,000.