

**DATE:** February 9, 2021

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT:** Strategic Plan Update: Early Years

**ORIGINATOR:** Nancy Petersen, Managing Director, Strategic Division Supports

**RESOURCE STAFF:** Clarice Anderson, Todd Burnstad, Husna Foda, Rachel Foley, Amanda Lau, Monica Lukas, Bob Morter, Ann Parker, Natalie Prytuluk, Soleil Surette

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## ISSUE

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of the Division's efforts in support of our youngest learners through a more detailed look at the Early Years Evaluation - Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA) data and provides a historical summary of the development of the Division's Pre-Kindergarten program, including the impact of changes to provincial Program Unit Funding (PUF).

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, Edmonton Public Schools formally reaffirmed the District Strategic Plan for the 2018-2022 term. The District Strategic Plan has three priority areas with supporting goals and outcomes. The plan provides common direction and alignment between the work of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent of Schools and Division staff. The plan serves as the foundation for a Division culture of evidence-based decision making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the Division's commitment to transparency and accountability, Strategic Plan Update reports were introduced in 2016–2017 as an extension of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). The reports are intended to provide the Board of Trustees with detailed progress towards the goals and outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

## CURRENT SITUATION

This Strategic Plan Update report highlights the importance of Division Early Years programming that can positively impact the number of children entering Grade 1 having reached emotional, social, intellectual and physical developmental milestones. It is in direct response to Priority 1 of the 2018-2022 District Strategic Plan for the Division to foster growth and success for every student by supporting their journey from early learning through high school completion and beyond.

## KEY POINTS

This Strategic Plan Update report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of work in support of Early Years programming.

## ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Strategic Plan Update: Early Years

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# Strategic Plan Update:

## Early Years

February 9, 2021

## INTRODUCTION

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Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB) provides Early Years programming through Pre-Kindergarten, full-day Kindergarten and Kindergarten. These programs help support more children to reach emotional, social, intellectual and physical developmental milestones before they enter Grade 1 through high quality purposeful play-based learning and the opportunity for access to specialized supports and services where need has been identified.

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of the Division's efforts in support of our youngest learners through a more detailed look at the Early Years Evaluation - Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA) data. Using the EYE-TA data as an indicator of growth, this report takes a closer look at the progress children make during their year of Kindergarten towards readiness for Grade 1. This closer look at the EYE-TA data provides a multi-year perspective and includes results for the following specific cohorts of Division Kindergarten learners:

- Self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit children (FNMI)
- English Language Learner (ELL) children
- Children with special education codes 30 and 41-47 (see Appendix I for a descriptor of these codes)
- Children who attended an EPSB full-day Kindergarten programming versus those who attended a traditional half-day program (Alberta Education provides funds to support half-day Kindergarten programming)
- Children who attended an EPSB Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program

The report also provides a historical summary of the Division's work to explore and expand early years programming prior to Kindergarten. This work was supported through a pilot that began in the 2014-2015 school year and saw an evolution of Pre-Kindergarten programming that expanded to meet the needs of a broader group of children across 32 Division schools. Changes in provincial Program Unit Funding (PUF) effective for the 2020-2021 school year resulted in a significant change in the Division's model of Pre-Kindergarten programming and which children we are able to serve. As a result of these changes, this September the Division's Pre-Kindergarten programming has been adjusted to six school sites.

The information shared in this report supports efforts taken in support of Priority 1, Goal One: An Excellent Start to Learning and highlights the importance of Division programming that can positively impact the number of children entering Grade 1 having reached emotional, social, intellectual and physical developmental milestones.

## EARLY YEARS EVALUATION-TEACHER ASSESSMENT (EYE-TA)

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To help monitor the growth and development of children prior to Grade 1 the Division uses the EYE-TA screening tool. Using this tool, Division Kindergarten teachers assess children's developmental readiness at the beginning of the school year and again in the spring. Kindergarten teachers gather information through observation and play-based activities to assess each child's developmental readiness across the five developmental domains of the EYE-TA:

1. Awareness of Self and Environment: a child's understanding of the world and their ability to make connections with home and community experiences.
2. Social Skills and Approaches to Learning: a child's attentiveness during classroom activities and their ability to interact with peers while respecting classroom rules.
3. Cognitive Skills: a child's basic mathematics and pre-reading skills and their ability to solve problems.
4. Language and Communication: a child's understanding of spoken language and their ability to express thoughts and feelings.
5. Physical Development:
  - Fine Motor: a child's ability to perform small movements that require hand-eye coordination.
  - Gross Motor: a child's ability to perform large movements that involve arms, legs and body.

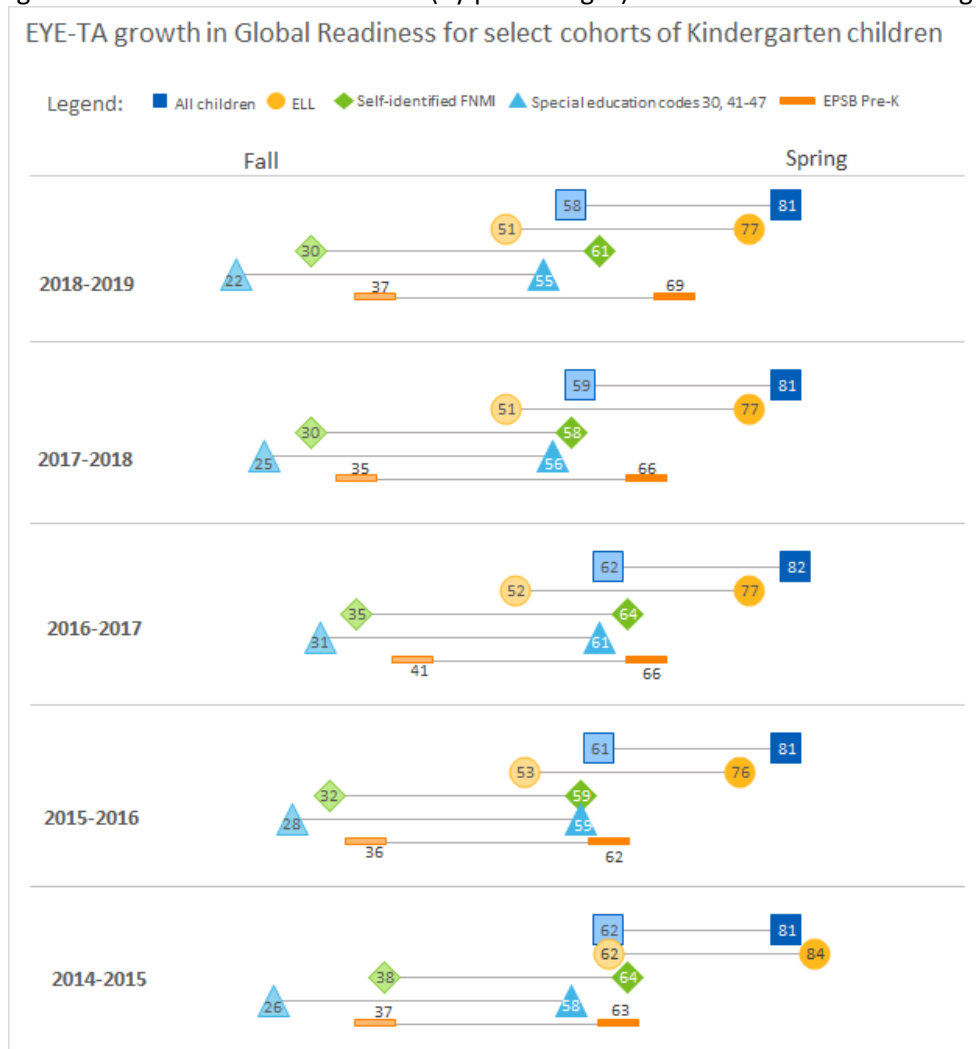
Individual results for each child across the five domains are combined to create an overall readiness score known as the Response to Intervention or RTI; RTI measures a child’s overall or global readiness for Grade 1. Teachers and schools use the information from the fall to inform programming and interventions to support children in developing towards meeting these milestones of readiness for Grade 1. Annual EYE-TA results can also be rolled up to capture growth at the Division level. The graph below provides a multi-year, comparative look at EYE-TA fall and spring results and overall readiness for Grade 1 for the following cohorts of children:

- All Division Kindergarten children (blue square).
- Kindergarten children identified as English Language Learners (ELL) (yellow circle).
- Kindergarten children self-identified as First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) (green diamond).
- Kindergarten children with special education codes 30 or 41-47 (light blue triangle).
- Kindergarten children who attended an EPSB Pre-Kindergarten program prior to Kindergarten (orange rectangle).

It should be noted that some children may be represented by the data in more than one cohort.

- The ELL cohort represents both ELL children and ELL children also coded as mild/moderate or severe special needs.
- The self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit cohort represents both children who self-identify as well as children who self-identify and are also coded as mild/moderate or severe special needs.
- The cohort of special education children coded 30, 41-47 also includes ELL and self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit children.

Graph 1. EYE-TA growth in Global Readiness scores (by percentages) for select cohorts of Kindergarten children.



When taking a multi-year look at the Division's EYE-TA results there are consistent patterns to be noted:

- Approximately 60 per cent of all children arrive in Kindergarten in the fall already meeting developmental milestones for Grade 1.
- By the spring, approximately 81-82 per cent of all children are consistently meeting all the developmental milestones.
- The Division's cohort of ELL children typically begin Kindergarten slightly below the benchmark of all Division Kindergarten children in their overall readiness but make positive gains in Kindergarten and by spring have almost caught up to the developmental readiness of all children. (It should be noted that the 2014-2015 cohort of ELL children was coded differently by the Division than the other years and does not accurately reflect students identified as both ELL and mild/moderate or severe special needs.)
- Self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit children experience significant growth between the fall and spring of Kindergarten.
  - However, this group of children consistently enter the Division at a significantly lower place of development and readiness than their peers.
  - It is important to recognize that despite making significant gains, there remains a gap in their readiness for Grade 1, reinforcing the importance of early engagement as identified in the OECD's Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students.
- As a cohort, children assigned special education codes 30 or 41-47 enter Kindergarten developmentally behind their peers. This is expected based on their meeting criteria for special education coding. Data from the EYE-TA demonstrates the benefit of Kindergarten programming for this cohort of children as 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.
  - The multi-year data suggests there may be a correlation between growth on the EYE-TA and the gradual expansion of Division Pre-Kindergarten programming, with a difference in growth of 26 points in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 compared to 31 and 32 points in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.

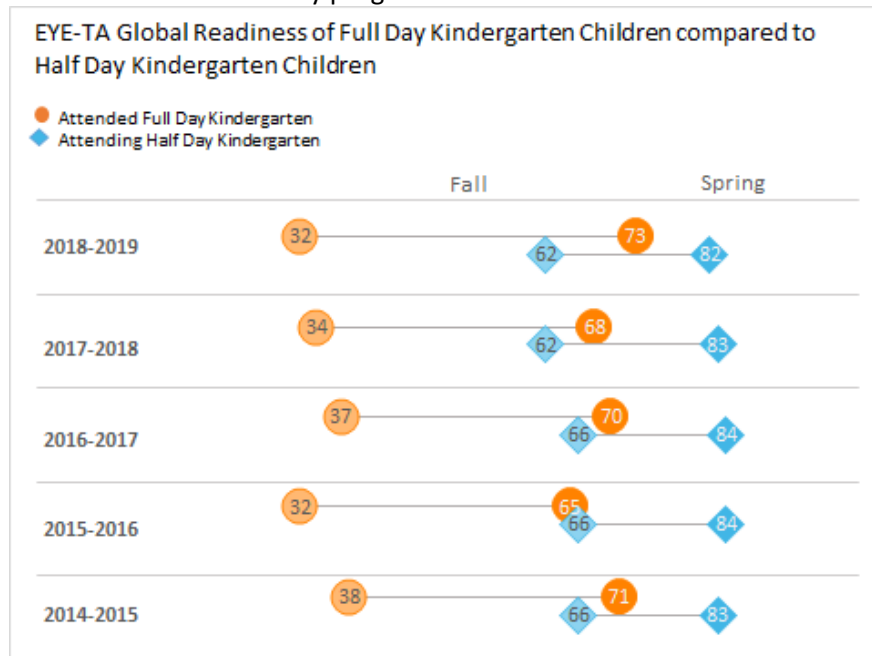
EYE-TA data also demonstrates the positive impact that full-day Kindergarten can have towards readiness for Grade 1. Full-day Kindergarten is currently offered at 26 Division schools serving children facing the challenges and barriers associated with social complexity. In respect to funding for full-day Kindergarten, the Division receives the same amount of base instruction funding from the province for children attending a full-day Kindergarten program as children attending a half-day program. Additionally, funding for Kindergarten is determined using the weighted moving average (WMA); the WMA factors all Kindergarten children as a 0.5 FTE, regardless of the program they are enrolled in. The Division funds the differential to support full-day Kindergarten through the following:

- The Edmonton Public Schools Foundation raises funds to support full-day Kindergarten at six Division schools.
- The Division supports the remaining 20 full-day Kindergarten schools through funding received from the province to support Grades 1 to 12 operations.

The following chart helps illustrate the importance and impact of full-day Kindergarten, as children attending these programs experienced significant growth on the EYE-TA from fall to spring in their readiness for Grade 1.

- Though there is a significant reduction in the gap in readiness from fall to spring, it is important to note that this cohort of children still enters Grade 1 behind in their readiness compared to their peers from less socially complex circumstances.

Graph 2. Comparing fall and spring EYE-TA Global Readiness of children who attended a full-day Kindergarten program versus those who attended a half-day program.



## PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM EXPANSION

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Division embarked upon a multi-year pilot to explore expanding the Division’s service to children prior to Kindergarten. To help inform this work, the Division looked at the provincial Early Development Instrument (EDI) data.

The EDI is a population level measure that provides data on childhood development at a community level. The Alberta EDI Program was a partnership between the Ministries of Children’s Services, Community and Social Services, Health and Education that existed from 2016 to 2020 and built upon the work of the previous [Early Childhood Development Mapping Initiative](#). EDI data was last collected in 2016 and shared in 2018; these reports can be found on the [ecdcoalitions.org](http://ecdcoalitions.org) website. EDI data has been an integral part of the planning process for Pre-Kindergarten programming within the Division. A description of the 2016 Edmonton EDI data and its relevance for the Division can be found in the [Early Years Strategic Plan Update Report](#) provided to the Board of Trustees at the April 10, 2018, Board meeting.

The EDI measures children’s ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in five general areas or domains:

- Physical health and well-being
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills
- Communication skills and general knowledge

Data from the EDI was one source of information used by the Division to help inform expansion of Pre-Kindergarten programming beginning with a pilot in 2014-2015. Additionally, the Division took into consideration the following to help inform the expansion of Pre-Kindergarten programming:

- Edmonton population demographics and school enrolment data
- School facility conditions and space utilization
- Consideration to existing early years program locations

- Other Pre-Kindergarten programming options and services available to families throughout the Edmonton area

The expansion of Division Pre-Kindergarten programming was intended to create financially sustainable programming closer to where families lived and increase the number of spaces available for children to access programming prior to Kindergarten.

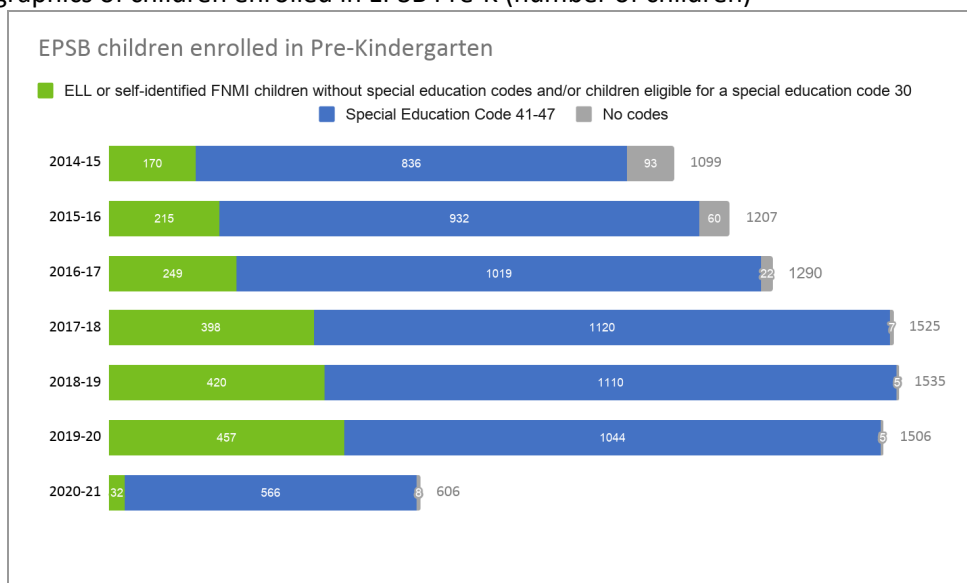
The first year of the three year pilot, 2014-2015, was focused in the Mill Woods community. The pilot focused on an approach to Pre-Kindergarten programming that provided intervention using multidisciplinary supports including speech and language, physical or occupational therapy and school family liaison services to help children work on skills such as communication, mobility and sensory exploration. A three-year expansion plan was approved in winter 2016 and by 2018-2019 there were 32 Pre-Kindergarten sites across the Division.

In early 2020, the Division’s work in support of Pre-Kindergarten took on an unanticipated focus with the indication there would be significant changes in the provincial PUF model. The work to prepare for these changes became a priority focus for the Division and included engaging with Pre-Kindergarten stakeholders to explore a new model of programming for the fall of 2020-2021 that would be feasible within constraints of the new provincial funding formula.

As a result of this work, this September Pre-Kindergarten programming was offered in six Division schools, with the capacity to serve a maximum of 600 children who meet the new provincial eligibility for PUF programming. Under the new PUF funding framework the Division is able to serve children who qualify as severe special needs under codes 41-47. The Division is no longer able to serve children who are identified as: ELL, self-identified First Nations, Métis or Inuit or eligible for mild/moderate code 30 special needs funding. A comprehensive overview of PUF funding changes and the impact to the Division’s Pre-Kindergarten program was provided to the Board of Trustees in a [report April 28, 2020](#).

The following graph illustrates a demographic breakdown of children served by the Division’s Pre-Kindergarten program throughout the years.

Graph 3. Demographics of children enrolled in EPSB Pre-K (number of children)<sup>1,2</sup>



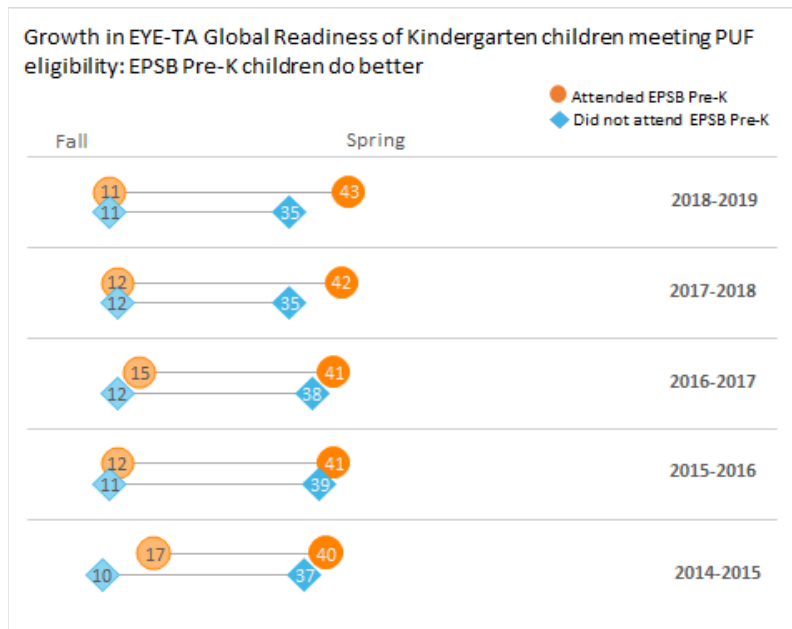
<sup>1</sup> All totals, except for the 2020-2021, reflect the final June count

<sup>2</sup> For 2020-2021, the 32 children represented by the green bar have been grandfathered from the 2019-2020 Pre-Kindergarten cohort; under current provincial PUF funding this group of children would not be served in coming years.

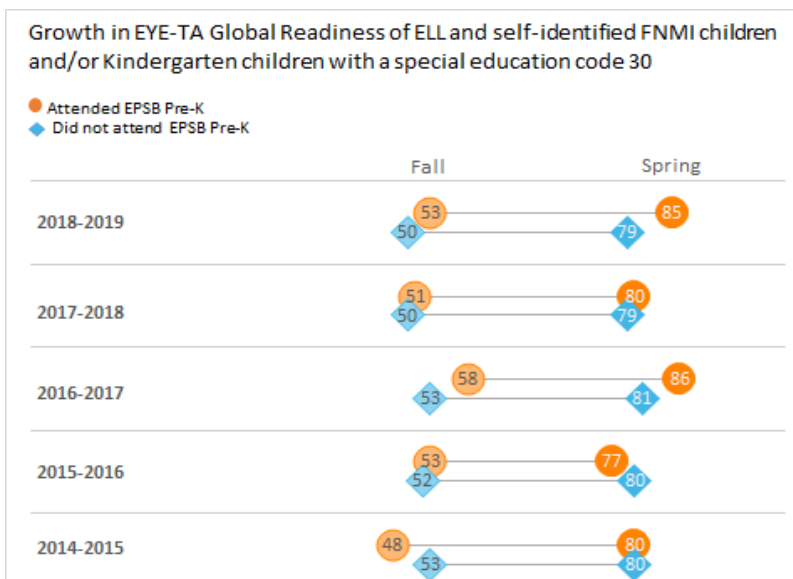
The following two diagrams demonstrate the positive impact the Division’s Pre-Kindergarten program had for children between the years of 2014-2015 and 2018-2019. The two diagrams show a comparison between Kindergarten children who participated in a Division Pre-Kindergarten program and those who joined the Division for the start of Kindergarten. The data is broken out into two diagrams profiling:

- Children meeting PUF eligibility as severe, including codes 41-47.
- Children who identify as ELL, self-identify as First Nations, Métis and Inuit and/or meet eligibility for mild/moderate special education code 30.

Graph 4. Comparing fall and spring Global Readiness EYE-TA scores for Kindergarten children meeting PUF eligibility (special education codes 41-47) who attended or did not attend an EPSB Pre-K program.



Graph 5. Comparing fall and spring Global Readiness EYE-TA scores of ELL or self-identified FNMI children without special education codes and/or children eligible for a special education code 30 who attended or did not attend an EPSB Pre-K program.





In looking at these results for both cohorts of children, there is a predictable pattern demonstrating that children who participated in a Division Pre-Kindergarten program achieved a stronger overall level of readiness for Grade 1 on the spring EYE-TA assessment of their Kindergarten year than their peers who did not participate in a Division Pre-Kindergarten program. There is the acknowledgement that some of the children joining the Division for Kindergarten may have attended a Pre-Kindergarten program elsewhere.

Based on this closer look at our EYE-TA data, there is evidence to indicate that the Division's efforts in support of Pre-Kindergarten programming from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019 had a positive impact towards improving children's readiness for Grade 1.

The EYE-TA data supports the importance of early intervention and demonstrates the impact the Division can have when programming for children prior to Grade 1. In the broader societal context, the positive impact of early years programming has been researched and examined significantly. The Division has pulled together a sampling of this work to further demonstrate the importance of programming for children in preparation for Grade 1 and ultimately their success and well-being in school and life: [Impacts of Early Childhood Education Environmental Scan](#).

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND NEXT STEPS

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### Enoch Cree Nation and Edmonton Public Schools Project

The *Exploring Early Learning & Family Engagement: A Professional Learning Partnership Between Enoch Cree Nation and Edmonton Public Schools* is a three-year project focused on building collective capacity related to high quality, culturally responsive Pre-Kindergarten programming. The following is an update about year two of the project (2019-2020) as well as plans for year three (2020-2021), which is the final year of the project.

The intention of year two was to deepen participants' shared understanding of key concepts introduced in year one through the continued exploration of traditional Cree child-rearing practices and play-based learning. Prior to March, participants engaged in a two-day professional learning session and intervisitation, where educators from both jurisdictions had the opportunity to observe each other's classes and model practices inspired by traditional teaching. Both activities garnered positive feedback, as well as strengthening the mutual respect and trust between the jurisdictions. As a result of the shift to at-home learning in March, however, additional plans made for year two were put on hold so that each jurisdiction could support the needs of their respective teaching staff during the transition to at-home learning.

Despite temporarily being put on hold, key staff from both jurisdictions met regularly to review the scope and sequence for the year three partnership as well as plan future professional learning opportunities. Year three will continue to strengthen the collaboration between EPSB and Enoch Cree Nation, with a focus on the indigenous ways of knowing and family engagement. Activities for the 2020-2021 school year include four professional learning sessions scheduled for November, January, March and April.

- The November session focused on storytelling with children and was provided by Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack and Richard VanCamp.
- The January session focused on teachings on the medicine wheel and was provided by Elder Rick Makokis.

The goal of year three is the collaborative development of culturally responsive resources to support the growth and success of children in the early years.

### Children's Autism Society of Edmonton Initiative (CASE)

Beginning in the fall of 2020, CASE has partnered with the Division to support their work with children with developmental disabilities who are Kindergarten age. Through this initiative, CASE operates a modified

Kindergarten program in classroom space at both Waverly and Princeton schools. The 13 children enrolled in the CASE Kindergarten program attend an extended half-day program Monday through Friday. CASE receives the provincial funding allocation for each child and provides a certificated teacher and three educational assistants as well as a multidisciplinary team consisting of a speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist and a behaviour consultant. The Division’s role in the initiative is the provision of space in the two community schools, which is provided to CASE at no cost. Other anticipated benefits to this developing partnership are:

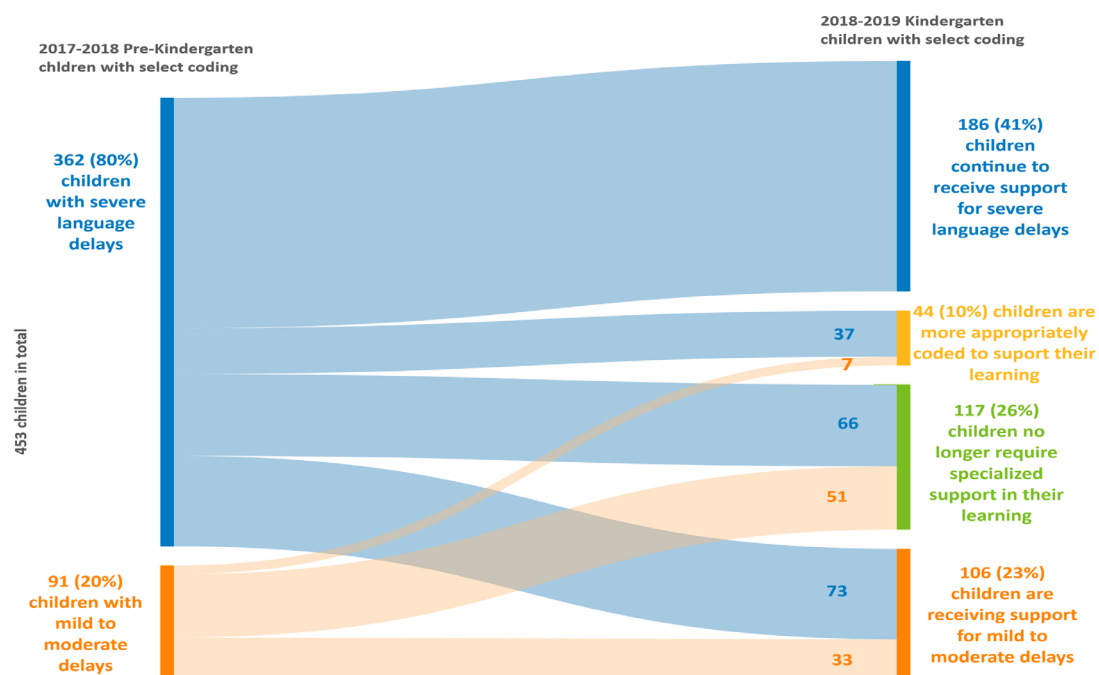
- The opportunity for staff from both organizations to collaborate and participate in professional learning opportunities.
- The opportunity for staff from both organizations to be intentional in working together to support families transition from Kindergarten to Grade 1.
- Families of the children attending the program are able to have their children be part of a Kindergarten program providing a small class size and specialized supports within a traditional elementary school community.
- The opportunity to explore other ways of working together in support of children with Autism and their families.

Feedback to date from parents and Division staff has been positive.

### Impact of Pre-Kindergarten Programming For Children With Severe Language or Mild/Moderate Delays

A review of children in Pre-Kindergarten for the 2017-2018 school year who transitioned into Kindergarten for 2018-2019 demonstrates the positive impact of a quality early years programming. The following chart shows a summary of 453 Pre-Kindergarten children with either a severe language delay coding or a mild to moderate coding and the positive impact of their Pre-Kindergarten learning experience. The chart illustrates children’s growth relative to changes in their coding. Of the 453 children, 117 no longer required a special education code; 73 children went from severe to mild/moderate and 44 received further assessment and were more appropriately coded to reflect their learning needs.

Fig. 1. Benefits of participating in Pre-Kindergarten for children with severe language or mild to moderate delays



The graph demonstrates that a significant number of children in Pre-Kindergarten who were eligible for funding (mild, moderate or severe) made significant gains and no longer qualify for special needs funding heading into Kindergarten. In terms of what this means for the Division, the following contextualizes the implications of this growth for one cohort of Pre-Kindergarten children:

- If the 117 children identified in the chart as no longer requiring a special education code are able to continue through to the completion of Grade 3 without special education coding, the Division will be able to redirect over \$2 million dollars to other students requiring specialized supports. This financial projection has been calculated using the funding criteria of the current budget allocation model.

## Next Steps

To support effective early years programming for as many children as possible, the Division will examine this year's Pre-Kindergarten program to inform programming going forward and will continue to explore how best to work with community partners in the area of the early years and families of young children.

Principals from the six Pre-Kindergartens have had an initial conversation to reflect on strengths of this year's program and opportunities for next year. They will continue to dialogue as they plan for the 2021-2022 school year.

## APPENDIX I

Code 30 – Child with Mild/Moderate Disability (age of entry 3 years and 8 months on September 1<sup>st</sup> for a maximum of 2 years)

Code 41 – Child with Severe Intellectual Disability

Code 42 – Child with Severe Emotional/Behavioural Disability

Code 43 – Child with Severe Multiple Disabilities

Code 44 – Child with Severe Physical/Medical Disability

Code 44 – Division Code 24 – Child with Severe Physical/Medical Disability (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

Code 45 – Child who is Deaf

Code 46 – Child who is Blind

Code 47 – Child with Severe Delay Involving Language (Code 47 applies to PKP and Kindergarten; Code 57 applies to Grades 1-12)

\*EPSB reference to code 47(+) identifies a child with Severe Delay Involving Language pending a physical/medical or emotional/behavioural diagnosis and requiring extensive specialized supports

\*Kindergarten children identified with special needs fall under the ECS Special Needs Coding Criteria (20, 41-47); however, they are supported through SLS Grant and not PUF Grant