

June 1, 2020

Honourable Adriana LaGrange  
Minister of Education  
228 Legislature Building  
10800 – 97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Honourable Rebecca Schulz  
Minister of Children's Services  
204 Legislature Building  
10800 – 97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Ministers,

### **Request to reconsider Program Unit Funding model**

Edmonton Public School Board Trustees have been receiving numerous calls and emails from parents and community members concerned about the reduction to Program Unit Funding (PUF) and the impacts this will have on children, their families and our education system.

There is abundant research detailing the many positive impacts of early childhood education, particularly for children with complex needs. Pre-Kindergarten programming sets our most vulnerable children up for success at an early age.

Edmonton Public Schools is proud of the very successful hub and spoke Pre-Kindergarten system we developed, supported by the previous PUF funding system, that addressed sustainability, access, and programming. The model provided a great start for children through the combination of play-based programming and the multidisciplinary support that was critical, given their severe developmental delays, to be ready and on par with their peers for Grade 1. To learn more about this model and its success, please see the [Strategic Plan Update: Priority 1 Goal One: An Excellent Start to Learning](#).

The previous PUF funding also provided for Family Oriented Programming, which gave the parents of these children the tools and strategies they needed to support their children's unique learning needs.

The 2019-2020 PUF allocation which made our program possible was approximately \$39 million; funding for 2020-2021 is approximately \$9.7 million. This is a variance of approximately 75 percent.

To ensure a robust understanding of what this funding decrease will mean to Edmonton Public Schools, our Board asked administration to prepare a report detailing the impacts. This report is attached for your information.

The impacts of the funding loss cut deep and will have long-lasting impacts. As the report details, the reduction will mean that:

- Our Division can only offer Pre-Kindergarten programming in six hub schools as opposed to 10 hub schools that offered programming during the current year.

- The current 22 pre-Kindergarten satellite locations will be suspended as of September 2020, making access a challenge for families.
- There will be less support for families as the new provincial framework no longer provides funding for Family Oriented Programming (FOP).
- Under the current PUF model, our Division serves approximately 1,040 pre-Kindergarten PUF children. Under the new model, the projected number of Pre-Kindergarten PUF children served will be approximately 600. This is a decrease of approximately 42 per cent.

In addition, the restricted age of access and introduction of a base funding amount for half-time programs means programming will be accessible to fewer children, making it much more challenging, if not impossible, for them to receive the early intervention they need.

Downsizing the Pre-Kindergarten program was an incredibly challenging decision for the Division, and one that will affect dedicated Pre-Kindergarten staff members and, most importantly, young learners and their families. There is no chance to have the same impact as can be had in Pre-Kindergarten later in a child's learning journey. Not only are the combination of the small class sizes and individualized multidisciplinary attention not possible in later grades with the current education funding model, but the rapid growth and transformation possible during a young child's brain development cannot be replicated as the child ages.

Adequate PUF funding makes economic and moral sense. Children who reach developmental milestones, and are therefore ready to enter Grade 1, do not require the intensive intervention supports throughout their elementary, junior high and high school education. This has a positive impact on their success and feelings of efficacy as a learner, not to mention the obvious cost efficiency of investing in our early learning programs to reduce the additional support required through their time in a K to 12 setting. If successful high school completion is our goal, and our collective wish is to transition our students to a life of dignity and fulfillment, it is difficult to comprehend why resources are being reduced for our most vulnerable children at a time where the evidence clearly concludes the effectiveness of the support that we are able to provide.

Given the many benefits of robust Pre-Kindergarten programming, and the great costs – literal and figurative - to all of society when vulnerable students and their families can't access it, our Board will be taking a position statement to the ASBA fall general meeting asking jurisdictions to join in advocating for PUF funding to be restored.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks  
Board Chair

TE:km

Attachment: *Impact on the Division Due to Changes to Program Unit Funding*

**DATE:** April 28, 2020

**TO:** Board of Trustees

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

**SUBJECT:** Impact on the Division Due to Changes to Program Unit Funding  
(Response to Request for Information #068)

**ORIGINATOR:** Todd Burnstad, Chief Financial Officer

**RESOURCE  
STAFF:** Madonna Proulx, Natalie Prytuluk

**REFERENCE:** [Interim Funding Manual for School Authorities 2020/21 School Year](#)  
2020-2021 Special Education Coding Criteria

---

#### **ISSUE**

At the March 31, 2020, public Board meeting, Trustee Draper stated that she has been receiving many questions and concerns about the changes to Program Unit Funding (PUF). She requested that Administration provide the Board of Trustees with an outline of impacts to the Division due the changes in PUF.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Currently, PUF supports pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten children with severe disabilities and delays, between the ages of 2 years 8 months to less than 6 years of age, for a maximum of three years. The Division operates half-day, four-day per week pre-Kindergarten programs (475 hours of instruction) at 32 locations. As part of PUF, the Division provides family-oriented programming sessions (FOPS) to build parent/guardian capacity and maximize allowable funding per child. Families in pre-Kindergarten can access nine sessions, and families of children in half-day Kindergarten can access seven sessions.

#### **CURRENT SITUATION**

The following summarizes PUF funding and other changes effective for the 2020-2021 school year:

- Moving from a three-year to a two-year model for PUF means that Kindergarten children previously coded as eligible for PUF (codes 41 to 47, severe disability and/or mild moderate speech delay) no longer qualify for funding. This is a reduction of approximately \$13 million.
  - The province has indicated that support for specialized services for all students is now included in the Specialized Learning Supports (SLS) grant.
- The 2019-2020 maximum funding for a PUF child is approximately \$25,000, inclusive of FOPS. Looking to the 2020-2021 school year, using the weighted moving average (WMA) model, children with a mild moderate speech delay (code 47) will be funded at \$10,000 for a half-day program and children with a severe disability (codes 41 - 46) will be funded at \$15,000 for a half-day program. On average, 85 per cent of the Division's PUF children are coded 47.
- The WMA model, combined with lower funding rates reduces the grant by an additional \$11 million.
- 2019-2020 FOPS funding is approximately \$5.9 million. The new funding framework does not provide any FOPS funding.

- Under the current PUF model, our Division serves approximately 1,040 pre-Kindergarten PUF children. Under the new model, the projected number of PUF children served will be reduced to approximately 600. This is a decrease of approximately 42 per cent in terms of the PUF children that will be served by our Division in 2020-2021. However, PUF funding is expected to be reduced by approximately 76 per cent.
  - Current year one PUF children who do not qualify for year two programming under the new provincial funding criteria, but who would still be recognized as a mild or moderate special needs learner, will be grandfathered in the new model and accommodated at one of the six locations for their year two of Pre-Kindergarten programming. Families wishing to access this programming would be eligible for transportation for a fee.
  - All children eligible for year two Pre-Kindergarten programming who are currently at a satellite location will also be accommodated for September in one of the six locations operational for September 2020.

As a result of changes to the provincial funding framework, Edmonton Public Schools has had to make significant changes to the Division's pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) model for the 2020-2021 school year.

PUF funding will continue to be allocated to support pre-K children with severe disabilities or language delays for a maximum of two years preceding Kindergarten. Funding will be allocated using the three-year WMA enrolment of children ages 2 years 8 months to 4 years 8 months who have been assessed and diagnosed with a severe disability or a severe language delay.

We will be offering pre-K in six hub schools as opposed to 10 hub schools that offered programming during the current year. However, we will be keeping the four schools that are discontinuing pre-K programming on reserve should we need more space to accommodate children. The current 22 pre-K satellite locations are being suspended as of September 2020.

The Division's revised model was informed by the constraints of the provincial funding framework and new provincial eligibility criteria for PUF children. Also considered were current enrolment trends, infrastructure, capacity to support pre-K programming, and feedback from pre-K leadership staff.

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The 2019-2020 PUF budget was approximately \$39 million; funding for 2020-2021 is projected at approximately \$9.5 million. This is a variance of approximately 76 per cent.
- Under the current PUF model, our Division serves approximately 1,040 pre-Kindergarten PUF children. Under the new model, the projected number of pre-Kindergarten PUF children served will be approximately 600. This is a decrease of approximately 42 per cent.
- The Division will offer pre-Kindergarten programming in six hub schools as opposed to 10 hub schools that offered programming during the current year.
- The current 22 pre-Kindergarten satellite locations are being suspended as of September 2020.

TB:ja