

Early Childhood Services (ECS) refers to educational programming for children before they enter Grade 1, and includes both Pre-Kindergarten programming for children who require additional supports and Kindergarten. The primary goal of ECS is to nurture each child's sense of self-worth and dignity, emphasizing experiences that support their holistic growth — physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual. Within the Division, Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs are rooted in Catholic values, offering learning opportunities that intentionally foster and nurture a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the permeation of Catholicity.

The Division may provide an Early Childhood Services Program (ECS) in each community to facilitate the transition from home to the school setting for children who meet the eligibility criteria for the program.

Definitions

Early Childhood Services (ECS) programs provide services to address the developmental needs of children before they enter grade one. In ECS programs, young children participate as active partners in learning, build a set of shared experiences and develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare them for subsequent learning. ECS programs provide additional support for children with special needs to assist them in reaching their full learning potential.

Kindergarten means one component of the total ECS program funded by Alberta Education and refers to the year immediately prior to grade one. Kindergarten is not mandatory but is a vital aspect of Early Childhood Services. Children may begin Kindergarten at age 4 years 8 months as of August 31, in accordance with Alberta Education criteria.

Pre-Kindergarten means Early Childhood Services programming for children who require additional supports to prepare them for Kindergarten and Grade 1, in accordance with Alberta Education criteria. Eligible children include those: learning English as a second language; requiring Francisation programming; gifted and talented; or diagnosed with a mild, moderate or severe disability, or a moderate or severe language delay. Children with a severe disability or a moderate or severe language delay may begin Pre-Kindergarten at age 2 years 8 months as of August 31. All other eligible children may begin at age 3 years 8 months as of August 31.

Special needs means a child with a mild, moderate or severe mental disability, visual impairment, learning disability, hearing impairment, emotional/behavioral disability or a child who is gifted and talented. All children with special needs require an Individualized Program Plan (IPP). The IPP is developed in consultation with parents/guardians, the certificated teacher, and, where applicable, learning support staff and other multi-disciplinary team members.

Program Unit Funding (PUF) means funding provided by Alberta Education to support the educational needs of children with a severe disability, or a moderate or severe language delay, who require Pre-Kindergarten intervention beyond what is offered in a regular ECS program. PUF is available for a maximum of three years for each eligible child, in accordance with Alberta Education eligibility criteria and the Funding Manual for School Authorities.

Procedures

1. Enrolment in an ECS program is voluntary. Children will be admitted into an ECS program when they have reached the age of five years on or before December 31 in the year in which they are enrolling, or if they are eligible for Program Unit Funding, in

accordance with Alberta Education age and eligibility criteria. Whenever possible the enrollment date will be aligned with the admission date of the public school boards.

2. The Principal is responsible for administering Pre-Kindergarten programming within the school.
 - 2.1 Pre-Kindergarten is for children who require additional supports to prepare them for Kindergarten and Grade 1, including children learning English as a second language, requiring Francisation programming, gifted and talented, or diagnosed with a mild, moderate or severe disability or a moderate or severe language delay, in accordance with Alberta Education criteria.
 - 2.2 Children with a severe disability or a moderate or severe language delay may begin Pre-Kindergarten at age 2 years 8 months as of August 31. All other eligible children may begin Pre-Kindergarten at age 3 years 8 months as of August 31.
3. Program Unit Funding (PUF) will be sought for all children that have special needs and require a wide range of supports and assistance, in accordance with Alberta Education criteria. PUF is available for a maximum of three years for each eligible child, contingent on eligibility criteria as set out by Alberta Education.
4. The Principal shall act as the Program Coordinator for the ECS program in the school.
5. The Principal and staff shall ensure that the conditions required for the Program Unit Funding are met, including the maintenance of required records (registration information, attendance records, documentation of eligibility for PUF and other funding, and signed educational service agreements where programming is delivered through a community-based program) in accordance with Alberta Education requirements.
6. Learning support teachers and/or other certificated staff shall provide teacher-directed programming for PUF-eligible children, as outlined by Alberta Education, and shall work collaboratively with school-based team members, learning services, community agencies and other multi-disciplinary teams, as needed.
7. All ECS programs operated by the Division are strongly encouraged to have an active Local Advisory Committee (LAC) consisting of administration, teachers and volunteer parents/guardians that act in an advisory capacity to the Principal.
8. Evaluations of child participation in the ECS program will address the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual growth of each child. Progress reports will be made available periodically to parents/guardians.
9. Children are normally enrolled in an ECS program for one year. The decision to maintain a child in an ECS program for more than one year will be made jointly by the teacher and Principal, in consultation with the parents/guardians.
10. Principals shall ensure that ECS programs serving students with special needs meet the following requirements:
 - 10.1 Screening/assessment information is maintained on file;
 - 10.2 Parents are consulted on all program placement decisions and informed of all program planning, implementation and evaluation activities directly involving their child; and
 - 10.3 An Individualized Program Plan (IPP) is on file for each child with mild, moderate or severe disabilities and for gifted and talented children-, and that the

goals and objectives identified in each IPP are reviewed regularly and incorporated into the child's educational programming across environments, activities and routines; and

- 10.4 Any ECS program operated in a facility, including a community-based site, complies with all applicable municipal and provincial public health, safety, fire and building standards.

References

Education Act, Sections 3, 21, 42, 56
Early Childhood Services Regulation

Funding Manual for School Authorities

Kindergarten Program Statement – Alberta Education

Standards for Special Education

Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education

Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12

Special Education Coding Criteria – Alberta Education

Early Childhood Services Handbook for the Identification and Review of Children with Severe Disabilities

Alberta.ca: Early Childhood Education (alberta.ca/early-childhood-education)

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