

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Background

Early Childhood Services (ECS) refers to the broad system of programs that meet the developmental and special needs of young children before they enter Grade 1. Kindergarten refers specifically to the education program for children in the year prior to Grade 1. Kindergarten, although not mandatory, is an important component of Early Childhood Services.

The District is guided by the Ten Principles of Programming (*Kindergarten Program Statement – Alberta Education, 2008*).

1. Childhoods differ depending on social and cultural circumstances.
2. Children's development is influenced but not determined by their early experiences.
3. Children interact and learn in a variety of contexts.
4. Children are co-constructors of knowledge and partners in learning.
5. Children are unique and active contributors to their learning.
6. Children construct and represent knowledge in a variety of ways.
7. Children are citizens and active participants in school and society.
8. Children are active collaborators in and users of assessment.
9. Children may require specialized programming and supports to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare them for later learning.
10. Children and their families may need coordinated community services to meet their needs.

In addition, through the permeation of Catholicity within the District, the kindergarten program is presented from a Catholic perspective with learning opportunities that intentionally invite and nurture a relationship with Jesus Christ. The integration of Catholic values into the total kindergarten curriculum forms a Christ-centred environment which supports the spiritual dimension of learning.

The focus of Early Childhood Services is the development of the child's sense of self-worth and dignity. The emphasis will be on providing experiences that promote the complete development of the child in all areas of growth, including physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual.

Procedures

1. Kindergarten Program
 - 1.1 Kindergarten programs will operate in elementary schools where there is a sufficient number of children enrolled. A minimum of 475 hours per year of instruction will be provided for children in the kindergarten program. If children participate in recess with the elementary students, this time is not to be included in the 475 hours of instructional time.

- 1.2 As an integral part of the school community, kindergarten classes will have access to the gym, the learning commons and any other parts of the facility available to the students in Grades 1 to 6. The kindergarten children will be encouraged to participate in all school-wide liturgies and activities.
- 1.3 Parents/legal guardians and families play a central role in their children's lives and therefore opportunities must be provided for parents/legal guardians to be meaningfully involved in their children's education. Parents/legal guardians are encouraged to become an active part of the child's Learning Team, which includes teachers, educational assistants and others involved in the education of their child.
- 1.4 The Kindergarten Program Statement includes seven learning areas:
 - 1.4.1 Early Literacy;
 - 1.4.2 Early Numeracy;
 - 1.4.3 Citizenship and Identity;
 - 1.4.4 Environment and Community Awareness;
 - 1.4.5 Personal and Social Responsibility;
 - 1.4.6 Physical Skills and Well-being;
 - 1.4.7 Creative Expression.
- 1.5 Learner expectations in the early literacy, early numeracy and citizenship and identity learning areas are the outcomes for kindergarten in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Social Studies in the *Program of Studies: Elementary Schools*. Learner expectations in the other four learning areas are integrated and focus on the early learning in Science, Physical Education, Health and the Fine Arts. Outcomes from the kindergarten level of the Health and Life Skills and Physical Education Programs of Study are integrated into the learning areas of Personal and Social Responsibility, Physical Skills and Well-being and Creative Expression.
- 1.6 Alberta Education provides a Program of Studies in some subject areas in kindergarten. District teachers will avail themselves of these Program of Studies and follow their requirements.

2. Eligibility

- 2.1 Administrative Procedure 301 - Admission of Non-Resident Students will apply when considering a child for admission to a kindergarten program.
- 2.2 The eligible age for entrance into the regular program of kindergarten is 5 years of age (but less than 7 years) on or before December 31 of the current year.
- 2.3 Although school jurisdictions can be funded for children from 3½ to 4½ who have been identified with special needs, the District currently does not offer programs within local schools for this age level. The District does comply with the Alberta Education mandate by working with other community partners and external groups to address the needs of these children, upon parent/legal guardian request. The District does provide programming for identified English Language Learning (ELL) children in the English

Language Learning Preschool Program. The child must be 4 years of age by December 31 of the year they enter ELL preschool.

- 2.4 A child who is identified as developmentally immature may spend two years in an Early Childhood Services program. The decision to have a child spend two years in kindergarten is made upon the request of the parent/legal guardian and in consultation with the Diverse Learning Team who have shared information and make the decision collaboratively. Developmental domains of motor, language, cognitive, social and emotional facets of the child will be taken into consideration.

3. Assessment and Reporting

- 3.1 Communication through a variety of methods (conferences, written reports, newsletters, *etc.*) must be available to all parents/legal guardians of kindergarten children on a regular basis. This will encourage parents/legal guardians to support their children in the learning process. A close working relationship between the parent/legal guardian and the teacher can only enhance the development of the child.
- 3.2 Assessment occurs as an ongoing component of day-to-day programming in the classroom and reporting periods follow the same schedule as that in the school where the kindergarten is located.
- 3.3 Children with mild, moderate or severe special needs, as well as, those identified gifted and talented will receive a written evaluation through the Learner Support Plan (LSP) in addition to their regular progress report and opportunities for parent/teacher conferences and points of contact.

4. Early Childhood Special Education

- 4.1 The District is committed to the planning and delivery of high quality special education supports and services that will allow individual children with special education needs to maximize their learning and achievement within an optimal learning environment. In this context special education refers to the education of children with mild, moderate or severe disabilities/delays and/or those who are gifted and talented as determined by Alberta Education's Special Education Coding Criteria.
- 4.2 In the District, consistent with Alberta Education mandates, an inclusive setting is the placement option for developmentally appropriate programming for children with special education needs. Developmentally appropriate programming is educational programming that is based on knowledge of child development and understanding of individual children's growth patterns, strengths, interests and experiences. An inclusive setting refers to specially designed instruction and support that occurs in regular classrooms and neighbourhood schools. Consistent with provincial special education standards, decisions with respect to programming for a child with special education needs is done in consultation with parents/legal guardians and, when appropriate, the child. When a child is identified as having special education needs a LSP, based upon diagnostic information and assessment, is developed. It is this LSP, not the setting in which the program is delivered, that defines the program required to meet a child's special education needs. The development of a LSP is a collaborative venture undertaken by the child's Diverse Learning Team to address the child's special education needs. As outlined in provincial documents, this Diverse Learning Team

includes, but is not limited to, a certificated teacher(s), the parents/legal guardians, the child (where appropriate), other District staff and others as required.

- 4.3 Within the parameters outlined in these documents, the District plans and delivers special education instructional programming that may include the following elements: identification, referrals, informed consent, specialized assessment and educational assistants. In many cases the District collaborates with members of the community and provides opportunities for parents/legal guardians to appeal if they are dissatisfied with their child's program.
- 4.4 Regardless of the setting in which a child's special education needs are met, LSPs must provide the basis for intervention strategies. The LSP is an ongoing record of the development, communication and evaluation of program strategies, instructional goals and child progress in relation to these appropriate and articulated goals.
- 4.5 All District schools shall have access to a range of services and supports that facilitate successful learning for children with special education needs within the context of available resources. The capacity of the District to design and implement a range of services, supports and programs is directly linked to, and reflective of, Alberta Education's resource allocation for public education.
- 4.6 The District shall use the Alberta Education's special education coding criteria to determine whether a child has a disabling condition/delay or is gifted and talented. This coding criteria is a description of characteristics used to identify the special education needs of children in one or more of the following areas:
 - 4.6.1 Physical/Medical;
 - 4.6.2 Behavioural/Emotional;
 - 4.6.3 Communicational;
 - 4.6.4 Cognitive/Intellectual;
 - 4.6.5 Academic.
- 4.7 When the classroom teacher identifies a child with potential special education needs, the principal shall access, as applicable, the School Resource Team (SRT) to address this need and to explore appropriate and reasonable supports, services and programming to meet these learning needs.
- 4.8 Consistent with Alberta Education requirements the District requires that information gathered from school-based screening, teacher assessment and observation, parent/legal guardian information and previous history be utilized to determine the developmental and special education needs of young children and to develop and provide appropriate program support. In cases where school staff in consultation with other District staff and/or specialists, believes that a child is eligible for coding according to Alberta Education criteria or is in need of specialized assessment and/or programming, the principal must access the support of the District's Instructional Services Diverse Learning Team.
- 4.9 Appropriate school or Instructional Services personnel must obtain parent/legal guardian informed written consent for specialized assessment. Informed consent is

required for District personnel to share information about a child with special education needs from or with another agency or person(s).

4.9.1 “Informed consent” means the individual:

4.9.1.1 Has been provided with all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought;

4.9.1.2 Understands and agrees, in writing, to the carrying out of the activity for which the informed consent is sought;

4.9.1.3 Understands the granting of consent is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time.

4.10 When a parent/legal guardian denies or withdraws consent for a specialized assessment for a child, this must be documented with an explanation of the process followed to obtain consent. This documentation will be placed in the child’s cumulative record file.

4.11 The District shall ensure qualified persons identify appropriate timing and type of assessments required in order to determine suitable educational goals, instructional strategies, services and programming to support the child. When specialized assessment occurs, only those individuals/staff qualified to provide an interpretation shall interpret the results to parents/legal guardians, and/or others involved with the child’s program, the assessment results and any related programming recommendations.

4.12 While teacher engagement is one of the most important contributors to the success of children with special education needs, additional support from educational assistants allows a classroom teacher to increase efficiency and effectiveness in their work with children with special education needs. Educational assistants, allocated by the District, are an additional adult support based on the overall learning and behaviour needs of each classroom rather than on disabling labels or codes. Educational assistants must work under the direction and supervision of a certificated teacher, while performing duties such as:

4.12.1 Specific tasks related to the child’s disability, directly supporting the learning environment of a child with special education needs;

4.12.2 Working with a group of children which includes the child with special education needs;

4.12.3 Working with a group of other children while the child with special education needs is meaningfully engaged in an activity;

4.12.4 Working with a group of children or the class while the teacher works with the child with special education needs and/or other children.

4.13 Principals must ensure appropriate assignments of educational assistants and must work with Instructional Services staff to provide effective training.

4.14 The District shall work with members of the community to meet the special education needs of children, including children and their families, community agencies, organizations and associations, other education authorities, regional health and children’s services authorities to the extent that the school community is in alignment

with District procedures and practices. The provision of coordinated services through contracted arrangements and agreements requires informed consent from parents/legal guardians. The District shall take an active role to initiate or to participate in collaborating with these members of the community, to improve educational and/or health-related services for children with special education needs.

- 4.15 As outlined in the *Education Act*, parents/legal guardians have access to an appeal process in relation to their child's instructional programming. This process, outlined in the Administrative Procedure 390, must be provided to parents/legal guardians when they indicate dissatisfaction or concerns about the programming for their child as part of the problem-solving process.

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Reference: *Education Act*, SA 2012, c E-0.3, ss 3, 21, 41-3
Early Childhood Services Regulation, AR 86/2019
Alberta Education: Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12
Alberta Education: Kindergarten Program Statement (2008)
Alberta Education: Standards for Special Education (June 2004)
Alberta Education: Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education (September 2006)
Alberta Education: Funding Manual