

## EARLY LEARNING SERVICES

### **Background:**

Research confirms the early years of a child's life are the most critical period in development. Early childhood development sets the course for a child's future and shapes the brain in ways that impact lifelong learning, behaviour, health and quality of life. Getting a positive start is key to a successful future.

Early Learning in Elk Island Public Schools supports children in reaching emotional, social, intellectual and physical developmental milestones in inclusive, play-based, language-rich and literacy-rich learning environments. It supports school readiness and prepares children for their transition to Grade 1. It focuses on the identification and implementation of best practices that align with early learning pedagogy. Early Learning supports equitable opportunities for children to participate in early learning experiences, including early intervention.

The Division enrolls children in Early Learning programming based on the *Education Act* and Alberta Education funding criteria.

### **Definitions:**

#### **Centre-based Programming:**

refers to the instructional programming hours developed and overseen by a certificated teacher in a school setting.

#### **Child with a Disability/Delay:**

refers to a child assessed and identified with a mild, moderate or severe disability/delay, as defined by Alberta Education's Special Education Coding Criteria.

#### **Developmentally Immature Child:**

refers to a child enrolled in a kindergarten program for a second year because the parent and the school agree a kindergarten program is the most appropriate placement for the child. The child must be less than seven years old on September 1 of that school year and not previously coded as a child with special education needs.

#### **Early Intervention Services:**

refers to educational programming for children prior to kindergarten, including both PALS.

#### **Early Learning:**

refers to a continuum of inclusive, play-based programming that is developmentally appropriate and meets the diverse needs of young children and their families. Early years programming includes early intervention (pre-kindergarten) as well as kindergarten programming.

**Individualized Program Plan (IPP) or Instructional Support Plan (ISP):**

is a statement of intentions developed to address the child’s learning needs and is based on individual assessments that help identify the level and types of instructional strategies and supports the child requires. An IPP or ISP is mandatory for all children identified as requiring specialized supports and services, including mild, moderate and severe disabilities/delays, and those who are gifted and require enrichment.

**Kindergarten:**

refers specifically to the education program for children in the year prior to Grade 1.

**Play and Learn at School (PALS) Program:**

is an early intervention program for children age two years, eight months to four years, eight months (as of September 1 in the year they register) with severe or mild/moderate disabilities/delays. Programming occurs through centre-based programming. PALS offers an enhanced support team that includes teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, educational assistants and inclusive learning consultants.

**Program Unit Funding (PUF):**

is provided by Alberta Education to school authorities for Early Learning for children with severe disabilities/delays who require additional support beyond that offered in a regular program. Funding is provided for individualized programming that meets the educational needs of children with severe disabilities/delays who are older than two years, eight months of age and younger than four years, eight months of age on September 1. PUF may be accessed for a maximum of two years for each eligible child.

**Procedures:**

1. Early Intervention Services

- 1.1. Enrolment in Early Intervention Services is voluntary.
- 1.2. Early Intervention Services are co-ordinated centrally and offered through the Play and Learn at School (PALS) program. Children with severe disabilities/delays are eligible for centre-based early intervention programming (PALS) if they are older than two years, eight months and less than four years, eight months as of September 1 of that school year.
- 1.3. The guiding principles within the [Early Years Framework](#) are the basis for all early intervention services programming.

2. Kindergarten

- 2.1. Enrolment in kindergarten is voluntary.
- 2.2. A child is eligible to enrol in kindergarten if the child will be between four years, eight months old and six years old as of September 1 of that school year.
- 2.3. Kindergarten programming will provide a minimum of 475 instructional hours during a school year. For individual children, modification to these hours, based on the child’s developmental level and educational needs, is possible.

- 2.4. A child who is at least six years old but less than seven years old on September 1 may enrol in kindergarten if the child is developmentally immature or is entering a kindergarten program for the first time.
- 2.5. The guiding principles within the [New LearnAlberta | Alberta's K-6 Curriculum](#) are the basis for all kindergarten programs.
- 2.6. A decision to enrol a child in a kindergarten program for more than one year will be made jointly by the teacher and principal, in consultation with the parent/guardian.
3. A child whose parent(s) or guardian(s) live(s) within the boundaries of the Division is eligible to enrol in Grade 1 if the child will be six years old on or before December 31 of that school year.
4. Any exceptions to school entrance into kindergarten or Grade 1 must be approved by the Superintendent or designate.

**Reference:**

Section 3, 21, 52, 53, 222 *Education Act*  
Early Childhood Services Regulation 87/2019  
Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12  
Alberta Education Inclusive Education Policy (2015)  
Funding Manual for School Authorities  
Standards for Special Education  
Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education  
Alberta Education ECS Fact Sheets  
Early Years Framework