

MEMORANDUM

PARKLAND SCHOOL DIVISION	February 13, 2024 Regular Board Meeting
то	Board of Trustees
FROM	Shauna Boyce, Superintendent
ORIGINATOR	Dr. Meg Miskolzie, Associate Superintendent, Student Supports and Services
RESOURCE	Bryn Spence, Division Principal, Student Services Christine Ross, Division Principal, Wellness and Community Partnerships
GOVERNANCE POLICY	Board Policy 1: Division Foundational Statements Board Policy 2: Role of the Board Board Policy 12: Role of the Superintendent
ADDITIONAL REFERENCE	Administrative Procedure 210: Inclusive Education Administrative Procedure 220: Early Childhood Development and Services Education Act
SUBJECT	STUDENT SERVICES REPORT - Kindergarten to Grade 12

PURPOSE

For information. No recommendation required.

BACKGROUND

The Board of Trustees reviews and approves the annual educational goals for Parkland School Division and provides a continuum of support and services to students. This report is in support of these responsibilities.

REPORT SUMMARY

The Student Services report highlights the various ways in which the Student Services team supports schools and coordinates resources to provide an inclusive, safe, supportive, academic learning environment that serves the needs of a diverse population of students throughout the school division. This collaborative approach supports the goal of a seamless integration of support and services for children enrolled in both Early Education programming and students in Kindergarten to Grade 12. Existing supports are reviewed, as well as areas of focus, and future directions.

Administration would be pleased to respond to any questions.

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Student Services Report February 2024



Presented to the Board of Trustees, February 13, 2024 Dr. Meg Miskolzie, Associate Superintendent, Student Supports and Services Resources: Bryn Spence, Division Principal, Student Services Christine Ross, Division Principal, Wellness and Community Partnerships

Our Students Possess the confidence, resilience, insight and skills required to thrive in, and positively impact, the world.

BACKGROUND

Specific to Student Services, The *Education Act* outlines the Board responsibilities 33(1) as follows: A board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to

- (a) deliver appropriate education programming to meet the needs of all students enrolled in a school operated by the board and to enable their success,
- (d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging,
- (e) provide a continuum of supports and services to students that is consistent with the principles of inclusive education,
- (f) collaborate with municipalities, other boards and community-based service agencies in order to effectively address the needs of all students and manage the use of public resources.

The vision for Student Learning in Alberta, as per the Ministerial Order on Student Learning, is that "Students will gain the knowledge and skills to form the foundations for successful and fulfilling lives, and make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world".

In addition to the *Education Act* and the Ministerial Order on Student Learning we are guided by the Standards for Special Education (2004) and the *6 principles of Inclusive Education* as per Alberta Education:

- Anticipate, value and support diversity and learner differences
- High expectations for all learners
- Understand learners' strengths and needs
- Remove barriers within learning environments
- Build capacity
- Collaborate for success.

In 2022, Alberta Education released <u>Implementing a Continuum of Supports and Services A Resource Guide for</u> <u>School and School Authority Leaders</u>, which provides support in the delivery of an inclusive education system.

PARKLAND SCHOOL DIVISION

Administrative Procedure 210: Inclusive Education states:

An inclusive education system is one that demonstrates behaviours and decisions that reflect valuing all students. Within an inclusive education system all students experience the most appropriate learning environments and opportunities to best achieve success. Each student belongs and receives a quality education no matter his/her ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender or age. The success of inclusive education programming relies on the engagement, collaboration and involvement of students, parents, staff and community.

Administrative Procedure 220: Early Childhood Development And Services states:

Early Childhood Programs utilize a continuum of programming that is developmentally appropriate and meets the diverse needs of young children and their families. A play-based learning environment shall exist as the standard that guides program development and delivery.

Historically, administration has opted to present Early Childhood Services (encompassing Early Education and Kindergarten) independently from School-aged Student Services when reporting to the Board. As the province progresses toward a Continuum of Supports and Services, it is appropriate to consolidate these reports. This approach will more effectively illustrate the overarching objective of facilitating a seamless transition for students and their families from Early Childhood services to School-Age services.

While this report emphasizes the objective of establishing smoother transitions for students, it is crucial to note that the following categories are defined as outlined below:

- Early Education: Preschool-aged children with identified needs are served in an Early Education (EE) program by the school authority, accessing Program Unit Funding (PUF). To be eligible for a maximum of two years of PUF, children must enter EE at minimum 2 years 8 months and less than 4 years 8 months of age. Those aged 2 years 8 months to 3 years 7 months require a minimum of 300 hours, and those aged 3 years 8 months to 4 years 7 months require a minimum of 400 hours to meet the PUF requirements.
- **Kindergarten:** Kindergarten (K) specifically refers to the education program for children in the year prior to Grade 1 and is an integral part of Early Childhood Services (ECS). Children with identified needs in Kindergarten are eligible for services by accessing the SLS (Student Learner Support) Grant.
- School-Aged: School-aged refers to the education program for students in Grades 1 through 12. Children with identified needs in Grades 1-12 are eligible for services by accessing Divisional allocations.

Early Education and Student Services Funding

For the 2023-2024 school year, students who are eligible under Alberta Education's Special Education Criteria, are funded in the following ways:

Early Education & Kindergarten Funding- per child allocation:

-Early Education: Program Unit Funding (PUF) Grant

-Kindergarten: Specialized Learning Support (SLS) Grant

- Base: Mild/Moderate (Code 30): \$3,246.06 (6% increase)
- Moderate Language (48): \$4,400 (10% increase)
- Severe (Code 41-46): \$16,500 (10% increase)
- Severe Language (Code 47): \$11,000 (10% increase)

(Note: 10% of code 47 students funded at the same rate as other severe codes) *Using Weighted Moving Average (WMA), with the exception of student identified as code 48

School-Aged Specialized Learning Support:

Unlike Early Education and Kindergarten, students in Grades 1 through 12 do not access additional funding based on identified diagnosis or delays. Instead, funding is provided for the entire school jurisdiction, with the expectation of providing a continuum of support and services to children/students in an inclusive learning environment. The Division is then responsible for ensuring the funding is disbursed to support student needs. The Student Supports and Services Department disburses funds to schools via two primary channels: through an Inclusion per student allocation, which is determined by student enrollment numbers, and via an identified student allocation. A portion of the allocated funding is reserved to maintain a continuum of support and services, which includes personnel dedicated to assisting students with complex learning needs.

Jordan's Principle Funding:

In adherence to Jordan's Principle, PSD collaborates to provide essential support for Indigenous students exhibiting needs beyond typical school resources. The funding encompasses a broad spectrum of health, social, and educational requirements. Upon identifying a student's needs and consulting with parents/guardians, School Administrators and/or Inclusive Education Leads work in tandem with the Student Services Department to facilitate Jordan's Principle referrals. This meticulous process ensures that all referrals align with the intent of Jordan's Principle, streamlining financial and reporting obligations.

Historically, PSD has submitted individual requests for students attending our schools. However, a significant change this year involved Jordan's Principle transitioning to a grouped request stream. It is now preferred that school divisions submit a consolidated request, specifying individual needs, necessitating a centralized approach. Notably, PSD has consistently managed Jordan's Principle funding through a central process overseen by Student Services. This strategic alignment with our centralized submission process will facilitate a seamless transition to the new funding model, reinforcing our commitment to efficiently address the needs of identified Indigenous students.

Our Students

Our Division values diversity and the unique contributions that each student brings to the classroom. Capturing diverse learning needs quantitatively is challenging, as diagnoses and learning needs are only one factor in each student's learning profile.

Identified Student Needs by School

The graph below shows the distribution of students with identified needs across various schools. In instances where students meet the criteria for multiple diagnosis/codes, the graph represents the diagnosis/coding considered most significant. Schools hosting specialized programs are highlighted, contributing as a distinctive factor influencing student needs at each respective site.



Individual Identified Student Needs

The code summaries listed on the following page provides insight into the number of Early Education and Kindergarten to Grade 12 students with identified diagnoses and learning needs within the Division as of the conclusion of the 2022-2023 school year (June 2023) and the current identified needs as of February 2024. It is crucial to approach the interpretation of these charts with caution, recognizing that the data presented does not fully capture the dynamic nature of student diagnosis and need.

Key Considerations:

• The overall identified student population has grown from 13.2% to 14.7% since June 2023. This increase is partly attributable to diagnoses obtained through the specialized assessment grant, in which numerous students underwent assessments funded by Alberta Education (refer to the Highlights section of this report for additional information). In particular, the growth in students identified with severe emotional/ behavioural needs has likely been captured through these assessments. Growth is also attributed to an influx of new students to the division, many from out of province and with significant learning needs.

Total Identified Student Population (Early Education to Grade 12)



*Note: Some students have multiple diagnoses and needs, resulting in multiple codes and multiple supports required.

- The most substantial increase in need has been observed in students diagnosed with severe needs, particularly those with severe physical/medical disabilities, which grew from 367 students to 411 students this year. This growth cannot be solely attributed to the specialized assessments conducted through Alberta Education's grant, as students with this level of need may not necessarily require an assessment of this type to warrant a diagnosis.
- The quantity and distribution of students diagnosed with mild to moderate needs has remained consistent with Divisional growth from the previous year to the current year.
- Within PSD there are presently 683 students identified with a Specific Learning Disability, constituting the largest overall group of student needs within the Division.
- Note: the increase in ECS severe codings on the following page requires contextual understanding during interpretation. This coding encompasses students in Early Education and Kindergarten. Many Kindergarten students will undergo code reassignments in June as they prepare to transition to Grade 1, altering the student coding and transitioning to other areas reflected in the graphs. This accounts for the perception of growth in these codes for the first half of the school year, and a subsequent shift to lower numbers of these codes in June of every school year.

PSD Specialized Programs

As outlined in *AP 210: Inclusive Education*, the Division ensures that community schools are the first choice in placement decisions for students, and that students are at the center of all decisions related to their learning. The majority of our students with identified learning needs are served within their community schools. Through collaboration between school staff, parent(s)/guardian(s), and Student Services staff some students benefit from the services and support available within the following specialized programs:

- 1. Early Education (*Currently 138 students enrolled within 12 classrooms at Brookwood, Broxton Park, Westview, and High Park, as well as at 2 daycare/playschool sites*): The Early Education Program operates four mornings or afternoons per week, providing play-based learning enriched with specialized supports to the following children:
 - children aged 2 years 8 months to 4 years 8 months with an identified severe delay or diagnosis.
 - children aged 3 years 8 months to 4 years 8 months with an identified mild to moderate delay.
 - PSD continues to offer *Play Partners* as an option for Early Education students who are not eligible for Alberta Education funding, where space and resources allow. *Play Partners* allows for high quality, inclusive programming for children in the community who do not have identified special education needs, and as an added benefit are language models for our students with identified speech needs. There is currently no criteria for the selection process required for *Play Partners*, as children access the program for a fee.

More information can be found about the Early Education program on the <u>PSD website</u>.

Annual Program Highlight: While 300 hour and 400 program hours are a requirement for 3 and 4 year olds they are a minimum number of hours. This year we are providing 422 hours to children who are 3 years old and in their first year of services and 506 program hours to children who are 4 years old in their second year of service. These additional hours provide increased access to programming for children and families, and allow us to continue to accept students up to mid-November and still access the full Program Unit Funding (PUF) grant. This was very helpful this year as we had an influx of children who were identified and registered after September 30th, but before the deadline in November.

Relating Everyday Academics & Life Skills (REAL) Program (Currently 39 students enrolled within 4 classrooms at Ecole Broxton Park): The REAL classroom provides an alternate classroom program for students with moderate to severe cognitive delays. More information can be found about the REAL program on the <u>PSD website</u>.

Annual Program Highlight: A fourth classroom was added this school year due to increased interest from families, with the program growing from 30 to 39 students.

3. Life, Academic, and Work Skills (LAWS) Program (*Currently 49 students enrolled within 4 classrooms 2 classrooms at SGCHS and 2 classrooms at MCHS*): The LAWS program provides an alternative non-credited classroom program for students with mild/moderate to severe cognitive delays and a significant impact on their adaptive functioning for students in grade 10-12. More information can be found about the LAWS program on the <u>PSD website</u>.

Annual Program Highlight - In previous years, the High Schools remained open to students enrolled in the LAWS program during the school-wide exam week at the end of each term, but closed to students for several days throughout the school year to allow for staff professional learning and program planning needs. Beginning this year, the LAWS schedule was adjusted to move these days to fall during the exam breaks, allowing for 3 days per semester, plus the transition/year end dates. This shift has allowed for LAWS students calendars to align more closely to their High School peers, while also allowing them to access additional programming time during the exam breaks. The 3 days per semester allow for LAWS team meetings at each site to review programming for students and overall program goals and also allows for collaboration between SGCHS and MCHS teams. Dates are also used to support transition planning with the REAL program and other feeder schools and allows time to connect with Off-Campus Coordinators to explore work placement opportunities for LAWS students.

4. STEPS Program (Currently 47 students enrolled in 5 classrooms - 1 classroom at Forest Green, 2 classrooms at Westview, and 2 classroom at Woodhaven): The STEPS Program is a transitional program for students with mental health needs who exhibit internalizing behaviours (e.g. fearfulness, social withdrawal, nervousness, etc.) and/or externalizing behaviours (e.g. physical aggression, defiance, relational aggression, etc.) that significantly impact_their ability to achieve personal success in a typical classroom within their community school. A contracted AHS Mental Health Nurse supports staff, students, and families in the program. More information can be found about the STEPS program on the PSD website. Intended Program Outcome: The intended outcome of this program is to support students in gaining the skills needed to successfully step back into their community school and classroom. Last year we had 5 students transition from the specialized classrooms back into typical classrooms. We are currently in the process of transitioning 15 students back to typical programming for varying times depending on student need.

Annual Program Highlights: A new addition to the STEPS program at Woodhaven School includes a grade 5-6 classroom, complementing the existing grade 7-9 program. This expansion addresses a significant logistical challenge by providing a local solution. Previously, transporting students in grade 6 or below from Spruce Grove to Stony Plain strained existing transportation resources. The inclusion of a local option not only eases the burden on transportation but also improves accessibility for families in Spruce Grove. This expansion underscores the program's dedication to adapting to the evolving needs of students and the community at large.

Students Services Staff and Supports

Supporting children with identified needs, alongside their families, is a team effort, requiring a comprehensive continuum of supports and services. In addition to supporting classroom-based teams at all of our school sites, Student Supports and Services offers support through several specialized programs including Early Education, REAL, LAWS, and STEPS at sites across the division. **The team is composed of both staffed and contracted supports, and includes:**

Staffed Supports:

- Classroom teachers
- School Administrators and Inclusive Education Leads
- Educational Assistants (EAs)
- Early Education Facilitator
- Complex Needs Facilitators (K-12)
- Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs)
- Speech-Language Assistants (SLPAs)
- Occupational Therapists (OTs)
- Family Support Workers
- Division Psychologist
- Mental Health Nurse

Contracted Supports:

- Physical Therapy
- Educational Psychology
- Blind/Low Vision
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Additional SLP time for assessments and individualized services
- Behavioural Consultant

Key Staffing and Support Shifts:

- We have increased SLP services to serve students by adding additional contracted services to address the increase in needs over and above what our current staffing can support.
- We have increased the amount of support from Educational Psychology in both Early Education and Kindergarten to support the significant increase in students with Autism and social-emotional challenges.
- Family Support Workers now provide support to students and families in Early Education to Grade 12. In previous years Early Education and Kindergarten had a separate family support model from students in Grades 1-12. Aligning these supports had allowed for continuity in services for families and schools.
- Through a partnership with Alberta Health Services, we increased our Mental Health Nurse position from 0.22 FTE to a full-time role this school year. This has led to increased support for students facing significant mental health needs across the division, with a primary focus on supporting students within the STEPS program. The Mental Health Nurse plays a pivotal role as a link between health practitioners and schools, fostering improved communication and collaboration. This ensures that pertinent information about students' mental health is shared between healthcare professionals and school staff. This collaborative approach has contributed to more comprehensive and coordinated support, enhancing our ability to provide timely assistance for students in need.

Restructuring of Student Services Facilitators

As the identified student population within the Division continues to expand, a reassessment of the Student Services Facilitator model became imperative to effectively allocate our existing resources in response to the growing needs. In our previous model, schools could access support from up to four Facilitators, each specializing in different areas (Complex Needs, Social-Emotional, Kindergarten, and Early Education). However, this model presented several challenges with a growing Division:

- Difficulty in building relationships between school staff and Facilitators due to the geographic spread of caseloads,
- Substantial travel time for some Facilitators,
- Transitions between Kindergarten and Grade 1, despite being intentionally planned, necessitated a change in Facilitator even if the student remained at the same school site, and
- Challenges in succession planning due to the specialized focus of Facilitators.

Following engagement with school teams, a new Facilitator model was introduced this school year. This revised model maintains a Facilitator dedicated to Early Education but introduces changes in the delivery of Division-level support to schools spanning Kindergarten through Grade 12. Within this new model, Complex Needs Facilitators now support students at 4 to 5 assigned school sites, reducing travel time and optimizing existing resources.

2022-2023 Facilitator Model - 6.0 FTE	2023-2024 Facilitator Model - 6.0 FTE
 Early Education Facilitator - 4 sites Kindergarten Facilitator - 17 schools Complex Needs Facilitator (Gr 1-12) - 11 schools Complex Needs Facilitator (Gr 1-12) - 11 schools Social Emotional Facilitator (Gr 1-12)- 19 schools Social Emotional Facilitator (Gr 1-12)- 3 schools + STEPS Programs 	 Early Education Facilitator - 4 sites 5 x Complex Needs Facilitators (K-12), each supporting students with complex and social-emotional needs at 4 to 5 schools

Impacts of this model restructure include:

- Enhanced Service Delivery: Feedback from School Administrators and Inclusive Education Leads highlights positive impacts on support services for students. With a more focused allocation of facilitators, there is an increased capacity to develop a comprehensive understanding of individual students. Facilitators work closely with educators and support staff to tailor interventions, accommodations, and strategies to meet the unique needs of each student, contributing to personalized learning experiences.
- Seamless Transitions: The new model facilitates smooth transitions between Kindergarten and Grade 1, as well as transitions between multiple schools. This ensures a more cohesive and supportive experience for students during critical educational phases.
- Promotion of Sustainability and Succession Planning: This restructure was designed to promote sustainability and succession planning. Each Facilitator's school assignment now incorporates a wide range of school grades and demographics and a minimum of one specialized program, contributing to a more robust and adaptable support system.

These strategic changes are aimed at addressing the identified challenges and enhancing the overall effectiveness of our Student Services Facilitator model.

Highlights

Inclusive Education Parent and Community Advisory Panel

The Inclusive Education Parent and Community Advisory Panel (IPAC) is a mechanism for ensuring continuing involvement of parent and community members in the operational aspects of inclusion within PSD. This Panel allows for dialogue between PSD Administration and panel members, relating to PSD procedures and operational practices regarding inclusive education and helps the Division strengthen our inclusive education system. The Panel includes 7 parents this year, increased from 6 parents last year, as well as the Associate Superintendent of Student and Support Services and the Division Principal of Student Services. IPAC has held three meetings to date this school year, with advisory conversations focused on:

- Inclusive Playgrounds
- Access to High School CTS Courses for students enrolled in LAWS
- Student Mental Health/Well-Being

Student Record Digitization & Divisional Code Review

Four years ago, in line with Alberta Education's directive, PSD initiated the digitization of student cumulative files, a complex undertaking demanding substantial time and attention for meticulous review, scanning, and secure storage before uploading to the provincial database (PASI). During the latter part of the 2022-2023 school year, Student Services staff systematically visited schools, ensuring the completion of this digitization process adhered to Division and Provincial guidelines.

Simultaneously, the Student Services team conducted a code review for all students with identified needs across the Division. Collaborating with school-based Inclusive Education Leads, the Complex Needs Facilitator reviewed student needs and documentation. An identified concern was that the provincial information system (PASI) only allows for one code (excluding gifted codes) per student, despite instances where students qualify for multiple codes. In collaboration with Technology Services we were able to implement a system where it is now possible for a secondary code to be assigned internally. This addition allows us to more accurately capture diverse student needs, enhancing both divisional and site based pictures of student needs. Access to accurate and comprehensive data has empowered informed decision-making at both levels, aiding administrators in resource allocation and targeted professional development implementation.

Provincial Specialized Assessment Program

To address challenges related to accessing specialized assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberta Education implemented a program to provide assessments to students who had not been able to access this support as a result of the pandemic. Through this process, school based IELs identified students who met the criteria set out by the province for consideration through this program. PSD submitted and received approval for a total of 270 student assessments, with a predominant focus on Psychological assessments. The assessments took place in the latter half of the 2022-2023 school year, but due to professional shortages across the province, some were deferred and completed in the fall of the 2023-24 school year. As of now, all approved assessments in PSD have been conducted and debriefed.

The process for application, coordination and debriefing assessments was a significant undertaking for schools and the Student Services Department; however, we are grateful for the valuable insights these assessments have provided into the learning needs of individual students. This information plays a pivotal role in shaping programming and enhancing our ability to address the unique needs of each student.

Supporting Students with Significant Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Learning Disabilities

In response to our increase in students identified with severe coding (including significant ASD) as well as our high number of students identified with Learning Disabilities across the division, we are ensuring staff have opportunities to increase their skills and knowledge in supporting students with these needs. Supports this year have included:

- In November, Complex Needs Facilitators and Early Education teachers attended *Success with Autism: Developing Different Minds, Talents and Thinking,* a PD session presented by Temple Grandin.
- Kindergarten staff, including teachers and Educational Assistants, received a professional learning session during aKindergarten PD Day, from a Psychologist regarding supporting students with ASD within a Kindergarten setting.
- This month, 54 staff from across the division virtually attended the *16th Annual Autism Conference* offered by Children's Autism Services of Edmonton. This included school staff, Inclusive Education Leads, Therapists, and Complex Needs Facilitators.
- PSD partnered with the *Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta* to deliver a series of 4 sessions focused on providing support for students with Learning Disabilities within the classroom environment. These sessions were recorded and are available for schools to use with staff to build staff capacity in meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities and/or planning for support.

PUF/SLS Verification Process (Audit):

Alberta Education reviews PUF/SLS submissions in depth to ensure students meet the criteria for funding for first year registrations. Submissions are due to Alberta Education in January of each school year.

- In the 2023-2024 school year, Alberta Education reviewed first year registrations for students that PSD had identified as being eligible for PUF/SLS funding. In addition, they sampled 20% of PSD's December 1, 2022 PUF registrations for codes 41, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 47 and 100% of PUF registrations for codes 42 and 48.
- 56 Files were submitted for verification this year, up from 52 from last year. This Alberta Education compliance measure is an annual labor intensive 6-week process for the Early Education and Student Services team, limiting services to students during the verification time frame.

Moving Forward

Aligned Therapy Support Model

The restructuring of the Complex Needs Facilitator (CNF) model this school year has emphasized the need to align our therapy service delivery within the division. Clear feedback from schools has indicated that the transition to a unified K-12 model has strengthened relationships, reduced support wait times, minimized meetings, and improved transitions between Kindergarten and Grade 1. While our current therapy support approach was effective in a smaller division, operational and implementation challenges have emerged as our division expands. Currently, there are two distinct therapy teams—one for Early Education and Kindergarten, and another for Grades 1-12. Over the remainder of the 2023-2024 school year, the Student Services Department will work to better align our therapy model with the Complex Needs Facilitator model. The objective of this planned restructuring is to optimize the use of our current divisional resources and establish a framework capable of meeting the evolving needs of a growing student population presenting increasing complexity.

Community Preschools and Daycares

The Early Learning team will continue to explore community preschool options to partner with to serve 3 and 4 year old children with identified needs in their community preschools who meet the minimum hour requirements and based on parent request for next year. This school year we supported children at Pembina Playschool and Bright Horizon Daycare.

Updated Standards for Inclusive Education:

We continue to await the release of the Standards for Inclusive Education. The current Standards for Special Education were last amended in 2004, and we have learned a great deal since then on what quality inclusive programming looks like. In the interim, Alberta Education has released the following Resource Guide for School and School Authority Leaders, designed to provide context and operational support for inclusive education systems: Implementing a Continuum of Supports and Services.