

Early Childhood Services Programming for Children with Special Education Needs

What is early childhood services (ECS) programming for children with special needs?

Early Childhood Services (ECS) programming for children with special education needs is programming based on a combined set of individually and developmentally appropriate practices. School authorities use the following guiding principles, which are outlined in Education's [Kindergarten Program Statement](#) when working with children:

- childhoods differ depending on social and cultural circumstances;
 - children's development is influenced but not determined by their early experiences;
 - children interact and learn in a variety of contexts;
 - children are co-constructors of knowledge and partners in learning;
 - children are unique and active contributors to their learning;
 - children construct and represent knowledge in a variety of ways;
 - children are citizens and active participants in school and society;
 - children are active collaborators in and users of assessment;
- children may require specialized programming and supports to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that engage them in their learning; and
 - children and their families may need co-ordinated community services to meet their needs.

Who is eligible for programming?

Children with special education needs who are enrolled in an ECS program are entitled to educational programming in accordance with the [Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12](#). Eligible children for whom programming is requested have access to developmentally and individually appropriate programs that facilitate and enhance learning.

Family-oriented decision making

Appropriate educational programming for young children with special education needs draws on the knowledge and expertise of children's parents and the understanding that a parent's primary role is nurturing and care giving.

School authorities work with families to provide appropriate educational programming for young children with special education needs while respecting family differences and building on family strengths.

It is the responsibility of the educator to clearly communicate with family members and take into account differences in linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. Family routines, rituals and beliefs should be considered when planning activities that require direct family involvement.

Settings and levels of programming for children with special education needs

Appropriate educational programming is based on meeting a child's educational needs within the most enabling environments. For children with special education needs, school authorities should allow for flexibility in settings, and the number of centre-based hours and family-oriented programming sessions.

Educational programming should be provided in natural settings to the greatest extent possible. Regardless of the setting, educational programming for ECS children with special education needs varies in the number of hours provided, based on the children's needs and developmental levels and taking into account parental preferences and local resources.

Centre-based programming

Centre-based programming refers to instructional program hours. Flexibility within an ECS program allows for centre-based programming to be delivered in a school or community setting. Education expects a certificated teacher to be directly involved with the centre-based programming hours. When planning centre-based programming for a child, ECS operators should ensure the number of programming hours does not exceed what is appropriate for the child's age and developmental level.

Family-oriented programming sessions

Very young children who require extensive programming may benefit from family-oriented programming sessions, which are individually planned, developmentally appropriate intervention for children with severe disabilities/delays and their families.

Program Unit Funding (PUF)

Program Unit Funding (PUF) is provided to school authorities for ECS children with severe disabilities/delays who require additional support beyond that offered in a regular ECS program. Funding is provided for individualized programming that meets the educational needs of children with severe disabilities/delays who are at least 2 years, 8 months of age and less than 6 years of age on September 1. ECS funding may be accessed for a maximum of three years for each eligible child.

In providing the most enabling educational environment possible, ECS operators are encouraged to consider models other than direct one-on-one assistance including:

- focused intervention in a small group;
- strategic use of educational assistant time;
- peer-model instruction;
- environmental supports (e.g., visual schedules, well-established routines, warnings of transition, visual cues, adapted furniture, use of physical boundaries to define space); and
- embedding Individualized Program Plan (IPP) goals in ongoing routines and activities.

Individualized Program Plan (IPP)

The IPP is a concise plan of action designed to address a child's education needs and is based on diagnostic assessment information that provides the basis for intervention strategies. The IPP is a working document for teachers, parents and other personnel involved in providing educational programming for the child. An IPP includes the following essential information:

- assessment level;
- current level of performance and, where appropriate, level of achievement relative to age-appropriate learning expectations outlined in the [Kindergarten Program Statement](#);
- identification of strengths and areas of need;
- level of programming and settings where programming will take place;
- measurable goals and objectives;
- procedures for evaluating the child's progress;
- identification of co-ordinated support services (including health-related), if required;
- relevant medical information;
- strategies, including accommodations and necessary instructional modifications;
- transition plans;
- formal review of progress at regularly scheduled reporting periods; and
- year-end summary.

Children with mild/moderate disabilities/ delays and those who are gifted and talented

Funding is also provided for individualized programming that meets the education needs of children with identified mild/moderate disabilities/delays or those who are gifted and talented, who are 3 years 8 months of age and less than 6 years of age on September 1. ECS programming is available through school authorities and approved private ECS operators in Alberta.

When a child with special education needs attends an ECS program, the teachers, parents and others involved with the child's program develop an IPP. This plan addresses the child's educational needs in the most enabling environment possible.