



ALBERTA
EDUCATION

Office of the Minister

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SEP 15 2020

Ms. Simone Rambaransingh
Chair
Alberta Speech-Language Association of Private Practitioners
PO Box 24008
Edmonton, AB T6W 2W2

Sent via email: simoneslp@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Rambaransingh:

Thank you for the June 30, 2020 letter from the members of the Alberta Speech-Language Association of Private Practitioners expressing your concerns regarding the Government of Alberta's 2020 Budget, particularly in relation to the Program Unit Funding (PUF) grant and changes to the coding criteria for code 47 (Severe Language Delay).

Education continues to be a top priority of our government. During the 2019/20 school year, Alberta Education conducted a review of its funding and assurance frameworks, which resulted in a new funding model for 2020/21. The updated model provides flexible and sustainable funding to school authorities to support children, students and families.

Our government's goals for the new funding model are to drive more dollars into the classroom, protect our most vulnerable students, contain cost growth, allocate funding predictably, ensure rural jurisdictions are treated equitably and foster collaboration among school authorities to enhance outcomes for Alberta students. The new model will give school authorities more autonomy and flexibility to invest in classrooms based on their students' needs.

School boards continue to receive a maximum of three years of funding for children who are assessed and diagnosed with severe disabilities. The PUF grant is provided to school boards for the first two years of pre-Kindergarten. For children in Kindergarten with severe disabilities, school boards receive funding through the Specialized Learning Support (SLS) Grant. The SLS Grant ensures that supports and services are in place from Kindergarten to Grade 12, or until such time as they are no longer needed by the student.

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Although the name of the grant has changed, the expectations for providing an early childhood services (ECS) program to children with severe disabilities or a severe language delay remain the same as in previous years. While our goal is to help ensure school authorities can direct maximum resources into the classroom, individual school authorities will continue to determine how to best allocate their resources.

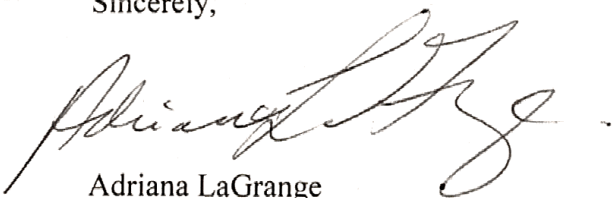
Alberta Education is responsible for establishing criteria for funding and collecting demographic information about children and students in the school system. The *Special Education Coding Criteria*, which contains seven categories of severe disabilities/disorders, is reviewed and updated annually.

Until this year, code 47 was the only severe disabilities code based on the diagnosis of a delay rather than the diagnosis of a disability or disorder. This resulted in an exponential increase in the incidence rate, whereby 68 per cent of children in ECS programs were diagnosed with a severe delay involving language. These statistics fall well outside of your national association's stated norm of 10 per cent of all children who may benefit from accessing speech-language pathology services. The changes to code 47 are warranted to ensure alignment with all other severe disability codes and to focus our efforts on children with severe language delay. The changes to code 47 in the 2020/21 *Special Education Coding Criteria* are intended to identify those children assessed and diagnosed by speech-language pathologists as having a severe language delay. Even with this change, Alberta remains the only Canadian province or territory whose Education department funds children diagnosed with severe language delays.

As a result of our new funding model, every single public school board, charter school, independent (private) school and independent ECS operator will see an increase in their operational funding for 2020/21. School authorities have the flexibility to identify supports and services that are needed to support an educational program for a particular child or student. Alberta's government expects school authorities and school leaders to be flexible and trusts in their professional skills, creativity and experience.

I appreciate you taking the time to write. Should you require further assistance, please contact Denise Matthews, Education Manager, Learner Services Branch. Ms. Matthews can be reached at denise.matthews@gov.ab.ca or 780-427-4159.

Sincerely,



Adriana LaGrange
Minister