

Program Unit Funding (PUF)

What is PUF?

Program Unit Funding (PUF) is provided by Alberta Education to school authorities for children in Early Childhood Services (ECS) programs. This includes preschool and kindergarten programs. Children with severe disabilities/delays are eligible if they:

- require additional support beyond what is offered in a regular ECS program
- meet the Alberta Education criteria for severe coding (codes 41-47)

Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing may qualify for code 45. The criteria for code 45 are as follows:

- a hearing loss of 71 decibels (dB) or more, unaided in the better ear, over the normal speech range (500 to 4000Hz) that interferes with the use of oral language as the primary form of communication (in other words—must be diagnosed with a severe to profound hearing loss and/or a severe speech and language delay)
- OR has a cochlear implant preceded by a 71 dB hearing loss unaided in the better ear
- the child is functioning at a severe to profound level and requires significant special programming and resources
- the hearing loss must be diagnosed by a clinical audiologist

Although a diagnosis of a severe disability/delay is required for eligibility, it is the extent to which the child can function in an ECS environment that is most important in determining both eligibility and the child's programming needs. Eligibility for PUF is based on the following:

- ☐ assessment by qualified personnel of a severe disability/delay

- documentation that demonstrates the child's current level of functioning in the ECS environment
- a current Individualized Program Plan (IPP) which addresses the child's educational needs
- levels of support and services provided to the child

PUF is provided for children, who are at least 2 years, 6 months of age and less than 6 years of age on September 1. PUF may be accessed a maximum of three years for each eligible child.

I think my child would qualify. What do I do next?

Speak with your ECS operator (preschool) or kindergarten program. ECS operators and school authorities must have all children approved for PUF by the Learner Services Branch, Alberta Education. Paperwork must be submitted that specify the essential criteria, supports required, diagnosis and name of professional(s).

The PUF approval process is ongoing as children's needs are identified; however, the final date for submissions is March 1 of the school year.

With successful ECS programming over time, some preschool and kindergarten children may have a code change from severe to mild/moderate (maximum two years of funding) or not require a code at all, within the maximum three-year PUF approval.

Does this mean that my child will get an Education Assistant in the classroom?

Not necessarily. Whether a child will be provided with an Education Assistant depends on many factors, including the nature of the support needed. Discuss this with your ECS program. Note that ECS programs are encouraged by Alberta Education to consider models *other than direct one-on-one assistance*, including:

- intervention in small groups

- strategic use of education assistant time
- peer-model instruction
- environmental supports (such as visual schedules, well-established routines, warnings of transition, visual cues, adapted furniture, use of physical boundaries to define space)

A model other than direct one-to-one assistance is considered to be appropriate for most children and it is essential for ECS operators to be strategic with the use of educational assistant time.

What can parents do?

- Contact your local school district *or* private agencies who are certified to manage a PUF application. Do this early, as there is time required for planning for your child to enter into the larger school systems. Get to know the key contact person at your local school district. Become knowledgeable about what services are provided before you decide to enroll your child in a program.
- In past years in Calgary, a PUF Resource Fair was held in January of each year. At this fair, parents have a chance to meet with all of the PUF providers in the area and gather information on the services available from each program. Contact the Children's Link at 403-230-9158 for more information.
- Review the Interviewing Guidelines for Potential PUF or FSCD providers in this toolkit.

For more information on PUF, visit:

http://education.alberta.ca/media/1176475/2012_july_fs-elb-programmingsn.pdf

<http://education.alberta.ca/parents/ecs/>