Using the EYE for Supporting Children with Special Needs in Alberta

Jennifer Weber
Early Learning Branch

Government of Alberta
Education
“Once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode.”

Loris Malaguzzi


Government of Alberta

Education
Overview

- ECS and funding for special needs
- Context for change
- The challenge
- Kindergarten Language Pilot
- The EYE-TA as a screening tool in early learning and special education
- The EYE-TA and Kindergarten Protocol
- Kindergarten Working Together Pilot Framework
Program Unit Funding

- 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 (2 years, 6 months of age and less than 6 years of age on September 1).
Mild/Moderate

- School authorities can access Early Childhood Services (ECS) mild/moderate funding to support children in kindergarten and the year prior to kindergarten in school-based or community-based language-rich and responsive learning environments in order to improve their learning outcomes.
Eligibility

• must provide an appropriate educational program for children who meet the criteria for at least one of the severe disability/delay codes.

• Educational Impact: Eligibility criteria requires diagnosis of a severe disability/delay, but it is the extent to which the child can function in an ECS program that is most important in determining eligibility and the child’s programming needs.
Minister’s Mandate

Continue to improve broad-based supports and early intervention initiatives for at-risk children to improve their learning outcomes.
Setting the Direction

Recommendation 10

• to develop and implement a model of support for young children who experience at-risk factors that enables programming and support in the most natural pre-school environment along with a seamless transition into grade one.

• http://education.alberta.ca/department/ipr/settingthedirection.aspx
The challenge

• Timely access to professionals such as Speech Language Pathologists
• The time it currently takes to assess and write reports before programming and collaboration with teachers can begin.
• Current model is reactive rather than proactive
• It uses a label to identify children
• The risk of missing children is high due to the complex steps that must be completed.
The challenge

The current eligibility and coding requirements were identified by Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic as leading to a disproportionate emphasis on assessing children with language delays/disabilities, and results in less available time for collaboration on programming.
Why language

- To create a more holistic approach to programming rather than one that focuses predominately on language delay and fine motor delay.
- Concerns in “labeling” children disabled for language delay
- 70% children identified for speech language
Kinder Pilot - Purpose

• to offer broad-based, language-enriched educational programming for all kindergarten age children within existing Base Instruction Funding and funding allocations for children with mild/moderate and severe delays involving language.

• To build on the capacity of educational staff in the use of universal strategies and enriched environments that will foster the learning potential of all children.
Essential requirements

- meet the proposal objectives within the current funding allocations to both school districts.
- provide enhanced programming with the current severe Program Unit Funding (PUF) and mild/moderate funding allocations received for Kindergarten children with language delays/disabilities.
Kinder Pilot aims to

• shifts the emphasis from assessments to determine a language delay/diagnosis to a model that identifies functional learning concerns.
• Refocus priority of current funding to delivering affective programming as opposed to funding to assess delays/disabilities.
• Refocus funding that is received would be used primarily for programming rather than for assessment.
• Promote collaboration of health and educational professionals to develop more cost effective delivery of educational programs including a range of broad based to targeted interventions.
Pyramid of Intervention

- Individual, inclusive, small group intervention, family supports, etc.
- Scaffolding - teacher supported through multidisciplinary team
- Ongoing assessment as, for and of learning

The majority of children are served through universal strategies. This includes the teacher, educational assistant, rich environments and educational resources.

- Screen with EYE
- Consult with therapists
- Child portfolios
The EYE as a screening tool in the early learning context

- Capacity building – teachers and MDT
- Facilitate discussion between professionals and parents in goal setting for children
- Focus intervention on strengths versus need
- Recognize variation in development where children identified with a language delay is not dependent on funding for enriched programming
- Documentation and impact statements
EYE as a tool - early intervention

- Funding supports programming rather than assessment by consulting therapists.
- Utilize programming as an initial intervention strategy.
- Develop a more manageable process where assessments may be required, as children with potential risk or delays/disabilities have been identified.
EYE as a tool - dialogue

• Change the lens through which we view children.
• Collaboration of teachers and specialist support team to build the skill set of all teachers.
• Increasing the amount of teacher coaches to assist with professional learning and building the capacity of all teachers to meet the needs of the diverse classes within Edmonton.
• Facilitate discussions with parents around determining family goals and assessing both the needs of child and family (Family Oriented Programming)
EYE as tool - programming

• Increase of teacher time to complete screen and collaborate rather than paying for specialist time to diagnose.
• Children are given appropriate functional educational support in a more timely manner as programming is based on results of a quickly completed screen and collaborative conversations rather than a lengthy diagnostic assessment.
• Pre and post testing completed by the teacher to ensure appropriate programming was put in to place to meet the needs of all students.
• Ongoing portfolio of all children’s classroom work.
EYE and the Kinder Protocol

- Parental Consent
- Family Oriented Decision Making
- Screening – EYE
- Developing an Impact Statement
  - Classroom consultations
  - Referral for Specialized Assessment
  - IPP Implementation
  - Documentation “portfolio”
- Programming and Monitoring
- Working with children with ESL needs
- Transition Planning
## Pilot Process - Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programming</th>
<th>Screening</th>
<th>Review</th>
<th>Impact Statement</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Preapproval Submissions</th>
<th>Preapproval</th>
<th>PUF Budget Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - initial strategies  
- observations  
- classroom consultations  
- consent - screening, services and how information will be used to access funding | - green, no concern  
- green, concern  
- yellow  
- red  
- children with ESL needs are not screened | - green; concern; referral  
- yellow; impact statement  
- red; yellow statement | - observation of impact on child's ability to function in the kinder setting  
- elements of impact | - program planning  
- classroom consultation  
- screening  
- reviewing  
- assessment | - yellow; impact statements  
- red; impact statements  
- assessments | - reviewed by ELB  
- preapproval confirmed or not approved  
- entered on to PUFs | - Application details, including ASN, programming hours, FOP, PUF budget |
Pilot Framework

**multidisciplinary teams**
- programming
- classroom consultations

**screening**
- assessment
- reviewing documentation "portfolios"
- review
- observations
- impact statement
- IPPs
- monitoring and "program evaluation"
- outcomes

**pre-approval submissions**
- green; no concerns; not submitted
- green; concerns; referrals and assessments;
- assessments submitted
- yellow and impact statements
- red and impact statements

**pre-approval process**
- assessments verified
- pre-approval confirmed via PUFs
- funding code confirmed
- PUF budget applications
- Funding
Initial Teacher feedback

- Teachers had awareness of their students' needs (e.g., language needs)
- Teachers took ownership of their students
- Focus on green strategies to benefit whole class
- EYE meeting with teachers was a helpful discussion
- Freedom for consultants to assess as needed
- More children received services (MM)
Initial Teacher feedback

- More consultant time in the classroom at the beginning (know kids, green strategies, familiar with classroom management, etc)
- Empowerment of teachers
- More teacher/EA in-servicing & discussion
- Did not have to wait for SLP before proceeding
- Lots of classroom discussion around KIDS
- More involvement/engagement of teacher earlier on
- Teachers have better idea of what is an appropriate referral
- Teachers felt they had a better knowledge base of their classroom
- Consistent teams
Edmonton Public Schools
Heather Raymond
Principal Programs/KIDS
Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services
780-456-8514
heather.raymond@epsb.ca

Edmonton Catholic School District
Corine Gannon
District Principal
Early Learning
780-989-3007
gannonc@ecsd.net

Alberta Education
Jennifer Weber
Senior Manager
Early Learning Branch
780-427-3429
jennifer.weber@gov.ab.ca
“Research demonstrates the value of inclusive programs where all children are given opportunities to thrive and grow. Inclusive learning environments acknowledge the value that comes from the diversity of each person’s strengths and contributions.