

**DATE:** March 5, 2024

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT:** Division Centre Program Information  
(Response to Request for Information #019)

**ORIGINATOR:** Cliff Richard, Chief Infrastructure and Technology Officer

**RESOURCE  
STAFF:** Bryan Evans, Terri Gosine, Geoff Holmes, Trish Kolotyluk, Terry Korte,  
Val Leclair, Ann Parker, Christopher Wright

**REFERENCE:** March 5, 2024 Board meeting (Trustee Sumar)

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#### **ISSUE**

At the December 12, 2023, Board meeting, Administration was asked to respond to a number of questions regarding Division centre programs.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Division accommodates parent choice when considering program options for students with complex needs. One choice available to parents is a Division centre classroom.

#### **CURRENT SITUATION**

At the December 12, 2023, Board meeting, Trustee Sumar submitted the following questions regarding Division centre programs:

#### **General**

- 1. Please provide a brief description of the Division centre programs offered including (if possible) actual and optimal staff resources per program and which Division centres would typically have a seclusion room.**

The Division provides a range of learning environments to help nurture students' emotional, mental and physical well-being. Every student is unique, with different strengths and challenges. The Division's specialized programming ensures that educational and support programs are designed to meet the unique needs of students with individualized learning needs. We offer specialized learning support for students who have emotional, behavioural, cognitive, learning, speech, hearing, vision, physical or medical needs. The following are specialized programs offered in the Division:

- Connections: supports students displaying chronic, extreme and pervasive behaviours. Students require close and constant adult supervision and a high level of structure to function in an educational setting.
- Connections/Opportunity: assists students with mild cognitive disabilities and severe behavioural challenges.

- Community Learning Skills (CLS): supports students who have moderate delays in most or all developmental areas. These students may have physical, sensory, medical or behavioural disabilities.
- Community Learning Skills/Connections: supports students with moderate cognitive disabilities, significant developmental delays and behavioural difficulties.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing: supports students with moderate to profound hearing loss.
- Extensions: supports students with advanced intellectual abilities who are achieving at a level much higher than their current grade. They can grasp new ideas, enjoy being challenged, are highly curious and have an advanced vocabulary.
- Gifted and Talented: supports students who have advanced intellectual ability compared to other students their age. These students have exceptional potential or ability across a wide range of areas, from creative thinking to understanding abstract relationships.
- Individual Support (ISP): supports students with severe to profound developmental disabilities. Students may have physical, sensory or behavioural challenges, and/or medical conditions, requiring special accommodations.
- Interactions: supports students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD impacts how people understand what they see, hear and sense. This lifelong disability can result in difficulties in communication, social relationships, behaviour or learning. Although students with ASD often achieve at grade level, many have uneven or delayed achievement.
- Literacy: is more than just knowing how to read and write—it's about making sense of the information you see. For students requiring academic support, Literacy programming helps them develop the skills and abilities to achieve in all subject areas.
- Opportunity: supports students with mild cognitive disabilities and significant academic delays in gaining skills for future independent living and employment.
- Strategies: supports students with learning disabilities whose intelligence is measured as average to above average and who have significant academic delays. Learning disabilities are complex and can vary from person to person, requiring flexible instruction that meets each student's unique needs.
- Tevie Miller Heritage School Program: supports students with diagnosed speech and language delays, disorders or disabilities. Programming includes on-site speech and language pathologists providing a range of language and literacy supports.

### Seclusion Rooms

The Connections, Interactions, Connections/Opportunity and Community Learning Skills/Connections programs typically have seclusion rooms.

### Staffing for Division Centre Programs

All classrooms, including Division centre programs, must have a teacher assigned to the class and a dedicated classroom space. Depending on the grade and/or learning needs of the student, a student enrolled in a Division centre program may receive all of their instruction in the specialized program class or they may be integrated partially in the regular program. The staffing component is dependent on the needs of students, not a set structure of staff according to the program.

### Mild/Moderate

The following Division centre programs typically accommodate students with a mild to moderate special education diagnosis:

- Community Learning Skills
- Extensions
- Gifted and Talented
- Literacy

- Opportunity
- Strategies
- Tevie Miller Heritage Schools Program

### Staffing

It is possible that, for mild to moderate Division centre programs, there may not be an educational assistant assigned to the class; it is also possible that there may be a part-time educational assistant assigned to the class (for example, mornings only) or that there may be one or more full-time educational assistants assigned to a class. Staffing levels are a school-based decision and are dependent on several factors including the grade level of the students, the number of students in the class and the complexity of student learning needs.

### **Moderate/Severe**

The following Division centre programs typically accommodate students with a moderate to severe special education diagnosis:

- Community Learning Skills/Connections
- Connections
- Connections/Opportunity
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Individual Support
- Interactions

### Staffing

Generally speaking, due to the complexity of student learning needs in the above programs, one or more educational assistants may be assigned to the class. Staffing levels are a school-based decision and the number and full-time equivalent (FTE) of the educational assistant(s) in each class varies depending on the grade level of the students, the number of students in the class, and the complexity of the student learning needs.

To help support the preparation and readiness of teaching staff dedicated to moderate/severe programs (specifically Connections and Interactions), Human Resources staff has worked, and continues to work, with current school program teams to provide authentic learning experiences over a three-month period for a set number of individuals. In addition to being fully immersed in classroom experiences, individuals benefit from weekly professional learning sessions that strengthen their skills and abilities. Typically, beginning teachers fulfill the teaching role in these classrooms and the Division is better positioned to attract and retain individuals to these roles with the structure of this project. Without this support, these teaching positions would be very challenging to fill.

## **2. Please provide a breakdown of enrolment in specialized programs by division.**

- a) Please also include the total # of requests for each program by parents during pre-enrolment by transportation zone by division.**

Division data for enrolment in Division centre classrooms by grade for the current school year, as of September 2023, follows:



Enrolment in Division Centre Programs by Grade – September 2023 Initial Count														
Division Centre Program	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total by Program
Community Learning Skills	0	6	8	14	16	14	17	18	32	22	24	23	39	<b>233</b>
Community Learning Skills/ Connections	0	2	4	2	1	3	1	2	8	5	2	3	7	<b>40</b>
Connections	0	36	66	56	86	72	93	59	64	68	6	7	8	<b>621</b>
Connections/ Opportunity	0	0	0	0	1	7	4	6	9	6	1	0	0	<b>34</b>
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	5	8	7	11	7	8	4	12	7	8	8	5	16	<b>106</b>
Extensions	0	0	0	3	2	6	6	1	4	4	0	0	0	<b>26</b>
Gifted and Talented	0	14	30	31	46	37	59	184	293	292	0	0	0	<b>986</b>
Individual Support	0	2	11	15	9	12	13	16	7	4	13	9	24	<b>135</b>
Interactions	0	201	151	160	133	102	98	81	84	75	59	55	89	<b>1288</b>
Literacy	0	0	0	0	7	16	18	14	18	24	0	0	0	<b>97</b>
Opportunity	0	25	34	40	55	96	89	128	149	120	57	65	73	<b>931</b>
Strategies	0	0	0	9	39	72	93	156	166	167	45	24	31	<b>802</b>
Tevie Miller Heritage School Program	26	23	17	19	25	19	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>146</b>
<b>Total by Grade</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>841</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>5445</b>
Source: Student Information #23875														



a) Program requests by transportation zone by division:

<b>Program Requests by Transportation Zone by Division – as of February 2024*</b>							
<b>Division Centre Program</b>	<b>Zone 1</b>	<b>Zone 2</b>	<b>Zone 3</b>	<b>Zone 4</b>	<b>Zone 5</b>	<b>Zone 6</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Community Learning Skills		Div. 1–13 Div. 2–17 Div. 3–33 Div. 4–40		Div. 1–8 Div. 2–8 Div. 3–14 Div. 4–28	Div. 1–7 Div. 2–12 Div. 3–35	Div. 1– 10 Div. 2–10 Div. 4–28	<b>263</b>
Community Learning Skills & Connections		Div. 1–7 Div. 2–6 Div. 3–7	Div. 4–15		Div. 3–4		<b>39</b>
Connections	Div. 1–22 Div. 2–35 Div. 3–21	Div. 1–16 Div. 2–11 Div. 3–11	Div. 1–20 Div. 2–29 Div. 3–22	Div. 1–33 Div. 2–43 Div. 3–35	Div. 1–47 Div. 2–53 Div. 3–55	Div. 1–31 Div. 2–49 Div. 3–33	<b>566</b>
Connections/ Opportunity			Div. 3–13 Div. 4–7		Div. 2–9 Div. 3–6	Div. 3–9	<b>44</b>
Deaf and Hard of Hearing			Div. 1–22 Div. 2–27 Div. 3–27 Div. 4–31				<b>107</b>
Extensions		Div. 2–3 Div. 3–7		Div. 1–2 Div. 2–6 Div. 3–7			<b>25</b>
Gifted and Talented		Div. 3–37	Div. 1–5 Div. 2–27 Div. 3–222	Div. 1–27 Div. 2–51 Div. 3–50		Div. 1–1 Div. 2–1	<b>421</b>
Individual Support	Div. 3–5 Div. 4–9	Div. 1–5 Div. 2–11 Div. 3–10 Div. 4–14		Div. 1–4 Div. 2–9 Div. 3–11 Div. 4–2	Div. 1–8 Div. 2–12 Div. 3–8 Div. 4–11	Div. 1–4 Div. 2–7 Div. 3–6 Div. 4–7	<b>143</b>
Interactions	Div. 1–121 Div. 2–84 Div. 3–80 Div. 4–37	Div. 1–14 Div. 2–16 Div. 3–9 Div. 4–46	Div. 1–101 Div. 2–69 Div. 3–45 Div. 4–52	Div. 1–90 Div. 2–72 Div. 3–44 Div. 4–57	Div. 1–122 Div. 2–92 Div. 3–61 Div. 4–43	Div. 1–112 Div. 2–76 Div. 3–44 Div. 4–41	<b>1528</b>
Literacy	Div. 3–12	Div. 3–22		Div. 2–11 Div. 3–23	Div. 2–12		<b>80</b>



Opportunity	Div. 1–11 Div. 2–37 Div. 3–23		Div. 1–4 Div. 2–25 Div. 3–167 Div. 4–191	Div. 1–19 Div. 2–57 Div. 3–46	Div. 1–39 Div. 2–58 Div. 3–66	Div. 1–15 Div. 2–39 Div. 3–57	<b>854</b>
Strategies	Div. 3–23	Div. 1–7 Div. 2–93 Div. 3–128 Div. 4–70	Div. 3–42	Div. 2–38 Div. 3–78	Div. 2–32 Div. 3–33	Div. 2–18 Div. 3–80	<b>642</b>

Source: SNAP (Special Needs Assisted Placement) data is dependent on schools providing accurate data in PowerSchool \*\*\* Div. 1 – Grades 1–3, Div. 2 – Grades 4–6, Div. 3 – Grades 7–9, Div. 4 – Grades 10–12

\*As of closure of SNAP Phase 1 in February 2024; additional requests are anticipated once SNAP Phase 2 opens in April 2024.

### 3. Please provide the number of students accessing each Division centre program over the last 10 years.

Enrolment in Division Centre Programs – 10 Year History										
Division Centre Program	2014 –15	2015 –16	2016 –17	2017 –18	2018 –19	2019 –20	2020 –21	2021 –22	2022 –23	2023 –24
Community Learning Skills	177	162	178	186	181	192	201	216	233	233
Community Learning Skills/Connections	28	28	25	28	28	27	21	22	29	40
Connections	548	546	583	577	629	633	625	595	607	621
Connections/Opportunity	26	21	18	18	19	30	32	26	32	34
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	73	77	81	83	87	92	99	91	95	106
Extensions	0	39	41	50	38	19	22	22	26	26
French Immersion Strategies	6	10	4	8	9	10	6	2	0	0
Gifted and Talented	1046	1113	1108	1079	1089	1087	1119	1105	1185	986
Individual Support	100	87	99	95	99	112	114	120	120	135
Interactions	309	345	390	448	493	574	684	862	1012	1288
Literacy	263	249	261	262	246	260*	227	191	158	97
Opportunity	950	980	976	936	920	907	886	888	900	931
Strategies	797	838	807	854	815	830	727	740	726	802
Tevie Miller Heritage School Program	207	209	217	242	234	227	156	146	126	146

Source: Student Information #23875  
2023–24 is from September initial count. All other years are from September final count.

\*As of September 2023, there are no students identified as Literacy (Code 63) in the Division. According to the 2020–2021 Budget Planning Manual, students will no longer be identified under Literacy (Code 63) and students currently coded Literacy (Code 63) will be coded until they transition to a new division, effective 2020–2021. According to the 2023–2024 Budget Planning Manual, students are identified as Learning Disability (Code 54 with full-scale IQ of 85 or higher and Code 54–63 with full-scale IQ less than 85).

**4. Please provide the breakdown of the Division centres established this school year by program for each transportation zone.**

**a) What are the considerations when making decisions?**

Number of Approved Division Centre Classes for the 2024–2025 School Year							
Program	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6	Total
Connections					1		1
Individual Support						1	1
Interactions	8	1	5	7	6	5	32
Opportunity					1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>35</b>

a) Considerations for the distribution of Division centre classes:

The distribution of Division centre classes is part of a complex system of student accommodation within the Division’s diminishing space availability. When considering the establishment or expansion of a Division centre classroom to meet demand, Administration considers:

- any shortfall of space for a Division centre program in a transportation zone at the elementary, junior high or senior high level
- schools with available space for Division centre classes considering:
  - utilization rate
  - student accommodation (overflow designated schools and new neighbourhood designations)
  - programming already in place at the school
  - future planning considerations
  - proximity to where students who are requesting the Division centre program reside
- consultation with the school principal, assistant superintendent and staff from Financial Services, Human Resources, Property Management, Specialized Learning Supports, Division Support Services, Student Transportation and Integrated Infrastructure Services regarding:
  - available space and proximity to demand for Division centre classrooms
  - impact on lease groups
  - infrastructure requirements
  - specialized supports
  - class capacity and grade configuration

- budget
- staffing
- student transportation
- other demands for space in schools include:
  - alternative programs
  - early years programming
  - mental health support classrooms
  - general accommodation of students in a growing city
  - lease partnerships that directly benefit the school community

**5. What is the typical ride time for students accessing Division centres using Division organized transportation services? What is the longest one-way ride home? How have both the average and the longest ride time changed in the last five years (if the data is available)?**

Summary of ride-time data for students accessing yellow bus transportation to Division centre programs since 2018:

	Average (Minutes)	Maximum (Minutes)	Number of Rides over 90 Minutes
<b>2018–2019</b>	33.5	95	0
<b>2019–2020</b>	32.6	92	1
<b>2020–2021</b>	31.3	91	1
<b>2021–2022</b>	34.0	94	11
<b>2022–2023</b>	35.2	100	24
<b>2023–2024</b>	34.6	110	14

Currently, the average one-way ride time for students attending Division centre programming is 34.6 minutes. Over the past five school years, the average has fluctuated between a low of 31.3 minutes in 2020–2021 to a high of 35.2 minutes in 2022–2023. A contributing factor to the increase in ride times first observed in 2021–2022 was an ongoing shortage of yellow bus drivers which limited the number of routes which could be added to help mitigate the longest ride times. Student Transportation continues to add additional routes as market capacity becomes available. In general, the longest ride times are experienced by students who reside in new and developing neighborhoods which are the greatest distance from available programming.

**6. How many students could not be accommodated in their preferred Division centre, but were provided with an alternative Division centre?**

**a) On average, how much additional transportation time did this result in?**

Student placement in Division centre programs is a collaborative process that considers a variety of factors. One consideration is finding programming that is available close to home and in a student’s resident transportation zone if possible. Although data around initial family preference is not available, in cases where students attend Division centre programming that is located outside of their resident



transportation zone, average one-way ride times are 39 minutes compared to an average of 25 minutes when the program is located in-zone.

**7. Can a student attain their high school diploma from a Division centre or must they be in an inclusive program?**

Division students, whether enrolled in a regular, alternative or Division centre program, have the same opportunity to complete high school by meeting the requirements to receive either a high school diploma or a certificate of high school achievement.

The Guide to Education (2023) states that choice *“is an important principle in Alberta’s education system. School authorities have the flexibility to use resources and any method of delivery as long as Alberta Education requirements, including outcomes of the programs of study/curriculum, are met.”*

**8. In the last ten years, can you provide examples of programming or spaces that have been developed and made available to students in inclusive settings to support self-regulation skills?**

Regulation is the body and mind’s ability to experience stress and return to and stay in a ‘just right’ state. Regulation is the way a person manages stress and how they recover. Self-regulation is when an individual manages stress on their own. Ideally, students would be able to identify and use strategies in various situations and/or spaces to support their emotional regulation and participation in learning. Examples of strategies that support self-regulation include (but are not limited to):

- mindfulness strategies
- Zones of Regulation
- movement breaks
- sensory toys or fidget tools
- breathing exercises
- alternative seating choices (stand up desks, tables)

Specific to spaces that support regulation, students enrolled in Interactions Division centre programs may have access to a sensory room to support their sensory needs. The sensory room may be located in the classroom or in a space in the school that is accessible to students enrolled in the program. Sensory rooms are typically equipped with items such as sensory toys, fidget tools, specialized lighting or soft seating for example.

Most often, specialized spaces are not required to support students with self-regulation. Teachers use proactive strategies such as those identified above, to assist students in staying regulated to ensure they are ready to learn. Teachers strategically adapt learning spaces so that students can participate (e.g., minimizing distractions in areas of the classroom where learning is occurring, providing tools such as noise-canceling headphones or study carrels, arranging the classroom so that students have spaces for quiet work and spaces for busier collaborative activities) and manage the flow of instruction to support self-regulation.

**9. In the last ten years, have any Division centres been converted to standard classroom spaces or other Division centre programs (ex: Connections to Interactions), either based on need or lack of utilization? If so, what has been the cost to convert Division centres to standard classroom spaces or alternative Division centre programs?**

**a) What are the anticipated changes (additions/removals of Division centres) broken down by Division centre for the coming school year?**

The Division has data related to the deactivation/suspension of Division centre programs dating back to 2016. The majority of Division centre reductions over the past several years involve ‘Mild/Moderate’ programs, such as Literacy, Opportunity and Strategies programming.

<b>Number of Suspended or Deactivated Division Centre Classes 2016–2023</b>	
<b>Mild/Moderate Programs</b>	<b>Number of Classes</b>
<b>Community Learning Skills</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Extensions</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Literacy</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Severe Programs</b>	<b>Number of Classes</b>
<b>Connections</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Individual Support</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Interactions</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>

Overall, Connections and Interactions have seen net increases in the number of classes. Most notably, Interactions has seen a net increase in the number of classes across the Division of approximately 247 per cent (see question 3 data table).

Deactivation or suspension of Division centre classes can involve a response to the following variables:

- a shift in student demographics
- the establishment of a program intended to provide more specific support to student needs (e.g., converting Connections to Connections/CLS)
- re-locating programs as a result of school consolidation and establishing the program at a new school
- the suspension of the Literacy code by the Division to align with Alberta Education, effective 2020–2021

If a Division centre classroom is utilized for other instructional needs, the Division may incur minor costs associated with preparing instructional space for student use, such as ensuring paint touch ups or other small repairs are addressed. Seclusion rooms may be decommissioned (i.e., doors removed and stored away) but are not deconstructed as they can serve as storage or focus space and be recommissioned if required to support another Division centre in the future.

- a) Anticipated additional Division centre classroom needs for the 2024–2025 school year, based on projected data as of February 20, 2024, are noted below:

<b>Anticipated Number of New Division Centre Classes for 2024–2025</b>		
<b>Program</b>	<b>Number of Classes</b>	<b>Facility Modifications Required</b>
<b>Interactions</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Connections</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Community Learning Skills</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CLS/Connections</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Individual Support</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>42</b>

<b>Anticipated Number of Suspended or Deactivated Division Centre Classes for 2024–2025</b>	
<b>Program</b>	<b>Number of Classes</b>
<b>Connections</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Community Learning Skills</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Interactions</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Literacy</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

CW/jl