

DATE: April 15, 2025

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Julie Kusiek, Board Chair

SUBJECT: Proposed letter for robust engagement regarding Standards for Special Education

REFERENCE [Standards for Special Education](#), amended June 2004

ISSUE

At the April 1, 2025 Board meeting, Board Chair Kusiek gave notice that she would be presenting a motion requesting that the Board write to the Minister of Education regarding the Standards for Special Education.

BACKGROUND

In September 2024, the Board [wrote](#) to the Education Minister asking that he share the timeline as to when the Standards for Special Education will be updated, including when consultations with stakeholders (e.g., school divisions, families of children with disabilities, and professionals who support students with disabilities) will take place and when the new standards will be released.

In October, Minister Nicolaides responded that in 2019, the Government of Alberta committed to updating the 2004 Standards for Special Education. In 2020 and early 2021, a draft Standards for Inclusive Education System was developed, and stakeholder engagement was held. Prior to the release of the draft standards, some stakeholders expressed concern and requested further engagement take place prior to implementation. In addition, the education system was focused on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to these concerns and the pandemic, the release of the standards was delayed. He stated that further research was underway, including work to update the policy and associated guiding documents, and that additional information would be shared as it became available.

To date the Board Chair, on behalf of the Board, has participated in some initial conversations with other school boards and government officials to provide feedback to the Standards for Special Education. However, the need for robust consultation and a strong engagement plan with all stakeholders is essential to ensure that all voices are heard and the best possible outcome is arrived at for students with specialized learning needs.

RELATED FACTS

- In the Premier's Mandate Letter to the Minister of Education, the Premier wrote the following statement:
"And importantly, as we grow new opportunities for students, we must address the growing needs of students with mental health and other learning challenges. These children must be provided with every opportunity to flourish in our education system and economy. We need them to be successful, fulfilled and fully participative in building our province."
- The Standards for Special Education were last amended in June 2004.
- Both the Teaching and Leadership Quality Standards were updated in April 2023.
- The enrolment rate of students requiring specialized learning supports is outpacing even the

Division's record-breaking overall enrolment growth.

- The Division provides choice to families in how to meet the educational needs of their child, including full integration within a regular program or alternative program, partial integration paired with enrolment in a Division centre program located within a community school setting, full-time enrolment within a Division centre program or, in some cases, enrolment in a specialized school designed to meet the unique needs of that student.
- The Board of Trustees chooses to distribute funds to schools in a way that recognizes that specialized learning supports require additional funds in school budgets. Through a weighted enrolment allocation, the Board of Trustees ensures that students who require higher levels of learning support are funded at a higher rate than students who require lower levels of support.
- Overall, the targeted funding the Province provides for classroom complexity is insufficient to cover the current levels of support required. The Division supplements classroom complexity funding and specialized learning supports grants over and above base funding allocations by approximately \$30 million each year.

RECOMMENDATION

That, further to the Board's September 10, 2024 letter to the Minister of Education regarding the timelines for an update to the Standards for Special Education, the Board of Trustees write a follow-up letter to further emphasize that school boards, educators, students and families be meaningfully consulted, to inform a fulsome Provincial update to the Standards for Special Education. The letter must also emphasize:

- **That the Province provides adequate ongoing funding to fully meet the diverse range of needs for students requiring special education supports within a variety of settings.**
- **That the rate of enrolment growth for students requiring specialized learning supports is outpacing the rapid growth of overall enrolment in the Division.**
- **That services for students who require specialized learning supports must be enhanced within provincial standards and funding to facilitate students' transition to life beyond the K-12 education system.**

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

Families with students requiring specialized supports have spoken directly to Trustees of the Edmonton Public Schools Board. Many of these families have expressed frustration with the current financial limitations and a desire for additional support and accommodation for their children. The following are barriers to providing students with specialized learning needs with more robust support:

- rapidly growing enrolment and lack of space, which leads to larger class sizes that makes integrated classrooms more challenging
- lack of space, which limits the addition of new Division centre programs
- funding, targeted government grants do not cover the full cost of accommodation for students with specialized learning needs
- outdated provincial standards, which do not acknowledge the evolving practices, school environments or increased complexity that exists today.

The Division is aware of families who seek an education with Edmonton Public Schools because of the range of choice we offer to students with specialized learning needs. The rate of enrolment of students with specialized learning needs is growing faster than that of overall Division enrolment. There is a clear need to have meaningful solutions-focused conversations with the Province on how to meet the evolving needs of students within Edmonton Public Schools.

As the Ministry of Education begins to re-engage in conversations with Boards about updating the Standards for Special Education, it is critical that our Board advocate now for a robust consultation and meaningful engagement with all stakeholders, including the families we serve at Edmonton Public Schools and the partners we know are essential to building the community support required for student success.

Robust consultation and meaningful engagement could lead to important conversations around topics such as:

- How can we ensure that families retain their ability to choose the learning environment they feel is best for their child, ranging from full integration to fully specialized programming, within the public education system?
- How can we, as a Province, bring together families, partner organizations, school boards and government to an agreed-upon understanding of what the Standards for Special Education should look like to support students to be successful, not only in their K-12 journey but in setting them up for their life after high school?
- What funding is required to achieve these standards and how can we build public support for public investment and expenditure on the public education of children?
- What information don't we have right now as part of the conversation that could be helpful?
- How can we work together to better support inclusion in the wider community during the student's K-12 education journey and once it is completed?
- How can we tie support for students requiring specialized learning supports into career pathways, encouraging and helping to build a path to success for every child to reach their full potential whether that be preparation for further studies, volunteering, the world of work or engaging with community in other meaningful ways?

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of this recommendation, the Board Chair will write to the Minister of Education on behalf of the Board.

JK:km