



## Program Unit Funding FAQ's

\*For Families

Big PLANS is recognized as a “school” although we do not function as a typical school. For example, our “class-list” of children does NOT inhabit a classroom in a single “brick and mortar” facility. Instead, our “classroom” environments take place within various communities in Calgary and area, and we are considered an Independent School because our vision is to provide enrichment services to children with mild-moderate (MM), severe (PUF) and English Language Learners (ELL) needs. Our services are layered over top of the preschool programming they receive where they are currently registered.

**Did You Know?** *Almost 29% of children entering kindergarten in Alberta are experiencing difficulty in one or more of the five key areas of development (Physical health, Social skills, Emotional maturity, Language and Thinking, Communication). Please see the published study where data was collected exemplifying this.*

*\*\*<http://www.ecmap.ca/project/about.html>*

**What programs are in place to help children who are experiencing developmental delays?** Early Intervention agencies like Big PLANS are licensed and funded by Alberta Education for the purpose of identifying and helping children who are demonstrating delays. Big PLANS is recognized as a “school” though we do not function as a typical school. We have certificated teachers as well as teams of contracted therapists who can screen and assess your child to know exactly how their skills are developing as compared to other same-aged children across the country.

### **As parents, what do we have to do?**

- You will need to sign the consent form if you would like your child screened. If your child is identified as having needs, a therapist will review the results of the assessment and offer therapy services.
- You will need to provide a copy of your child’s birth certificate.
- You are invited and strongly encouraged to participate in therapy sessions when they occur.
- You will need to review the IPP together with the Early Learning Specialist (Certificated Teacher).
- If your child has a Child Development Facilitator (CDF), you will need to sign their timesheets every two weeks.

**What is the difference between screening and assessments?** A developmental screening is a short test that reveals if a child has acquired certain developmental skills or if there are delays. Children participate in 15-minute screenings with an SLP and/or an OT. Children who demonstrate potential delays and require further assessment to ensure this is true are identified through the screening. An assessment is a process of gathering information about a child. The various assessments our therapists use are ‘standardized’, meaning they are created by having thousands of children take the test before it is published. Based on these results, formulas are created to break scores into average, below average, above average, etc. as well as percentiles. When a child is tested using a standardized assessment their scores can be compared to a very large sample of same-aged peers.

**Why do you need a copy of my child’s birth certificate?** Your child’s birth certificate serves as proof of their age. Early Intervention Programs are only available to children prior to and in kindergarten so we need to ensure we are providing services to those who meet the age-eligibility criteria. Your child’s birth certificate also serves to verify legal name, which is required by Alberta Education at the time of Alberta Student Number (ASN) creation.

**Is there a cost?** No, this program is funded by Alberta Education.

**When will therapy start?** Therapy typically begins in Mid-November.

**How often will it be?** Therapy services will occur 2-4 times per month but the frequency and amount of therapy are directly related to the severity of the child's needs.

**How many sessions will my child receive?** The number of sessions depends on how quickly the child achieves their goals. If the child achieves their goals quickly, the frequency of therapy is reduced or the child may graduate from the program. Therapy continues at a set frequency with the child if they continue to need the additional help.

**What happens when my sessions are used up?** When allotted therapy hours are used up the child is either released from the program or a request is made for more therapy hours.

**What happens if my child's goals are not achieved and they have used up their therapy hours?**

Recommendations are made for your child to continue therapy in kindergarten or for your family to seek out private therapy.

**Where does therapy happen?** Therapy can occur at your home, at the school (before or after class - we will NOT remove a child from class), or at the therapist's office. Your therapist can discuss this with you based on scheduling and transportation. It is required that a minimum number of Family Oriented Programming Sessions occur when your child is receiving PUF programming.

**Do I have to be there for therapy?** You are invited and strongly encouraged to participate in therapy sessions when they occur.

**What is the time commitment?** Sessions will usually be one hour in length each time. Frequency is dictated by your child's needs. You will be given ideas for fun activities to practice at home with your child.

**What is the IPP and why does my child need one?** Our agency is funded for enrichment services, which means that all of the children receiving funding are required to have an Individual Program Plan (IPP). This IPP lays out the specific 'enrichment' activities that will be conducted with your child. These activities are written in the form of goals and strategies.

**What benefits are there to participating in the program?**

- All children are expected to have acquired specific foundational skills that they are using independently when they enter kindergarten. Early Intervention ensures these strong skills are present.

**Truthfully, there are no disadvantages when a child receives funding; however, you should be aware that:**

- Your child will have a code (codes are numbered specifically based on the child's needs from 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 or 47) on their cumulative file for preschool and kindergarten. The code has no bearing past kindergarten.
- Your child will have an IPP on file from preschool through to kindergarten.
- Some private schools may require an explanation from parents about WHY the child needed additional help or why they have an IPP on file.

**Will my child's code follow them for the rest of their life?** No. The code has no bearing past kindergarten.

**Is my child's file automatically shared with his/her next school?** As of March 2013, based on Alberta Learning regulations, we no longer need parental consent to share a child's IPP if it is requested by a subsequent school. The IPP is considered to be part of the student's cumulative record. If a school requests information from Big PLANS, we are obligated to share this confidential information with their continuing school.

**Do I need to tell the Kindergarten teacher about this intervention work?** No. If your child has been released from the program, you are not required to mention their participation in the program. If ongoing help is recommended, it is beneficial to speak with your kindergarten teacher about ongoing services your child may be eligible for.

**Why is my child being observed in the classroom?** Classroom observations serve as the means for the certificated teacher to ensure that the enrichment goals being worked on in therapy, are functionally assisting the child in their classroom experience. For example, does working on speech sound clarity help my child to have meaningful conversations when they are interacting with their peers?

**Can my child attend preschool without his/her Child Development Specialist?** The answer to this question varies depending on the preschool site and the needs of the individual child. This needs to be discussed with the classroom teacher and your child's Education Coordinator as soon as a Child Development Specialist is assigned to your child.

**Can my child's Child Development Specialist drive them to and from school?** No. Under no circumstances are any Big PLANS employees or contractors able to transport children. It is the responsibility of the parent to provide transportation for their child to and from school, therapy sessions, Family-Oriented Programming Sessions outside of the home and other educational events/appointments.

**Are Family Oriented Programming Sessions (FOPS) a necessary part of my child's programming?** Family Oriented Programming Sessions give you one-on-one access to experts that can answer questions about your child's needs and offer strategies to support their continued development. They are a required part of programming for all children receiving Program Unit Funding. FOPS allow for the skills and strategies learned in therapy to be transferred to the home environment.

**Do I need to be an active participant in FOPS?** Yes. These sessions will provide you with knowledge about your child's development and needs, but also with strategies and ideas to help your child continue to master these skills.

**Can someone other than a parent be present at a FOPS?** Yes. We encourage and welcome any family member or child-care provider who spends time interacting and working with your child to attend. They too can help with the transfer of skills and strategies into the home environment.

**Will Big PLANS follow my child into kindergarten?** Big PLANS is only able to continue services into Private kindergarten settings.

**At what age does my child have to go to kindergarten?** A child who turns four years old on or before March 1st is eligible to attend kindergarten in the fall of that same calendar year. However, a child who is not yet five years old on September 1st has the option of waiting until the following year before entering kindergarten.

**Can Program Unit Funding (PUF) follow my child into grade one if he/she has only accessed two years of funding?** No. A child must be registered in preschool or kindergarten in order to receive Early Intervention Funding.

**What is the risk of me not moving forward with services this year and just waiting to see how my child does?** You may be placing your child in a position of 'risk' if you choose not to access Early Intervention. The expectations for children entering kindergarten are high. Early intervention places all children on an equal play-field when it comes to foundational skills required for successful learning in kindergarten.