

Appreciation and Kindness

- Thank you for your kind messages, however I genuinely believe it is you who require thanks. Parents play such important roles in the education of their children, and I appreciate the effort each and every one of you put into your child's education.
- There were a couple of questions about whether or not the government will thank teachers, and the answer is yes. We have thanked teachers in the past, and we will continue thanking them in the future.
- The reality is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have worked hard to ensure our students continue to learn. They quickly adapted their classes, and quickly shifted to distance learning. Educators, as well as parents, have truly gone the extra mile to ensure our students continue to learn, and I cannot thank everyone enough for it.

Communication/Announcements/Press Releases & Relationships

- I want to thank everyone who raised concerns about how we are communicating information to the system and to the public at this time. I firmly believe that there is always room to grow, and always welcome feedback.
- To address some of the criticism around how we have communicated information since the COVID-19 pandemic began, I think it is important to note that during the early stages of the pandemic we were not operating under normal timelines. My goal was to communicate information to the education system and to the public as soon as I possibly could. Decisions were being made 7 days a week, which is why many of my media availabilities or press conferences were rolling out on Fridays, Saturdays or Sundays. As soon as a decision was made, it was my goal to communicate this. I know that some people may not agree with this direction, however I felt it would have been inappropriate to hold off on communicating decisions for multiple days.
- In terms of relationships with the education system, I have made it clear that my door is always open to our education partners. My office and I have regular meetings with all of our education partners, including the Alberta School Councils' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents and the Alberta Teachers' Association, and prior to the pandemic, I made it a priority of mine to visit every single school division in the province (I was on track to visit every division prior to COVID-19, however as soon as public health guidelines allow for it I intend to finish that tour!). In fact, it is due to these strong relationships that we were able to quickly develop a continuity of education plan for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. Once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, I am looking forward to continuing to visit our education partners and hosting in-person meetings again.

Consultation and Decision Making

- As I previously stated, I am in active communication with all of our education partners. Many of the decisions we have made as a government, from the new funding model to the continuity of education plan, were based on significant input from the education system. Currently, we are actively consulting with all of our partners, including parents through ASCA, on our re-entry plan for the 2020-21 school year.

Education/Curriculum

- On the topic of students progressing to the next grade, it would be unfair for us as a government to penalize our students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our continuity of education plan was developed with input from our education partners, and we are confident that our students will be prepared to succeed next year.
- Regarding updates to the provincial curriculum, I will have more to say on that in the near future.
- In regards to Program Unit Funding, Our new funding model continues to protect our most vulnerable children, including children with severe disabilities, and Alberta continues to have the earliest intervention program for Children in Canada at 2 years, 8 months. Under the old model, there was a significant drop in supports for students entering Grade 1. The new funding model closes that gap by providing a consistent level of support for K-12 students through the new Specialized Learning Supports Grant, while continuing to prioritize early intervention for pre-K students through Program Unit Funding. PUF eligibility remains the same, and students diagnosed with severe disabilities or severe language delays remain eligible for funding.

Evaluations/Assessments

- With in-person classes cancelled, it is up to individual teachers to determine what content to cover based on the remaining curricular outcomes, and to plan tasks that are reasonable to do from home. Additionally, we have made the decision to cancel all Grade 6 and 9 provincial achievement tests and grade 12 diploma exams through to the end of June. Any students who paid for their April or June diploma exams will be reimbursed. For students who plan on enrolling in summer school this year, provincial achievement tests and diploma exams will occur.
- Regarding report cards, each student will receive a final grade and a report card appropriate to their grade level. Teachers will assess a student's progress and assign a final grade. It is the expectation that school authorities work with their parents and inform them how assessment will be determined. All students who were on track to progress to the next grade will do so.
- More information is available at: <https://www.alberta.ca/student-learning-during-covid-19.aspx>

Francophone/French Education, Second Language, Newcomers

- Francophone school authorities are expected to follow the same continuity of education guidelines as the remainder of the school system.
- I do understand that there are parents who do not speak French, and may struggle supporting their child with their school work at-home. While students are not currently in the classroom, at-home learning continues to be teacher-directed. I would encourage any parents who require assistance to work with their teacher and school authority.
- We have also instituted a provincial education helpline for parents where Alberta Education staff can address their questions and direct them to their school authorities, where applicable. Parents can reach the hotline by calling 780-422-6548 (toll-free by dialing 310-0000, followed by the 10-digit phone number) or by emailing studentsupport@gov.ab.ca

Funding/Budget

- I want to be clear on this, Budget 2019 and Budget 2020 did not include any cuts to education. We honoured our platform commitment to Albertans and maintained education spending at record levels: \$8.223 billion.
- Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 we had to make the difficult decision to temporarily adjust education funding. I want to stress that this was not made lightly, no decision regarding valuable workers is. This is just as true in the public sector as the private sector. Governments of all levels, including the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, were being forced to make difficult decisions at the same time.
- The unfortunate reality is that in-person classes are not occurring due to COVID-19, and at-home learning options do not use the same staff and resources. I want to stress that this was a temporary measure, and that funding will be restored to regular levels on July 1st.
- In regards to Program Unit Funding, Our new funding model continues to protect our most vulnerable children, including children with severe disabilities, and Alberta continues to have the earliest intervention program for Children in Canada at 2 years, 8 months. Under the old model, there was a significant drop in supports for students entering Grade 1. The new funding model closes that gap by providing a consistent level of support for K-12 students through the new Specialized Learning Supports Grant, while continuing to prioritize early intervention for pre-K students through Program Unit Funding. PUF eligibility remains the same, and students diagnosed with severe disabilities or severe language delays remain eligible for funding.

Health/Well-being/Safety

- Our re-entry plan will prioritize the safety and wellbeing of students. We are currently consulting with education partners, and it will also be informed by advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.
- We also recognize the impact that COVID-19 may have on the mental health of our students. I am currently working with Associate Minister of Mental Health & Addictions Jason Luan on this matter. Most recently, Minister Luan announced increased investment in mental health supports in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included an additional \$21.6 million to improve access to phone and online supports with existing helplines, including the Kids Help Phone.
- Additionally, we worked quickly to ensure that our student nutrition program continues during the COVID-19 pandemic. In early April I was proud to announce that nine non-profits will receive \$3 million to provide additional food assistance to vulnerable K-12 students and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. This \$3 million was in addition to the \$15.5 million provided to school authorities for the 19-20 school year.

Homeschooling

- COVID-19 has not changed how homeschooling works. If a parent chooses to follow Alberta's curriculum while homeschooling, their child will be eligible for an Alberta diploma upon graduation.

High School Students

- Students on track for 100 or more credits are still eligible to graduate and get a high school diploma. Principals can award up to 15 credits to students in Grade 12 who were negatively impacted by class cancellations.
- Schools will work with students to complete courses underway. They will provide a final mark and award credits.
- If a student is unable to complete a course that would have led them to achieve a high school diploma, such as a work experience or a career and technology studies course, principals can award credits to ensure the student graduates.
- More information is available at: <https://www.alberta.ca/student-learning-during-covid-19.aspx>

Inclusive Education (Type 1 Diabetes)

- Thank you for your question around students with Type 1 Diabetes. I would encourage you to submit an e-mail to our office at education.minister@gov.ab.ca so we can discuss this further.

New School Builds

- We were elected by Albertans with a clear mandate to build schools across the province. That is why Budget 2019 and Budget 2020 both included new school projects.

- It is too early to tell if the COVID-19 pandemic will result in delaying some of the projects that are currently underway. That being said, in April the Minister of Infrastructure announced that we are accelerating 5 school projects as part of our government's economic stimulus package. More information on that announcement is available here:
<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=70087BE7C8800-F3C4-57D2-D74B62DDA1D018CB>

Playgrounds

- Playgrounds are important to local communities and provide a place for all children to explore and develop. Our government is supporting school divisions and parent fundraising groups by investing \$5 million in 26 new playground projects across Alberta.
- Moving forward, any new K-6 school projects will have funding for a playground included in their capital budgets, preventing the need for parents to fundraise for these vital projects.

Public/Private/Charter Schools

- Our government is not privatizing education, full stop.
- Alberta has a long history of education choice, including public schools, separate schools, Francophone schools, charter schools, independent schools, early childhood education and home education. Our government firmly believes that parents, not politicians, have the right to choose the kind of education they feel is best for their children. I recently tabled Bill 15: Choice in Education Act. If passed, this bill will protect parental choice and provide supports for all types of schooling options available to Albertans.
- It is important to note that Bill 15 will not change how funding works. Public, separate, Francophone and Charter schools continue be funded at 100%, and independent schools continue to receive 70% in funding.
- We will continue to protect *all* aspects of our education system.

Program Unit Funding / Special Needs Students

- This has come up a few times in previous questions. Our new funding model continues to protect our most vulnerable children, including children with severe disabilities, and Alberta continues to have the earliest intervention program for Children in Canada at 2 years, 8 months. Under the old model, there was a significant drop in supports for students entering Grade 1. The new funding model closes that gap by providing a consistent level of support for K-12 students through the new Specialized Learning Supports Grant, while continuing to prioritize early intervention for pre-K students through Program Unit Funding. PUF eligibility remains the same, and students diagnosed with severe disabilities or severe language delays remain eligible for funding. Additionally, every single school division in Alberta is receiving an increase in their operational funding for the upcoming school year.

- School authorities continue to receive the funding they require to support their students.

Resources / Supports for Parents

- I recognize that the transition to at-home learning has not been easy, and I appreciate the hard work parents have done to support their students. School authorities are offering their students multiple ways to complete their education, including online learning, paper-course packages and telephone check-ins.
- More than 4,000 curriculum resources to support parents and students are available on the LearnAlberta.ca website. School authorities have also made various resources available on their own websites. Additionally, school authorities and the government have provided about 60,000 devices to students as they learn from home. School authorities have prioritized providing devices to students based on need, focusing on students who do not have access to devices, have complex needs, or are high school students. The Métis Nation of Alberta, in partnership with Rupertsland Institute, has also purchased more than 2,200 devices for self-identified Métis students across Alberta.
- More information on supports and resources for parents can be found at:
<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=712792C1E64D8-9A5B-9162-E664314164B1783C>.

School Fees

- Our government respects the autonomy of school boards to make decisions about the operation of their schools, including decisions about the allocation of funding and school fees. The *Education Act* restricts school authorities from charging fees for instructional supplies and materials. Locally elected trustees are in the best position to comment on their board's policies and procedures surrounding fees.

School Resuming / 2020-2021 School Year

- We are currently working with education partners, including the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta School Councils' Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta and individual school divisions to develop a re-entry plan for the upcoming school year. Once a plan has been finalized we will communicate that to both the education system and the public. School authorities will be provided with enough time to prepare their schools as we transition into the 2020-21 school year, and our aim is to communicate a finalized plan prior to August 1st, 2020.
- For more information on our re-entry engagement, please see our May 6th release:
<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=712792C1E64D8-9A5B-9162-E664314164B1783C>.