

April 14, 2020

Ref: 248940

As the Minister of Children and Family Development and the Minister of Education, we are writing today to let you know that our ministries are working hard on solutions that will work for your families during this unprecedented time. We know that you and your children have been facing extraordinary challenges, uncertainty and stress, and are working with the Ministry of Health on solutions to a situation none of us have faced before. We know answers are not coming fast enough for you and we appreciate your continued patience.

In the past few weeks, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has:

- Adapted some of our work to accommodate physical distancing, communicating with you online and by phone about your family's situation and needs.
- Worked with organizations providing services to your family to ensure they can continue to serve you, even though the way they work needs to be adapted to line up with direction from the Provincial Health Officer.
- Created flexibility in our programming so that families can access services normally outside of policy, including access to some supported child development programming during school hours and greater flexibility in the use of respite funding. Please visit here for more info: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/covid-19-information/child-youth-with-special-needs-response-to-covid-19>
- Allowed families who receive respite funding to use it during school hours, for caregiver relief for siblings or to purchase homemaker services like house cleaning and meal prep.
- Temporarily suspended payments on all maintenance agreements for Special Needs Agreements to alleviate some financial stress.
- Relaxed rules around access to At Home Program to accommodate the lack of available medical practitioners.
- Ensured families in receipt of Autism Funding will be able to purchase equipment and services that normally are not eligible.

In addition, just this week, MCFD announced an emergency relief support fund to help more eligible families waiting for services. You can find that announcement here:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020CFD0043-000650>

MCFD and the Ministry of Education have been working hard during this unprecedented time to find ways for children with special needs to go to school, which provides critically important structure and supported learning environments.

Since the suspension of in-school instruction on March 17, 2020, the Ministry of Education has worked collaboratively with education partners on a co-ordinated approach. Guidelines for developing education plans for students are following these principles:

1. Maintaining a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.
2. Providing the services needed to support children of essential workers.
3. Supporting vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
4. Providing continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

These principles are also guiding planning and support for students with disabilities and diverse abilities. School Districts and Independent School Authorities have been asked to ensure that:

- Specific learning plans are developed for students with disabilities to allow for continued learning in the home environment and to ensure equity of access to learning.
- Learning plans are aligned with the goals identified in a student's Individual Education Plan and are developed in consultation with specialists who typically support the student in the educational setting.
- Specialized supports continue to be provided to students where possible (e.g. may depend on community capacity to deliver the service).
- School-based teams work with parents and caregivers to develop specific learning plans for children who were receiving 1:1 supports in a classroom setting.

During the first week after Spring Break, School Districts and Independent School Authorities were asked to focus on immediate care and learning needs for the children of front-line Essential Service Workers in health, social services, law enforcement and emergency response. After the needs of Essential Service Workers are addressed, School Districts and Independent School Authorities have been asked to look at their operational capacity and prioritize supports for parents/caregivers of students with disabilities, particularly those who have unique needs and/or would benefit from in-person instruction.

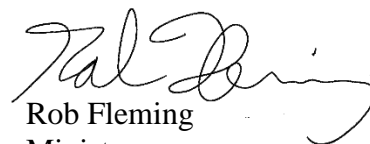
Next week, MCFD and the Ministry of Education are planning to meet with School Superintendents to talk about opportunities to prioritize in-person school supports for students with disabilities. We will be able to provide more guidance in the coming days.

Please check the [Ministry of Education Web site](#) and the [MCFD Web site](#) regularly for updates and information.

We want you to know that we have heard you and we continue to work collaboratively to adapt to this changing situation. The challenges that you face as families are at the forefront of our minds.

Sincerely,


Katrine Conroy
Minister


Rob Fleming
Minister