



May 21, 2020

VIA E-MAIL

Ref: 249264

Nancy Walton
Autism Support Network Society
E-mail: nwalton8021@gmail.com

Dear Nancy Walton:

Thank you for your letter of April 21, 2020, addressed to myself and to the Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Education, communicating your recommendations to the ministries, the data you collected, and the concerns and stresses being experienced by autism families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We acknowledge the challenges faced by families of children with autism as services are reduced and social distancing recommendations remain in place. In collaboration with our ministry partners and providers, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Ministry of Education (EDUC) are working to ensure there is continuity in services for families with children with autism as they experience increased vulnerabilities associated with the pandemic.

Acknowledging the breadth of responses to your survey, we understand that every family is different, and the temporary measures outlined in our previous correspondence may not address the issues faced by all families. We want to assure you that we will continue working hard to find new ways to provide relief, and we will work to keep families and service providers apprised of any updates. For the most up-to-date information, we encourage you to refer to the [CYSN response to COVID-19](#) Web page, where we will be updating COVID-19 response information on a regular basis.

We understand many families who receive autism funding would like to have their funding period extended. With this in mind, MCFD has updated policy so that families/caregivers of children or youth whose 6th or 19th birthday falls between March 15 – June 30, 2020 will have up to three additional months to use unspent funding from the affected funding period. Families/caregivers are encouraged to work with Autism Funding Program staff, who will assist them to ensure access to the unspent funding that supports their child or youth's intervention plan.

In response to your recommendations around Education Assistants (EAs) and Autism Behavioural Analysis support workers entering homes and allowing ASD children to enter schools to work with EAs under safe protocols, MCFD and EDUC's meetings with school superintendents to talk about opportunities to prioritize in-person school supports for students with disabilities are ongoing. More guidance is forthcoming.

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Ministry of
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For the time being, at the direction of EDUC, for students who were receiving specialized supports (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy) on-site, school-based teams should explore alternate service delivery models and the capacity within the professional community to continue to provide students access to these types of services.

Additionally, where operationally feasible, school districts and independent schools should develop plans to help students continue to access specialized supports in the home environment. For students receiving 1:1 service, school-based teams will need to work together and with families and caregivers to develop a plan for ongoing learning and supports.

MCFD also encourages continued service delivery where possible. To support in-person appointments, families are encouraged to use the [COVID-19 Self Assessment tool](#) and [COVID-19 preventative measures information](#) to determine if it would be safe to bring a professional into their home; regulated health professionals (such as Physical Therapists and Occupational Therapists) are mandated to follow the BC Centre for Disease Control's [COVID-19 Care instructions for vulnerable people](#).

Lastly, to address the stresses families are experiencing at this time, we recognize that COVID-19 has brought a new level of stress and worry to many people's lives. Below are links to mental health resources, which include information for parents to support children and youth during this time of uncertainty. There are also free online resources available to students, parents and educators to support social and emotional well-being during the pandemic.

- [Virtual mental health supports for everyone during COVID-19](#)
- [Mental health support for children & youth during COVID-19](#)

We appreciate your concerns and we recognize that the financial pressures and anxieties associated with the pandemic are challenging for families. MCFD and EDUC are working with the resources available to maximize support for families, and we acknowledge the need for ongoing support development as the pandemic continues. Please check the [Ministry of Education Web site](#) and the [MCFD Web site](#) regularly for updates and information.

Thank you for your concern and advocacy on behalf of families with children during this challenging time.

Sincerely,



Katrine Conroy
Minister of Children and Family Development