



2021 Report—Volume 1: Improvements Needed to Help More Early Learners Succeed

REGINA, SK., June 8, 2021: In her *2021 Report – Volume 1*, Chapters 5 and 11, Provincial Auditor Judy Ferguson identifies improvements the Ministry of Education and the Saskatoon Public School Division No. 13 each need to make to help preschool-aged and kindergarten-aged children successfully learn and develop academically.

The Office did two audits related to early learners.

One looked at the Ministry's processes to evaluate whether a key program—the Early Learning Intensive Support Program—helps preschool-aged children experiencing disabilities receive a good start on early learning and development. The Program, consistent with the Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, encourages inclusivity of these children in pre-kindergarten programs. The Program, operating since 2017-18, funded 242 spaces in existing pre-kindergarten programs for selected preschool-aged children in 23 of the 27 school divisions at a cost of \$3.0 million in 2020–21. Children in these spaces are those experiencing significant delays in development and may include children diagnosed with autism, cognitive delays, and behavioral issues.

The other audit looked at the Saskatoon Public School Division No. 13's processes to monitor its success in readying students for learning in the primary grades when exiting kindergarten. The readiness of Saskatoon's over 1,500 kindergarten students (at 77 percent) is similar to the provincial average of 79 percent—both well below the provincial goal of 90 percent.

Each audit identified many positive steps and actions taken to support early learners. For example, the Early Learning Intensive Support Program had clear objectives (like helping young children receive a good start on their learning and development), had a well-designed evaluation plan, and generally collected and analyzed data as planned. The School Division had appropriate assessment tools to help teachers collect information on key developmental and learning areas of individual kindergarten students, generally gave teachers sufficient guidance on use of assessment tools, and used a consultative process to help teachers identify students with significant learning needs and strategies to address those needs.

However, both audits recognised the need for improvements. Both audits identified gaps in data collected needed to measure progress and make informed decisions.

The Ministry audit found the Ministry was not collecting data about the progress of each child in the Program. Without collecting such data, the Ministry cannot determine whether individual children participating in the Program receive sufficient support to learn and develop. Nor was the Ministry collecting information about actions participating school divisions took to address identified issues with the Program. Identified issues included teachers not receiving enough support to attend training to enhance skills, and specialized professional supports (like speech language pathologists) not being sufficiently available to classroom staff. Not knowing whether identified issues are sufficiently addressed increases the risk of the Program not being successful in helping these children learn and develop.

The School Division audit identified data collection issues. Testing found kindergarten teachers did not always assess students at least twice a year as expected, or use suitable numeracy assessment tools. Also, the Division could not explain why some kindergarten students did not participate in required reassessments. Use of standard assessments of key learning and development areas of kindergarten students (like literacy and numeracy) collects essential data about whether a student is progressing as expected or having trouble learning. Not collecting sufficient data about a student's progress means teachers may not make appropriate changes to their instructional practices or seek alternate resources to help individual students succeed.

In addition, the School Division audit found analysis of kindergarten assessment data collected is limited. The School Division needs to better analyze this data to identify trends and common areas of struggle across all schools in the Division. Robust data analysis helps identify root causes at certain schools or division-wide gaps. Identifying and addressing root causes will help the Division help more kindergarten students be ready for learning in the primary grades.

Ferguson reports, "Initiatives to help early learners are critical given the percent of kindergarten students in Saskatchewan publicly funded schools assessed as ready for learning is well below the provincial goal of 90 percent. Moreover; the ready-to-learn attainment of self-declared First Nations, Métis, and Inuit kindergarten students remains significantly lower (at 56 percent in 2019-20)." Research



shows quality education early in life leads to better health, education, and employment outcomes later in life, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those experiencing disabilities.

The full Provincial Auditor's [2021 Report – Volume 1](#) is available online at www.auditor.sk.ca.

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For more information, please contact:

Judy Ferguson, FCPA, FCA
Provincial Auditor
Phone: 306.787.6372
info@auditor.sk.ca

Maygen Ring
Executive Assistant
Phone: 306.787.6361
media@auditor.sk.ca

Additional issues highlighted in the Provincial Auditor's *2021 Report–Volume 1* include:

- [Chapter 6: Health—Using Critical Incident Reporting to Improve Patient Safety](#)
- [Chapter 8: Justice and Attorney General and Corrections, Policing, and Public Safety—Implementing Strategies to Reduce Short-Term Remand in Saskatoon and Surrounding Area](#)
- [Chapter 10: Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority—Regulating Cannabis](#)
- [Chapter 22: Saskatchewan Health Authority—Providing Timely Access to Mental Health and Addiction Services in Prince Albert and Surrounding Area](#)
- [Chapter 31: Water Security Agency—Regulating Drainage](#)
- Others from 24 additional chapters

See accompanying news releases and backgrounders for further details about key topics.