



Provincial Auditor looks at whether school divisions are doing enough to ensure the best educational outcomes for students with intensive needs and home-based students

REGINA, Sask., June 7, 2018 – In her *2018 Report – Volume 1*, Provincial Auditor Judy Ferguson reports on how well Saskatoon School Division No. 13 supported the learning of students with intensive needs, and how well Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 was monitoring the education of its home-based learners. She found that both divisions had areas that needed improvement. “It is important that all students in the province receive the best education possible,” says Ferguson. “School divisions need to provide students with intensive learning needs the support they require, and actively monitor home-based educators.”

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 (Chapter 11)

Saskatchewan school divisions are required, by law, to accommodate students with intensive learning needs in the regular program of instruction, or through special programming. Students with intensive needs are those assessed as having a capacity to learn that is compromised by a cognitive, social-emotional, behavioural, or physical condition (e.g., autisms, depressive or anxiety disorders, deafness).

In 2016-17, Saskatoon Public School Division had about 16,000 students in Kindergarten to Grade 8. About 7% of these students had identified intensive learning needs.

Provincial Auditor Judy Ferguson reports Saskatoon Public needs to do more to support students with identified intensive learning needs. The Report pinpoints 11 areas for improvement. Key areas included the following.

Saskatoon Public did not centrally monitor whether its schools sufficiently support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with identified intensive needs. It did not specifically estimate future enrollment of students with intensive needs; or analyze trends in the number of them or changes in the categories of their intensive needs. It could not show how it determined the number of staff needed to support these students. It determined adaptations and classroom interventions on a student-by-student basis.

The Report indicates the actual increases in students with identified intensive learning needs outpaced increases in staff that provide supports to these students over the last three years. “Reliable estimates and understanding trends in categories of needs are critical in determining adaptations or classroom interventions, or staff needed to support students with identified intensive learning needs,” says Ferguson.

Saskatoon Public had a well-defined approach to designate students as having intensive learning needs, and to identify learning supports. However, its assessment process took considerably longer than good practice of 10 school days. The Division took between six to ten weeks to complete a psychologist assessment; and four to six weeks to complete a speech language assessment. Saskatoon Public needs guidance on the expected timeframes for completing assessments of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with special needs to avoid delays in identifying and implementing learning supports for students.



Saskatoon Public developed a learning plan for each student with intensive needs as expected. But it did not always document agreement between the school staff and parents on these plans. In addition, it did not always document discussions and steps taken to implement learning plans, or complete progress reports for each student. For one half of files of students with intensive needs tested, the 2016-17 year progress reports were not signed by parents or at all (i.e., also missing school staff signatures). For almost two-thirds of the files tested, they did not contain a progress report for the first term of the 2017-18 school year. Ferguson says “Involving parents and securing their support is key in encouraging a child’s learning and development.”

Providing appropriate learning supports as early as possible to students with identified intensive learning needs can help them succeed in life.

Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 (Chapter 7)

Saskatchewan has the third-highest proportion of home-based learners in Canada. The number of home-based learners is growing.

Home-based educators have a right to direct their children’s education from their home, and are responsible for their children’s education. School divisions are responsible for regulating home-based educators and monitoring the educational progress of home-based learners. Laws, along with Ministry of Education policies, set clear requirements for operating and monitoring home-based education programs in Saskatchewan.

As of September 30, 2017, Prairie Valley School Division had 143 home-based students. Over 75% of these students were in Kindergarten to Grade 8.

Provincial Auditor Judy Ferguson reports that Prairie Valley did not do enough to fulfill its regulatory role of monitoring the education of its home-based learners. It needed to better understand its authority to monitor home-based education programs in the division, and to exercise that authority.

Ferguson also found the Division did not follow its policies to register home-based learners, and monitor home-based educators. Contrary to policy, the Division renewed the 2017-18 program registration for 21 students without receiving their progress reports for the prior year, or confirming each student demonstrated satisfactory education progress in the prior year. In addition, it did not consistently give home-based educators written confirmation of program registration to inform them that their proposed programs were satisfactory, or give them timely feedback. Furthermore, it did not keep all correspondence with home-based educators.

Only through active monitoring can the Division know whether home-based learners receive a quality education appropriate for their age and ability. Active monitoring is key to ensuring home-based education plans and home-based student progress reports meet the Ministry and legal requirements. It is also key to holding home-based educators accountable for the delivery of that education.

Additional issues highlighted in the Provincial Auditor’s Report include:

- › Providing timely access to mental health and addictions services in the former Prince Albert Parkland Regional Health Authority (Chapter 8)



- › Providing primary medical care in adult secure-custody correctional centres at the Ministry of Corrections and Policing (Chapter 3)
- › Regulating drainage at the Water Security Agency (Chapter 12)
- › Managing future cleanup of oil and gas wells at the Ministry of Energy and Resources (Chapter 17)
- › Regulating oil, gas, and pipeline industry incidents by the Ministry of Energy and Resources (Chapter 4)
- › Delivering the impaired driver treatment program at the Saskatchewan Impaired Driver Treatment Centre (Chapter 9)

Further details regarding the key topics covered in Volume 1 of the 2018 Report can be found in the accompanying [media releases and backgrounder](#). The full Provincial Auditor's 2018 Report – Volume 1 is available online at www.auditor.sk.ca.

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