Chapter 2
Grade 12 Graduation Rates

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Education (Ministry) is responsible for setting objectives and giving direction for early learning, elementary, and high school education. Our audit found that during 2011, the Ministry did not have effective processes to increase the Grade 12 graduation rate above the 2004-05 baseline rate. For students entering Grade 10 between 2004-05 and 2008-09, the overall provincial Grade 12 graduation rate decreased 3.3% (from 75.6% to 72.3%). The Ministry had not sufficiently identified and analyzed the reason for the decrease. As well, it had not analyzed the most effective education strategies to use at critical learning points and did not give clear direction to the education sector as to how to improve Grade 12 graduation rates across Saskatchewan. We make ten recommendations to strengthen the Ministry's planning processes, analysis of effective strategies, and the direction it gives to school divisions to enhance student achievement and improve Grade 12 graduation rates.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry is responsible for all matters relating to early learning, elementary, and secondary education (Pre-K-12).

In 2010-11, the Ministry spent about $1.3 billion on Pre-K-12 education and worked with 28 school divisions and 708 schools.[1] For purposes of this chapter, we define "school divisions" to include public schools, separate schools (e.g., Catholic), and conseil scolaire (French language schools).[2] The Federal Government funds 86 First Nations schools on reserves in Saskatchewan that enroll about 14,000 students (all grades).

Saskatchewan has about 190,000 Pre-K-12 students enrolled in schools whether funded provincially, federally, or independently.[3] Regardless of the source of funding, the Ministry sets the Grade 12 graduation requirements for all students including directing the curriculum and the qualifications of teachers where students seek a Grade 12 graduation certificate in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Grade 12 graduation rates show wide differences among school divisions and also among students as highlighted in Figure 1. This chapter describes the results of our audit of the Ministry's processes to improve Grade 12 graduation rates.

3.0 BACKGROUND

Graduating from Grade 12 is an important personal goal with broad societal implications. At a personal level, students who do not complete Grade 12 have fewer

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[1] Ministry of Education *2011 Annual Report,* p. 27.
[2] *The Education Act 1995* defines school divisions as public and separate school boards only.
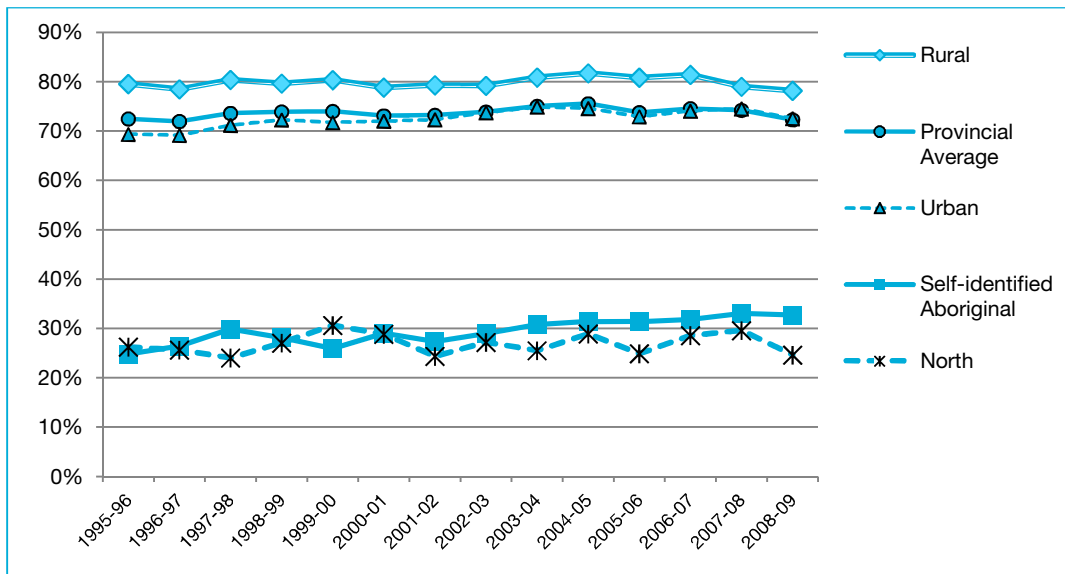[3] Ministry of Education information systems.

work opportunities, less income, and ultimately poorer health. Over the long term, Grade 12 graduation rates affect the size of the skilled workforce and the provincial economy.

The Government of Saskatchewan has identified the education of all young people as a top priority. Figure 2 shows that in 2009, the Grade 12 graduation rate (within three years) was 72.3% for all students provincially and 32.7% for Aboriginal students.[4] The Premier specifically expects the education sector to reduce the gap between the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that complete Grade 12.[5]

The learning and resources that enable Grade 12 graduation are complex but include timely learning of critical reading, writing, and mathematics skills. The reasons for delayed graduation vary widely and could include poor attendance (e.g., due to lack of student engagement/motivation, bullying, discrimination, health or teen parenting challenges), lack of suitable learning materials, poor instructional practices or assessment methods. Some families frequently move from school to school and some schools have difficulty retaining qualified teachers. These factors create gaps in learning that make Grade 12 graduation more difficult.

Figure 1—Long-term Trends in Grade 12 Graduation Within Three Years After Entering Grade 10 - Saskatchewan Students 1996 to 2009

Source: Ministry of Education Student Data System 2011.

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[4] Ministry of Education *Plan for 2012-13,* p. 10 explains that these students received marks for at least two Grade 10 classes and within three years completed requirements for Grades 12.
[5] The 2010 Minister's Mandate Letter is available at http://www.gov.sk.ca/cabinet/harpauer/.

Figure 2—Baseline and Trends for Persistence to Complete Grade 12

	Entered Grade 10	Within 3 Years		Within 4 Years		Within 5 Years	
		All	FN&M[3]	All	FN&M	All	FN&M
	2000-01	73.1	29.0	78.0	39.6	79.7	46.5
	2001-02	73.2	27.3	77.8	37.8	79.7	43.9
	2002-03	73.9	29.0	78.6	38.9	80.5	46.1
	2003-04	75.0	30.8	79.0	39.9	80.4	45.0
	2004-05	**75.6**	**31.4**	**79.7**	**41.1**	**81.4**	**47.0**
	2005-06	73.8	31.4	78.4	41.5	80.1	47.2
	2006-07	74.6	31.8	79.5	43.0	81.1	48.1
	2007-08	74.2	33.0	78.8	43.2	n/a	n/a
	2008-09	72.3	32.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Table header: **Baseline (2004-05) and Trends for Graduation Rates** — Measure: Per cent of students[1] in a cohort[2] entering Grade 10 in the year shown who complete Grade 12 within three, four or five years (Saskatchewan)

[1] *Data includes students in provincially-funded, independent, and First Nations schools.*
[2] *Grade 10 cohort consists of students having marks in at least two Grade 10 subjects and enrolled in Grade 10 for the first time.*
[3] *Self-declared First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.*

Source: Ministry of Education Student Data System 2011 and *Plan for 2012-13* p. 10.

Grade 12 graduation rates within three years of entering Grade 10 declined slightly between 2004-05 and 2008-09 (Figures 1 and 2). We analyzed trends during 2005-2009 and found that about half of the school divisions had steady graduation rates, 11 trended downward (some sharply), and two school divisions (each with less than 125 Grade 12 students) improved their Grade 12 graduation rate.[6]

Some Saskatchewan students were motivated to study four or five years to complete their academic requirements for Grades 10, 11, and 12 (see Figure 2). Five years after entering Grade 10, the graduation rate for Aboriginal students was 48.1%. This is significantly better than the 31.8% Grade 12 graduation rate after three years in Grades 10, 11, and 12. Exhibits 6.1 and 6.2 set out further information about Grade 12 graduation rates for all students (i.e., from public, separate, French, independent, and First Nations schools).

4.0   AUDIT OBJECTIVE, CRITERIA, AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this audit was to assess whether the Ministry had effective processes to increase Grade 12 graduation rates above the 2004-05 baseline year. We focused on processes that the Ministry used during February 1, 2011 to January 31, 2012 for publicly-funded school divisions.

After discussion with the Ministry, we selected 2004-05 as the baseline year. In 2004-05, the Ministry began reporting Grade 12 graduation rates that included students graduating from public, separate, French, First Nations, and independent schools.

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[6] The Ministry of Education provided us with data from public, separate, and French schools from its Student Data System 2011.

To conduct this audit, we followed the *Standards for Assurance Engagements* published in the *CICA Handbook - Assurance*. Our approach to the audit included documenting our understanding of the Ministry's processes, reviewing documents, policies, websites, and other guidance the Ministry provided to its staff and school divisions, and testing key aspects of those processes. To evaluate the Ministry's processes, we used criteria based on the work of other auditors and current literature listed in the selected references. The Ministry's management agreed with the criteria outlined here and explained throughout this chapter.

The audit criteria expect that to have effective processes to increase Grade 12 graduation rates above the baseline, the Ministry should:

❭ Provide strategic direction to improve Grade 12 graduation rates

❭ Manage risks influencing Grade 12 graduation rates

❭ Monitor Grade 12 graduation rates and related factors

❭ Take corrective action

Since 2006, the Ministry has aimed to strengthen the accountability of the education system for its results in terms of student achievement and Grade 12 graduation rates. It established a *Continuous Improvement Framework* and requested that school divisions submit Continuous Improvement Plans to the Ministry and make public reports on their results. Overall school division spending on Pre-K-12 education rose from $1.7 billion in 2008-2009 to about $1.8 billion in 2010-2011.[7] In late 2011, the Ministry advised school divisions that by mid-2012, it would expect greater accountability for results, including improved Grade 12 graduation rates.

However, during 2011 to 2012, the Ministry provided limited strategic direction and did not manage the risks to education that it identified. It did not monitor whether all school divisions used effective strategies, and did not clearly communicate required actions to school divisions with poor results including low Grade 12 graduation rates. The Ministry told us that it plans, during 2012, to state clearly what it expects school divisions to do to improve Grade 12 graduation rates in the future.

We concluded that during February 1, 2011 to January 31, 2012, the Ministry of Education did not have effective processes to increase Grade 12 graduation rates above 2004-05 baselines. As reflected in Figure 2, between 2004-05 and 2008-09, the overall provincial Grade 12 graduation rate decreased 3.3% (from 75.6% to 72.3%). During the same time period, there was a 1.3% increase (from 31.4% to 32.7%) in the Grade 12 graduation rate for self-declared First Nations and Métis students.

5.0   KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we describe our key findings and recommendations related to the audit criteria set out under each subheading. Regardless of the source of school funding, the

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[7] School division financial statements as at August 31 year-end.

recommendations apply to the Ministry's role in directing school divisions and in setting Grade 12 graduation requirements for students in all schools.

5.1   Need Better Direction to School Divisions

We expected the Ministry would have processes to provide strategic direction to improve Grade 12 graduation rates and would:

❯ *Clarify accountability with relevant partners (e.g., school divisions)*

❯ *Communicate strategic direction and specific measurable targets*

❯ *Identify key effective strategies to achieve targets (i.e., curriculum strategies, instructional practices, student assessment strategies)*

5.1.1 Legislative Authority Not Used to Set Direction

As highlighted in Figure 3, *The Education Act, 1995* (Act) gives full authority to the Minister of Education to direct elementary and secondary education. School divisions must comply with provincial laws, regulations, and Ministry directives. They are also accountable to local people for their operational decisions and results.

Figure 3—Authority for Education

The Education Act, 1995 gives the Ministry authority to direct the education practices used in Saskatchewan. For example:

The Act s. 3-4 - The Minister is responsible for all matters related to education (unless specifically assigned to another Government department or agency). The Minister shall:
- Set goals and objectives for the growth and development of the education system
- Give instructions and directions
- Provide curriculum guides, and reference materials
- Prescribe subjects of instruction, course requirements, learning resources, etc. "to ensure an optimum quality of instructional services in schools"
- Provide advice and recommendations to school divisions on the management of schools

The Act s. 85 - Subject to directives from the Minister, school boards have a duty to administer and manage schools but any "educational supervision" is subject to the "approval of the department."

The Act s. 176(1) - "The program of studies and the courses of study used in a school are to be consistent with the regulations and with any directives that the Minister may issue." **Regulation 23(1)** – The Minister must authorize and issue courses of study "in curriculum guides, bulletins, or directives."
Regulation 31 – The department may set examinations to assess student learning.

The Act s. 278(1) & (2) - On the date specified, school boards shall submit to the Minister for review (s. 280.1) and approval, written…program objectives…policies and programs, and estimated revenues and expenditures required for the purposes of the school division.

The Ministry emphasizes shared responsibility among its partners for education results. The Ministry's primary partners are school boards/conseil scolaire, school divisions, principals, and teachers. For example, in the Ministry's *Pre-K-12 Continuous Improvement Framework: A Guide for School Division Strategic Planning* (Guide), the Ministry lists roles and makes several partners responsible for each role listed. However, the list describes the Ministry's role as restricted to setting policy, far less than the Ministry's legislated role as set out in the Act (see Figure 3).

The Ministry explained that during the last two decades, grants from the Provincial Government contributed a smaller proportion of overall school funding than came from

local property taxes, leading some people to perceive school divisions had greater powers than granted to them by the Act. We note that the authority of the Minister of Education (and the Ministry) is not dependent upon the source of school funding. In Canada, education is a provincial matter (not municipal or federal).[8]

During 2011, the Ministry was working toward a new accountability relationship with school divisions. Management told us that it is moving toward directly requiring actions that are anticipated to improve the education of Saskatchewan students.

> **1. We recommend that the Ministry of Education use its legislated authority to direct school divisions toward improved Grade 12 graduation rates.**

5.1.2 Need to Set Targets and Communicate Direction

The Ministry uses its planning processes to decide its strategic direction. It communicates the general strategic direction of the education system annually in March for the school year commencing in the fall. For example, its *Plan for 2011-12,* states it intends to "Support improved student achievement ..."

The Ministry communicates its strategic direction to school divisions in its *Pre-K-12 Continuous Improvement Framework: A Guide for School Division Strategic Planning* (Guide). Introduced in 2005-06, the Guide includes a framework of four priority areas for action (i.e., governance and accountability, higher literacy and achievement, equitable opportunities, smooth transitions). For the 2011-12 school year, the Ministry gave this guidance to school divisions after the school year began, in November 2011.

The Ministry does not set targets for the education system. It does not have targets for improved graduation rates and does not specify what improvements it expects in student achievement. Instead, the Guide asks school divisions to consider the local circumstances and set targets in the Ministry's four priority areas for action. For example, one school division set targets for student reading, mathematics, and daily attendance to improve progressively over three years. If long-term targets are different in every school division (without logical reasons for the differences), the province may continue to have inconsistent results and widely-varied Grade 12 graduation rates.

In 2010, the Premier directed the Minister of Education[9] to facilitate students' achievement to a level equal to the national average on standardized assessments of reading, mathematics, and science. To make this goal meaningful, the Ministry needs to state clearly by when and in what grades student achievement should improve. The Ministry measures student achievement at many points (as described in the next section and on its website).[10] It should state clearly what it measures to show changes in student achievement at specific critical points. When the Ministry has identified these

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[8] The Federal Government funds First Nations' schools on reserves, but the province in which students obtain a Grade 12 graduation certificate sets the curriculum and graduation requirements.
[9] The Minister's Mandate Letter is available at http://www.gov.sk.ca/cabinet/harpauer/.
[10] The Ministry reports many measures of student achievement and related factors in its Saskatchewan Education Indicators reports. Some measures are used to assess student learning for the purpose of guiding further teaching. Other measures assess the progress of Saskatchewan students compared to other students provincially, nationally, or internationally. The 2010 Indicators Report is available to the public at http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/2010-Indicators.

critical learning points, it will be better able to assess overall student progress and set realistic targets for student achievement and for Grade 12 graduation rates. It needs to clarify how it will monitor that students are on track toward Grade 12 graduation.

> 2. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education clearly state what should be measured and how it should be measured to assess student progress/achievements that significantly contribute to successful Grade 12 graduation.**

Specific targets for improved Grade 12 graduation rates would help the Ministry identify which strategies would be effective to achieve the targeted level of progress and report improvements. Realistic but challenging targets can inspire focused action and more rapid results. Specific targets for what the education system should achieve, and by when, would help the Ministry communicate clear direction and a sense of urgency to school divisions.

> 3. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education set short and long-term targets for increasing Grade 12 graduation rates.**

5.1.3 Need to Identify Key Effective Strategies

The Ministry has long-standing processes to identify education practices or strategies thought to improve student achievement. The Ministry identifies strategies but does not specify which strategies are most effective to help students achieve success at critical points in learning (i.e., key effective strategies).

As described previously, the Ministry has authority to provide directives to school divisions, and particularly strategies related to:

❭ Curriculum design and content

❭ Instructional methods

❭ Assessment of student learning[11]

The Ministry's website lists many references related to curriculum guides, courses of study for various grades, and related resource materials and instructional methods. The Ministry has an Assessment for Learning Program to determine students' skills in writing (Grades 5, 8), reading (Grades 4, 7, 10), and mathematics (Grades 5, 8).[12] It has no provincial tests to assess student progress in science.

The Ministry has processes to identify new strategies for education. It uses working groups, task forces, and advisory groups, such as those in Figure 4, to identify

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[11] Ministry definitions are at http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/effective-practices.
[12] Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report 2010.

strategies and it obtains research about a few strategies. These groups recommend strategies and make them public. Sometimes the strategies are vague (e.g., study best practices for teaching). A few strategies are more specific (e.g., teach essential Treaty knowledge to all students). The strategies are set out in multiple documents dated from 1991 to 2011.

Figure 4—Examples of Advisory Groups and their Recommendations

Ongoing – Working groups of teachers recommend curriculum and instructional practices in subject matter areas (e.g., English, social studies, mathematics).

2010 – Provincial Panel on Student Achievement – strengthen culture of learning with evidence of effectiveness and public reports; strengthen assessment capacity; identify and promote practices that have proven effective to enhance student learning; improve student retention with alternative programs; student engagement.

2010 – A Time for Significant Leadership: A Strategy for Implementing First Nations and Métis Education Goals—strategies proposed throughout (e.g., four priority areas: cultural affirmation/safe environments, curriculum actualization, shared decision-making, lifelong learning approach).

The Ministry needs to identify which strategies are the most effective to support student achievement of critical learning. For example, the Ministry could identify essential strategies that school divisions could use to help Grade 3 students who are struggling to learn how to read and write. The Ministry could identify key effective strategies that evidence shows will improve student achievement at critical points and ultimately will increase Grade 12 graduation rates. It could identify key effective strategies about what to teach (curriculum), how to teach (instructional practices), and how to measure student learning (assessment tools).

4. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education identify practical, key strategies that have proven effective in Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions to strengthen student achievement and increase Grade 12 graduation rates.**

5.2   Need Focused Management of Identified Risks

We expected the Ministry would have processes to manage risks influencing student achievement and would:

❯ *Identify critical risk factors influencing Grade 12 graduation rates*

❯ *Direct implementation of key effective strategies*

❯ *Align resources with key effective strategies*

5.2.1 Some Important Risk Factors Identified

The Ministry annually completes a formal environmental scan that identifies various risks facing the Ministry. This process identifies and documents possible root causes of the risk that some students will not graduate from Grade 12. The 2011 environmental scan identifies some factors contributing to lower student achievement, including:

❱ Students lack literacy skills and do not read regularly (some also lack appropriate reading materials)

❱ Teachers assigned to work outside their subject matter expertise (possibly due to scheduling or teacher retention issues in school divisions)

❱ Lack of support services (e.g., speech therapy) for students with intensive needs

❱ School climate of bullying and racism

❱ Students' attendance at school is poor or inconsistent for various reasons

The Ministry has an active risk management process that identifies First Nations and Métis students as having higher education risks and proposes actions to help Ministry staff to better understand related risks. The Ministry does not have a plan for the education sector to manage all of the important risks it has identified. The Ministry's 2005 Anti-bullying Strategy is a good start, but more action plans are needed as suggested in the next section.

5.2.2 Need to Direct School Divisions to Use Key Effective Strategies

The Ministry has not identified the most important or key effective strategies and has not directed school divisions to use specific key strategies. There is one exception. The Ministry's Continuous Improvement Guide tells school divisions that: "First Nations and Métis education is a required component of continuous improvement planning and reporting in all four provincial priorities." As part of that strategy, the Ministry directs schools to teach a curriculum related to Treaty Essential Learning.[13] The Ministry also measures and reports student learning in that area.[14]

The Ministry meets formally with half of the school divisions every year regarding the Continuous Improvement Framework. At that time, it sometimes verbally suggests education strategies thought to be effective. The Ministry meets regularly with school divisions' superintendents and others to discuss current issues and promising practices. It sponsors professional development opportunities to help school division personnel implement some strategies. This informal and undocumented system has so far not improved graduation rates.

The Ministry needs to direct school divisions to use specific key effective strategies. Using key effective strategies at critical points could significantly increase student achievement and ultimately could increase Grade 12 graduation rates. Directing the use of key effective strategies could make student achievement more consistent across the province and help improve Grade 12 graduation rates.

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[13] Treaty Essential Learning explains our common history as people whose ancestors signed Treaties. It is available to the public at http://www.otc.ca/siteimages/TELS.pdf.
[14] *Education Indicators Reports* are at http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/2010-Indicators.

5. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education direct school divisions to use key effective strategies (once identified by the Ministry) that have proven practical for overcoming the most significant risks of school divisions affecting student achievement and for increasing Grade 12 graduation rates.**

5.2.3 Need to Better Align Resources with Strategies

As described previously, the Ministry has processes to require school divisions to prepare a Continuous Improvement Plan (Plan) and to report certain information. The Ministry does not have a process to verify that each school division submits a Plan and a Continuous Improvement Report (Report) for each year. By late February 2012, less than half the school divisions we examined had submitted an updated Plan for the 2011-12 school year and less than 60% had submitted a Report for the 2010-11 year that ended six months previously. The Ministry does not formally analyze school divisions' Plans or Reports to determine if required elements are included or missing.

Of those Reports that school divisions submitted, we found very few contained the required details about the strategies used and specific progress toward targets. For example, some school divisions reported they met their targets but did not disclose what the targets were. Most did not explain the resources required to implement important strategies although some identified the staff needed (e.g., number of additional teachers or other professionals).

The Ministry meets with each school division every second year (about half of school divisions annually) to discuss their Reports for the prior year and their Plans for the year ahead. To date, the Ministry has not challenged school divisions to explain the reasons for poor results or how they used resources. The Ministry told us that in mid-2012, it plans to talk explicitly with school divisions about their progress toward improved student achievement and higher Grade 12 graduation rates. At present, the Ministry reviews and approves school divisions' budgets without reviewing their planned objectives or programs. The Ministry needs to assess school divisions' Continuous Improvement Plans and Reports to help allocate resources effectively.

We observed that some school divisions have goals that do not relate to student education or achievement. One school division listed its first goal as enhancing the spiritual growth of board members and teachers. Without a timely review of school divisions' plans, the Ministry does not know if school divisions plan to spend public money on student education as intended.

6. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education review each school division's Continuous Improvement Plan and assess its planned use of key effective strategies before approving the school division's budget for the related school year.**

7. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education review each school division's Continuous Improvement Report and assess if it is achieving its planned outcomes.**

5.3 Monitoring Graduation Rates Without Analysis of Influencing Factors

We expected the Ministry would have processes to monitor Grade 12 graduation rates and related factors and would:

〉 *Require school divisions to report on strategies used and risk factors influencing their graduation rates*

〉 *Analyze progress in graduation rates and use of key effective strategies*

〉 *Report trends in graduation rates*

5.3.1 School Divisions Required to Report Strategies but Not Risk Factors

The Ministry's Continuous Improvement Guide provides clear direction that school divisions must report the specific strategies they use to improve student achievement in each of the four priority areas (i.e., governance and accountability, higher literacy and achievement, equitable opportunities, smooth transitions). The Ministry also clearly requires school divisions to report the results they achieve with the strategies they use (e.g., results in reading, mathematics, Grade 12 graduation rates).

The Ministry does not require school divisions to report risks influencing student achievement. However, the Ministry collects information about some risk factors, such as the proportion of students who:

〉 Do not have basic skills needed to enter kindergarten

〉 Do not have expected reading skills

〉 Require intensive support due to physical or intellectual disability or development disorders

We recognize that many factors influence school achievement. Nonetheless, the Ministry (and school divisions) could document specific critical factors that reduce student achievement and corrective action that could overcome them. For example, the Ministry told us that the number of students enrolled in some schools is far greater than the number of students who attend regularly, even at the elementary level. *The Education Act, 1995* requires that all children attend school until they are 16 years old. The Ministry could require school divisions to describe attendance issues and their probable causes and impact on school achievement. It could analyze and report data from other ministries about issues that could impact school attendance (e.g., trends in teen

pregnancies, youth involved with the law). Poor attendance is a key risk to poor student achievement. The Ministry needs to clearly identify what influences school attendance to help it analyze what action would improve school attendance.

8. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education require school divisions to report critical risks limiting student achievement and that the Ministry analyze provincial progress in reducing critical risks.**

5.3.2 Limited Analysis of Progress in Graduation Rates

The Ministry collects important information about student achievement and reports the facts. It reports very limited analysis of the meaning or significance of the facts it reports. For example, the Ministry compares student reading, mathematics, and science abilities to international ratings using Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development standardized tests at various grade levels. The Ministry does not comment on the major reasons for the levels of achievement reported.[15] Similarly, the Ministry reports the Grade 12 graduation rates of the school divisions without interpreting the major contributing factors. The Ministry does not comment on why some Saskatchewan schools have lower graduation rates than others.

The Ministry does not analyze which factors most likely influenced the different levels of achievement and graduation rates across the province. That is, when a school division's student achievement is lower, the Ministry does not analyze and document the contributing factors. When a school division's student achievement is higher, the Ministry does not document what key strategies were used to achieve that success. Figure 1 shows that the Ministry analyzes student characteristics including family heritage and the location of students residence (northern, rural, urban)—factors that the students and teachers cannot change. That information might be broadly useful for resource allocation but is less useful for directing educational strategies.

The Ministry needs to know what key factors are influencing student achievement and graduation rates. The Ministry is responsible to interpret the data it collects. Central analysis and interpretation will make the data more useful for directing the education sector toward improved student achievement. This analysis could help the Ministry give direction to school divisions (and share information across ministries) on the most effective strategies to improve student achievement and graduation rates.

9. **We recommend that the Ministry of Education analyze and report whether school divisions use key effective strategies that could influence Grade 12 graduation rates.**

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[15] Ministry of Education *Plan for 2012-13*; http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AFL/National-International.

5.3.3 Reporting Trends in Graduation Rates

The Ministry has effective processes to report Grade 12 graduation rates. It obtains data about students graduating from public, separate, French, First Nations, and independent schools. This makes it possible to report trends using complete information that is comparable over time. The Ministry collects information on the number (and proportion) of students that are eligible for Grade 12 graduation. These students have achieved the 24 credits required to graduate. The Ministry provides school divisions with an annual report of their Grade 12 graduation rates compared to the provincial average and trends in graduation rates.[16]

Reporting graduation rates is complex. It is important to report reliable information in a comparable way. This helps the Ministry, school divisions, teachers, parents, and the public to better understand how Saskatchewan students are progressing compared to students across Canada and internationally.

The Ministry is working with other provinces to standardize ways to measure graduation rates in Canada. In the meantime, the Ministry has a good system to compare, over time, the proportion of students who achieve the minimum 24 credits for Grade 12 graduation in three, four, five, or more years.

5.4 Some Corrective Actions Taken

We expected the Ministry would take corrective action and would:

❯ *Communicate specific corrective actions*

❯ *Use change management principles to motivate corrective action*

❯ *Report progress to key decision-makers*

5.4.1 Some Specific Corrective Actions Communicated

The Ministry has processes to identify and communicate corrective actions on some factors influencing student achievement. It communicates on websites or in letters to school divisions the corrective actions it identifies.

For example, in response to concerns about bullying and racism in schools, the Ministry established a committee to develop ways to address these problems. The Ministry continues to use its 2005 Anti-bullying Strategy. The Ministry also designed and shared a model policy and guidelines for school divisions dealing with racism and bullying in schools. The Ministry provides some funding for specific projects such as a Kids Help Line to provide professional counseling to children who are bullied. Effectively reducing racism and bullying in schools could support improved attendance and student achievement.

More recently, the Ministry addressed another factor reducing student achievement and produced the *2011 Action Plan—English as an additional language and immigration*. For

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[16] *Saskatchewan Education Indicators Reports* are at http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/2010-Indicators.

example, this Action Plan identifies instructional methods and tools for student assessment when high school students' English skills are limited. It also recommends better multilingual library resources.

Some families move often (e.g., seeking work, family support, or affordable housing). This results in students changing schools often. Changing schools disrupts students' learning and is challenging (e.g., student must adjust to a new school, new teachers, and potentially the loss of dependable, supportive friends). These students need support. To help track if students are enrolled in school and where, the Ministry has a formal agreement with 87% of First Nations schools to exchange information.

5.4.2 Some Change Management Principles Used

The Ministry uses some change management principles to correct identified problems related to Grade 12 graduation rates. We looked for three specific change management approaches:

❱ Set short-term tasks and provide prompt feedback

❱ Identify change agents in leadership roles

❱ Make best practices easily accessible

The Ministry does not generally give specific short-term tasks to school divisions. Most feedback is informal, although it has formal meetings with each school division every second year as part of its Continuous Improvement Process. The Ministry told us that in future meetings it plans to be more direct with school divisions about the performance of their students.

The Ministry expects its staff to share effective strategies that support better student achievement. Change agents and champions for promising practices can be effective in promoting more rapid results. This will be more useful after the Ministry identifies key effective strategies.

The Ministry uses its public website to communicate new ideas for teaching and learning. The information is not easy to find. Also, the Ministry is building an internal website to share new research and promising practices among its staff. We encourage the Ministry to continue finding ways to share effective practices quickly and widely.

5.4.3 Need to Report Progress and Meaningful Analysis

As described earlier, the Ministry reports progress toward increased Grade 12 graduation rates for all school divisions. In some cases, school divisions in the same city have widely differing Grade 12 graduation rates. Such differences should be carefully analyzed to determine what corrective actions are required. For example, if there is a difference in reading skills or school attendance, the school divisions should understand why and take corrective action. The Ministry also needs this information to determine if there are key effective strategies that it should direct all school divisions to use.

Without this analysis, the Ministry cannot take action to realign resources or monitor progress more closely. School divisions, leaders in the education sector, and the public

need to know this information so that all can do their part to support students, teachers, and communities to achieve higher Grade 12 graduation rates.

> **10. We recommend that the Ministry of Education publicly report the major reasons for differences in the graduation rates of all school divisions and schools.**

6.0   EXHIBITS

6.1   Percentage of <u>All Saskatchewan Students</u> Completing Grade 12 up to 8 years After Entering Grade 10 (by Cohorts starting in 1995-96 to 2008-09)

Grade 10 Start	Years from Start of Grade 10 to High School Completion						Not	Still	Total
Year	3 or less	4	5	6	7	8 or more	Enrolled	Enrolled	Students
1995-96	72.5%	77.1%	78.6%	79.3%	79.8%	81.3%	18.5%	0.2%	13,848
1996-97	72.0%	77.1%	78.4%	79.0%	79.5%	81.1%	18.6%	0.3%	14,337
1997-98	73.6%	77.9%	79.2%	80.1%	80.6%	82.0%	17.6%	0.3%	14,591
1998-99	73.9%	78.1%	79.4%	80.2%	80.9%	82.4%	17.3%	0.4%	14,445
1999-00	74.0%	78.4%	79.9%	80.9%	81.6%	82.5%	17.0%	0.4%	14,432
2000-01	73.1%	78.0%	79.7%	80.8%	81.4%	82.2%	17.3%	0.5%	14,562
2001-02	73.2%	77.8%	79.7%	80.5%	81.0%	81.8%	17.5%	0.7%	13,640
2002-03	73.9%	78.6%	80.5%	81.2%	81.7%	82.2%	16.9%	0.9%	13,777
2003-04	75.0%	79.0%	80.4%	81.3%	81.9%	82.3%	16.6%	1.1%	13,640
2004-05	75.6%	79.7%	81.4%	82.2%	82.7%		15.2%	2.1%	13,759
2005-06	73.8%	78.4%	80.1%	81.2%			15.0%	3.8%	14,090
2006-07	74.6%	79.5%	81.1%				12.5%	6.4%	13,446
2007-08	74.2%	78.8%					9.2%	12.0%	13,462
2008-09	72.3%						4.0%	23.6%	13,310

Note: Students that are included in the Grade 10 cohort are those who are enrolled in Grade 10 for the first time and are registered in two or more courses.
Includes students in all schools (i.e., provincially-funded, First Nations, independent) except offshore and custody and care schools. Does not include students in the Functional Integrated program and students who transferred to another province/country.
A student's Aboriginal status is identified through self-declaration. Not all Aboriginal students choose to self-declare and some schools do not provide opportunity for self-declaration.

Source: Ministry of Education Student Data System 2011 (Report: SDS – K12 Indicators – Persistence Rates).

6.2 Percentage of <u>Saskatchewan Self-Declared Aboriginal Students</u> Completing Grade 12 (by Cohorts starting in 1995-96 to 2008-09)

Grade 10 Start	Years from Start of Grade 10 to High School Completion						Not	Still	Total
Year	3 or less	4	5	6	7	8 or more	Enrolled	Enrolled	Students
1995-96	24.8%	31.5%	36.1%	39.7%	42.6%	51.2%	47.4%	1.5%	758
1996-97	26.5%	35.3%	38.7%	40.3%	42.7%	51.4%	46.8%	1.9%	862
1997-98	29.9%	37.3%	41.2%	44.2%	46.2%	56.0%	42.1%	1.9%	900
1998-99	28.1%	36.4%	40.3%	44.0%	47.8%	56.3%	41.7%	2.0%	963
1999-00	25.9%	34.6%	40.9%	45.6%	48.0%	53.6%	43.6%	2.8%	1,019
2000-01	29.0%	39.6%	46.5%	50.9%	53.1%	58.1%	39.1%	2.8%	1,257
2001-02	27.3%	37.8%	43.9%	48.0%	50.1%	53.3%	43.0%	3.6%	1,453
2002-03	29.0%	38.9%	46.1%	49.3%	51.1%	53.2%	42.6%	4.2%	1,767
2003-04	30.8%	39.9%	45.0%	48.7%	51.1%	52.1%	43.4%	4.4%	1,981
2004-05	31.4%	41.1%	47.0%	49.9%	52.2%		38.9%	8.9%	1,873
2005-06	31.4%	41.6%	47.2%	51.0%			35.3%	13.7%	2,182
2006-07	31.8%	43.0%	48.1%				28.4%	23.5%	2,258
2007-08	33.0%	43.2%					18.9%	37.9%	2,392
2008-09	32.7%						8.3%	58.9%	2,470

Note: Students that are included in the Grade 10 cohort are those who are enrolled in Grade 10 for the first time and are registered in two or more courses.
Includes students in all schools (i.e., provincially-funded, First Nations, independent) except offshore and custody and care schools. Does not include students in the Functional Integrated program and students who transferred to another province/country.
A student's Aboriginal status is identified through self-declaration. Not all Aboriginal students choose to self-declare and some schools do not provide opportunity for self-declaration.

Source: Ministry of Education Student Data System 2011 (Report: SDS – K12 Indicators – Persistence Rates).

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