

## Chapter 19

### Education—Grade 12 Graduation Rates

#### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Education (Ministry) is responsible for setting objectives and providing direction for early learning, elementary, and high school education. In our *2012 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 2, we concluded that the Ministry did not have effective processes to increase Grade 12 graduation rates above the 2004-05 baselines. For students entering Grade 10 between 2004-05 and 2009-10, the overall provincial Grade 12 graduation rate decreased 1.9% (from 75.6% to 73.7%).

In this chapter, we report by January 31, 2014, the Ministry has partially implemented three of the ten recommendations, and although it is working on the remaining seven, it has not yet implemented them. The Ministry, collaboratively with school divisions, is working towards finalizing and implementing an Education Sector Strategic Plan. It expects this will be a multi-year plan focused on specific outcomes and achievement of goals, including improving Grade 12 graduation rates across Saskatchewan. The Ministry has not yet identified and analyzed the reasons for changes in graduation rates, nor has it identified the most effective education strategies that could influence student achievement and Grade 12 graduation rates.

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

In our *2012 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 2, we reported that the Ministry did not have effective processes to increase Grade 12 graduation rates above the 2004-05 baselines. We made ten recommendations. This chapter describes our follow-up of management's actions on those recommendations.

For the purposes of this chapter, “school divisions” include public schools, separate schools (i.e., Catholic), and the conseil scolaire (French language schools).<sup>1</sup>

The Ministry is responsible for setting objectives and providing direction for early learning, elementary, and high school education. As reflected by its two goals related to Grade 12 graduation, the education of young people is a priority for the Government:

- › To lead the country in Grade 12 graduation rates by 2020<sup>2</sup>
- › To reduce the difference in graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 50% by 2020<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1** shows Grade 12 completion rates for students in Saskatchewan over the 10-year period of 2000 to 2010. It shows a large difference in graduation rates for students who have identified themselves as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, as compared to all students.

<sup>1</sup> *The Education Act, 1995* defines school divisions as public and separate school boards only.

<sup>2</sup> *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



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

**Figure 1 – Trends for Persistence to Complete Grade 12**

Percentage of students <sup>4</sup> in a cohort <sup>5</sup> entering Grade 10 in the year shown who complete Grade 12 within three, four, or five years						
Entered Grade 10	Graduated within 3 years		Graduated within 4 years		Graduated within 5 years	
	All	FNMI <sup>6</sup>	All	FNMI	All	FNMI
2000-01	73.1	29.0	78.0	39.6	79.7	46.4
2001-02	73.2	27.4	77.8	37.8	79.7	43.9
2002-03	73.9	28.9	78.7	38.8	80.5	46.0
2003-04	75.0	30.8	79.0	39.9	80.4	44.9
2004-05	75.6	31.5	79.7	41.1	81.4	47.1
2005-06	73.8	31.3	78.4	41.5	80.2	47.2
2006-07	74.6	31.8	79.5	43.2	81.3	48.5
2007-08	74.3	33.0	79.1	43.6	81.2	49.7
2008-09	72.7	32.9	77.6	42.9	n/a	n/a
2009-10*	73.7	35.9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Ministry of Education 2012-13 Annual Report, p. 10

\* This is the most current data available at January 31, 2014

To conduct this review, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance*. To evaluate the Ministry's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Ministry's management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

### 3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation, the Ministry's actions up to January 31, 2014, and the status of the recommendation. At March 31, 2014, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has not yet considered the recommendations.

We found that the Ministry has partially implemented three recommendations and although it is working on the remaining seven, it has not yet implemented them.

<sup>4</sup>Data includes students in provincially funded, Independent, and First Nations schools.

<sup>5</sup>Grade 10 cohort consists of students having marks (pass or fail) in at least two Grade 10 subjects and enrolled in Grade 10 for the first time.

<sup>6</sup>Self-declared First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Students.

### 3.1 Need to Use Legislative Authority to Set Direction

We recommended that the Ministry of Education use its legislated authority to direct school divisions toward improved Grade 12 graduation rates. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Partially Implemented

The Ministry continued to provide strategic direction to school divisions through the Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework (CIAF).<sup>7</sup> In fall 2013, the Ministry initiated a new method of planning, deployment, and reporting which replaces the CIAF. Under the new method, the Ministry expects to have one overall plan for the education sector—the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)—as well as detailed plans for each school division and the Ministry. The Ministry expects that the ESSP will be a multi-year plan focused on specific outcomes and achieving goals set in the *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond*. The detailed plans are expected to support the actions required under the ESSP. The Ministry anticipates holding schools, school divisions, and Ministry management accountable for meeting targets set through the ESSP.

*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. By using its legislated authority to provide directions to school divisions, the Ministry can guide school divisions towards improved Grade 12 graduation rates and equitable opportunities for all Saskatchewan students.

### 3.2 Need to Set Measures for Student Progress

We recommended 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 Grade 12 graduation. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Partially Implemented

The Ministry announced the Student Achievement initiative on May 16, 2012. Through this initiative, it pledged to provide students, parents, and teachers with information about student achievement.

The Ministry has identified aspects of this initiative that are linked to successful graduation (e.g., measuring readiness for school, early reading and number sense, and mathematics and problems solving). The Ministry is measuring both readiness for

<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Education's *PreK-12 Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework: A Guide for School Division Strategic Planning and Accountability 2012-2013* defines the Ministry's Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework as the accountability framework for Saskatchewan's education sector. Its purpose is to increase the achievement of all students and to eliminate inequitable performance and achievement outcomes for First Nations and Métis students.



school and grades 1-3 reading levels. It placed the remainder of the assessments on hold pending the outcomes of the Student First consultations and the development of the ESSP. The Student First consultations are a province-wide consultation process to gather feedback from students, teachers, parents, and the broader education sector on how to improve the education system by putting students first.<sup>8</sup> In addition, it expects to develop the ESSP in collaboration with school divisions. This process is to include choosing metrics and measures used to report progress towards meeting targets.

### 3.3 Need to Set Targets for Graduation Rates

We recommended that the Ministry of Education set short and long-term targets for increasing Grade 12 graduation rates. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Partially Implemented

As noted earlier, the Government's *The Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond* sets out two long-term goals for improving graduation rates. These goals include its targets. It includes additional goals related to the Ministry of Education – developing a standardized assessment model,<sup>9</sup> and increasing the number of Grade 3 students reading at grade level<sup>10</sup> by 20% by 2015.<sup>11</sup>

As part of the development of the ESSP, the Ministry stated that it is working with its education partners to clarify the strategic direction for the education system and determine expectations, including setting short- and medium-term targets for increasing Grade 12 graduation rates. At January 2014, the Ministry had set some targets for increasing Grade 12 graduation rates; however, work remains. Specific short-term targets for improved Grade 12 graduation rates would help the Ministry identify priorities. Specific targets and priorities for the education system would help the Ministry communicate clear direction and promote achievement of incremental progress towards the overall long-term targets.

### 3.4 Need to Identify Key Effective Strategies

We recommended 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. 2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Not Implemented

<sup>8</sup> [www.education.gov.sk.ca/student-first](http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/student-first) (24 February 2014).

<sup>9</sup> *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond*, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Reading at grade level means that the student meets established criteria developed to assess reading levels.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

The Ministry indicated that it has started developing a framework to identify the key drivers of student achievement. It expects this framework to be a part of the ESSP, which is in the process of being approved at the board level of each school division and is expected to be finalized in March 2014. To identify practical, key strategies, the Ministry advised that it plans to work with school divisions experiencing success in the areas identified as key drivers of student achievement, and then share these strategies with other school divisions.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.5 Need to Direct School Divisions to Use Key Effective Strategies

We recommended 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. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Not Implemented

The Ministry indicated that it plans to use information from a province-wide survey tool, “*Tell Them From Me*” that will collect information from students and teachers. This survey tool is planned to be fully implemented by the fall of 2014. The Ministry plans to use this information to improve student engagement, as a path to improving graduation rates.

As discussed in **Section 3.4**, the Ministry has not yet identified key effective strategies. Until it has done so, it cannot provide school divisions with direction on which strategies to use to overcome the most significant risks for increasing Grade 12 graduation rates. Also, as noted in **Section 3.4**, the Ministry plans to work with school divisions experiencing success in the areas identified as key drivers of student achievement (prototypes), and then share these strategies with other school divisions. Identifying and implementing the use of key effective strategies could make student achievement more consistent across the province and help improve Grade 12 graduation rates.

<sup>12</sup> The Ministry refers to this process as “prototype and spread”. This means that school divisions with effective strategies in place will be used as “prototypes” that can be “spread” to other school divisions.



### 3.6 Need to Assess Planned Use of Key Effective Strategies

We recommended 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. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Not Implemented

In the past, school divisions submitted and the Ministry reviewed Continuous Improvement Plans. With the planned change in methodology to ESSP, the Ministry intends to ensure accountability by meeting regularly with school divisions and reviewing the status of progress to meet sector targets. Without a timely review of school divisions' plans, the Ministry will not know if school divisions plan to spend public money on student education as intended (e.g., by following Ministry directives to use key effective strategies to improve student achievement).

### 3.7 Need to Assess Achievement of Planned Outcomes

We recommended that the Ministry of Education review each school division's Continuous Improvement Report and assess if it is achieving its planned outcomes. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Not Implemented

The Ministry meets with school divisions annually to discuss significant issues, including student achievement and progress on graduation rates.

Starting in spring 2013 and going forward, the Ministry stopped utilizing the Continuous Improvement Report.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the Ministry and school divisions expect to use the annual reports of school divisions as the primary tool of assessing their progress over the preceding year. As the Ministry implements the improvements noted in **Section 3.3**, planned outcomes and targets will be included within school division annual reports and be available as a means to assess the achievements and progress of school divisions. In addition, the Ministry plans to have regularly scheduled meetings with school divisions to review the status of progress towards meeting targets.

If the Ministry does not review school division progress in achieving goals, there is a risk that it will not provide appropriate guidance and supports to school divisions to achieve the overall goals of the education system.

<sup>13</sup> The Continuous Improvement Report was a report submitted by school divisions to the Ministry that presented evidence of progress in meeting expected outcomes and that provided direction for subsequent plans.

### 3.8 Need to Report and Analyze Critical Risks

We recommended 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. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Not Implemented

The Ministry has not required school divisions to report critical risks that limit student achievement. For example, poor school attendance limits student achievement.

Reporting critical risks would help the Ministry (and school divisions) identify probable causes, as well as provincial opportunities for corrective actions to overcome them. With this information, the Ministry could also analyze provincial progress in reducing critical risks.

### 3.9 Need to Analyze and Report on Use of Key Effective Strategies

We recommended that the Ministry of Education analyze and report whether school divisions use key effective strategies that could influence Grade 12 graduation rates. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Not Implemented

As noted in **Sections 3.4** and **3.5**, the Ministry plans to work with “prototype” school divisions, and then share these strategies with other school divisions. After it identifies key effective strategies and directs school divisions to use them, the Ministry can analyze and report on use of key effective strategies.

The Ministry needs to know what key factors are influencing student achievement and graduation rates. Central analysis and interpretation will make the data more useful for directing the education sector towards improved student achievement. This analysis could help the Ministry give direction to school divisions on the most effective strategies to improve student achievement and graduation rates.



## 3.10 Need for Public Reporting

We recommended that the Ministry of Education publicly report the major reasons for differences in the graduation rates of all school divisions and schools. (2012 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation)

**Status** – Not Implemented

The Ministry advised that it is considering recommendations from a sector working group to ensure attribution of graduation rates to school divisions fairly represents time spent and progress accomplished when students transition between school divisions. The Ministry feels that this is necessary to strengthen how it measures student progress before addressing this recommendation.

Careful analysis of differences in graduation rates between schools would determine what corrective actions are required. Without an analysis of the reasons for differences in graduation rates in all school divisions and schools, the Ministry cannot take appropriate action (e.g., realign resources or monitor progress more closely).

School divisions, leaders in the education sector, and the public could use this information to provide support to students, teachers and communities to achieve higher Grade 12 graduation rates.