

## Chapter 11

# North East School Division No. 200—Increasing Grade 3 Students Reading at Grade Level

### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

Grade 3 reading levels are considered a leading indicator of future student performance. Grade 3 students who do not make the transition to comprehending what they read fall behind, impacting their overall academic success.

In 2014, Saskatchewan’s education sector jointly set a goal to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level from 70% at June 2014 to 80% by 2020. At June 2015, 73% of Grade 3 students in the provincial education system could read at grade level.

North East School Division No. 200 (North East or Division) is responsible for educating about 5,000 students in the area surrounding Nipawin, Tisdale, Hudson Bay, and Melfort. This includes about 1,400 students in Kindergarten to Grade 3. At June 2015, 66% of its Grade 3 students were reading at or above grade level.

In 2015, North East had, other than for the following, effective processes to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level to meet the Education Sector Strategic Plan goal of 80% by 2020. North East School Division No. 200 needs to:

- › Document all of its key risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level, and strategies for managing the risks. This documentation would support understanding and proactive management of the risks within each school and across the Division.
- › Work with other school divisions to develop additional guidance on exempting students from provincial reading level assessments. This guidance would foster consistent decisions on exempting students from reading assessments across school divisions.
- › Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of tools it uses to assess student reading levels. These evaluations would determine whether assessment tools provide teachers with the necessary information to help them increase individual student reading levels.
- › Advise the public of reasons for differences between planned and actual results for Grade 3 reading levels, and changes the Division plans to make in response to those differences. This information can help staff, parents, and communities identify ways to support North East’s efforts to improve students’ reading.

We encourage other school divisions to use the information in this chapter to assess their own processes for increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level.



## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes our audit of North East’s processes to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level.

### 2.1 Provincial Grade 3 Reading Goals

In 2014, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) and the 28 Saskatchewan school divisions formed the Provincial Leadership Team<sup>1</sup> to lead and coordinate the development and implementation of the *Education Sector Strategic Plan* (sector plan). One of the goals of the sector plan is to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level to 80% by 2020. The education sector also set an interim goal of 78% of Grade 3 students to be reading at grade level by June 2015.

As shown in **Figure 1**, at June 2014, 70% of Grade 3 students in Saskatchewan read at or above grade level. By June 2015, Ministry data showed this had increased to 73%.

**Figure 1—Provincial Percentage of Grade 3 Students Reading at Grade Level<sup>A</sup>**

	% of Grade 3 students reading at grade level
Provincial actual at June 2014	70% <sup>B</sup>
Provincial actual at June 2015	73% <sup>C</sup>
<i>Education Sector Strategic Plan</i> Interim Goal for June 2015	78% <sup>D</sup>
<i>Education Sector Strategic Plan</i> Goal for 2020	80% <sup>E</sup>

<sup>A</sup> Provincial results do not include students who attend a school administrated by a First Nation or by a Hutterite colony.

<sup>B</sup> Ministry of Education, *Annual Report 2014-15*, p. 5.

<sup>C</sup> North East School Division No. 200, *Annual Report 2014-15*, p. 13.

<sup>D</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>E</sup> Ministry of Education, *Plan for 2015-16*, p. 6.

The sector plan requires the Ministry and each school division to develop an action plan for increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at or above grade level to achieve the sector plan goal.

Additionally, in 2014, a team of educators and administration officials from across the province formed the Provincial Reading Team. This Team has developed *Saskatchewan Reads*, a companion to the English Language Arts curriculum, to assist teachers in improving student reading levels in the province.

### 2.2 The Importance of Literacy and Grade 3 Reading Levels

Grade 3 reading levels are considered a leading indicator of future student performance.<sup>2</sup> Grade 3 is a critical transition point in a student’s reading ability. It is the year when students move from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn.<sup>3</sup> Students who do

<sup>1</sup> The Provincial Leadership Team is comprised of the Deputy Minister of Education, three Assistant Deputy Ministers of Education, a Director of Education of each school division, representatives of First Nations education authorities, and a Métis representative.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth, Vision 2020 and Beyond*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Annie Murphy Paul, *Why Third Grade Is So Important: The ‘Matthew Effect’*, (2012).

not transition from learning-to-read to comprehending what they read fall behind. Students that cannot read at their grade level will likely continue to fall behind as they continue on to higher grades; not reading at grade level impacts their overall literacy and academic success.

Literacy (i.e., the ability to read) improves the lives of individuals and a society's economic prosperity. Individuals and societies with high levels of literacy enjoy greater economic, health, and social benefits.<sup>4</sup> A low literacy rate in any nation or jurisdiction is tied to higher rates of unemployment, low income, and poor health.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.3 About North East School Division

North East is one of Saskatchewan's 28 school divisions. It is a public school division responsible for educating about 5,000 students in an 11,000 square kilometre area surrounding Nipawin, Tisdale, Hudson Bay, and Melfort.<sup>6</sup> In 2014-15, it had revenues of \$72 million, and expenses of \$60 million.<sup>7</sup>

North East's mission is to ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed.<sup>8</sup> The instruction North East provides to Kindergarten to Grade 3 students includes teaching students to read. It reports that at June 2015 66% of Grade 3 students were reading at or above grade level.<sup>9</sup> In 2014-15, it had about 1,400 Kindergarten to Grade 3 students<sup>10</sup> within 16 of its 21 schools, taught by about 90 teachers.

If North East does not have effective processes to increase its Grade 3 students' reading levels, students may be at greater risk of not achieving their overall academic, social, and economic potential.

## 3.0 AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, CRITERIA, AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this audit was to assess, for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2015, the effectiveness of North East School Division No. 200's processes to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level to meet the Education Sector Strategic Plan goal of 80% by 2020.

We interviewed staff at the Division Office (e.g., Director of Education, superintendents) and examined North East's strategic and action plans that relate to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level. We also examined guidance for assessing students' reading levels, reports on reading levels, and evidence of resources and training provided. We visited five schools in the Division to interview staff (e.g., principals, teachers) and examine school resources (e.g., supporting reading initiatives, training, books).

<sup>4</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada, *Literacy in the Information Age – Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey*, (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Auditor General of British Columbia, *Literacy: Creating the Conditions for Reading and Writing Success*, (2008), p. 3; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada, *Literacy in the Information Age – Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey*, (2000).

<sup>6</sup> North East School Division No. 200, *Annual Report 2014-15*, pp. 3 and 30.

<sup>7</sup> North East School Division No. 200, *Audited Financial Statements 2014-15*. Revenues include \$10.7 million in capital grants; related capital assets will be amortized into expenses over the lives of the assets.

<sup>8</sup> North East School Division No. 200, *Strategic Plan of the Board 2013-2017*.

<sup>9</sup> North East School Division No. 200, *Annual Report 2014-15*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.



To conduct this audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance*. To evaluate North East’s processes, we used criteria based on our related work, reviews of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultations with management. North East’s management agreed with the criteria (see **Figure 2**).

**Figure 2—Audit Criteria**

- 1. Identify actions to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level**
  - 1.1 Set expectations (e.g., action plans, incremental targets, alignment with sector plan)
  - 1.2 Establish relationships with key stakeholders (e.g., parents, communities, First Nations)
  - 1.3 Communicate expectations (to teachers, students, parents, communities, First Nations)
- 2. Support implementation of actions**
  - 2.1 Allocate resources (e.g., staff, funding, tools, supports)
  - 2.2 Provide training to support actions (by teachers, support staff)
  - 2.3 Manage risks to timely completion of actions
- 3. Monitor effectiveness of actions**
  - 3.1 Measure progress
  - 3.2 Adjust actions as required
  - 3.3 Report on progress

**We concluded that for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2015, North East School Division No. 200 had, except in the following areas, effective processes to increase the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level to meet the Education Sector Strategic Plan goal of 80% by 2020. North East School Division No. 200 needs to:**

- › **Document all of its key risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level, and strategies for managing the risks**
- › **Work with other school divisions to develop additional guidance on exempting students from provincial reading level assessments**
- › **Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of tools it uses to assess student reading levels**
- › **Publicly explain reasons for differences between planned and actual results for Grade 3 reading levels, and resulting changes to action plans**

## 4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we set out the criteria (expectations) and our key findings along with related recommendations. For clarity, when we refer to Division staff, we mean superintendents, learning coordinators, and learning consultants. When we refer to school administrators, we mean principals and vice-principals. When we refer to school staff, we mean teachers, counsellors, speech pathologists, educational psychologists, occupational therapists, and support staff.

## 4.1 Actions Identified to Increase Grade 3 Reading Levels

We expected that North East would set expectations (e.g., action plans, incremental targets) that align with the education sector plan. To support achievement of expectations, North East would establish relationships with key stakeholders and communicate its reading expectations.

### **Expectations Set**

North East's Division-level action plan identified expectations to increase Grade 3 reading levels. These expectations aligned with the education sector plan's reading goals and key actions. The Division-level plan identified several reading assessment tools to support teachers in planning interventions to help students with reading, and the Division in measuring student reading levels. See **Figure 3** for a list of reading assessment tools and a brief description of each. North East set its Grade 3 reading goals (i.e., targets) based on the reading assessment tools set out in the Division-level plan.

**Figure 3—North East Reading Assessment Tools**

Tool	Use Directed by	Frequency of Student Assessment for Grades 1 to 3
<b>Diagnostic Levelled Reading</b> (DLR or provincial measurement tool) measures reading fluency and comprehension (within the text [e.g., retell events, main idea, details, character, setting, problem] and beyond the text [e.g., inferencing, connections, opinions]). These assessments are ongoing throughout the year for teacher and student purposes. Teachers formally administer the assessments in each school division for provincial measurement purposes three times a year (e.g., January, March, and June for Grade 1 students; November, March, and June for Grades 2 and 3 students). Results are not used to determine a student's English Language Arts mark.	Provincial Leadership Team	Three times per year
<b>Reading Assessment District</b> (RAD or North East measurement tool) assesses students up to Grade 9 (including Grades 1 to 3) on their comprehension strategies (e.g., prediction, main ideas and details, inferencing, and opinions). In addition, it measures students' understanding of cognitive strategies to comprehend (e.g., reread, sound out, look at context cues, make connection to other words or contexts) using a formal test developed by a publishing company. Results may be used in determining a student's English Language Arts mark.	North East	Two times per year
<b>Students Achieve</b> determines student marks for report cards based on the curriculum. Part of a student's English Language Arts mark includes data related to reading, such as comprehending text and responding to it.	North East	Four times per year
<b>Levelled Literacy Intervention</b> (LLI or small group literacy interventions) is instruction for a specific amount of time (e.g., six weeks) in a small group for students who have difficulty reading	North East	As required

Source: Provincial Auditor Saskatchewan, 2016, based on Ministry of Education and North East School Division materials.

North East's Board of Education (Board) approved the 2015-16 Division-level action plan on May 19, 2015. The action plan included:



- › An interim reading goal of 75% of Grade 3 students reading at or above grade level by June 2016.<sup>11</sup> Division management advised that North East's interim goal was 3% lower than the sector plan goal because North East's interim results of 66% at June 2015 were lower than the interim sector results of 73% at the same date. We note that the November 2015 mid-year result for the Division was 76%.
- › Actions such as further assessments of student reading ability, organization of resources to support initiatives (e.g., assigning support staff to free up teacher time for more extensive work with small groups of students), and delivery of teacher training on related areas (e.g., assessments and extensive small group work with students).

In our visits to North East schools, we found school administrators and teachers understood the reading goals set out in the Division-wide plan, as well as the data obtained from student reading assessments. The Division used this data to analyze progress towards the reading goals. To support the Division-wide plan, schools developed school-level action plans. We found these were consistent with the Division-wide plan. School-level actions included:

- › Delivery of programs and initiatives (e.g., development of individualized student reading plans, small group reading interventions)
- › Teacher training (as identified by the Division, schools, or teachers) on assessing students' reading levels, responding to student needs (including reading interventions)
- › Meetings to discuss initiatives (e.g., to plan reading strategies, to reflect on success of reading strategies)
- › Provision of resources to support initiatives (e.g., books, information packages for parents)
- › Events to involve parents (e.g., information nights, literacy night, student/family reading challenge)
- › Student reading assessments (see **Figure 3** for a description of the various assessment tools used)

### **Expectations Communicated to Key Stakeholders**

North East communicated its reading expectations (e.g., planned actions) to stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, communities including First Nations) in various ways. For example, school community councils<sup>12</sup> reviewed and approved the 2015-16 school-level action plans.

Also, North East had ongoing communications with stakeholders about reading strategies and actions. It provided information and guidance to help parents support their children's reading. It did this through a variety of methods such as:

<sup>11</sup> North East School Division No. 200, *Annual Report 2014-15*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> School community councils facilitate parent and community participation in school planning and provide advice to the school board, school staff, and other agencies involved in the learning and development of students. Under *The Education Act, 1995*, school community councils are required to be established for each school in a division.

- › Websites (e.g., information about assessment tools, tips for reading with children)
- › Social media (e.g., email, Facebook, Twitter)
- › Newsletters
- › Face-to-face discussions (e.g., end of term meetings with students and parents)
- › Literacy events (e.g., family literacy nights)
- › School community councils

We found schools obtained community support for reading through local organizations such as community libraries, service clubs, local hockey teams, and senior citizen homes. Support included donations of books, sponsorship of reading initiatives, community members reading to students, or having students read to others.

## 4.2 Risk Strategies Needed to Support Action Plans

### 4.2.1 Documented Risk Strategies Needed

*We expected that North East would identify and manage risks that could impact timely completion of actions for improving reading levels.*

Division-wide and school-level action plans described similar key risks that North East faced in meeting student reading goals. These risks included challenges interpreting and responding to reading assessment results, staff not identifying and planning interventions for students struggling with reading, and low parent participation to support students at home. However, action plans did not capture all key risks.

During our school visits, we found school administrators and teachers identified risks not included in either the Division-wide or school-level action plans. These risks included students who frequently move among schools and school divisions, insufficient teaching time, and a lack of suitable books.

Documenting all key risks related to achieving planned reading levels supports understanding and proactive management of the risks within each school and across the Division. Proactive risk management helps to address risks before student reading levels are negatively impacted.

- 1. We recommend that North East School Division No. 200 document all of its key risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level.**

Although the Division-wide and school-level action plans included sections for documenting risk management strategies, North East did not document strategies to manage many of its key risks to Grade 3 reading levels. For example, it did not document strategies related to interventions staff would use with students struggling with reading, low parent participation, students who frequently move among schools





and school divisions, and insufficient teaching time. Division staff, school administrators, and teachers described certain strategies they used to manage key risks set out in the action plans and those informally identified by staff during their work (e.g., specific training for teachers, funding to purchase books, visits to students' homes).

Risk management strategies are typically designed to reduce key risks to an acceptable level. Documentation of those strategies help staff know what actions are expected to reduce key risks affecting Grade 3 student reading levels. It also helps staff understand how their work contributes to reducing key risks. Furthermore, documentation facilitates sharing of risk strategies among the Division's 16 schools and supports active risk management. Without active risk management by staff, students may continue to struggle to read at grade level by the end of Grade 3, resulting in those students falling further behind as they continue their schooling.

**2. We recommend that North East School Division No. 200 document strategies for managing identified risks related to increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level.**

## 4.2.2 Resources and Training Provided Based on Documented Risks

*We expected North East would use a risk-based approach to allocate resources (e.g., staff, funding, tools, supports) to increase reading levels. We expected North East would provide training to support actions (e.g., by teachers, support staff).*

North East made various resources available to staff to aid in assessing and increasing students' reading levels. It determined these resources within its action plans, considering documented risks. After North East has completed its documentation of risk management strategies as discussed in **Section 4.2.1**, it should review its action plans and resource allocations to maintain focus on its key risks.

North East's reading resources included student books categorized by reading level, materials for more extensive work with small groups of students, and guidance for reading assessments. North East also supported reading by providing specialized teachers, staff training, and assistance from Division staff (e.g., two superintendents, three learning coordinators, three learning consultants).

Learning consultants provided in-school assistance to teachers related to reading assessments and interventions. Superintendents and learning coordinators:

- › Worked with schools to understand how reading assessments support the success of students in individual schools
- › Assessed individual school needs and allocated resources to the schools (e.g., teacher training, books and materials to support individual and small group instruction)

We found Division staff and school administrators determined staff training required from a division-wide perspective and for individual teaching staff. It provided funding for



teaching staff to attend external training or workshops about reading. Teachers prepared individual annual professional growth plans that included their plans to attend training or workshops about reading.

The Division also provided internal training, and varied this training based on teachers' experience and expressed needs. For example, North East trained all teachers new to its division about teaching students to read. It had annual training for Grades 1 to 3 teachers about the reading assessments it used (see description of assessment tools in **Figure 3**). It trained Grades 1 to 3 teachers on the use of small group literacy interventions, which was one of its key strategies to help students who had difficulty reading and writing.

In addition, it gave teaching staff various supports such as:

- › Criteria and guidance on how to assess students in reading
- › Explanations on how the different types of reading assessments it used aligned with each other and the curriculum
- › Forms, on its website, to assist teachers in assessing reading levels
- › Guidance on ways to help students learn to read, including students with learning difficulties (e.g., small group literacy interventions). For example:
  - In 2014-15 it deployed small group literacy interventions in selected schools. In these schools, teachers provided small group instruction to students who had difficulty with reading and writing
  - In 2015-16 it deployed small group literacy interventions in all schools
- › Guidance on how to evaluate books to assign them to a certain reading level; determining the reading level of a book helps teachers carry out reading with students based on the reading skills of the student (i.e., student's progress at individualized rates)

We found North East used various methods, which were school specific, to free up the regular classroom teachers' time to focus on more intensive instruction for students who were struggling with reading. For example, in one school it used literacy coaches (teachers who assist classroom teachers) to help classroom teachers assess student reading levels. Teachers in schools that we visited indicated that while they could always use more time, these processes supported their ability to carry out reading assessments and more intensive instruction when needed.

Small group literacy interventions took place within regular classrooms. In some schools, it used a co-teaching model where one teacher would instruct a class, while the regular classroom teacher simultaneously carried out a small group literacy intervention in the same classroom. The Division allowed regular classroom teachers to use other teachers as resources (e.g., to observe another teacher assess a student's reading level, co-teaching).

Division staff discussed results from student reading assessments regularly with school administrators. We found Division staff, school administrators, and teachers we interviewed were all familiar with the reading assessment data. We found examples of school administrators and teachers receiving additional resources (e.g., small group



literacy intervention materials) throughout the year based on results of ongoing reading assessments.

## 4.3 Guidance for Exemptions and Explanations of Changes to Action Plans Needed

### 4.3.1 Guidance Needed for Exempting Students from Reading Assessments

*We expected that North East would measure progress towards meeting its reading goals and adjust its actions as required. We expected North East would give staff guidance on measuring progress including determining any students to be exempted from measurement or reporting.*

North East's processes required teachers to assess students' reading levels multiple times in a school year (see frequency of students assessment in **Figure 3**). After each assessment period, North East compared the overall reading assessment results to its reading targets.

Provincial guidelines, in *Saskatchewan Reads*, help school divisions determine when it may be appropriate to exempt a student from reading assessments completed using the provincial measurement tool. *Saskatchewan Reads* indicates that students should be assessed and reported in provincial reading assessment results unless a student is not able to complete the reading assessment (i.e., student is exempt). *Saskatchewan Reads* also provides guidance on reporting results to the Ministry and the public, including reporting the number of students that were exempt from reading assessments.

Exemption from provincial reading assessments are allowed for students whose English proficiency level is below a stated level, are absent at the assessment period, with limited or no communication skills, with intellectual functioning significantly below average, or with severe emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.<sup>13</sup> Exemptions may occur based on a recommendation by a collaborative team, comprised of the classroom teacher, school staff, and division staff.

*Saskatchewan Reads* provides general guidance; it does not contain sufficient detail so that exemptions are made consistently between schools and school divisions and from year-to-year. For example, it does not set out how to determine the level of intellectual functioning, and emotional and behavioural difficulties that warrant exemption. For another example, *Saskatchewan Reads* does not contain guidance to help divisions select members for collaborative teams, and guidance for analyzing alternatives and making recommendations.

Although North East provided direction to use the *Saskatchewan Reads* guidelines, it did not give schools and staff additional guidance on how to apply these guidelines, or for exempting students from reading assessments using the North East measurement tool. We found staff in some of the schools we visited were uncertain about how to determine if it was appropriate to exempt students from a reading assessment.

<sup>13</sup> *Saskatchewan Reads*, (2015), p. 81.

For the June 2015 assessment, North East reported reading assessment results for 96.3% of its Grade 3 students, which was 7.4% higher than the provincial rate of 88.9%. It exempted 3.7%<sup>14</sup> of Grade 3 students from the reading assessment.<sup>15</sup> The Division reported that the majority of the exempted students were English-as-an-Additional-Language students with an English proficiency below the required level for assessment (an exemption category noted in *Saskatchewan Reads*).

Without additional guidance on determining which students to exempt, the Division increases the risk that exemptions are not assessed consistently with other school divisions or among North East schools. This may result in not assessing some students who could benefit from interventions or other additional supports indicated by the results. In addition, some schools may exempt more or fewer students than necessary, which could affect school, division, and provincial assessment results as well as decisions made based on those results. A lack of guidance increases the risk that students could be improperly exempted from reading assessments.

**3. We recommend that North East School Division No. 200 work with other school divisions to develop additional guidance for exempting students from provincial reading level assessments.**

### 4.3.2 Evaluation of Assessment Tools Needed

*We expected that North East would evaluate its assessment tools to determine if they provided useful, reliable information about Grade 3 students' reading levels. We expected North East would consider the value gained from each assessment tool, the combined value of all assessment tools, and whether any information gaps exist that could be met by different or further assessment tools. For example, it may use one tool to identify specific reading difficulties for a student to allow for directed reading interventions and another tool to mark student reading performance for a report card. The number and type of assessment tools would be the most efficient combination that produces useful and reliable information required to support decisions for students.*

As set out in **Figure 3**, North East uses several different reading level assessment tools including its selected variation of the provincial measurement tool.<sup>16</sup> It adopted its tools based on research. It has used some tools for many years (e.g., North East measurement tool since 2009), and implemented others more recently, such as the selected provincial measurement tool (Diagnostic Levelled Reading) in 2014.

North East did not have processes to evaluate the effectiveness of its reading assessment tools. As of December 31, 2015, North East had not evaluated the effectiveness of any of its assessment tools, including the selected provincial measurement tool, or determined the combined value of its multiple assessment tools.

<sup>14</sup> North East exempted 13 of its 351 Grade 3 students.

<sup>15</sup> North East School Division No. 200, *Annual Report 2014-15*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Working with school divisions, the Ministry approved four variations of the provincial measurement tool that met common criteria to generate comparable results. Two variations were commercially developed with modifications made to reflect Saskatchewan context, and two Saskatchewan school divisions each developed their own variation (e.g., to include additional First Nations and Métis context). North East selected one of the variations developed by a Saskatchewan school division, which had similar demographics.



During our visits to schools, school administrators and teachers expressed varying views about the reading assessment tools. Although staff generally expressed support for the Division's plan, a few school administrators and teachers noted concern about potential subjectivity in performing assessments and about the frequency of assessments of individual students. For example, an individual Grade 1, 2, or 3 student is formally assessed at least five times in a school year – three times using the Ministry tool and two times using North East's tool. An evaluation of the assessment tools would help the Division respond to concerns about the subjectivity and frequency of student reading assessments.

Periodic analysis of the effectiveness of the reading assessment tools would enable the Division to determine whether the assessment tools are working as expected; that is, whether they provide teachers with the necessary information to help them increase individual student reading levels. Not periodically evaluating its reading assessment tools increases the risk that teachers and students may spend time on assessments that do not help to increase student reading levels. In evaluating the effectiveness of the reading assessment tools, the Division may seek to work with the Ministry and other school divisions.

**4. We recommend that North East School Division No. 200 periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the tools it uses to assess student reading levels.**

Division management advised us that North East plans to begin evaluating its reading level assessment tools in 2016.

### 4.3.3 Reporting of Changes to Action Plans Needed

*We expected that North East would report progress towards achieving its reading goals to its Board, the Ministry, staff, parents, and communities. Reports would explain differences between results and targets, and adjustments to related actions and plans, if any.*

Division management regularly discussed student reading assessment results with school administrators, including in planned quarterly meetings. We found school administrators discussed reading assessment results with staff during regular staff and school committee (e.g., student achievement) meetings. Based on reported progress, North East adjusted its planned actions for increasing the percentage of Grade 3 students reading at grade level. For example, the Division changed assignments of teachers and literacy coaches, and reallocated classroom space to address reading challenges experienced by some groups of students.

North East's Board received quarterly updates on the Division's progress toward its reading goals. North East publicly reported year-end assessment results in its annual report, including information about the number of students exempted from assessment. As previously noted, at June 2015, 66% of North East's Grade 3 students were assessed as reading at grade level or above using the Ministry's assessment tool as compared to North East's interim goal of 75%.

We found North East did not explain, in its reports to the Board or the public, why actual results differed from its targeted reading goals. Nor did it share in its reports the changes it planned to make in order to achieve its goal.

Explanations for differences between planned and actual reading results provide key information to the Board and public to facilitate informed decision-making. This information can help staff, parents, and communities identify ways to support North East's efforts to improve students' reading. Without adequate reporting, the Board may make uninformed decisions about strategies and resource allocations needed to support students with reading challenges and its staff, and the public may not know how to support North East's action plans.

- 5. We recommend that North East School Division No. 200 publicly provide the reasons for differences between planned and actual results for Grade 3 student reading levels, along with key resulting changes to action plans.**

## 5.0 SELECTED REFERENCES

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