

## Chapter 20

### Education—School Instruction Time for Students

#### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

Instruction time requirements reflect the minimum number of hours of educational instruction that the Ministry of Education (Ministry) thinks are necessary to enable students to learn a particular area of study (e.g., math). The Ministry sets minimum total instructional time requirements for each grade (e.g., 950 hours/year for Grade 8), and for core curriculum areas of study (e.g., 200 minutes/week for Grade 8 math).

This chapter sets out the status of three recommendations we first made in 2009 to improve the Ministry's processes to achieve compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction time as required by the Minister.

By December 2015, the Ministry had implemented one of the three recommendations – it requires all school divisions to publicly report their school calendar for the upcoming school year. This includes setting out instructional days and hours of school operation. However, the Ministry continued not to have processes to monitor school division compliance with its instruction time requirements for core curriculum areas of study. Rather, it expected school divisions to self-monitor. Our further work found some school divisions knowingly did not comply with the Ministry's requirements and did not advise the Ministry of this non-compliance. In these cases, they provided students with less instruction time in some courses than the Ministry required so they could offer students more course options each year.

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry is responsible for establishing regulations authorizing provincial instruction hours per year, and providing courses of study or curriculum guides pertaining to these courses (i.e., provincial core curriculum).<sup>1</sup>

The core curriculum gives Saskatchewan's 28 school divisions guidance on what students are to learn and when. At December 2015, it included seven required areas of study (e.g., language arts, math, and science). Through the *Registrar's Handbook for School Administrators*, the Ministry has set a required minimum time allocation for instruction for each of the required areas of study (i.e., instruction time).<sup>2</sup> Having a minimum instruction time helps ensure students receive sufficient instruction to enable them to learn the area of study.

In our *2009 Report – Volume 3*, Chapter 4, we reported that, for the year ended September 30, 2009, the Ministry did not have adequate processes to achieve compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction time as required by the Minister. We made four recommendations. By January 2014, as reported in our second

<sup>1</sup> [www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/prek-12-education-early-learning-and-schools/k-12-school-divisions-in-saskatchewan](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/prek-12-education-early-learning-and-schools/k-12-school-divisions-in-saskatchewan) (21 December 2015).

<sup>2</sup> <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/86941-Registrar%27s%20Handbook%202015-16%28DEC%29.pdf> (7 April 2016)



follow-up (i.e., *2014 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 20), the Ministry had implemented one of the four recommendations – it had defined instruction time.

This chapter describes the results of our third follow-up to assess the Ministry's progress in addressing the three remaining recommendations.

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 2009 audit. The Ministry's management agreed with the criteria in the 2009 audit.

## 3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at December 15, 2015, our expectations, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

We found the Ministry had implemented one of the three remaining recommendations.

### 3.1 Published School Calendars Report Expected Instruction Time

We recommended that the Ministry of Education require school divisions to publicly report on their performance in meeting the Ministry's instruction time requirements. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement May 12, 2010)

**Status** – Implemented

*We expected the Ministry would require school divisions to publish their Board-approved school calendars, which show the overall instructional hours.*

*The Education Regulations, 1986 (Regulations) define instructional time as any time where students are receiving instruction in an educational program under teacher supervision. The Regulations require each school division and conseil scolaire to provide at least 950 hours of instructional time for grades 1 to 12 and 475 hours of instructional time for Kindergarten.*

At December 2015, there were 702 Ministry-funded schools in Saskatchewan.<sup>3</sup> Every school division (including the conseil scolaire) is required to notify the Minister of and publish its school calendar for the upcoming school year by May 1. The calendar must set out instructional days and hours of school operation.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2014-15*, p. 4.

Each school division used its Board-approved school calendar to set out and advise the Minister and public of its overall instruction hours; divisions made these calendars publicly available on their websites.

The Ministry monitored that it received each division's Board-approved 2015-16 school calendar, and confirmed their alignment with the required minimum overall instructional hours. The Ministry's calendar confirmation processes included asking school divisions for clarification or clearer alignment with overall minimum instruction hours, where necessary.

### 3.2 Monitoring of Divisions' Compliance with Requirements for Required Areas of Study Needed

We recommended that the Ministry of Education monitor for all core curriculum areas of study the extent to which school divisions meet the Ministry's requirements for instruction time. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement May 12, 2010)

**Status** – Not Implemented

We recommended that the Ministry of Education take corrective action where necessary to improve school division compliance with the Ministry's requirements for instruction time. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement May 12, 2010)

**Status** – Partially Implemented

*We expected the Ministry would ask school divisions to advise it, in writing, of instances where they did not comply with instructional time requirements for core curriculum areas of study (exception reporting). In addition, we expected the Ministry would use information obtained to identify reasons for non-compliance, assess the impact of non-compliance on students' learning, and take actions (as necessary) to improve school division compliance with the Ministry's requirements for instruction time for school calendars (i.e., 950 hours) and for core curriculum areas of study in priority areas. For priority areas (e.g., those that adversely impact student learning), we expected the Ministry would obtain commitment for action from relevant school divisions, and confirm divisions carried out key actions.*

As outlined in **Section 3.1**, the Ministry monitored whether school calendars contained the total required instructional hours per legislation and took corrective action as necessary so that divisions met those requirements.

While the school calendars provide enough information to determine total required instructional hours, they do not provide sufficient information to enable the Ministry to know whether a school division met instruction time requirements for each required core curriculum area of study (e.g., math).



For elementary and middle schools, the instruction time requirements for areas of study allows for 20% flexibility of instruction time for locally-determined options (e.g., core French).<sup>4</sup> Elementary core curriculum areas of study also overlap as some teaching occurs jointly between subjects. For example, students may be learning about both math and science in one class. The Ministry acknowledges the allowed flexibility and overlap may cause complexities in measuring and monitoring instructional time requirements for these elementary and middle school areas of study.

The Ministry relied on school divisions to monitor compliance with instructional time for required areas of study; it did not expect divisions to report to it on their compliance (or non-compliance – e.g., exception reporting). Because the Ministry did not have processes to monitor schools divisions' compliance in this area, we contacted five school divisions.

The Ministry is aware that school divisions have delegated to Directors of Education<sup>5</sup> the responsibility for monitoring their division's compliance with instructional time requirements for required areas of study, and they have delegated to school principals the responsibility for monitoring their school's compliance. Divisions expect Superintendents of Education to discuss and resolve instruction time compliance issues with the principals.

Each of the five school divisions we contacted indicated that they have decided to use reduced instruction time to offer high school students more course options per semester; therefore, each division is not complying with some of the instruction time requirements for required areas of study. Rather than offering only 24 credits in three years (as required for graduation), some school divisions offer students more credit opportunities with less instruction hours per credit. For example, these school divisions offer high school courses with 5 to 15 hours less instruction time than required by the Ministry.

We found that the Ministry was not aware of these instances of non-compliance. As a result, it had not had the opportunity to consider the reasonableness of the divisions' expressed rationale, the impact on students' learning, or the impact on its instruction time requirements for required areas of study.

Where reduced instruction time for required areas of study adversely impacts students' learning, the Ministry could consider providing affected school divisions with options to help them comply with instruction time requirements while making sufficient courses available to students to enable graduation within three years of starting high school.<sup>6</sup>

Also, without actively monitoring whether school divisions meet instruction time requirements for required areas of study, the Ministry does not know whether students receive sufficient instruction for each area of study. Not receiving sufficient instruction may contribute to the 75% 2014 provincial graduation rate for students within three years of starting high school.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education, *Registrar's Handbook for School Administrators 2015-16*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> School divisions have further delegated this responsibility to Superintendents of Education.

<sup>6</sup> Students start obtaining credits in Grade 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2014-15*, p. 10.