

Chapter 7

Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 – Monitoring Progress of Home-based Learners

1.0 MAIN POINTS

In Saskatchewan, home-based educators have both the responsibility for educating their children, and the right to direct their children's education from their home. School divisions are responsible for registering and administering home-based education programs. This responsibility includes assessing programs' compliance with the law and related policies, and assessing the progress of learners in relation to the home-based education plans and learners' age and ability.

Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 is responsible for monitoring home-based education programs for almost 150 home-based learners. Over three-quarters of its home-based learners are in elementary and middle school grades (i.e., Kindergarten to Grade 8), with the remaining learners in high school grades (i.e., Grades 9 to 12).

Prairie Valley did not have effective processes to monitor the educational progress of home-based learners. To improve its monitoring processes, the Division needs to:

- Fully exercise its authority to monitor home-based education programs and make sure home-based learners receive education appropriate for their age and ability.
- Register home-based education programs in accordance with established requirements. Reinforcing registration requirements would help the Division hold home-based educators accountable for the education of home-based learners, and help ensure home-based learners receive an adequate education.
- Take action to encourage home-based educators to submit all required program documentation. This would help ensure the Division has sufficient information to monitor effectively.
- Better align forms, templates, and checklists with home-based education requirements. This would help home-based educators comply with legislative and Ministry requirements, and help the Division show how it has fulfilled its regulatory role.
- Maintain all correspondence with home-based educators, and consistently give them feedback on their learners' annual progress reports. This would enable Division staff to better support home-based educators and learners.

Effective monitoring of home-based education programs is key to Prairie Valley fulfilling its regulatory role. It helps ensure home-based programs assist home-based learners in making sufficient educational progress for their age and ability, and provide them with a quality education.



2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the results of our audit of Prairie Valley School Division’s processes to monitor the educational progress of home-based learners. Home-based learners are students between the ages of 6 and 18 years enrolled in home-based education programs initiated by and under the direction of a parent or guardian to provide instruction at home.¹ This chapter uses the terms learner and student interchangeably.

2.1 Home-based Education in Saskatchewan

While home-based learners represent a small percentage of total students in the province, Saskatchewan has the third-highest proportion of home-based learners in Canada (approximately 1.2%).² This number has grown significantly over the past decade. As of September 30, 2017, Saskatchewan had 2,483³ home-based learners compared to 1,222⁴ in 2006-07 – a 103% increase.

Figure 1 – Saskatchewan Home-based Education Enrolments for 2015 to 2017

Home-based Education Enrolments As of September 30	Total	% in elementary or middle school ^A	% in high school ^B
2015	2,240	80.0%	20.0%
2016	2,364	79.7%	20.3%
2017	2,483	81.6%	18.4%

Source: Ministry of Education.

^A Elementary and middle school grades are Kindergarten to Grade 8.

^B High school grades are Grades 9 to 12.

As **Figure 1** illustrates, over three-quarters of Saskatchewan’s home-based learners are in the elementary or middle school grades (i.e., Kindergarten to Grade 8). Enrolment of home-based learners in high school is lower likely because they must earn secondary credits through the provincial education system (in Grades 10 through 12) to earn a high school diploma. The Ministry of Education provides several options for home-based learners to earn secondary level credits and/or enter post-secondary educational institutions. These include:

- Completing secondary credits recognized by the Ministry of Education (e.g., courses at high schools in school divisions, distance learning courses)
- Challenging Grade 12 provincial departmental exams for 100% of the final mark⁵
- Completing other Grade 12 equivalency courses (e.g., Prior Learning Credit - Adult 12 Program, General Educational Development [GED])⁶

¹ *The Education Act, 1995*, section 2.

² <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/blogs/homeschooling-in-canada-continues-to-grow> (28 February 2018).

³ Information provided by the Ministry of Education.

⁴ Fraser Institute, *Home Schooling in Canada: The Current Picture – 2015 Edition*, (2015), p. 23.

⁵ The Ministry of Education administers provincial departmental exams for Grade 12 students instructed by non-accredited teachers, for home-based education students, and for adults wishing to earn Level 30 credits in eight Grade 12 subjects. www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/departmental-exams (03 March 2018).

⁶ The Adult Grade 12 is considered equivalent to a regular Grade 12 standing and is recognized by colleges and universities for admission. The GED is accepted by most employers and some post-secondary institutions but does not meet the required prerequisites for admission to Saskatchewan’s universities.

- Satisfying special admission procedures of some post-secondary education institutions for home-based education students that do not earn a high school diploma

2.2 Responsibilities for Home-based Education

In Saskatchewan, home-based educators have both the responsibility for educating their children, and the right to direct their children's education from their home.⁷ Also, Saskatchewan boards of education (school divisions) are responsible for monitoring the progress of home-based learners.⁸ See **Section 5.0** for goals of education for Saskatchewan.

Laws make school divisions responsible for registering and administering home-based education programs.⁹ This includes assessing programs' compliance with the law, relevant policies, and procedures; and assessing the progress of home-based learners in relation to education plans and learners' age and ability.¹⁰

The Ministry of Education's manual—*Saskatchewan Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual*—sets out policies and procedures for operating and monitoring home-based education programs in Saskatchewan. It includes detailed expectations of school divisions and home-based educators (e.g., parents). For example, home-based educators must administer their children's home-based education programs, and give their school division specific documentation (e.g., program registration, written education plans, annual student progress reports within prescribed timeframes) to enable school division monitoring.

Inadequate monitoring of home-based education programs can increase the risk of home-based learners not receiving a proper education, negatively affecting their ability to succeed and reach their full potential in the future. Effective monitoring of the delivery of home-based education programs is key to school divisions making sure home-based learners receive a quality education and progress as expected.

2.3 Home-based Education in Prairie Valley School Division

Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 is one of 28 Saskatchewan school divisions. Prairie Valley is a rural school division located in the southeast area of the province consisting of towns, villages, resort villages and rural municipalities, with no urban centre.¹¹

Prairie Valley had 143 home-based learners as of September 30, 2017 (140 as of September 30, 2016).¹² It has a large number of home-based learners as compared to the other 28 school divisions in the province. Over three-quarters of its home-based learners are in elementary and middle school grades (i.e., Kindergarten to Grade 8), with the remaining learners in high school grades (i.e., Grades 9 to 12).

⁷ Ministry of Education, *Saskatchewan Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual 2016-17*, p. 1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Section 85(1) of *The Education Act, 1995* and *The Home-based Education Program Regulations, 2015*.

¹⁰ *The Home-based Education Program Regulations, 2015*, section 12(1).

¹¹ Prairie Valley School Division, *2016-2017 Annual Report*, (2017), p. 3.

¹² Information provided by the Ministry of Education.



The Division employs a Home-based Education Consultant that spends part of his or her time monitoring home-based education programs operating in the Division. It reimburses home-based educators (families) for certain eligible costs associated with providing home-based education programs (e.g., supplies, textbooks, distance-learning course fees), up to a maximum per student each year. In 2016-17, the Division reimbursed over \$60,000 for home-based education programs (2015-16: over \$25,000).

3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 did not have effective processes, for the 12-month period ended January 31, 2018, to monitor the educational progress of home-based learners. The Division needs to:

- **Fully exercise its authority to monitor home-based education programs and make sure home-based learners receive education appropriate for their age and ability**
- **Register home-based education programs in accordance with established requirements**
- **Take action to encourage home-based educators to submit all required program documentation**
- **Better align forms, templates, and checklists with home-based education requirements**
- **Maintain all correspondence with home-based educators and consistently give them feedback on their learners' annual progress reports.**

Figure 2—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach

Audit Objective: to assess whether Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 had effective processes, for the 12-month period ended January 31, 2018, to monitor the educational progress of home-based learners. Home-based learners are students between the ages of 6 and 18 years enrolled in home-based education programs initiated by and under the direction of a parent or guardian to provide instruction at home.[^]

Audit Criteria:

Processes to:

1. Provide a framework for monitoring home-based education programs
 - 1.1 Maintain policies and procedures consistent with legislation and Ministry of Education policies
 - 1.2 Provide home-based educators with supports (e.g., guidance, learning resources)
 - 1.3 Keep home-based educators and learners informed of expectations
2. Hold home-based educators accountable for the educational progress of home-based learners
 - 2.1 Register home-based learners consistent with policies and procedures
 - 2.2 Assess whether home-based education plans adhere to legislation and policies
 - 2.3 Assess the educational progress of home-based learners
 - 2.4 Take action as necessary (e.g., require improvement plans, cancel home-based education programs, communicate with stakeholders)

Audit Approach:

To conduct this audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate Prairie Valley's processes, we used the above criteria based on related work, reviews of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultations with management. Prairie Valley's management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined the Division's policies and procedures for monitoring the educational progress of home-based learners. We interviewed relevant staff responsible for monitoring home-based education programs. We examined documentation for a sample of home-based learners to assess the operating effectiveness of Prairie Valley's processes to monitor the educational progress of home-based learners.

^A *The Education Act, 1995, Section 2.*

4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Home-based Education Policies Well Established and Consistent with Law and Ministry Requirements

Prairie Valley has up-to-date and clear policies to regulate home-based education programs operating in its Division. In addition, it has clear procedures to register, monitor, and support the delivery of home-based education programs.

Prairie Valley routinely reviews and updates its Administrative Procedures that it uses to manage its operations. The Director of Education approves significant changes and presents them to the Board of Education for information and review.

The Division's Administrative Procedures include a policy specific to home-based education—AP 2700. It makes its Home-based Education Consultant responsible for monitoring the home-based education programs registered with the Division.

AP 2700 provides a brief overview of requirements for registering and monitoring home-based education programs. It augments expectations set out in the Ministry's *Saskatchewan Home-based Education Policy Manual*.¹³ AP 2700 establishes deadlines for key activities relevant to home-based education programs. See **Figure 3** for the annual process for registering and monitoring home-based education programs.

Figure 3—Annual Process For Registering and Monitoring Home-based Education Programs

Timeline	Events and Requirements
August 15	<p>Deadline for home-based educators to register or renew home-based education programs. When registering their programs, educators must provide the school division with the following forms (or equivalent information):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Home-based Education Program Registration form The registration form includes the name and contact information of the educator, demographic information of the learner(s) and last grade completed, and the starting date of the home-based education program. ➤ Written education plan for each learner The written education plan for each learner must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The reason for and the philosophical approach of the home-based education program. ➤ A minimum of three broad annual goals in each of the four areas of study—language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics. These goals must be consistent with the <i>Goals of Education for Saskatchewan</i>—see Section 5.0. ➤ The means that the educator will use to assess the educational progress of the learner.

¹³ The Ministry's Manual provides more in-depth information and requirements concerning the roles and responsibilities for school divisions and home-based educators.



Timeline	Events and Requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The services that the educator intends to access from the school division.
Within 30 days of receiving the registration	<p>The Division's Home-based Education Consultant must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review the registration form and the written education plan to assess compliance with requirements of the Act, Regulations, and the policies (e.g., that education plan is appropriate for learner's age and ability) ➤ Register the home-based education program once it complies ➤ Send written notification of registration to the home-based educator <p>Prairie Valley is to use a checklist to assess the registration's compliance with requirements of the Act, Regulations, and policies prior to granting registration.</p>
September 30	Deadline for school divisions to submit student enrolment numbers, including those for home-based education programs, to the Ministry of Education.
September to June (school year)	Home-based educators are responsible for directing the home-based education programs consistent with submitted education plan.
June 30 (end of school year)	<p>Home-based educators must provide an annual progress report for each learner. Educators have two options to submit an annual progress report, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Test results of the learner who has taken a nationally normed standardized achievement test ➤ A portfolio of work including sufficient detail of the educational progress of the home-based learner (includes a periodic log of activities performed throughout a school year; and either a detailed summative record,^A or samples of work, or both)
June to August	<p>The Division's Home-based Education Consultant must review and assess each learner's educational progress in relation to the written education plan and the learner's age and ability. This review is to include assessing the home-based education program's compliance with the Act, Regulations, and policies.</p> <p>Prairie Valley is to use a checklist to assess the educational progress of a learner. Typically, it sends educators feedback to acknowledge the Division's acceptance of the reports.</p>

Source: Developed from Prairie Valley School Division No. 208's *Administrative Procedure 2700 Home-Based Education* and the Ministry of Education's *Saskatchewan Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual 2016-17*.

^A A summative record is a record of the educational progress of a home-based learner in relation to a written education plan. It is a statement of a learner's academic achievement at the end of a unit, project, course, program, or school year.

The Division has standard forms, templates, and checklists for the home-based program (e.g., registration form, education plan template, and periodic log template to document educational progress of the learners). Educators can use these or submit information using other formats, as long as they submit the required information.

We found AP 2700 aligns with the Regulations and the Ministry's *Saskatchewan Home-based Education Policy Manual* other than for the following area. AP 2700 does not provide processes for cancelling home-based education programs. If such a need arises, management indicated it would follow the detailed program cancellation process set out in the Ministry's manual.

The Division makes home-based education program information easily accessible on its website and through direct communications with home-based educators.¹⁴ Its website includes AP 2700, its forms and templates, and a link to the Ministry's Manual. We also found that Prairie Valley emailed program information (e.g., documentation requirements, deadlines) directly to registered or interested home-based educators.

¹⁴ <http://www.pvsd.ca/Pages/default.aspx> (5 March 2018).

Well-established policies surrounding home-based education help the Division and its home-based educators understand their respective responsibilities.

4.2 Some Forms, Templates, and Checklists Not Fully Aligned with Requirements

While Prairie Valley has standard forms, templates, and checklists for registering and monitoring home-based education, a few do not align well with legislative and Ministry requirements.

Even though home-based educators are not required to do so, our testing of 30 student files found most educators use some form of templates (i.e., the Division's, or those publicly available from other organizations).¹⁵ This emphasizes the importance of templates being understandable and prompting educators for all necessary information.

When comparing the Division's forms, templates, and checklists to the legislative and Ministry requirements and other publicly available templates,¹⁶ we found:

- The registration form does not require educators to document the start date of their home-based education programs as required by the Ministry's policy.
- The education plan template does not specifically require educators to identify three broad goals for each of the four areas of study (i.e., language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics)—three is the minimum number of goals that the Ministry's policy requires.
- The checklist Prairie Valley uses to assess education plans and the educational progress of learners does not require documentation of the Consultant's assessments against related legal and policy requirements. The Consultant must assess the consistency of the education plan with the *Goals of Education for Saskatchewan* and the appropriateness of the plans/progress reports for the age and ability of home-based learners. The Division's checklist only requires a check mark to indicate whether an education plan or progress report incorporates a sufficient number of goals.
- Annual maximums for eligible costs in the financial reimbursement guidelines communicated to educators (i.e., \$600 per registered Grades 1 to 12 students, \$300 for Kindergarten students) did not agree with rates in the AP 2700 (September 2015: \$300 per student, \$150 per Kindergarten student), or maximums last approved by the Board (September 2016: \$500 per student, \$250 per Kindergarten student).

Our testing of seven financial reimbursements found the Division reimbursed each home-based educator for eligible costs based on maximums communicated directly to educators. In February 2018, Division management revised AP 2700 to correspond with the financial reimbursement guidelines communicated to educators and obtained the Board's approval for this level of reimbursement.

¹⁵ The Home School Legal Defence Association of Canada and Saskatchewan Home-Based Educators have templates and forms publicly available for educators' use. We determined these templates are consistent with legislation and the Ministry's policy manual.

¹⁶ Ibid.



Also, unlike some other school divisions,¹⁷ the Division does not provide templates for preparing a complete portfolio of work when educators chose this method for submitting annual student progress reports. Educators must submit portfolios of work by June 30.

Complete and well-designed forms help home-based educators comply with legislative and Ministry requirements. Having forms and templates aligned with requirements prompts educators to provide all required information. The Division needs this information to assess the educational progress of home-based learners, and the programs' compliance. Also, having checklists that prompt documenting results of the Division's assessments would help the Division show how it has fulfilled its regulatory role when registering and monitoring home-based education programs.

1. We recommend that **Prairie Valley School Division No. 208** revise its home-based education templates, forms, and checklists to better align with the Ministry of Education's policy requirements.

4.3 Supports Readily Available to Home-based Educators but Limited Use of Non-financial Supports

Use of the wide array of available Division materials and services is limited, even though home-based educators frequently use available financial supports.

Through its website and activities of the Home-based Education Consultant, the Division routinely advises home-based educators about materials, services, and financial supports that are readily available to them. **Figure 4** lists those materials, services, and financial supports. The Home-based Education Consultant directly advises educators of available services and supports through emails sent at the beginning of the school year and periodic informational meetings held during the year. These meetings give home-based educators an opportunity to connect with other home-based families and to learn about materials and services they can access from the Division. Only just over one-quarter of home-based education families attended an informational meeting during 2016-17. We noted the families involved in home-based education within the Division remains relatively constant from one year to the next.

Figure 4—Prairie Valley Materials, Services, and Financial Supports Available for Home-based Educators

Available materials and services include:

- Provincial curriculum guides
- Textbooks and learning resources used in the Division
- Access to Division resource centres
- Access to individual courses in a school through application to the Director of Education/CEO or designate
- Assessment tools
- Assessment, consultative support, and approved technical aids for students with diverse and intensive needs
- Participation in extra-curricular activities (the home-schooled student must meet the same participation criteria that are applied to students enrolled in regular school programs at the school)
- Driver education

¹⁷ Other school divisions, such as Regina Public Schools and Prairie Spirit School Division, provide educators with templates to prepare a complete portfolio of work (i.e., periodic log and summative record).

Available financial supports are:

- Reimbursement of approved actual eligible costs of educational materials and services to an annual maximum per registered home-based student. Examples of eligible costs include books, curriculum, museum memberships, tickets to historic tours, online classes, electronic devices used for education purposes, or dance classes. Educators must submit requests for reimbursement of eligible costs by June 30.
- Payment for distance learning courses.

Source: Prairie Valley School Division No. 208's *Administrative Procedure 2700 Home-Based Education*.

Only a few home-based educators access available materials and services. At the request of the Division, they indicate when registering their programs which materials and services, if any, they intend to access from the Division. Our testing of 30 home-based learners for the 2016-17 school year found very few educators requested materials or services from the Division. Only three requested standardized assessment tests, and four requested other available services (e.g., distance learning courses, physical education, band). We found that the Division provided the services when requested.

Most home-based educators accessed financial support from the Division. As described in **Figure 4**, the Division reimburses home-based educators up to annual maximums for eligible costs. We found that almost 80% of families with home-based learners requested financial reimbursement of eligible costs from the Division during 2016-17.

4.4 Some Home-based Education Program Registrations Inappropriately Renewed for 2017-18 School Year

Prairie Valley inappropriately renewed registration of some 2017-18 home-based education programs.

Home-based educators must register their programs and students with the Division each year. They must submit completed registration forms and education plans (or equivalents) by August 15.¹⁸ The Division must determine whether the submitted information complies with the law and related policies, and request additional information as necessary.¹⁹ The Ministry's policy allows a school division to renew a home-based education program if the educator provides an updated registration form and education plan. Also, a program cannot be renewed unless a student's annual progress report demonstrated satisfactory educational progress during the previous year of the program.

The Division tracks registered home-based learners using a spreadsheet. It tracks its receipt of key information like registration, education plans, and annual student progress reports. It reconciles registered learners to the Ministry's student enrolment data.

The Division's spreadsheet was not current for about one quarter of its 140 learners registered for the 2016-17 school year. We identified 39 learners in the 2016-17 spreadsheet where, according to the Division, educators did not submit progress reports for their home-based students. Our testing of these 39 learners found educators had submitted progress reports for 7 learners, and did not for 32 learners.

¹⁸ While Prairie Valley has an established registration deadline of August 15 for home-based education programs, the Division accepts registrations up to September 30 (which is the final date for the Division to submit enrolment information to the Ministry).

¹⁹ *The Home-based Education Program Regulations* (Section 5) and the Ministry of Education Saskatchewan *Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual 2016-17*, pp. 7-8.



Also, the Division renewed the 2017-18 program registrations for 21 of the learners without receiving their previous school year's annual student progress reports. Of the 21 learners inappropriately registered, the Division registered four learners without receiving updated registration forms and education plans (or equivalents).

The Division cannot effectively regulate home-based educators if it renews program registrations before assessing the educational progress of learners in the previous school year, and before determining whether proposed programs comply with the law and related policies. This could result in the Division not holding home-based educators accountable for the education of home-based learners, and some home-based learners not receiving an adequate education.

2. We recommend that Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 only renew the registration of a home-based education program after it receives all required documentation from the home-based educator and confirms that the program complies with the law and related policies.

Management confirmed that the Division did not follow up on the status of the missing annual student progress reports or take steps to obtain the missing information for the 21 learners inappropriately registered in 2017-18. The Ministry's policy includes escalation procedures that school divisions can use to address home-based educators' non-compliance with legislation and policy requirements. This includes instances where educators fail to submit required information like annual student progress reports.

During the 2017-18 registration period, the Division experienced turnover of staff responsible for monitoring home-based education. The Division inappropriately registered these learners due to new staff not having a full appreciation of their new roles and duties or awareness of authority or procedures to obtain missing information. See **Recommendation 5** about the Division's authority to monitor home-based education.

4.5 Written Confirmation of Registration Provided Inconsistently

Prairie Valley did not consistently give educators written confirmation of annual registration of their home-based education programs as required.

Once satisfied that the program meets legislative and policy requirements for home-based education, the Division must give educators a written notice of program registration within 30 days of receiving the request for registration. The written notice of registration advises an educator that their home-based education program is legally registered. Also, the Division must maintain all correspondence with the educators related to registering, renewing, and monitoring home-based education programs within the learners' permanent records.²⁰

We found that the Division actively monitors whether learners registered in the previous year continue with their programs in the following year. For example, the Home-based Education Consultant communicated with educators of previously registered learners when the Division had not received registration forms within a reasonable timeframe. If an

²⁰ *The Home-based Education Program Regulations* (Section 11).

educator withdrew a home-based education program (e.g., learners enrolled in a school, the family moved), the Division documented this information in its tracking spreadsheet.

For all 30 home-based learners' files we tested, we could not determine whether the Division gave educators notice of 2016-17 program registration within 30 days of receipt of registration forms as required. The receipt date of registration information was not evident in the learners' files (e.g., information was not date stamped, and the files did not include emails or letters from the educators). In addition, for five of those files, Prairie Valley did not give educators a written notice of program registration.

Notices of registration inform educators that their home-based education programs meet related legal and policy requirements, and they can proceed with delivering the program. Not issuing notices promptly, or at all, increases the risk of home-based learners receiving education programs that are inconsistent with the *Goals of Education for Saskatchewan* or inappropriate for their age and ability.

3. We recommend that Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 give home-based educators written confirmation of program registration within the required time.

Not maintaining all correspondence with home-based educators is not only a violation of the Regulations, but it also increases the risk of Division staff not having information to monitor home-based education programs. In addition, it may make it harder for the Division to support home-based educators or learners, especially during times of staff turnover.

4. We recommend that Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 maintain correspondence with home-based educators about the registration, monitoring, and renewal of home-based education programs.

4.6 Division Not Effectively Exercising Authority to Monitor Education Plans and Progress Reports

While Prairie Valley has established processes to monitor the receipt and assessment of home-based education plans and annual student progress reports, the Division did not follow its processes or effectively exercise its authority to monitor.

As shown in **Figure 5**, our testing of 30 home-based learners for the 2016-17 school year identified numerous instances where the Division did not follow its established processes. For example, it did not obtain required information (e.g., annual student progress reports, complete learner education plans), or identify deficiencies in information obtained. Therefore, it did not take any actions to remedy these issues.



Figure 5—Testing Results of 30 Home-based Learners related to 2016-17 Education Plans and Progress Reports

Home-based Education Plans

- Seven plans lacked documentation of the reason for and the philosophical approach to the home-based education program.
- Thirteen plans did not include a minimum of three broad goals in each of the four areas of study. Issues ranged from the educators not documenting any goals, too few goals, or using the same goals for all learners in a program (which is prohibited by the Ministry's policy).
- Nine plans lacked documentation of the means of assessing and recording the educational progress of learners.
- For three plans, the Home-based Education Consultant did not assess them using the Division's assessment checklist.

Annual Student Progress Reports

- The Division did not receive progress reports for eight learners, with the Division following up on the status for only one of these learners.
- Nine progress reports did not meet the requirements set out in the Ministry's policy. Issues ranged from the lack of periodic logs to the reports not addressing learners' progress for each of the four areas of study.
- For seven learners, the Division did not provide educators with feedback on the learners' progress reports.

Source: Provincial Auditor Saskatchewan.

Laws and Ministry policies make Prairie Valley responsible for determining whether home-based programs comply with legislation and established policies, and whether home-based learners receive education appropriate for their age and ability. As described in **Section 4.1**, Prairie Valley has well-established policies and procedures to do this. If Prairie Valley finds that an educator is not complying with the requirements, laws give it the authority to contact the educator to discuss the steps necessary to achieve compliance.²¹ If necessary, it has the authority to cancel the home-based education program. As of January 2018, Division management communicated it has never cancelled a home-based education program.

We found, through interviews with Division staff, they were hesitant to question information that home-based educators submitted. Further, we found they did not have a good understanding of the extent to which they can question that information when exercising their authority to regulate home-based education. The results of our testing support this finding.

If the Division does not fully understand the extent of school division authority to monitor home-based education, it cannot effectively hold educators accountable for complying with the related legislation and policy requirements. In addition, it increases the risk of home-based learners not receiving education appropriate for their age and ability. Prairie Valley may wish to work with the Ministry and other school divisions to improve its understanding of school division authority to monitor home-based education.

5. We recommend that Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 obtain a better understanding of the extent of school division authority to monitor home-based education.

As indicated in **Figure 5**, the Division did not always provide educators with feedback on learners' annual student progress reports.

Effective monitoring involves actively assessing information submitted and obtaining missing required information. Ineffective monitoring can result in the Division not providing

²¹ *The Home-based Education Program Regulations, 2015, Section 12.*

home-based educators with timely feedback concerning their home-based education program. Ineffective monitoring processes can also result in learners not attaining sufficient educational progress for their age and ability.

6. We recommend that Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 actively assess whether home-based education plans and annual student progress reports meet the requirements established by legislation and the Ministry of Education when registering programs and monitoring learner educational progress.
7. We recommend that Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 promptly give educators feedback for all home-based learners following review of learners' annual progress reports.

4.7 Potential Opportunity to Improve Home-based Educators' Compliance with Requirements

Unlike some other Saskatchewan school divisions, Prairie Valley does not use incentives to encourage home-based educators to submit all required documentation.

In discussions with Ministry staff, we learned that some school divisions implement incentives to encourage educators to submit all required information for their home-based education programs. For example, some school divisions do not provide educators with full reimbursement of eligible educational expenses associated with their programs until the educators submit all required information to the division.

Implementing incentives to encourage educators to comply with all home-based education requirements can foster educators' compliance. This can reduce the level of resources needed to follow up with educators on missing or insufficient required documentation.

8. We recommend that Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 consider the use of incentives to encourage educators to comply with all home-based education documentation requirements.

4.8 Board of Education Informed About Home-based Education

Prairie Valley periodically provides its Board and senior management with key information about home-based education programs operating within its Division and its related monitoring activities.

During the 12-month period ending January 2018, the Home-based Education Consultant began periodically reporting the following information to the Board and senior management:

- Enrolment data (registered learners)
- Legislative requirements



- Availability and use of supports and financial reimbursement for educators
- Options for secondary home-based education (i.e., Grades 10 to 12)
- Educator feedback obtained during informational meetings held during the year

Going forward, management indicated it intends to include home-based education information within its quarterly school instruction and operation report (for all Division programming) to the Board. As described in **Section 4.6**, the Division did not identify deficiencies with information submitted by home-based educators. Management indicated that when it identifies educators’ non-compliance with home-based education requirements, it intends to provide such information to the Board.

Other than enrolment data, the Ministry does not require Prairie Valley to provide specific information about the Division’s monitoring of home-based education programs. The Ministry receives home-based learners’ academic results for credit-level classes (Grades 10 to 12) through its student data system—this is the same information the Ministry receives for students enrolled in the public education system.

5.0 GOALS OF EDUCATION FOR SASKATCHEWAN

Goals of education in Saskatchewan should direct efforts to develop the potential of all students in the province. Education should affirm the worth of each individual and lay the foundation for learning throughout life. Students benefit from exposure to learning in a variety of situations. Attainment of the goals is a venture the school shares with the student, the home, the church, and the community. Although the degree of school responsibility will vary from community to community, the school has some responsibility for each goal. A body of knowledge and a range of skills and attitudes are necessary to function in a changing world. It is intended, then, that education will enable Saskatchewan students to do the following to the best of their abilities:

BASIC SKILLS

1. Read, write, and compute.
2. Acquire information and meaning through observing, listening, reading and experiencing.
3. Process information through intellectual and technological means.
4. Solve problems by applying basic principles and processes of the sciences, arts, and humanities.
5. Communicate ideas through written and spoken language, mathematical symbols, and aesthetic expression.

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

1. Seek and value learning experiences.
2. Act as self-reliant learners.
3. Base actions on the knowledge that it is necessary to learn throughout life.

UNDERSTANDING AND RELATING TO OTHERS

1. Act on the belief that each individual is worthwhile.
2. Base actions on the recognition that people differ in their values, behaviours, and life styles.
3. Interact and feel comfortable with others who are different in race, religion, status, or personal attributes.
4. Develop a sense of responsibility toward others.

SELF CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

1. Perceive themselves in a positive way.
2. Appreciate their own abilities and limitations.
3. Set and work toward personal goals.
4. Assess praise and criticism realistically.
5. Present themselves with confidence.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Seek an understanding of the purpose and worth of human existence.
2. Develop a knowledge of God.
3. Respect family, religion, and culture in a pluralistic society.

CAREER AND CONSUMER DECISIONS

1. Develop an awareness of career opportunities.
2. Develop interests and abilities in relation to vocational expectations.
3. Adapt to shifts in employment patterns and technology.
4. Make informed consumer decisions.

MEMBERSHIP IN SOCIETY

1. Assume responsibility for their own actions.
2. Work with others to achieve individual and group goals.
3. Participate in the democratic processes of government and perform the duties of citizenship.
4. Respect the rights and property of others.
5. Act with honesty, integrity, compassion, and fairness.
6. Develop a sense of national pride and acknowledge the need for international understanding.
7. Work toward greater social justice.
8. Assume responsibility for dependent persons in a manner consistent with their needs.
9. Respect law and authority.
10. Exercise the right of dissent responsibly.

POSITIVE LIFE STYLE

1. Practice appropriate personal hygiene, engage in sufficient physical activity, and maintain a nutritionally balanced diet.
2. Avoid harmful use of alcohol and other drugs.
3. Cultivate interests that may be the basis for personal development and leisure pursuits.
4. Recognize the importance of productive activity.
5. Display initiative and pursue tasks diligently.
6. Maintain a safe and healthful community.
7. Respect and seek to enhance the environment.
8. Appreciate beauty in its many natural and constructed forms.
9. Express themselves creatively.

GROWING WITH CHANGE

1. Work toward immediate and long-term goals
2. Base actions on an understanding that change is a natural process in society.
3. Select workable alternatives in response to changing conditions.
4. Develop confidence in making decisions that involve risk.

Source: Ministry of Education, *Saskatchewan Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual 2016-17*, p. 62.

6.0 SELECTED REFERENCES

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