

## Chapter 11

### Saskatoon School Division No. 13—Supporting Students with Intensive Needs

#### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

In Saskatchewan, school divisions are required to accommodate students with intensive needs in the regular program of instruction or provide special programming to meet those students' learning needs. Students with intensive needs are those assessed as having a capacity to learn that is compromised by a cognitive, social-emotional, behavioral, or physical condition.

In 2016-17, 7.3% of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students in Saskatoon School Division No. 13 (Saskatoon Public or Division) were students identified as having intensive needs. The number of its Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs is increasing.

Saskatoon Public had, other than the following, effective processes to support the learning of students with intensive needs. Saskatoon Public needs to:

- Formally estimate future enrolment of the Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs; analyze trends in the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and their categories of intensive needs; and determine staff needed to support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. This would allow Saskatoon Public to confirm it has the right amount of resources necessary to support students with intensive needs.
- Maintain documentation of the key consultations, discussions, decisions, and steps taken for supporting Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs; retain evidence of agreement on learning plans for those students; and also maintain their assessment information in the student cumulative files. This would help ensure continuity of supports provided and reduce the risk of repeated, overlooked or forgotten actions to support a student's learning needs.
- Give staff guidance on expected timelines for completing requested intensive-needs assessments of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students. This would help avoid delays in implementing learning supports for students with intensive needs.
- Regularly monitor progress in achieving learning goals of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and centrally monitor whether schools sufficiently support these students to enable progress towards their learning goals. This would include agreement on the students' learning plans and with students' progress. As well, it would allow the Division to evaluate deployment of resources and determine whether it is providing sufficient support to students with intensive needs.
- Give senior management and the Board of Education enough information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. This would enable evaluating whether the Division provides students with educational services consistent with those students' individual educational needs and abilities.



## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the results of our audit of Saskatoon School Division No. 13's processes for supporting learning of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Students with intensive needs are those assessed as having a capacity to learn that is compromised by a cognitive, social-emotional, behavioral, or physical condition.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Responsibility for Educating Students with Intensive Needs

*The Education Act, 1995* gives boards of education (school boards) the responsibility for administration and management of schools, with oversight from the Ministry of Education.<sup>2</sup> It makes school boards responsible for exercising general supervision and control over the schools in their school division.

The Act makes school boards legally obligated to provide appropriate education to all students. It also makes school boards responsible for providing students with educational services that are consistent with that student's educational needs and abilities.<sup>3</sup>

The Act requires school boards to reasonably accommodate students with intensive needs in the regular program of instruction.<sup>4</sup> In addition, if school boards cannot accommodate these students in regular programming, the Act expects them to provide special programming to meet those students' learning needs.

*The Education Regulations, 2015* place further expectations on school divisions in identifying students with intensive needs, and providing them with services. For example, upon request the Director of Education of a school division must direct that an assessment be conducted to determine if the student has intensive needs.<sup>5</sup>

Boards of education are responsible for making programs and supports available to pupils with intensive needs, at no cost to parents, and using qualified individuals to provide programs/supports.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.2 Ministry of Education Approach for Supporting Students with Intensive Needs

The Ministry provides school divisions with an approach for supporting students' intensive needs through varied methods of instruction, intervention, and support.<sup>7</sup> As set out in **Figure 1**, the approach includes three escalating stages of interventions progressing from school-wide and classroom-based initiatives to interventions specific to the individual student. It combines collaborative problem solving, with both family and community

<sup>1</sup> Section 178(1) of *The Education Act, 1995*.

<sup>2</sup> Section 85(1) of *The Education Act, 1995*.

<sup>3</sup> Section 178(4) of *The Education Act, 1995*.

<sup>4</sup> Section 178(9) of *The Education Act, 1995*.

<sup>5</sup> Section 54(5) of *The Education Regulations, 2015*.

<sup>6</sup> Section 56(1) of *The Education Regulations, 2015*.

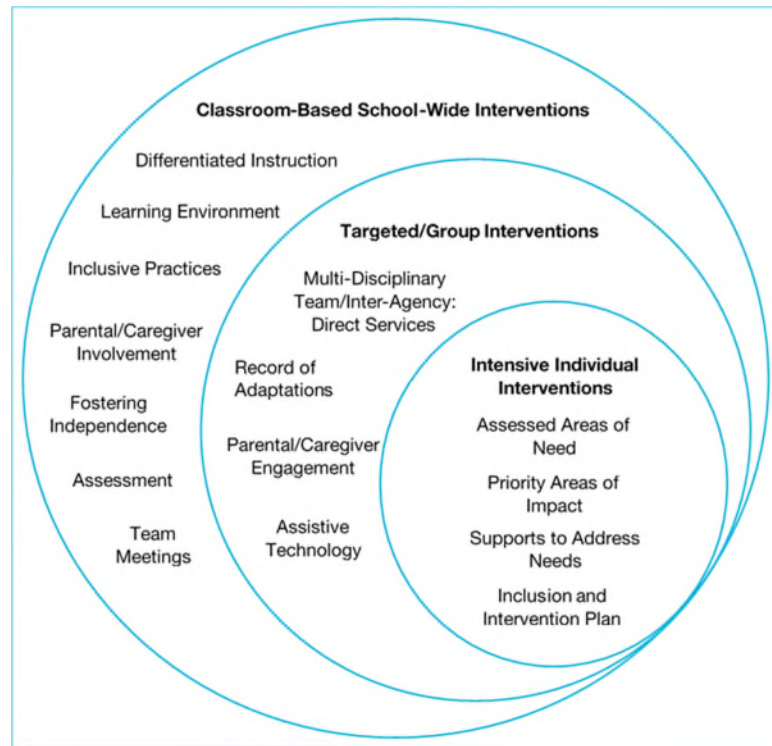
<sup>7</sup> Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, *Actualizing a Needs-Based Model*, (2015).

<http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/87218-Actualizing%20a%20needs-based%20model.pdf> (22 March 2018).

involvement. The approach expects those that know the student best (e.g., parents, teachers), as well as professionals with specific expertise develop student-support plans.<sup>8</sup>

The Ministry of Education makes other resources available to assist divisions.<sup>9</sup> For example, it provides them with intensive need categories that reflect specific diagnoses (see **Figure 2**).

**Figure 1—Approach to Supporting Students at School**



Source: Adapted from information provided by the Ministry of Education.

**Figure 2—Ministry of Education Intensive Need Categories**

**Blind or Visual Impairment:** measured loss of central visual acuity that is 20/70 or less in the better eye with proper correction; or field of vision is not greater than 20 degrees at the widest diameter.

**Deaf or Hard of Hearing:** hearing loss greater than 34 decibels in the better ear; or a unilateral hearing loss which is 50 decibels or more; and, a significant delay in speech and language.

**Intellectual Disability:** a disorder that includes both intellectual and adaptive functioning deficits in conceptual, social, and practical domains.

**Bipolar, Depressive, Anxiety, or Related Disorders:** includes Selective Mutism, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Psychotic Disorders, etc.

**Orthopaedic Disability:** mobility is significantly impacted; limitations are documented in self-care (e.g., feeding, dressing, toileting), and specialized transportation is required.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder:** includes the previously diagnosed Asperger's Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder. Also includes Autism Spectrum Disorder associated with a known medical or genetic condition (e.g., Rett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder) or environmental factor (lead paint exposure, acquired brain injury).

**Physical Health Impairment:** school attendance is limited for at least three months secondary due to physical health issues, or supervision is required to ensure health and safety with personal care (e.g. managing medications, provision of medical procedures).

<sup>8</sup> Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, *Inclusion and Intervention Plan Guidelines*, (2017).

<sup>9</sup> Resources available at: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/deplist.cfm?d=11&c=2435> (22 March 2018).



**Neurodevelopmental Disorder associated with prenatal substance exposure:** includes Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), related disorders, or documentation of prenatal exposure to substances.

**Substance-related and Addictive Disorders:** includes substance use or a substance induced disorder.

**Other Diagnosed Condition:** diagnosed condition not included above (e.g., severe language delays, learning disabilities).

**Other Undiagnosed Condition:** no diagnosed condition exists but individual requires intensive supports.

Source: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/82982-intensive-supports-categories.pdf> (26 March 2018).

## 2.3 Students with Intensive Needs in Saskatoon School Division

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 is one of 28 Saskatchewan school divisions. Saskatoon Public is an urban school division located in the city of Saskatoon. It has just over 2,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, including 1,455 FTE classroom teachers, and 575 FTE educational staff in other positions (e.g., educational assistants, speech language pathologists).<sup>10</sup>

*Saskatoon Public Budget Report 2017-18* includes as one of its 46 priorities—*Continue to ensure inclusive learning environments and supports for all children with intensive needs and learning challenges.*<sup>11</sup>

The Division has about 25,000 students of which almost two-thirds are Kindergarten to Grade 8 students.<sup>12</sup> It operates 49 elementary schools in Saskatoon.<sup>13</sup> The Division also has a specialized school (John Dolan School) that provides a range of services for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 with multiple disabilities.<sup>14</sup> John Dolan School is organized by student need instead of by grade as other schools.

The number of its Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs is increasing. As shown in **Figure 3**, Saskatoon Public had 1,167 Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs in 2017-18 as compared to 1,069 in 2015-16. At December 31, 2017, Saskatoon Public had about 7.3% of its Kindergarten to Grade 8 students identified as having intensive needs.

<sup>10</sup> *Saskatoon Public S.D. #13 Board of Education Annual Report – 2016-17*, p. 46.

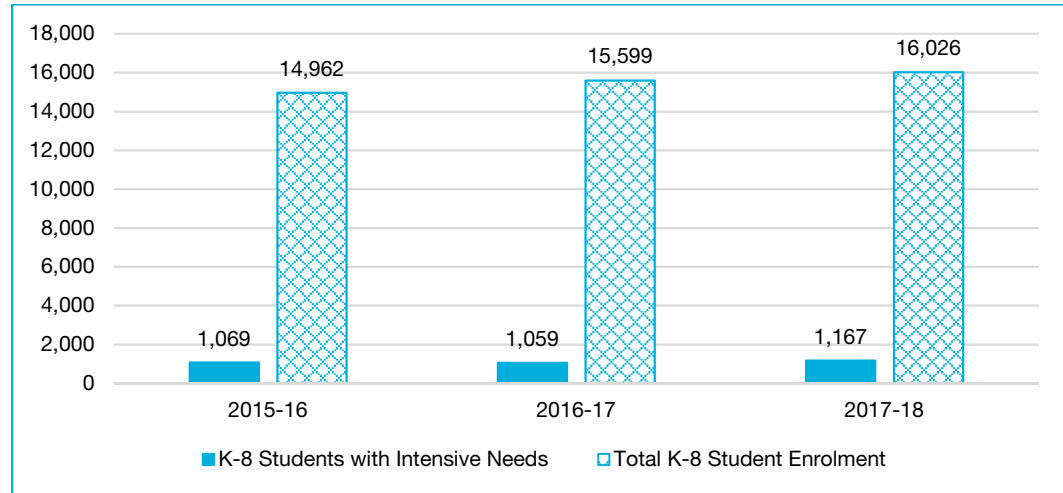
<sup>11</sup> [www.spsd.sk.ca/division/reportsandpublications/Documents/FINAL%20BUDGET%20DOCUMENT%202017\\_2018.pdf](http://www.spsd.sk.ca/division/reportsandpublications/Documents/FINAL%20BUDGET%20DOCUMENT%202017_2018.pdf) (22 March 2018).

<sup>12</sup> *Saskatoon Public Schools Budget Report 2017-2018*, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> [www.spsd.sk.ca/Schools/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.spsd.sk.ca/Schools/Pages/default.aspx) (9 April 2018).

<sup>14</sup> [www.spsd.sk.ca/Schools/specialEd/faqs/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.spsd.sk.ca/Schools/specialEd/faqs/Pages/default.aspx) (9 April 2018).

**Figure 3—Saskatoon Public’s Number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 Students with Intensive Needs Compared to Total Kindergarten to Grade 8 Enrolment<sup>A</sup>**



Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.

<sup>A</sup> Enrolment data is of September of applicable school year. Number of students with intensive needs is for school year (at April 2018 for 2017-18).

## 2.4 Importance of Supporting Students with Intensive Needs

Research shows the value of early intervention in improving students’ educational outcomes.<sup>15</sup> It indicates that the academic achievement of many students with intensive needs can be similar to their peers when given access to the same content with specially designed instruction, supports, and accommodations when needed.<sup>16</sup> A solid education equips students in succeeding, contributing to society, and, for some, living independently and caring for themselves.

As learning is a cumulative process, difficulties early on can have a cascading effect throughout a student’s education, resulting in having to play catch-up for years to come.<sup>17</sup>

## 3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

**We concluded that, for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2017, Saskatoon School Division No. 13 had effective processes, except in the following areas, to support the learning of students in Kindergarten to Grade 8 with intensive needs. The Division needs to:**

- **Formally estimate the future enrolment of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs; analyze trends in the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and their categories of intensive needs; and determine staff needed to support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs**

<sup>15</sup> Questions about Special Education, [www.saskatoonpublicschools.ca/Schools/specialEd/faqs/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.saskatoonpublicschools.ca/Schools/specialEd/faqs/Pages/default.aspx) (4 October 2017).

<sup>16</sup> [https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Martha\\_Thurlow-Meeting\\_the\\_Needs\\_of\\_Special\\_Education\\_Students.pdf](https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Martha_Thurlow-Meeting_the_Needs_of_Special_Education_Students.pdf) (07 November 2017).

<sup>17</sup> [www.sac-oac.ca/sac-work/early-identification-intervention](http://www.sac-oac.ca/sac-work/early-identification-intervention) (31 October 2017).



- **Maintain documentation of the key consultations, discussions, decisions, and steps taken for supporting Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs; retain evidence of agreement on learning plans for those students; and also maintain assessment information in the student cumulative files**
- **Give staff guidance on expected timelines for completing requested intensive-needs assessments of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students**
- **Regularly monitor progress in achieving learning goals of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and centrally monitor whether schools sufficiently support these students to enable progress towards their learning goals**
- **Give senior management and the Board of Education enough information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs**

**Figure 4—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach**

**Audit Objective:**

The objective of this audit was to assess the effectiveness of Saskatoon School Division No. 13's processes, for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2017, to support the learning of students in Kindergarten to Grade 8 with intensive needs. Students with intensive needs are those assessed as having a capacity to learn that is compromised by a cognitive, social-emotional, behavioral, or physical condition.

**Audit Criteria:**

1. Design learning supports for students with intensive needs
  - 1.1 Estimate division-wide intensive learning needs
  - 1.2 Identify resources available (e.g., teachers, qualified professionals, support staff, funding, tools, supports)
  - 1.3 Deploy resources to address priority needs
2. Implement learning plans for students with intensive needs
  - 2.1 Identify students with intensive needs
  - 2.2 Use validated tools to assess the learning needs of those students
  - 2.3 Design student learning plans
  - 2.4 Carry out student learning plans
  - 2.5 Adjust learning plans based on students' progress
3. Monitor results
  - 3.1 Assess delivery of learning supports (e.g., obtain feedback, review complaints, assess tools and supports used)
  - 3.2 Adjust resources as necessary
  - 3.2 Communicate results (e.g., senior management, parents)

**Audit Approach:**

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

We examined the Division's criteria, policies, and procedures that relate to providing supports for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. We assessed the Division's processes by testing a sample of student files at five Kindergarten to Grade 8 schools and at the John Dolan School.<sup>A</sup> We interviewed key personnel at the Division office and schools. We assessed controls over key IT applications, tested key aspects of the Division's processes, and consulted with an independent consultant with subject matter expertise. The consultant helped us to identify good practices.

<sup>A</sup> John Dolan School is organized by student need instead of by grade.

## 4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Resources Supporting Students with Intensive Needs Defined

Saskatoon Public has clearly defined the various learning supports (e.g., staff, programs, services) it offers to Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.<sup>18</sup>

The Division has several specialized programs targeted to students with specific needs (e.g., behaviour challenges, intellectual disabilities) (see **Figure 5**). For example, the Division provides some autism diagnostic services for students in the division. Also, it makes assistive technology (e.g., laptop computers) available to students that require it.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 5—Special Education Programs Offered in Saskatoon Public**

**Autism Support Program:** designed for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and challenging behaviours. The goal is to provide an individualized program to develop strategies to meet their social, communication, behavioural, and sensory needs in order to transition successfully back into the neighborhood school.

**Behaviour and Learning Accommodation in a Needs-Centred Environment (BALANCE):** this program is an individualized, highly structured learning opportunity that utilizes a variety of cognitive behavioral strategies.

**Functional Academics:** program for elementary students with a mild intellectual disability who also have behaviour challenges.

**Functional Life Skills:** provides support for students with moderate intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities to help them become as independent as possible in their daily lives.

**John Dolan School:** a special school for students with severe or multiple disabilities. Students may attend until age 22. The school houses a multi-sensory environment for students, that fosters relaxation, co-operation and participation through interactive play stations, soothing music, and special lighting (called the Mary Vinish Snoezelen Park).

Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.

To deliver its programs, the Division employs various types of staff to support classroom teachers in meeting the needs of students with intensive needs. As shown in **Figure 6**, support staff includes resource teachers, special education consultants, professional and specialized staff (speech language pathologists, educational psychologists, counsellors), and educational assistants.

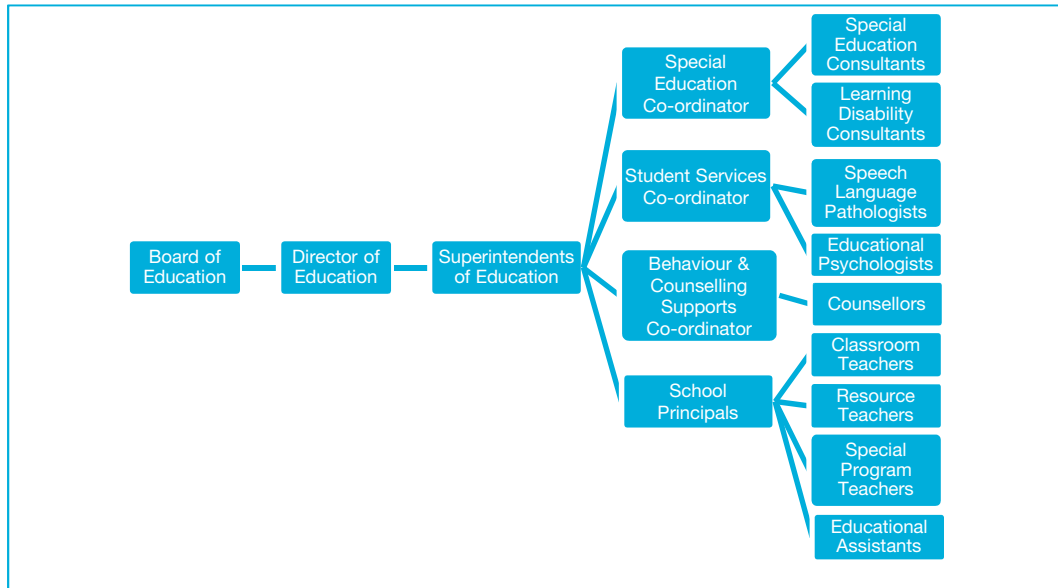
<sup>18</sup> [www.spsd.sk.ca/Schools/specialEd/Documents/SpecialEducation.pdf](http://www.spsd.sk.ca/Schools/specialEd/Documents/SpecialEducation.pdf) (22 March 2018).

<sup>19</sup> *Saskatoon Public Schools Strategic Direction 2016-2017*, p. 2.





**Figure 6—Saskatoon Public’s Organizational Chart for Staff Supporting Students with Intensive Needs**



Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.

Some staff who support students with intensive needs operate division-wide; whereas others are assigned to specific schools and/or specific students.

The Division centrally assigns each professional (speech language pathologists, educational psychologist) to several schools based on projected caseload for the school year. These professionals may collaborate and help each other in managing workloads throughout the year.

Special education consultants work with a portfolio of schools to assist in identifying students with intensive needs, consult with teachers to support students with intensive needs (e.g., provide materials and instructional strategies), and support implementation of assistive technology.

We found the Division uses a model to guide its allocation of resource teachers to schools. The model uses factors such as the actual number of intensive need students, actual overall student enrolment, and results of student assessments (e.g., reading assessments). The Division indicated that it also considers staff workloads when making resourcing decisions during its annual budgeting process.

For determining the number of educational assistants for an elementary school, the Division considers the school’s special education program needs, and the number and needs of students with intensive needs including those requiring one-on-one support.

Schools can request one-on-one educational-assistant support for a student using a standard request template. The Division places priority on safety concerns, or personal care needs of a student with intensive needs. One-on-one support assigns a specific educational assistant to a student on a full-time basis. The Division processes and approves requests for one-on-one support centrally.

In addition, Saskatoon Public works with other school divisions, other government agencies like the Saskatchewan Health Authority, and various not-for-profit agencies (e.g.,



Autism Services of Saskatoon) to provide further assessment services and/or learning supports to students with intensive needs—see **Figure 7**.

**Figure 7—Key Agencies and Partnerships**

<p><b>Autism Services of Saskatoon:</b> offers programs and resources to families with students with autism spectrum disorder.</p> <p><b>Child &amp; Youth Mental Health &amp; Addictions Services:</b> services available through the Saskatchewan Health Authority to support students with mental health needs and their families. Services include individual and family counselling, group therapy, and case management for the family.</p> <p><b>St. Mary’s Wellness Clinic:</b> school-based pediatric clinic that offers comprehensive healthcare and mental health services to disadvantaged patients and families. The program is a partnership between St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 20, University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine, and Saskatoon Tribal Council. It operates one day a week at WP Bate School (Division school).</p> <p><b>Community Living Service Delivery:</b> branch of the Ministry of Social Services that provides support services to students with intellectual disabilities and their families such as counselling, respite planning, and crisis intervention.</p> <p><b>Cognitive Disability Strategy:</b> Ministry of Social Services program to support students with cognitive disabilities and their families. Families apply for funding when their children need supports not offered through any other system.</p> <p><b>Saskatchewan Association for Community Living:</b> agency offers supports to students with intellectual disabilities and their families such as peer support groups, recreational programs, and advocacy support.</p> <p><b>Alvin Buckwold Child Development Program:</b> program through the Saskatchewan Health Authority that provides diagnostic and treatment services to children 0-18 years at risk of developmental, cognitive and/or physical challenges.</p> <p><b>Partnerships with Prairie Spirit School Division No. 206 and St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 20, and Saskatchewan Health Authority (Child &amp; Youth: Mental Health and Addictions Services):</b></p> <p><b>Youth Day Program:</b> a short-term assessment and intervention program to help youth (age 12-18) with severe mental health and substance use issues.</p> <p><b>Children’s Therapeutic Classroom:</b> short-term assessment and intervention program designed to meet the needs of children who exhibit severe mental health disorders. The function of the program is to support the development of more effective emotional, social, and academic functioning for students in order for them to transition successfully back to their neighborhood schools.</p>
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Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.

## 4.2 Qualified Staff Support Students with Intensive Needs

Saskatoon Public employs qualified staff to assist Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

Saskatoon Public set out credentials for teachers, professionals, and other staff supporting students with intensive needs in job descriptions. Job descriptions clearly outline requirements for education and experience for educational assistants, resource teachers, special education consultants, co-ordinators, speech language pathologists, and educational psychologists. For example, it requires speech language pathologists and educational psychologists to possess a post-secondary degree in their respective fields. It requires educational assistants to possess post-secondary education related to special education programming and related work experience.

We found that the Division supports its teachers in gaining additional education in the special education field (e.g., train to become a resource teacher). It pairs these teachers with experienced resource teachers until they fulfill the educational requirements.



In addition, the Division maintains resource teacher and educational assistant handbooks. These provide key information about assigned responsibilities and day-to-day work with students and staff. We found the handbooks were clear and comprehensive.

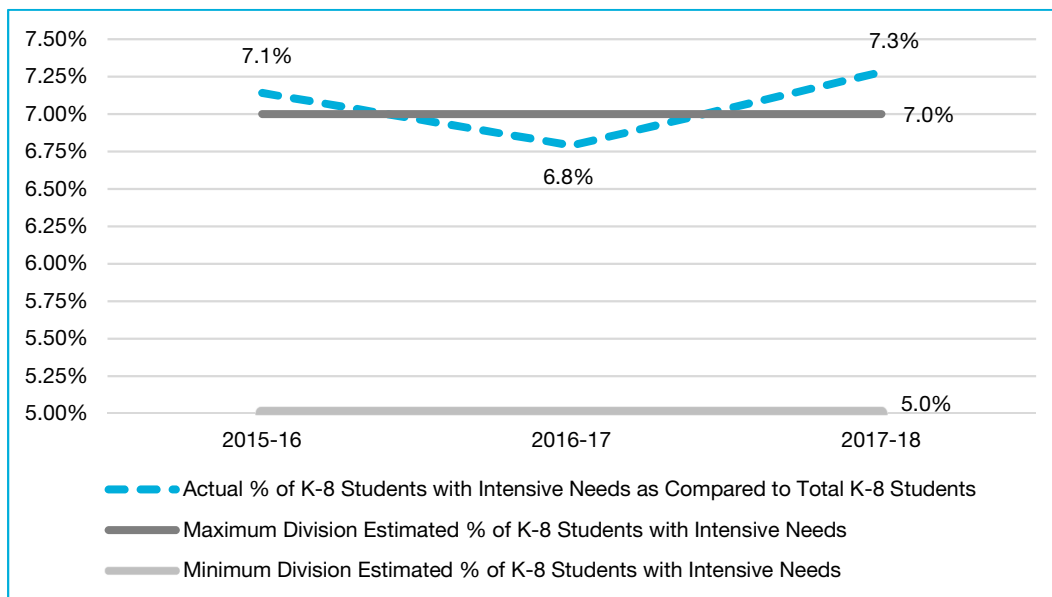
### 4.3 Better Forecasting and Analysis of the Future Enrolment of Students with Intensive Needs Needed To Support Staffing Decisions

Saskatoon Public does not specifically estimate the future enrolment of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Accurate estimates are important for determining support staffing needs. Each 1% difference in estimates of total students equates to about 160 Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs (see **Figure 3**).

Each year, Saskatoon Public estimates enrolment for the upcoming year of Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. While it does not specifically estimate the number of students with intensive needs, Division management indicated that they expect about 5% to 7% of students enrolled to have intensive needs.

We found that the Division’s maximum expected enrolment of students with intensive needs of 7% was lower than the actual enrolment numbers of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students in two out of the last three years. As shown in **Figure 8** for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students, the Division’s actual enrolment of students with intensive needs as compared to total enrolment was between 6.8% and 7.3% in the last 3 years. Over the same period, the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs increased from 1,069 to 1,167 students for a total increase of 9.2% (see **Figure 3**).

**Figure 8—Saskatoon Public’s Actual % of Kindergarten to Grade 8 Students with Intensive Needs Enrolment Compared to Division Estimated Range**



Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.

Reliable estimates of future enrolment of students with intensive needs would give Saskatoon Public better information to determine resources (teachers and other supports) to support those students. Without reliable estimates of future enrolment of students with

intensive needs, the Division may not determine the amount of resources it needs to provide students with intensive needs with sufficient support.

1. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 formally estimate the future enrolment of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

### Basis of the Number of Staff Assigned Not Documented

The Division had not documented its determination of the number of staff needed to support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. The increase in the actual number of students with intensive needs over the last three years has outpaced the increase in the staff providing supports to these students in most cases.

The Division determines staff to support students with intensive needs primarily through its annual budgeting process. The Division indicated that during this process, it decides on the nature and number of support staff, and other tools and supports (e.g., assistive technology) for students with intensive needs. It considers the number of identified students requiring one-on-one support.

However, the Division could not show us how it links increases in support staff to increases in the number of students with intensive needs and the changes in their needs.

As noted in **Figure 9**, our analysis found that the combined increase in staff used to support students with intensive needs has increased 8.5% between 2015-16 and 2017-18, as compared to a 9.2% increase in the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

**Figure 9—Saskatoon Public's Staffing Complement Supporting Kindergarten to Grade 8 Students with Intensive Needs**

FTEs (K-8)	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	% increase in staffing (from 2015-16 to 2017-18)	% increase in K-8 students with intensive needs enrolment (from 2015-16 to 2017-18)
Resource Teachers	82.5	85.6	89.7	8.7%	9.2%
Educational Assistants	308.4	315	336.1	9.0%	
Speech Language Pathologists	14	15	14.8	5.7%	
Educational Psychologists	9	10	10	11.1%	
Counsellors	16.7	17.2	17.2	3.0%	
Special Education Consultants	4.5	4.5	4.5	0%	
<b>Combined</b>	435.1	447.3	472.3	8.5%	

Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.



Our analysis also found that the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students requiring one-on-one support from an educational assistant has increased by 49 students over the last three years (see **Figure 10**).

**Figure 10—Number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 Students Requiring One-on-One Educational Assistant Support**

2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	% increase from 2015-16 to 2017-18
155	175	204	31.6%

Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.

In addition, we found almost all of the 11 categories of intensive needs increased along with the number of students with intensive needs, and students requiring one-on-one support. As shown in **Figure 11**, between 2015-16 and 2017-18, Saskatoon Public had increases of over 10% in all six categories listed (e.g., mental health disorders and other diagnosed conditions [e.g., severe language delays or learning disabilities]). The number of students with multiple disabilities increased 18.5%.

**Figure 11—Saskatoon Public’s Categories of Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 Students with Intensive Needs**

Intensive Needs Categories <sup>A, B</sup>	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	% increase for category (2015-16 to 2017-18)
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	60	73	71	18.3%
Intellectual Disability	323	352	373	15.5%
Bipolar, Depressive, Anxiety, or Related Disorders	184	209	225	22.3%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	285	286	316	10.9%
Physical Health Impairment	222	232	245	10.4%
Other Diagnosed Condition	93	138	151	62.4%
Multiple Disabilities <sup>B</sup>	243	282	288	18.5%

Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division No. 13.

<sup>A</sup> See **Figure 2** for a brief description of each category. Table includes categories with increases greater than 10%.

<sup>B</sup> Students with multiple disabilities are recorded in multiple categories.

We recognize that a direct relationship between increases in the number of students with intensive needs to the number of teachers is not realistic. The needs of students can vary significantly depending upon their intensive need, category, and severity of their needs. Also, Saskatoon Public can take varied approaches to address those needs.

As well, Saskatoon Public does not analyze its population of students with intensive needs to identify changes or trends (e.g., changes in categories).

Our analysis of records in the Division’s student supports IT system found duplicate entries for students (e.g., had more than one student plan), and differences in how the Division entered grade identification for students (e.g., entered Kindergarten four different

ways).<sup>20</sup> We also found that prior to the 2017-18 school year, the Division retained records in its IT system on students receiving additional supports at school who were not designated as students with intensive needs. The Division discontinued this practice in the current school year.

The Division retains point-in-time information on its Pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 students with intensive needs. Therefore, the Division could not readily provide us with the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school year. As a result, we conducted our own analysis to determine the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs (see **Figure 3**).

Inconsistent entry of student information can make analysis of trends and changes in students with intensive needs difficult. Further, without a documented assessment of students with intensive needs and staff needed to support these students, the Division cannot show that it is making sufficient programs and supports available to students with intensive needs as *The Education Act, 1995* requires.

2. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 analyze trends in the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and their categories of intensive needs.
3. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 document its determination of staff needed to support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

#### 4.4 Well-defined Approach to Designate Students as Having Intensive Learning Needs But Better Documentation Needed

Saskatoon Public's elementary schools use a well-defined approach to designate Kindergarten to Grade 8 students as having intensive learning needs. However, Saskatoon Public elementary school TEAMS do not consistently record their key decisions and action items. In addition, the Division did not consistently keep intensive-need assessment results in the student's cumulative file (e.g., assessments by speech language pathologist, educational psychologist).

Each school has a group comprised of both school staff (i.e., school administrators, classroom teachers, and resource teachers) and Division professionals and consultants (i.e., speech language pathologist, educational psychologist, counsellors, special education consultant).<sup>21</sup> Saskatoon Public refers to these groups as TEAMS.

TEAMS at each school are responsible for deciding appropriate intensive learning supports for students identified as potentially having intensive learning needs. TEAMS determine whether division professionals are to conduct assessments to determine if a student has intensive needs. TEAMS meet on a monthly basis.

<sup>20</sup> The Division uses a student supports IT system called CLEVR to track key details about students with intensive needs (e.g., name, grade, school, identified need category, learning supports). CLEVR is an online application used for integrated data collection and tracking.

<sup>21</sup> Division refers to head office-based staff such as superintendents and special education consultants. Division professionals include speech language pathologists, educational psychologists, and school counsellors. School staff refers to staff such as school principals, vice principals, resource teachers, special education teachers, and classroom teachers.



Staff at an elementary school initially identify individual students with learning or behaviour challenges. They discuss possible adaptations or classroom interventions to support the success of identified students. Where a student continues to struggle after use of those adaptations or interventions, the school staff refer the student for discussion at a monthly school TEAMS meeting.

School TEAMS discuss the needs and learning supports suitable and available to each referred students. They may:

- Direct the school to pursue parental approval for Division professionals to formally assess the learning needs of the student
- Refer the student to the Division's autism diagnostic service
- Recommend parents obtain a referral (from family doctor) to external medical or mental health professionals, learning support services, or community partners
- Identify whether a student requires the use of assistive technology (e.g., laptop computer)

School TEAMS also discuss, overall and for individual students, new issues or struggles students with intensive needs may have, changes to classroom strategies to address those needs, student assessment workload, or assistive technology options.

The Division provides staff (e.g., resource teachers, principals) with standard forms (rubrics) to assist them in prioritizing and assessing students (e.g., Impact Profile rubric for one-on-one educational assistant support, Psychoeducational Assessment Prioritization Form, Impact Assessment template).

We found that Division staff used the standard forms as expected for the 36 files of students with intensive needs we tested.

In addition, the Division provides schools with guidance on conducting TEAMS meetings, and what information to review and prepare in advance of the meeting (e.g., interventions already tried, other evidence/data to support the concern). The guidance includes a template for TEAMS to document the concerns, strategies, and updates discussed, as well as the action plan for a student.

All six schools we visited used the Division-supplied IT software (called OneNote) to record information about their school's TEAMS meetings. However, for 11 of the 36 files of students with intensive needs we tested, records of TEAMS discussions and consultations on that student's challenges, options, next steps, and resolutions were incomplete or documentation was minimal. One of five files we tested of students (where the Division was considering designating the student as having intensive needs) had no records of TEAMS discussions on that student.

Incomplete documentation on consultations, decisions, and actions about student support from school TEAMS meetings may result in students not receiving timely support. Consistently documenting these discussions would help ensure continuity of supports provided and reduce the risk of overlooked or forgotten actions to support a student's learning needs.

**4. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 require schools to consistently document key consultations, decisions, and action items resulting from their meetings for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.**

For each student identified as requiring a formal assessment of potential intensive supports, the Division uses a standard assessment approach (called Impact Assessment Profile). School staff, using standard templates, complete the assessment profile, and consult with Division professionals as needed. The assessment profile documents each student's needs and recommended supports. Special Education Consultants approve the completed profiles to designate a student as having intensive learning needs.

For the 36 files of students with intensive needs we tested, each student had an assessment profile completed and approved by the Division. However, for 2 of the 36 student files we tested, the student cumulative file did not contain the student's assessment information.

A student cumulative file typically contains a student's grades, attendance, standardized assessment reports and other information from a student's educational career. Parents have the right to inspect the file and have copies of any information contained in a student cumulative file. In addition, to assist in continuity of education, divisions transfer student cumulative files when a student transfers to another school.<sup>22</sup>

Maintaining assessment information on student cumulative files allows this information to be accessible to parents and to school staff in order to provide sufficient supports to students with intensive needs.

**5. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 maintain in student cumulative files assessment information related to Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.**

The Division uses a student supports IT system to track key details about students with intensive needs (e.g., name, grade, school, identified need category, learning supports). Each December, the Division shared this information with the Ministry of Education.

## **4.5 Guidance on Expected Timelines for Assessments Needed**

Saskatoon Public has not provided guidance on expected timelines for completion of assessments of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

Division professionals (e.g., speech language pathologist, educational psychologist) receive referrals for student assessments from elementary schools as directed by the school's TEAMS. The Division indicates caseloads, additional testing, obtaining parental consent, and time of year all affect the timing of completing assessments.

Division professionals track when they receive a request for an assessment, and which assessments are completed but not the date on which the assessment is done.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Education, The Student Cumulative Record Guidelines ([http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/83639-Student%20Cumulative%20Records%20Guidelines%202015%20-%20ENG%20\(2\).pdf](http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/83639-Student%20Cumulative%20Records%20Guidelines%202015%20-%20ENG%20(2).pdf)) (2 April 2018).





Management indicated that it typically takes between:

- Four to six weeks (20 to 30 school days) to complete a speech language assessment
- Six to ten weeks (30 to 50 school days) for a psychologist assessment.

A school year is 195 days. We found that good practices support a quicker assessment time of two weeks (10 school days).

A completed assessment is the prerequisite to identifying intensive learning supports for a student. Delays in completing these assessments cause delays in implementing learning supports for students with intensive needs. These supports are key to students' educational success.

**6. We recommend Saskatoon School Division No. 13 provide guidance on expected timelines for completion of assessments of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.**

## **4.6 Learning Plans Developed as Expected**

Saskatoon Public staff develops a learning plan for each Kindergarten to Grade 8 student with intensive needs as expected.

The Division documents a student's goals in the learning plan. School staff develop goals for each student based on areas of need identified in the student's assessment profile.

A student assessment profile identifies a student's level of need in key areas such as independence, personal/social well-being, safety, communication, and academic achievement. The profile also sets out recommended student supports (e.g., resource teacher, educational assistant, and division professionals), and the expected frequency of each support. Frequency is marked as:

- Frequently (e.g., every day or on a regular schedule, at least two to three times a week)
- Occasionally (e.g., scheduled blocks, at least once a week), or
- Periodically (e.g., less than once per week or specific activities in time of need)

Special Education Consultants review assessment profiles and student-learning plans for alignment of the level of need and support indicated, and for realistic and measurable goals.

For all of the 36 files of students with intensive needs we tested, school staff used standard templates to design learning plans for students with intensive needs. The plans outlined the frequency of supports and goals for the school year. In all instances where students we tested were previously designated as intensive needs (e.g., in the 2016-17 school year and prior), school staff used the prior year student plan to help inform the current year plan.

## 4.7 Agreement on Learning Plans Not Always Documented

Collaboration and agreement between school staff and parents on Kindergarten to Grade 8 student plans is not always documented.

School staff document learning plans for students with intensive needs in the Division's student supports IT system. They are to retain a copy of the learning plan in the student cumulative file. Once the resource teacher drafts the learning plan, school staff are to discuss the plan with the student's parents, and sign-off on agreement with the plan.

We found learning plans missing from 13% of the 36 student cumulative files of students with intensive needs we tested. Also, 17% of the 36 student cumulative files of students with intensive needs we tested had learning plans that were not signed by parents, or were not signed off at all (i.e., missing school staff signatures as well). These files did not contain any indication of disagreement with parents. For all 36 files we tested, school staff documented student plans in the Division's student supports IT system.

Parental involvement and support for their child's education is beneficial for all students but even more important for students with intensive needs. Parents can play a key role in helping with assignments, and encouraging a child's learning and development.

Documenting agreement of the learning plans shows that school staff and parents have discussed the student's learning plan. In addition, it shows that the school staff and parents agree on Saskatoon Public's approach to address the individual student's needs, and their involvement. Not having documented agreement between school staff and parents on the students' learning plans may affect student success.

**7. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 retain evidence of agreement on learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.**

## 4.8 Better Evidence of Monitoring of Student Plans to Support Students with Intensive Needs Needed

The Division did not retain key documentation on actions, discussion, and decisions (with Division staff, school staff or parents) regarding monitoring and adjusting student-learning plans of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. In addition, it did not consistently document key consultations, decisions, and action items resulting from school TEAMS meetings.

We found that student files lacked documentation on consultations with parents. One-third of the 36 files of students with intensive needs we tested did not contain evidence of discussions with parents. For the other two-thirds of files we tested, the notes of consultations with parents were in the TEAMS meeting notes. The Division does not maintain TEAMS meeting notes in student cumulative files.

Also, the Division did not consistently maintain documentation of its discussions, decisions, and steps taken to implement student-learning plans. Almost one-third of the



36 files of students with intensive needs we tested did not contain evidence of discussions with Division and school staff.

Collaboration between the Division, school staff, and parents are key components to student success at school. Keeping consistent and accessible documentation (e.g., in the student supports IT system) would assist school staff in monitoring steps taken to support students with intensive needs and help avoid repeating intervention strategies found ineffective for students who transfer between schools.

**8. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 require consistent and accessible documentation of key discussions, decisions, and steps taken to implement learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.**

Division and school staff do not log or track complaints received from parents of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Division staff indicated that for any concerns noted by parents that cannot be resolved at the school level (e.g., by the principal) would be discussed at TEAMS meetings. See **Recommendations 4 and 8** about consistent documentation.

For students with intensive needs, school staff are to regularly monitor student progress at least three times a year. They are to prepare reports on students' progress in achieving goals (progress reports), as set out in the learning plan, three times a year. If a student with intensive needs is struggling to meet their goals, or achieves their goals during the school year, school staff are to adjust the student's goals when assessing student progress.

For all of the 36 files of students with intensive needs we tested, school staff adjusted goals in learning plans. For each of these files, staff developed, for each student, student goals based on student progress between school years.

School staff are to meet with parents to discuss progress of student goals, and sign-off on the progress report. Schools are to retain the signed copy of the progress report in the student cumulative file.

We found that school staff did not consistently complete progress reports on student goals for students with intensive needs as expected. School staff also did not always retain evidence of parent sign-off on progress reports. For the 36 files for students with intensive needs we tested, 52% of 2016-17 year-end progress reports were not signed by parents, or were not signed off at all (i.e., also missing school staff signatures). Further, 63% of files for students with intensive needs we tested did not contain a progress report for the first term of the 2017-18 school year.<sup>23</sup>

Without documented progress reports including student progress against goals and documented evidence of parent agreement, there is a risk that there could be a difference of opinion with students with intensive needs' progress.

**9. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 regularly monitor students' progress in achieving goals set out in learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.**

<sup>23</sup> Term 1 report cards were to be completed the week of November 20th. We completed testing December 3 to 14, 2017.

## 4.9 Division Monitoring of Results Needed

Saskatoon Public does not formally monitor on a division-wide basis or on a school-by-school basis whether it is meeting the identified needs of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Rather it uses primarily informal mechanisms to assess, monitor, and adjust delivery of learning supports.

The Division prioritizes access to existing resources using the results of student assessment profiles (e.g., the category of intensive needs, type and intensity of support needed, and school). It makes the principal at each school responsible for allocating division-assigned educational assistants to students based on student need (as set out in the student assessment profile) and input from classroom teachers. During the school year, schools are to adjust educational assistant assignments given changes in the number of students requiring support, and in level of need of individual students. Schools requiring additional educational assistant support must make written requests to the Division office for additional resources.

For the 36 files of students with intensive needs we tested, one student was receiving less support than outlined in that student's assessment profile. While the student was assessed as requiring frequent support of an educational assistant, the student did not receive any support from an educational assistant. Upon further examining the allocation of educational assistants within that student's school, we found that the school had not allocated educational assistants based on the assessed needs of its students (that is, it had provided other students assessed as having lesser needs with educational assistants before the student we tested).

The school and Division management noted the school was providing this student with support using other resources (e.g., resource teacher and classroom teacher) because the school did not have enough educational assistant resources to support all of the assessed intensive needs of students. As of December 2017, the school had not specifically requested additional resources for educational assistants.

The Division does not require schools to report whether students with intensive needs are progressing against goals as expected. Such information would help the Division determine whether it is providing sufficient support to students with intensive needs. The information would also help the Division to evaluate deployment of resources to schools to support students with intensive needs.

**10. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 centrally monitor whether schools sufficiently support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with identified intensive needs to enable students to progress towards their individual learning goals.**

Also, Saskatoon Public deploys assistive technology to help students with intensive needs in the classroom. School staff assign devices to students on a trial basis to assist in finding a device that will be a good fit for students. Examples of assistive technology include:

- Laptops and tablet computers – used for applications such as voice recognition and predictive text, symbol-based communication, and organization of assignments



- FM radio/sound systems – amplifies sound in the classroom for students with hearing loss
- Hokki stools – specialized stool that allows students to keep moving while sitting still
- Slant boards – angled writing surface to help students with proper wrist and hand placement

Midway through the school year, the Division produces a tracking sheet to check which devices (e.g., laptops, tablet computers) are in use, and which devices it can reassign to other students.

The Division assesses delivery of learning supports (staff, assistive technology) through regular communication with its staff. Division branches (e.g., Special Education, Support Services) and Division professionals (e.g., speech language pathologists, educational psychologists) meet monthly to discuss caseloads, professional development opportunities, resource availability, and issues and concerns staff are experiencing.

## 4.10 Reporting Needed on Key Aspects of Supporting Students with Intensive Needs

Saskatoon Public does not give senior management or the Board enough information to enable them to determine whether the Division is sufficiently supporting Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Its reports are activity-based instead of results-based.

Division staff communicates high-level activities about its intensive-learning-support programs with senior management through regular meetings. Student Supports and Special Education branches of the Division report, in writing, to the Director of Education quarterly. The quarterly reports focus on high-level program activities and staff professional development.

The Division periodically makes presentations on intensive needs programming at school community council meetings.<sup>24</sup>

The Board receives periodic reports about specific special education programs the Division offers. For example, in October 2015, it received a report about the EagleEyes program at John Dolan School.<sup>25</sup> The report noted the learning opportunities this communication program has provided to non-verbal students at the school. In addition, the Student Supports branch and Special Education branch staff periodically attend Board meetings to discuss special education programs.

The Division communicates activity-based information on its supports for students with intensive needs to the public. The Division publishes a *Report to the Community* annually to update the public on the key activities undertaken for its core strategies, including

<sup>24</sup> School Community Councils are school-level advisory bodies that involve parents, students, community members, and school staff, working together on issues that affect student learning and community well-being. [www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/prek-12-education-early-learning-and-schools/school-community-councils-support-centre](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/prek-12-education-early-learning-and-schools/school-community-councils-support-centre) (27 March 2018).

<sup>25</sup> EagleEyes is an eye-controlled technology that helps students with profound physical disabilities interact and communicate with other people through use of a computer.

special education and student services. The report does not indicate whether intensive need support programs are working or are successful.

We found Division staff centrally monitor waitlists for its specialized programs. For example, as of December 2017, the Division's waitlists were as follows; 17 students for the BALANCE program, five students for Functional Life Skills, and four students for the Autism Support Program. The Division uses this information to help determine whether to request additional programming primarily through its annual budgeting process, and to allocate existing learning support staff. It may request approval for additional funding from the Board during the school year. For example, we found that in February 2018, the Division requested funding for additional educational assistants to support students with intensive needs.

However, we found management and the Board do not receive written reports about how Saskatoon Public is managing its waitlists for its specialized programs, or trends in the number of students with intensive needs, or types of their needs. Also, they do not receive reports on whether schools are sufficiently meeting the identified needs of students with intensive needs.

Receiving information on key aspects of intensive learning support programs, periodically, would enable senior management and the Board of Education to evaluate whether the Division is meeting its legal obligations with respect to students with intensive needs. That is, is the Division providing students with educational services that are consistent with that student's educational needs and abilities, and sufficiently accommodating students with intensive needs? Information on its support programs for students with intensive needs could include data on management of waitlists for specialized programs, trends in students with intensive needs (number, types and intensity of needs), and summarized information on the educational progress of these students.

**11. We recommend that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 provide senior management and its Board of Education with enough information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.**

In 2017-18, the Division introduced a feedback tool to assist in collecting information from the community regarding what the Division is doing well and what it can improve. The Division plans to use this feedback to inform its current strategic planning process. The information the Division collects through this tool may also be useful when considering adjustments to supporting students with intensive needs.

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