

Chapter 14

Education Ministry and School Divisions—Transporting Students Safely

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By January 2018, the Ministry of Education and the five school divisions (Northwest, Chinook, Good Spirit, St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate and Prince Albert Roman Catholic Separate) had further improved their processes to safely transport students—they implemented all of the remaining recommendations from our *2014 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 44 follow-up.

The Ministry took a co-ordination and oversight role in helping school divisions to transport students safely. It established processes for providing all school divisions with a summary of legislation related to the transportation of students. It instructed school divisions who contract transportation services to obtain sufficient information to determine whether their contractor meets legislated requirements for safe student transportation. In addition, the Ministry established a transportation working group to assist in identifying effective strategies to manage the condition of vehicles, the performance of drivers, the behaviour of students on the bus, and collision risks.

The five school divisions have improved their processes to transport students safely. All school divisions provided their contracted transportation providers with all of the applicable transportation-related legislation, set clear expectations, and received reports on safe student transportation. The five school divisions also appraised driver performance, and carried out bus evacuation drills. Such strategies are key to keeping students safe while they are being transported to and from school.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry is responsible for all matters related to early learning, elementary, and secondary education. It is to provide leadership and co-ordination in these areas. School divisions are responsible for administering schools and for managing student transportation.

This chapter describes the results of our second follow-up of the Ministry and six school division management's actions on 14 recommendations we first made in our *2012 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 36—8 recommendations for the Ministry and 6 for the school divisions. We had reported that the Ministry of Education did not effectively oversee school divisions' processes to safely transport students. For that same period, we also reported that six school divisions we audited had, other than the following areas, effective processes to safely transport students. They need to:

- Align transportation policies and practices with legislated requirements
- Manage transportation safety risks related to driver performance (e.g., defensive driver training)



- Monitor the performance of contracted transportation services

In our first follow-up in *2014 Report - Volume 2*, Chapter 44, we reported that, by May 2014, the Ministry had implemented one of eight recommendations and partially implemented another one. We also reported that one of the six school divisions had implemented its recommendation and work remained for the other five school divisions.

To conduct this follow-up audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance* (including CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry and each school division's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Ministry of Education and the school divisions' management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our audit, we reviewed the relevant policies and examined documentation (e.g., driver appraisals, complaints) maintained by the Ministry of Education and each of the five school divisions.

3.0 STATUS OF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation. It also sets out the status of the recommendations at January 31, 2018, and the Ministry's actions up to that date. We found that the Ministry of Education implemented all seven recommendations.

3.1 Ministry Recommendations Implemented

We recommended that the Ministry of Education provide school boards with a summary of current legislation related to transporting students and request that each School Board review reports showing that its school division complies with legislated transportation requirements.

(2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Since May 2014 (the time of our last follow-up), the Ministry of Education began providing school divisions with a summary of transportation legislation and began monitoring compliance through its annual survey.

On August 10, 2017, the Ministry gave school divisions an updated document titled *Student Transportation Legislation and Best Practices*.¹ This document compiles relevant legislation and best practices. In this document, the Ministry advised school divisions of its plans to verify their review of legislation and confirm their compliance with the requirements. It expects school divisions to confirm their compliance every year as part of the Ministry's regular fall survey.

¹ The Ministry originally gave school divisions a document titled *Student Transportation Legislation and Best Practices*, dated May 29, 2014. But at that time, it had not asked each school board to confirm its division complied with the legislation transportation requirements.

We recommended that the Ministry of Education work with school divisions to identify key risks to safe student transportation and cost-effective options for managing those risks. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

We recommended that the Ministry of Education require school divisions to report to their school boards the strategies they use to reduce risks related to vehicle condition, driver competence, student behaviour, and collisions. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

The Ministry identified key risks to safe student transportation and strategies to address those risks. It also implemented a board reporting process.

The Ministry is using a transportation working group it established in March 2015 to identify key risks to safe student transportation and best practices to address these key risks. The working group has representatives from the Ministry and seven school divisions.

A March 2015 survey and consultation with this group identified four key risks (driver competence, student behaviour, vehicle maintenance/condition, and external factors) and strategies/best practices to manage these risks. The Ministry expects school divisions to consider and manage cost-effectiveness of strategies through each of their school divisions' budgets.

The Ministry requires school divisions to annually report to their school boards on the strategies they use to reduce related risks. It also confirms this in an annual survey school boards submit to the Ministry.

We recommended that the Ministry of Education establish and provide guidance to school divisions about the distance for students to be transported to school including requesting school boards approve any exceptions to their school divisions' policies. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

The Ministry's revised transportation-funding model outlines guidance to school divisions about transporting students.

The Ministry implemented a new transportation-funding formula for the 2017-18 school year based on its review of the funding for school divisions and consultations with school divisions. It bases the majority of urban transportation funding on walking distances of 0.5 kilometres for Pre-Kindergarten, and one kilometre for Kindergarten to Grade 8. The Ministry recognizes school divisions' need to be adaptive to unique local circumstances, so the walking distances in the transportation-funding formula are not prescriptive.



We recommended that the Ministry of Education work with school divisions to identify relevant student transportation performance information that should be reported to school boards quarterly and annually to help them supervise student transportation. (2012 Report –

Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

The Ministry identified transportation performance information and monitors that this information is reported to school boards.

The Ministry's transportation safety reporting guidelines include a list of relevant performance information (e.g., number of students transported, average one-way ride time, emerging issues) for school divisions to report to their boards quarterly. It developed this list after consulting with the transportation working group. Annually the divisions are to report to their boards on their key risks and how they are managed.

The Ministry established an internal process to follow up and obtain an action plan from a school division on steps to achieve compliance in the event of non-compliance with requirements that it is monitoring.

We found the Ministry followed up with letters to the school divisions who indicated non-compliance in November 2017. The Ministry expects these school divisions to advise it of their plans to achieve compliance.

We recommended that the Ministry of Education provide guidance to school divisions for consistent, written, and timely processes to track and resolve complaints about safe student transportation. (2012 Report –

Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

The Ministry gave school divisions guidance on tracking and resolving complaints about safe student transportation.

The Ministry provided a template and guidance to track and resolve complaints. In addition, the Ministry has developed an internal procedure document that details the procedures for the Ministry to follow if a school division indicates non-compliance with the process.

We recommended that the Ministry of Education require school divisions to provide school boards and the Ministry with written reports about outstanding risks and unresolved complaints. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public

Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

The Ministry requires school divisions to report to their boards regularly on outstanding risks and unresolved complaints. For example, it requires board reports to include emerging issues such as outstanding risks and unresolved complaints.

The Ministry provided instructions on regular reporting to school boards based on consultations with the transportation working group.

4.0 STATUS OF SCHOOL DIVISIONS' RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation. It also sets out the status of the recommendations at January 31, 2018, and each school division's actions up to that date. We found that since May 2014 they had implemented all five recommendations.

4.1 Northwest School Division No. 203

We recommended that Northwest School Division No. 203 reference all relevant legislation within its busing contracts to align its transportation requirements with legislation and regulations. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Northwest School Division references all relevant transportation legislation in its busing contract.

Northwest School Division has a single contracted bus route; it signed a new agreement with the contracted transportation service provider on July 11, 2016. The agreement references all relevant legislation, and regulations related to transporting students. All drivers are provided with a copy of the legislation and regulations in the driver's handbook and receive updates as needed.

We found that the last updated copy was shared at the October 2017 driver meeting.

4.2 Chinook School Division No. 211

We recommended that Chinook School Division No. 211 reference all relevant legislation within its busing contracts to align its transportation requirements with legislation and regulations. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Chinook School Division references all relevant transportation legislation in its busing contracts.

Chinook has renewed its contracts with the transportation service providers. The agreements are dated February 23, 2017, and reference all relevant legislation and regulations.



We recommended that Chinook School Division No. 211 define what is expected of contractors that provide student transportation services, including required reports. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Since May 2014 (the time of our last follow-up), Chinook School Division defines contractor expectations.

Chinook, in one of its policies, explicitly establishes requirements for the Manager of Transportation. The requirements include communicating driver roles and responsibilities, monitoring compliance with applicable legislation and regulations, monitoring status of driver abstracts, licences and medicals, investigating and acting on complaints, reporting to the board on general supervision activities, and annually assessing the school division's school bus safety program.

Also, Chinook expects its contractors to comply with all relevant regulations, policies and guidelines set by the Ministry of Education and Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI).

We recommended that Chinook School Division No. 211 implement a driver appraisal process. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Chinook School Division has a driver appraisal process.

Chinook's policy indicates the Manager of Transportation must supervise drivers. This includes monitoring driver abstracts, licensing, and medicals.

Also, Chinook outlines driver requirements in its busing contracts and monitors driver evaluations. It conducts driver evaluations in the instance of new drivers or drivers identified as needing additional supervision.

In our review of two of the five drivers evaluated, Chinook used a standard form which included areas of driver evaluation such as hazards, pre/post trip inspections, road management, and overall feedback to drivers.

We recommended that Chinook School Division No. 211 document complaints about student transportation and how the complaints were resolved. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Chinook School Division uses a formal process to track and resolve transportation safety complaints. Chinook uses Student Bus Conduct forms and formally tracks all complaints including resolutions. It uses a four-part process to deal with complaints that includes the following steps:

- Complaints are received (in various formats)

- Authorized staff investigate and gather necessary information to fully inform resolution
- Resolution of complaints, which are dependent on the nature and severity, may be resolved at the driver or board level, or escalated to law enforcement
- Follow-up

4.3 Good Spirit School Division No. 204

We recommended that Good Spirit School Division No. 204 provide school bus drivers annually with legislated requirements to transport students safely. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Good Spirit School Division provides drivers with legislated requirements.

Good Spirit provides school bus drivers with materials setting out legislated requirements to transport students safely at its annual meeting at the beginning of each school year. We found that both regular and substitute driver materials refer to legislated requirements to transport students safely.

We recommended that Good Spirit School Division No. 204 implement a driver appraisal process. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Good Spirit has implemented a driver appraisal process.

Good Spirit's driver appraisal process includes: driver evaluations, annual SGI driver abstract reviews, and checks on the validity of licences of all drivers.

In our review of three of the six drivers evaluated, we noted Good Spirit had evaluated pre-trip inspections, route information, and vehicle information. Its evaluation process is for new, spare, and regular drivers. Also, it sets re-evaluation dates (if needed) and identifies additional training needs during the driver evaluation.

We recommended Good Spirit School Division No. 204 document student participation in timely bus evacuation drills and driver identified evacuation risks. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Good Spirit School Division conducts and documents bus evacuation drills.

Good Spirit bus drivers document student participation in bus evacuation drills twice during the school year, once in the fall and once in the spring. Drivers identify and resolve evacuation risks by conducting one bus evacuation, providing feedback to students and then conducting a second bus evacuation.



All 10 bus evacuation forms we reviewed were appropriately signed and indicated the date and the location of the evacuation drill.

We recommended that Good Spirit School Division No. 204 document complaints about student transportation and how the complaints were resolved. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Good Spirit School Division documents complaints received about student transportation, and resolves them.

We found it sufficiently retains complaint details including the actions taken to resolve the complaint and dates.

4.4 Prince Albert Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 6

We recommended that Prince Albert Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 6 reference all relevant legislation within its busing contracts to align its transportation requirements with legislation and regulations. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement on January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

Prince Albert Roman Catholic Separate School Division references all relevant legislation and regulations in its busing contracts.

Since May 2014 (the time of our last follow up), the school division asked, in writing, the contractor to comply with all laws and also provided the contractor with a copy of the Ministry of Education's *Legislation and Best Practices* document which outlines all applicable legislation. The contractor agreed in writing.

4.5 St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 20

We recommended that St. Paul's School Roman Catholic Separate Division No. 20 reference all relevant legislation within its busing contracts to align its transportation requirements with legislation and regulations. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division references legislation and regulations in its busing contracts.

St. Paul's contract with its transportation service provider states that the service provider agrees to comply with all applicable municipal, provincial, federal laws. This contract is dated August 23, 2016.

We recommended that St. Paul's School Roman Catholic Separate Division No. 20 implement processes to monitor its contractor's driver appraisal process. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division monitors its contractor's driver appraisal process.

St. Paul's implemented a process to monitor its contractor's driver appraisal process. The process requires the contractor to submit annually the safety compliance assessment, and SGI Carrier Profile (which outlines the summary of all accidents). The school division also randomly chooses a route and reviews the driver's file and bus maintenance record. The contractor provides the School Division with those driver appraisals. St. Paul's reviews them. St. Paul's had received five driver appraisals since June 2017.

For two of five drivers' appraisals, we noted the contractor used a standard form which included areas of driver evaluation such as pre/post trip inspections, protocols for safe backing up, loading/unloading, railroad crossing, intersections, etc.

We recommended St. Paul's School Roman Catholic Separate Division No. 20 implement processes to monitor its contractor's vehicle maintenance processes. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division monitors its contractor's vehicle maintenance process.

St. Paul's implemented a process to monitor its contractor's vehicle maintenance by requesting that the contractor provide SGI vehicle audit reports and preventative maintenance reports for the buses contracted. We noted that St. Paul's is doing this monitoring annually.

We recommend that St. Paul's School Roman Catholic Separate Division No. 20 define expectations and reporting requirements with contractors. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division defines expectations and reporting requirements with its busing contractor.

We found that St. Paul's receives monthly reports from contractors as expected. It received reports on: bus conduct, route summary by run, late notifications, and number of students transported. In addition, contractors submit quarterly reports on the number



of students transported, routes, age of fleets, average capacity of buses, average ride time, and longest ride time. They submit annual reports on SGI Carrier Profile (outlines any accidents by bus), SGI Bus Inspections (SGI inspects buses annually), and First Student Compliance Audit.²

We recommended that St. Paul's School Roman Catholic Separate Division No. 20 document complaints about student transportation and how complaints were resolved. (2012 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status – Implemented

St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division documents and resolves complaints.

St. Paul's tracks and documents safety complaints. Each month, drivers compile a monthly summary of complaints. In January 2017, the School Division started maintaining a tracking spreadsheet.

We found the spreadsheet sufficiently documents complaints about student transportation, and briefly explains how complaints were resolved. We noted that all complaints on the spreadsheet were dated, and dealt with in a timely manner (within two weeks).

² First Student conducts a Safety Compliance Audit which includes assessments on items such as shop safety and bus maintenance.