

Chapter 24

Prairie South School Division No. 210—Equipping the Board with Knowledge and Competencies to Govern

1.0 MAIN POINTS

This chapter describes our first follow-up of Prairie South School Division No. 210's actions on the four recommendations made in our 2015 audit of its processes to equip its Board with the knowledge and competencies necessary to govern the Division. By January 2018, the Division had strengthened those processes; it implemented all four recommendations.

Prairie South set out the baseline knowledge and competencies necessary for the Board to govern the Division. It maintains a listing of its current Board's individual and collective assessments for the necessary competencies and knowledge. In addition, Prairie South gives Board members opportunities to learn from each other by deliberately partnering experienced Board members with lesser experienced ones. The Board Chair monitors whether the Board is addressing gaps in individual and collective Board knowledge and competencies. Furthermore, Board members periodically self assess their knowledge and competencies. Results of these assessments help it determine its progress in developing Board governance knowledge and competencies.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Our *2015 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 13 included four recommendations related to improving the processes that the Board of Education of Prairie South School Division No. 210 uses to equip itself with the necessary knowledge and competencies to govern the Division.

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 Prairie South's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Prairie South agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our audit, we interviewed Division staff, reviewed Board minutes and policies, and examined documentation of Board member knowledge and competencies maintained by the Division.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendations at January 25, 2018 and Prairie South's actions up to that date. We found that the Division had implemented all four recommendations.



3.1 Board Assessed Against Knowledge and Competencies Necessary to Govern

We recommended that the Board of Education of Prairie South School Division No. 210 set out its baseline knowledge and competencies necessary to govern the School Division. (2015 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 13, 2016)

Status – Implemented

We recommended that the Board of Education of Prairie South School Division No. 210 maintain a current listing of knowledge and competencies possessed collectively and by individual Board members. (2015 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 13, 2016)

Status – Implemented

Prairie South's Board set out the baseline knowledge and competencies necessary to govern the Division. In addition, it maintains a current listing of the Board's individual and collective assessments for the necessary competencies and knowledge.

The Board revised its policy manual in 2015 to incorporate the determination of the knowledge and competencies necessary for effective governance. It made this determination a part of the regular Board development cycle. The process identified nine necessary Board competencies and knowledge (e.g., administration, governance, teaching, IT, finance). We found that the Board based its process on a respected externally developed school board governance model.

As part of its 2016 Board planning process, we found that Board members each assessed themselves against the nine necessary competencies and knowledge. This gave the Board Chair information on Board members' strengths, as well as areas where the Board could focus development of its knowledge and competencies.¹ For example, we found the assessment indicated that several Board members had experience in governance and human resources, and one member had experience in the areas of IT and risk management. The Division shared the competency assessment results with the Board Chair.

Since 2016, the members of the Prairie South's Board have remained the same.

Periodic competency assessments provide a snapshot of the Board's individual and collective knowledge and competencies.

¹ In December 2017, Division management acknowledged it plans to share the competency assessment results of future Board self-assessments with the entire Board.

3.2 Strategy to Address Knowledge Gaps Implemented and Monitored

We recommended that the Board of Education of Prairie South School Division No. 210 document a plan to address gaps in individual and collective Board knowledge and competencies. (2015 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 13, 2016)

Status – Intent of Recommendation Implemented

We recommended that the Board of Education of Prairie South School Division No. 210 periodically monitor whether Board professional development training addresses gaps in individual and collective Board knowledge and competencies. (2015 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 13, 2016)

Status – Implemented

To address identified Board competency gaps, Prairie South primarily used a strategy of assigning members to its committees in a way that provides them with support to further develop specific Board governance knowledge and competencies. The Board monitored its progress in addressing identified gaps primarily through the work of its committees. Also, it used external subject matter experts to help them address areas where the Board did not have sufficient knowledge.

The Board Chair adopted a strategy to address identified gaps. The Chair used the 2016 self-assessment results to assign Board members to Board committees. The Board Chair deliberately partnered experienced Board members with members who had identified competency gaps. This assignment method developed individual members' knowledge and competencies through mentorship and on-the-job training.

In addition, the Board and its committees are encouraged to consult with external subject matter experts in areas beyond its knowledge or competencies. Furthermore, the Board policy manual expects individual Board members to address their own gaps in knowledge and competencies.

The Board Chair informed us that the Board uses the work of its committees to monitor, on an ongoing basis, its progress in addressing identified gaps. Results of committee work make it apparent where it continues to have Board knowledge/competency gaps, and where it should use the assistance of experts or further develop its knowledge and competencies. Also, it expects to use the results of its next self-assessment to assess its progress. The next assessment process is scheduled to occur in September 2018.

We found that, since the 2016 self-assessment, the Board and its Chair effectively used these strategies. We found:

- When comparing committee membership to the 2016 self-assessment results, the committees included Board members with a mix of self-assessed competency levels relating to the specific committees' mandates—committee composition was giving members the opportunity to learn from each other.



- The Board consulted with external subject matter experts. For example, the Board consulted with Ministry of Education staff when establishing transportation guidelines for Pre-Kindergarten students.
- Board members made efforts to take advantage of relevant professional development opportunities to address their knowledge gaps.

Monitoring progress towards addressing identified gaps helps ensure the Board, collectively, maintains the necessary competencies and knowledge to effectively govern.