

Chapter 19

Education—Monitoring School Instruction Time

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By January 2019, the Ministry of Education made limited progress in improving its processes to monitor school divisions' delivery of minimum required instruction time for required areas of study (e.g., 210 minutes per week for Grade 6 math).

The Ministry does not actively monitor whether each school division provides students with at least the minimum amount of instruction time for required areas of study. The Ministry expects schools to monitor, but does not check that they are.

Not all school divisions are actively monitoring whether they comply with the minimum amount of instruction time for required areas of study. For example, three of the four school timetables we reviewed did not meet the provincial minimum requirements for the instructional time for various required areas of study. Directors of Education of these divisions were not aware of these exceptions and did not report them to the Ministry.

Active monitoring would help the Ministry to know whether school divisions meet the Ministry's requirements for instruction time. It would also help it identify school divisions, if any, where it needs to take corrective action to ensure students receive sufficient instruction time for all required areas of study.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

In 2008, the Ministry determined that students were not receiving actual instructional time in the amounts that it requires. For example, in the *2008 Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report*, the Ministry reports that the percentage of classrooms receiving the required time of instruction in the subject of mathematics for Grades 5, 8 and 11 (Math 20) were 46%, 63%, and 4.3% respectively.¹

By law, instructional time is any time in which pupils of a school are in attendance and under teacher supervision for the purpose of receiving instruction in an educational program.² Educational programs include work experience programs, parent-teacher-pupil conferences, examinations, and other learning activities that school boards provide.

By law, in each school year, school boards must provide at least 950 hours of instructional time for Grades 1 to 12, and 475 hours of instructional time for kindergarten.³

In addition, the Ministry, through the Ministry of Education's *Registrar's Handbook for School Administrators*, requires school divisions to devote a minimum amount of time to

¹ 2008 Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report, p.141.

² The Education Regulations, 2015, s. 25.

³ Ibid., s. 28.



required areas of study (e.g., 210 minutes/week for Grade 6 math). Required areas of study include language arts, mathematics, science, social science, health, arts, and physical education.

Having minimum instruction time for grades and required areas of study gives students sufficient instruction time to enable them to learn the area of study.

At September 2018, 27 school divisions (including the Conseil scolaire fransaskois) with about 767 schools had about 184,000 students.⁴

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

Our *2009 Report – Volume 3*, Chapter 4 concluded that the Ministry did not have adequate processes to achieve compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction time as required by the Minister. We made four recommendations. By September 2015, the Ministry had implemented two of them.⁵

This chapter describes our fourth follow-up of management's actions on the recommendations we originally made in 2009.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To perform this follow-up audit, we interviewed Ministry and school division staff, reviewed relevant legislation and policies, and assessed the reasonableness of supporting documentation.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at January 31, 2019, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

3.1 Monitoring of Compliance with Requirements for Required Areas of Study Needed

We recommended that the Ministry of Education monitor for all core curriculum areas of study the extent to which school divisions meet the Ministry's requirements for instruction time. (*2009 Report – Volume 3*, p. 63, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement May 12, 2010)

Status – Partially Implemented

⁴ 2018-19 Active list of School Division schools. Data is available at www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=93039 (4 April 2019).

⁵ *2016 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 20, *Education – School Instruction Time for Students*, (2016), p. 243.

Total Instruction Time Monitored

The Ministry actively monitors total instruction time. The Ministry requires school divisions to submit calendars outlining the total hours of instruction time.⁶ School divisions publish their calendars on their websites.

We found each of the two directors we interviewed had submitted to the Ministry annual calendars outlining total instruction hours for their division. This enabled the Ministry to determine whether divisions planned to meet the minimum total instruction time.

Minimum Amount of Subject Area Instruction Time Not Actively Monitored

The Ministry does not actively monitor whether school divisions provide students with at least the minimum amount of instruction time for required areas of study (e.g., 210 minutes/week for Grade 6 math). Its approach to rely on the school divisions to report exceptions is not working.

Rather since November 2017, it expects school divisions to report non-compliance with required instruction hours for required areas of study.⁷ However, it has not reminded school divisions of this expectation since then.

On November 14, 2017, the Ministry posted a message about instructional time requirements and compliance in an information bulletin. It regularly uses information bulletins to convey key messages to school divisions. The November 2017 bulletin asked school divisions to monitor total instruction hours and instruction time in required areas of study, and the extent to which the school divisions meet the Ministry's requirements for instructional time. In addition, it asked school divisions to report all instances of non-compliance with these requirements, if any.⁸

The two school division directors we interviewed each indicated they expect their divisions' principals, vice principals, and superintendents to verify (using timetables prepared by teachers) that instructional time meets instruction time requirements in the required areas of study, and report to school division directors if they do not do so. Each indicated that they had not received reports of any exceptions.

In our review of four school timetables, we found three timetables where instructional time for a number of required areas of study (e.g., mathematics, science) was less than provincial requirements. These exceptions were not reported to related directors of education, and as a result, were not reported to the Ministry.

The Ministry not actively monitoring instruction hours for required areas of study increases the risk that school divisions do not actively monitor compliance or report non-compliance to the Ministry. Not providing students with appropriate instruction time for required areas of study may result in them not sufficiently understanding or succeeding in those key subjects. By not regularly communicating expectations to school divisions about reporting

⁶ As reported in our *2016 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 20, the Ministry reviews annual calendars of each school division to monitor whether the division has planned to meet the minimum total instruction time (i.e., minimum 950 hours for Grade 1 to 12 and 475 hours for Kindergarten).

⁷ The Ministry of Education's *Registrar's Handbook for School Administrators* sets out the required instruction hours for required areas of study.

⁸ Where school divisions report non-compliance, the Ministry planned to work with the school division to reallocate instruction time to the required hours.



non-compliance with instruction time, the Ministry increases the risk that schools are unaware of this requirement.

We recommended that the Ministry of Education take corrective action where necessary to improve school division compliance with the Ministry's requirements for instruction time. (2009 Report – Volume 3, p. 64, Recommendation 6; Public Accounts Committee agreement May 12, 2010)

Status – Partially Implemented

Since our last follow-up in 2016, the Ministry has not taken any corrective action in that it has not received any reports on non-compliance from school divisions. In addition, it has not confirmed with school divisions whether they complied with the required instruction time for required areas of study.

As a result, the Ministry does not know whether school divisions comply with its time instruction requirements for core curriculum required areas of study.