

Chapter 20

Education—Putting into Operation the Education Sector-Wide Strategic Plan

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Education is responsible for providing leadership and direction to the Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 (PreK-12) education sector. This includes providing leadership and co-ordination for the preparation of goals, objectives, and educational planning for the present and future growth and development of the education system.

By February 2019, the Ministry had implemented the last recommendation outstanding from our 2015 audit of its processes to put into operation the sector-wide strategic plan for the PreK-12 education sector, called the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). The Ministry established a process to systematically review school division action plans, and was preparing to share the results of its June 2018 reviews with school divisions by March 31, 2019.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, the Ministry and its education partners, including boards of education and First Nations and Métis education authorities, have used the ESSP to track progress and enhance accountability towards achieving sector goals and outcomes.¹ The goals and outcomes identified in the ESSP are largely focused on improving student success, such as improving kindergarten students' readiness to learn, and the number of students at grade level in reading, writing, and math.

This chapter describes our second follow-up of management's actions on recommendations we made in 2015.

In 2015, we assessed the Ministry's processes to put into operation the ESSP. Our *2015 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 9 concluded that for the 12-month period ended January 31, 2015, the Ministry had effective processes to put into operation the ESSP, except for the need to establish a deadline for school divisions to complete action plans and for the Ministry to review the action plans. We made two recommendations. The Ministry had implemented one of the two recommendations by February 14, 2017.²

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.

We examined the Ministry's processes for reviewing school divisions' action plans supporting the ESSP. We also interviewed relevant Ministry officials.

¹ Ministry of Education, *Plan for 2018-19*, p. 3.

² Previous follow-up of the Ministry's actions on recommendations were reported in our *2017 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 21.



3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out the recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at February 4, 2019, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

3.1 Process to Review Action Plans and Communicate Results Established

We recommended that the Ministry of Education, to co-ordinate plans across the sector, review school division action plans supporting achievement of the outcomes identified within the sector-wide strategic plan for the Pre-K through Grade 12 education sector. (2015 Report – Volume 1, p. 86, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 13, 2016)

Status – Implemented

Since 2015, the Ministry has established a process to systematically review school division action plans. At February 2019, it was preparing to share the results of its review with school divisions.

For a sample of five school divisions, we found the Ministry reviewed and assessed the divisions' action plans for alignment with the ESSP in June 2018. The Ministry used criteria to help consistently assess the alignment of the school division action plans with the outcomes identified in the ESSP. The Ministry documented the results of its assessments. It made observations specific to each school division, as well as overall observations, conclusions, and recommendations for the education sector.

As of February 4, 2019, the Ministry had not communicated the results of its assessments of action plans with the school divisions. Management indicated that the Ministry planned to communicate them by March 31, 2019. It recognized that sharing the results of its assessments would help foster better alignment of school division action plans with the ESSP outcomes. This in turn, would increase the likelihood of the education sector, as a whole, achieving these desired outcomes.