

Chapter 32

Living Sky School Division No. 202—Engaging Grades 7 to 12 Students

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Living Sky School Division No. 202 has improved its processes to engage Grade 7 to 12 students.

By February 2019, Living Sky required its schools to use an action plan template to develop clear and timely responses to the *OurSCHOOL* survey results for student engagement. The Division also regularly meets with its Indigenous Advisory Council to obtain feedback to help increase the engagement of First Nations and Métis students.

While the Division analyzed the year-over-year survey results at a division-level, its schools did not conduct a year-over-year analysis at a school-level. Also, the Division and its schools did not establish interim targets related to the survey results. Establishment of interim targets and in-depth analysis at the school-level can help the Division to measure the success of specific student engagement initiatives. Doing so may help schools focus their resources on initiatives that are making a difference in student engagement.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Student engagement is the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet formal requirements of schooling, and make a serious personal investment in learning.¹

Disengaged students are at a higher risk of falling behind and may drop out of school.² Students that are not sufficiently engaged in school may not graduate, which in turn may negatively impact future employment opportunities for these students.

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.³ It makes school boards responsible for exercising general supervision and control over the schools in their school division. In addition, it establishes the duties of students relating to student engagement, such as attending school regularly and being diligent in their studies.⁴

¹ Willms, J. D., Friesen, S. & Milton, P., *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic, and intellectual engagement*, (2009), p. 7.

² blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2013/07/pittsburgh--a-student-who-show.html (18 March 2019).

³ Section 85(1) of *The Education Act, 1995*.

⁴ Section 150 of *The Education Act, 1995*.

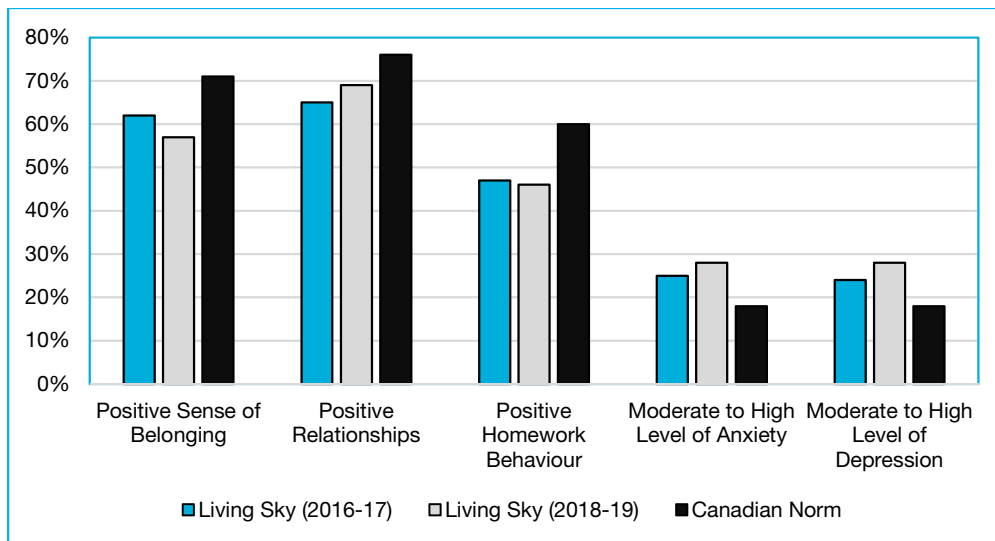


To help school divisions monitor student engagement, the Ministry makes available and expects Saskatchewan school divisions to annually administer a survey called the *OurSCHOOL* survey. School divisions separately administer this survey to students in Grades 4 to 6 (elementary) and in Grades 7 to 12 (middle/secondary). The survey is designed to collect information such as students' sense of belonging, intellectual engagement, and positive relationships (i.e., measures of student engagement).⁵ An external consultant contracted by the Ministry developed the survey and facilitates its use.

Living Sky is a primarily rural school division located in northwest Saskatchewan. The Division has approximately 5,400 students, and operates 23 schools in 14 communities.⁶ It includes the communities of North Battleford, Unity, Spiritwood, and surrounding areas. At September 30, 2018, almost one-third of the Division's students had self-identified as First Nations and Métis.⁷

Figure 1 sets out the Division's Grades 7 to 12 survey results from 2016-17. Results were worse than the Canadian norm (i.e., positive sense of belonging, positive relationships, positive homework behaviour, level of anxiety, level of depression). When compared to the most recent survey results for 2018-19, the percentage of students within the Division reporting positive relationships improved since our last audit but the other survey results have remained flat or worsened. The level of student engagement in these areas remains worse than the Canadian norm.

Figure 1—Living Sky's 2016–17 and 2018–19 *OurSCHOOL* Engagement Indicators for Grades 7 to 12 Worse Than the Canadian Norm



Source: Adapted from Living Sky's *OurSCHOOL* survey results.

Students living in poverty, students with disabilities, and students from ethnic minorities and First Nations and Métis communities disproportionately experience disengagement from school. Disengagement has also been linked to school violence and social exclusion.⁸

⁵ Ministry of Education Plan for 2018-19, p. 6.

⁶ Living Sky School Division No. 202 Board of Education Annual Report – 2017-18, pp. 30, 33.

⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

⁸ Willms, J. D., Friesen, S. & Milton, P., *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic, and intellectual engagement*, (2009), p. 7.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our first follow-up of management's actions on the four recommendations we made in our *2017 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 8 about Living Sky's processes to engage Grades 7 to 12 students. We concluded that for the 12-month period ended January 31, 2017, Living Sky School Division No. 202 had, other than the matters reflected in those four recommendations, effective processes to engage Grades 7 to 12 students.

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

To perform this follow-up audit, we examined the Division's strategic plan, a sample of schools' survey action plans, as well as minutes and agendas from relevant meetings (e.g., Board, Indigenous Advisory Council). We also interviewed relevant Division staff.

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 February 9, 2019, and Living Sky's actions up to that date.

3.1 Clear and Timely Action Plans Developed

We recommended that Living Sky School Division No. 202 require its schools to develop clear and timely action plans in response to the OurSCHOOL survey results. (2017 Report – Volume 1, p. 106, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 12, 2018)

Status – Implemented

Living Sky required its schools to use an action plan template to develop clear and timely action plans in response to the *OurSCHOOL* survey results.

In its action plan template, the Division set out its priorities for schools to address when responding to the survey results (i.e., positive teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, and positive relationships). For each of the priorities, the template required schools to establish actions, tasks, responsibilities, timelines, and success criteria.

For a sample of three schools, we reviewed their action plans responding to the 2018-19 survey results. We found that these schools completed their action plans in a timely manner (i.e., within one month of survey closing) and included specific actions addressing the priority areas, along with associated deadlines.⁹

⁹ The Division closed the survey to student responses in early November 2018.



Developing action plans earlier in the school year gives the Division and its schools more opportunity to implement and evaluate initiatives designed to improve student engagement.

3.2 Interim Targets Related to Survey Results Not Established

We recommended that Living Sky School Division No. 202 and its schools establish interim targets related to the OurSCHOOL survey. (2017 Report – Volume 1, p. 107, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 12, 2018)

Status – Not Implemented

Living Sky and its schools did not establish interim targets related to the *OurSCHOOL* survey results.

Living Sky's strategic plan for 2017-18 to 2019-20 includes some outcomes relating to student engagement, such as increasing graduation rates, enhancing meaningful relationships, and improving student attendance.

While the Division plans to use the *OurSCHOOL* survey results to help measure its progress toward achieving these outcomes, the Division has not established targets associated with the survey.

Also, our review of action plans of three schools found that the schools identified success criteria for each of their planned actions, but did not include targets for measuring success of the actions. Without establishing targets, it is difficult for the Division and its schools to measure the success of actions.

In the spring of 2019, the Division plans to create and administer its own student engagement survey, in addition to the *OurSCHOOL* survey.

Assessing student engagement a second time during the school year will help the Division assess its progress in improving student engagement over the course of the school year. Establishment of targets can help the Division assess the impact of its actions during the school year.

3.3 Schools Not Analyzing Year-Over-Year Survey Results

We recommended that Living Sky School Division No. 202 and its schools analyze the year-over-year OurSCHOOL survey results to inform survey action plans. (2017 Report – Volume 1, p. 107, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 12, 2018)

Status – Partially Implemented

Living Sky analyzed the year-over-year *OurSCHOOL* survey results at a division-level, but its schools did not perform a similar analysis.

The Division reviewed its year-over-year survey results at a division-level. It then made adjustments to action plans (e.g., development of a second survey during the year with a focus on questions about student mental health).

The Division shared its year-over-year *OurSCHOOL* survey results at various levels throughout the Division (e.g., Board, Administrators' Council, Senior Leadership Team).

For a sample of three schools, we found that the schools did not conduct a year-over-year analysis of the *OurSCHOOL* survey results at a school-level. The analysis conducted by these schools focused on reactions to the most recent survey results (i.e., celebrations, surprises).

Analysis at a school-level may highlight successful student engagement initiatives and those initiatives not achieving the desired outcomes. This would help schools in focusing their resources on initiatives that are making a difference in student engagement and reduce potential for initiative overload.

3.4 Input of Indigenous Advisory Council Obtained

We recommended that Living Sky School Division No. 202 obtain the input of its Indigenous Advisory Council on the OurSCHOOL survey results specific to First Nations and Métis students.¹⁰ (2017 Report – Volume 1, p. 108, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 12, 2018)

Status – Implemented

The Division obtained the input of its Indigenous Advisory Council to help increase the engagement of its First Nations and Métis students.

Living Sky's Indigenous Advisory Council is comprised of elders and students that provide advice and guidance on matters concerning the Division's First Nations and Métis students. The Council meets approximately four times each year. The Division shares the results of the *OurSCHOOL* survey with the Council—it shared the most recent survey results in February 2019.

We found that the Division developed its plan for supporting First Nations and Métis students based on the information provided by the Council. The Division's plan includes actions such as placing an emphasis on meaningful curriculum connections, culturally relevant material, and developing strong relationships between teachers and students.

We also found that members of the Council were involved in various activities within the Division contributing towards student engagement, such as blanket exercises, an attendance campaign, and the development of a traditional teachings booklet to use in schools.¹¹

Obtaining the input of the Indigenous Advisory Council enables the Division to develop specific initiatives in response to the survey results, further engaging First Nations and Métis students.

¹⁰ The Division's Indigenous Advisory Council was formerly known as its Elders' Council.

¹¹ The blanket exercise is an interactive educational program that organizations can use when teaching the history of indigenous peoples in Canada.

