

Chapter 21

Prairie Valley School Division No. 208—Monitoring Progress of Home-based Learners

1.0 MAIN POINTS

In Saskatchewan, home-based educators have the responsibility for educating their children, and the right to direct their children's education from their home. School Divisions are responsible for registering and monitoring home-based education programs by assessing program compliance with the law and related policies, and assessing the progress of learners.

By January 2020, Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 significantly improved its processes to monitor home-based education programs. It addressed all eight recommendations from our 2018 audit. Key improvements included the following.

The Division revised its forms and templates to help educators provide all required information for their home-based education programs. It effectively registered home-based education programs, and assessed the education plans and annual progress reports provided by educators. Following its assessments, the Division consistently gave educators timely feedback on learners' annual progress reports.

In addition, to encourage educators to comply with home-based education documentation requirements, the Division implemented a practice of reimbursing educators for eligible expenses only after it received and assessed learners' annual progress reports.

Effective monitoring of home-based education programs helps ensure they assist home-based learners in making sufficient educational progress for their age and ability, and providing them with a quality education.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Prairie Valley School Division is responsible for monitoring home-based education programs for almost 180 home-based learners. Home-based learners are students between the ages of six and eighteen years enrolled in home-based education programs initiated by and under the direction of a parent or guardian to provide instruction at home.¹ This chapter uses the terms learner and student interchangeably.

In Saskatchewan, home-based educators (e.g., parents) have both the responsibility for educating their children, and the right to direct their children's education from their home.² Saskatchewan boards of education (school divisions) are responsible for monitoring the progress of home-based learners.³

¹ *The Education Act, 1995*, section 2.

² Ministry of Education, *Saskatchewan Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual 2016-17*, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.



The Ministry of Education's manual—*Saskatchewan Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual*—sets out policies and procedures for operating and monitoring home-based education programs in Saskatchewan. It includes detailed expectations of school divisions and home-based educators. For example, a home-based educator must administer their children's home-based education programs, and give their school division specific documentation (e.g., program registration, written education plans, annual student progress reports within prescribed timeframes) to enable the school division's monitoring.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our first follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2018.

Our *2018 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 7, concluded that, for the 12-month period ended January 31, 2018, Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 did not have effective processes to monitor the educational progress of home-based learners.⁴ We made eight recommendations.

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

We examined the Division's policies and procedures for monitoring the educational progress of home-based learners. We interviewed relevant staff responsible for monitoring home-based education programs. We examined documentation for a sample of home-based learners to assess the operating effectiveness of the Division's processes to monitor the educational progress of home-based learners.

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, 2020, and the Division's actions up to that date.

3.1 Templates and Forms Aligned with Requirements

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 revise its home-based education templates, forms, and checklists to better align with the Ministry of Education's policy requirements. (*2018 Report – Volume 1*, p. 94, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

Since January 2018, the Division appropriately revised its home-based education templates, forms, and checklists to align with the Ministry of Education's policy and legislative requirements.

⁴ The original report regarding these recommendations can be found at auditor.sk.ca/publications/public-reports. We reported the original audit work in *2018 Report – Volume 1* (Chapter 7, pp. 87-101).

In June 2018, the Division revised various templates, forms and checklists staff and home-based educators use in home-based education programs. The Division made the following key revisions to its templates:

- Adjusted its registration form to include all information (e.g., name, gender, last school attended, start date of the home-based education program) set out by the Ministry.
- Revised the template for home-based education plans to require home-based educators to include a minimum of three broad goals for each of the four areas of study (i.e., language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics) set out by the Ministry of Education. It expects these goals to be consistent with the *Goals of Education for Saskatchewan*—see **Section 4.0**.
- Updated various templates home-based educators can use when submitting learners' annual progress reports, to assist educators in providing the Division with all required information upon completion of the home-based education program. Templates updated included those for the periodic log of activities performed throughout a school year, summative record, and samples of work.⁵
- Amended the verification form staff use to assess education plans and the educational progress of learners. The Division uses this form to assess the consistency of a learner's education plan with the *Goals of Education for Saskatchewan* and the appropriateness of the plan and progress report in relation to the learner's age and ability.

The Division clearly communicated its revised templates, along with examples of completed education plans and annual progress reports, to home-based educators. In addition to posting information on the Division website, staff sent emails to home-based educators following the end of the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years to remind educators about changes to the Division's templates. This provided educators with a reasonable amount of time to use the new templates for the upcoming school year.

In addition, the Division provided educators with an overview of the template changes during two parent information sessions in November 2018.

Having templates and forms that align with the Ministry's requirements helps educators provide all required information for their home-based education programs and assists the Division when assessing the programs.

3.2 Written Confirmation of Registration Provided Timely

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 give home-based educators written confirmation of program registration within the required time. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 97, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

The Division provided home-based educators with written confirmation of program registration within a reasonable timeframe.

⁵ A summative record is a record of the educational progress of a home-based learner in relation to a written education plan. It is a statement of a learner's academic achievement at the end of a unit, project, course, program or school year.



As set out by the Ministry, home-based educators must submit a registration form, including an education plan for each home-based learner, to the Division by August 15 of each year. Once the Division is satisfied that a program meets the requirements set out by the Ministry, the Division must provide educators with written notice of program registration within 30 days of receiving the registration form.

For 15 home-based learners tested, we found:

- For 12 students, the Division provided educators with timely written confirmation of registration.
- For each of three students, while the Division did not provide written confirmation of registration, it took appropriate steps to communicate with educators about missing or incomplete registration requirements (e.g., registration form) prior to verbally accepting the education plans. In addition, the Division consulted with and obtained guidance from Ministry staff as necessary when addressing the registration of these students.

Confirmation of registration informs educators that their home-based education programs meet related legal and policy requirements, and they can proceed with delivering their programs. Prompt confirmation of registration reduces the risk of home-based learners receiving education programs that are inconsistent with the *Goals of Education for Saskatchewan* or inappropriate for their age and ability.

3.3 Division Effectively Assessing Education Plans and Progress Reports

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 maintain correspondence with home-based educators about the registration, monitoring, and renewal of home-based education programs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 97, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 obtain a better understanding of the extent of school division authority to monitor home-based education. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 98, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 actively assess whether home-based education plans and annual student progress reports meet the requirements established by legislation and the Ministry of Education when registering programs and monitoring learner educational progress. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 99, Recommendation 6; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 promptly give educators feedback for all home-based learners following review of learners' annual progress reports. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 99, Recommendation 7;

Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

The Division exercises its authority to monitor home-based education when assessing education plans and progress reports provided by educators. It provides educators with feedback on learners' annual progress reports in a timely manner and maintains all correspondence with educators.

Since our 2018 audit, we found the Division increased the rigour of its review of learners' education plans and progress reports when evaluating whether they meet legislative and Ministry requirements. We found the Division increased its understanding of its role in monitoring home-based education programs. For example, staff attended a home-based education webinar provided by the Ministry, and routinely consulted with Ministry staff to seek clarification of the Division's authority and role as deemed necessary (e.g., when assessing information provided by educators).

We found the Division suitably offers assistance to educators in regards to developing education plans and progress reports. The Division hosted two parent information nights in each of the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, and invited educators to request individual meetings with Division staff, as needed.

For each of 15 home-based learners' files for the 2018-19 school year tested, we found the Division:

- Actively assessed whether the education plans and annual progress reports complied with the requirements established by legislation and the Ministry, and appropriately followed up instances needing corrective action or guidance. In the 15 files tested, the Division found five education plans and six annual progress reports did not meet all of the requirements (e.g., insufficient goals within the education plan, incomplete progress reports). In these instances, the Division gave the responsible educators additional guidance (e.g., examples of appropriate goals for an education plan) to help them comply.
- Following its assessment of the annual progress reports, it gave feedback to educators within two weeks of receipt of progress reports.
- Maintained all correspondence with the educators in the respective learners' files.

In addition, we found the Division began, in December 2018, providing the Board with semi-annual updates about the status and progress of receipt and assessment of home-based education plans and progress reports.

With an improved understanding of the extent of its authority to monitor home-based education, the Division is better able to effectively monitor the progress of learners—reducing the risk of learners not attaining sufficient educational progress for their age and ability.



3.4 Division Appropriately Renews Home-based Education Programs

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 only renew the registration of a home-based education program after it receives all required documentation from the home-based educator and confirms that the program complies with the law and related policies. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 96, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

The Division established a clear process to renew only those home-based education programs that meet requirements for the previous school year.

In June 2018, the Division clearly communicated with all educators (via email) it would not renew home-based education programs until educators had met the requirements for the previous school year (i.e., Division received, evaluated, and approved the annual progress reports). The Division provided similar communications to educators on an individual basis, where necessary, when evaluating annual progress reports for the 2018-19 school year. The Division's home-based education policy clearly indicated that educators must provide the Division with annual progress reports for all learners by June 15th of each year.

For each of 15 home-based learners' files for the 2018-19 school year tested, we found the Division only renewed the related home-based education programs for 2019-20 when it was satisfied with the students' progress for 2018-19 and educators had provided appropriate education plans for 2019-20.

When it assesses the educational progress of learners in the current school year before renewing programs for the next year, the Division can better hold home-based educators accountable for the education of home-based learners.

3.5 Incentive to Improve Home-based Educators' Compliance with Requirements Implemented

We recommended Prairie Valley School Division No. 208 consider the use of incentives to encourage educators to comply with all home-based education documentation requirements. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 99, Recommendation 8; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

To encourage educators to comply with home-based education documentation requirements, the Division implemented a practice of reimbursing educators for eligible expenses only after it received and assessed learners' annual progress reports.

Following the 2017-18 school year, the Division notified home-based educators it would only provide reimbursement for eligible expenses associated with home-based education

programs after it received and assessed annual progress reports.⁶ It reiterated this practice at the parent information sessions in 2018-19, as well as at the end of 2018-19 school year (via emails to educators).

In late 2019, the Division analyzed the practices nine other Saskatchewan school divisions used to encourage educators to comply with home-based education documentation requirements. It found only four other school divisions used monetary incentives—all of which related to withholding reimbursements until educators submitted progress reports. Based on its analysis, the Division decided to maintain its recent practice of reimbursing educators after receiving and assessing annual progress reports.

For 11 of 12 families represented in 15 home-based learners' files we tested, the Division followed its practice to reimburse families only after it received and assessed the learner's annual progress reports. One family tested did not submit a request to the Division for reimbursement of eligible expenses.

Implementation of incentives to encourage educators to comply with all home-based education requirements can foster educators' compliance—reducing the level of resources needed to follow up with educators on missing or insufficient documentation.

4.0 GOALS OF EDUCATION FOR SASKATCHEWAN

Goals of education in Saskatchewan should direct efforts to develop the potential of all students in the province. Education should affirm the worth of each individual and lay the foundation for learning throughout life. Students benefit from exposure to learning in a variety of situations. Attainment of the goals is a venture the school shares with the student, the home, the church, and the community. Although the degree of school responsibility will vary from community to community, the school has some responsibility for each goal. A body of knowledge and a range of skills and attitudes are necessary to function in a changing world. It is intended, then, that education will enable Saskatchewan students to do the following to the best of their abilities:

BASIC SKILLS

1. Read, write, and compute.
2. Acquire information and meaning through observing, listening, reading and experiencing.
3. Process information through intellectual and technological means.
4. Solve problems by applying basic principles and processes of the sciences, arts, and humanities.
5. Communicate ideas through written and spoken language, mathematical symbols, and aesthetic expression.

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

1. Seek and value learning experiences.
2. Act as self-reliant learners.
3. Base actions on the knowledge that it is necessary to learn throughout life.

UNDERSTANDING AND RELATING TO OTHERS

1. Act on the belief that each individual is worthwhile.
2. Base actions on the recognition that people differ in their values, behaviours, and life styles.
3. Interact and feel comfortable with others who are different in race, religion, status, or personal attributes.
4. Develop a sense of responsibility toward others.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Seek an understanding of the purpose and worth of human existence.
2. Develop a knowledge of God.
3. Respect family, religion, and culture in a pluralistic society.

CAREER AND CONSUMER DECISIONS

1. Develop an awareness of career opportunities.
2. Develop interests and abilities in relation to vocational expectations.
3. Adapt to shifts in employment patterns and technology.
4. Make informed consumer decisions.

MEMBERSHIP IN SOCIETY

1. Assume responsibility for their own actions.
2. Work with others to achieve individual and group goals.
3. Participate in the democratic processes of government and perform the duties of citizenship.
4. Respect the rights and property of others.
5. Act with honesty, integrity, compassion, and fairness.
6. Develop a sense of national pride and acknowledge the need for international understanding.
7. Work toward greater social justice.
8. Assume responsibility for dependent persons in a manner consistent with their needs.
9. Respect law and authority.
10. Exercise the right of dissent responsibly.

⁶ The Division reimburses home-based educators for approved actual expenses up to a maximum of \$500 per year (\$250 for kindergarten students).



SELF CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

1. Perceive themselves in a positive way.
2. Appreciate their own abilities and limitations.
3. Set and work toward personal goals.
4. Assess praise and criticism realistically.
5. Present themselves with confidence.

POSITIVE LIFE STYLE

1. Practice appropriate personal hygiene, engage in sufficient physical activity, and maintain a nutritionally balanced diet.
2. Avoid harmful use of alcohol and other drugs.
3. Cultivate interests that may be the basis for personal development and leisure pursuits.
4. Recognize the importance of productive activity.
5. Display initiative and pursue tasks diligently.
6. Maintain a safe and healthful community.
7. Respect and seek to enhance the environment.
8. Appreciate beauty in its many natural and constructed forms.
9. Express themselves creatively.

GROWING WITH CHANGE

1. Work toward immediate and long-term goals
2. Base actions on an understanding that change is a natural process in society.
3. Select workable alternatives in response to changing conditions.
4. Develop confidence in making decisions that involve risk.

Source: Ministry of Education, *Saskatchewan Home-based Education: Policy and Procedures Manual*, p. 62.